VOICE OF AROHA

NEWSLETTER

NL: 04 | 2025
JULY-AUGUST

EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES | CELEBRATING YOUNG LEADERS





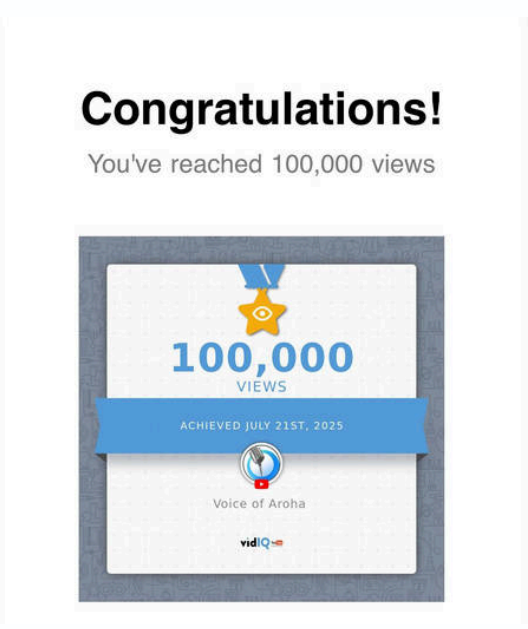






ART AND CULUTRE AWARD WINNER 2025





OPENING MESSAGE

Kia ora e te whānau,

The months of July and August have been the busiest and most rewarding of the year so far for Voice of Aroha. Our youth have achieved incredible milestones across many fronts, and I am deeply proud of everything we've accomplished together.

We were honoured to see our young people's creativity and dedication recognised with Voice of Aroha winning the Wellington Airport Regional Community Award for Arts & Culture Category. Alongside this, our teams delivered and organised a wide range of events in both Wellington and Palmerston North, celebrating the achievements of 56 young ethnic leaders and highlighting the power of youth voices in action.

A major highlight has been the launch of our new programme, Empowering Youth Voices—a series of workshops that have built skills, confidence, and leadership among young people. This initiative is being co-designed and led by six of our youth leaders, showcasing what true youth-led change looks like.

We are also delighted to welcome two new staff members to our whānau: Eric as our IT & Web Developer Officer and Jazhyra as our Photographer and Videographer. Their skills add to the strength of our growing team and will support the important mahi ahead.

Over the past two months, our platforms have created meaningful opportunities for young people to sit alongside decision-makers, ask critical questions, and share their perspectives. We've had the privilege of engaging with leaders such as the Minister of Finance Hon. Nicola Willis and Labour MPs Barbara Edmonds and Phil Twyford, as well as community leaders, and inspiring young changemakers. These kōrero remind us that when youth are given space, they rise to the challenge, raise their voices, and show us that change is possible.

It is an absolute pleasure for me to lead an organisation that not only supports young people but also creates spaces where they can belong, connect, and thrive. None of this would be possible without the tireless efforts of our dedicated team—Rata, Hamid, Sahar, our Board and our volunteers and everyone who continues to walk alongside us in this journey.

A huge thank you to our funders, partners, and supporters—your aroha and commitment make this mahi possible. At the same time, the demand for our programmes is growing, and with it the need for sustainable support. These are challenging times for many, but with your continued generosity we can keep empowering youth, building leaders, and ensuring ethnic voices are heard and have space to belong and grow.

If you are in a position to contribute, we warmly welcome your support—whether through funding, donation, partnership, or sharing our kaupapa with others who believe in the power of youth voices. Every bit of support helps us to grow, reach more young people, and create lasting impact.
Together, we are building leaders, empowering voices, and shaping a future where refugee and migrant youth can step forward with confidence.

Ngā manaakitanga,
Kodrean Eashae
CEO, Voice of Aroha


MC - EMERGING ETHNIC LEADERS - LOWER HUTT



KEYNOTE SPEAKER- ARTIST NETWORK LOWER HUTT


SPEAKING TO STUDENTS- HUTT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL


SPEAKING AT THE ASYLUM SEEKERS EQUITY PROJECT- VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

WELLINGTON AIRPORT REGIONAL COMMUNITY AWARDS - ARTS & CULTURE WINNER 2025



Voice of Aroha is thrilled and honoured to be the winner of the Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards – Wellington City, Arts & Culture category!

