

# He Pūrongo mahi mo te Tau Annual Report 2025 ACE Aotearoa

ADULT AND COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION AOTEAROA INC  
(ACE AOTEAROA)



Adult and Community  
Education

**ace**  
aotearoa



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# He Kupu nā ngā Toihau Co-chairs' overview

**E ngā maunga, E ngā awa, E ngā moana,  
E ngā waka, Tēnā kōtou kātoa.**

**Ka hūri ki ngā tini mate o te tau kua pāhuri,  
haere, haere, haere ki te pō,  
e kōre e hōki mai.  
Kei te mihi, kei te tangi.**

**Ka hūri ki a tātou te hungaora,  
Mauri ora ki a kōutou.**

**Tēnā kōutou  
Tēnā kōutou  
Tēnā tātou kātoa.**

Jay  
Rupapera



Dr Edmund  
Fehoko

## **Grounded in Ancestral Knowledge while Embracing the Future**

Emphasising the importance of ancestral knowledge while embracing future-focused opportunities (especially those provided by new technologies) has long been the kaupapa of the ACE sector. In 2025 that focus was particularly evident.

A refresh of the annual Hui Fono and Conference saw ACE Aotearoa offer these flagship professional development events consecutively so those attending the Hui Fono could stay on for the two-day conference. The theme *AI/AI – Bridging Artificial and Ancestral Intelligence* explored the intersections of modern AI and ancestral wisdom through the bringing together of educators, experts in technology and community leaders. Attendance numbers and feedback from the events held in Ōtautahi were overwhelmingly positive.

The ACE Aotearoa Awards presented at the ACE Conference dinner, remain one of the highlights of the ACE Conference. This year two of our esteemed former Board colleagues were honoured for sector leadership. Charissa Waerea and Pale Sauni have brought immense wisdom and energy to our ACE Aotearoa Board and the wider sector over many years. Their citations as well as those of the recipients of Educator and Programme Awards are available on page 22.

Like the Hui Fono and ACE Conference the 2025 Festival of Adult Learning Ahurei Ākongā underwent a refresh reverting to its original branding Adult Learners' Week He Tangata Mātauranga. The return to the festival's original name is a reminder that the celebration is a UNESCO inspired event connecting Aotearoa with over fifty countries throughout the world. A number of new organisations participated and organisers were especially pleased to have eleven Auckland branch libraries on board.

Three new Board Members joined the ACE Aotearoa Board at the 2025 AGM. Dr Will Flavell, Heidi Renata and Charmaine Tukua bring entrepreneurial flair and deep knowledge of learning and teaching. Former Board member, David Do has also been co-opted to the Board bringing expertise in policy and planning.

**“Ko te pae tawhiti whāia kia tata, ko te pae tata whakamaua kia tina.”**

**Seek out distant horizons, and cherish those you attain.**

The Board farewelled Kathryn Hazlewood after ten years of service including six year as co-chair Tangata Tiriti. Kathryn's contribution has been invaluable. Dr Edmund Fehoko has stepped into the role of co-chair Tangata Tiriti while Jay Rupapera has retained the role of co-chair Tangata Whenua. The Board has continued to be future-focused with a refresh of the Strategic Plan to ensure inclusion and engagement are at the heart of everything ACE Aotearoa does.

As lead agency for the ACE sector, ACE Aotearoa has an important research and innovation function and in 2025 the organisation was fortunate to be the recipient of an Ako Aotearoa Research and Innovation Grant. The research undertaken over eight months was an investigation of teaching and learning circles within the adult learning environment. Dr Cherie Chu-Fuluiifaga from Victoria University was lead researcher with support from Jennifer Leahy and Tai Samaili.

The ACE Sector Capability Steering Group met regularly to discuss policy initiatives and provide advice, and the Board continued to work closely with the Tertiary Education Commission and the Ministry of Education to progress a range of issues affecting the sector.

In late 2024, we extended our warm congratulations to our colleague Peter Clinton Isaac Foese on his appointment as President of ASPBAE (Asia South Pacific Basis Adult Education) for the period 2025-2028. Peter's appointment is a reminder that we are inextricably linked to others in the Asia South Pacific and beyond, and can provide wisdom and leadership at this complex time of cuts to aid, the emergence of repressive governments, international conflicts, and risk from climate uncertainty.

We are grateful for the commitment and innovation shown by everyone in the sector during 2025 and especially wish to acknowledge the contributions of the ACE Aotearoa team that continues to remain faithful to the social justice kaupapa of those who have gone before while constantly looking to the future seeking new ways to enhance the experience of learners.

As we look ahead, ACE Aotearoa remains committed to grounding innovation in the wisdom, relationships, and values that have always sustained our communities.

