VOICE OF AROHA

NEWSLETTER

NL: 02 | 2026

MARCH -APRIL - MAY - JUNE

MONTHS OF IMPACT



















OPENING MESSAGE



Kia ora whānau,

Welcome to our Months of Impact edition, reflecting on everything we achieved together from March through June. Looking back, it is incredible to see how much our community has accomplished in just a few months. None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our volunteers, supporters, funders, partners, and the amazing young people and families who continue to believe in the kaupapa of Voice of Aroha.

The highlight of these past months was undoubtedly the YES Youth Empower Summit 2026. Over three unforgettable days, we welcomed more than 340 young people from across the Wellington region and beyond to connect, learn, grow, and lead together. Seeing so many rangatahi from refugee and migrant backgrounds finding confidence, building friendships, sharing ideas, and discovering new opportunities reminded us exactly why this work matters. The summit was truly youth-led, full of energy, creativity, and hope for the future.

We also had the privilege of celebrating another major milestone through the Ethnic Youth Success Awards in both Wellington and Palmerston North. Together, we recognised 107 outstanding students for their achievements in Academic Excellence and Leadership. Watching students proudly walk across the stage alongside their families, teachers, and community leaders was one of the most inspiring moments of the year. These awards continue to remind us that our diverse young people are shaping a bright future for Aotearoa.

Another proud moment for our organisation was being named a finalist in the Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards For Porirua . This recognition belongs to every volunteer, partner, donor, and supporter who has stood beside us throughout our journey. It is an honour to have our community's collective impact recognised and celebrated.

As you read through this newsletter, you will see just how much can be achieved when communities come together with a shared vision. Every event, every conversation, every volunteer hour, and every partnership has helped create opportunities for people to belong, thrive, and lead.

To our funders, partners, sponsors, schools, councils, community organisations, volunteers, and every individual who has supported Voice of Aroha thank you. Your belief in our vision allows us to continue creating spaces where refugee and migrant communities feel seen, heard, celebrated, and empowered.

We are excited for what lies ahead we will continue building stronger communities, empowering future leaders, and creating lasting impact across Aotearoa.

Ngā mihi nui,
Kodrean Eashae
CEO, Voice of Aroha

YES LAUNCHES AT PARLIAMENT



The YES Youth Empower Summit 2026 officially began with a memorable launch event at New Zealand Parliament, bringing together rangatahi, community leaders, educators, youth workers, government representatives, and supporters to celebrate youth leadership and empowerment.

Hosted by Hon Phil Twyford MP, the evening featured inspiring keynote addresses from Hon James Meager, Minister for Youth, and Dr Claire Achmad, Children's Commissioner. Guests also enjoyed a vibrant cultural performance by VietKidsNZ and a thought-provoking panel discussion, Beyond Access: What Young People Actually Need to Thrive, exploring how communities and decision-makers can better support young people.

The launch created an inspiring beginning to the summit, setting the tone for three days of learning, connection, leadership, and meaningful conversations.

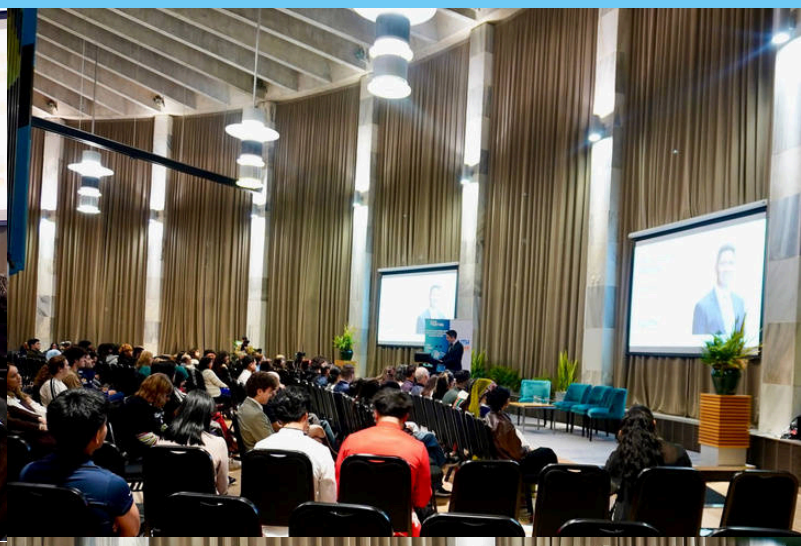


A first-of-its-kind summit, the YES Youth Empower Summit 2026 empowered over 340 young people across three unforgettable days.

