Winter
2025

Adult & Community Education Newsletter

ACE Aotearoa Conference

This year, ACE Aotearoa took a new approach to our annual ACE Conference and Hui Fono, hosting the events back-to-back from June 10–12 in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Our guiding whakataukī — he waka eke noa (we are all in this together) — perfectly captured the spirit of this decision. The shared theme, **AI | AI – Bridging Artificial Intelligence and Ancestral Intelligence**, wove both events together in a powerful and thought-provoking way.

Our aim was to honour the deep roots of Indigenous knowledge while exploring the cutting edge of artificial intelligence — creating space for both the past and the future. As AI continues to shape our lives and learning environments, it's crucial that we ask: How do we protect and uplift ancestral wisdom in this new technological age?

Ancestral Intelligence — the wisdom handed down through generations — and Artificial Intelligence — the creation of machine-based systems — offer radically different ways of understanding and navigating the world. Where AI focuses on data processing and algorithms, Ancestral Intelligence prioritises lived experience, cultural context, and our deep connection to the natural world.

Contents

Whakataukī

Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere. Ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōna te ao.

The bird that feeds on the miro berry owns the forest. The bird that feeds on knowledge owns the world.

At this year's conference, we asked the big questions:

- How do we safeguard ancestral knowledge from misuse or unconsented extraction?
- How do we confront bias, racism, and the erasure of Indigenous voices in AI systems not built with us in mind?
- And importantly, how can we harness AI as a tool for good — to share our stories, expand access to learning, and preserve culture for generations to come?

A key theme that emerged during the conference was the importance of integrating *Ancestral Intelligence*—including Indigenous language, cultural data, values, and historical knowledge—into our use of modern technologies like AI. The discussion centred on how to do this in a way that honours and protects the authenticity of Indigenous knowledge systems, rather than diluting or commercialising them. Participants raised critical questions about ownership, consent, and intellectual property: How can we ensure that ancestral knowledge is not only acknowledged, but respected, safeguarded, and retained within the communities it originates from? As we embrace digital tools, there is an urgent need to establish clear frameworks that prevent the exploitation or misrepresentation of cultural knowledge, while enabling Indigenous communities to lead and define the ways their histories and wisdom are used in the digital age.

The event featured a lineup of speakers and workshop facilitators who sparked vibrant discussion, critical reflection, and meaningful networking.

We welcomed back Te Ataahia Hurihanganui (Rangitāne, Ngāti Kahungunu-ki-Wairarapa, Ngāti Ira, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whāoa, Tūhourangi-Ngāti Wāhiao, Ngāti Whakaue-Ngāti Te Roro o te Rangi) as Kaikōrero for the second year. With her warmth, wisdom, and presence, Te Ataahia once again held the space beautifully, drawing our collective circle closer together as we shared our breath.

She was joined this year by Charmaine Tukua (Tainui, Ngāi Tahu) – Pouwhare, our 2022 ACE Aotearoa Educator of the Year | Tangata Whenua, who brought her own strength and insight to the kaupapa. Charmaine is a distinguished Māori educator with more than 25 years of dedicated service in adult and community education, particularly in the revitalisation of mātauranga Māori. As a senior educator at Ara Institute of Canterbury, she has profoundly influenced the delivery of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori programmes, focusing on foundational education in adult literacy, broadcasting and engineering.

Charmaine opened conference by taking us all on a journey as she welcomed us to her whenua. She spoke of her mountain Maungatere (Mount Grey) and her awa Rakahuri (the Ashley River) as well as the history of Kaiapoihia Pā. She also shared stories of her love of whānau and the strong wahine in her life including her great grandmother, grandmother and mother who she honored. We joined Charmaine on the journey from North Canterbury to Latimer Square, the conference venue.

Together, Te Ataahia and Charmaine helped guide us through a conference that challenged, inspired, and reconnected us — to each other, to our stories, and to the future ahead.

AI, Ethics, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Dr Karaitiana Taiuru

Dr Karaitiana Taiuru

Dr Karaitiana Taiuru, a respected researcher, advocate, and thought leader in technology and Indigenous rights, delivered a powerful keynote address. With over 30 years of experience in the IT sector, Dr Taiuru brings a wealth of knowledge to the complex intersections of artificial intelligence (AI), ethics, and Māori data sovereignty.

A central theme of Dr Taiuru's presentation was the importance of Māori communities retaining control over their digital and cultural data. He emphasised that despite limited financial or human resources, many free tools and platforms are available to help communities achieve this vital goal.

Dr Taiuru is currently focused on AI ethics and governance across both public and private sectors. He called for "myth-busting" around common misconceptions about AI, noting that while concerns exist, they are often overstated or misunderstood.

“AI is not something to fear,” he said. “It’s about understanding it and managing it in ways that align with our values and needs. It’s also essential that indigenous communities have discussions around AI. It is only intelligent when we give it our knowledge and if we do not share that knowledge then we will be at risk of digital colonisation. AI will guess and make assumptions about what our knowledge is. The counter argument to that is that if we do share we risk intellectual property rights abuse. These are the paths for Māori to navigate.”

Dr Taiuru outlined and defined the four steps to protect mātauranga Māori with AI including:

1. Define and understand what is Māori data and what is Māori data governance.
2. Engage with Māori stakeholders for tapu and noa.
3. Label your Māori data.
4. Create and implement Te Tiriti and tikanga based principles applicable to your organisation.

Dr Taiuru then went on to refine how to address these issues using legal instruments and court decisions. He also shared valuable advice about individual organisations using best practice to customise their principles and plans about how they will use AI within their organisation, how they will incorporate AI into existing data and governance frameworks, looking at their own internal tikanga values such as manaakitanga and how these are applicable to the implementation of AI across a business and treating data as a taonga.

In separate conversations Dr Taiuru addressed one of the most pervasive fears—that AI will replace human jobs—and offered a more nuanced perspective. While acknowledging that some roles may become redundant, he pointed to research suggesting that AI is more likely to create new employment opportunities than eliminate them.

“We will always need people to train AI systems, validate outputs, and provide expert knowledge. This will generate new roles in sectors like logistics, education, and technology. Human input will remain essential,” he explained.

However, Dr Taiuru also highlighted the environmental and ethical costs associated with AI. He noted the substantial resource demands of AI technologies—for example, every sentence generated by systems like ChatGPT requires approximately half a litre of water to cool the servers involved. The increasing consumption of electricity and the use of rare earth minerals, often mined in underregulated environments, also raise serious concerns about sustainability and labour exploitation. This point proved to be a key discussion at several of the conference workshops and panel discussions.

Intellectual property (IP) risks were another focus of Dr Taiuru’s address. As AI becomes more prevalent, the potential for IP theft—especially of Indigenous knowledge—grows. He urged organisations to take this threat seriously and implement clear safeguards.

Despite the challenges, Dr Taiuru remains optimistic about AI's potential to enhance learning and improve access to information. He noted that AI offers capabilities beyond traditional search engines and can help develop innovative educational resources—provided that its use is approached with care.