**“Ka mua, ka muri.”**

**We walk backwards into the future with our eyes fixed on the wisdom of the past.**

**No reira, tēnā ano kōutou e tautoko nei i te kaupapa o ACE Aotearoa.**

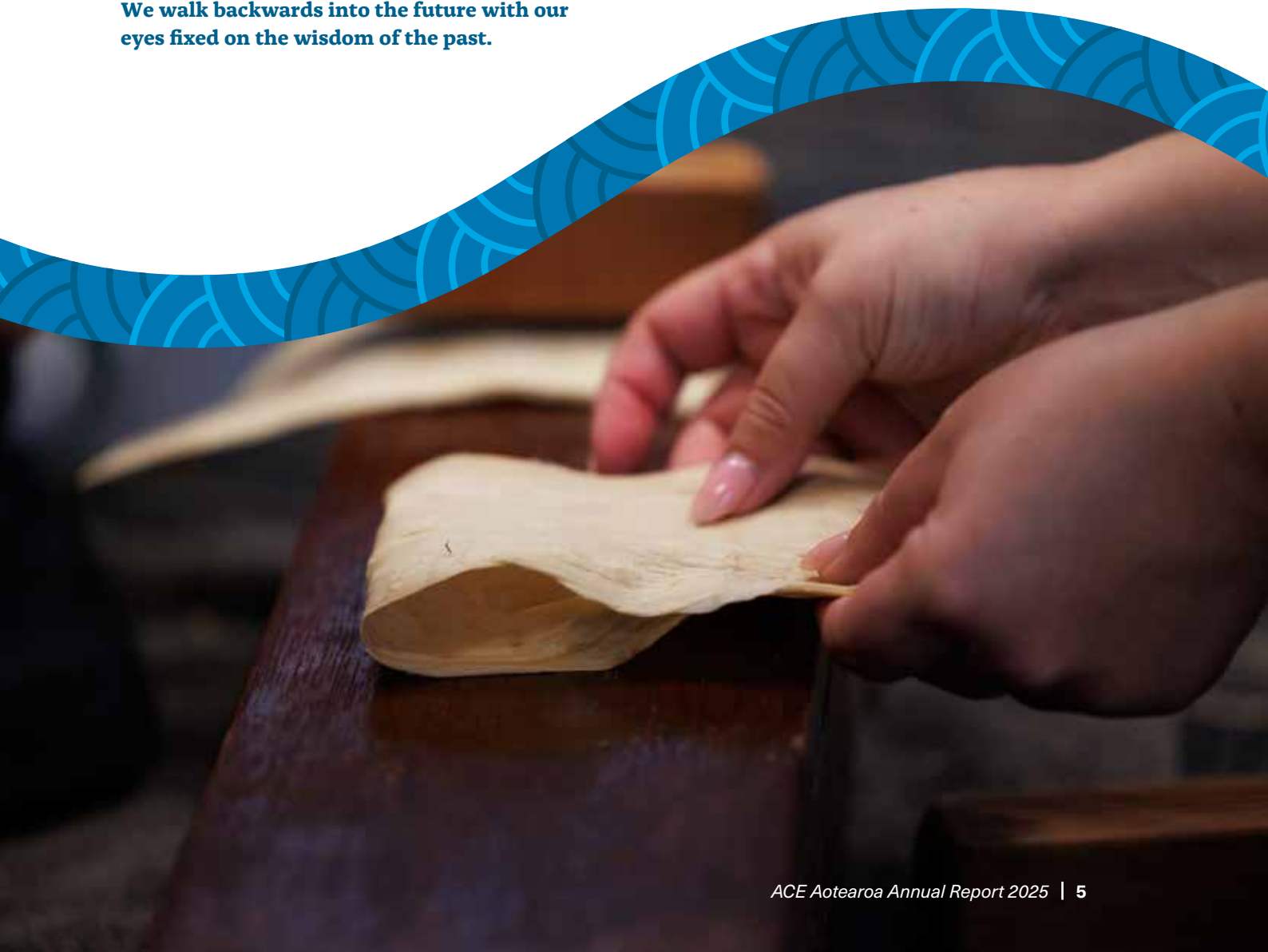
**Tēnā kōutou  
Tēnā kōutou  
Tēnā tātou kātoa.**



*Jay Rupapera*  
Co-chair



*Dr Edmund Fehoko*  
Co-chair



# He mihi nā te Kaiwhakahaere Matua Chief Executive Officer

**Tēnā kōutou, tēnā kōutou, tēnā kōutou kātoa.**

**Ka nui te mihi māioha ki te hūnga e huihui nei o  
Adult Community Education Aotearoa**

**Nau mai, hāere mai, whakatau mai rā!**

**‘Kua tawhiti ko te haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu  
He tino nui rawa ou mahi, kia kore e mahi nui tonu.**

**‘We have come too far, not to go further.  
We have done too much, not to do more.’**

*Ta Hemi Henare, 1988.*



*Hannah  
Pia Baral*

## **For the year ending 31 December 2025**

This year has been one of both reflection and transition for ACE Aotearoa and the wider Adult and Community Education sector. Across the motu, our providers have continued to deliver high-impact, community-led learning, even as the environment around us shifts.

A highlight of the year for me was the 2025 ACE Conference and Hui Fono, held in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Bringing these two flagship events together under the theme “AI | AI – Bridging Artificial Intelligence and Ancestral Intelligence” created a powerful space for dialogue about the future of learning in Aotearoa.

The conference challenged us to think carefully about the role of emerging technologies in our sector. We explored not just what AI can do, but how it should be used, particularly in ways that uphold mātauranga Māori, protect Indigenous data sovereignty, and reflect our shared values.

Keynote speakers and workshop sessions explored both the opportunities and risks of AI, asking important questions about bias, ownership, and cultural integrity. At the same time, there was a strong focus on practical application, from governance and leadership through to teaching practice. For me, this reinforced that AI must remain a tool that supports, rather than replaces, the human relationships at the heart of ACE.

This kaupapa was further strengthened through our international engagement. In November, I represented ACE Aotearoa at the International Think Tank Meeting in Vientiane, Lao PDR, alongside education leaders from 23 countries. I was joined by Peter-Clinton Isaac Foase, ASPBAE President, with whom I also shared the panel discussion.