This recognition means so much to us. It celebrates every story we've shared, every voice we've uplifted, and every moment we've stood together in unity, creativity, and purpose.
To our amazing team, volunteers, partners, supporters, and community — this award belongs to all of us. Your passion, belief, heart, and aroha shine through everything we do.

We also want to congratulate all the incredible community organisations who were nominated. Your mahi inspires us and strengthens the vibrant spirit of Wellington.

A huge thank you to everyone who nominated us and to all those who have supported Voice of Aroha over the years. Your encouragement motivates us to continue empowering youth, celebrating culture, and sharing stories that matter.

This award is more than a recognition — it's a reminder that together, we can create change, celebrate diversity, and uplift every voice in our community.

We are deeply grateful to the Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards for this honour, and we're excited to keep growing, connecting, and leading with purpose.

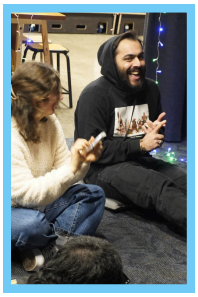
Read more here: Click Here


EMPOWERING
YOUTH
VOICES
LEVI'S
Voice of Aroha

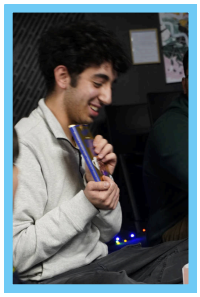

This award is presented to
Voice of Aroha
Winner
Arts and Culture

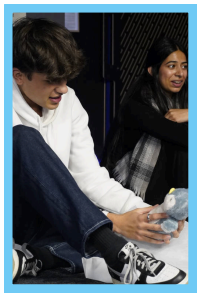














VOICE OF AROHA MID-WINTER CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION



In July, the Voice of Aroha whānau came together to celebrate a very special Mid-Winter Christmas. It was a night filled with aroha, and festive spirit, bringing together our dedicated team.

Everyone contributed to a wonderful shared feast, with each person bringing a dish to the table. The food reflected the diversity and generosity of our volunteers, from hearty home cooking to sweet treats, creating a meal that warmed both body and soul.

As we gathered around the table, stories began to flow. Many shared nostalgic memories of past Christmases, family traditions, and funny moments, reminding us how powerful storytelling is in connecting people. These conversations deepened the sense of belonging and strengthened the ties that make our team so special.

The evening wouldn't have been complete without a little festive fun. Our Secret Santa exchange sparked plenty of joy and laughter as gifts were unwrapped and surprises revealed. It was a simple but meaningful way to celebrate the spirit of giving that our volunteers embody every day through their mahi with Voice of Aroha.

This Mid-Winter Christmas celebration was more than just a party but it was a reminder of the warmth and strength that comes from community. We left with full hearts, and a renewed appreciation for the aroha that binds us together.

Written by Ayaan Chand

EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES PROGRAMME



























EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES PROGRAMME

Empowering Youth Voices -- Our brand new programme dedicated to building leadership skills and building community has been a rousing success!

Our programme is designed for all youth ages 15-26, providing a supportive and inclusive space where rangatahi can grow in confidence, share their perspectives, and take action on issues that matter most to them! So far, the Voice of Aroha team, along with our talented EYV leaders, have led 8 amazing workshops, filled with purpose, education, and reflection.

Our first workshop, centred around Leadership and Advocacy, was such an inspiring start to our programme. Facilitated by the lovely Carla Rey Vasquez, the session brought in a vision of leadership and encouraged participants to reflect on their own strengths, explore what it means to lead with empathy, and practice speaking up for the causes they care about.

Our Public Speaking & Civic Education workshop was led by the one and only, Vira Paky! In this workshop, Vira taught our future young leaders the importance of advocacy and how to grow into a strong public speaker. The session left our participants feeling more confident and ready to take over the world with their public speaking skills! We were also joined by Jack Marshall and Cici Huang from Porirua City Council, who spoke about how local government works and why young people need to enrol and vote in local elections. To close, our youth leader, Jared, gave a heartfelt keynote on his own public speaking journey and the role of mana wāhine in shaping his life.

