

# Belong Aotearoa Programme Impact Evaluation

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# Introduction

Belong Aotearoa is an innovative organisation created by, for and led by a diverse ethnic community. Belong Aotearoa are a social change organisation, making deep and valuable relationships within the community, public and private sectors to catalyse positive systems change.

This report is an impact evaluation of the Belong Aotearoa community programmes held at the Wesley Community Centre between 2019-2021. This evaluation seeks to understand the impacts the Belong Aotearoa programmes have had and the key factors that made the programmes successful.

This evaluation has found that the Belong Aotearoa programmes have supported former refugee and migrant women's settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand, in a number of important ways, such as by providing a sense of community and opportunities to connect with their culture, improving conversational English skills, rebuilding confidence, and providing pathways to employment. This has significantly impacted the wellbeing of both the women and their wider families.

A number of key factors have been identified that made Belong Aotearoa programmes successful. These include: a strong focus on former refugee and migrant women, a place-based approach with a supportive host, a 'ground-up' approach to programme development, high relational practice, the use of a peer-lead and supported approach, and strong cross-sector collaboration.

Belong Aotearoa recently shifted away from programme delivery to focusing on systems change. This report seeks to identify the programmes impact, the unique strengths of Belong Aotearoa and how these can be utilised to support their system change work moving forward.

## Research methods

Point and Associates conducted interviews with community leaders, partner organisations, and Belong Aotearoa staff members. A focus group and one-on-one interviews were also held with some programme participants.

This evaluation utilised programme data collected and analysed by Belong Aotearoa, as part of their normal course of business, including surveys, reports, evaluations, and promotional materials.

The quotes used throughout this document are direct quotes from community partners, leaders and Belong Aotearoa staff. There are also quotes and stories of change that describe first-person accounts from programme participants. Names have been changed where appropriate to ensure confidentiality.



## Overview of Belong Aotearoa programmes

This evaluation focused on the programmes provided by Belong Aotearoa held at the Wesley Community Centre between 2019-2021 including:

### Job Search Seminars

The Job Search seminars were interactive, informative, and designed to provide a clear job search pathway. The seminar topics included understanding the Aotearoa New Zealand business culture and environment such as employment rights, English language, and communication skills, customising your C.V. and cover letters, and how to get local work experience by volunteering.

One hundred and fifty-four people (154), from former refugee and migrant communities, participated in Job Search seminars hosted at the Wesley Community Centre between February 2019 and February 2020. After completing the Job Search seminars, ninety percent (90%) of participants reported feeling more confident about looking for a job in Aotearoa New Zealand and ninety-four (94%) reported having a greater understanding of the job search process.

### WISE

The WISE collective (Women Inspired Strong Empowered and Enterprising) supported former refugee women to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, confidence, and resources to start-up or contribute to activities generating income for their families.

Four hundred and seventy-five women (475) participated in WISE workshops and events hosted at the Wesley Community Centre between February 2019 and December 2021.

### AMARTE

The AMARTE (Auckland Migrant and Refugee Training Enterprise) project was a joint initiative led by Belong Aotearoa in partnership with the New Zealand Ethnic Women Trust. The AMARTE Project provided former refugee and migrant women with free hospitality training to support them to gain employment, seek further education or start their own business in the hospitality industry. The training covered hospitality skills, barista training, social networking and using conversational English.

Fifty-six women (56) participated in the AMARTE project hosted at the Wesley Community Centre in 2019.

### Catering Business Start-up Course

The Catering Business Start-up course participants gained essential business knowledge, skills and certification needed to start their own catering business. The course covered food control planning, setting up business basics (e.g., IRD, finances, networks, marketing), waste minimisation, food presentation, tasting sessions and food safety certification.

One hundred and forty women (140) completed the Catering Business Start-up courses hosted at the Wesley Community Centre between January 2020 and December 2021.

### Kahika

Kahika is a twelve (12) week programme designed for former refugee and migrant women. The programme has a strong focus on self-development and empowerment. Programme topics include Treaty of Waitangi, leadership, goal setting, and mentoring. The programme ran for two (2) days per week with participants attending workshops, group mentoring sessions and undertaking self-directed learning toward achieving their individual goals.