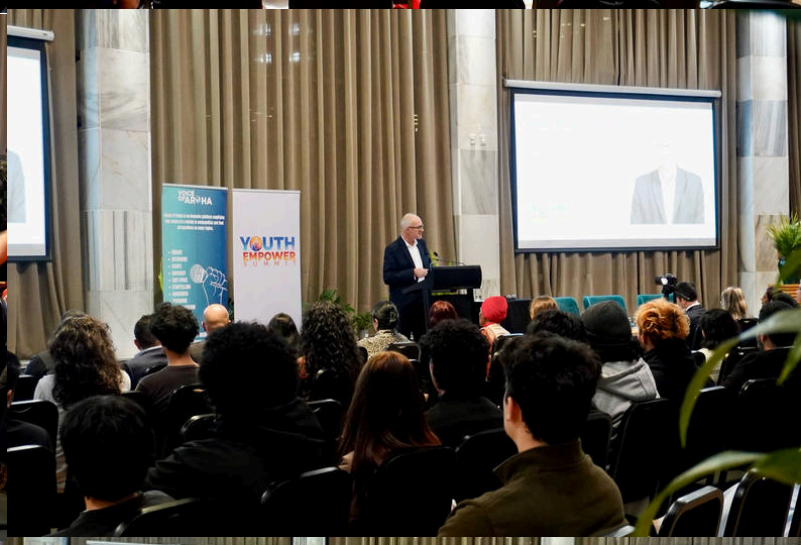
YOUTH EMPOWER SUMMIT

YES LAUNCHES AT PARLIAMENT

















YES LAUNCHES AT PARLIAMENT













YES YOUTH EMPOWER SUMMIT 2026



Summit Day One: Celebrating Identity, Culture & Community

Day One of the summit began at Pātaka Museum of Arts and Cultures with a beautiful mihi whakatau led by Dr Taku Parai and Te Pūoho Katene on behalf of Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira, warmly welcoming participants and grounding the kaupapa in manaakitanga and connection.

The morning also featured a special haka performance by Aotea College, celebrating the cultural diversity of our communities and creating a welcoming atmosphere for the day ahead.

Participants then explored identity, belonging, wellbeing, and leadership through the Roots panel discussion before taking part in a range of interactive workshops delivered by ATOM, Asian Family Services, Future Unity, and Pearly Stitch. The afternoon featured another very special piano performance by VietKidsNZ followed by the "This Is How We Do It" panel, where leaders from business, entrepreneurship, and community organisations shared their journeys and practical advice on creating meaningful careers and making a positive impact.

The summit welcomed a group of 50 young people from Palmerston North, who travelled to attend Day One, highlighting the regional interest and impact of the event.

Throughout the day, attendees connected with community organisations through interactive stalls, networked with speakers and fellow participants, and received complimentary goodie bags packed with resources and gifts generously donated by our sponsors and supporters.



YES YOUTH EMPOWER SUMMIT 2026









YES YOUTH EMPOWER SUMMIT 2026



















Summit Day Two: Inspiring the Next Generation of Leaders

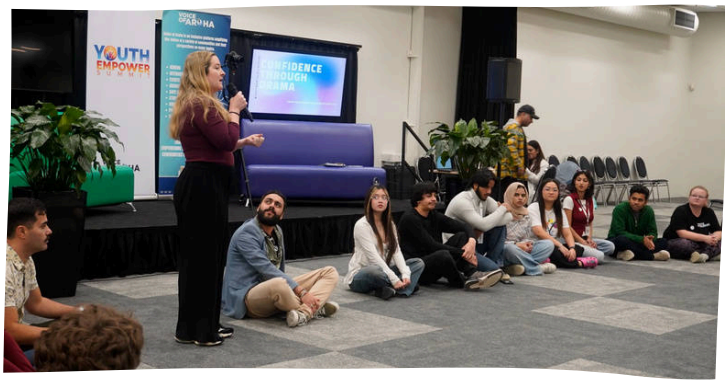
The final day of the summit focused on leadership journeys, future pathways, confidence, and creating positive change.

Participants heard from an inspiring lineup of emerging young leaders who shared their personal stories of advocacy, resilience, and leadership. The What The Heck Am I Doing? panel offered honest conversations about navigating careers, embracing uncertainty, and building purpose-driven futures, while the Confidence Through Drama workshop encouraged participants to strengthen their communication skills and step confidently outside their comfort zones.

Community stall partners once again engaged with attendees throughout the day, before the summit concluded with a celebration of the friendships, connections, and ideas that had been created over the weekend.













YES YOUTH EMPOWER SUMMIT 2026











Looking Ahead

The inaugural YES Youth Empower Summit brought together more than 340 attendances across three inspiring days, creating a vibrant space where rangatahi could connect, learn, and be empowered alongside community leaders, educators, youth workers, and changemakers.
As one of the first large-scale youth leadership summits in Aotearoa designed and delivered by migrant and refugee background young people, for ethnically diverse young people while welcoming all rangatahi, YES showcased the power of youth-led initiatives and community collaboration.