“I strongly advise users not to input confidential or sensitive information into AI systems, as these platforms are not secure. And always fact-check outputs—AI is not infallible. This is especially critical for minority communities and women, who are often underrepresented in datasets.”

Dr Taiuru concluded with a call to action: embrace AI but do so responsibly. He stressed the importance of ethical frameworks, strong governance, and learner protection in the adoption of AI technologies.

“There is a wealth of free online training available to support small organisations in navigating this space. I encourage you to take advantage of these resources to protect both your staff and your learners.”

The Five AIs

Jose Roberto 'Robbie' Guevara

Robbie Guevara is well known to ACE Aotearoa. He is an educator with extensive experience in adult, community and popular education with a focus on education for sustainable development and global citizenship education. Robbie is an Associate Professor at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia and he is the President of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). Robbie was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in October 2012 for his contribution to adult learning in the Asia-Pacific region.

Robbie chose to merge his presentation with the following panel discussion, featuring Lara Draper (General Manager – Adults and Seniors, Deaf Aotearoa) and Peter-Clinton Isaac Foaese (President, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education). But before the panel took the stage, Robbie set the tone with an invitation to reframe our thinking about artificial intelligence—and intelligence more broadly.

Rather than seeing AI as a destination—"the crossing of a bridge"—Robbie encouraged us to view it as a bridging process: something fluid, evolving, and responsive to our learning journeys. He introduced a conceptual framework of Five AIs, each representing a different dimension of intelligence that we navigate and draw upon.

1. Academic Intelligence

Robbie's first exposure to "AI" came through traditional education. Trained as an environmental scientist, he was always reminded by his mentors — "do not let your schooling get in the way of your education." This early foundation grounded his view of intelligence as something deeper than credentials alone. His early work with an environmental NGO in the Philippines involved designing a grassroots environmental education curriculum, where his initial motivation was to bring science to the people. But he soon realised that these communities had their own environmental knowledge, that he had to learn from.

2. Andragogical Intelligence

A surprising career turn saw Robbie "run away with the circus"—literally - when he spent a year with a community theatre group travelling around the Philippines. During this time he saw the power of non-formal education, and he developed **andragogical intelligence**: the understanding of how adults learn. Designing participatory and creative learning experiences, especially for grassroots communities, highlighted the diversity of learning styles and cultural expectations. It underscored that adult education must flex and adapt to context and experience.

3. Ancestral Intelligence

Robbie's third lens, **ancestral intelligence**, invited reflection on the limitations of science and formal education when removed from cultural context. It recognises the knowledge, values, and practices passed through generations—a deep intelligence often overlooked in Western paradigms. For Robbie, this intelligence was essential to restoring balance in how we define and engage with learning not just "about" our environment, but "for" our environment.

4. Artificial Intelligence

Robbie then reflected on the main conference theme - **artificial intelligence**—the most recent "AI." Like the other speakers, he cautioned against blind adoption. He reminded us that AI can replicate and reinforce the biases and assumptions baked into its data. To illustrate this, Robbie shared an AI-generated image based on seemingly neutral prompts. The result? A stereotyped, assumption-laden visual that revealed as much about the biases of the inputs as the limitations of the tool itself.

5. Adaptive Intelligence

The final—and arguably most crucial—form of intelligence Robbie introduced was adaptive intelligence: our ability to assess, integrate, and apply the other four AIs. This is the space where we, as learners and educators, make meaning. Adaptive intelligence is where we negotiate complexity and change, drawing on the strengths of each perspective to navigate, but also co- create our future.

Together, the session underscored that intelligence is not static or singular. Whether inherited, learned, technological, or responsive, intelligence is a process of bridging—one that, with care and reflection, can lead us to richer, more inclusive futures.

Panel discussion

Lara Draper (General Manager – Adults and Seniors, Deaf Aotearoa) and

Peter-Clinton Isaac Foaese (President, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education)

As the session moved into the panel kōrero, Robbie invited panellists to offer three words each that captured their experience of the conference. These would later be fed back into AI to generate a new visual aimed at demonstrating the bias but also the potential.

Lara opened by offering a compelling insight into the multi-dimensional nature of sign language. "It's not just about words," she explained, "but movement, eye contact, facial expression, and space. However, I believe that while AI capturing or translating sign language is indeed much more complex and requires more data compared to linear language, it is still evolving. There are new AI signing avatars being developed but we don't yet know how accurate they will be in truly capturing the multi-dimensional nature of sign language."

Lara shared three words that encapsulated her conference experience: connection, communication, and community. She spoke of the Deaf community's strong cultural identity and the importance of visual thinking over linear language. Her question was how these will be interpreted and exist in an AI world. And she agreed that adaptive intelligence would be essential in bringing this together in a meaningful way.

She agreed that adaptive intelligence—our ability to integrate cultural, emotional, and technological understandings—would be crucial in navigating this future. Lara called for collective action, stressing the need for the Deaf community to come together to shape their own response to AI: "We must be involved in defining how our community is represented, engaged, and empowered in this space."

Peter offered a different but equally thoughtful lens. His three phrases were Metacognitive laziness, footprints, and love letter. These came from sessions he had attended during the conference. He wanted to point to how AI has no soul and requires the human heart to be an effective tool for humanity.

"Metacognitive laziness," he explained, refers to the ease with which we accept online information at face value, without questioning its source, motive, or manipulation. "AI can reinforce that laziness if we're not vigilant."

"Footprints" served as a reminder of our environmental and ethical impact—how our choices, including those around technology, leave marks on the world. And finally, his poetic use of "love letter" referenced the many speakers who described their work as expressions of love for whānau and community. He noted that, in the right hands, AI could also become a kind of digital love letter—a tool for honouring stories, legacies, and futures.

Peter concluded with a powerful reminder: "We are all ancestors in the making. We have a responsibility to shape the society we want to leave behind."

AI, Ancestral Intelligence, and the Future of Leadership
Panel discussion

Opening day of the conference featured an experienced line up of panellists to lead the discussion around AI. We were fortunate to have Heidi Renata, Emily Broadmore, Ta'i Richards and Fesaitu Solomone. Each panellist brought a unique perspective to the discussion.

Heidi Renata

Founder and Chief Energy Officer at INNOV8HQ, Heidi Renata is a self-described Curious Wahinepreneur based in Ōtepoti | Dunedin. INNOV8HQ, one of the world's first indigenous-led innovation hubs, has evolved into a global consultancy focused on Indigenous leadership, entrepreneurship, and future capability.

With over 13 years in the tech sector—including helping launch Aotearoa's first text message at Vodafone NZ—Heidi combines digital expertise with cultural grounding. Her mission: to empower Māori and rural communities, especially rangatahi, to lead with purpose.

Heidi sees great potential in AI for personalising learning and enhancing accessibility, while also warning of its risks—particularly for communities already on the margins. "AI isn't good or bad," she said, "it's a tool. The question is: are we ready to lead it with wisdom?"

That's where Ancestral Intelligence comes in—a term coined by Teina Boasa-Dean. It reminds us that knowledge systems began with our tūpuna. "AI is clever," Heidi says, "but Ancestral Intelligence is wise. Together, they can create tech that serves people, not just markets."