The gathering focused on how rapid advances in digital technologies, particularly AI, are reshaping learning, work and participation globally. What stood out for me was

how closely these conversations mirrored what we are already navigating here in Aotearoa — ensuring equitable access, upholding human rights, and keeping people and communities at the centre of digital transformation.

I contributed by facilitating a panel session and sharing insights from our national AI kaupapa. A clear theme throughout was the importance of working collectively, building on existing networks, and ensuring global dialogue translates into practical, locally grounded action.

This experience reinforced that while the challenges we face are shared, Aotearoa brings a distinct perspective, particularly in how we centre relationships, community voice and indigenous knowledge systems in education.

Alongside this future-focused work, the year has also been marked by significant change. The Government’s decision to disestablish Ako Aotearoa represents a substantial loss for the tertiary education sector. For nearly two decades, it has played a central role in lifting teaching quality, supporting educators, and strengthening collaboration across the system.


Its closure leaves a gap in national capability, particularly in areas such as professional learning, research, and sector-wide leadership. It reinforces for me the importance of strong networks.

Despite these challenges, there is much to be encouraged by. Across the sector, I continue to see innovation in practice, strong community engagement, and a deep commitment to equity and lifelong learning. From libraries evolving into digital learning hubs, to intergenerational programmes that build skills and connection, ACE remains responsive to the needs of learners at every stage of life.

We have continued to advocate for the value of community education, support our members, and create opportunities for connection and professional growth. Events, awards, and sector initiatives this year have highlighted the depth of expertise and dedication within our network.

Looking ahead, my focus is clear. We must continue to champion the role of ACE as an essential part of Aotearoa's education landscape. We will continue to support inclusion, strengthen communities, and enable people to participate fully in a rapidly changing world. This includes engaging critically with new technologies, while staying grounded in the relationships, values, and knowledge systems that define our sector.

In a year of both opportunity and uncertainty, one thing remains constant for me: the strength of our collective. On that note I want to thank the Board of ACE Aotearoa for their leadership and governance support, the ASSG, PD Advisory Group, Adult Learner's Week Advisory Group and the ACE Awards judges. Final thanks go to the small, but mighty, team we have working to support our members.



*Hannah Pia Baral  
Kaiwhakahaere Matua  
Chief Executive Officer*



# Sustainable ACE – Our People Our Stories

AUTUMN 2025

## Supporting Settlement



Communication is fundamental to the existence and survival of individuals, groups, societies and nations, and a shared language is the most common tool for communication. For refugees and immigrants arriving in a new country the language barrier can often seem the hardest mountain to climb.

English Language Partners (ELP) has 21 centres nationwide teaching English for work and everyday life in New Zealand. Their commitment is to help new Kiwis learn the English they need to participate and live independent lives.

AUTUMN 2025

## A Walk Along the Rainbow



For the past 40 years Papakura Support and Counselling Services has been providing a range of valuable support assistance to their community. While the agency started out as a Women's Refuge,

staff soon identified that community concerns were not just focussed on women, but on families and their desire to meet a wider range of needs within their South Auckland community. It was at that point the agency branched out to offer an expanded range of services, introducing counselling support and personal development workshops, including anger management, self-esteem and parenting courses.

Silver Kilivia is the Community and Cultural Relationships Manager and he says their focus is on providing people with the tools and skills to enable them to identify and then access the resources they need to continue with their personal growth.

SPRING 2025

## Breaking Down Barriers: Adult Community Education for the Deaf Community



For many within the Deaf community, information needs to be delivered directly, intentionally, and in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). This means adult community education (ACE) becomes more than just a learning opportunity—it becomes a lifeline to knowledge, independence and participation.

Deaf Aotearoa, the national organisation advocating for and supporting Deaf people, is bridging this gap by providing a full range of adult learning courses designed specifically for the Deaf community. Some programmes are adapted from mainstream ACE courses, while others are uniquely developed to meet Deaf learners' cultural and communication needs.

This year (2025), Deaf adults across the country had the choice of around 65 ACE courses offered through Deaf Aotearoa, covering everything from life skills and health education to leadership development and digital literacy.

#### SUMMER 2025

### Lifelong Learning: The Secret to Staying Curious, Connected and Well



Those in the ACE sector know that learning is a lifelong journey with research consistently showing that keeping the mind active through learning not only supports memory and cognitive health but also strengthens social connections and emotional wellbeing. For many older adults, continued education can be the antidote to the loneliness epidemic. Learning fosters purpose, curiosity, and belonging.

One of the movements supporting lifelong education for older people is U3A – the University of the Third Age. Founded in France in the 1970s, U3A began with the goal of creating opportunities for retirees and semi-retirees to continue learning, sharing knowledge, and staying engaged with their communities. Unlike traditional universities, U3A is peer-led with members teaching and learning from each other. There are no exams or degrees, just shared curiosity and mutual encouragement.

#### SUMMER 2025

### Stitching Culture and Confidence: Heather Black's Kaupapa Māori Sewing Journey



For the past nine years, Heather Black has been quietly transforming lives through her Kaupapa Māori sewing classes in South Auckland. More than just lessons in sewing and garment construction, Heather's classes offer a safe, nurturing space for Māori and Pasifika women to connect and support one another, and celebrate their cultural identity, all within an inclusive environment.

Many of Heather's taura (students) do not whakapapa directly to South Auckland, or even Aotearoa, but they come together as urban Māori, Pasifika and all nationalities. Their workspace becomes the meeting house, where they gather as equals to share, learn, and embrace the beauty of their culture."