Seventeen women (17) completed the Kahika programme hosted at the Wesley Community Centre in 2021. After completing the programme, eighty-eight percent (88%) reported having opportunities to help themselves and their families and confidence they to fulfil their aspirations. By the end of the programme, four (4) women had successfully secured new employment, five (5) had started their own businesses and seven (7) women were actively applying for jobs.

### Treaty workshops

The Treaty workshops are facilitated by Tangata Tiriti - Treaty People and are designed for former refugee and migrant community members. The Treaty workshops use an informative and interactive approach to explore Te Tiriti o Waitangi including what Te Tiriti says and what happened after it was signed. The workshops also explored what Te Tiriti means to newcomers to Aotearoa New Zealand and participants practise responding to job interview questions about Te Tiriti.

Ninety-eight (98) women participated in Treaty workshops held at the Wesley Community Centre between 2019 and 2021. After completing the Treaty workshops, eighty-nine percent (89%) reported they had a greater understanding of the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

### Current Programmes held at the Wesley Community Centre

In 2022, Belong continues to provide Safari Multicultural Playgroups, WISE Catering, and Catering Business Start-Up Courses at the Wesley Community Centre. The Treaty workshops continue to be delivered but now across different parts of Auckland.

## What impacts have the Belong Aotearoa programmes had?

Former refugee and migrant women say that Belong Aotearoa has supported their settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand in a number of important ways.



*We want the women to come and socialise. We want them to get to know their own community as well as other community people. We want them to learn about the New Zealand way of living, the services available to them and to practise their English language...After Belong work I can see it helps them to feel like this is their country.” Sasi Niyamathullah - Wesley Community Centre (former WISE coordinator)*

### The programmes provided women with a valuable sense of community

Belong Aotearoa’s locally focused programmes have prevented and reduced the impact of loneliness and isolation and provided a valuable sense of community for former refugee and migrant women.



*I felt very homesick because I used to live with my family. I left a big family in Pakistan, and I came here feeling alone. I didn't have any connections.” Programme participant*



*I could see from the faces of these lovely women that they really enjoyed the class, the friendship and sense of community. So, it is really amazing how the programme is giving a sense of belonging and community for all these women who came from all corners of the world.” Amie Maga - Migrant Action Trust*

He Ara Oranga Wellbeing Outcomes Framework, developed by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission in collaboration with communities and with guidance from experts, identifies community connection as having a powerful impact on wellbeing (New Zealand Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, 2021). Social isolation, loneliness and lack of support are significant issues for former refugee and migrant women (Lim et al., 2022). We heard several stories where women made new friends and became part of a supportive community through Belong Aotearoa.

## Zaara's story



*I am from West Bengal, India. When I first arrived, I didn't know anyone, so I was at home alone most of the time; I didn't have a job. I felt depressed and lonely.*

*I used to use the walking track at the Wesley Centre, and one day I saw a group of women dressed in the full burka learning to ride bikes. I approached them to find out what was happening. It was a WISE event, so that was my first contact with WISE.*

*It felt really nice meeting people at WISE. Each week it's like coming to a family meet-up. The activities such as cooking together and learning Zumba really help to connect people well. I certainly got more than I was expecting at WISE; everyone was really friendly, especially to newcomers. It's a very motivating and welcoming environment, and it has impacted my life in a very positive manner... I have benefited in multiple ways from being part of the WISE community, especially emotionally. The ladies are loving and caring, which is hard to find; it's a very special environment where you feel cared for like you are family."*



## The programmes provided the opportunity for women to connect with their culture

Increased wellbeing is strongly associated with being able to live, share and see your identity within your own, and other communities. (New Zealand Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, 2021). We heard that Belong Aotearoa programmes have provided safe spaces for former refugee and migrant women to express their culture and to connect with others from similar cultures or backgrounds.



