

Adult & Community Education

Newsletter



Nancy, an ELP Volunteer based in Hamilton, with an ELP learner. Story on page 11.

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.

Learning beyond the classroom

Learning at Shama happens in kitchens, sewing rooms, and conversation circles. This is not a place of traditional, formal classrooms. English language classes, sewing lessons, and "Cooking and Conversation" sessions bring together women from many cultures who share a desire to learn and belong.

"Sometimes women say, 'I already know how to cook,'" says Silvana Erenchun Perez, Shama's Strategic Manager. "But the cooking classes are not about recipes. Classes are a relaxed, familiar place to practise English, celebrate culture, discover more about life in New Zealand, and learn from each other. They are a space where women share how things are done in their home countries, explore Kiwi ingredients, and swap ideas for blending flavours and traditions, like adding kumara to a curry".

The "Cooking and Conversation" sessions often spark discussions about daily life from shopping and



Members of the Shama Ethnic Women's Trust sewing group.

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Whakataukī

*Whāia te mātauranga
hei oranga mō koutou.*

*Seek after learning
for the sake of your
wellbeing.*



using public services to understanding school fundraisers and community events. Silvana recalls one of her early experiences as a new migrant from Chile, when she attended a school event that coincided with the Melbourne Cup. "I didn't realise it was a dress-up occasion," she says. "Everyone was very elegantly dressed, and I felt out of place. These are the kinds of experiences we talk about in our sessions, so that other women can feel more prepared and confident."

Building skills and confidence

Shama's life-skills courses also include sewing classes, which provide one-on-one tuition in using sewing machines, repairing clothes, and developing practical techniques that can lead to income opportunities or volunteering. These sessions help women learn by doing, with tutors guiding participants at their own pace.

English language learning remains a cornerstone of Shama's work. Around 30 women participate in each cycle of classes, divided into smaller groups by ability.

Because classes are women-only, they provide a culturally safe space for those who may not feel comfortable learning in mixed-gender environments. The emphasis is on communication for everyday life with the women practising conversations that happen at schools, shops, or workplaces and using the learning to build confidence to engage outside the classroom.

As Silvana notes, "It's not just language learning, it's also about learning how to participate in the community."

The biennial Shama fashion show also helps the community engage more widely when over 200 garments are on show.

Learning as a pathway to participation

The outcomes of these learning experiences are often transformative. Many participants begin as learners and go on to volunteer, tutor, or work within their communities. "It's a progression we see often," says Silvana. "Women come here unsure of their English or isolated at home. Over time, they start volunteering, which gives them new confidence and experience. Some move into employment in roles like teacher aides, interpreters, or community workers. It's about regaining independence and having choices."

Silvana's own journey mirrors the experience of many of the women she now supports. After moving from Chile to Hamilton, she found herself at home with a young baby, far from the professional life she had built as a journalist. She joined Shama first as a participant in sewing classes, then volunteered as an interpreter, and later found part-time work in community radio. Eventually, she returned to Shama as a manager, where she continues to oversee its programmes today.

"Many migrant and refugee



Members of the Shama Ethnic Women's Trust.

women come to New Zealand with strong qualifications and professional experience," she says. "But when they arrive, their education is not always recognised, and their skills are not immediately trusted. Through Shama, they rebuild that sense of value and capability. They often rediscover the strong, capable women they already were."

Expanding services and reach

Shama's growth over the past 20 years reflects both the increasing diversity of the Waikato region and the ongoing need for culturally responsive education and support. In 2024, over 70 women participated in Shama's life-skills programmes, and the organisation provided social and community support to more than 400 women. Its team of 17 staff members deliver social work, counselling, and administrative support alongside educational and community initiatives.

Beyond Hamilton, Shama also delivers violence prevention and healthy relationships training to ethnic community groups across New Zealand. The training is led by a full-time facilitator based in Auckland and is designed around best-practice approaches that respect cultural difference.

Each programme is tailored to the community it serves. For example, a recent workshop in Ōamaru partnered with the Waitaki Multicultural community to develop resources on healthy relationships for parents from

migrant and refugee backgrounds. These materials were designed to help parents understand what their children are learning at school in Aotearoa, and to support them in discussing these sometimes sensitive topics in culturally meaningful ways.

Silvana notes that this approach of working alongside communities to co-develop solutions, is central to Shama's philosophy. "It's about prevention and education, not just response," she says. "We work with groups to talk about consent, relationships, and cultural expectations in ways that make sense for them."

Who comes through the doors

The women and families who engage with Shama represent the diversity of Hamilton and the wider Waikato. Some are newly arrived migrants seeking connection and orientation. Others are mothers balancing childcare, work, and language learning. There are also survivors of violence and women rebuilding their lives, as well as those looking for community and a sense of belonging.

A community of trust and respect

While the tutors who lead Shama's courses are mostly long-term New Zealand residents, the trust's governance reflects the communities it serves. Most of Shama's trustees are ethnic women who bring lived experience of migration, settlement, and cultural diversity. This balance

ensures that programmes are grounded in both local knowledge and cultural understanding.

All of Shama's courses are either free or offered at minimal cost, removing financial barriers to participation. This accessibility is essential for many women who may not yet be eligible for mainstream education funding or who face financial hardship.

The broader impact

Through its educational programmes, community outreach, and advocacy work, Shama acts as a bridge between cultures, helping women navigate life in Aotearoa while maintaining their individual cultural identity. The organisation's model demonstrates how adult and community education can address social isolation, improve language and life skills, and strengthen social cohesion.