We extend our sincere thanks to our funders, Porirua City Council, Lower Hutt City Council, the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, The Clare Foundation, Xero, and Zeal Foundation, for believing in the vision of YES and helping bring it to life.

A heartfelt thank you also goes to our partners and supporters, including Parliament, Pātaka Art + Museum, Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira, Nonstop Solutions, Dignity NZ, Red Cross Palmerston North and Wellington, MMCCNZ, Flamingo, StudentCard NZ, Forest & Bird Youth, Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa, NZ Police, National Refugee Youth Council, Welly360 Photo Booth, ATOM, Asian Family Services, Future Unity, Pearly Stitch, Romina Meneses, VietKidsNZ, and the many businesses and organisations that contributed resources, merchandise, and items for our community stalls and participant goodie bags.

We are incredibly grateful to our venue partners, Parliament and Pātaka Art + Museum, for hosting the summit, and to our catering partners, Huihui, Simply Food, and Annabelle Kebab, for providing delicious lunch, and refreshments across all three days.

A special thank you to Nonstop Solutions, our Sustainability and Waste Management Partner, for supporting the summit across both event days and helping us achieve an 88.7% resource recovery rate, and to Dignity NZ, our Period Equity Partner, for ensuring free menstrual products were available to participants throughout the event.

Finally, thank you to our incredible team of volunteers, our speakers, facilitators, MCs, photographers, videographers, and event staff. In particular, we acknowledge Kodrean Eashae, Chief Executive Officer, and Aditi Tiwari, Youth Engagement & Project Coordinator, whose leadership guided the planning and delivery of the summit from concept through to completion.
Following the overwhelming success of YES 2026, Voice of Aroha has already begun planning the next Youth Empower Summit, with aspirations to expand the event to a national scale and create opportunities for even more rangatahi across Aotearoa.

If you would like to attend, volunteer, facilitate a workshop, become a speaker, sponsor the event, or partner with us, we would love to hear from you. Together, we can continue creating spaces where all rangatahi feel seen, heard, empowered, and inspired to lead.

ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026



The Palmerston North Ethnic Youth Success Awards celebrated the achievements of more than 42 outstanding ethnic students from high schools across the Manawatū region. Students were recognised for their excellence in two key categories: Academic Excellence and Leadership, celebrating not only their achievements but also the dedication, resilience, and determination behind their success.

The evening was filled with pride, inspiration, and a strong sense of community as students, families, teachers, and community leaders came together to celebrate the next generation of leaders. It was a powerful reminder that success is built through perseverance, courage, and the support of those around us.

We were honoured to welcome the Mayor of Palmerston North, whose presence highlighted the importance of recognising and investing in the achievements of young people from our diverse communities. The evening also featured an inspiring keynote address from Martine, who shared her personal journey with honesty and passion. Her story encouraged students to embrace challenges, believe in themselves, and understand that leadership is about making a positive difference in the lives of others.

Many students shared how meaningful the evening was for them. One student said, "It means so much to have my family here celebrating with me. This award is not just for me, but for everyone who has supported me along the way." Another reflected, "Seeing so many young people from different cultures being recognised gives me hope and motivation to keep working towards my goals."

The Palmerston North Ethnic Youth Success Awards once again demonstrated the incredible talent, leadership, and potential within our ethnic communities. More than an awards ceremony, it was a celebration of belonging, opportunity, and the bright future being shaped by these remarkable young people.

A huge thank you to the Ministry of Education for their valued partnership and ongoing support, and to St Peter's College for generously hosting this memorable celebration.



ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026




























ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026











ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026



The Ethnic Youth Success Awards celebrated 65 ethnic students from high schools across Wellington for their success in two main areas: Academic Excellence and Leadership. The night was filled with a positive and inspiring vibe as every pupil was acknowledged for their commitment, perseverance, and passion for their work. This night is a reminder to all of us about how great feats can be achieved when resilience, leadership, kindness, and grit is portrayed. Also, Natraj School of Dance performed a vibrant bharatanatyam performance at the Success Awards. Amazingly, the guest speakers who were invited all had their unique life story to tell, and spoke the message of how leadership and success is not always a straight path; there are hardships along the way, but in the end with determination and confidence we can make positive impacts all the way from our local community to an international scale.

When interviewing some students, they stated, “it’s been so inspiring and amazing to see all of these diverse people” and “I’m really happy to see my parents smiling and filming me while I was on stage because this award is for them, and I’m doing all of my hard work for them”. Seeing how the Ethnic Youth Success Awards has an uplifting environment and inspires our young leaders, it truly shows how events like these can shape our future and motivate youth to take meaningful action in our society.