Most of Heather's taura are first-time learners. Many arrive without resources, and some have never used a sewing machine. But thanks to Heather's resourcefulness—and donations from past students and a curtain bank that supplies off cuts—they manage.

SUMMER 2025

## Share Kai Cook's collective



During 2024 Risingholme Learning in Ōtautahi received ACE funding to develop a series of cooking workshops and practical sessions to build the teaching capabilities of tutors from the Share Kai Cook's collective. Share Kai uses kai/food to bring people together and help remove barriers to participating in our society. It is a collaboration between InCommon, SEWN and former refugee women from countries like Afghanistan, Eritrea, Nepal and Bhutan. The group creates opportunities for their community to actively engage, learn from and make meaningful connections with those from different backgrounds.

The cooks at Share Kai are all migrant women who are already very competent cooks and who have a desire to build their knowledge and capability as a cooking tutor to support them into a work pathway.

SUMMER 2025

## Learning and Belonging: Shama's Pathways for Ethnic Women in the Waikato



For many ethnic women in the Waikato, settling into life in Aotearoa New Zealand brings both opportunity and challenge. Adjusting to a new language, navigating unfamiliar systems, and managing the expectations of family and culture can be isolating experiences. In this space, Shama Ethnic Women's Trust provides not only practical support but also a sense of belonging and purpose through community-based adult learning.

Founded in 2002, Shama was established in Hamilton to support ethnic women experiencing family violence. Over time, the organisation recognised that many of the women it worked with needed something broader. They needed a place to learn, to grow confidence, and to connect with others without having to leave behind their cultural identities. Today, Shama offers a wide range of programmes designed to equip women with essential life skills, strengthen families, and support wellbeing through education and connection.

SUMMER 2025

## Rutherford College – Celebrating 50 Years of Community Education and Connection



Rutherford College Community Education celebrated over 50 years of adult education this year, marking decades of enriching lives through lifelong learning in West Auckland. Since its beginnings in the early 1970s, the College has been a trailblazer in bringing learning opportunities beyond the classroom and into the heart of the community.

The journey began in 1972 when the then Principal of Rutherford College, Eric Clark, returned from visits to Canada, the USA, and Europe inspired by international models of community use of school facilities. In his prize-giving address that year, Clark presented a visionary idea that schools should serve not only young students, but also the wider community.

Fifty years on, Rutherford College Community Education continues to be a centre of lifelong learning in Te Atatū and surrounding areas. The programme now offers more than 200 courses, welcoming over 2,200 adult learners each year.

SUMMER 2025

## WestREAP's ACE Programmes – Supporting Rural Communities



Adult and Community Education (ACE) on the West Coast is focused on accessibility and relevance. In a region where transport options are limited and distances are large, WestREAP (West Coast Rural Education Activities Programme) ensures learning opportunities are available to people in their own communities.

WestREAP delivers learning opportunities from Punakaiki to Haast, a stretch of more than 400 kilometres. Classes are held in schools, halls, and churches, often providing the only local access to education in remote areas.

For many learners, WestREAP classes may be the only social or educational opportunity available that week. Their strength lies in delivering directly within communities to build trust and ensure what is on offer is relevant.



# Te Ao Māori et protecting mā Māori

Dr. Hone Harata  
Ngāi Tahu, Ngāi Hara, Ngāi Tahu  
@hara  
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ace Thriving Communities Transforming Aotearoa  
Communities Aotearoa ace Thriving Trans

Lectrum

# ACE learning in the community



Adult learning in Aotearoa is delivered in a vast array of settings, often in response to a community need. It is much wider than funded programmes and includes the thousands who participate in book clubs, community choirs, dance, drama, fitness programmes and other community initiatives. It is therefore difficult to determine how many learners are actively engaged in learning at any one time.

32 organisations provided their data.



## Sample Funding Sources

- Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)
- Ministry of Social Development (MSD)
- Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS)
- Foundation North
- Lotteries
- Self-funded by learners
- District Councils
- Councils
- Local Boards
- Trusts



## Sample range of programmes offered

Literacy
Numeracy
ESOL (English Language Learning)
Te Reo Māori
NZ Sign Language
Other Language Learning
Digital Literacy
Computer Skills
Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies
Coding and Programming
Employment Skills
Career Planning and Job Search
Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Financial Literacy and Budgeting
Communication and Public Speaking
Leadership and Governance
Health and Wellbeing
Mental Health and Resilience
Fitness and Physical Activity
Nutrition and Healthy Living
Parenting and Family Learning
Community Leadership and Volunteering
Environmental Sustainability
Gardening and Food Production
Cooking and Food Skills
Creative Writing
Visual Arts and Crafts
Performing Arts (Music, Dance, Drama)
Photography, Media and Design
Cultural Knowledge, Heritage and Identity
Life Skills and Independent Living

