

ROC STAR

MAGAZINE

APRIL 2025

VOL. 3

YOUTH CAMP
HOLIDAY
PROGRAM

ROC'S 20TH
ANNIVERSARY

ROC'S NEW
PODCAST!

Garden project



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR INTERNS

— *Intro*

WELCOME TO ROCSTAR!

ROC Trust is
proud to present
its third magazine,
featuring thought-
provoking articles
and inspiring
stories



— *Intro*

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Vision

To Empower Forced Migrant and Migrant Communities.

Mission

We exist for the communities that we serve, and our mission is to:

- Strengthen social and economic integration
- Develop youth through sport and education
- Be a learning and resource centre
- Provide a community hub

Our Values

Compassion

Connecting, sharing and supporting each other and the community

Integrity

Fairness, responsiveness and doing what we say

Empowerment

Acquiring knowledge and attitudes that lead to faster and better integration

Tolerance

Respecting differences and not expecting others to think, look, speak and act just like us.

Beyond the Ceremony: 2025 The ROC Internship Graduation

A Legacy of Impact, Resilience & New Beginnings

On February 10, 2025, at Trust Waikato, Hamilton, the Refugee Orientation Centre (ROC) Trust hosted its largest and most powerful Internship Graduation Ceremony to date a night of recognition, transformation, and an unshakable commitment to change. This was not just a farewell; it was a testament to resilience, the triumph of vision over obstacles, and the boundless potential of those who simply needed a chance.

More Than an Internship – A Lifeline

For many migrants and international students, securing an internship in New Zealand is an uphill battle. They arrive in New Zealand full of dreams, investing their life savings into education, only to face closed doors and unanswered emails. It is not just about work experience, it is about survival, belonging, and dignity.

ROC did not have unlimited resources, but it had something far greater: a deep-rooted belief that skills should never go unnoticed, that inclusion should not be optional, and that opportunity should not be a privilege. We saw the struggle, we felt the urgency, and we responded not with words, but with action.

From 200 to 400 hours of dedicated service, 31 interns worked across digital transformation, marketing, research, and strategy helping ROC grow while reshaping their own futures. This ceremony was not just their graduation, it was a marker of their courage and growth, a celebration of the bridges they built for themselves and others.



A Night of Stories, Struggles & Victories

The evening began with refreshments, laughter, and networking in an electrifying space where mentors, interns, and leaders shared experiences. At 6:30 PM, the Masters of Ceremony, Jeswin and Namrata, set the stage with an opening that reflected not just formality, but authenticity.

“As migrants, finding an internship is a battle,” Jeswin shared.

“But ROC never said no. It believed in us even when we doubted ourselves.”

A solemn Karakia followed, grounding everyone in gratitude and purpose. Then, the lights dimmed, and the screen illuminated with the **‘Intern Journey Video’** a collective labor of love from the interns themselves. The audience laughed, cried, and relived the stories of struggle and success, watching raw moments of learning unfold on the screen.



Mentors Amit Lal and Peter Ensor were honored for their unwavering guidance, mentors who did more than teach they transformed. Group leaders like Nimila Jose, Salik Ram Ghimire, Nivya Dubey, and Prakash Jayagopal shared reflections on leading with integrity and empathy, reinforcing that true leadership is not about titles but impact.

Then came the voice that resonated with every soul in the room Wenji Shen, an intern who arrived hesitant and unsure, now standing tall with confidence.

“I came in unsure. I leave with clarity. ROC didn’t just teach me how to work, it showed me how to grow.”

Her words did not just touch hearts, they ignited purpose.



A Moment of Recognition & A Call to Action

The Certification Ceremony, led by Sandya Rajapakshe, was filled with applause, cheers, and teary smiles. Every intern was honored for their contributions, and standout performers received awards recognizing their unique strengths: Best Tester, Enthusiasm Champion, Commitment Excellence, Silent Achiever, Go-Getter, Best Implementation, Innovator's Award, Productivity Enhancement, Cool Leader, Cool Team Player, Transformation Award, Best Video Team, Excellence Team, Special Recognition, Best Organiser, Outstanding Leadership, Top Performing Group.

Then, the room quieted as the keynote speaker, **Jenny Nand**, took the stage. A mentor, a leader, a force of nature she stood before the graduates and delivered words that would stay with them forever.