As Hamilton continues to grow in cultural diversity, Shama's work remains vital. Its success shows that adult education is not limited to classrooms but is also about learning how to live, connect, and contribute in a new environment.

"Learning here is about connection," says Silvana. "It's about creating a space where women can support each other, share experiences, and build new lives together."

Find out more at:
<https://shama.org.nz/>

The following story is taken from Volunteering Waikato social media and tells the story of Rohini.



"My journey with Shama began shortly after arriving in New Zealand, during a time when I was seeking connection, purpose, and a way to contribute to my new community. With a background as a teacher in India, I was passionate about education and working with people, but starting over in a new country came with many challenges.

Volunteering at Shama gave me the opportunity to support English language classes for ethnic women—many of whom, like me, were navigating life in a new land. What began as a few hours of volunteering soon became something much more meaningful. Shama quickly felt like a home away from home—a place where I was welcomed, encouraged, and surrounded by women who uplifted and inspired one another.

Over time, I became involved in a range of activities, including assisting with community events and school holiday programs. These experiences allowed me to develop new skills, gain local experience, and connect with families from diverse backgrounds. Each moment deepened my sense of purpose and belonging.

Shama didn't just give me a place to volunteer—it gave me confidence, a sense of direction, and a trusted support system. One of the most humbling moments in my journey was being nominated by Shama for the Volunteer Waikato Award. This recognition affirmed that my contributions were valued and made a difference.

With Shama's support, I was able to transition into the workforce and am now working as a relief teacher in New Zealand. Having Shama as a local referee and a guiding presence gave me the courage and credibility, I needed to take that important step forward in my career.

I am grateful for the role Shama has played in my journey. The organisation's work with ethnic women is not only empowering—it is life-changing. I take pride in my role here and deeply appreciate the opportunities to stay connected with Shama."

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.

By 1973, a school-wide survey led by staff and senior students revealed a strong appetite among locals for adult and continuing education. The following year, Rutherford College became one of four schools nationally to pilot the "community school" model supported by the Ministry of Education.

The initiative provided dedicated funding and staffing, including the appointment of a Director of Community Education. The first to hold that role was John Wise, who led the early programme from 1974 to 1976, setting the foundations for the centre that exists today.

By 1985, Rutherford College was offering around 175 courses, many developed in collaboration with local organisations.

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



Hannah Pia Baral at the open evening at Rutherford College.



Erihapeti Ngata-Aerengamate at the open evening at Rutherford College.

From arts, crafts, and languages to technology, wellness, and business skills, the range reflects the diversity and creativity of the West Auckland community. The courses remain affordable and accessible, ensuring that cost is never a barrier to personal or professional growth.

Ramona Toth, Community Education Director, says the ethos of community partnership remains at the heart of the programme.

"We're proud to continue Eric Clark's vision by working closely with local organisations. Our goal is not only to teach new skills but to empower people, strengthen families, and support wellbeing across the community."

Over the years, Rutherford College has developed strong partnerships that extend learning well beyond the classroom walls. One of those collaborations is with the Department of Corrections, where for the past seven years the College has delivered first aid courses to both staff and offenders across Tāmaki Makaurau.

For many participants, earning a first aid certificate is a milestone achievement.

"For some of these learners, it's the first formal certificate they've ever received. It becomes a taonga, something they're deeply proud of. We've even heard stories of graduates using their new skills to save lives at home," says Ramona.

Building on that success, Rutherford has also introduced food hygiene courses for Corrections staff across the North Island, improving the quality of meals prepared within prisons and community hubs. The initiative not only supports workplace upskilling but promotes wellbeing and dignity through access to good food.

A Golden Celebration of Lifelong Learning

To mark its 50-year milestone, Rutherford College hosted its first-ever Open Evening on 10 September. The event featured kōrero from:

- Hannah Pia Baral, CEO of ACE Aotearoa
- Erihapeti Ngata-Aerengamate, Kaitiaki of Te Kotuku Marae and Deputy Chair of the Board of Trustees
- Gary Moore, Principal of Rutherford College

Their reflections honoured the past while looking to the future of community education.

A highlight of the evening was the Awards Ceremony, recognising the achievements of outstanding adult learners and tutors, a celebration of perseverance, growth, and mentorship. Guests also took part in free workshops and the quintessential community sausage sizzle.

Rutherford College Community Education remains a beacon of opportunity in West Auckland. Its success is built on strong partnerships, a belief in the power of learning, and a deep commitment to community.

"Lifelong learning isn't just about gaining qualifications," says Ramona. "It's about building confidence, connection, and purpose. That's what makes this work so meaningful, and why, 50 years on, we're still as passionate about it as ever."

Another recent partnership involves barista training for women nearing the end of their community service. Delivered over two Saturdays, these courses provide practical skills, confidence, and pathways into employment.

"It's not always easy to bring offenders into a school environment," says Ramona. "But with the right planning and support, it's possible. We treat them as learners, not labelling them in any way and every one of the eight women from our first intake went on to find work afterwards."

Rutherford also works with the Ranui Action Group, offering learner and restricted driver licence programmes for rangatahi in West Auckland. These initiatives remove key barriers to employment and independence for young people who might not otherwise have the means or support to achieve their driver's licence.

The journey of Rutherford College within the ACE sector has not always been smooth and Ramona is the first to highlight some of their issues which are generally focussed on financial viability. "Several times we have been on the brink of closure due to financial issues but there has always been that strong desire to keep the doors open whatever it takes. I think this is at the heart of our success. We deliver a very real benefit to adult learners in our community, and we have a dedicated and professional team who are prepared to do what it takes to remain viable". Sometimes that has meant personal sacrifice for the team but witnessing the life changing results they deliver makes that worthwhile.

