

# NEW RESIDENT MAGAZINE

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When We Became New Zealanders



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## He Mihi

E ngā Mana.

E ngā Reo.

E ngā Waka.

He Mihi tenei kia koutou, nau mai, piki mai, kake mai, haere mai.

Haere mai, whakatau mai ki Aotearoa. He nui te mihi, he nui te aroha, kia koutou, ngā Iwi Taketake o te Ao.

I mahue atu o koutou whenua, o koutou kāinga, me o koutou whānau. Ahakoa enei, kiaū tonu kito koutou Reo, o koutou Tikanga, hei tikitiki mo o koutou mahunga. Pikaupia mai hoki ngā tini mate o te wā, kia tangihia, kia tukua he roimata mo rātou –kia tutuki ai te kōrero nei – “rātou kia rātou, tātou kia tātou.”

“Kotahi tekohao o te ngira e kuhuna ai te miro mā, te miropango, me te mirowhero. I muri kia mau ki te Aroha, ki te Ture, me te Whakaponu.” He korero nā Kingi Potatau Te Wherowhero.

He mātapono enei hei arahia tātou I runga I te tika, te pono, me te aroha.

Noho ora mai. Kia ora.

‘Bobby’ Robert Newson

## English Translation of Mihi

Distinguished Guests.

Cultural Ambassadors and Leaders

Faith Communities Ladies and Gentlemen.

Greetings and welcome.

We bid you welcome – welcome to Aotearoa - New Zealand. We greet you; we honour and respect you the Indigenous peoples of the world.

With heavy saddened hearts you have left your homeland, your homes, and your family to find a new life in another land. We recognise and encourage you, as you seek to find this new life in this new land – hold on to your language hold on to your culture – your identity – who you are. To your Ancestors and loved ones passed, whom you cherish in your hearts let them meet as we today meet.

“There is but one eye of the needle through which the white, black and red threads must pass. After I am gone hold fast to love, to the law and to your beliefs.” Famous words spoken by Potatau Te Wherowhero the first Maori King.

The principles of Faith (belief) Hope and Charity will guide us through life.

Blessings to you all.

‘Bobby’ Robert Newson



## Welcoming Message

As someone who migrated to New Zealand with my family 37 years ago, I understand the many emotions that come with settling into a new country — the excitement, the uncertainty, and the hope for a better future. My family’s journey took us through several countries before we finally made New Zealand our home, and each stage of the journey brought new experiences, challenges, and lessons about adapting to change and finding a sense of belonging. I have great admiration for those who have made that journey from countries even further away and who have overcome immense challenges to build a new life here.

New Zealand is enriched by the incredible diversity of people who choose to live here. Immigrant and former refugees bring valuable skills, experiences, and perspectives that strengthen our communities and contribute to the fabric of our nation. Your courage and determination to rebuild your lives continue to inspire me.

While the journey of resettlement and settlement can be difficult, it is also full of opportunity. I encourage you to take advantage of the education, training, and community programmes available to help you not only to settle but to thrive and make your dreams a reality. Every step forward, whether learning a new skill, finding employment, or building friendships, helps strengthen the shared future we are creating together.

I have always believed that a welcoming and inclusive New Zealand benefits everyone. When people from diverse backgrounds are given the chance to succeed, our communities become stronger, more vibrant, and more connected.

As a National List MP based in Mt Albert, I value the opportunity to work with the many organisations and community groups that make this area such a wonderful place to live. ARCC plays an important role in helping new Kiwis settle, connect, and thrive, and I deeply appreciate the work you do. My office and I are always ready to assist and provide support where possible.

Hon Melissa Lee  
National List MP based in Mt Albert



# ARCC Employment Survey: Barriers to employment for immigrants with forced displacement experience in NZ

## Introduction

For many New Zealand immigrants or newcomers, particularly those who have experienced forced displacement offshore (former refugees), finding a job is an opportunity to rebuild their lives in their new home, but barriers and other factors prevent them from getting meaningful jobs. In August 2018, ARCC conducted an employment survey for immigrant communities, using a questionnaire on employment status and work experience in New Zealand. The questionnaire was targeted at those in employment or seeking employment opportunities who have completed their compulsory education. It is relevant to both male and female community members.

ARCC summary report on the employment connection concept feasibility study, which targeted 20 individual organisations representing immigrant communities in Auckland. Members have frequently identified attainment of timely and appropriate employment as a significant barrier to smooth and judicious resettlement. Lack of access to relevant business, workplace, or professional networks denies them critical information and opportunities. Our experience working with these people and communities suggested that existing jobseeker preparation and support programmes may not intentionally and aggressively link people

to appropriate employers, networks and jobs.

A pilot Employment Connection programme (OMEGA) that proved effective for immigrants operated for four years from 2008. OMEGA was driven as much by business needs for scarce skills and talent as by immigrant's need for employment. This approach seemed to fill a critical gap in the employment pathway, and ARCC wanted to see if it could be applied to NZ immigrants with forced displacement experience.

