



**“The Fairley Leadership Program connected me with my community.”**

**Sam Atukorala** Fairley Fellow 2014

Sam Atukorala participated in the Fairley Leadership Program in 2014 after he relocated to Shepparton with his wife for her work a year earlier. Sam acknowledged having limited understanding of the region and felt a disconnect with the community. “The program aided me immensely, I developed a better understanding of the region, its challenges, opportunities and strengths and the ability to widen my network, connecting me with my new community.”

Sam has always had a passion for serving and supporting his community since he relocated to Australia from Sri Lanka in 2000 and is highly recognised for his significant contributions in the multicultural community. He is renowned for welcoming and helping people find their feet not only in the Goulburn Murray region, but in Australia.

When asked how the program enabled him to become a community leader, Sam said “one of the tricks of leadership is not only knowing what, but also knowing who to ask for guidance and help when needed. The Fairley Leadership Program brings diverse but like-minded people together and builds deep and lifelong friendships that make it easier to know who to call. This goes both ways and I have had the opportunity to be part of some very interesting and fulfilling activities.”

Sam’s involvement in a broad range of committees, boards and organisations is expansive. He has been a member of the Rural and Regional Advisory Committee for the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council Australia’s, Goulburn Valley Health Community Advisory Group, Greater Shepparton Safe Communities Advisory Committee, Mitchell Shire Safe Communities Advisory Committee, Victoria Police Blue Ribbon Foundation, Director with the Shepparton Central Rotary Club, President of the Buddhist Association of the Goulburn Valley and Vice President of the Bouchier Street Primary School Council.

Sam has also had the opportunity being a member of the Regional Advisory Council Hume Region to determine the regions critical priorities and help shape future investment and providing advice to the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

Sam has passed on his knowledge as a mentor in the Greater Shepparton City Council’s Community Leadership Program and the New and Emerging Community Leadership Program. His leadership also crosses into sport as an AFL Diversity Program Ambassador, an All Communities Ambassador for Cricket Australia, GLoBall Ambassador for Essendon Football Club, Team Manager for the Melbourne Renegades Champions League Sri Lankan Team, and a Community Ambassador during the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games.

While Sam continues being active in the community, he is focussed on strengthening community engagement, social inclusion, economic participation and settlement outcomes in this region through his role as the Strategic Engagement Coordinator (Goulburn Region) with the Ethnic Council of Shepparton & District Inc. reporting to the Multicultural Affairs Unit in the Department of Families Fairness and Housing.

Sam's drive to represent the community since his involvement with the Fairley Leadership Program has been significant in bridging the gaps in our multicultural communities, helping new Australians to be heard and connected in the community.

But what's next for this Fairley Fellow?

"I'm focussed on supporting the community to address regional concerns. The Goulburn Murray has the highest level of homelessness in the state, housing affordable continues to be a problem and the need to improve youth employment outcomes."

"We are a proud region and the program helped instil in me to not only gain the knowledge but also establish a strong connection with the local community to continue my passion in this region."