



## Casthuri Kamalaraj

ACSE Awards 2022  
Female Engineer of the year

### Profile

Casthuri started in the industry as an intern in 2012, working on a wide scale of projects at a small structural consultancy, varying from modest single-dwelling homes to post-tensioning design. This job led her to her next six years of designing and delivering large-scale commercial projects at the next company in 2015. Whilst here Casthuri was given the opportunity to work within the commercial, multi-residential, government, health, education, and event engineering spaces. The occasional glimpses of high-end residential projects and temporary event structures reignited a creative flame Casthuri had whilst studying her combined degree in Architecture and Engineering, which ultimately led her to Partridge.

Casthuri joined Partridge in 2021 and has since covered projects from alterations and additions, heritage structures, and multi-storey cliff-side homes. The wide palette of structural projects Casthuri has contributed to over the years has broadened her problem-solving skills and allowed her to develop her team to think big as well as understand all the finer details.

### Key Projects



Structural design & management of **Mezzo**, a \$105mill twelve storey multi-residential & commercial development in Glebe



Design of temporary event installations across all major Australian cities, including **Taronga Zoo Vivid 2018 sculptures**



Structural design of the award-winning **Smart Design Studio office** in Alexandria



Structural design and management of **Intellicentre 3 (IC3)**, a new \$55mill data centre development in Macquarie Park



Design of a \$16mill home in **Avalon Beach**, winner of the 2019 National and State MBA House Awards

## Mentoring Coordinator

Casthuri started working in a small firm, of approximately 15-20 staff. When new staff started working with the company, she noticed the difficulty many had to enter into a small, close team of people and feel welcomed with a sense of belonging. Casthuri took this experience through to her new role in the next company of approximately 200 people in size and took it upon herself to create a new job role of Mentoring Coordinator.

Whilst the catalyst of this role was Casthuri's past experiences, it was the momentum gained from internship intake year after year which presented the vehicle to make this endeavour a success. Cohorts of university students all starting at a new company in the same period of time, seeking their own sense of belonging, were now given an established framework to form their own bonds and enter this new working environment together as a solid team. Casthuri managed this role alongside her own role as a Structural Engineer to ensure all new undergraduate and graduate staff across all disciplines of engineering felt welcomed, supported, and excited about commencing their career in this workplace.

## Industry Leadership



Over her career, Casthuri has taken every opportunity to support entry-level staff wherever possible. Casthuri published a 'Day in the Life of a Structural Engineer' article on Engineers Australia's online platform, demonstrating what to expect for the graduate level of engineers in the community. She has been involved with Engineers Australia since early in her career, and when given the opportunity to sit on a panel with fellow leaders to discuss pathways to becoming Chartered, Casthuri took up the chance without hesitation. This experience was rewarding for both the audience and Casthuri, as once the panel discussion concluded, a line of engineers were waiting to ask her questions and have a discussion on how they could make their next step forward in their careers. This enthusiasm and energy toward development are what drives Casthuri in her extra-curricular activities outside her role as a Structural Engineer.

## Contribution to Partridge

As a team leader, Casthuri is an fantastic role model for the younger engineers in her team. She is an advocate and instigator of the Partridge Intern and Graduate program, assisting in the oversight of the junior members and ensuring they are educated, led and exposed to the industry. She shares her knowledge and experience on a daily basis and demonstrates a healthy work-life balance. As one of the most senior female engineers at Partridge, Casthuri is a shining example for the young female engineers at our company. She regularly encourages the participation of staff members, in particular juniors and females, in industry events and activities that promote learning, development and diversity. Casthuri's wealth of technical understanding and experience in mentoring is invaluable for the younger engineers within the company. Partridge is proud and pleased to see Casthuri recognised as a strong role model both externally and internally, and believe she has an influencing future on the lives of many young engineers.



## Student Mentoring

Casthuri graduated from a highly academic focussed high school, where engineering was scarcely discussed amongst law and medicine, and even further not promoted to females at the time. When the opportunity came during her career to provide guidance to STEM students through CSIRO, Casthuri took the time from work to participate and assist wherever possible to get the message across. She believes achieving major traction in numbers of females in industry is only possible if the thoughts are planted early, back in school

## Women in Design & Construction Mentor

Starting at the company as the second female after the part-time receptionist, this introduction to the industry brought home the issue of lack of diversity, as she navigated the work environment as a young female engineer. She drew support from senior males around her, and guidance from senior females by participating in the Engineers Australia Women in Engineering mentoring program.

To give back to the community of women in the construction industry, Casthuri continues to learn and educate herself on the resources available by staying involved in events hosted by NAWIC and WIDAC. For the past few years, Casthuri has also participated in the WIDAC mentoring program. She has been paired with younger women in the industry who are seeking support and guidance in their early years of work, through critical junctions of development. Having been in the same position years ago, Casthuri sees no bounds in assisting younger women in the industry if it means that support will one day be paid forward to another.

## Skilled Migrant Mentoring

Casthuri was born in Sri Lanka and raised in Australia. As she sees many of her own family migrate to find careers in their new homes, she can see firsthand the difficulty in securing jobs in a country where 'local experience' is the governing factor in recruitment.

Casthuri became involved with a not-for-profit organisation, City East Community College, in 2019. The City East College mentoring program provides support to skilled migrant job seekers in all industries, and Casthuri to date has supported those in the engineering industry by providing career guidance, conducting mock interviews, and having one on one mentoring partnerships over several years.



Casthuri sees the difference cultural behaviours make in securing job roles, and recognises that the smallest efforts could go a long way in helping someone set up their career to support their own family in a new country.

## Adversity & Challenges

Casthuri was aware that she had more than one hurdle in the industry. Initially, this was purely based on gender issues, but soon her cultural differences came into play. Casthuri comes from a traditional, conservative south-Asian background, where in large drinking culture does not exist. As part of the construction industry, typical end-of-week festivities are centred around going to the pub or hosting a drinks night.

This workplace culture can be worked through and navigated, which is what Casthuri continued to do through the next few years until the opportunity came to change the narrative. When Casthuri volunteered to organise the next young professional networking event, she successfully changed the focus away from alcohol, and towards something more creative and culturally inclusive.

As Casthuri moved into project manager roles, she found herself in design meetings and rooms predominantly occupied by men. Diversity was the next challenge she encountered in her senior years as a Structural Engineer, where the voices and opinions shared all started to sound very similar. Casthuri's voice provided a point of difference and was appreciated and respected in her projects. She brought forward a creative solution to problems that the team could not find answers to, and aided collaboration between all the big and small players in the room. In the commercial space of the industry, there are conventions and traditions which remain from the male-dominated culture, however, in the residential space of creative engineering which Partridge services, the culture is far more diverse. Casthuri has now worked in teams of entirely women, and also amongst men who challenge the norm. The creative engineering world Casthuri now operates in provides the right kind of challenges which she believes help to develop her as an engineer and as a person.