## The Employment Feasibility Study

We successfully applied to The Tindall Foundation (TTF) for a small donation to cover the costs of a feasibility study to see if the OMEGA model would work for NZ immigrant communities. This proposal included detailed due diligence to assess the likelihood and consultation with a range of potential stakeholders – business, employers, service providers, community leaders, and job seekers. If this feasibility study supported our assumptions, in-depth collaboration with key partners would lead to the later co-creation of a

detailed pilot-project proposal.  
Three levels of research were completed:

1. A comprehensive survey of the skills, talents and employment status of 200 NZ immigrant communities with forced displacement experience (former refugees).
2. Consultation with eight agencies which currently provide employment-related services to NZ immigrants (former refugees).
3. Consultation with an organisation which more directly links NZ immigrant communities in Auckland with employers.

### Summary of Results

All Feasibility Study data collection and consultation summaries are completed. Analysis of results is as follows.

## Immigrant Communities

The attached summary of results – complemented by other related research – indicates that many NZ immigrant communities (former refugees) are not in jobs or are underemployed for long periods, even in these times of low unemployment. Several key reasons were reported (non-recognition of qualifications and past experience, language and foreign-name issues, absence of local experience, lack of networks), with the last being the most prominent. This indicated that a more actively engaged employer-focused OMEGA model may well fill a missing link between skilled and qualified job seekers and employers with talent needs.

However, the size of the NZ immigrant's population with displacement experience and the spread of latent skills and talent within it



do not align with the narrower, professionally focused OMEGA model. NZ immigrants (former refugees) skills and needs range from unskilled casual work to youth and part-time employment, to qualified but not recognised professionals and technical experts. This broad range would make it difficult to engage with individual employers who need such a variety of employees, especially given that around 80 % of employers are small- to medium-sized businesses.

However, it does not mean that some form of connection to appropriate employers, more active and intentional than current services, is not needed; only that the OMEGA model is probably not the most suitable.

## Agencies and Service Providers Consultation

The attached independent report on consultation with agencies/NGOs that currently offer employment-related services shows that there are already many providers of many such services and support to resettled people in Auckland. They agree that the findings of the community Survey are accurate, but see the barriers identified as enduring and systemic, despite their best (and reportedly largely successful) efforts to overcome them. They fear the negative effects of excessive duplication through the provision of more such services.

Some agencies report active engagement with employers to supplement their primary focus on jobseeker preparation. However, few appear to have the active engagement and funding that the OMEGA model achieved, though they do think it is too expensive and primarily professionally focused. While they would be interested in co-creating a possible Employer Connection model, they are guarded and uncertain about what that may entail.

## Direct Employer Connection Consultation

In lieu of individually surveying the large number of employers who may require the breadth of NZ immigrants (former refugees) skills and talent, Host International was consulted as a body already active in this role. It is a non-profit partner of ARCC working across the Asia-Pacific region, which has been actively working with New Zealand employers to improve employment outcomes for resettled community members. Their attached report confirms that the barriers NZ immigrants (former refugees) face from a potential employer's perspective are real and stem mainly from preconceptions employers may have about potential issues with this group compared to others who apply for jobs. Cultural differences with the local workplace culture, inability to sell themselves as effectively as other applicants, and higher upfront costs are cited as potential issues they foresee. Employers are reported to be interested in hiring resettled employees, both to fill critical skills shortages and to demonstrate their social responsibility. A range of ways employers can be better educated - and former refugees employed - are noted, including internships, work experience programmes and mentoring.

## Analysis and Conclusions

Bringing the results of the above together, it would seem that the OMEGA model of more direct engagement with and support from employers to improve employment outcomes for NZ immigrants (former refugees) is not feasible to pursue in its current form. This is because:

- The breadth of skills and talent in former NZ immigrant communities, and the small numbers within each cohort of these, are insufficient to justify a dedicated, stand-alone new service offering.
- Existing agencies and services offered by NGOs report that they already address many of the identified needs.
- There is lukewarm interest from provider organisations in co-creating a follow-up pilot programme.
- Host International has recently moved its Asia-Pacific employer-focused model to Aotearoa New Zealand, which appears to offer services similar to those of OMEGA.

However, this does not mean that the barriers to timely and appropriate employment currently in place will be overcome any more effectively if the status quo is merely maintained. The former refugee Employment Survey results, along with other research here and overseas, clearly prove that stronger links to and engagement by employers with skills and workforce needs will reduce these barriers and lead to more and better jobs for this group than is currently the case. There is a real gap between what is currently provided and what is needed.

## Conclusion

For the above reasons, ARCC will not proceed with efforts to trial the OMEGA model through a proposed Employment Connection pilot project. This is a valid and prudent outcome from the feasibility study.

It will continue to be active in finding solutions to the remaining barriers, primarily through its partnership with HOST International in Aotearoa New Zealand. This will include sharing information and referrals from its community members with HOST International-connected employers and providing other forms of support and education to employers, NZ immigrants (former refugees), and agencies providing employment-related services, as needed.

ARCC thanks the Tindall Foundation for its donation to support this feasibility study; Stewart Devitt, Susan Elliott, and Trevor Grey for their help; former refugee community leaders and members who completed the survey; agencies and service providers who shared their views; and HOST International for their employer perspectives.

