

Report from Timaru District Multi Ethnic Council

The Timaru District Multi Ethnic Council was formed in April 2007 and one of our first projects was to help write a Migrants guide with the Timaru District Council which has been widely distributed in our region and integrate throughout the country from a variety of local authorities.

We are now a registered Incorporated Society and are in the process of applying for a variety of subsidies for funding.

We have been invited to speak at a wide range of humanity organisations like Local primary schools, Polytechnic, National Council of Women, Citizens advice.

The local Diwali festival has attracted 260 people and our group gave lots of support and we had a wonderful colourful cultural experience celebrity with our Indian friends.

Also we had a celebration of Chinese New Year in Feb.

We were honoured to host the Minister of Ethnic Affairs Hon Chris Carter when he visited Timaru in Oct. He was very interested in our group & enclosed us to keep up our efforts. He thinks Timaru is ideally sized & situated city for migrants & refugees to settle in.

We meet every month on first Sunday evening for Pot Luck dinner & have invited a variety of speakers during the last year.

2008 Started off with our involvement in organising an outdoor cultural concert for the Waitangi Day Celebration, we helped raise money for an orphanage in Nepal.

In March we hosted our 4th Annual Race Relations day dinner & were thrilled to have Joris de Bres, Race Relations Commissioner as our guest speaker. Over 400 people came for the potluck banquet!!

We hope to establish a series of forums in the coming months and also wish one day to employ Migrant Worker.

Periodically we attend all the Citizen ship Ceremonies hosted by the Timaru District Council and last month we welcomed 45 new citizen in Timaru city!!!

Attached Picture of Race Relation Day & Speech from Joris de Bres, Race Relations Commissioner



Address by Joris de Bres, Race Relations Commissioner

Timaru Multi-Ethnic Council Race Relations Day Dinner Caroline Bay Hall, Timaru, March 26, 2008

Before I came to Timaru for tonight's Race Relations Day dinner, I thought I'd better do a quick check on the demographics of the Timaru district compared to the whole of New Zealand. A visit to the Statistics New Zealand website told me that the ethnic composition of the district at the last census in 2006 was quite different to New Zealand as a whole. This will probably come as no surprise to you, but a comparison with the national demographics reveals the following particulars:

- 81% of people in Timaru identify as European, compared to 67% in New Zealand as a whole (a difference of 14%)
- 16.2% identify as New Zealander, compared to 11.1% nationally (a difference of 5%)
- 6.3% identify as Maori, compared to 14.6% nationally (a difference of 8%)
- 1.4% identify as Asian, compared to 9.2% nationally (a difference of 8%).

- Just under 1% identify as Pacific, compared to just under 7% nationally (a difference of 6%)
- The total of those who identify as Maori, Pacific and Asian in Timaru is less than 9% compared to over 30% nationally (a difference of 21%)
- 9.7% were born overseas, compared with 22.9% nationally
- Only 7% speak more than one language, compared to 20% nationally (a difference of 13%).

That was two year ago, and for the full age range of the population. The most recent figures nationally for children, however, show that those who are at least partly of Maori, Pacific and Asian descent make up 0% of our school population, and 55% of our newborn babies. I don't know how that compares with the numbers for Timaru, but your community is probably still a little less diverse than the New Zealand population as a whole, but more diverse that it was even two years ago.

All communities in New Zealand are undergoing change, and this change is most dramatic in the places that have been relatively untouched by diversity until now. There have been two key drivers for this. The first was the arrival of international students, and the second is the even more recent increase in migrant workers, particularly in horticulture, viticulture and agriculture, but also in skilled workers and professionals in provincial businesses and the health sector.

Rural and provincial communities are likely to have an even greater dependence in future on international students and migrant workers to sustain their economy and services.

It makes sense in these circumstances to ensure that students and workers who do come to the district are well cared for and either settle successfully or leave with a positive experience to relay to their friends and families.