"Leadership isn't about power, it's about purpose," she declared.

"And every one of you has the power to shape the future of this community, this country, and this world."

The ROC Way: A Journey That Never Ends

As the ceremony drew to a close, Jeswin and Namrata returned to the stage, their voices steady, their message clear.

"Two months ago, we were students. Today, we're professionals. Tomorrow we're leaders."

"Wherever you go, ROC goes with you."

And with that, the ROC Internship Graduation Ceremony 2025 ended not with an ending, but with a beginning.

Because at ROC, we do not just prepare interns for the workforce we prepare them for life.



A Legacy Built on Courage, Vision & Action

The impact of this program extends far beyond one night, one internship, or one recognition. It is about breaking barriers, rewriting narratives, and ensuring that no one with talent and determination is left behind. The digital booklet prepared by the interns captures this spirit a reflection of their invaluable contributions, from website development to Salesforce CRM migration, from research to digital marketing campaigns.

As ROC approaches its **20th anniversary in 2025**, this graduation stands as the **largest milestone** in its history of internship placements. It is proof that when a community comes together, when vision meets action, and when opportunities are created with heart, transformation is inevitable.

So to our graduates: you may have completed your internship, but your journey is just beginning.

Congratulations. The future is yours to shape.



ROC AND NFACT Girls Empowerment Camp 2025

Mt Pirongia Lodge, Waikato

What happened? A group of 20 (17 girls between 14-25, one mother and 2 staff) went via bus to Mt Pirongia Lodge. There we joined together with ROC (Refugee Orientation Centre, Hamilton) and First Steps outdoors to support the experiences of refugee background girls from Afghanistan, Congo and Colombia. There was a wide range of activities including: zipline, archery, rock climbing, abseiling, bush skills, nature walk (and swim), campfire, movie night, orienteering and workshops from Red Cross's Pathways to Employment, The Treaty People, NZ Police and Mixit. Within activities, there was a 'challenge by choice' principle where there was encouragement for the girls to step outside their comfort zone, also knowing they had the choice to sit something out. NFACT staff were impressed by the willingness of the girls to give things a go, to be brave and connect with new people (making new friends) and try new experiences. Many participants had not had the chance to travel away from home and family which took courage. The girls helped each other with language, encouragement and support.

Who participated or benefitted? A group of 20 (17 girls between 14-25 and one mother, all from Afghanistan and Pakistan + 2 NFACT staff).



What was achieved? In a post-feedback/debrief session the girls spoke of having a sense of achievement by overcoming challenges that included being away from home, travelling without family, trying new activities (archery, climbing, orienteering). A highlight spoken of was the chance to connect with people from different countries which was a new experience, which meant new friend across regions and cultures. The girls all worked together to get tasks including cleaning and meal preparation done.

What other community benefits or outcomes were achieved?

- New and strengthened collaboration between all organisations involved, alongside stronger connections between young people from very diverse cultures.
- Increased confidence by participants to try new things, connect with new people and have a positive experience with a sense of safety and support in a new setting.
- Enhanced knowledge through workshops and learning about different cultures.

Feedback and Reporting

Participants spoke very highly of the entire experience. There was a freedom that came with having an opportunity for just girls due to culturally connected norms. The diversity of the participants (and the activities) enhanced the experience for those who came. Pre-camp meetings organised by NFACT staff supported the sense of safety and understanding and expectations, with the debrief catchup reinforcing the sense of community and keeping the memories alive.



The new ROC Podcast



The ROC Podcast is an exciting new venture in the world of audio storytelling, dedicated to exploring the rich tapestry of cultures, ideas, and innovations from around the globe. With a focus on authentic conversations and insightful discussions, each episode of the ROC Podcast brings listeners closer to the voices that are shaping our world today. The podcast is set to feature an impressive lineup of guests, including influential figures such as Fariya from Shama NZ, who will share her unique perspectives and experiences in community leadership and cultural advocacy.

Listeners can expect a diverse array of episodes covering a wide range of topics—from cutting-edge technological advancements to deep dives into cultural traditions, and everything in between. The ROC Podcast aims to create a platform where stories that inspire change and foster understanding are given center stage.

By highlighting voices from different walks of life, the podcast seeks to bridge gaps and celebrate the diversity that exists in our global community.