*I think Belong Aotearoa look at cultural lifestyle and make sure nobody loses their cultural lifestyle because that is what is rich in the communities.” Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member*



*I was feeling very hesitant because I was wearing a hijab... so in this country I wouldn't fit or maybe people would notice me. When I joined, I saw many other ladies like me.” Programme participant*

The importance of connection to cultural identity is noted as being of particular importance to the wellbeing of former refugee and migrant young people and their parents (New Zealand Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, 2021). Experiences of racism and discrimination can negatively impact former refugee and migrants’ ability to safely settle in Aotearoa New Zealand (Malatest International, 2019). Rahmi's story speaks to the importance of being able to live, share and see identity when settling into new communities.

### Rahmi’s story



*I come from Pakistan. When I first arrived in New Zealand, I was nervous and scared, it was my first-time leaving Pakistan. Everything was new and I felt very alone, I felt timid to speak English and I stayed inside a lot. It was difficult because my husband is both studying and working a part time job, so he is out of the house for the entire day, which meant I was on my own most of the time.*

*I used to come to the park beside the Wesley Centre, I was just walking on my own and I saw a beautiful group of ladies, so I approached them and started chatting. It turned out that a few were from Pakistan, so they looked familiar and approachable, it was lovely to be able to speak in our mother tongue. From that day on I began attending the WISE hub every Friday, I felt very welcome.”*





### The programmes supported women to improve their ability to speak English

The programmes run by Belong Aotearoa have provided a safe and supportive environment for refugee and migrant women to learn and practice conversational English. The increased confidence and ability to communicate in English has had a profound impact on the lives of not only the women but also their wider family.

“ In our courses we will say we are all English second language speakers. This is a safe place for you to try to speak English.” Nazmin Bhikoo - Belong Aotearoa Programme coordinator

“ I saw many other ladies like me and many ladies who helped me a lot to improve my English. I knew a few sentences...no matter what we have to speak in English so no one can laugh at others because we all are in different stages.” Programme participant

Communicating in English is one of the most common difficulties facing former refugees and migrants from non-English-speaking countries (Kan et al., 2020). Former refugee and migrant women report that being unable to communicate in English is a key barrier to settlement, by, and can lead to social isolation and a sense of ‘not belonging’ (Lovelock & Potiki, 2021; Abbas et al., 2022). Inaya’s story demonstrates the impact increasing confidence and ability to speak English has on reducing isolation and achieving personal goals.

## Inaya's story



*I came to New Zealand in 2017 from Sudan. When I first came here, I couldn't speak English and I couldn't understand people. I was very shy. I stayed at home. I joined WISE catering two or three years ago and I am a different person now.*

*After doing WISE catering I set up my own business and I now sell my traditional food at a local market. One of my best products is my traditional sauces which I decided to sell in bottles after receiving lots of positive feedback from many return customers. Having a stall forced me to speak English and build my confidence. Recently I got a job with Belong Aotearoa, helping to run the Start-up Catering course.*

*I'm feeling happy because I am more confident. My family are happy for me because now I can drive and pick up my kids, I can speak in English, run my business, I can go to university, I can meet other people."*

## The programmes supported women to rebuild their confidence

Belong Aotearoa programmes have supported former refugee and migrant women to feel competent, which has grown their self-esteem. The programmes have helped women to feel valued, to understand what transferable skills they have and to think about what their goals in Aotearoa New Zealand might be.



*I have seen the confidence grow from when they initially arrived. Sometimes to go and speak to someone without being embarrassed, is my language okay or am I going to be laughed at is a huge thing. Without those programmes they wouldn't even do that. Something as small as that opens up so many doors for them." Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member*



*It was those skills that they learnt and the engagement that they had with other ladies, everything put together grew their confidence. At the end of it a lot of them didn't want to go into hospitality but I want to do this. It gave them new skills and the feeling now I can go and learn to drive. It just gave them that encouragement. Sometimes they may have been confident people in their countries, but they have come here and lost that." Nazmin Bhikoo - Belong Aotearoa Programme coordinator*

Former refugee and migrant women describe the biggest impact of the Belong Aotearoa programmes is that they provided them confidence.