Story No.1

# Kuperan Sharmi



I left my home at just 16 years old, carrying nothing but fear, hope, and the dream of safety. For more than three decades, life in Sri Lanka meant constant struggle, fear and danger. My parents worried every day about what might happen to us. Finally, they made the hardest decision any parent could make: to send me and my three brothers away so we could have a chance at life. That decision set us on a long and uncertain journey across countries and seas.

My name is Kuperan Sharmi, and this is my story.

At 16, I left everything behind and went first to Malaysia, where I lived with my three brothers. Life was harsh there—I had no documents, was detained, and even spent six months in jail and two years in detention camp. I learned to survive, to adapt, and to speak new languages. Eventually, I fled to Thailand by bus, and from there tried to reach Australia by boat. Instead, our boat — carrying about 250 desperate people who had each paid agents thousands of dollars, a huge amount of money in 2009 — was intercepted by the Indonesian Navy. Many people had sold their homes and land in Sri Lanka just to pay the agent fees. I spent the next four years in a refugee camp in Indonesia, waiting and holding on to hope.

When we left on the boat, it was only me and my two brothers. One of my elder brothers stayed behind in Malaysia because he had married a

Malaysian woman. He is still there today with his wife and three children, even though he has never been able to obtain residency or citizenship.

While in the refugee camp, life was a relentless struggle, filled with hardship and uncertainty, but I found comfort in my determination to survive. I could work for long hours in carpentry and painting as a cheap labour. I acquired skills and deepened knowledge while earning insufficient wages, each day a testament to my resilience. Despite, the daily struggles and poor living conditions, I hold on to a glint of hope, believing that one day, I would escape this life and find a better future with opportunities.

Through UNHCR and the humanitarian process, I was finally offered the chance to rebuild my life in a safe place— Aotearoa New



While I'm at work, my wife keeps busy creating and altering traditional dresses — turning her passion into her own little business.

Zealand. In 2012, I arrived here and spent six weeks at the Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre. I had no English, no job, and no idea what the future would look like. The lack of New Zealand work experience, education, and language barrier were my biggest challenges, but I was determined. I immediately enrolled for an English course and a preparatory course at Auckland University of Technology where I could practise English every day with classmates and talking with people from other communities quickly improve my English proficiency and communication skills. Even learning road rules and daily life in New Zealand took time, but I never gave up.

When I first arrived here, I relied on social housing and government support, but I knew deep down I did not want to live like that forever. Benefits may help you survive,

but they also limit your independence. If you earn too little, you still cannot get ahead. I realised that depending on government support was not the life I wanted for myself. I wanted to stand on my own feet, pay my own way, and live with dignity and satisfaction.

In my early years in Aotearoa New Zealand, I took any work I could find—painting, timber flooring, carpentry—just to keep going. Some jobs were tough, and many times I wasn't treated fairly. I would turn up, do the work, and was told that tax would be taken care of. They deducted whatever they said was tax, then paid us the small amount left in cash.

But each job was a lesson. I picked up new skills, learned how to deal with people, and slowly built my confidence. Somewhere along the way, I began to ask myself: I've got the



My business, NZ Smart Painter Ltd., offers professional painting, flooring, and carpentry services.



Cooking is my way of sharing my culture – I prepare dishes for restaurants or community events whenever there's an order.

knowledge, the skills, and the tools to do the job properly. If I can work this hard for other people, why can't I put the same effort into something of my own? That question stayed with me, and in 2022 I finally took the step and started my own business—NZ Smart Painter Ltd.

At first, it wasn't easy. No one knew me, and few trusted my experience. I had to prove myself, job by job, showing that I could work cleanly, quickly, and honestly. Over time, opportunities grew. I began doing painting, flooring, and renovation work under my own name. Running my own business gave me freedom—freedom from dependency, freedom from unfair treatment, and the dignity of standing on my own.

In 2022, I married, and my wife and I are now expecting our first child. She is also entrepreneurial, working as a tailor making traditional clothes and doing alterations. Together, we are learning that while registering a company in New Zealand is easy, building a customer base and network requires patience, persistence, and trust.

When I started my own business and after my wife arrived, I moved into a private rental because my income is not consistent. If I lived in social housing, my rent would increase based on my income, sometimes becoming very high, which is difficult to manage. In a private rental, the rent stays the same regardless of my income.



Preparing traditional Sri Lankan dishes is also a special time spent with my wife, as we share moments and build our business together.

I also runs a small side catering business, where I catered Sri Lankan food for community events and local family households and gatherings. With deep love for our cultural recipes, I takes pride sharing the flavours of my heritage in every dish I prepares. Cooking has always been a family affair for me and my wife. Whether preparing meals for a community event or a quite family gathering, I finds joy in working alongside my loved ones, combining passion, tradition and togetherness into every plate I serve.

Life in New Zealand has challenges—the rising cost of living, uncertain work, and the ache of not seeing my parents for more than 18 years. Yet I know one thing: I cannot go back. This is my home now. This is where I belong.

My dream is to buy a house one day, to visit my parents in Sri Lanka, and to grow my business into a food supply company serving restaurants. Most of all, I want to keep improving myself, because I believe that whatever you do in life, you must do it with happiness. There is no point in doing something if it does not bring joy. In my free time, I enjoy playing chess and cricket, which remind me of both my roots and my new community.