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.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, U3A groups have flourished since the 1980s, adapting the original model to suit local communities. Each group operates independently, offering a mix of lectures, study circles, and discussion groups shaped by members' interests. Members meet in libraries, community halls, or homes, in spaces where learning is both social and stimulating. The focus is not only on acquiring knowledge but on staying connected, building friendships, and keeping the mind vibrant.

In Taradale, Hawke's Bay, the spirit of learning and connection is thriving. Among the members of the local U3A is Keith Rowe, a former Methodist minister who spent many years in parish ministry and theological education. Keith first



Gary Moore, Principal of Rutherford College.



Members of the U3A Taradale contentious issues group, November 2025 during a discussion of local body elections and futures for local body government.

encountered U3A when invited to speak to the Remuera branch on interfaith understanding, a topic close to his heart. When he and his wife later moved to the Hawke's Bay in 2016, he decided to join U3A Taradale.

Keith says that this was when he truly realised he had "become one of the elderly." That awareness deepened during the isolating times of COVID-19 and Cyclone Gabrielle, when people checked in to make sure he and his wife were safe and didn't need help with shopping. "It changed my sense of status," he reflects. "I recognised I was now part of that community of older people and U3A became a natural place to belong."

Today, U3A Taradale has around 300 members and offers a range of study and activity groups, from French, te reo Māori, geography and history to cycling, book discussions, and a luncheon group that researches the cultural background of local restaurants before visiting them. The underlying principle is simple: no one should be lonely, everyone has wisdom and experience to share.

Keith belongs to two groups, the Contentious Issues Group and the History Group, both are strong examples of U3A's model of engaged learning. The Contentious Issues Group, he explains, "deals with the topics that divide the Christmas dinner

table." Around 12 members meet regularly, selecting subjects at the start of the year from gang culture and climate change to economic systems or international conflict. One person researches the topic and presents their findings, after which everyone has a turn to respond, with no one able to speak twice until everyone has had a turn to speak. "It's a very democratic process," Keith says. "We're not trying to reach consensus, just to understand how others think and to develop our own views."

While the topics can sometimes be sobering, Keith says the discussions create a sense of purpose and intellectual energy. "It's often hard to find the grounds of hope at our age, but being with others who are thinking deeply about the world helps you feel that you're still contributing."

Recently, the group hosted a session for a wider U3A audience of about 60 people, exploring the hotly debated topic of Māori wards. Instead of a lecture, they placed cards with "for" and "against" statements on each table, prompting everyone to respond to their card before joining an open discussion. "It was lively, respectful, and a great learning experience," says Keith. "People really talked and no one took offence."

Keith's History Group takes a similar peer-learning approach. Each member

presents on a topic of personal interest with one recent session exploring a member's family migration journey from Germany to South Africa. Last year, Keith co-led a short course on the Treaty of Waitangi, bringing together 23 members over three sessions. He contributed academically gained historical context, while a local kaumātua shared stories and wisdom from a Māori perspective. Together, they explored the Treaty documents, the Declaration of Independence, contemporary Māori thinking and key Waitangi Tribunal findings.

For Keith, U3A represents the best kind of education, engaged learning. "We need to value the wisdom seniors can offer, the richness of reflected on experience we bring to society," he says. "U3A gives us that chance to keep learning, keep thinking, and keep connecting."

As Napier and other cities plan for more age-friendly communities, Keith believes U3A has an important role to play — keeping older people mentally active, socially connected, and contributing meaningfully to society.

Probus, another well-known organisation for retirees, also offers seniors a structured opportunity for learning and engagement albeit through a more passive model of learning. As Keith says both passive and engaged learning models are extremely valid but use different educational techniques.

Probus groups tend to centre around guest speakers, social gatherings, and outings. Their format provides valuable companionship and recreation, particularly for those who prefer to listen and observe rather than actively participate. While both Probus and U3A serve vital roles, they cater to different styles: Probus offers community through learning from an informed speaker, while U3A creates community through shared inquiry. Both organisations show that learning in later life isn't just about knowledge — it's about connection, purpose, and the joy of discovery.

International Marking 65 Years of Adult Learning Leadership in Australia

This year, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) celebrates 65 years as the national peak body for adult learning and community education in Australia. Since its establishment in 1960, ALA has played a central role in promoting access, equity, and lifelong learning across Australia's diverse communities.

ALA has positioned adult education as a cornerstone of personal development, social inclusion, and community resilience. Over the decades, the organisation has worked to ensure that adults, particularly those who may have missed out on formal education, can access meaningful learning opportunities. Through advocacy, sector leadership, and collaboration with providers, ALA has supported the development of foundation skills, community-based education pathways, and inclusive learning environments.

To commemorate its 65th anniversary, ALA has adopted the theme: "Celebrating 65 Years of Excellence in Adult Education: Renewing Futures, Empowering Communities." This theme reflects the organisation's ongoing commitment to supporting both individual learners and the broader communities they are part of. Throughout 2025, ALA has put the spotlight on stories of achievement, examined the evolution of the adult education sector, and explored future directions and challenges. They also showcased 65 celebratory messages sent by politicians, current and past board members, partners, and supporters.

Insights from the CEO

Jenny Macaffer, who has led ALA as CEO for much of the past decade, shared her reflections on the organisation's journey and the road ahead.