Each episode promises to be a journey of discovery, with engaging interviews that offer a blend of personal anecdotes, professional insights, and thought-provoking discussions. Whether you're tuning in to learn about new social initiatives, hear about groundbreaking research, or simply looking for inspiration, the ROC Podcast is the place to be. Join us as we navigate the complexities of our world with curiosity, empathy, and a commitment to highlighting stories that matter.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to expand your horizons and connect with a community of like-minded individuals through the power of conversation.

The ROC International Garden: New Soil, Same Spirit

From Grandview to Fairfield – our roots keep growing.

We've got some blooming brilliant news to share!

After 3.5 years of cultivating not just vegetables, but vibrant friendships, a sense of community, and a deep feeling of belonging at our Grandview ROC International Garden, it's time for our garden to plant its roots in fresh new soil.

As our season in Grandview gently winds down this July, we've been searching for the perfect new patch of land to carry our kaupapa forward. And we're absolutely thrilled to announce: **Fairfield Community Garden is opening its gates — and its heart — to welcome us in!**

Just a few days ago, our ROC whānau sat down with the incredible team behind The Fairfield Project. After walking the whenua, dreaming out loud, and envisioning what could be, we've officially been given the green light to grow. An MOU is now in the works, and we're getting ready to begin this exciting new chapter very soon.

Gardening is a language without borders.



For many former refugee families, stepping into the garden is both a comfort and a challenge — unfamiliar soil, new weather patterns, and crops they've never grown before. But with every tiny seed, there's a story. With every harvest, a moment of pride.





A Sacred Beginning at the Marae

April 2025 marked a profound milestone as the ROC Trust team was welcomed with a traditional Pōwhiri ceremony at this beautiful Marae. The cultural resonance of this gathering transcended mere formality—it embodied the spirit of partnership that will nurture our new Fairfield garden project. As we stood on sacred ground, embraced by tradition and community, we felt the powerful convergence of shared values and vision. While the full details of our collaboration are still unfolding, the ceremony has already planted seeds of meaningful connection. This traditional welcome doesn't simply mark a change of location; it represents a deeper integration with the land and its heritage, honoring both where we've come from and where we're going together.



To The Salvation Army, our deepest thanks for 3.5 years of belief, support, and shared vision at Grandview. Your generosity gave roots to something truly powerful.

And to Jovi from Hamilton City Council, Ioana Manu, and the wonderful Lynnette, the operational team, the Fairfield Project board, thank you for seeing the magic in this mahi and welcoming us so warmly.

The ROC International Garden lives on new soil, same spirit.

Here's to growing kai, friendships, and futures together in Fairfield

Empowering Families, Enriching Futures

The Impact of the ROC Learning Community Hub 2025 for Ethnic Migrants



Navigating a new education system in a foreign country can be daunting, especially for migrant parents striving to provide the best for their children. Recognizing this challenge, the ROC Learning Community Hub (LCH) for Ethnic Migrants 2025, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, was launched as a transformative initiative aimed at bridging the knowledge gap. More than just an educational program, LCH is a beacon of empowerment, equipping parents with the understanding and confidence to support their children's academic journey and future aspirations.

My personal journey with LCH has been nothing short of inspiring. I, Nimila initially joined ROC as an intern, while my colleague Nithya came on board as a volunteer. We dedicated ourselves to the cause. Our journey has been one of growth and opportunity, eventually leading both of us to step into staff roles as Project Leaders for LCH.



This is our very first professional experience, and in today's challenging economic climate, having the chance to be a part of such a meaningful initiative is a breakthrough, an opportunity that means so much more than just a job.

In our roles, we've had the privilege of working closely with passionate, resilient parents who are eager to understand how the New Zealand education system works and how they can better support their children's learning. But the sessions go far beyond just information sharing, they create a space of connection, belonging, and mutual encouragement. Families leave not just with knowledge but with renewed hope and a deeper sense of community.

Personally, this project has been a catalyst for immense growth. It has allowed me to develop valuable skills in leadership, project management, and community engagement. More than that, I've witnessed firsthand the transformational power of education, how it uplifts not just individuals, but entire families.

