



## ESF's IWD Forum 2024

The Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) brought together over 180 people from across the emergency management sector to celebrate International Women's Day 2024. The program addressed the theme 'Inspire Inclusion' which aimed to provide a broader diversity and inclusion lens to the program.

Michael Morgan AFSM, FRV Deputy Commissioner, and Cassie Lindsey began the day with a discussion about progress to advance gender equity in their experience at the Fire and Emergency Champions of Change Coalition. The key takeaway was a call for urgent action to work collectively in combatting areas such as discriminatory policy and limited PPE and uniform. Cassie also foregrounded an important theme for the day when she said, "what gets measured gets managed."

Christine Nixon shared her reflections on 'Inspiring Inclusion' as the first female chief commissioner in any Australian state police force. She told the story of her career which illustrated her "getting your foot

in the door” philosophy, encouraging the audience to think about the limits they place on themselves, as well as the limits organisations can place on them. She said, “Think about the power you have. Some of the most powerful people I have seen in organisations were not the ones in charge. They are people like you who have enormous capacity to think about using your power.” She also stressed the importance of kindness to each other in the workplace.

Angela Harbison, the CEO and Cofounder of The Separation Guide, in her presentation, ‘Happy ever after’, discussed the contributing factors for relationship breakdown, current trends and how this private and life-changing experience impacts so many in our workplaces, and creates “the kind of stress that impacts your executive thinking”. Angela emphasised the importance of creating a very supportive work environment from both colleagues and managers, and audience discussions concluded that this support cannot be a ‘cookie cutter approach’ and should be individually tailored.

It was announced that ESF is about to embark on a ground-breaking study to get a deeper understanding of how the experience of separation and divorce affects people who work in the emergency services sector.

ERV CEO Mariela Diaz facilitated a panel to discuss barriers to inclusion and how they can be overcome. The panel brought a wealth of lived experience including Wei Fong Yee (AV Director Diversity and Inclusion), Inspector Amanda Bowden (Co-Deputy Chair VP Pride Employee Network), Donna Sherwen (DEECA Program Manager Aboriginal Partnership), Shanleigh Meldrum (VicSES Gisborne Unit), Deb Azzopardi (CFA volunteer Epping), Zoe Murdoch (LSV volunteer Hampton & Starfish all abilities program team), and Claire Kinnear (000Vic Team Leader). A key takeaway from the panel was that leaders with lived experience are often in a unique position to lift others up and use that position of power for good. Shanleigh Meldrum stressed the key ingredients to inclusivity in emergency services as being accessibility, attitudes, and policy. The panel also emphasised the need for safe spaces within emergency services, as they can be life changing for someone with a history of exclusion. This was illustrated by Zoe who spoke so passionately about how LSV so positively transformed the life of her family living with autism.

An addition to the event this year was new Diversity and Inclusion Awards which attracted 26 entries from ESF’s member agencies. The judges, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, Ro Allen and Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, Dr Niki Vincent agreed the programs and people nominated demonstrated tremendous commitment and progress.

Kate Fitzgerald, Deputy Secretary Emergency Management DJCS, presented the Awards, as follows:

### **Diversity and Inclusion Champion**

This award acknowledges a person for making a significant impact to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

#### **Winner:**

- Beth Taylor CFA

### **Highly Commended:**

- Sam Dwyer LSV
- Michael Prior VICSES

### **Women's Equality Initiative**

This award acknowledges a particular program for promoting the inclusion of not just women, but people of all genders in an emergency services workplace

#### **Winner:**

- Women's Support Coordinator Project FRV

### **Highly Commended:**

- Victorian Emergency Management Sponsorship of Diverse Talent Program – EMV & Parks Victoria
- Women's Advisory Committee CFA

### **Gender Inclusivity Initiative**

This award acknowledges a particular program for promoting the equality of women in an emergency services workplace.

#### **Winner:**

- Improving AV's response to LGBTIQ+ community members

### **Highly Commended:**

- Regional Gippsland Pride Network - LGBTIQ+ Awareness Program DEECA
- Inclusion Safety program: tackling unconscious bias FFMVic

The award winners explained their winning initiatives in conversation with the judges showcasing leading practice in the sector. Beth Taylor shared that, "it took [her] a while to learn to celebrate the small wins." She also showcased the great work in diversity and inclusion of small rural communities, that often goes unnoticed.

Sarah Hammond from the 'Women's Support Coordinator Project FRV' shared how she and her team have been attracting girls and women to work at FRV, then supporting them through the application process. Sarah also said recruitment policy is often a barrier, and one the Women's Support Coordinator Project is working to overcome.

Steven Gelagotis and Tiarni Allan from AV's 'Improving AV's Response to LGBTIQ+ Community Members' showcased how small steps, such as pronouns on a name badge, can often have a big impact. Ro Allen recalled how a community member said in response to the badges, "they made me feel safe, respected and loved; like I was in good hands."

Ro Allen and Dr Niki Vincent reflected on their experience as judges, noting the difficult judging process, as, "there [was] so much merit in everything that [they] saw." The judges said they felt most compelled to award programs that weren't about fixing women, but about fixing the system. Ro concluded by emphasising that it is through the sort of outstanding programs and individuals revealed by the Awards that we set high standards for diversity and inclusion that can lead to significant improvement in these areas.

Cath Greaves, CEO Life Saving Victoria, reflected on the day, noting that the power of a conversation and small changes can have a big impact on the road to gender equality.

A new episode of the ESF Better Together Podcast has just been released for IWD! ESF CEO Siusan MacKenzie sat down with PhD candidate Helen Frazer, to discuss her work around the effects and causes of trauma on women first responders. Listen [here](#).

<https://esf.com.au/events/international-womens-day/>

## Better Together Podcast: Helen Frazer

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## 'Firing up girls' interest in fire and emergency services' - Barbara Cosson

ESF would also like to highlight a recent article by Barbara Cosson written for The Age, in which she interviewed Dawn Hartog Senior Manager of Water Emergency Management at Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), CFA Board member and Toolangi brigade captain. The article explores how social change programs are helping boost the number of women in emergency services. Read it [here](#).

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