Content Creation “Social Media 101” was all about social media. The phones we scroll on, the news we watch, and the articles we read are all important, and it’s important to learn how to use it as an advocacy platform. Facilitated by Janhavi Gosavi, a talented journalist and storyteller who creates impactful content and shares powerful stories through her mahi at Re News, dove into how content can be used to make an impact in our society. Our participants left this workshop eager to make a change!

Learning Confidence through Drama was a different tone compared to our other EYV workshops! Instead of focusing on discussion or debate, this session invited participants to step into a creative space where they could learn by doing. Through interactive drama exercises, they discovered how movement, voice, and expression can build confidence and presence in everyday life.

The Career & Employment Path was one to remember. This workshop gave rangatahi the chance to reflect on their strengths, discover new opportunities, and build the confidence to take their next steps toward future pathways. With guidance from Dr Sherrie Lee, participants engaged in interactive activities that not only sharpened practical skills but also encouraged them to dream bigger about what’s possible. The energy in the room was uplifting, and the conversations that unfolded showed just how motivated our youth are to create meaningful futures for themselves.

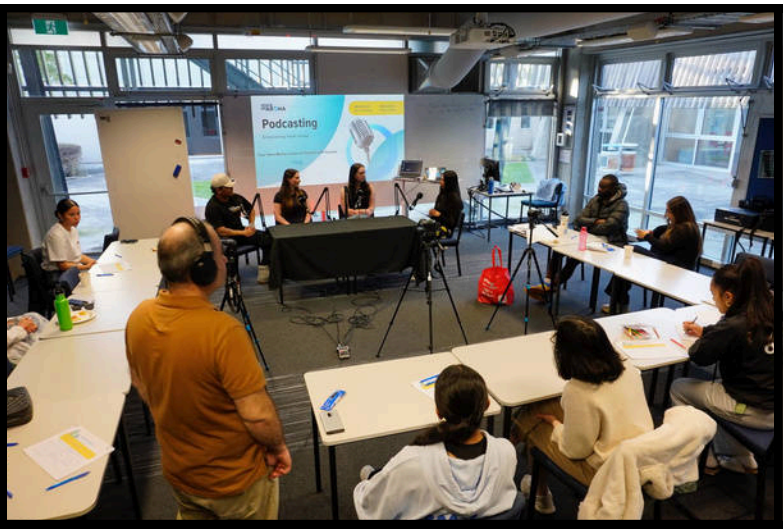
AI for Youth opened up an exciting new space for our participants to explore. Facilitated by Praveen, the session introduced what artificial intelligence is, how it connects to our daily lives, and how it’s shaping the future. Youth had the chance to experiment with prompts, practice using AI tools, and reflect on how technology can be used for good in society. The workshop not only sparked curiosity but also encouraged our rangatahi to think critically about how they can be leaders in a fast-changing digital world.

Storytelling brought the focus back to the heart of our mahi — sharing voices that matter. Facilitated by Heather, this session gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their own journeys and learn how to turn personal experiences into powerful stories. Through interactive exercises, they explored how storytelling can inspire, connect, and create change in their communities. The room was filled with honesty, laughter, and courage as our youth discovered that their stories are not just valid but vital to shaping the future.

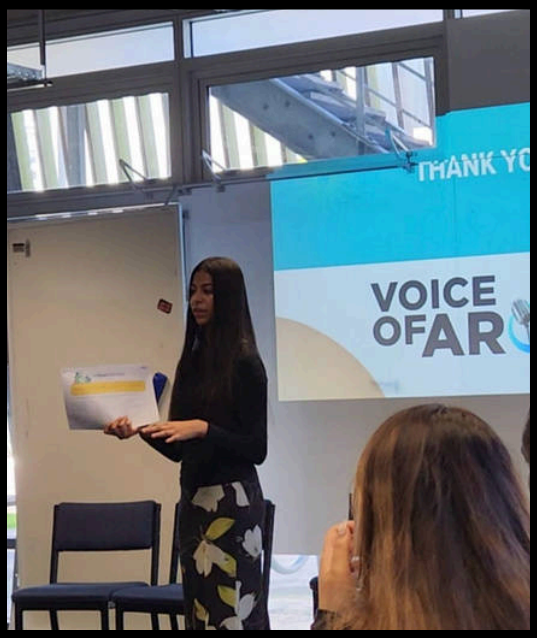
A huge thank you to our amazing EYV team, Jared, Soteria, Aditi, Saja, Gaby, and Maraea, for all the energy, care, and encouragement they bring to every session. It is because of their dedication that our rangatahi feel supported, inspired, and excited to step up, connect with each other, and grow their confidence.

