

Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa Joins Welcoming Communities Programme



Welcoming Communities is a programme led by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) in partnership with the Ministry of Ethnic Communities and the Human Rights Commission. Welcoming Communities works towards healthier, happier, and more productive communities by welcoming newcomers into the local community. There are 35 Councils involved and Hutt City Council joined the programme at the beginning of 2023.

In developing our approach, it was important to partner with Mana Whenua in their role as 'first welcomers'. Since early 2023, Council Tumuaki Māori Matiu Jennings and his successor Kaanihi Butler-Hare have worked with Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa on this approach.

In 2023, Immigration New Zealand (INZ) decided that instead of inviting more Councils to join the programme, it would use the resource to support partnerships with Mana Whenua in rohe (tribal areas) with the Welcoming Communities programme. This escalated our engagement and led to Batool Arif (our Welcoming Communities Coordinator) and Kaanihi Butler-Hare meeting with Wirangi Luke (Te Tumu Whakarae) and Peggy Luke-Ngaheke (Manager of Waiwhetū Marae) of Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa to strengthen the connection.

Te Rūnanganui o Te Āti Awa was then invited to be one of seven Mana Whenua entities to join the programme. This agreement recognises what the Rūnanga already does in welcoming newcomers and provides resources for new joint activities.

This provides an exciting opportunity will help to build a bridge for our newcomer communities to connect, learn about the history of Aotearoa, Te Tiriti, and build relationships with Mana Whenua.

Fostering these connections and sharing knowledge will grow positive inter-ethnic relationships and a more socially cohesive community. Our ethnic communities, alongside refugee and migrant stakeholders, are looking forward to cultivating these meaningful relationships.

Our First Pōwhiri and Wānanga at Waiwhetū Marae

The first Pōwhiri and Wānanga at Waiwhetū Marae took place on 24 June 2024, after Te Rūnanganui o te Atiawa joined the Welcoming Communities Programme. The event brought together over 150 people, including students, teachers, and staff from English Language Partners, and the Hutt City Council Connected Communities Team.

Participants were from diverse backgrounds, including Colombia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iran, Afghanistan, China, India, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Turkey, alongside our Pakeha friends.

The day began with a pōwhiri, followed by heartfelt speeches.

Matiu Tahi extended a warm welcome, and Whaea Peggy

emphasised the importance of preserving heritage languages. She acknowledged the challenges faced by those bringing their languages to a new country, saying, *"Please don't let your language die. You are who you are and shouldn't be anyone else."*

Following the pōwhiri, our ethnic community members shared kai to express their love and respect for the mana whenua. Whaea Peggy expressed her gratitude, saying, *"You have really humbled us in choosing to come here and bring kai."* She also shared her hope for the future: *"Hopefully in time, my mokopuna and your grandkids will be the caretakers of this land."*



The day continued with a tour of the health facilities and the Rūnanga. The General Manager of English Language Partners thanked the Marae for the warm welcome, highlighting the importance of strengthening the relationship. He said,

"It feels amazing to be welcomed and connected by the mana whenua. As an organisation, we consider it our responsibility to educate our learners about bicultural Aotearoa before the system shapes their perspectives."

This pōwhiri and wānanga mark the beginning of a meaningful relationship between our ethnic communities and Mana Whenua. Both are dedicated to nurturing this bond, with a shared commitment to building compassionate and empathetic communities, grounded in respect, generosity and a mutual passion for learning.

Pōwhiri and Wānanga at Waiwhetū Marae



June 2024, Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt

The first Wānanga at Waiwhetū Marae after Te Rūnanga ārai o Te Awa Kōwhiri joined the Welcoming Communities Programme. Students from our local stakeholder English Language Partners, with teachers, and National Office staff gathered at the Marae for Pōwhiri and Wānanga. Our Hutt City Council Connected Communities Team also joined and helped throughout the day.



In attendance:

-  120 people
-  ELP staff from the Lower Hutt, Upper Hutt, and the National Office sites
-  Ethnicities from Colombia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iran, Afghanistan, China, India, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Turkey, alongside Pakeha friends

"It feels amazing to receive such a warm welcome from the indigenous people of this land. There are many similarities between my culture and Te Ao Māori, making it feel like home here."

Participant

"Hopefully in time, my Makopuna and your grandkids will be the caretakers of this land."

Whaea Peggy, Waiwhetū Marae

"As an organisation at English Language Partners, we consider it our responsibility to educate our learners about the bicultural Aotearoa before the system educates them and makes them biased."

Participant

Impacts

- Strengthening partnership between Mana Whenua and Welcoming Communities
- Building relationships between ethnic communities and new communities
- Educating our Ethnic Communities about Māori, and Te Ao Māori

Learnings

- Working with Council Māori advisors was instrumental in developing the relationship with the Runanga
- Taking the time to build the connection
- There is a gap in newcomers connecting with tangata whenua and being introduced to Te Ao Māori

Insights

- It takes time to build a meaningful relationship with mana whenua
- If newcomers don't have an early connection with tangata whenua they can absorb negative attitude to Māori from the host community





Wānanga and Pōwhiri with Red Cross, and ChangeMakers Resettlement Forum:



In August 2024, Waiwhetū Marae welcomed a group of 45 people for a wānanga, including team members and board representatives from ChangeMakers Resettlement Forum and the Red Cross. This gathering featured the second Wānanga and Pōwhiri, a traditional Māori welcoming ceremony.

The attendees included members of migrant and refugee communities, alongside their Pākehā colleagues. The Welcoming Communities coordinators and neighbourhood facilitators were present to awahi the kaupapa (support the cause) throughout the day.

As everyone gathered at the marae, Whaea Peggy began the karanga, the ceremonial call of welcome. A special moment followed as Batool Arif, from Welcoming Communities, was honoured with the role of kaikaranga, delivering the visitors' responding call in her indigenous language, Dari.

Matiu Tahi, speaking on behalf of Waiwhetū Marae, warmly welcomed the group, followed by Pancha, the President of the Multicultural Council, and two wāikorero from ChangeMakers and the Red Cross. Matiu Tahi generously shared his knowledge about the various parts, and patterns of the marae and their significance. He recognized the long journey that many migrants and former refugees have taken to make Aotearoa their home, and the deep emotions associated with leaving one homeland and building a new one. Matiu also spoke about tikanga, the traditional Māori customs, highlighting their adaptability while stressing the importance of preserving those aspects that define who we are.

The marae thoughtfully adapted its tikanga (protocol) to meet the needs of diverse ethnic communities during these two pōwhiri, allowing guests to bring and share their own kai (food).

Our members of ethnic communities express their aspiration that every newcomer to the city has the opportunity to connect with tangata whenua (people of the land) and learn the history from them. Whaea Peggy also spoke about the importance of learning one's own language, which deeply resonated with her experience and emphasised its role in shaping identity. Hearing the significance of language from the people of the land was heartwarming for the migrant and refugee communities present.

The invitation to respond to the karanga in the Indigenous languages of these ethnic communities, the sharing of kai, the generosity of sharing, and flexibility of protocol shown throughout the event beautifully illustrated what authentic partnership looks like.

Mana whenua and our ethnic communities are eager to nurture this relationship and build upon it, our ethnic communities expressing a strong desire to support kaupapa Māori and to weave Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) into the events and celebrations they host. Together, the council, communities and mana whenua will create a more welcoming, inclusive, and cohesive society in our beautiful city Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.