New Zealand has given me safety and a second chance at life. In return, I work hard, contribute, and hope my journey can show others—especially former refugees—that with determination and courage, even the hardest journeys can lead to new beginnings.

Story No. 2

# Tial Tu Sang



When the plane touched down in Auckland in March 2006, I closed my eyes and whispered a quiet prayer. After years of uncertainty, I had finally reached a land I had never heard of before - New Zealand - a place that promised safety, peace, and a new beginning.

My wife and I arrived in New Zealand under the Refugee Quota Programme, coming from Malaysia where I have lived for nine long years, working as a painter on construction sites. It was tough work, but I had no other choice – I needed to earn money to support my family. Deep down, I always dreamed of becoming an electrician, but life's circumstances did not allow it. Those years in Malaysia were difficult; at one point, I was even imprisoned.

My wife and I came from the same village in Chin State, Myanmar. We had known each other since before I left Myanmar, and later, in 2004, we got married and started a new life together in Malaysia. I had never even heard of New Zealand until I attended an orientation session organised by UNHCR. I imagined it to be a country filled with tall buildings and modern cities.

When we arrived at the Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre, I was surprised – it was not what I expected. I wondered how our life would be here.

Soon, however, I found comfort knowing that there were already a few Chin families living in Auckland, only about four at that time. That discovery gave us encouragement and hope. The first challenge we faced was the language barrier. Thankfully, the support we received at the Māngere Centre was wonderful. The officers were kind, friendly, and very helpful. After moving into the community, the ARMS organisation supported us with settlement and social needs. We were assigned a volunteer who became a great guide and friend. He helped us find furniture for our first home, taking me around Auckland with a map because he wanted me to practise using it for navigation. He also taught us how to use public transport and encouraged

us to do things independently so we could build confidence and adapt to our new life.

My wife began studying English at an intermediate level, supported by StudyLink. However, we faced challenges in understanding the system. During the transition from WINZ to StudyLink, we did not receive any payments for about two to three weeks. It was stressful, but our volunteer helped us apply for hardship support.

I also had a home tutor who tailored my English lessons around my previous work experience. He taught me the names of construction tools and even took me to Mitre 10 for practical learning. Through him, I gained confidence



I always approach my work with goodwill – it's not just a job, but a commitment to quality.



We love spending our holidays exploring together – family time is everything.

and was later introduced to his friend, who offered me training in painting. By the end of 2006, I started doing small painting jobs, and by the end of 2007, I joined a construction company to gain New Zealand work experience. There, I learned about taxation, safety rules, and workplace regulations.

In October 2015, I decided to take a big step – I started my own business, Sang Painting Ltd. My motivation was simple: I was grateful for the support we had received through WINZ, but I didn't want to depend on government assistance forever. I wanted to stand on my own feet, buy our own home, and contribute back to New Zealand by paying taxes.

Starting a business came with its own challenges – language barriers, lack of

networks, and difficulty finding customers. Communicating with clients and managing emails was not easy, and I struggled to understand the taxation system, especially deadlines and penalties. I didn't know where to seek help, to have training and workshop for safety, etc. I learned, sometimes the hard way, that it is very important to regularly check your MyIR account and plan your tax payments ahead. My advice to anyone wanting to start a business is to learn about New Zealand's tax and legal systems first.

WINZ provided some support for start-up resources, but we were required to submit a business plan, and I didn't know where to get help for that. I think it would be great if there were organisations to assist former refugees and migrants with business planning

and entrepreneurship. After COVID19-, my business slowed down, but I remain positive and grateful for how far we've come.

My wife, on the other hand, took a completely different path. She is now working as an interpreter, something she never imagined doing. While studying English, she often helped interpret for our community. Through this, she improved her language skills and gained valuable experience. When our twin daughters were just three years old, she received a scholarship to study interpreting at UNITEC. She attended evening classes, balancing study, motherhood, and community service.

Her first job interview was in 2014 at the

Māngere Refugee Resettlement Centre — the same place where our journey in New Zealand began. It was her first formal interview, and she didn't know how to "sell herself" or impress the employer, but her dedication and volunteering experience helped her succeed. Before that, she had volunteered in a playgroup and as a teaching assistant at a primary school — roles that didn't pay money but built experience, confidence, and networks that later opened doors for her.

When we first arrived, there was no Chin community in Auckland. We joined a Burmese Fellowship that met once a month. As more Chin families arrived, we formed our own community group in 2011. My wife served as the President of the Chin Community in 2014



Serving our Chin community has been a joy for both of us, in leadership roles or behind the scenes.

and as Secretary in 2023. She also teaches our children the Chin language, ensuring that they value their mother tongue and culture.

Outside of work, my hobbies include playing volleyball, hiking, fishing, and sightseeing. I love spending time with my family. We always speak our mother tongue at home so our children can understand and use it proudly. During holidays, we enjoy trips and picnics together – I believe family bonding is very important.

Our hard work has paid off. We bought our first home in 2016 in Glen Eden, our second in 2018, and our third in 2022. We rent our first two homes to community members at below-market rates because we want to give back and

support others just as we were once supported. Looking ahead, my goal is to continue supporting my children to pursue good education and make positive contributions to society. To all who wish to start a business, learn about the country's laws, taxation, and systems. Stand on your own feet. To all newcomers to New Zealand, I want to say this: there will be challenges, especially in the beginning, but don't give up. The government and community organisations are ready to help – don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask. Opportunities won't always come to you; you have to look for them and grab them. Embrace and learn about other cultures while valuing your own identity, traditions, and language.