Through a number of much publicised bad experiences and negative overseas reaction, we have learnt the importance of pastoral care for our international students. Adherence to a national pastoral care code is now mandatory for all schools. However, students can still (as in the past year in such places as Nelson, Christchurch, Napier, Tauranga, and Whangarei) be subject to harassment or assault in the street, and their safety is therefore a responsibility for the community as a whole and not just for the school. If international students are important to the future of the district's schools, then it is important to ensure that they feel welcome and that they are safe.

Just last week, as part of Race Relations Day in Christchurch, Canterbury University, the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, the Christchurch City Council, the Police and the Human Rights Commission, launched a joint "Welcome to Christchurch" campaign for international students and migrants, including welcome posters and guidance for students on how to report instances of racial harassment.

I was at a Race Relations Day festival attended by several thousand people in Nelson just before Easter, and one of the features of that event was the formal welcome given to international students by school and civic authorities as part of the festival. Students from different countries were welcomed onto the stage by representatives of educational institutions and greeted by the Mayor. Similarly, at another well attended Race Relations Day festival in Hastings the week before, seasonal Solomon Island workers from the local orchards were invited to perform. These are just two simple ways of making people feel welcome and included.

While there are pastoral care provisions for international students, it is more difficult to ensure that migrant workers are well treated and made to feel part of the local community. As with students, their experience is vital to a continuing supply for the local economy in the future, as they are the purveyors of the district's reputation as a safe and inclusive place to work.

This week, there will be over 15,000 seasonal workers in the Hawke's Bay alone. Marlborough needs 3,000 for the pruning season starting this month, and the Bay of Plenty's kiwifruit growers will need an additional 8,600, of whom at least 3,500 are increasingly recruiting migrant workers, and I understand the same is happening here in South Canterbury. Pastoral care for these more isolated workers presents particular challenges.

It is important to respect the human rights of these workers. A recent report of an Ashburton farmer saying she had banned three Romanian farm workers from speaking their own language at work is a breach of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, however well intentioned in terms of encouraging them to learn English. There has been a recent report in the New Zealand Herald of qualified Filipino nurses working in 'slave labour' conditions in Northland having incurred major debts to recruitment agents and being bonded to work for up to three years at low wages in rest homes. The number of work permits for migrant workers for 13 low wage sectors in New Zealand has jumped tenfold in the past 5 years.

For the first time this year, there has been a special scheme for seasonal workers from the Pacific Islands, which includes requirements for recognised employers to provide good conditions of work and pastoral care. Around 5,000 seasonal workers have already come to New Zealand in the past year from Kiribati, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and elsewhere working holiday or other work permits and for whom there are no specific protections.

It is both an employer and a community responsibility that these workers are looked after. We have learnt over the years that people integrate into the community best when they are provided with a little help to settle, be it through social support or language teaching, as well as through recognition of their own language, culture and social and economic contribution.

Events like tonight's dinner are a way of affirming that the diversity international students, seasonal migrant workers and permanent migrants bring to this community is valued. The establishment of the Timaru Multi-Ethnic Council is an important development, similar to the development of migrant centres, newcomer's networks and new ethnic councils in a number of other provincial communities. The importance the Multi-Ethnic Council has attached to participation in this year's local Waitangi Day celebration is also evidence of their vision to bridge all the different cultures of this district.

There is a need for a partnership between community groups, schools, employers, the local council and central government to ensure that newcomers are welcomed, assisted and included in the local community. The next local government long term community plan, which I believe is due to be completed next year, may be an opportunity to address these issues more specifically than at present in the community outcomes sought for this district.

Race Relations Day is observed around the world as the International Day for the elimination of Racial Discrimination. It offers us an annual opportunity to celebrate our diversity. The theme for

this year is “Finding Common Ground”, emphasising not only our cultural diversity but also the humanity and the human rights that we share. Thank you for inviting me to be part of your celebrations here tonight.