Emily Broadmore

Director of communications consultancy Heft, Emily Broadmore transitioned from political advisor and press secretary to co-founding Heft in 2020. She also runs creative social enterprises and founded Folly Literary Journal and The Wellington Writers' Studio.

Emily reframed AI as a creative partner, not just a technical one. She urged leaders to model AI use, creating a culture where others feel safe to explore. "Leadership matters," she said. "AI adoption starts at the top. Use it and give others the freedom to experiment."

Her call to action: embrace AI with a curious mindset—don't wait for permission.

Fesaitu Solomone

Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Pacific Languages, Fesaitu Solomone (Rotuman) leads efforts to revitalise endangered Pacific languages. The Centre offers free language courses, cultural competency training, translation services, and advocacy work.

Fesaitu spoke on the AI of Ancestral Intelligence, where individuals must take responsibility for language and cultural preservation. "Without language, there is no culture. Machines can't feel, but we can. Our heads are where language lives—we are the processing units."

Her message: "We are the knowledge holders. Our job is to protect and strengthen our languages and traditions. That is Ancestral Intelligence."

Ta'i Richards

General Manager of CIDANZ (Cook Islands Development Agency New Zealand), Ta'i Richards is a fluent reo Māori Kuki Airani speaker and a champion of language and cultural revitalisation. Under his leadership, CIDANZ has embraced AI as a practical and cultural tool.

The agency's AI policy focuses on three pillars:

1. **Boosting productivity**, with a reported 50% increase using AI for reports, policies, and analysis.
2. **Amplifying cultural knowledge**, exploring AI for language learning.
3. **Honouring tīpuna and empowering rangatahi,** integrating AI into legacy and future-facing initiatives.

Conclusion

Together, the panellists shared insights that bridged technology and tradition. Their message—AI has promise, but must be guided by cultural intelligence, ethical leadership, and a deep commitment to community values.

AKO Workshop Sessions

Over the two days of the conference, participants had the chance to dive into a range of Ako workshop sessions, choosing from themes focused on Governance, Management, or Teaching and Learning. With laptops (and curiosity) in hand, attendees were encouraged to fully engage in these interactive, hands-on experiences. It was all about walking the talk—putting new knowledge into practice immediately, using real-world scenarios that brought the learning to life.

AI in Governance

Chelsea Natana, Catherine Davidson, Rhys Harris: Deloitte

At the AI in Governance workshop, Chelsea Natana, Catherine Davidson and Rhys Harris from Deloitte shared practical tools and insights to help organisations use AI in a responsible and meaningful way. The session was designed for those in a governance role and the focus was on understanding the risks and benefits of AI, understanding te ao Māori considerations, application of trustworthy AI, and an activity session focused on the AI maturity index. As Catherine said at the start of the workshop "we will not get the benefits AI promises if we don't trust it."

The team stressed the need for clarity and leadership on the use of AI from senior roles within an organisation. The need for clear alignment on the use of Ai with the overall organisational strategy and the requirement to bring everyone on the team on the journey with you, including how and why it will be used. If people within an organisation don't understand these key initial steps it will be hard to implement.

Based on significant global research Deloitte has developed a model for trustworthy AI use in New Zealand. The core of Deloitte's Trustworthy AI framework is based on global findings and includes seven core components:

- Privacy
- Transparency and explainable
- Fair and impartial
- Responsible
- Accountable
- Robust and reliable
- Safe and secure

The model also includes guidance which has been tailored for a New Zealand context and framed around Te Ao Māori principles. These principles include Mana Motuhake, Whakamarumartia, Mana Tangata, Kōwhiringa and Mana Taurite. Each of the principles is underpinned by Te Ao Māori values including Kotahitanga, Manaakitanga, Kaitiakitanga, Rangatiratanga, Whakapapa and Whanaungatanga. Trustworthy AI requires each organisation to develop the five pillars of AI governance maturity including:

1. Policy and principles
2. Procedures and controls
3. People and skills
4. Organisational structure and
5. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

Workshop participants were given time to explore a reality check for their organisation based on the principles with the development of takeaway actions.

AI in ACE Leadership: The Renaissance of Right Brain Thinking

Emily Broadmore

Emily's workshop equipped participants with practical strategies to align AI adoption with creative intelligence—emphasising the need to balance data-driven tools with human qualities like intuition, empathy, and meaning-making. Participants came away with clear approaches to using AI while strengthening human-centred leadership and governance.

A key focus of the session was identification of issues to watch for in your team when using/implementing the use of AI. These included:

1. Cognitive Offloading

Cognitive offloading refers to the process of shifting mental tasks from the human brain to external tools—in this case, AI systems. When using AI, we increasingly rely on it to perform tasks such as writing, analysis, decision-making, and memory recall. While this can improve efficiency and free up mental bandwidth, over-reliance on AI may lead to reduced critical thinking, problem-solving, and even basic recall skills. The risk is that leaders and teams may become too dependent on AI outputs, weakening their own judgement and capacity to challenge or improve those results.

2. Loss of Creative Intuition

AI excels at pattern recognition and replicating existing forms of content or solutions, but it doesn't generate originality in the way humans do. Overuse of AI—particularly in ideation, design, or strategy—can dull our creative instincts. When organisations default to AI to brainstorm or develop ideas, they may lose the unique human spark that comes from intuition, lived experience, and serendipitous thinking. This loss could mean fewer breakthroughs and a decline in innovation over time.

3. Trust in the Tools

Trust in AI tools is essential—but it must be well-placed. As AI becomes more embedded in decision-making processes, users must understand its capabilities, limitations, and biases. Blind trust in AI can lead to errors being accepted without scrutiny, while too little trust can prevent its effective use. Building appropriate trust means fostering AI literacy across teams, ensuring transparency in how AI systems work, and creating feedback loops where human oversight remains integral.

4. Good Enough Culture

A "good enough" culture emerges when AI is used to produce fast, functional outputs that are acceptable, but not necessarily excellent. This mindset can be tempting in fast-paced environments where speed and scale matter. However, settling for AI-generated mediocrity can gradually erode quality, depth, and originality—especially in areas like communications, learning design, or customer engagement. It's important to balance efficiency with the pursuit of excellence and maintain human review and refinement as a key step in the AI workflow.

5. The Expertise Gap

As AI tools become more sophisticated, there's a growing gap between what the tools can do and what users understand about how they work. Many people use AI without fully grasping how it processes data, where its biases come from, or how its outputs are generated. This gap can lead to poor decision-making, compliance risks, or ethical oversights. Bridging the expertise gap requires upskilling, transparency, and cross-functional collaboration—bringing together technical, ethical, and domain expertise to ensure AI is used responsibly and effectively.

Workshop participants were then set free in the world of AI to write a LinkedIn post using AI technology but at the same time questioning and critiquing the language that came back.

More free leadership and AI resources are available for download from the Heft website: www.heft.co.nz

From Tikanga to Tech: Where Mātauranga Māori Meets AI Governance

Shae Parsons

Shae Parsons is an associate consultant with Qrious, an IT Consulting business. AI is already shaping decisions in funding, education and service delivery – but who decides how it's used and whose values guide it? This session explored how Māori and community values can strengthen governance and policy in the age of AI.

