

2022 Employee of the Year Nominee, Sona Ter-Yegishyan

Sona Ter-Yegishyan is the City of Burbank's first social worker in a position that is shared between the Library Services and Parks and Recreation Departments, providing services out of the three libraries and two senior centers. Sona joined the City of Burbank in July 2021. Having only been here a year, what makes her contributions significant enough for Employee of the Year recognition? She has been nothing short of amazing in building a position from scratch, understanding and addressing a complex set of needs, and going well beyond expectations of what the social worker would contribute.

Before this position was created, Library and PR staff struggled with assisting community members whose needs went beyond our training and skillsets. This includes people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, those with mental health diagnoses, isolated older adults, families with parenting challenges, and many others who utilize City services. Staff choose these jobs because they want to help, and these situations left staff feeling helpless.

Enter Sona, a trained mental health professional and social worker. Sona immediately launched into the work of offering direct public assistance and building strong networks with partners, including other City staff and local nonprofit organizations. She has ably divided her time in order to cover a huge number of sites while also helping move City policy and projects forward. A number of Library and senior center patrons who were resistant to help have, with Sona's patience and persistence, opened themselves up to assistance.

Internally, Sona's positive attitude, calmness and expertise have created an environment where staff have been able to open up about challenges and develop their abilities to de-escalate situations, recover from stressful interactions, and learn to set appropriate boundaries. She makes the City stronger every day by building confidence and competencies in staff while nurturing individuals so they can change their lives for the better.

Sona stepped into a situation that would have overwhelmed many people, whether due to the huge needs or the fact that the position had not been completely defined. She has truly transformed the ability of the Library and PR to serve the community in a very short time. Her efforts make her deserving of Employee of the Year.