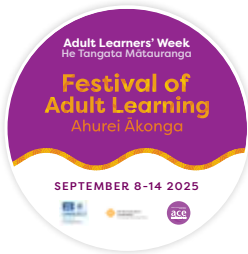
# ACE 2025 achievements

## ACE Sector Steering Group



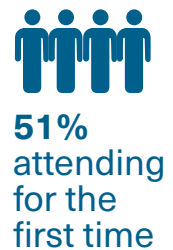
meetings held

## Adult Learners Week



to host the festival  
across the motu

## ACE Conference



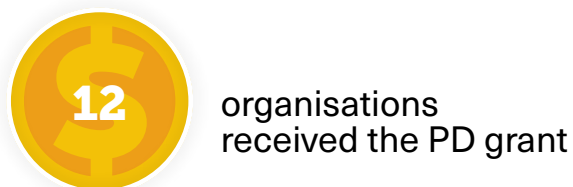
## Hui Fono



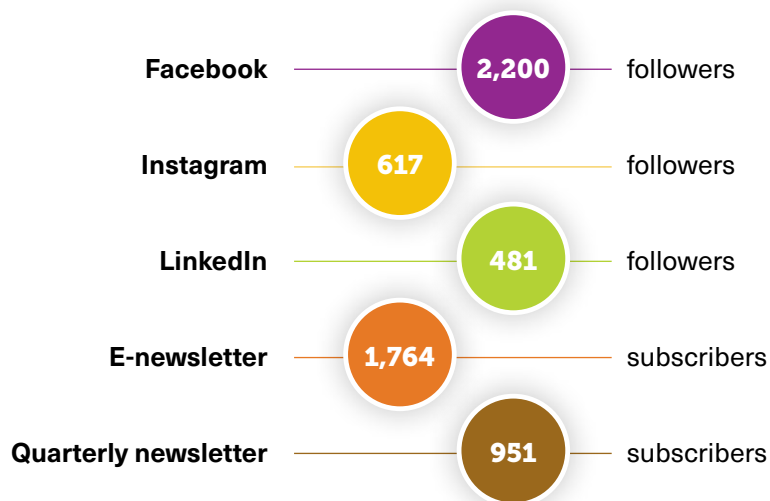
## Professional Development Workshops



## Professional Development Grants



## At a glance:



## International Memberships

- Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)
- International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)
- Adult Learning Australia (ALA)

# ACE Sector Steering Group (ASSG)

The ACE Sector Steering Group (ASSG) is a subcommittee of the ACE Aotearoa Board that offers leadership by advising the government and discussing key issues identified by members within both the ACE and broader tertiary sectors.

In 2025, the group met four times with representatives from the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and the Ministry of Education to provide updates on sector developments, explain how new policies and requirements affect learners and providers, and explore ways to advance the interests of the ACE sector.

The ASSG provided submissions to the Ministry of Education on the Draft 2026 Funding Determinations and the Draft Tertiary Education Strategy 2025–2030 that demonstrated the value of the ACE sector's input—highlighting, for example, the formal approval of online synchronous learning delivery, which now allows for more flexible and accessible options to meet learners' needs.

Nonetheless, several important challenges remain and the ASSG recognised the continued need to advocate for: meaningful and equitable provision for ACE priority learners, an inclusive and fair funding and tendering system for all ACE providers and programmes, and ongoing dialogue with the Ministry of Education and the TEC to enhance integration of ACE sector initiatives into sector-wide pathways for learners who are currently disengaged from education and employment.

The ASSG also continues to address how the work and value of the ACE sector can gain greater visibility and recognition from the government. Conversations about the ACE sector can sometimes fail to reflect the full breadth of ACE programmes, the outcomes and impact, and particularly its long history of fostering civic participation, cultural confidence and community wellbeing. In addition, the sector still lacks comprehensive support systems and mechanisms to collect data and report on the outcomes and impacts of learners' participation in ACE programmes. This lack of cohesive information remains a barrier on how well the success of the ACE sector's work can be fully represented and understood. It will be valuable to scope in 2026.

## **For 2025, the members of the ASSG were:**

- Bronwyn Yates, Independent Chairperson of the ASSG
- Hannah Pia Baral, ACE Aotearoa
- Dr Edmund Fehoko, ACE Aotearoa
- Tai Samaeli, ACE Aotearoa
- Helen Lomax, and then Corrina Gestro-Best, Ako Aotearoa
- Nigel Sutton, Community Learning Associations through Schools [CLASS]
- Rachel Elsy, and then Nita Hutchinson, English Language Partners NZ
- Claire McGowan, Literacy Aotearoa
- Fesaitu Solomone, Centre for Pacific Languages
- Tracey Shepherd, REAP Aotearoa
- Maureen Muller, and then Hine McLetchie, Te Ataarangi Trust
- John Sullivan, Federation of Workers Educational Association [FWEA].

# Professional Development

In 2025, ACE Aotearoa delivered a strong and wide reaching professional development programme that supported educators across the adult and community education sector to grow their confidence, capability, and practice. The programme focused on what matters most in ACE teaching: learner wellbeing, cultural responsiveness, practical strategies, and connection. Workshop streams included Teaching Standards, Successfully Teaching Adults, Supporting Neurodiverse Learners, Te Reo Māori for the ACE Sector, Whakawhānau, AI for Education, and the Masterclass Series.

Feedback on the teaching standards workshops showed consistently high levels of satisfaction, with 90% of participants reporting the workshops completely or mostly met their needs. Educators valued the clear explanations and practical examples, particularly in areas such as culturally responsive teaching, reflective practice, and supporting learner wellbeing.

Successfully Teaching Adults workshops were delivered across nine regions. These workshops modelled good ACE practice through co-facilitation and a strong values base grounded in aho, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga, and whanaungatanga. 91% of participants said the workshops met their needs, and many reported feeling more confident to apply new strategies in their own teaching contexts.

