



IC Auckland Newsletter December 2014

Kia ora ano, and welcome to our fourth and final newsletter for 2014!



Early summer is a great time for adventuring! And while travelling far away is fun, there are also adventures to be had closer to home and some of those help grow collective local identity as much as personal connections. This newsletter celebrates some of those. Some of them started from relatively small beginnings to become so much more; others prefer to stay small; all of them are journeying towards making their place the place local people want it to be. Read on and you will find out about some of the unexpected results of community gardening in Epsom, the amazing progress of former refugee women and their food as well as some of the learning gained, with patience, by the Connecting Education and Communities project team. All the stories we feature are written by those involved and there are links included for you to find out more directly from them. Scroll down to find out more ☺.

If you would like to share what locally-led change you and your community are up to, please let me know by email and we'll happily run an article or advertise your event:

Denise.Bijoux@inspiringcommunities.org.nz.

*Thanks for your support this year, wishing you all enjoyable and restful festive season and summer!
Denise.*

1. Community Gardening in Epsom



There is a vibrant little community garden behind the old stone Epsom Community Centre in Gillies Ave. Up until three years ago it was a wasteland between the car-park and the meeting rooms – then the Epsom Community Centre had the vision of creating a community garden. They paid for the building of nine raised beds, a large rainwater tank and a small garden shed. An appropriate soil mix was barrowed in and under Dee Pigneguy's supervision the first organic seedlings were planted by a group of volunteers keen to learn about sustainable food cultivation.

For two years a loyal group of about ten of us have met to spend a couple of hours once a week growing lovely, fresh, organic vegetables to take home. We bring along seaweed, horse manure, scraps for the worms and potted up seedlings grown at home. During the summer months Dee Pigneguy comes along once a month to hold mini workshops on organic growing techniques.

As well as now having more fantastic local produce to eat, we have all learnt a lot and new friendships have formed as well. Coffee at a local café after 'work' is an important part of the day and, in the winter especially, we spend almost as much time having coffee together as we do working in the garden!

Not everything we do is planned in advance. Last summer, for example, one of the beds was full of very healthy calendula flowers – far too many! Not wanting to pull them out and discard them, we wondered what to do with them. Calendula petals have good healing properties so we googled recipes for making ointments and after several fun workshops at one of our homes we made lots of lovely beeswax-based calendula salve. Many people found it very helpful for eczema and other skin problems so we sold all of our stock at various local gatherings. This means we now have a small fund we may use to go on a garden tour together. Hopefully we will repeat the project again this summer and be able to include members of the public on a day tour of gardens with us for a small fee to cover extra costs.

Our small group has also helped to plant fruit trees in the ECC grounds so there is more local food production. We will help to maintain these trees and may host pruning and propagating workshops in the future. We also hope to contribute to some of the food related programmes that happen at the Epsom Community Centre as improvement to facilities and our volunteer time allows.

All of us have been surprised in one way or another about what a few hours of community gardening has added to our lives in terms of our feelings about the neighbourhood we live in. For a relatively small investment of time, supported by the Epsom Community Centre, the garden has provided an

opportunity to know more people, grow and share our skills and feel better connected. It is a small, ongoing adventure not far from our homes that is easy and fun to be part of and has yielded many things. We know that we couldn't do any of it without one another.

If you want to know more, please email Jenny: r.j.wood@xtra.co.nz

2. WISE Women's Collective (Women + Inspired + Strong + Empowered and Enterprising)



So far, it has been a two year adventure and, as Project Coordinator Heather Tanguay says, "everyday something new happens!"

Starting alongside the Safari Projects which facilitate fun activities to encourage interaction and English language skills while refugee-background mothers and their children learn to be 'school ready', the WISE Women's Collective is a joint project of Auckland Regional Migrant Services (ARMS) and Auckland Refugee Community Coalition (ARCC) with support from JR McKenzie Trust.

Set up to help former refugee women earn money to support their families, initial meetings had to work out ways to join up women from very different backgrounds, cultures and languages as they trained together and gained knowledge, resources and confidence to generate income. Sharing food was used to "get the ball rolling", says Heather. Soon cooking, and the craft skills many had learnt at home and in school, were being shared women were ready to start selling their goods and food.

Possibly the catering business is the most well known. After starting at the New Lynn night market a year or so ago, the women cook for many other markets now and also run a very successful catering business that is growing all the time. But, like all good adventures, none of this would have been possible if the project hadn't overcome some bumpy patches and made some side journeys, such as learning how to operate without electricity and working with the people who provide certified food handling training to allow this training to be completed using interpreters. The lack of electricity was overcome with assistance from New Lynn Lions Club who provided rechargeable lighting and by using candle heated bain-marie. The training was a little trickier as the trainers and certifiers had never worked with interpreters before and were reluctant at first. Now, though, a whole new market has opened up for them, with WISE Women's Collective about to run its third course with them in just over a year!