Shae facilitated a structured discussion on the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and tikanga Māori, with a particular focus on Māori and Pacific communities. The session emphasised the importance of embedding tikanga-based principles at the governance level when assessing the relevance and impact of AI tools or programmes within organisations.

Participants were encouraged to reflect critically on the ethical, cultural, and operational implications of AI by utilising a decision-making guide grounded in tikanga. Shea noted the importance of reviewing these questions annually to ensure they remain relevant and fit-for-purpose in an evolving technological landscape.

The guide presented to help organisational decision-making is based on six key questions:

1. He mana tēnei? (Who holds the mana?)
- Who is the data about, and do they know it is being used?
- Are communities involved in decision-making, or are they simply being informed?

2. He aha te kaupapa? (What is the purpose?)
- Is this project clearly aligned with the organisation's vision?
- Does it uphold commitments to equity and lifelong learning?

3. Ko wai ka whai hua? (Who benefits? Who might be harmed?)
- Could the system create or reinforce bias?
- Are any groups excluded, over-surveilled, or rendered invisible?

4. Kei hea te tikanga? (Where are the values?)
- Have the principles of tika (doing things right), pono (integrity), and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) been applied?
- What does tikanga say about consent, transparency, and protection?

5. Kei te mārama tātou? (Can we explain this clearly?)
- Would learners, communities, or funders understand how the system works?
- Is there a plan for communicating and reviewing the initiative?

6. Ka taea te whakahoki? (Can we undo or stop it?)
- Is there an exit plan or mechanism to pause implementation if concerns arise?
- Who has the authority to trigger a review, and how responsive is the process?

Following the presentation of the framework, attendees participated in a hands-on session, working through the template to apply the questions to hypothetical scenarios. This practical application allowed participants to build familiarity with the framework and consider how it might inform strategic and operational decisions within their organisations.

SImpact: An AI-augmented process reimagining impact reporting

Jade Tang-Taylor

Jade Tang-Taylor, Co-Founder & CEO of SImpact AI, led a thought-provoking session titled "Reimagining Impact Reporting: AI for Social Good." She challenged the community sector to rethink how impact is measured and communicated, highlighting the practical ways AI can support more meaningful and accessible reporting.

Describing her career path as "more of a squiggly line than a straight one," Jade drew on her rich background in Design Thinking, Systems Thinking, and Futures Thinking. She invited participants to consider how these perspectives can help tackle complex challenges in new, more human-centred ways.

At SImpact, her mission is ambitious yet deeply grounded: to make impact reporting faster, easier, and more meaningful for NGOs, not-for-profits, and grassroots organisations. "In a world where time, energy, and resources are stretched thin," she said, "capturing your impact shouldn't feel like another mountain to climb."

Using SImpact's AI-powered platform, organisations can now complete in weeks what used to take months—often without needing external consultants. Jade was quick to point out that while the tool is powerful, it's not a one-size-fits-all fix. "Some people might try it, then decide to step away—and that's okay. It's about finding what works for your context."

Her workshop session was broken into three parts:
- **Information** – An overview of the SImpact platform and its capabilities
- **Experimentation** – Hands-on testing and real-time exploration with participants
- **Reflection** – A chance to share experiences, ask questions, and provide feedback

SImpact's process, is five simple steps:
1. Data Collection
2. Data Analysis
3. Report Writing
4. Report Design
5. Final Review

While each phase requires input, Jade noted that the final review is where most of the effort lies—ensuring the story of impact is accurate, compelling, and complete.

Drawing on her own time in the community sector, Jade acknowledged the realities many organisations face. "I've seen how the digital divide holds back amazing grassroots efforts," she said. "SImpact was born from that frustration. We want to be more than a tool—we want to be collaborators. AI can make reporting more accessible, more efficient, and, in the end, more human."

Who's behind SImpact?

SImpact is a social venture in partnership with ThinkPlace + Dovetail, with the incredible support of amazing advisors and leaders across community, philanthropy, AI, tech, start-up and impact consulting.

Treating AI as a Trusted Colleague: Unlocking Its Potential in Community Education

Ben Fish

Ben Fish, Practice Lead of Digital Enablement at Kambium, likens Artificial Intelligence (AI) to a capable colleague—smart, fast, and efficient, but one whose work always needs a second look. "When using AI, you need to be on point in terms of what you're requesting," Ben says. "The more specific and targeted you can be, the more efficient and helpful the response will be."

Ben works closely as a trainer with a range of organisations, including ACE Sector member Deaf Aotearoa. He believes AI has significant potential to support the sector—if used purposefully. From drafting course content and lesson plans to analysing learner feedback, AI can dramatically streamline workflows. But he stresses the importance of human oversight: "You must do your own due diligence with a thorough check and review of the final product."

Critically, tone matters. Ensuring that the final output sounds like you—or reflects your organisation's unique voice and brand—is essential. "You still need to put your stamp on it," Ben says.

Ben facilitated a hands-on workshop designed to reduce the fear and uncertainty often associated with emerging technologies. Participants explored practical ways to harness AI in their everyday work, guided through real-time demonstrations and supported exercises.

A key takeaway? AI tools are not all the same. "Even though AI is a technology, each tool has behavioural characteristics that make it unique," Ben explains. "Some tools pick up certain things that others miss, so it's important to cross-check outputs and experiment with more than one platform."

He also highlighted a vital risk consideration: data privacy. Not all AI tools offer the same levels of security or confidentiality. Users must ensure that any system they adopt aligns with organisational policies and ethical standards for data protection—especially when handling learner information or sensitive material.

The Promise and the Precaution of AI in Community Education

AI holds considerable promise for the community education sector. It can reduce administration burden, personalise learning experiences, and provide new insights through data analysis. For smaller organisations with limited resources, it can be a transformative force—enabling educators to do more with less.

But with great potential comes responsibility. Misuse or over-reliance on AI without human oversight risks inaccuracies, inappropriate tone, or breaches of confidentiality. Educators must be equipped not only with the tools, but with the critical skills to use them wisely.

Conclusion: Partner, Don't Replace

AI should not replace the educator—it should empower them. When treated as a collaborative partner rather than a shortcut or magic fix, AI can become a powerful ally in advancing adult and community education. As Ben Fish advises, "Use AI like you would a capable assistant: trust, but verify. And always make sure the final voice is your own."

Practical Considerations in Human Resources for Leading Personnel

Rachel Skudder

Rachel Skudder, Director of Remedy HR, led a workshop on

how AI and human intelligence can complement each other to improve recruitment, performance management, employee well-being, and decision-making—while keeping people at the heart of HR.

She began with a powerful reminder: people must remain central to every HR process.

"Ancestry, our human lineage, history and our divinity, sets us apart from AI or any invented system or model, and is the basis of our intergenerational heritage, regenerative and transformational power and sovereignty over our hearts, minds, souls, spirits and bodies.

We encompass a unique human dimension and weave stories of life, love, loss, values, beliefs, ethics and the whole range of conscious and sentient experiences that shape our heritage and identities, allowing us to connect deeply with one another and the world around us in ways that algorithms and machines can never fully replicate."