To every parent and participant: thank you. Your enthusiasm, openness, and willingness to grow have made this journey deeply meaningful. Together, we are not just navigating a new system, we are building a future where every child is supported, and every family feels empowered to thrive.



Masterpieces in the Making:

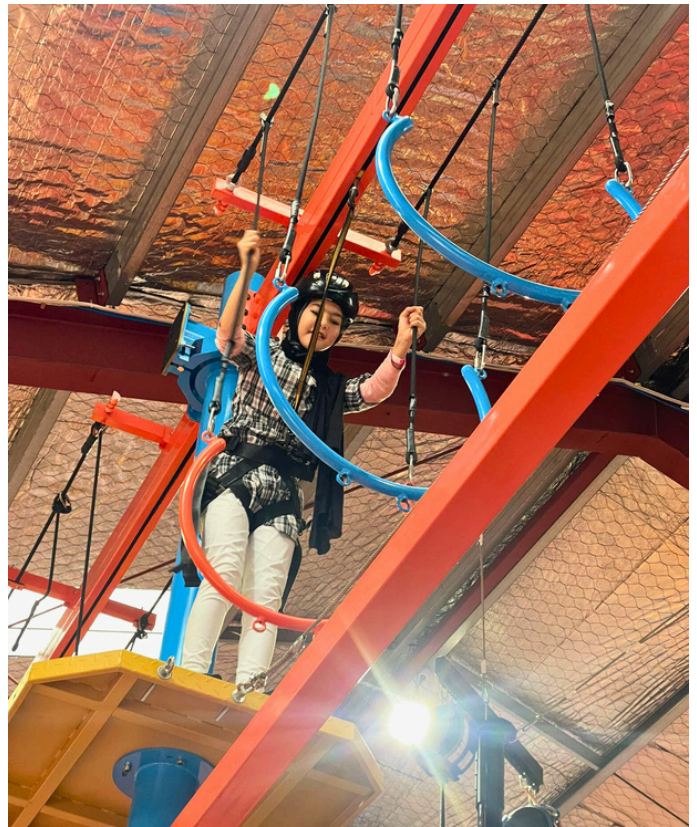
ROC Holiday Programme That Inspires Creativity and Connection

Every year, the ROC Trust Holiday Programme becomes a vibrant heartbeat of joy, growth, and belonging for tamariki in Hamilton, especially for children from refugee and migrant communities. But the theme for this January 2025 holiday programme, “Masterpieces in the Making,” turned that heartbeat into a powerful rhythm of colour, courage, and connection. Far more than a school holiday programme, this was a transformative creative journey, one where children didn’t just paint, draw, or decorate; they discovered themselves.

From the very first day, the theme of unity and individuality was brought to life. Children began by adding their own stick figure to a collective “Masterpieces Banner”, a humble black vivid creating a powerful message: “You matter, and you belong.” As the banner filled with joyful little figures, it became a living tapestry of diversity, proudly displayed by volunteers as a symbol of strength in community.

The week bloomed with creativity. From crafting bold team banners and quirky “Masterpiece Monsters” to decorating delicious biscuits, each activity invited children to dive into their imaginations, express their emotions, and share their stories through art. These weren’t just fun projects, they were bridges to friendship, empathy, and healing.

But the programme didn’t stop at the art table. A thrilling visit to Ninja Valley gave tamariki the chance to leap, climb, and laugh their way through physical challenges that encouraged teamwork, built resilience, and sparked joy. It was an exciting change of pace, reminding every child that their strength can shine in many ways.





This unforgettable experience would not have been possible without the incredible generosity of Ministry of Social Development(OSCAR), Momentum Waikato and Common Good Foundation and the welcoming space provided by St. Paul's Collegiate School. A special thank you to Jenny Nand for her guidance and support. A big shoutout to Enock, Patricia, Kaveri ,ROC holiday programme staff and volunteers from Rimbrook for their continuous support and efforts.

At its core, Masterpieces in the Making wasn't just about creating art, it was about creating belonging. It reminded every child that they are more than their past, more than their challenges, they are artists of their own stories, masterpieces in the making.

As the programme came to a close, children left not just with painted creations, but with new friends, stronger voices, and memories that will stay with them forever.

Masterpieces in the Making was a transformative experience that allowed the children to not only explore their creativity but also gain a sense of belonging and community. This programme helped them build new friendships, develop important life skills, and return home with cherished memories and a greater sense of confidence.