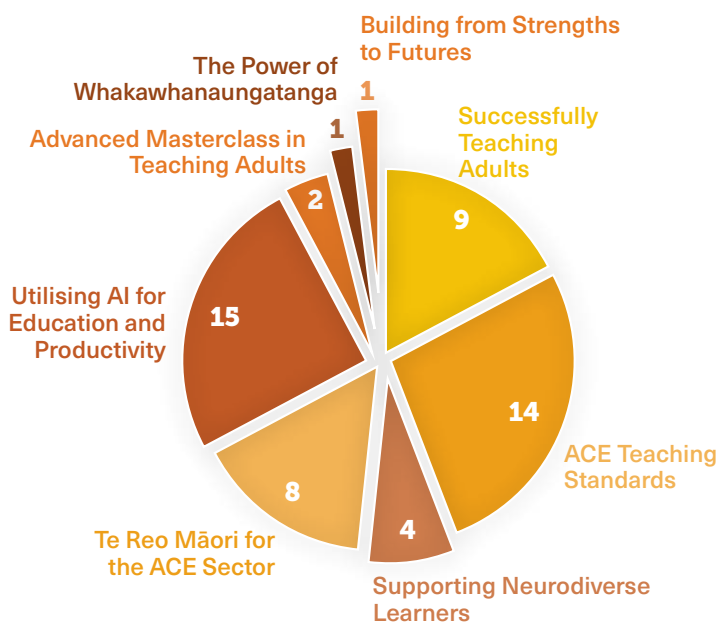


The Supporting Neurodiverse Learners programme had a particularly strong impact. 76% of participants said the workshop completely met their needs, with no negative feedback recorded. Educators described meaningful shifts in understanding neurodiversity and gained practical tools they could use immediately in their learning environments.

The Te Reo Māori for the ACE Sector series continued to be highly valued, with 98% of participants reporting the workshops met their needs and 94.6% intending to use what they learned. The series supported educators to build reo confidence and strengthen culturally grounded practice.

**Overall, the 2025 programme reinforced ACE Aotearoa’s commitment to Tiriti led practice and delivered tangible benefits for educators and learners nationwide.**

## Workshops held



# Māori and Pacific Professional Development Hui Fono 2025:

## *Reclaiming AI through Indigenous Knowledge*

Hui Fono 2025 brought together more than 130 Māori and Pacific educators, leaders and change-makers in Ōtautahi Christchurch, reaffirming its place as a grounded professional learning space within Aotearoa's Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector.

Now in its 15th year, Hui Fono continues to centre Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practice and lived experience. Designed by and for the communities it serves, it creates a space where mātauranga Māori and Pacific worldviews shape both the kōrero and the learning experience.

For the first time, Hui Fono was delivered alongside the ACE Conference, strengthening continuity between the two and enabling Indigenous perspectives to more directly inform wider sector conversations.

The theme, *AI | AI – Bridging Artificial Intelligence and Ancestral Intelligence*, focused on the relationship between emerging technologies and long-held knowledge systems. Rather than positioning these as competing forces, Hui Fono emphasised ancestral intelligence as essential to navigating the ethical and cultural challenges of AI.

The programme reflected this approach. Wānanga, panel discussions and talanoa explored how AI is shaping communities, alongside practical discussions on governance,



cultural integrity and the protection of Indigenous knowledge. Participants also shared local practice and lived experience.

A keynote from Papali'i Pale Sauni grounded the day in personal and intergenerational insight, highlighting the enduring role of ancestral knowledge in shaping identity, leadership and community wellbeing.

Tikanga and cultural practice remained central throughout, with whakataua, te reo Māori and Pacific languages, and whakawhanaungatanga reinforcing the relational foundations of learning.

Hui Fono 2025 highlighted a clear opportunity for the sector to reclaim the narrative around AI. Indigenous knowledge systems provide the context and ethical grounding needed to ensure emerging technologies support, rather than undermine, community aspirations.



Hui Fono 2025

## ACE Conference 2025:

### *Connecting a Sector, Shaping the Future*

The ACE Aotearoa Conference 2025 brought together educators, providers and sector leaders from across the country in Ōtautahi Christchurch, creating a shared space for learning, reflection and connection.

Held immediately after Hui Fono, the conference strengthened continuity across both events, guided by the whakatauki he waka eke noa – we are all in this together. This enabled insights from Hui Fono to carry directly into wider sector discussions.

The theme, *AI | AI – Bridging Artificial Intelligence and Ancestral Intelligence*, positioned the conference at the intersection of technological change and community-based learning. It reflected a growing recognition that while AI is reshaping education and work, its use must be guided by human values, cultural context and collective responsibility.

The programme featured keynote presentations, panel discussions and practical workshops. Topics ranged from AI in governance and leadership to applications in teaching, learning design and impact reporting. Sessions also explored ethical issues, including Indigenous data sovereignty and the need to maintain trust, equity and accountability.

Workshops and demonstrations focused on practical application, enabling educators to test tools, share experiences and build confidence. At the same time,



speakers reinforced the importance of critical thinking to ensure technology supports, rather than replaces, the relational foundations of adult and community education.

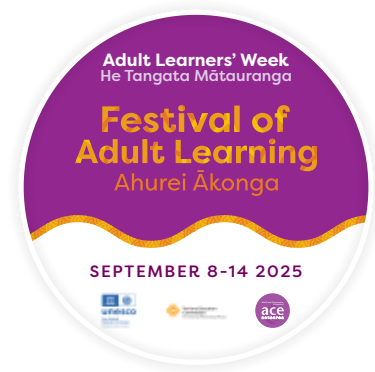
The conference also provided a valuable opportunity for reconnection across a dispersed sector, strengthening relationships and sharing collective challenges and achievements.