Rachel shared four guiding principles for managing HR in the age of AI:

1. **Don't abdicate your humanity.**

Lead with your Human Intelligence. Use AI to amplify—not replace—your capacity for connection, empathy, and wise judgment. People need people first and foremost.

2. Start with Wonder!
Imagination, curiosity, and playfulness drive intelligence and original thought. AI cannot create like you can.

3. Creativity and the Innovation Value Chain
Quoting Aneesh Raman: *"Disrupt yourself or be disrupted."*

Diversity, critical thinking, and open dialogue foster innovation. Encourage divergent thinking, safe talanoa, and respectful disagreement. Use AI as a catalyst, not a crutch.

4. The 8 C's
In today's innovation economy, "soft skills" are more vital than ever. These human qualities distinguish us from machines and prepare us to adapt in a rapidly evolving workplace:

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Critical Thinking
- Courage
- Compassion
- Communication
- Connection
- Collaboration

Rachel concluded with a timely quote from Einstein: *"...imagination is more important than knowledge."*

Supporting Foundation Ākonga with Generative AI

Dr Selena Chan

From pastry cook to Prime Minister's Supreme Award recipient, Dr Selena Chan has had a rich and evolving career in education. Beginning her teaching journey in 1980 with baking students at what was then Christchurch Polytechnic (now Ara Institute of Canterbury), Selena has spent over four decades helping learners succeed—especially those just starting out or getting a second chance.

In her current role as Educational Developer within Ara's Learning Design team, Selena supports staff across a wide range of teaching and learning initiatives. From designing programmes spanning foundation to postgraduate levels, to embedding mobile and blended learning strategies, she's deeply focused on improving learning outcomes in vocational education.

In her workshop session, Selena shared insights into how generative AI (Gen AI) is being explored as a tool to support foundation-level ākonga. "Our learners come with diverse needs," she explained. "Many are second-chance learners who face challenges with digital literacy and access to technology. Part of our role as educators is to help them navigate those challenges—and that includes understanding and using AI."

Selena emphasised that while AI isn't a replacement for learning, it can be a powerful companion. "Think of it as a study buddy. It can support learners with disabilities, neurodiverse learners, and others who may need additional scaffolding. But we must be intentional in how we use it—always guided by pedagogy, not novelty."

She offered a compelling example from Ara's Graphic Design programme, where AI has helped ākonga quickly grasp the elements of good design. "AI can accelerate the learning process," she said. "But when it comes to interpreting a design brief and delivering something truly original and context-specific, that's where human creativity still takes the lead."

Ara's proactive approach to digital tools has always positioned it at the forefront of innovation in teaching. "We saw early that AI needed to be in our toolkit," Selena said. "But like every new tool, it's about critically analysing how and when to use it."

Selena also highlighted the increasing demands on apprentices—especially in areas like literacy and numeracy. "The bar keeps getting higher. Vocational education must equip learners for the workplace, and AI has real potential to support that preparation, if we use it well."

Her session was a timely reminder: as technology evolves, so must our teaching strategies. With empathy, critical thinking, and a commitment to learner success, educators like Selena are helping ensure AI becomes an asset—not a barrier—for the next generation of ākonga.

Ancestral Intelligence and AI anchored in Pacific Language and Culture

Tracey Sā

Tracey Sā is a learning and Development Consultant working with the Centre for Pacific Languages. She started her session with a wakeup call as she led the team through a Samoan clapping routine inspired by Sasa traditions. Tracey's session focused on the loss of language among

Pacifica communities who have emigrated to New Zealand across several generations. She shared her personal journey culminating in the question – why does Cultural intelligence matter?

"Once you lose your language you also lose your culture and identity, and you lose the connection to your essence and culture. At the Centre we champion our languages and provide a leadership platform to recognise our people and who we are and the spaces we are in. We do a lot of work to reduce the stigma that people feel who do not know their language. Courses are held online and face to face using a consistent learning model.

Language matters because it preserves our culture, keeps it alive and promotes respect. Language and culture have a sacred role in shaping identity and learning. Languages keep alive homes, churches, schools and villages and the technology we use to do this must support not distort original dialects, expressions, proverbs and chants. Our authenticity is our authority, and Pacific AI must be developed with, not on, our people."

The Centre is already using AI Learning tools in Pacific classrooms alongside elders with CPL courses now blended with digital tools to increase access. Apps teach chants, hymns, prayers and vagahau, Gagana lead the way elders would. They are embedding taoga into digital tools.

Tracey finished her session with a powerful Alagā'upu.

Kia lālāmouga e haau a vagahau mo e aga fakamotu ti hahamo ke he tapunu!

Put your language and culture on your shoulders and with all you might and power , carry it to the highest peak!

The Centre for Pacific Languages offers Samoan language classes, along with Tongan, Vagahau Niue, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan, Fijian, Rotuman, Kiribati and Cook Islands Māori language classes. Courses are 10 weeks long and taught once a week in a 2hr tutor-facilitated online class.

Being Curious About AI

Diana Law, Tai Samaeli

At the Being Curious About AI workshop, educators explored how AI tools can support everyday tasks and enhance learner experiences. Designed as an accessible and fun introduction, the one-hour, face-to-face session focused on experimenting, reflecting, and learning together.

The emphasis was on practical application—how AI might help with tasks like writing feedback, creating a flyer, or drafting a course description. Participants tried free tools like ChatGPT and Canva AI, considering what might be useful in their own contexts. The goal wasn't expertise, but curiosity, confidence, and creative thinking about easing workloads or trying new approaches.

A highlight was the AI Speed Challenge. Participants drew cards with real ACE tasks and worked in teams to produce content using AI in just five minutes. From session outlines to promotional blurbs, the results sparked laughter, insight, and genuine excitement.

While much of the session explored AI's possibilities, it also prompted critical thinking about its limits. A powerful concern raised was the invisibility of ancestral and experiential knowledge in AI tools. If that wisdom isn't in the data, can AI truly serve our communities? And if people don't realise what's missing, whose voices are excluded? These questions grounded the kōrero in ACE values of integrity, care, and cultural responsiveness.

One strong idea was the need to "triangulate" AI-generated answers—check them against ancestral knowledge, trusted people (Auntie Intelligence), and reliable sources. While AI can be fast and helpful, it's not always accurate, culturally grounded, or context-aware. By layering in lived experience, cultural values, and community insight, decisions are more likely to be ethical, meaningful, and relevant. The message: AI should support, not replace, human judgment and collective knowledge. Triangulation keeps us anchored and intentional.

Participants left with a practical resource, plenty of ideas, and a clear message: AI doesn't replace the human side of teaching and learning—but used thoughtfully, it can be a powerful support. As one facilitator put it:

"AI takes care of the everyday jobs, giving you more space to connect, support, and build community."

ChatGPT in Action: Unlocking AI for Adult and Tertiary Educators

Saylene Tanielu-Ulberg

Pacific Advisor, Saylene Tanielu-Ulberg from Ako Aotearoa, led an interactive workshop that explored how to guide AI tools like ChatGPT to reflect a Pacific world view. The hands-on session focused on customising outputs to align with Pacific values, cultural context, and learning needs.