Teaching our children about our language, culture and traditions ensures they grow up proud of their roots and happy in the community.

Story No. 3

# Henok Tsegay Towelde



I was born and raised in Eritrea, a country in the Horn of Africa. Life there was not always easy, but it was home. In 2010, through family reunification, I migrated to New Zealand with my mother and two cousins to join my brother, who had arrived a few years earlier under the Refugee Quota Programme. What began as a difficult and uncertain journey has now turned into a story of resilience, growth, and opportunity.

I completed high school in 2004, full of dreams and determination to make my own way in life. After graduation, I opened a small music shop as well as a business selling electronic gadgets. Managing own business was not always easy, but I enjoyed being independent and learning what it meant to work for myself.

However, in June 2005, when I was just 19 years old, my life took a dramatic turn. Together with my mother, brother, and two cousins, I made the heartbreaking decision to leave Eritrea. The journey was dangerous, but we had no other choice. We walked across the desert, enduring long and exhausting 12 days, until we finally reached a refugee camp in Sudan.

Life in the refugee camp was tough. The living conditions were unsuitable, resources were scarce, and it soon became clear that we could not sustain ourselves there for long. As a result, my family and I decided to move to Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, in search of better opportunities. I began operating a small phone business, which allowed me to support my family while we waited for something more permanent. After five long years of uncertainty and struggle, our prayers were finally answered — we received the good news that our visas to New Zealand had been approved.

Arriving in New Zealand in 2010 was both exciting and overwhelming. While we were grateful for safety and a fresh start, the challenges were many. We experienced culture shock, the weather was far colder than what we were used to, and language barriers made daily life difficult. We also had little knowledge of the legal system or how to access support services. Simple things like filling out forms, asking for help, or finding a job proved challenging, especially with limited English and no New Zealand work experience.

Determined not to give up, I enrolled in an English skills course at Unitec Institute of Technology. Over three months, I learned how to communicate more confidently, prepare for interviews, and build my language skills. Encouraged by my progress, I pursued

further studies and enrolled in a Certificate for Electrical Apprenticeship at Unitec in 2012. The programme offered two weeks of voluntary work experience — and that opportunity changed everything for me. It not only gave me valuable skills and knowledge but also a strong recommendation that later helped me secure employment as an electrician.

I worked hard, showed up early, and tried to learn as much as I could. At the end of the two weeks, the company offered me a job. I started my apprenticeship, earned my certificate, and when it was time to move on, I went back to that same company — Calendar Electric — to ask if they'd take me on again. They did. I stayed with them for over ten years, and that's really where my professional journey began. I'm proud of the progress I've made and how



Whenever I have time alongside my work as an electrician, I love helping manage my wife's hair salon.



My wife's passion for hair and beauty inspired us to start a business – creating opportunities for her and other women in our community.

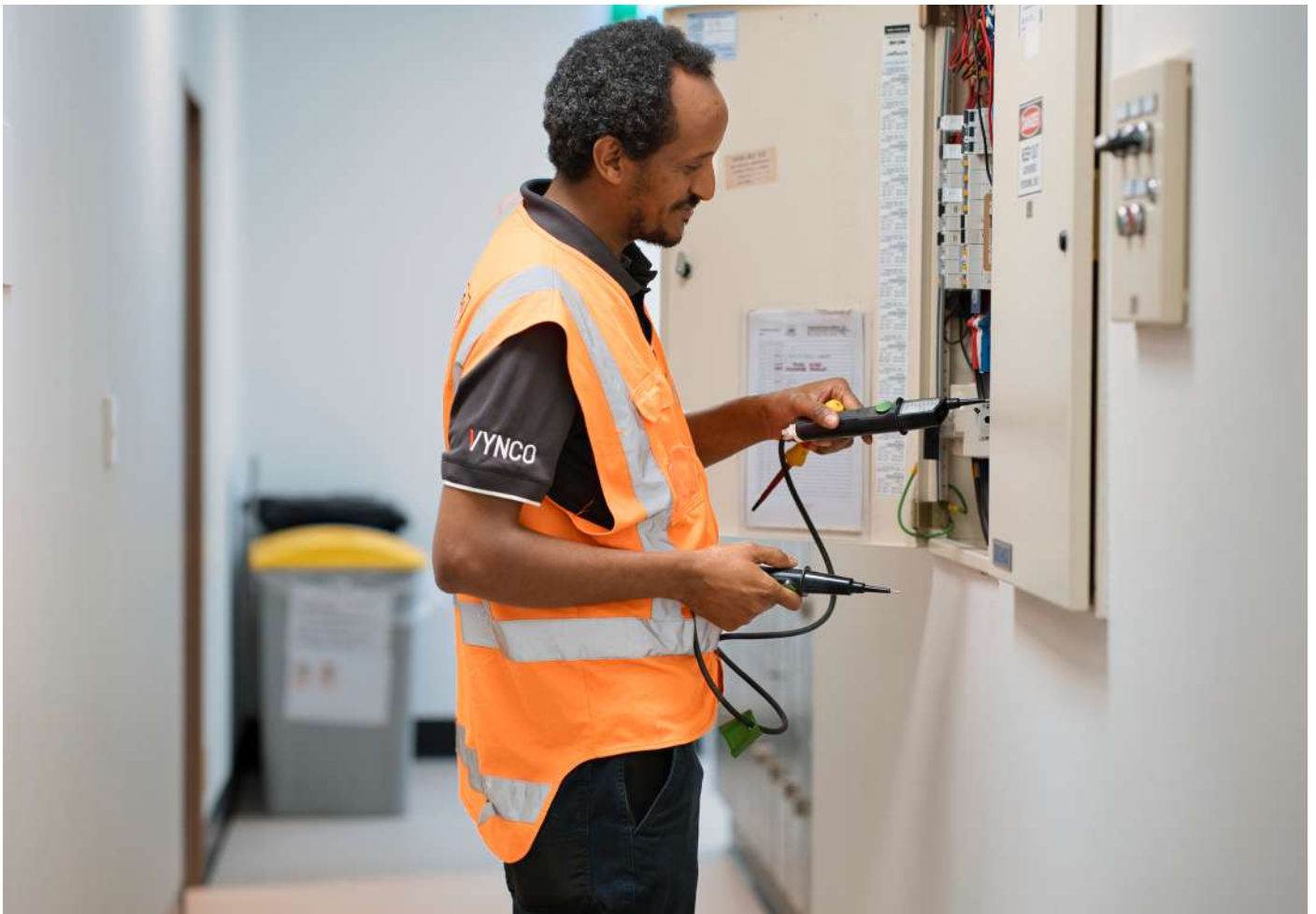
far those first small steps have taken me.