Written by Apiksha Sharma

EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES PROGRAMME

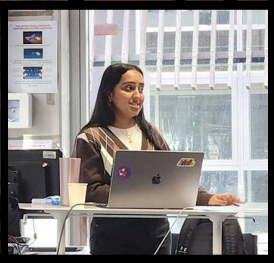

























VOICE
OF AROHA



Main Reception
Nau mai haere mai ki


EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES PROGRAMME









VOICE OF AROHA







EMERGING ETHNIC LEADERS BREAKFAST 2025 - PLAMERSTON NORTH



EMERGING ETHNIC LEADERS BREAKFAST 2025 - WELLINGTON



EMERGING ETHNIC LEADERS BREAKFAST 2025

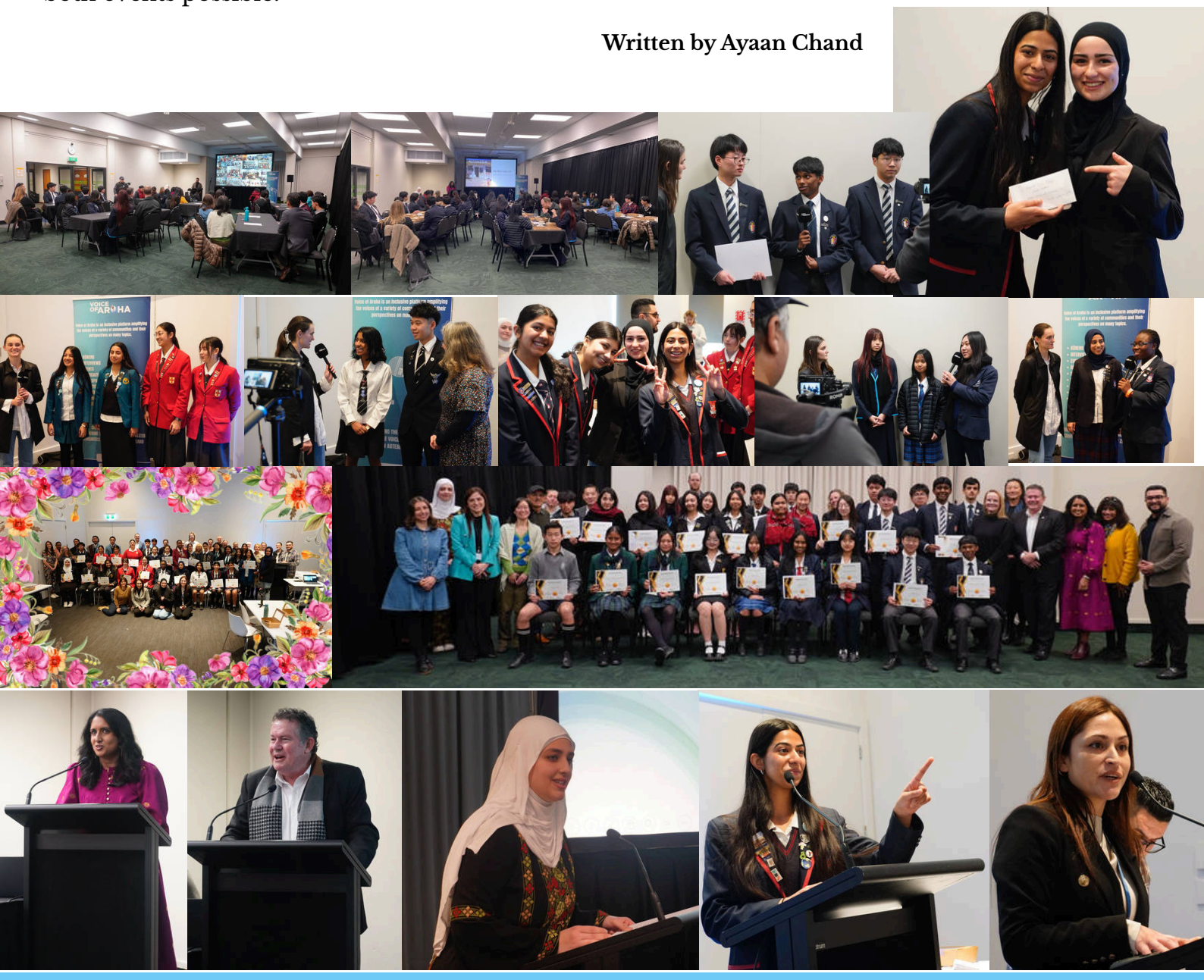
This August, Voice of Aroha proudly hosted the Emerging Ethnic Leaders Breakfast 2025 in partnership with the Ministry of Education, with celebrations in both Palmerston North and Wellington (Lower Hutt). Now in its second year, the kaupapa continues to honour ethnic rangatahi whose leadership is making a difference in schools and communities.