While there is no singular agreed definition of wellbeing, key commonalities across many models are the importance of:

- Self-esteem/self-acceptance & self-respect and
- Accomplishment/competence & mastery

(Westerhof & Keyes, 2009).

Haben's story highlights how building confidence requires a sense of belonging, nurturing peer relationships and opportunities to learn.

### Haben's story



*I come originally from Eritrea. I came to New Zealand because it is the country that accepted me as a refugee. I had been here for six months before I heard about WISE, it was through a friend who heard about it at a Red Cross meeting. When I first attended, I felt very good, I loved that it was all women and that they were all very welcoming. I felt happy because I didn't know many people as I have no relatives here. I was excited to meet so many new women and to make friends.*

*WISE has had a big impact on my life, it makes me feel confident, it's my second family. I feel like I need to come to the hub and spend time with the ladies. The courses have also been great, I've done the Barista Course, Food Health and Safety Course and I have taken driving lessons".*



## The programmes provided pathways to employment

Belong Aotearoa programmes have provided pathways to employment through upskilling, training, mentoring, and encouraging volunteering and entrepreneurship. The opportunities to volunteer and Belong Aotearoa's focus on recruiting people with lived experience, has created opportunities for not only employment but also for people to explore and better understand where their strengths and passions lie.



*A few of the women were dentists back home but they can't get that job here, so they start by volunteering and then assistant childcare. Recently I heard a few of them got dentist assistant roles. That is how our trainings and workshops help them to move on to employment" Sasi Niyamathullah - Wesley Community Centre (former WISE coordinator)*



*I have some skills and I showed them, and I improved my dosa skills, I started a business with help from them. Financially now I am able to earn a little money, so that gave me more confidence so I'm more independent rather than only depending on my husband's income" Programme participant*

Employment is critical for successful settlement, contributing to self-sufficiency and independence, and providing networks and opportunities for greater community participation and contribution. Many former refugee and migrants face barriers with employers not recognising their prior work experience or skills and also requiring work experience in Aotearoa New Zealand (Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa | New Zealand Government, 2022). Sasi's story highlights the barriers former refugee women experience and how employment is an important pathway to achieving personal goals and wellbeing.

### Sasi's story



*I am from Sri Lanka. I was born there and then moved to India when I was 8 years old. I came to New Zealand in 2013. I came with my two young kids. I came with a refugee background under the family reunification category, so I didn't have a job.*

*My sister told me you give your resume everywhere, the shops and cafés. I was giving it to everyone, and I could see some of them just throwing it in the rubbish. My sister told me about Safari playgroup, and I joined with my children. The coordinator told me about WISE. She said you can go there, meet new people and it would be a way to get employment and learn*



*about my community.*

*I went to WISE hub in 2014. They really welcomed me and then they were giving me ideas. The coordinator said you can go and attend a job search workshop. She said whenever I am free, I could come there as a volunteer. I began volunteering and that is how I was introduced to WISE. They wanted someone to work as a project worker. So, I applied, and I got it. It was 12 hours to start then went up to 20 hours. Later on, I was the programme coordinator for WISE Collective which runs the hubs and catering service.*

*This job really helped me to understand what my passion was and what I really wanted to do in my career. I put my energy and effort in because I really wanted to support the community. I am now employed at the Wesley Community Centre; I love seeing the diversity of everyone coming to the centre including refugee and migrant women who feel welcome in their local community”*



### **The programmes supported the wellbeing of women and their families**

Belong Aotearoa programmes have supported the mental and physical wellbeing of former refugee and migrant women. The programmes have reduced isolation and provided a valuable source of social connection and support. The programmes have also created opportunities for physical activity and exercise, and upskilled women on healthy eating and nutrition within the Aotearoa New Zealand context.