A huge thank you to the Ministry of Education for their valued partnership and ongoing support, and to Bishop Viard College for generously hosting this memorable celebration.

Written by Harshita Rajamani







ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026





ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026

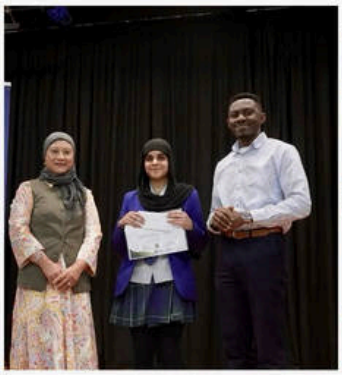








ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026























ETHNIC YOUTH SUCCESS AWARDS 2026




WATCH NOW



WELLINGTON AIRPORT REGIONAL COMMUNITY AWARDS

We are incredibly proud to share that Voice of Aroha has been named a finalist in the Arts & Culture Award, while our YES Youth Empower Summit has been selected as a finalist in the Education & Youth Development Award at the Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards.

This recognition reflects the passion, dedication, and collective effort of our amazing volunteers, partners, and supporters who continue to make our kaupapa possible.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has supported us on this journey, and a special thank you to the person who nominated us. Your belief in our mahi means the world to us. Together, we are creating lasting impact in our communities.



COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENTS

Bella & Bio-Bot Recognised as a Regional Community Awards Finalist

We are delighted to share that Bella & Bio-Bot, the youth-led STEM storytelling initiative created by siblings Jayathi and Jayath Jaiganesh, has been named a Finalist in the Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards 2026 (Wellington City).

What began as a children's picture book has grown into a youth-led STEM initiative, inspiring children through storytelling, hands-on learning and environmental curiosity.

Adding to this exciting milestone, Bella & Bio-Bot has also been invited to present interactive workshops at MakerFest Tauranga 2026, where Jayathi and Jayath will inspire children and families through storytelling, science and creativity.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who has supported our journey, including the wonderful Voice of Aroha community. Every opportunity to reach more children and families helps inspire curiosity, creativity and a lifelong love of STEM.







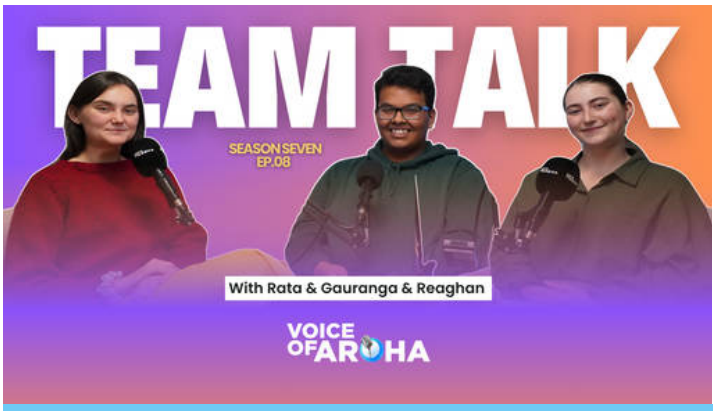
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NEW EPISODES

Tune in to these inspiring kōrero on the Voice of Aroha Podcast.
Watch the full conversations on our YouTube channel — and don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss what's coming next.



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Subscribe to Our YouTube Channel
Stay connected for inspiring stories, podcasts, community highlights, and the latest from Voice of Aroha. Subscribe today and be part of the journey!



NEW PODCAST SERIES: "BETWEEN TWO WORLDS"

Introducing Our New Podcast Series: "Between Two Worlds"

We are excited to announce the launch of Between Two Worlds, a new Mental Health Awareness Podcast Series by Voice of Aroha.

This series brings together real conversations with people from diverse backgrounds, particularly those from refugee and migrant communities. Through personal stories, lived experiences, and honest discussions, we aim to:

- Raise awareness about mental health and wellbeing
- Reduce stigma through open and authentic conversations
- Create safe spaces for dialogue, connection, and understanding
- Promote resilience, healing, and hope within our communities

Every story matters, and every voice deserves to be heard.

Join us as we explore the challenges, triumphs, and journeys of individuals navigating life between cultures, communities, and identities.

Real Conversations
Real Stories
Real Growth

This programme is proudly supported by Nōku te Ao Nōku Te Ao and the Mental Health Foundation of NZ Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand. We are grateful for their support in making this important kaupapa possible.

#BetweenTwoWorlds #MentalHealthPodcast #voiceofaroha



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Subscribe to the VOA Newsletter for exciting news, events, and community projects. Don't miss out on upcoming episodes—subscribe now to stay informed and get involved!



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