She noted the parallels between ALA and ACE Aotearoa, particularly in navigating a rapidly changing environment. Adaptability and preparedness, she said, are essential qualities for both organisations. One of the key challenges ALA faces is maintaining financial and governance sustainability as a not for profit based organisation. Recruiting and retaining a skilled board without remuneration requires significant commitment from members, many of whom are from an older demographic. Engaging a new generation of leaders and broadening the organisation's reach is a priority. Jenny also highlighted the ongoing tension between accredited and non-accredited learning. While accredited programs often attract more funding, non-accredited learning plays a vital role in building skills, confidence, health and wellbeing and community capacity. Ensuring that this form of learning is recognised and supported remains a central issue for ALA. Jenny emphasised the critical role adult learning and community education plays in supporting democratic participation. In an era where information is increasingly contested, education equips individuals with the tools to make informed decisions. She also highlighted the importance of accessible learning in remote and regional communities, where it fosters social connection and strengthens local networks. Looking ahead, ALA is committed to ensuring adult learning and community education remains part of national conversations, particularly on pressing issues such as climate change and social equity. Jenny stressed the need for adult education to be included in policy discussions and decision-making forums.



Sustaining a National Voice

Despite having less than four full-time staff, ALA is a respected voice in the sector. The organisation has managed Adult Learners' Week on behalf of the federal government for the past 30 years, a key initiative in promoting lifelong learning.

ALA also publishes an academic journal three times a year, focusing on research that places adult learning at its centre. In 2017, a special edition of AJAL highlighted the results of The Getting of Wisdom Exchange, a collaboration involving around 100 adult education practitioners and researchers from ten countries across Australia, New Zealand, Asia, and Europe. Experiences and knowledge were shared during three one-day conferences, including one held in Wellington, New Zealand, and the papers contributed to the special edition of AJAL that year.

ALA's special edition for 2025 focuses on creative pedagogies in adult education and celebrates AJAL's 65-year anniversary issue.

With increasing competition for funding and the rise of new online learning providers, ALA continues to evolve its delivery models and advocacy strategies.

Looking Forward

Strong relationships remain central to ALA's work and Jenny invests considerable time in stakeholder engagement and networking, which has enabled the organisation to maintain a presence in key national forums. Notably, ALA was one of the few not-for-profit education bodies invited to the Australian Jobs and Skills Summit following the ALPs Australian federal election.

Despite current challenges, Jenny remains optimistic, seeing strength in the collective voice of adult learners. She believes that continued advocacy, along with education and lifelong learning, is essential for building a better, more inclusive future for all.

"We look forward to continuing our collaboration 'across the ditch' with our sister organisation, ACE Aotearoa, strengthening connections and sharing expertise in adult and community education," says Jenny.

***Message from Hannah
Pia Baral CEO ACE
Aotearoa to ALA***

On behalf of Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa, I want to extend our warmest congratulations on reaching this remarkable milestone of 65 years of championing adult education and lifelong learning across Australia.

For more than six decades, ALA has opened doors, transformed lives, and strengthened communities by ensuring that learning opportunities are accessible to all Australians, regardless of age or background. Your unwavering commitment to educational equity and social inclusion has made a profound difference.

Here's to celebrating your rich legacy and to the continued impact you will continue make in the years ahead.



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. Following the workshops, the group delivered a "Tastes from Around the World" cooking course for Risingholme with a focus on three ethnic cuisines.

Following this course, the tutors participated in a second round of workshops in the first term of 2025 to solidify their learnings and gained further practical experience leading more cooking sessions. Over three weeks, they taught Share Kai volunteers and Risingholme tutors and staff to make traditional Nepalese momos (dumplings), Eritrean Doro Wat (Chicken Stew), and Ghormeh Sabzi (a herby meat stew from Afghanistan). The sessions ran like a traditional cooking class with tutor demonstrations followed by participants working in pairs at their stations to recreate them.

Many of the dishes included ingredients not typically used in Western cooking like Berebere spice mix for the Doro Wat and a herby vegetable mix for the Gormeh Sabzi. The tutors explained potential swaps that could be made when ingredients were hard to source while remaining true to the cuisine. A highlight of the course was learning how to fold momos by hand with the tutor walking learners through the simple but intricate technique.

At the completion of each session, the tutor and learners shared a meal together.

The PD sessions have enabled several of the women to explore pathways to work including Jamila (Afghani tutor) who has opened her own stall at one of the local markets where she shares her food and passion for cooking with the public.

Lynda Megson, Director at Risingholme says the PD course has enhanced tutors' learning experience. "In addition to the tutor training and mentorship programme we were able to run three cooking classes at no cost to participants, and this allowed us to simulate a cooking class to enable the tutors to implement their prepared lesson plan. This was invaluable to their development as tutors, and we are proud to have been part of their learning journey with the support of ACE Aotearoa."





Andy with digital literacy learners.

WestREAP's ACE Programmes Strengthening Rural Communities

WestREAP – Adult & Community Education | West Coast

Adult and Community Education (ACE) on the West Coast is grounded in accessibility, inclusion, and community connection. In a region shaped by long distances, limited transport, and isolated townships, WestREAP ensures learning opportunities are brought directly into communities rather than expecting people to travel.

"For many learners, our class might be the only social or educational opportunity available that week," says Holly McHugh, ACE Team Leader.

Learning Where People Live

WestREAP delivers programmes across more than 400 kilometres, from Punakaiki to Haast, using local spaces such as halls, churches, and schools. One of the region's biggest challenges, Holly says, is that education and employment pathways look very different from those in large centres.

"Distance, transport, and cost

pressures are daily realities here. Our delivery must reflect local needs."

WestREAP programmes are funded primarily through TEC's community education streams, supporting everything from foundation learning and wellbeing programmes to workforce training.