*Many of my friends joined because we started physical fitness. They were sitting and talking about doing something, but we couldn't find a ladies-only gym - there is some but they're far or maybe expensive. But here we are all ladies starting physical fitness, and our overall health improves, we all lose some weight and are more fit and more active." Programme participant*



*I think what they were doing in Belong Aotearoa which I really admired and am really passionate about in health promotion that I do is looking at ways to keep the cultural food we like and making it healthy." Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member*

Research has shown that persistent health inequities exist for former refugee and migrant women and children (Abbas et al., 2022). Approximately forty percent (40%) of former refugees have experienced severe trauma. Long-term physical and psychological suffering are common. Settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand can also bring additional adverse health issues for e.g. mental health conditions caused by stress, loneliness and isolation, increased obesity and reduced physical activity (Health Navigator, 2022). Non-English speaking former refugees and migrants also face significant barriers in accessing primary and mental health services and support (Mortensen, 2011).

The positive impact of the Belong Aotearoa programmes on the wellbeing of women has also rippled out and supported the wellbeing of their wider family. Many of the women interviewed commented on the positive impacts of their own improved wellbeing on their children and partners.



*They like it very much because now I speak quite good and even if I make a mistake in English, I can talk confidently. My children are happy because before I was not able to attend their parent-teacher meeting and I was always looking for my husband, he would have to do it. So now we have a big mental relief, and I can support my husband and I can go everywhere with my kids, and they are more confident now that their mum is more confident." Programme participant*



*I think we always forget that the women that come along to the programmes or that group, it is not just about her, there is a whole whānau behind her. She goes home and makes a lifestyle change for everybody really." Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member*

Fartida's story highlights the impact the Belong programmes have had on improving former refugee and migrant women's quality of life, family relationships and settlement journey.



### Farida's story

“ I am originally from Iraq. I came to New Zealand as a refugee 8 years ago. I also experienced culture shock, I struggled with learning English and at the same time I was having to fight for my right to stay, it was overwhelming.

WISE has had a huge impact on my life, now I dance, I sing, I paint, and I feel happy, it really helped me to feel free to be myself and accept that New Zealand is my home. My health is so much better even than before and everyone sees it, my family and all of my friends. Now I am an active member of my community and I seek out relationships and opportunities and I am keen to learn whereas previously I had been very inward thinking and isolated. Now I am always smiling, and I wear colourful clothes to express my happiness, I have a zest for life.

I was also absolutely overjoyed to get the opportunity to learn to ride a bike through WISE, this is something that I would never have imagined I would get the chance to do”.

## What are the key factors that made Belong Aotearoa programmes successful?

Belong Aotearoa has developed innovative approaches over-time, resulting in a range of programmes with different focuses and structures. However, there are key factors that were evident as consistently underpinning their positive impact.

### The strong focus on supporting former refugee and migrant women

The programmes developed by Belong Aotearoa reflect a clear understanding of the needs and issues experienced by former refugee and migrant women.

As noted by a number of people interviewed, while former refugee and migrant men often have paid employment to support their settlement into Aotearoa New Zealand, women often remain isolated at home. The primary role for many former refugee and migrant women is a focus on supporting their partner into employment and settling their children into schooling. This often means their own needs are not met and their settlement aspirations not considered. This was noted as having a significant impact on their wellbeing.



*They focus often on women's needs and recognize the isolation that women migrants feel. Often the husband is supported to go out to work and gets social connection and integration but often the women are left behind in that scenario. They then often become more reliant on their children to translate so I really appreciate the focus they have on migrant women, their experience and helping them to connect with each other along with the world." Julie Fairey- Former Puketāpapa Local Board Chairperson*



*They won't have any family here so they will be by themselves. The kids will go to school and the husband will be working. They are sitting at home and don't have any opportunity to connect with other people, so they are isolated. For many women they experience mental illness." Sasi Niyamathullah - Wesley Community Centre (former WISE coordinator)*

Belong Aotearoa has successfully connected and engaged with groups often considered 'hard to reach'. This has been achieved by understanding, and being highly responsive to, the needs of former refugee and migrant women. Belong Aotearoa respects, values, and celebrates the cultural identity and diversity of former refugee and migrant women. This has meant that Belong Aotearoa has been able to provide them with welcoming spaces for



social connection and support.