In Palmerston North, we celebrated 27 young leaders, joined by Mayor Grant Smith, who delivered a message of encouragement, and keynote speaker Vanisa Dhiru, whose kōrero on resilience and success inspired all. A highlight was seeing last year's awardee Deema Abbas co-MCs with Kodrean Eashae, showing leadership passed on to the next generation.

In Wellington, we recognised 29 outstanding students, with former recipient Aarthi Candadai returning to inspire this year's cohort. The event was brought to life by co-MCs Saja Al-Laham and Kodrean Eashae, alongside the support of Alana McCorry and Batool Arif from Hutt City Council.

A huge thank you to the Ministry of Education, especially Cinthia Soto and colleagues, for their partnership, and to our Voice of Aroha team, including Rata, Sahar, Hamid, and Ja for making both events possible.

Written by Ayaan Chand



EMERGING ETHNIC LEADERS BREAKFAST 2025










COMMUNITY CLIMATE TRAINING PROGRAMME 2025

We just wrapped up our Community Climate Training Programme and honestly, it was magical. Two days full of creativity, learning, and connection — the kind of days that remind you why we do this work.

The first day was all about play, imagination, and dreaming big. Oscar Arnold — our absolute legend, enviro-champion, arts wizard, and all-round creative genius — kicked us off with Ozone-style ice-breakers that got everyone thinking differently and having fun. We shared ideas from around the world, saw what other communities have done, and then came back home to the Hutt to see the climate realities right here with Melanie Vautier from Upper Hutt City Council. Then Jim Scully from ThinkPlace got us brainstorming like mad. By the end of the day we had seven amazing projects taking shape — from composting and community gardens, to waste solutions, to energy-generating cycleways, to social media campaigns.

But the real magic was the people. Over seven countries represented. Ages from seven to their 60s. Some knew nothing about climate, some were experts, and everyone brought something unique. Everyone shared, everyone learned, everyone built together. It was colourful, playful, full of generosity, curiosity, and connection. It honestly felt like we were building the bricks of a better tomorrow, together.

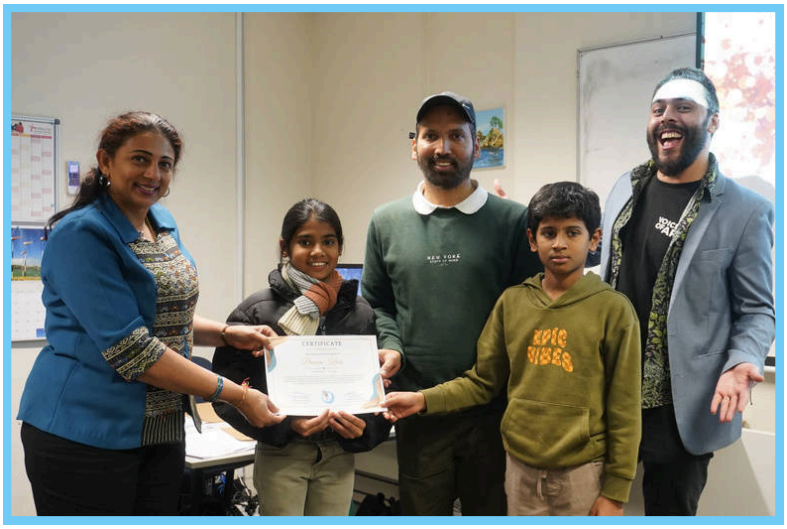
Day two was celebration time. Friends, whānau, supporters all came along to cheer on our teams pitching their projects Dragon's Den-style. Confidence soared, teams shone, and our judging panel — Beanie Rowe, Ihaia Puketapu, and Prabha Ravi — were incredible, encouraging, and full of wisdom.