Making Space for Inclusion:

A Call for Culturally Inclusive Community Venues in Hamilton

Kirikiroa Hamilton is a city that rightfully celebrates its growing diversity and inclusive aspirations. Yet, based on our experience, a significant gap persists: the availability of culturally inclusive, accessible community venues with affordable and flexible catering options.

As an organisation working closely with former refugee and migrant families, we know that hosting community events is not simply about gathering—it's about expressing cultural identity, passing on traditions, and fostering a sense of belonging. These are essential functions for communities rebuilding their lives in a new country. However, our ability to facilitate such events is consistently challenged by rigid venue policies—particularly those related to catering.

Many suitable venues require the exclusive use of pre-approved caterers. These services are often priced well beyond the reach of nonprofit organisations like ours and are designed for corporate or private events. In one case, we were denied a quote entirely because our event didn't meet the vendor's minimum spend. Even when available, the limited menus rarely meet the cultural or dietary needs of the communities we serve.

In many cases, we've found that the food provided through mandatory catering services is not only culturally unsuitable, but also disproportionately expensive. Some menus offer far fewer items than what local restaurants or community providers could offer for a fraction of the cost. It's often shocking to see how much is being charged for such limited options—raising serious questions about fairness, accessibility, and value for money. For non for profit organisations operating on tight budgets, this model creates a barrier that feels less like policy and more like exclusion.

We also reflect on the past with concern. Previously, community groups like ours were welcomed to host cultural events at beautiful spaces such as the City Council's Reception Lounge. It was a valued venue—both accessible and accommodating. Unfortunately, it is no longer available for community use, and the reasons remain unclear. If venues must mandate catering services, we ask: why can't authorities approve and support smaller, local restaurants—many of which offer affordable, culturally relevant menus? And if these restaurants are not considered suitable, why aren't they supported to meet the required standards instead of being excluded entirely? The logic behind current catering restrictions remains opaque, and this lack of transparency raises real questions for us.



These restrictions don't just complicate logistics—they impact cultural integrity. Food is not a luxury in our gatherings; it is a vital expression of identity. When traditional food is not permitted, it diminishes the relevance and purpose of the event, and the community's connection to it.

We fully support the need for health and safety standards and understand that venue providers operate within commercial models. But we believe there is space for policy innovation—solutions that maintain safety while supporting community-led catering for culturally specific events.

Our experience suggests that while Hamilton's public infrastructure may be physically adequate, it is not yet socially responsive. For organisations like ours, affordability and flexibility are not optional—they are essential. Without them, meaningful cultural programming becomes inaccessible, despite the city's stated commitment to inclusion.

We believe Hamilton has an opportunity to lead with a bold, practical approach:

- More inclusive pricing models for not-for-profit and community-led groups
- Safe, clearly defined processes for community-prepared food
- Ongoing engagement with organisations serving ethnic and migrant populations

As the city grows, its infrastructure must evolve—not just in bricks and mortar, but in values and policies. Community venues should not merely host events; they should enable identity, participation, and belonging.

Creating affordable space for culture is not about convenience—it is about equity, dignity, and the right of every community to gather meaningfully. We hope this message can spark a constructive dialogue and inspire lasting, inclusive change.

Now is the time to move from aspiration to action—by embedding inclusion into the very spaces where our communities come together.



Two Decades of Empowerment:

ROC Trust's 20-Year Journey of Refugee Advocacy and Community Building



As the ROC Trust celebrated its 20th anniversary during the Annual Meeting on 23rd of April at the Hamilton garden, attendees were treated to an inspiring retrospective of two decades marked by compassion, resilience, and community transformation. This milestone gathering honoured the achievements of the past and cast a hopeful eye towards the future.

Opening with Tradition and Culture

The event began with a moving karakia—a traditional Māori prayer—setting a tone of reverence and unity. The ROC After-School children brought energy and cultural pride to the stage with a passionate haka performance, affirming ROC's commitment to nurturing young voices.

A Vision Realised

Founded with a bold vision to uplift and empower refugee communities in Aotearoa, ROC Trust has grown into a dynamic force for social change. The anniversary celebration reflected this journey, capturing the essence of ROC's grassroots beginnings and its evolution into a leading voice for refugee advocacy.