*The first thing which is very important is because I am Muslim, I want ladies only and that group was perfect for me. I am not only wearing hijab, but I'm also wearing niqāb which includes face covering so I was feeling very confident when I joined because there were other Muslim ladies, and they were wearing hijab. I told other women in my community that this group is very good for us. Most of them were staying at home and didn't go out because they thought they would be judged for wearing niqāb and thought no one accepts them. They were worried someone might say something racist to them. These women came to look at the group and were then confident to join. I know from experience; women would not feel comfortable to attend if men were coming. Belong respects our needs and our different cultures. So that's why we feel very good." Programme participant*

Belong Aotearoa programmes have supported the settlement of former refugee and migrant women by providing opportunities to improve their conversational English and upskill, encouragement to consider their own aspirations and pathways to employment. Belong Aotearoa programmes have supported former refugee and migrant women to learn more about Aotearoa New Zealand, for e.g., Te Tiriti o Waitangi, but in a way that encourages and supports the retaining of their own cultural identity. The positive impacts have also extended out beyond the women to their wider families, with participants reporting that their home lives are happier and less stressful.



*WISE has provided me with a platform to express myself and develop personally. The courses offered are both extremely helpful and interesting. WISE has really helped me to engage with NZ society. Also, amazingly for me through my WISE connections I got the opportunity to volunteer for the Police. In the meantime, I am working as a reliever in a childcare centre. I got this job by word of mouth. One of the women at the WISE hub had heard they were looking for someone, so I applied. For me, the WISE hub has been like a big group of friends, and it has helped me a lot. It's the place where I got to know a lot of stuff about New Zealand and other people as well." Programme participant*



*I now have my own money in my hands so I can spend without asking my husband and I can give anything to my children if my husband is not able to afford these things. So, this is also good for mental health as my kids*

*are not suffering for things or anything.” Programme participant*

### **A place-based approach with a supportive host**

The location and visibility of the Belong Aotearoa programmes have been a key success factor.

Research identifies proximity to where people live as a critical factor to successful programme delivery (Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit, 2017). Interviews with programme participants supports this, with many women learning about the Belong Aotearoa programmes from other community members or while out and about in their local community.



*When I came here, I was not driving, and I used to live very near to the community centre. I went there to shop for veggies and fruits, and there were some ladies who told me if you are new here and want to meet some other ladies, there is a wise women group so you can come.” Programme participant*



*Word of mouth is great. The ladies have spread the word, and someone can see in the community, this lady has changed, what has she done? Sometimes a flyer is a person who has gone through a programme and has come out a lot better.” Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member*

Wesley Community Centre has provided a safe and respectful environment where programme participants feel comfortable.



*The staff and Centre were always friendly to the women. The other thing is they understand the women and their culture. Most of the women are from a Muslim background so whenever they want to do any exercise, they need a private space. The Wesley Community Centre know that, understand, and say it is your space so you can use it. They always say yes to programmes and welcome our women.” Sasi Niyamathullah - Wesley Community Centre (former WISE coordinator)*



*A lot of them just walk up. Also, while they are connecting at that Centre it is part of their community. There is that market on Wednesdays. You can tell they are comfortable in that building and in that environment.” Sandy Thompson - LEAD Centre for Not-for-Profit Leadership*

## A 'ground up' approach to programme development

Belong Aotearoa programmes are developed in response to what former refugee and migrant women say they want and need.

There is considerable evidence that supports the effectiveness of community-led or 'ground up' approaches to programme development. Shared commitment to 'place', and the community defining its own needs and solutions, have been identified as key to effective community-led development (Ball & Thornley, 2015).

“ Stay grass roots.... Always keeping it from ground up delivery. From management down I don't think delivery happens successfully for a longer outcome when it is top to bottom. If the organisation starts to make decisions from the top, chances are it is not going to fit into the society we are living in.” Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member

Belong Aotearoa has provided the opportunity for former refugee and migrant women to have a voice, as well as ownership and influence over programme content and delivery. A strong sense of reciprocity is evident with women's skills and contribution to the programmes being highly valued. Belong Aotearoa were dedicated to providing former refugee and migrant women with a safe space to explore their interests and then ongoing support to achieve their aspirations.