The climate is changing, and so are we. That change started right here, in this room, with this group of people, imagining, creating, and investing in the future.

Huge, huge thanks to English Language Partners Lower Hutt for the space, to Melanie & Upper Hutt City Council, to Jim & ThinkPlace, to Oscar for making it all happen — and of course to every participant. You showed up, you dreamed, you created, you built, and you invested in yourselves, in each other, and in a better tomorrow.

Written by Rātā Simperingham















NEW EPISODES

This winter has been full of inspiring kōrero on the Voice of Aroha Podcast. In July and August, we released a series of powerful episodes that brought fresh perspectives on climate action, resilience, and storytelling. Ranging from TeamTalks to Podcasts with inspiring members of our community, we've seen it all, so don't forget to check them out! Thank you to Nikolas Hardwick, Jemima Tito, MP Barbara Edmonds, Nate Wilbourne, Hon Phil Twyford, Jenny and William, Souhila Abdelazziz, Naomi Sai, Jordan, Tayshon, Greer, Hong, Hon. Nicola Willis and Liban Ali for taking the time to join us and share your deep, inspirational thoughts and words. You all have brought such meaningful conversations to the table that our viewers & volunteers appreciate deeply!

Check them out on our YouTube channel and don't forget to subscribe!



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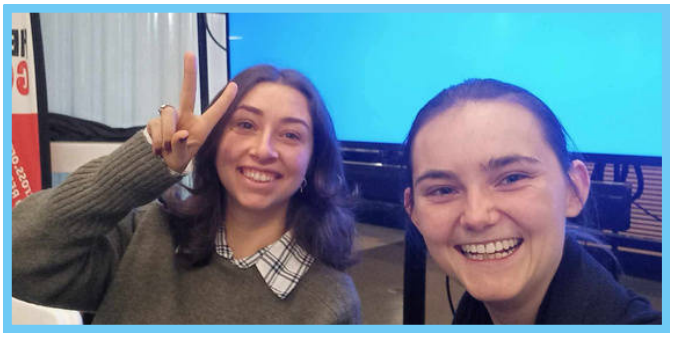


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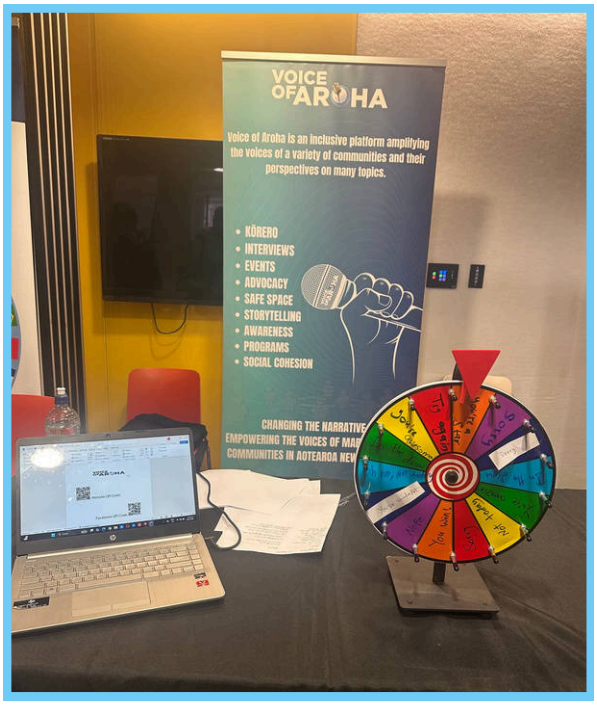
WATCH NOW

Clubs Expo



Voice of Aroha had such a blast at Victoria University's 2nd semester Clubs Expo at Kelburn! Sahar and I set up our stall armed with posters, chocolate, and heaps of energy, and it was amazing to connect with so many rangatahi.