The first part of the session was a prompt to ChatGPT to create a lesson plan for neurodiverse learners. The output was fast and articulate and offered up anticipated solutions. In the second part of the session ChatGPT was asked the same question but to include a Pacific world view. The output was completely different and did meet requirements for the inclusion of pacific values. This led to a deeper discussion about the limitations of AI when cultural nuance is absent from training data. Saylene then demonstrated how to use the paid "Custom GPT" version to train the system to better reflect Pacific cultural frameworks. She walked participants through how to embed spiritual concepts, values like va (relational space), respect for elders, and Pacific languages into the AI's tone and responses.

ACE Awards 2025 Recipients

Educator of the Year Tangata Whenua Rahera Shortland

Whaea Rahera has been teaching adults for over 30 years and excels at it. She possesses deep knowledge, wisdom, and an innate ability to connect with learners from all walks of life, particularly Māori students. She is known for her ngākau māhaki—a gentle, humble, and open-hearted approach that fosters a safe and inclusive learning environment. Her expertise goes beyond simply delivering content; she is a skilled facilitator who encourages meaningful discussions, empowers her students, and adapts her teaching to meet their needs. With patience, empathy, and a genuine passion for lifelong learning, she inspires confidence and growth in those she teaches, leaving a lasting impact on their personal and professional journeys.

Educator of the Year Tangata Tiriti Jacob Koria

Jacob began his journey with Literacy Aotearoa as a volunteer, driven by his passion for making a difference in the lives of Māori and Pacific learners. His dedication and natural ability as an educator quickly became evident, leading him into a part-time tutoring role before earning his current full-time position. Jacob is a truly special individual whose passion for education, particularly for supporting learners who struggle with dyslexia, is both inspiring and transformative. His youth, cultural resilience, and ability to connect with learners provide him with a unique depth and perspective as an educator.

Jacob's contributions have proven invaluable to the team, and his presence continues to elevate the learning experiences of all those he works with. He is an asset not only to Literacy Aotearoa but to the broader education community as well.

Programme of the Year Tangata Whenua Maranga/Rise Up

Maranga||Rise Up is a kaupapa Māori programme which represents the coming together of two powerful kaupapa: Te Hurihanga, an adventure and life skills education programme for young people in the justice system, and Te Rōpū Taitama, an identity and tikanga wānanga for tāne aged 18-34. Maranga||Rise Up has three cornerstones: te ao Māori, life skills and adventure.

Maranga||Rise Up is an opportunity for men aged 18-30 to attend monthly noho wānanga where they can build their capacity and develop understanding of who they are and what their place is in the world. For those not in education or employment, there are limited options. This programme is a good alternative for tāne who might be drifting, lost or vulnerable to making bad choices.

Programme of the Year Tangata Tiriti Merge Sign Language New Zealand Programme for Essential Workers

The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) programme for essential workers has been running for almost three years. It was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each course lasts three weeks. To date, 130 courses have been delivered reaching 1,430 students since 2021/2022.

The purpose of the course is to enable essential workers to interact with a Deaf person under their care in an efficient manner. When both parties are unable to interact with each other, there is an additional barrier to service delivery.

Learners are from a variety of emergency services, including fire, police, ambulance, civil defence, and health care. NZSL (New Zealand Sign Language) courses are specific to each industry with carefully chosen vocabulary and phrases to help essential workers be more accessible to the Deaf community.

Leader of the Year Tangata Whenua Charissa Waerea

Charissa Waerea (Ngaati Rongomaiwahine, Ngaati Kahungunu, Taranaki ki Ngaaruahine, Tuwharetoa ki Taupō) has been a dedicated, long-serving Board member of ACE Aotearoa and friend of the sector for many years. During her Board tenure from 2014 – 2024 she served as co-chair Tangata Whenua and was a member of two standing sub-committees. She has also been a member of the ACE Hui Fono Steering Group, ACE Conference Advisory Group, Festival of Adult Learning Advisory Group, ACE Sector Steering Group, Strategic Alliance, and an active member of Taranaki ACE networks.

Charissa has represented ACE Aotearoa at international gatherings and in 2011 completed the Asia and South Pacific Association for Adult and Basic Education (ASPBAE) Leadership Development Course (BLDC), in Ho Chi Min City, Vietnam.

A significant sector achievement was her role as local advisor for the annual ACE Hui Fono Māori and Pacific professional development event, hosted at Parihaka, Ngāmotu. Seeing an opportunity to host Hui Fono in Taranaki, Charissa established relationships with Tagata Moana living in the region, met with community leaders, and worked intensively to bring together mana whenua and Pacific peoples. This relationship led to the establishment of the Taranaki Pacific ACE network, and the strengthening of Tagata Moana ties in Ngāmotu, Taranaki.

Charissa has been cultural facilitator to the ACE Aotearoa staff and contractors implementing the organisation's te reo me ona tikanga professional learning programme. She has supported the use of te reo me ona tikanga across all areas of ACE Aotearoa's service delivery. It is testimony to Charissa that Tangata Tiriti Board members, staff and contractors confidently use te reo Māori in their public speaking roles, and everyday work environments.

Charissa is an inspirational leader and educator and a most worthy recipient of the ACE Aotearoa 2025 Award for Leader of the Year Tangata Whenua.

Leader of the Year Tangata Tiriti Pale Sauni

Papali'i Pale Sauni, (aka Pale in the fale!) is a Samoan leader in education, health, and social services. When speaking last year during Samoan Language Week, his message on the topic of Being a Samoan Success, Even When No One Notices! was that "despite our willingness to succeed academically, physically, socially and spiritually, we could still achieve success even if no one noticed it."

One of his earliest contributions was on the Tertiary Education Commission Advisory Group, Pacific Strategy under the lead of TEC Pacific Advisor, Dr Airini. Pale presented insights into working in community, contextualising inequity in society, challenging education targets that could lead to perpetuating negative outcomes for Pacific people in Aotearoa.

His impact is seen far and wide across communities and education sectors. Everyone knows Pale! Pale was elected to the ACE Aotearoa Board in 2014, re-elected in 2017 and co-opted from 2021 to 2024. Additionally, he was appointed, to the ACE Professional Development Steering Group (PDSG) responsible for oversight of the ACE sector professional development strategy and implementation of nine PD projects. During this time he was appointed as a Board representative to the ACE Hui Fono Advisory Group, a position he held until 2024. Pale also acted as advisor to the ACE Conference.

As an advisor to flagship ACE events Pale has brought so much more than knowledge of pedagogy and practice. He has brought energy, creativity, warmth and his unique talent as a musician, MC and stand-up comedian. These have left an indelible impression on the sector.

Pale has sought to lift the profile of Pasifika in ACE and across tertiary education. He has achieved this through informing strategy, turning objectives into action, and through networking. He has also led a Pacific Capability project delivering individual mentoring and training to over 500 Pacific community organisations across Auckland Te Tai Tokerau.