It reinforced the ongoing relevance of ACE, highlighting its role in fostering connection, inclusion and lifelong learning in a rapidly changing environment.



ACE Conference 2025

# Adult Learners' Week – He Tangata Mātauranga



Adult Learners' Week He Tangata Mātauranga continues to be a highlight of the ACE calendar, celebrating the power of lifelong learning across Aotearoa. Held from 8–14 September, the 2025 festival brought together communities nationwide, with around 50 events showcasing the diversity, creativity and impact of adult and community education.

The week recognises that learning is lifelong, life-wide and life-deep. Across the motu, learners engaged in activities that opened new pathways, built confidence and strengthened connections to their communities. From rural towns to urban centres, the festival highlighted the often-unseen stories of growth and transformation happening every day in ACE spaces.

Events reflected the breadth of the sector. In Ōtautahi, a sector gathering shifted the spotlight to tutors, acknowledging their vital role in supporting learners to grow and succeed. In Kirikiriroa, Arts for Health offered creative workshops that fostered wellbeing, connection and self-expression across a diverse learner base. Other initiatives included open days, community learning programmes and library events, each contributing to a strong sense of belonging and shared learning.

Adult Learners' Week also plays an important role in raising the profile of ACE, encouraging more people to return to learning and strengthening networks across the sector. It is both a celebration and a call to action—highlighting the value of accessible, community-based education and its role in building resilient, connected communities.

Across all activities, a clear message emerged: adult learning changes lives. Whether gaining new skills, reconnecting with culture, or simply finding confidence, learners across Aotearoa continue to demonstrate the transformative impact of education at every stage of life.



# International Activities

## **International Think Tank Meeting on Education and Digital Transformation**

In November, youth and adult education leaders from across Asia, the Pacific and beyond gathered in Vientiane, Lao PDR, for the International Think Tank Meeting and Strategising for Education Stakeholders. Held on 24–25 November, the event brought together 62 participants from 23 countries to explore how rapid advances in digital technologies—particularly artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven platforms—are reshaping learning, work and participation in society.

For adult and community education providers, these shifts raise critical questions around access, inclusion and ethics. Discussions focused on how the sector can respond in ways that uphold human rights, strengthen communities and equip learners with the skills needed to navigate an increasingly digital world.

Three key priorities emerged: strengthening advocacy to ensure digital transformation remains human-centred and aligned with equity, climate justice and the Sustainable Development Goals; building partnerships through better ecosystem mapping and cross-sector collaboration; and developing internal capability, including digital literacy, hybrid learning models and an ongoing international forum on AI in education.

ACE Aotearoa was represented by Chief Executive Hannah Pia Baral, who also facilitated the closing panel, alongside ASPBAE President Peter Clinton Isaac Foaese, DVV International Director Uwe Gartenschlaeger and ICAE President Robbie Guevara. Panellists emphasised the importance of building on existing networks, strengthening collaboration and advancing clear, values-based advocacy.

A consistent theme was the centrality of human relationships in education, particularly for communities often underrepresented in policy discussions, including rural communities, migrants, refugees, Indigenous peoples and women. The discussion also highlighted the role of community-led education in influencing policy and strengthening cultural identity, including the revitalisation of Indigenous languages such as te reo Māori.

Reflecting on the event, Hannah noted the strong alignment between global conversations and local realities in Aotearoa: “It was a reminder that the questions our learners and providers are asking aren’t just local—they’re global. And Aotearoa has real wisdom to contribute.”

Participants concluded by endorsing a Call for Action advocating for a rights-based, human- and planet-centred approach to adult learning in the age of AI. The Think Tank reinforced the vital role of adult education in ensuring that technological change supports inclusion, critical thinking and lifelong learning.

# AA Focus Ltd 2025 Year in Review

2025 was a year of meaningful progress for AA Focus Ltd. Under the chairship of Yun Liu, the organisation deepened its work across property management, community capability building, events support, and Pacific leadership development, contributing to both its charitable mission and its long-term sustainability.

## **ACE House**

AA Focus Ltd continued in its role as property manager for ACE House, maintaining four established tenancies throughout the year. In 2025, work was also undertaken to assess a 10-year maintenance plan for the property and explore its commercial feasibility, with a view to identifying future options for increasing revenue opportunity. This forward planning reflects the organisation’s commitment to sound asset stewardship and its focus on building long-term financial sustainability.

## **Pacific Capability Project – A Ten-Year Milestone**

The Pacific Capability Project marked its 10th anniversary in 2025, a significant milestone that reflects the enduring value of this work. Funded by the Lotteries Grants Board, the project delivered mentoring and training across governance and strategic planning, management, financial management, and marketing and communications to 50 community organisations in Auckland during the year. A decade of consistent delivery has built genuine expertise and trust with the communities AA Focus Ltd serves.

## **Cook Islands – Leadership Facilitation**

AA Focus Ltd delivered specialised leadership facilitation training to Cook Islands public servants, the organisation’s first international engagement. This work reflects both the depth of expertise AA Focus Ltd brings to complex environments and its commitment to serving Pacific communities in the region.

## **Looking Ahead**

Across these areas, 2025 demonstrated AA Focus Ltd’s capacity to deliver quality work in diverse contexts. The organisation enters 2026 well-grounded in its purpose and with a broadening base of experience to draw on as it continues to grow.

