

The women of Central Desert Regional Council

Local women in local government

The Central Desert Regional Council area is in the central southern section of the Northern Territory (NT), lying north of Alice Springs and covering a landmass larger than that of Victoria.

There are nine remote Aboriginal communities in the region and 13 outstations housing just over 4,000 residents.

Council employs 320-odd staff, 71 percent of whom are Aboriginal and 49 percent are female.

Chief Executive Officer, Diane Hood, has nominated several of the women on her team for recognition as LG Focus Council's High Achievers.

Maintaining culture

One of Council's senior man-

agers, Sascha McKell was raised in Council's largest community, Yuendumu.

The daughter of the manager of a 1,600 square km cattle station, Sascha was educated in Yuendumu and Adelaide before returning to community in her early 20s to work for the Community Government Council which later became Central Desert Regional Council.

Over the ensuing 11 years, Sascha held a number of positions across a variety of departments.

She also briefly held a place on the community's local decision making body, the Local Authority before going on to be an elected member sitting on the Regional Council with Aboriginal elders and leaders from around the region.

A passionate supporter of all of the Council's communities, Sascha said, "Local communities are vital for the maintenance of Aboriginal culture in Australia.

"It's essential that funding is effectively managed, services are delivered well and people have access to the same facilities as their city cousins."

Sascha currently oversees the management of four of the

region's communities, including her beloved Yuendumu.

Sisters share the role

Across the highway some 432km away is the community of Engawala where Council oversees municipal services to the community and its outstations, airstrip maintenance, animal control, community safety, aged and disability services, children's services, school nutrition, youth, sport and recreation programs and is contracted to provide Centrelink services and monitor the delivery of power and water supplies.

Engawala is home to 177 residents, 20 of whom work for Council.

Council has several female heroes in Engawala, the first being local sisters, Maureen and Dianne Dixon who job share the role of administering the Council office.

Both women were born and bred in community, following in the footsteps of many generations of family.

Both have worked for Council for eight years, hold Certificate III qualifications in Local Government and both are accredited by

the Federal Government as Centrelink Agents.

Dianne is also a member of another of the local heroes, the Engawala Local Authority.

Local Authorities exist in all nine communities as a means of stimulating engagement in council decision making, thus ensuring the management and development of local government services are in line with community aspirations.

The 4th tier of government

Engawala's six appointed Local Authority members are all Aboriginal and all female.

The body is supported by the Regional Council to meet five times per year with staff traversing the 360km round trip from Alice Springs to provide secretariat services.

CEO Hood, who also attends most meetings, said, "Local Authorities are the hidden fourth tier of Government in that their input shapes local decision making and informs the strategic direction of the Regional Council.

"It's a privilege to work with a group of Aboriginal Elders, mothers, sisters and aunts who represent their community with pride and passion."

A future leader

Council is also proud of Reanna Campbell from Yuelamu, a community of 253 people some three hours drive from Alice Springs.

At 25, Reanna has recently been appointed to the NT Chief Minister's First Circles Leadership Program, which provides participants with exposure to the workings of the NT Government and supports them to develop their skills.

The program's manager, Andrew Ross, said, "Reanna was chosen because she demonstrated a sound work ethic, commitment to family and community and a willingness to develop knowledge in order to contribute to the Yuelamu community."

Ms Hood, commented that Reanna's accolade, 'is well deserved, and she is in good company with five past councillors having been part of this valued program'.

"It is hoped that Reanna will consider becoming a Councillor one day."

Council celebrates and thanks its 157 female employees as making a valued contribution to local government in the Northern Territory.



Reanna Campbell from Yuelamu community, accepted onto the NT Chief Ministers First Circles program.

At the National General Assembly 2018, delegates nominated individuals or teams from their councils who are improving operations for their local community.