Although I enjoyed working as an electrician, I always carried a dream of owning my own business. In 2020, I finally took the leap and registered H & M Electrics Ltd., working as a subcontractor. Starting out was not easy – I faced challenges such as finding clients, building trust, overcoming racial barriers, and struggling to access financial support like bank loans. The company I had previously worked for still contracts work to me occasionally, so it's been more than fifteen years of steady connection – from apprentice to subcontractor. It's been a long road, but every step has taught me something about commitment and perseverance.

Through hard work, persistence, and a

dedication to delivering quality service, my reputation grew. Today, my business has expanded, and I have two permanent employees, with additional staff hired depending on contract demands. One of the things I am most proud of is giving newcomers an opportunity to gain valuable work experience in New Zealand, just as others once supported me.

In 2020, I married my wife, whom I had known since our days back home, and I sponsored her to join me in New Zealand. After she arrived, she began looking for work. Unfortunately, finding a job was difficult for her, so we thought – why not create our own? My wife has always been passionate about hair and beauty, especially African hair extensions. Together, we came up with the idea of starting a small business. We reached out to our connections back in Africa and Dubai, found reliable suppliers, and began



Despite the challenges of managing my own business, it has grown steadily and earned a reputation for delivering quality services.

offering hair extension services from our home. While the business started well, we soon noticed a limitation — some customers were hesitant to visit a home-based setup. To overcome that, I decided to take the next step in my entrepreneurial journey. In 2022, we opened Bilen Hair Extension, our first salon, which my wife now manages.

This wasn't just about expanding a business — it was about creating opportunities for others. Bilen Hair Extension not only offers high-quality and authentic African hair services but also provides employment to women in our community. We import materials directly from Kenya, ensuring our clients receive genuine and diverse products that celebrate our culture. Several women now work with us, some part-

time, doing braiding and styling. They earn their own income while contributing to the growth of the salon — a model that supports both independence and community empowerment. One of our stylists, for example, started at our shop, gained experience and confidence, and eventually opened her own salon. Seeing others succeed through opportunities we helped create is one of the most rewarding parts of this journey.

Of course, running a business in a new country hasn't been easy. We had to learn about banking systems, credit histories, and business loans — all while earning the trust of clients unfamiliar with African hair culture. But with patience, consistency, and integrity, we've built a loyal customer base and a reputation we're proud of.

Today, Bilen Hair Extension serves not only African clients but also Pacific and Kiwi women who are curious to explore new styles. Slowly but surely, we're helping to introduce the art and beauty of African hair culture to New Zealand. Our dream is to grow even further — expanding across the country, and eventually into Australia — continuing to promote beauty, culture, and connection through our work.

Beyond business, I am a proud husband and a devoted father to two wonderful children. My family is my greatest source of strength, and I cherish every moment spent with them. Outside of work and family, I enjoy playing football and spending quality time with friends. For me, these moments of fun and connection bring balance to life.

I remain actively involved in my local community. Through my church and personal networks, I support new arrivals from my country by sharing guidance on how to navigate life in a new land, drawing from my own experiences of hardship and success.

My journey from Eritrea to New Zealand has been filled with challenges but also with countless opportunities to grow and build a better future. From walking through the desert as a teenager to running two successful businesses today, I am deeply grateful for the resilience I developed, the support I received, and the chance to give back to my community.



Having big dreams is a motivation for us — inspiring growth in both of our businesses.