In 2022, he was a nominee for the Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards, and in 2023 was the recipient of the Sunpix Ltd Pacific Health & Wellbeing Award. He is a most worthy recipient of the ACE Aotearoa 2025 Award for Leader of the Year Tangata Tiriti.

Reclaiming AI Through Indigenous Eyes: Inside Hui Fono 2025

Since its inception in 2008, Hui Fono has been a uniquely Māori and Pacific-led space for professional development, intentionally grounded in indigenous knowledge systems and pedagogies.

It is a conference experience that is authentic and honouring of Tangata Whenua and Tangata Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (people of the Pacific).

This year marked several firsts: the first time Hui Fono was held in a hotel, the first time it ran for one day only, and the first-ever use of a digital app to support real-time interaction.

In its 15th year, Hui Fono 2025 had more than 130 participants, with more than half continuing on to attend the ACE Conference.

Former ACE Aotearoa Director Analiese Robertson returned as Hui Fono and Conference Director to manage this change in strategic direction for the two flagship events, bringing her deep knowledge of the sector and the vision to life.

"The bringing together of many ancestors into one space requires significant care and an intelligence of its own," she said.

"There is high expectation with representation, ceremonies, 'un-conferencing', while being strictly anchored in the AI – ancestral intelligence that is commonly characteristic of the described learning services delivered by Māori and Pacific."

Keynote: The Power of Storying from the Homeland

The event opened with a powerful keynote from Papali'i Pale Sauni, affectionately known as Pale in the Fale.

A long-serving educator and Papali'i of Savai'i, Samoa, Pale traced his personal journey from heritage land to leadership in Aotearoa's education, health and social service sectors.

He shared an impactful presentation of his ancestral lands in Samoa, acknowledged his mother's journey of migration, and how that landed him as a leader in education, health and social services.

Pale spoke about ancestral intelligence through the lens of his own family and contrasted his upbringing in Sāmoa, fluency in the language and his immersion in the culture, with his son's experience of being born in Aotearoa New Zealand and now on a journey of reconnection.

A key point that ancestral intelligence resonates with our ancestors' traditional knowledge we want to retain.

Panel: Culture, Technology and Intergenerational Wisdom

A rich panel discussion brought together voices from academia, tech and the arts.

Dr Linita Manu'atu introduced the Tongan concept of poto (spiritual insight and wisdom) as a counterpoint to the limitations of modern AI.

She was joined by technologist and founder of Tokelau in Tech and Inati AI, Tracey Savelio, artist and cultural leader Nina Oberg Humphries and product consultant Norie Ape.

Their conversation examined what it means to pass down knowledge, not just through data, but through lived connection and intergenerational storytelling.

Ako Session Workshop Highlight: Will Fleming's DigiKōr and the Future of Oral Storytelling

Will Fleming, founder of Campfire Studios, is dyslexic. But that hasn't stopped him from becoming an extraordinary storyteller.

With the help of AI, the Cook Islands-born video director and podcast producer has built a platform for authentic Māori and Pasifika storytelling.

Through Campfire Studios, Will captures and preserves intergenerational kōrero to help whānau reconnect with their heritage using digital tools.

His mission is to elevate Māori and Pasifika voices and protect oral traditions for future generations.

At Hui Fono, Will introduced DigiKōrero, an NZQA-accredited programme that teaches participants how to use podcasting and digital media to share their stories.

It's a space for talanoa and for learning how to record, store and honour the knowledge passed down through whānau.

Will says he only sees positive in AI. "Each story I record is essentially data and AI takes that data and helps analyse and frame it. It only hallucinates or does its own thing when there is not enough context provided.

"With the work I do, whānau provide the context and history. Imagine two generations from now, your stories and your parent's stories are still alive and thriving because they have been captured and stored."

Profile: Tracey Savelio – Bringing Inati to the Cloud

Inati is a traditional Tokelauan practice built on the principle of fair and equal sharing.

When fish are caught, the community ensures that every household receives a portion, based on family size. It's a cultural expression of unity, support and equity.

This value system has become the foundation of Tracey Savelio's work in technology. As a result, she created Inati AI, a project grounded in her Tokelauan values of equity.

By day, Tracey works as a data governance analyst at Kiwibank. But her influence reaches far beyond her day job.

She actively volunteers her time and expertise to support digital inclusion and innovation in Pacific communities.

Last Easter, she launched the Tokelau in Tech social media platforms to make technology more accessible.

These platforms, which are all tailored for the Pacific community, provide free resources, links to IT tools and a central hub of AI knowledge.

Tracey also founded Katou Connect, an online training initiative delivering digital literacy programmes such as Internet Basics, Online Safety and introductory AI courses.

Inside Kiwibank, Tracey has become a driving force for women in tech.

She completed an external Amazon Web Services (AWS) "Cloud for Her" course, a flexible learning pathway for women globally who want to go deeper on the AWS Cloud system.

After lobbying for the programme to be brought in-house, Kiwibank became the first organisation to offer the AWS "CloudUp for Her" programme internally.

As a mentor in the eight-week course, Tracey supports women across the bank in building confidence and technical skills, guiding them toward AWS Cloud Practitioner certification.

"I'm especially passionate about increasing Māori and Pasifika representation in tech and creating pathways for women to thrive in this space," Tracey said.

"We must make IT accessible and integrate culture with protection. We are the data stewards of our community – and that is a large responsibility."

Reflections from the Wānanga | Talanoa Sessions

Attendees shared their intelligence, with prompting from our reflection cards. Here's a selection of their voices:

How can AI tools be designed to reflect the tikanga, languages and worldviews of our communities?

"Distribution of knowledge through AI can be a powerful tool – creating an environment where practices are adhered too."

"It needs human knowledge and ideas to feed into this tool. People need to be upskilled so they can comfortably feed into the system"

"By having indigenous voices at the helm. Have our own tools. Use our language. Named by us."

What might a co-created learning resource look like in your community? Who needs to be involved?

"It's accessible, relevant and easy to use and provides accurate information."

"Community is a very broad term. There needs to be a model created that each community can adapt to reflect the needs and requirements of the community. It requires lots of talanoa that are frequent."

Where might AI create harm, exclusion or imbalance in your learning context — and how can we prevent this?

"Potential imbalances and harm can occur with misuse of AI and creating unedited or unreferenced information to be shared creating a false platform made up by AI to gap fill enquiries."

"I think knowledge is power so releasing any knowledge, cultural or native will create imbalance. To some extent it is a way of colonisation so it does impose serious implications if terms and conditions aren't read properly."

"Provide training. Read terms and conditions. Perform regular audits. Protect privacy."

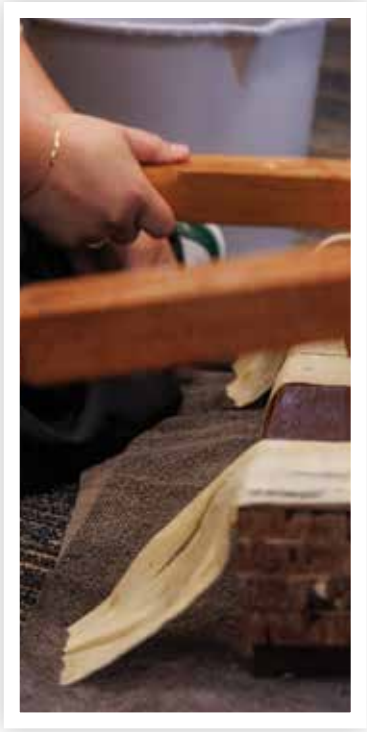
In Their Own Words: Participant Reflections

After the event, attendees were invited to reflect on the kaupapa, the kōrero, and what they would carry forward into their own work and communities.