Creativity, Confidence & Community

Art4Me is one of WestREAP's longest-running programmes, supporting more than 100 participants every week in towns from Blackball to Hari Hari. The focus is wellbeing through creativity, providing a space where connection and confidence can grow.

Tutor Judy recalls one participant who joined the programme while experiencing long-term illness and depression. Through Art4Me, they regained confidence, secured a part-time role delivering newspapers, and began volunteering in the community.

"We're life coaches as much as tutors. We support people not only to find work, but to stay well and confident once they're back in the workforce after long periods away. What we do isn't really about the art at all, it's relational, wraparound, life-coaching mahi that helps people rebuild belief in themselves," says Judy, Art4Me tutor.

Pathways Into Local Industry

WestREAP is also opening up new pathways into growing regional industries such as mining and transport. The Class II Learner Licence Theory programme has already helped participants step into employment opportunities previously out of reach. WestREAP is now expanding into Class II practical and logbook training with local partners, offering a more affordable route to securing a full licence.

What makes the programme distinctive is the wraparound support



WestREAP learners from a range of courses including barista training and reading.



Learners from the WestREAP ESOL class.

offered to learners facing barriers, including financial hardship, literacy needs, and low confidence.

“We are a dyslexia-friendly organisation. Many capable people have missed out because traditional education wasn’t right for them. Our goal is to open doors,” says Holly.

Digital Inclusion in Runanga

In Runanga, a community with no public transport and areas of limited cell coverage, digital literacy workshops are helping reduce isolation and build capability in everyday technology use.

“Learning about Wi-Fi calling has been life-changing. People are reconnecting with whānau they hadn’t been able to reach before. Holding classes locally builds community just as much as skills,” says Jan Flinn, Community Organiser.

Commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

WestREAP delivers four te reo Māori classes each year and is working towards a no-fee model by 2026. Recently, they also hosted community Treaty workshops led by Kevin Hague, generating strong local engagement and meaningful discussion.

Across the Coast, WestREAP’s ACE programmes continue to demonstrate the power of local, relationship-based education. Whether it’s reconnecting people through creativity, building workforce pathways, strengthening digital inclusion, or advancing te reo Māori and Treaty learning, the focus remains constant: removing barriers and creating opportunities so communities can thrive.

“My focus in this role is always on those who need it the most, the people who might otherwise fall through the cracks, and those most vulnerable to the realities and pressures of rural living. I am constantly in awe of the strength and mana of Coasters, and I have learned so much about true community and whakawhanaungatanga in this role. It is an honour to do this work, and I remain committed to delivering education that genuinely works for Coasters,” concludes Holly.

Celebrating volunteers in Adult and Community Education

Every day across Aotearoa, volunteers transform lives through adult and community education. International Volunteer Day, marked globally on 5 December, reminds us to pause and celebrate their stories and the difference they make all year round.

One organisation at the heart of this work is English Language Partners (ELP). Founded by volunteers, ELP has grown into a nationwide not-for-profit organisation, helping people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to learn English to settle, work and succeed in Aotearoa.

Alongside English classes and groups, the original volunteer home tutor programme continues to thrive. Through a network of over 800 dedicated volunteer home tutors, ELP plays a vital role in empowering learners to become confident and independent members of their communities.

Volunteers complete training locally, at one of 21 ELP centres around Aotearoa, earning a NZQA-recognised Certificate in ESOL Home Tutoring. The training equips volunteers with the practical skills to confidently support adult learners in a one-to-one setting.

From learners to volunteers

At ELP, volunteers come from all walks of life and bring their own unique life experiences to the role. Some volunteers were once learners themselves. After building their English literacy skills, they become inspired to give back and support others on their English language learning journeys.

Dhana moved to New Zealand from Sri Lanka in 2023. A trained early childhood education teacher, she found work and joined an English for Employees class in Hastings to improve her English for the workplace.

“I’ve learnt a lot about Kiwi slang. I struggled a lot to understand the Kiwi accent at work and some Kiwi phrases my colleagues are using. Now I’m using them myself, I try to give it a go,” says Dhana.

“Also, we use many te reo Māori words and concepts at work. My class has really helped me to learn and understand them,” she adds.

Motivated to give back to her community, Dhana completed the Home Tutor training in 2025, and she attended the 2025 Hawke’s Bay Volunteering Awards, where ELP was a finalist.

“The free English classes and my tutor have helped me a lot here in New Zealand. I’m very grateful for it. Now I want to share what I learnt and help a migrant with their English,” says Dhana.

Like Dhana, Romi discovered that learning English was only the beginning of a much bigger journey.



Romi



Dhana

Romi, originally from Argentina, arrived in Aotearoa three years ago with an academic and professional background. For her, learning English wasn't just about mastering a new language – it is about reclaiming her voice, reconnecting with her identity and opening the door to a future life in Aotearoa.

Through her own experience and her work with others, Romi has developed a strong sense of purpose. "I want to teach English," she says.

"I realised there are so many women who struggle with English. They were professionals in their countries but gave up their careers here. They're overqualified but can't validate their professions without English. It's a high barrier."

Romi now volunteers as a home tutor in Tauranga, supporting a Cambodian learner who speaks Khmer and Thai. "I'm so proud of her," Romi says. "She struggles with reading and writing but speaks well. She does lots of homework."

"There should be a way to help them. It's also good for New Zealand," says Romi.

Conversations that change lives

For the past eight years, Lower Hutt volunteer Hugo has supported newcomers to Aotearoa through simple but powerful means: connection and conversation. Hugo began volunteering after he retired, motivated by the negative attitudes he was seeing toward migrants and wanting to offer something constructive.

"To support an immigrant was my stand against the negativity," he says.