Story No. 4

# Mohamed Abdulkadir



I was born in Kenya when my family escaped the Civil War in Somalia in 1998. I arrived in New Zealand as a baby, carried into a new life by parents. I have no memories of Africa where my journey began, yet my childhood was filled with the sound of Somali stories, songs, and laughter. Through family conversations, tales of the oceans and ports of Mogadishu, and memories shared by elders, I learned to love a place I do not remember living in yet feel deeply connected to.

Growing up in New Zealand, my parents made sure our Somali identity remained alive in our home. Our language echoed through our conversations, our meals carried the richness of tradition, and our values of respect, generosity, faith, and community guided the way we lived. They described Somalia so vividly—its blue waters, vibrant markets, expansive skies, and majestic mountain ranges—that it became a place living within me and I developed a deep appreciation for where we come from.

Food was one of the strongest connections to that heritage. In Somali culture, a meal is an expression of love, togetherness, welcome, and unity. I grew up watching my family prepare dishes with care, share food with guests, and keep our culture alive through recipes passed from one generation to the next. These values shaped me and inspired my journey into business.

At 24, I founded Banaadir Restaurant to honour our culture and share Somali hospitality with the community. What began as a dream evolved into a respected family-run restaurant known for its authentic flavours, fragrant spices, and warm service. For me, Banaadir has never been only a business. It is a cultural home—a living expression of our roots and a place where people can experience the richness of Somali cuisine.

Over the years, our journey has some challenges—long days, financial obstacles, and the complexity of navigating the hospitality world in New Zealand. But with resilience, adaptability, and the unwavering support of our community, we pushed through and continued to grow. Working side by side with my family strengthened our bond and kept our traditions alive for the next generation.

One of our proudest moments came in 2025 when Banaadir was featured in Metro Magazine's Top 50 Eats Under \$25 list. We were deeply honoured not only to be recognised, but also to win the category award for Best Pasta among Auckland's top restaurants. Metro captured something truly meaningful about our food and our story, writing: "Beyond simple deliciousness, part of the allure of dining at Banaadir is contemplating how the



As a family business, everyone plays a part in keeping the restaurant running, including myself.



Serving and sharing delicious traditional food with our customers brings me so much joy.

varied dishes you'll find on the tables have been carried by the winds of history — tangible examples of the seafaring, migration, trade and colonisation that have taken place across the Horn of Africa since antiquity.”

Those words affirmed what we have always believed—that our food carries history, identity, and the stories of our ancestors.

Banaadir in Mt. Roskill has also become much more than a dining space. It is a meeting place for the Somali community and a welcoming hub for people from all cultures. We support cultural events, community initiatives, and social gatherings, offering a home for connection, pride, and belonging.

Furthermore, it is a migrant-owned business

leading local sustainability. Guided by Somali values of frugality, hospitality, and community care, the restaurant has embedded environmentally responsible practices into its daily work. Through a circular partnership with the New Zealand Ethnic Women's Trust (NZEWT) Community Garden, food scraps are turned into compost and exchanged for fresh, culturally familiar produce used in the kitchen. Its connection with the Puketāpapa Local Board further strengthens its involvement in neighbourhood sustainability programmes and low-waste initiatives. Every week, Banaadir also offers its kitchen for a catering and micro-enterprise programme for former refugee and migrant women run by NZEWT, providing practical training in cooking, food safety, budgeting, and small-business skills.

A man with a beard, wearing a white long-sleeved button-down shirt with the name 'Alina' embroidered on the chest and grey cargo pants, is leaning on a glass display case. The case contains several trays of food, including what appears to be a large flatbread or pizza, and some fried items. The restaurant's name 'BANAADIR RESTAURANT' is visible on a blue sign above the entrance. The background shows a bright, modern interior with large windows and a bar area with stools.

# BANAADIR

RESTAURANT

I am proud that our restaurant has grown this year and received awards for our achievements.

Seven women currently participate, gaining confidence and greater economic independence. Together, these efforts show Banaadir's belief that sustainability is built through steady choices that care for both people and the environment.

Looking ahead, my vision is to continue expanding Banaadir Restaurant, so it remains a cornerstone of Somali cuisine in New Zealand. In late 2025 and into the years ahead, I am also expanding into market stalls across Auckland. This new venture will bring vibrant foods of Africa to local neighbourhoods, giving more people the chance to experience our flavours and traditions.

New Zealand has been my home for as long as I can remember. It has given my family safety, opportunities, and the space to grow

while holding fast to our identity. I am grateful for the support we have received and proud to contribute something meaningful back through our food, our hospitality, and our story.

To newcomers arriving in this land, I want to say: you belong. Hold your culture close with pride while embracing new possibilities. Every beginning is challenging, but with consistency, community, and belief in yourself, you can build a strong and successful life. New Zealand offers space to grow—step into that space with hope and courage.



At the heart of our restaurant is our customers – their feedback and satisfaction inspire us to keep serving with love and passion.

## About ARCC

ARCC is a non-profit umbrella organisation that serves as the collective voice of NZ immigrant communities, particularly those with experience of forced displacement. We are a community-led organisation that provides integrated settlement support services for our whenua and community. We work at the local, regional, and national levels to contribute to positive change through our REAL Pillars of Research, Education, Advocacy & Leadership. ARCC consists of twenty-seven coalition member organisations representing twenty different countries/ethnic backgrounds, including Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Myanmar, Palestine, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, and Uganda.