Here's what some of them shared:

"Seeing our own phenomenal people of Māori and Pasifik in the AI, data, tech and academic world share their knowledge with such passion and generosity. Whilst a small number of our own [are] trailblazing the way, they are now part of our Hui Fono family that we can connect with, collaborate alongside and seek their esteemed counsel."

"The kōrero about Ancestral and Artificial Intelligence and understanding their individual roles as an individual. But then being able to apply that same understanding to my organisation and bridging that gap of using artificial intelligence as a tool to improve efficiency, while understanding that you still have to use your 'ancestral intelligence' to ensure the essence of the organisation, e.g. kaupapa and values, are reflected in the artificial intelligence output. An example could be using artificial intelligence to write a policy; this will give you a first draft. But then using your 'ancestral intelligence' from an organisation perspective to refine the policy to align with the organisation's Kaupapa, values and beliefs while reflecting on its history, too."



"I always love building my networks. Finding out what everyone is up to in their space and having those conversations where we cut out the barriers that we face in our workshop and [we] can sit down and say... Okay the stats are still not good for us as Māori and Pasifika but what can we do about it? What are you doing about it? How can we continue to work together? I would love for us to continue in the Ancestral Intelligence within the tech space as that really is the best pathway for us to continue to advance both the ancestral and artificial knowledge systems. And have better outcomes for our people."

These reflections speak to the depth of connection, the relevance of the conversations, and the value of creating a space where ancestral knowledge and digital tools can coexist.

From ancestral lands to digital landscapes, Hui Fono 2025 showed how deeply rooted cultural intelligence continues to shape the future of learning, leadership and technology.

Nicole McIntosh

Lived experience and a passion to inspire others, drives thirst for learning

Nicole McIntosh says her own journey of recovery fuelled her passion to help others make life-changing shifts and launched her onto a path of professional development.

For the past year, Nicole has been employed as a Wellbeing Coach for the Wellington branch of Pivot, a drug and alcohol support service. Her role centres around supporting individuals in the mild to moderate space of substance use.

"My focus is on harm reduction, helping people reduce their alcohol or drug consumption in safe environments. Having lived through similar struggles, I deeply understand what it's like to feel stuck and hopeless, and equally, how it feels to come out the other side stronger. What I find of immense value is seeing clients make changes in their lives, whether it's a small shift or a major life transformation," says Nicole.

She values her personal experience but understands that ongoing learning and professional development are essential to further enhance her coaching practice. In 2022 she completed her Level 3 NZ Certificate in Health and Wellbeing in Support Work (Disability) with work-based learning provider Careerforce, followed by a Level 4 Certificate in Health and Wellbeing (Disability) in 2023.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the makeup of the Careerforce certificates and style of learning and I wanted to enhance my skills further, so I spoke with my manager about the Peer Support Apprenticeship and enrolled."

Balancing full-time work and study can be challenging, but Nicole says that she has now learnt to structure her learning and manage her time effectively. She says there are still moments of self-doubt that creep in, but she is learning to trust the process.

"I also have more awareness around the role I play in the office and my role in peer support," she says, "The power in my story is in helping clients see their own potential for change. It empowers them to take control of their own journey."

The Peer Support Apprenticeship is a 21-month entirely work-based learning programme completed via an online learning and assessment platform. Careerforce takes enrolments throughout the year and each learner is assigned a dedicated Apprenticeship Advisor for the duration of the programme. Nicole says she really appreciated the support and encouragement of her Careerforce Advisor Charlie Stanworth-Miller who checked-in and offered extra support when needed.

Having almost completed her Peer Support Apprenticeship and with aspirations for continued learning, Nicole is already planning to undertake a course in te reo Māori in March and has future plans to pursue further qualifications in mental health and addictions.

Careerforce is currently offering free enrolment in the Peer Support Apprenticeship via the Peer Support Grant, funded by Te Whatu Ora until June 2026, subject to eligibility. Employers may also qualify for Apprenticeship Boost funding. You can find out more about it at www.careerforce.org.nz

Board Talk

Spotlight on Board Member Anne Troy: A Lifelong Learner and Advocate for Community Education

Anne (bottom row second from the right) in the botanical gardens on a class trip with students from Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Ukraine, South Korea, Indonesia and Japan.

One of ACE Aotearoa's newest board members proudly describes herself as a lifelong learner—a title she embraces with enthusiasm and purpose. Anne Troy, elected to the Board at the 2024 AGM, brings with her an impressive legacy of dedication to adult and community education.

Anne currently teaches ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) at Wellington High School and Community Education Centre (CEC), where she also coordinates funded courses and delivers leadership training in Mental Health First Aid. With more than 20 years of experience in adult education, Anne's teaching journey has spanned the globe, including roles in South Korea, the UK, Istanbul, Italy, the Czech Republic, and here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

"I love supporting migrants as they begin a new chapter of their lives—helping them build connections, find employment, and establish a sense of community," Anne shares. "I'm very much a hands-on tutor. Having lived and worked in several countries, I understand firsthand the challenges of starting over in a new environment."

Anne's passion for education and community made her decision to join the Board a natural progression.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to grow, contribute, and support the sector from a governance perspective. It's a space I care deeply about," she explains.

Serving on the Board has already provided Anne with a broader view of the diverse learning opportunities taking place across the country.

Anne Troy

"This year, I had the privilege of being a judge for the ACE Aotearoa Awards. It's been incredibly inspiring to see the amazing work happening throughout our communities. People are doing life-changing work and making a real impact."

Anne believes her dual role—as both a current educator and Board member—brings valuable insight to the table.

"I work with one of the largest ACE providers in the country, and I'm still actively teaching. That gives me a unique perspective. I also come from a multicultural background—my mother is Singaporean—so I'm connected to a variety of communities and bring a diverse lens to the Board."

A true lifelong learner, Anne is currently studying te reo Māori and is planning to pursue formal governance training this year to further enhance her contributions to the Board.

"I'm committed to growing in this space so I can represent our learners and educators more effectively," she says.

With her deep experience, cultural insight, and unwavering passion, Anne is enjoying helping to shape the future of adult and community education in Aotearoa.

Stop Press: AGM

At the recent AGM of ACE Aotearoa, the following nominees were elected to Board vacancies.

Tangata Whenua Caucus

- Heidi Renata
- Charmaine Tukua
- Will Flavell

Tangata Tiriti Caucus

- David Do
- Lottie Vinson

We welcome back David and Lottie who were both re-elected, and who bring with them valuable experience and understanding of both our organisation and the broader sector.

We are equally excited to welcome three new Tangata Whenua Board members, who have extensive experience in governance, adult education, and community engagement. In future newsletters we will profile new members.