His teaching approach is relaxed and relationship-focused. Rather than sitting at a table with worksheets, Hugo and his ELP learner meet each week to walk and talk. Their walks help his learner navigate everyday Kiwi life, from local issues to cultural differences while building a friendship that eases the challenges of settling in a new country.

Hugo draws on his background as a former early childhood teacher, prioritising encouragement over correction. "We don't want to discourage. Encouraging the conversation to continue is more important than getting everything right."

He believes that true progress isn't measured in tests or milestones, but in connection. "It's more friendship than pupil and kaiako — that's why we are called English Partners."

Many ELP volunteers have dedicated decades of service. Nancy is a shining example, volunteering in Hamilton for an incredible 29 years.

She takes pride in creating a safe, welcoming space where learners can speak freely about their lives, cultures and the unique challenges they face.

"You can have some hilarious conversations about things. Nothing's bad – everything is on the table," says Nancy.

Lessons often cover practical topics that learners from migrant and refugee backgrounds find most useful. One conversation even saved a life when Nancy shared a story about a relative who had battled breast cancer.

For Nancy, tutoring English was never just about vocabulary and grammar. "Learning straight grammar was too boring for students," she says. Instead, she developed her own casual, conversational style that builds confidence, trust and lifelong friendships.

Stories like these show the incredible diversity and dedication of volunteers in the adult and community education sector.

Supporting volunteer training

ELP volunteers are well supported through training and ongoing professional development, with access to resources and guidance from Volunteer Leaders – ELP staff dedicated to working with volunteers. Volunteers also join a network of local and national peers across Aotearoa, collaborating online and connecting in person to learn from one another.

As part of ACE Aotearoa's ongoing commitment to supporting volunteer-based programmes, ACE Aotearoa was pleased to provide funding for a crucial health and safety video resource developed by ELP. The video was produced in collaboration with Lance Burdett from WARN International, an expert in resilience and personal safety.

In the video, Lance talks to volunteers about a wide range of safety protocols, including having a charged mobile phone at all times. Volunteers are shown how to assess safety before arriving at a tutoring session. For example, this could be a risk caused by flooding during a severe weather event.

ELP's National Volunteer Advisor, Inge De Leeuw, says volunteering with ELP is about much more than tutoring English.

"It's about building genuine community connections, learning from diverse cultures, and contributing to a more inclusive and welcoming society," she says.

Inge and ELP's 21 Volunteer Leaders around Aotearoa often hear from volunteers that the experience is deeply rewarding. "Volunteers tell us the learning goes both ways – they gain a huge amount out of this experience too."

"For learners, having a tutor can be truly life-changing. We're incredibly grateful for the contribution volunteers make, and we value them as an essential part of the ELP whānau."

If you're interested in volunteering with English Language Partners, visit their website to find out more and apply: englishlanguage.org.nz/volunteer

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 tauira (students) do not whakapapa directly to South Auckland, or even Aotearoa, but they come together as urban Māori, Pasifika and all nationalities which brings its own set of challenges she explains. "A lot of urban Māori don't have a marae in the city—or have never been to a Marae, so we create our own space. Our workspace becomes our meeting house, where we gather as equals to share, learn, and embrace the beauty of our culture."

Most of her tauira 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. Heather also buys Māori-designed fabrics, where possible.

Each participant is given the tools and materials to learn in a way that's meaningful, exciting, and empowering. Everything they make, they take home, to show their whānau.

Heather provides her classes and support for a gold coin donation, if they can afford it. She also sources low-cost sewing machines and then on-sells them to her students, at a discounted rate, once they have learnt in class how to use them. This means her tauira can continue their learning at home and pass on their knowledge to their whānau.

Her teaching approach is based around a Māori whakaaro: confidence

building is just as important as mastering a stitch. "Teaching someone to design and sew a garment for themselves and their whānau is only the beginning – it is empowering for them," she says.

Each year culminates in a vibrant fashion event held at a hall in South Auckland, where tauira showcase the garments, they've created. It's more than just a runway show—it's an opportunity for the tauira to get together and celebrate what they have learnt, with their fellow tauira and their whānau. They gain confidence, acceptance, and mana to be able to show what they have achieved.

Some will wear garments they've made to the show; others show embroidery using their pepeha. They swing poi, they wear kakahu (clothes) made with Māori measurements, as well as any kete and pōtae (hats) they've crafted themselves. The night is emceed by local personalities and judged by local fashionista. Nora Swan from Dressed in Confidence was one of last year's judges. Prizes are also sourced from local businesses who help to support the kaupapa.

"Māori women often put their whānau and communities before themselves," says Heather. "This event is their moment to shine, to be seen, supported, and celebrated."

Heather's commitment to kaupapa Māori education, including te reo, extends well beyond her weekly classes. For nine years, she's taught at Roscommon School's total immersion units, where rangatahi have been the first kura in Aotearoa to create their own school uniform. Students sew bags, skirts, shirts and cushions with everything rooted in te ao Māori. Heather also leads Pepeha Tuitui (stitching) workshops and Sew your Pepeha sewing wānanga, to help others see the world with a Māori view.

During Matariki 2025 Heather hosted a pepeha sewing workshop with kura teachers in Rotorua.

She incorporates traditional Māori measurements and philosophies in her pattern drafting and designs, grounded in a kete of mātauranga Māori principles.

Heather's working week spans multiple community sites—including Rawiri Community House, Te Whare Awhina Manurewa, Activate Church Takanini, Whare Koa Māngere, Māngere East Library, Clover Park Community House, and more. In between, she tirelessly seeks funding, donations, and opportunities to support and expand her mahi.