The catering business itself has been an adventure of its own. Emerging from requests at markets, it now sees groups of women all over Auckland serving meals at many meetings and celebrations. Delivering food has opened the city up to the women and grown their confidence, pride and sense of

purpose. However, while several of the women have now got driver's licenses, this is a huge achievement that often takes several attempts so the Collective contracts a driver for larger jobs.

Also a refugee, our driver has proved to be a wonderfully reliable and much needed resource as lack of good public transport is a major obstacle for many of the women wishing to attend the Safari and WISE activities. Families from refugee-backgrounds often do not live near bus routes or need to take more than one bus, often with their preschool children, to get to a WISE hub or Safari playgroup. Community van transport is much needed and our driver is supported by the provision of a van and mechanical support by a friend who wishes to see him be able to become self-sufficient/self-employed in due course. Perhaps this is another enterprise initiative in the making!

And so, like any good adventure, one thing leads to another: the WISE Collective Project allows women to connect across boundaries with the WISE Hubs providing space for women to share craft skills and stories; WISE trainings assisting the development of various skills including accounting and food presentation; the WISE team facilitating free ESOL classes; and the WISE newsletter keeping women posted about further training that leads to paid work for some. The WISE team keep close links with the Safari staff and the projects populate one another. There are many opportunities and possibilities ahead but already, collectively, these relatively small multicultural projects are growing a real sense of belonging and community for former refugee women from countries including Burma, the Congo, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Afghanistan, and Iraq and that is no small achievement at all.

"I used to live inside with the curtains closed and cry all day. Now there is no time for that! I am so happy that I am cooking and meeting these women. My life has started again. It is a second life."

(Afghani woman, WISE Women's Collective)

You can support WISE Women's Collective at <http://www.givealittle.co.nz/org/wisecollectiveproject>. Contact Heather for more information WISE@arms-mrc.org.nz.

3. Connecting Education and Communities



Initiated in 2012, the JR McKenzie Connecting Education and Communities project is focussed on building family and whānau engagement in children's learning at local, regional and national levels.

The project is coordinated by JR McKenzie, and comprises a team with experience in grant-making, evaluation and strategic community development. Our team are a patient bunch, as years of working in this area has taught us that good things take time. Our patience has been well-rewarded this year as the CEC project has gained considerable traction at local and regional levels. We've also

learned a great deal about how our project is working in communities and the positive effects it is having.

First, our projects seem to be contributing to building stronger community ties—for example, hundreds of educators and whānau attended the JRM funded, Pukekohe-based Te Huarahi “Kai, Kapahaka and Korero” evening in November. Other local CEC projects are helping schools and learning centres be more responsive to the needs of their communities and to build parents' confidence and self-esteem. In Whangarei, for example, we are seeing many parents who had negative experiences in education to develop positive relationships with their schools. These benefits have “rippled” out to other members of the family and to other members of the community as participants share their learning and experiences with others around them.

We've also learned a lot about what kinds of local CEC activities seem to have the greatest impact. We've learned that CEC programmes seem to work best when they are based on mutual respect between families and schools, and when communication and learning is two-way—activities that allow whānau and families to both give and receive support may be more effective than one-directional activities. CEC activities are also more likely to have an impact if they are responsive to the needs of communities, and build on the strengths and values of those groups. We've also learned that retaining a clear focus on learning is key, as is providing enough resources to projects—because it's unrealistic to expect busy teachers to take on extra parent engagement activities on top of their existing workload, a little funding to support a dedicated “community liaison coordinator” or “kaiarahi” role can go a long way.

At a regional level, we've learned about collective effervescence and the powerful effect of bringing people together who share a common vision. We've learned that our educators and whānau are not only hungry for ideas around how to connect education and communities, but also that they bring a number of ideas around how to effectively engage whānau with children's learning, and how schools and whānau can build positive and productive relationships. As a team, we've learned that connecting with local educators and whānau and responding to the needs of each region is far more effective than a generic presentation. We know that follow-up is key, as is the facilitation of relationships.

We're also aware that building strong relationships takes time, and we may need to wait before we will see the impact of these partnerships on children's achievement. In the meantime, we need to stay committed to developing strong relationships between schools, parents, families, and community organisations—this work is important, and can have a real impact on helping children, families, and communities achieve success.

Opportunities coming up soon!

JAPHA fund: Every month the JApHA Fund (*Just Another Philanthropic Aucklander*) will pay a monthly grant of up to \$1,000 to Aucklanders who have small and creative projects that will achieve social or environmental good. This fund also makes giving more accessible. You can find out more about both contributing to the fund and applying for a grant from it here:

<http://www.aucklandcf.org.nz/95/for-community/grants-and-funds/the-japha-fund>

Local Board funding: The current round of community funding for your local board/s closes on 19 December! Applications are now open for community groups seeking funding from the local board for project costs, for projects in the new year (from February 2015). Apply online at <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/newseventsculture/communityfundingsupport/grantsfundng/communityfunding/Pages/communitygroupfundingcentral.aspx>

CD conference: Unitec are hosting a community development conference in February to bring together practitioners, academics and students to share knowledge, research and stories. More here: <http://www.unitec.ac.nz/cdconference>