



Belong Aotearoa

Aotearoa's population and ethnic make-up is growing increasingly diverse, with more than 200 ethnic groups in Auckland alone, according to Stats NZ.

While ethnic diversity is key to creating a vibrant and inclusive nation, the journey to settlement and integration is often a difficult one for many newcomers.

Discrimination, inequitable access to services, and social isolation are just some things experienced by newcomer communities every day, reducing their sense of belonging to our society at large.

Belong Aotearoa (CC43070) (formerly known as Auckland Regional Migrant Services Charitable Trust – ARMS) is a social change organisation that has supported over 70,000 newcomers to Aotearoa since 2003.

Their vision is to help create 'An inclusive, connected New Zealand where newcomer communities are able to enjoy and contribute towards our collective wellbeing and prosperity'. For close to two decades, Belong Aotearoa has been delivering settlement support programmes to assist and inform newcomers. They run a range of workshops, community outreach projects, information sessions, and individual support that recognised the unique needs of newcomers. There are governance and leadership sessions available for aspiring leaders, that support the representation and development of newcomer leaders across sectors.

Three years ago Belong Aotearoa reviewed their strategy to ensure their support services were still needed. The review showed a need to focus less on service delivery and more on systemic change to address four key areas:

1. inequitable access to employment and enterprise for migrants and refugee background communities;
2. social isolation of these communities, particularly for women;
3. gaps within the ethnic sector;
4. discrimination caused by biased attitudes towards these communities.

"Belong Aotearoa acts as a catalyst for initiatives that promote participation, inclusion and identity for our migrant and refugee background communities. Over the years we have worked not only directly within community at a grassroots level, sparking community led initiatives, but also at other levels, working alongside key stakeholders in government and private sectors that create a positive change for new migrant and refugee background communities." Rochana Sheward, Chief Executive.

Rochana leads a diverse team fuelled by a common passion of promoting the visibility, participation, and representation of migrants, resettled communities and minority ethnic groups.

The team runs a range of initiatives that include the WISE Collective Project for former refugee women and their families. WISE stands for Women, Inspired, Strong, Empowered and Enterprising.

WISE helps women build their capacity to access education, employment, enterprise and civic life with confidence and support. Just last year, the project's catering service (which serves up unique offerings of ethnic dishes cooked by refugee background women) fulfilled over 129 orders. This fed more than 9,000 people!



Neama, Chitra, Fitriyah and Eslam serving the food with members from the Wesley Community Centre.



Safari Multicultural Playgroup.

Safari Multicultural Playgroup is another project that supports our society's youngest members and their families. Safari playgroups are a space for mothers with pre-schoolers who may have low levels of English. Many of them are also socially isolated, with little family support. This project helps mothers integrate, communicate, prepare their children for primary school, and gain parenting skills suited to the "New Zealand" context.

In addition to community projects, Belong Aotearoa provides volunteering opportunities. They also produce webinars to upskill and inspire migrants, former refugees and the wider ethnic community around key topics of interest like immigration and employment.

To find out more about Belong Aotearoa visit their [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).



The team at Belong Aotearoa (L-R: Sally, Malu, Swait, Najira, Rochana, Anjira, Nazmin, Sasi, and Yasmin)