Heather Black

Tainui te waka, Taupiri te maunga, Waikato te awa, Nga Tae e Rua te marae, Ngāti Te Ata te hapū



Heather Black, on left, with two students

Board Talk

Looking Ahead: Jay Rupapera and Dr Edmond Fehoko on Strengthening the Future of ACE Aotearoa

At the recent AGM of ACE Aotearoa, Jay Rupapera was re-elected as Co-Chair Tangata Whenua, continuing her leadership alongside Dr Edmond Fehoko, Co-Chair Tangata Tiriti. Together, they bring a shared commitment to strengthening the organisation's future direction and ensuring the adult and community education (ACE) sector continues to grow its reach and impact.

A Strategic Refresh for an Inclusive Future

Jay Rupapera says one of the Board's key priorities for the coming term is completing the strategic refresh, a process that will define ACE Aotearoa's direction and reaffirm its purpose.

"The strategic refresh is going to be incredibly important for the sector," Jay explains. "It's vital that we take an inclusive approach to practice and that our members clearly see ACE Aotearoa as an engaging and welcoming organisation."

She notes that this work goes beyond strategy documents. "It's about embedding inclusion and engagement into every aspect of what we do, from how we connect with our members to how we advocate for adult and community education nationally."

Intentional Engagement

As Tangata Whenua Co-Chair, Jay is focused on strengthening intentional engagement with Māori learners, providers, and communities.

"It's about having clear goals and outcomes for Māori communities who are accessing ACE," she says. "We need to collect whānau voices to inform those goals and to understand where the gaps are and how we can better respond."

Jay also highlights the importance of recognising the collective contributions

of Māori, Pacific and all communities involved in ACE. "It's about balance and connection, making sure everyone can see themselves reflected in our work and outcomes."

Strengthening Advocacy and Membership

Another key focus for Jay is advocacy, ensuring ACE Aotearoa continues to be a strong voice for adult and community education in a changing political and economic environment.

"In the current climate, we need a clear strategy for advocacy," she says. "Adult and community education is a vital pathway for workforce development and social connection. We need to understand the political space we're working in and engage effectively within it to deliver great outcomes for our sector and our communities."

She adds that advocacy must remain grounded in listening. "Our effectiveness depends on how well we listen to our members, to Māori and community voices, and to those delivering learning at the grassroots level."

Partnership and Balance at the Board Table

Jay says she values the partnership she shares with her Co-Chair, Dr Edmond Fehoko, describing their working relationship as one built on complementary strengths.

"What's unique around the board table is the range of perspectives we bring," she says. "We share the same kaupapa, but each of us contributes different experiences. Edmond's expertise in tertiary learning and research, and his deep connection with Pacific communities, really complements my background in community-based education."

Dr Edmond Fehoko: Exploring New Horizons

Dr Edmond Fehoko brings extensive experience across the education sector and strong relationships within Pacific communities. He says his focus is on positioning ACE Aotearoa for the future.

"We can't afford to just deliver business as usual," he says. "We need

to think about where we're going, what critical areas we should explore, what new horizons are emerging, and how we can strengthen our reach to new communities."

Edmond acknowledges the challenges of operating in a shifting political and funding landscape but views this as an opportunity for growth. "Uncertainty forces us to step outside our comfort zones, explore new partnerships, and look at new funding streams. That's where innovation happens."

He is optimistic about the sector's future, crediting the leadership of Chief Executive Hannah Pia Baral and the ACE Aotearoa team. "The sector is in a good space," he says. "If we continue to think strategically and act with purpose, we can step confidently into new territory."

Accountability and Purpose

Edmond describes his role on the Board as one of stewardship, ensuring the organisation remains accountable to the learners and communities it serves. "Adult and community education is often about second-chance learners," he says. "Our role is to normalise those opportunities and create spaces where learners can thrive."

He adds that the bicultural governance model of ACE Aotearoa is one of its great strengths. "Working within a bicultural structure allows us to build on our collective strengths and learn from each other. It's a model that reflects the values of partnership and shared responsibility."

Edmond cites a favourite quote from Benjamin Disraeli that captures his philosophy: "The greatest good you can do for another is not just share your riches, but to reveal to him his own." He says this sentiment reflects the essence of adult and community education, helping people uncover and realise their own potential.

Together, Jay and Edmond are focused on guiding ACE Aotearoa into its next chapter, one defined by inclusion, intentional engagement, and a clear sense of purpose for the future of adult and community learning in Aotearoa.

Celebrating Leadership and Legacy: Acknowledging Kathryn Hazlewood's Contribution to ACE Aotearoa

After six years of service, Kathryn Hazlewood has stepped down from her role as Co-Chair Tangata Tiriti on the ACE Aotearoa Board, leaving behind a legacy of leadership, integrity, and a deep commitment to lifelong learning.

Kathryn's journey with the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector began in 2015, when she managed the Adult Community Education Aotearoa contract during her time at the Tertiary Education Commission. From the beginning, she was drawn to the heart of the sector, its people, and its power to create change.

"I was drawn to the ACE sector straight away," Kathryn reflects. "It's a sector where I could see the potential to make the most significant positive change for individuals, whānau, and communities."

A pivotal moment in her journey came when she attended the Hui Fono in Ahipara, at the invitation of Analiese Robertson. "Being part of that event was a game changer," she says. "It helped me develop a fuller, more grounded understanding of the ACE sector and its people."

When Kathryn later moved on from TEC, her connection to ACE remained strong. In 2019, she was elected to the ACE Aotearoa Board, an opportunity that allowed her to continue contributing to a sector she felt deeply aligned with. "It has been a wonderful board to be part of, a board filled with heart, with people truly at the centre."