“ We ask them what they really want to learn. They may want to do sewing. We can do that with some of the hubs. One of our women who has a certificate in sewing will go and teach them.” Sasi Niyamathullah - Wesley Community Centre (former WISE coordinator)

“ These group of women got to express their dreams, come up with a plan and then Belong organised them to have mentors, internships and whatever they needed to fulfil their dream.” Sandy Thompson - LEAD Centre for Not-for-Profit Leadership



### Highly relational practice

Key to the success of Belong Aotearoa programmes was the centring of highly relational practice.

A relational approach to community and social innovation was explored in a 2018 report by The Southern Initiative. A key characteristic identified was the growing of trusting relationships with communities, based on personal connections. Relational practice includes being inclusive, valuing who you are and what you each offer, showing interest in one another's lives, demonstrating genuine care and concern, being open to things as they unfold, and a willingness to operate at both a human and a professional level (Hancock, 2018).

Belong Aotearoa are highly skilled in relational practice. Relationships are prioritised, valued, and given the ability to grow over time. Belong Aotearoa also creates warm and safe environments that provide the opportunity for women to build genuine relationships with each other. Belong Aotearoa has created a culture where relationships are viewed not as a means to an outcome, but as an important outcome in their own right.



*I have noticed that the women I was working with from Belong have great personal relationships with the women...You could tell the women from the community really like them, really respect them and are really grateful for anything they coordinate for them." Sandy Thompson - LEAD Centre for Not-for-Profit Leadership*





*We still keep the connection going also in the sense that any new programmes we may have, any seminars we may have we pass it on to them. We may see them in the year again because they have come to a certain seminar, so we get to catch up that way. That is another thing we do, and we don't just stop." Nazmin Bhikoo - Belong Aotearoa Programme coordinator*

### **The use of a peer-lead and supported approach**

The use of a peer-lead and supported approach has been a critical factor in the success of the Belong Aotearoa programmes.

Peer-lead programme development and delivery recognises, values, and utilises the knowledge that comes from personal lived experience (Te Pou, 2022). Peer support, which is peer-to-peer provided social and emotional support, has long been recognised as an effective, but under-utilised, mental health and wellbeing intervention (Suresh et al., 2021).

Belong Aotearoa's use of a peer-lead and supported approach has been fundamental to the success of programmes engaging participants. This approach has supported the creation of authentic, and often long-term, relationships and provided the opportunity to nurture the emerging leadership of women with lived experience.

Peer-leadership promotes equity and participation amongst former refugee and migrant women and provides the ability to exercise self-determination.



*I think that is the best thing because experience can sell so much. That is what I like about Belong Aotearoa, they actually do employ people that have gone through the programmes themselves, exceeded, empowered and now ready to go through another cycle with some new ones coming through." Ella Kumar - Puketāpapa Local Board Member*



*The work that Belong does for strengthening groups of women and particularly again giving capacity and validation to the women so they can step up and lead" Julie Fairey- Former Puketāpapa Local Board Chairperson*

## A collaborative cross-sector approach

Belong Aotearoa demonstrates a strong commitment to cross-sector collaboration, and they are highly skilled in this area.

Working effectively with a broad range of stakeholders is a key tenet of good community development practice (Department of Internal Affairs, 2011). Collaboration across organisations, and with communities, is an effective response to complexity. Collaboration builds trust and understanding of roles, capabilities and contributions across organisations, so that they can work more effectively together (Eppel et al., 2018).

Belong Aotearoa places the woman, and her needs and aspirations, at the centre of decision making. Fundamental to this approach is the singular goal of connecting women with the help and support available to achieve their goals. Belong Aotearoa has a comprehensive overview of the community-based support available and importantly strong cross-sector relationships. Belong Aotearoa often acts as a host bringing expertise from across the sector together for the benefit of former refugee and migrant women. Belong Aotearoa does not use a traditional service referral approach and instead provides women with an introduction to different organisations. This is further evidence of their highly relational practice.