# Our Stories

## Annual Awards Recipients 2025

### EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR TANGATA WHENUA

#### Rahera Shortland



Recipient of the Award for Educator of the Year Tangata Whenua, Rahera Shortland.

Whaea Rahera is a respected Manutea of Te Ataarangi, entrusted with protecting the mauri of the kaupapa since its early days. For more than 30 years she has taught adult learners and mentored emerging kaiako, sharing her deep knowledge of te reo Māori and tikanga with generosity and care.

Known for her ngākau mähaki, Whaea Rahera creates safe and inclusive learning environments where taura feel valued and supported. Her ability to adapt to different learning styles, communicate with clarity, and empower learners has made a lasting impact on countless students and educators.

A patient, wise and compassionate educator, Whaea Rahera embodies lifelong learning and continues to inspire growth and confidence in all those she teaches.

### EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR TANGATA TIRITI

#### Jacob Koria



Recipient of the Award for Educator of the Year Tangata Tiriti, Jacob Koria.

Jacob Koria began his journey with Literacy Aotearoa as a volunteer before progressing into tutoring and now a full-time educator. Driven by a passion for supporting Māori and Pacific learners, he has become a valued educator and advocate for inclusive learning.

Jacob places learners at the centre of his teaching, tailoring lessons to individual needs and aspirations. From supporting learners with dyslexia to building digital literacy and life skills, his approach is practical, innovative and empowering.

His strong cultural understanding and ability to connect meaningfully with learners create environments where taura feel respected and supported. Jacob's dedication to professional growth and learner success continues to make a significant contribution to Literacy Aotearoa and the wider education sector.

## COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMME OF THE YEAR TANGATA WHENUA

### Maranga | Rise Up



Recipient of the Award for Community Based Programme of the Year Tangata Whenua, Maranga || Rise Up.

Maranga | Rise Up is a kaupapa Māori programme that combines Te Hurihanga and Te Rōpū Taitama to support tāne aged 18–30 through te ao Māori, life skills and adventure-based learning.

Running since May 2024, the programme includes monthly noho wānanga over 10 months, supported by regular mentoring and goal-setting between wānanga. Participants explore identity, healthy masculinity, emotional wellbeing, tikanga Māori and connection to te taiao.

Designed for tāne who may be vulnerable to isolation, offending or gang involvement, the programme supports participants to move from shame to strength by reframing their stories and recognising their potential. Through whakawhanaungatanga, mentoring and community support, Maranga | Rise Up is helping build stronger, healthier individuals and communities.

## COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMME OF THE YEAR TANGATA TIRITI

### Merge Sign Language New Zealand Programme for Essential Workers



Recipient of the Award for Community Based Programme of the Year Tangata Tiriti, Merge Sign Language New Zealand Programme for Essential Workers.

Merge NZ developed its New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) programme for essential workers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, helping improve communication between Deaf people and frontline services.

Delivered over three-week courses across five terms annually, the programme has reached more than 1,430 learners through 130 courses and over 470 teaching hours since 2021. Participants include emergency services, civil defence and healthcare workers.

Courses are tailored to each profession, teaching industry-specific NZSL vocabulary and practical communication skills through role-play and scenario-based learning. Delivered by Deaf tutors, the programme creates authentic learning experiences that are responsive to learners' needs and pace.

The programme has strengthened accessibility and inclusion across essential services, while inspiring many learners to continue their NZSL journey through further study.

**MEMBER OF THE YEAR  
TANGATA WHENUA**

**Charissa Waerea**



Recipient of the Award for Member of the Year, Tangata Whenua, Charissa Waerea.

Charissa Waerea (Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Kahungunu, Taranaki ki Ngāruahine, Tūwharetoa ki Taupō) has been a dedicated leader and long-serving Board member of ACE Aotearoa, serving from 2014–2024, including as Co-Chair Tangata Whenua.

Throughout her governance and advisory roles, Charissa has championed manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga and tikanga Māori across the organisation and sector. She has played a significant role in ACE Hui Fono, the ACE Conference, Festival of Adult Learning and numerous sector networks and advisory groups.

A key achievement was her leadership in strengthening relationships between mana whenua and Pacific communities in Taranaki through Hui Fono, contributing to the establishment of the Taranaki Pacific ACE network. She has also supported ACE Aotearoa staff and Board members to confidently use te reo Māori and tikanga in everyday practice.

Charissa's wisdom, cultural leadership and commitment to adult education have made a lasting contribution to the ACE sector.

**MEMBER OF THE YEAR  
TANGATA TIRITI**

**Pale Sauni**



Recipient of the Award for Member of the Year Tangata Tiriti Pale Sauni.

Papali'i Pale Sauni is a respected Samoan leader whose influence spans education, health and social services. A passionate advocate for Pacific success, he has dedicated his career to supporting equity and opportunity for Pacific communities across Aotearoa.

Pale served on the ACE Aotearoa Board from 2014–2024 and contributed to numerous advisory and professional development groups, including ACE Hui Fono and ACE Conference. Through these roles he has strengthened Pacific representation, informed strategy and supported sector-wide professional development.

Known for his warmth, creativity and humour, Pale has brought energy and connection to ACE events as an advisor, MC and musician. He has also led Pacific capability initiatives supporting more than 500 Pacific community organisations across Auckland and Te Tai Tokerau.

In recognition of his leadership and service, Pale was nominated for the 2022 Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards and received the 2023 Sunpix Pacific Health & Wellbeing Award.