We met incredible people — like Tayshon Yates and Naomi, who've both since joined us for interviews! The stall was buzzing: spinning the wheel, chatting with students, hearing their stories, their views, their experiences. It was fun, vibrant, and full of curiosity. We got to share what Voice of Aroha is all about, and also just be with the people — the energy was infectious.



It was such a reminder of why we do this work: meeting rangatahi where they are, hearing their voices, and inviting them to join the conversation, get involved, and make change happen.

Written by Rātā Simperingham



The Journy toward Compassion : Souhila Abdelazziz in Wellington

This July, we had the pleasure of hosting a talk by Souhila Abdelaziz, who came from Christchurch to lead a powerful session on “The Journey Toward Compassion.” It truly felt like a meaningful retreat for us all.

We’d also like to thank the incredible leaders from various organisations and communities who joined us—your presence made the room feel alive with wisdom and warmth.
A special thanks to Judah and ChangeMakers for hosting us in such a beautiful space.

Souhila ended the session by quoting Rumi “Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder. Help someone’s soul heal. Walk out of your house like a shepherd.”





Written by Ch[illegible]

VOLUNTEER STORY HIGHLIGHTS

This section highlights stories and experiences from our wonderful volunteers.

Kia ora!



My name is Carlos and I am Assyrian, born in Syria and I moved to Aotearoa when I was 3. I am 17 now and will be turning 18 very soon. I am currently a student at Newlands College in my final year, and other than volunteering, I love to spend time with my family, play badminton and go on long road trips! I also love to travel, some of my dream destinations are Iceland, Greece and Japan!

I first discovered Voice of Aroha on social media from friends who had volunteered or been interviewed by them. They also came to my school during the wonderful TEDxYouth@Paparangi event last year and I was interested in getting involved. So I mentioned doing the expression of interest form at the start of this year to my friend and he loved the idea! We both ended up having the privilege of meeting and volunteering with so many amazing people and I knew I had made the right decision to join!

Anytime I attend anything with the Voice of Aroha whānau I have an amazing time! I love being surrounded by all the positivity in the whānau. Some moments I have really enjoyed are all the team talks I've done. I remember being so nervous the first time thinking I would mess up or say the wrong thing, but something about just chatting with the most amazing people is so fun! Another wonderful memory I have was walking along Cuba street during Cuba Dupa with Rātā and Hamid and interviewing people on the street. Again, I was very nervous to approach people and ask if they would like to participate, but being with the most amazing people, I gained the confidence to approach and interview several people which was an unforgettable experience! Drinking the hot chocolate that Rātā bought me afterwards was another unforgettable experience. Being involved in the cultural night run during youth week was also one of my highlights this year! I got to wear my traditional clothing as well as seeing dozens of people wearing their beautiful traditional dress with pride! I got to perform a dance with my family and had many people from the crowd join in and learn a thing or two about Khigga (Assyrian folk dance)!
But the main reason I have continued to volunteer with Voice of Aroha is Rātā's famous hot chocolates. They're so good that they've ruined coffee shop hot chocolates for me!

I was first interested in volunteering with Voice of Aroha because I wanted to give back to a community that I was so privileged to be a part of. But over this year, it appears I have gained so much too! My confidence has grown, I've met so many wonderful people, and tried so many new things as well! I love being around the lovely VOA whānau and I genuinely only feel positive energy around the most amazing group! I've also brought my little brother along with me to multiple events and the people couldn't have been more inviting towards him! He loves you all!

And finally, to all the readers, do everything you possibly can! Everything you do matters and can make a big difference. Change the sentence "what if I had done this", to "This is what I have done"!

Aroha nui, thank you for being part of my journey!
Here's to more hot chocolates, dancing, and moments that remind us of the joy in giving back! | Carlos :)

Written by Carlos

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