*It is not like only Belong can do this. Other services do some things really well. Some people may do similar things as us, but people will go where they feel comfortable, or they may go to both organisations...So, now we are open to collaboration very freely. We want to know what other people are doing and how can we join together or feed off each other. Those sorts of things are happening, and everyone is seeing the benefits whether it is Belong or other organisations working with us. Together we can develop things that are missing in the community.” Nazmin Bhikoo - Belong Aotearoa Programme coordinator*



*Belong offered in our early days before we were incorporated, they were an umbrella organisation for our funding so that was quite crucial. Or they would apply for the funding for the workshops.” Marisa Maclachlan - Treaty People*



## Utilising the unique strengths of Belong Aotearoa in Systems Change work

The need for a systems change approach to address racism, immigration issues and to fulfil collective responsibilities as Tangata Tiriti were all touched on in stakeholder interviews.

“ I know for a fact that it is almost impossible for some people to get work in their chosen fields simply because of their name or accent. Their qualifications may be perfect for the job but the person doing the hiring can't get their mind around a foreign name or accent, so the perfect candidate doesn't even get an interview. That I think is a crying shame.”  
*Programme participant*

Belong Aotearoa are considered to be well-placed to lead this work. Their advocacy and coordination work during the current COVID-19 pandemic was acknowledged as both critically important and highly successful.

“ Belong really did a lot of good work with that articulating migrant's aspiration for the New Zealand government to make available more support, funding for upskilling and training migrants that are already here.” *Amie Maga - Migrant Action Trust*

This evaluation has highlighted the unique strengths of Belong Aotearoa. These can be utilised to support and strengthen Belong Aotearoa's work in systems change.

## Strong connections and relationships across refugee and migrant communities

While many organisations focus on a singular population group, a unique strength of Belong Aotearoa is that they bring together, and engage with, a large diverse group of people from former refugee and migrant backgrounds, with a particular focus on women. These connections and relationships are highly valuable and can be used to drive systems change.



*We want people who are community leaders or community organisers, so we know the information is going to get back to their different groups and organisations.... It has been a really rewarding relationship from our perspective where Belong has given us loads of time, support and access to different communities.” Marisa Maclachlan - Treaty People*

## A workforce with lived experience

Belong Aotearoa’s commitment to developing, supporting, and recruiting former refugee and migrant women is a key organisational strength. This report highlights the positive outcomes that come from this way of working, which is viewed as valuable by decision makers and funders. A workforce with lived experience is a key asset for Belong Aotearoa as they have shifted into systems change.



*Organisations like Belong with the lived experience and expertise that they are able to share is incredibly valuable for decision makers like me because it is not something in our lived experience.” Julie Fairey- Former Puketāpapa Local Board Chairperson*

## A well-regarded organisation including with funders

Belong Aotearoa as an organisation, and through their approach to programme development and delivery, has successfully gained and maintained support within communities, across the sector and from funders. This demonstrates a high degree of organisational skill, as often what communities want is challenging to achieve within a competitive and siloed funding environment. Belong Aotearoa’s reputation and skill working with communities, across the sector and for funders, will be highly valuable in their systems change work.



*I think the Belong team role model inclusion, tolerance, innovation but also role model how to work in a politically difficult environment. So, they don’t engage in battles. It is not like they are passive around the politics, but they don’t stir it up, they don’t resist it, they just work around it.” Sandy Thompson - LEAD Centre for Not-for-Profit Leadership*



## Conclusion

Belong Aotearoa programmes have been highly successful at supporting the settlement of former refugee and migrant women in Aotearoa New Zealand. This has often had profound impacts on the wellbeing of the women and their families.

Belong Aotearoa's highly relational practice, strong placed-based approach, and commitment to community-led programme development and delivery aligns strongly with best and emerging practice evidence.

Any future systems change work needs to build on the success of these local initiatives and continue to support women's access to opportunities for transformational change in their local communities.



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