We are a mediating institution that provides an authentic voice on behalf of the vulnerable NZ immigrant communities. Those who experience forced displacement promote racial unity, encourage peaceful integration, and support the thriving of these communities. Our vision is to be a trusted community advisor and a leading agency on the settlement and integration of NZ immigrants into communities, organisations, funders, and policymakers throughout New Zealand.

## About New Resident Magazine

The New Resident Magazine is a biannual publication that shares inspiring stories from individuals with forced displacement experiences. These stories provide practical information about the resettlement and settlement process in New Zealand.

Through these stories, New Resident Magazine aims to challenge common misconceptions and stereotypes about forced migrant communities by amplifying the voices of community members. The lack of accurate representations in the mass media has led the public to have a distorted image of people subject to forced migration. This magazine provides a space where diverse stories unfold.

The intended outcome of the New Resident Magazine is to serve as a comprehensive resource that guides new residents on their journey towards successful settlement in New Zealand. Additionally, it helps educate the audience about the diverse experiences of these communities.

## ARCC Sponsors

We could not do the work we do without the support of our trustworthy funders. We are grateful for their continuous support in our efforts to assist our communities.



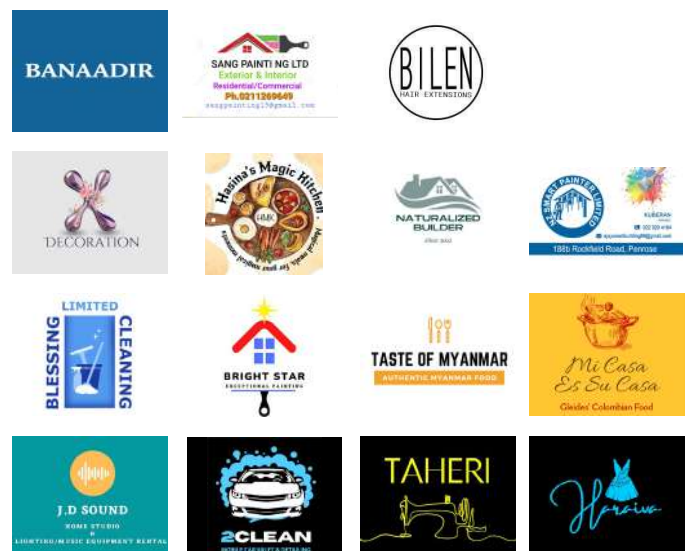
## ARCC Supporters

We would like to express our appreciation to our ongoing supporters for their commitment to supporting the work of ARCC in various capacities.



## Community Businesses

We are proud to see individuals from our communities develop their own businesses in New Zealand. We take pride in supporting their businesses and ventures through our New Resident Magazine.





## Closing Remark

### Putting Down Roots

As I reflect on closing remarks, I draw on those feelings and emotions many of us have felt after relocating and establishing a new home away from the comfort of familiarity and loved ones. No matter how much time has passed, all of us who have migrated to Aotearoa can remember it, and it serves as a force that unites us. When we arrive somewhere new, the ground beneath us can feel full of promise and uncertain all at once. However, the journey of putting down roots is not one that is just about finding a home and learning how things work; it's about creating connection, belonging and purpose. It's about trusting ourselves so that, with time, care and support, the seeds that we plant here will grow stronger and more meaningful than we ever expected.

Putting down roots takes patience and self-compassion. There are language and cultural barriers, moments of loneliness, feelings of being lost or not belonging, or yearning for the people and places that have been left behind. However, it is in facing these challenges that we begin to grow deeper. We learn resilience. We learn to ask for help from those around us when in need. We learn that even small acts, such as sharing a meal, attending a local event, or introducing ourselves to someone on the street or a neighbour, can become the small sparks of building a community. It may take time for those roots to feel sturdy and steady, but with time they will grow and the external stems, leaves and even flower become visible to ourselves and others.

Aotearoa offers each one of us a rich landscape for opportunity, new experiences and to meet new people. Here, and through the support of the Aotearoa Resettled Community Coalition, there is a beautiful opportunity to blend our cultures, our experiences, and our dreams into something that we each can take part in shaping. The mahi, the hard work and effort we put into learning, working, and contributing, helps those roots take hold. We then begin to see that we each have something amazing to add to this shared whenua, this land that has brought us together.

As this edition of the New Resident Magazine draws to a close, I ask each of you reading this message to carry forward the courage to keep digging deep, the hope to keep nurturing, and the heart to keep growing. Putting down roots is a journey of tending, connecting, and flourishing together in Aotearoa.

**Jazmen Rose**

**ARCC Governance Board Secretary**

## SETTLEMENT LOCATIONS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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Auckland, Waikato, Manawatu, Wellington, Nelson,  
Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Blenheim  
Timaru, Ashburton, Levin and Masterton.

## RESETTLEMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS

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If you are in need of support in any settlement locations. Please contact ARCC and we will connect you with the right service providers.

# CONTACT US

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If you need to be in touch with your community  
within Aotearoa New Zealand.



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# WELCOME TO AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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