Over her tenure, Kathryn worked alongside three directors, Colin McGregor, Analiese Robertson, and Hannah Pia Baral, each bringing unique strengths and perspectives to the organisation. She describes this as a time of growth and evolution, where leadership was shared, and values remained at the forefront.

Kathryn's Co-Chair Tangata Whenua, Jay Rupapera, offered this tribute to Kathryn's leadership:

"The time Kathryn and I spent together as Co-Chairs was about valuing each other's strengths, weaknesses, and experiences. We complemented each other so well, always patient, humble, and supportive. Kathryn brought a real sense of integrity and balance to the organisation. I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to Kathryn for her leadership and lasting impact."

That partnership was a defining feature of Kathryn's time on the Board. Together, Jay and Kathryn modelled what it means to lead a Tiriti-based organisation, one that honours the principles of partnership.

"Working alongside Jay and the board has been a privilege," Kathryn says. "It's a relationship built on mutual respect, partnership, and trust that extended around the



Kathryn Hazlewood and Jay Rupapera



David Do, Deleraine Puhara, Jay Rupapera, Hannah Pia Baral, Kathryn Hazlewood, Charissa Waerea, Pale Sauni

board table." Kathryn acknowledges with gratitude all the board members she's worked with over the past six years, their aroha, passion, and shared commitment to the ACE sector have been a constant source of inspiration.

Kathryn says she steps back with a sense of pride and is optimistic about the future for ACE. "After six years, it felt like the right time to step aside and make space for others. The board is in a very strong position, with an experienced and capable leader in Hannah, who is working alongside the board and sector to position the organisation well in the current political and economic context. I'm proud to be an ACE lifelong learner and I will always feel connected to the sector and look forward to watching the movement continue to grow."

Noticeboard

Save the Date! **26-28 May 2026**



Tēnā koutou katoa, Tālofa lava, Kia orana, Mālō e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Namaste, Mālō ni, Fakatalofa atu, Halo ola keta, Mauri and warm Pasifika greetings to you.
ACE Aotearoa is bringing the ACE Conference to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland next year!

The annual conference brings together educators, leaders and advocates from across Aotearoa to share insights, strengthen partnerships and explore the future of adult and community education. Expect thought-provoking keynotes, sector-wide kōrero and inspiring examples of innovation in practice.

The ACE Conference and Hui Fono will be held back-to-back once again. Hui Fono takes place on 26 May, followed by the ACE Conference on 27–28 May – giving Māori and Pacific educators the perfect opportunity to connect with and continue the kōrero across the wider ACE sector.

Block your calendars and pencil us into your diaries: 26-28 May 2026. More details, theme and registration info coming soon.

ACE Aotearoa Annual Awards 2026

Nominations are open for the ACE Aotearoa Annual Awards 2026. These prestigious awards recognise excellence in teaching, ACE programmes, and leadership within the sector and are an opportunity for you to acknowledge your colleagues and the wonderful work they do.

The Awards are one of the highlights of the ACE calendar and are presented at our conference dinner. Award recipients receive complimentary travel, accommodation and registration to attend the conference.

We encourage you to begin thinking about nominating someone in your team or wider ACE community, a programme you are proud of, or a person who has demonstrated leadership through contributions to governance, management, research or innovation. Nomination forms can be accessed through the online link on our Awards webpage. We can help with any nomination hiccups. Email admin@aceaotearoa.org.nz

Nominations close March 13, 2026 and will be considered by an external panel of judges.

Nomination forms are available for download at <https://www.aceaotearoa.org.nz/events/ace-aotearoa-annual-awards>

We look forward to receiving your nominations.

AI Policy for Education Groups

Doctor Karaitiana Taiuru was a keynote speaker at the 2025ACEAotearoa conference. He spoke on AI, Ethics, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty and reached out to us recently following feedback he received from attendees asking about how to implement some of the ideas he discussed.

Dr Taiuru has subsequently created a full draft AI Policy for education groups. There is no copyright, it is fully open to anyone to edit, remove or add and it can be found online here <https://www.taiuru.co.nz/nz-specific-ai-and-generative-ai-policy-template-for-education/>

Is Your Organisation on the ACE Providers Map?

ACE Aotearoa regularly receives enquiries from learners looking for community-based learning opportunities. To help connect these learners with local education options, ACE Aotearoa maintains the ACE Providers Map – a national directory showing where adult and community education is taking place across Aotearoa.

So far in 2025, the map has already been searched over 3,300 times, highlighting the strong interest in lifelong learning and community education.

If your organisation offers adult and community education programmes and isn't currently featured, ACE Aotearoa invites you to get in touch to have your details added. The map is open to all providers that meet the ACE definition – you don't need to be ACE-funded to be included.

Organisations are also encouraged to check their existing listings to ensure information is accurate and up to date. If your organisation doesn't have a physical site, ACE Aotearoa can place a pin on the city or town where you are based so learners searching in your region can still find you.

To view the map or check your listing, visit www.aceaotearoa.org.nz/ace-providers-map. For more information or assistance, contact the ACE Aotearoa team at admin@aceaotearoa.org.nz

ACE Aotearoa Office Christmas Hours

The ACE Aotearoa office will close on Christmas Eve (24 December) and reopen on 5 January 2026.



Have a Great Break

On behalf of the team at ACE Aotearoa we wish you all a restful and peaceful break. We hope that each of you gets time to relax and hopefully enjoy some sunshine and downtime. We look forward to working with you in the New Year to continue our partnership work within the sector.