

Cultural Celebration Award Entrant: Raeburn House

House is where the heart is. Raeburn House is a primary mental health provider and community development organisation with a focus on mental wellbeing, community wellbeing and diversity. Its mission is to connect diverse vibrant communities within the Waitemata region by working alongside people to strengthen the health and wellbeing of communities.

Over the last 30 years, Raeburn House has developed into a recognised thought leader in the area of community development, and the provision of learning opportunities.

With diverse communities front of mind, Raeburn House delivers integrated services, including providing resources and information; supporting the capacity building of individuals and communities through community development projects, including enhancing the capability of the social profit sector; strengthening families and settlement support.

Raeburn House is the key knowledge holder of current settlement support services as it holds both Settlement Support and Settling In contracts. This allows the organisation to look at settlement from both an economic and psychosocial aspect. Their celebration of diversity, not only in the community, but also within their own workforce, enhances their ability to deliver effective services.

"I love how Raeburn House has so many different faces. You have an extremely multicultural workforce; Indian, Chinese, Iranian, English, Canadian and Kiwi," says Jill Nernehy from the Kaipatiki Community Facilities Trust.

"You seem to be the only ones actually doing stuff for new migrants. For example, when I could no longer employ Deleram in my organisation, you snapped her up, and she's still with you."

An important part of effective delivery of their services is an understanding of cultural difference and appropriate language skills. Their accountability framework notes the ability of those working with the client to speak their language, ensuring that the client's needs are fully met and they are referred to the most appropriate services.

Valuing a diverse workforce was particularly evident in the case of Venkat Sai, who was originally from Southern India and came to New Zealand two years ago to pursue a post graduate IT qualification. Venkat was unsuccessful in gaining a part time role with the business hub side of Raeburn House's service delivery and, instead, offered to work voluntarily for the organisation.

"I had no experience of the not for profit sector. I was still finishing my studies, and also had the pressure of trying to find full-time employment in order to stay in New Zealand," recalls Venkat.

"I had felt so welcome at Raeburn that I just knew it was where I needed to be, and I had faith, that something would work out. It was like pay it forward...karma."

Carol Ryan, General Manager, made the courageous decision to employ Venkat one day a week, to help build the business hub by working in his area of expertise, database design. At this time Venkat was working two jobs, studying full time and volunteering one day a week.

Venkat has now finished his studies, graduating top of his class, and thanks to the way he built his credibility within the community, he works 30 hours a week in the business hub.

The Community Volunteer Centre is an important part of Raeburn House's work with new migrants. Volunteering is one way of migrants using their existing skills to give to their community, helping them to settle well and build greater understanding between host and newcomer communities. The Volunteer Centre is complemented by a welcoming friendship group, Global Food and Friends, that brings newcomers and Kiwis together to share cultural experiences, strengthen social bonds and improve settlement outcomes for migrants and their families.

It is not only their work with new migrants that sets Raeburn House apart. Their services have been designed to meet diverse needs, ensuring all delivery is reflective of the diversity of the region.

Their understanding of diverse communities allows them to instigate, develop, co-ordinate and participate in projects that have a positive outcome for the health and well-being of the community. It also allows them to support the capability of individuals, families and groups to achieve well-being at a community level.

The Board of Raeburn House is committed to the continuance of the delivery of services and learnings that enhance community development practices, and support engagement with all voices in their communities. The Community Volunteer Centre, Business Hub development, Auckland Diversity Alliance Network (ADAN) development and the new suite of Training Toolkits will continue their development to best meet the needs in the sector.