Moments That Mattered

Through a powerful visual narrative, attendees were taken on a journey through ROC's 20-year timeline—highlighting the people, stories, and milestones that have shaped the organisation. From community-driven projects to advocacy efforts, ROC's impact is both profound and far-reaching.

Artistry in Action

Music and performance played a central role in the celebration. Enock Tuyisunge, a beloved member of the community, delivered a soulful musical performance that resonated deeply with the audience. Later, the ROC After-School children returned to the stage, showcasing their talents and reminding everyone of the importance of investing in the next generation.

Recognising Excellence

The evening's recognition ceremony was a stirring highlight—an opportunity to honour those whose contributions have shaped the heart of ROC Trust.

The session began with a moving tribute to the late Guillaume Muzombo, ROC's founder. His visionary leadership laid the foundation for what the organisation has become today. A series of awards followed, celebrating long-standing leaders and supporters, volunteers and Staff, who were also honoured for their steadfast dedication to community programming and operational excellence. The stories shared demonstrated how ROC is truly a community-powered initiative.

Looking Ahead

The celebration closed as it began—with a karakia, this time one of thanksgiving and looking forward. Attendees left not only with memories of an unforgettable evening but with a renewed sense of purpose.

As ROC Trust steps into its third decade, its mission remains clear: to continue empowering, advocating for, and building community among those often left on the margins. With the legacy of the past 20 years as its foundation, ROC moves forward—stronger, wiser, and ever more committed to its cause.









A heartfelt thank you to our incredible event leaders, Nimila Jos and Dhanish Alsain, who led the team with excellence and delivered a truly outstanding event. Your dedication, leadership, and collaborative spirit made all the difference.

A Tribute to Guillaume Muzombo

Founder: The Refugee Orientation Centre Trust Inc.

Twenty years ago, in the heart of Hamilton, a quiet yet powerful movement took root. Four friends Guillaume Muzombo, Gustave, Odon, and Oscar Bulamba came together with a shared purpose: to support former refugees like themselves who were rebuilding their lives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Their journey began in a refugee camp in Kenya after fleeing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Resettled in New Zealand in 2000, they found peace but also faced enormous challenges. Despite their qualifications, they were expected to start again from scratch. With limited support systems, they studied at local institutions while navigating language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity.

But they persevered. They graduated with qualifications in Public Policy, Social Work, Business, and Dairy Processing. Out of their own struggles, a new determination emerged: to help others. With support from Community Waikato and early funders, they founded the Refugee Orientation Centre Trust.

Their first initiative was a computer literacy programme using donated equipment, empowering former refugees to build confidence and reconnect with the world.

In 2007, they launched a multicultural football festival to bring people together through joy and sport. It was later renamed Jambo, a warm Swahili greeting meaning “hello” a word that reflected their roots



and the welcoming spirit they hoped to foster in the community. What began with humble resources soon became a beloved annual tradition of unity and belonging.

They also turned their attention to education. Guillaume, a teacher by background, worked with schools to better support refugee students. This led to the After-School Programme, a crucial bridge between families and schools.

Guillaume and Oscar often visited classrooms, helping students understand what it means to be a refugee and why people seek safety in New Zealand.

Marie Jeanne Muzombo, wife of Guillaume, has been actively involved with ROC for many years, providing valuable support to various programs including After School programs, advocacy, and social work. Her contributions have been a significant asset to ROC.

Over the years, life took the founders on different paths. Gustave moved to Australia, and Oscar stepped back to focus on family. But Guillaume continued to lead ROC with tireless dedication, mentoring youth and growing the organisation.

In 2019, ROC Trust faced a profound loss when Guillaume passed away. His legacy, however, lives on. A new generation has stepped forward carrying the torch with passion, vision, and strength.



Today, ROC Trust stands as a symbol of resilience and unity impacting lives through education, sport, digital empowerment, and community connection.

This 20th anniversary is not just a milestone. It is a tribute to the founders, to Guillaume's enduring legacy, and to every person who believed in the power of community to transform lives.

It all began with a simple truth: "We need to do something." And they did.

You are invited to:

PRESENTATION ON RESEARCH:

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT IN NZ

By Prof Jay Marlowe

9th May - 10.30am to 12pm

Venue: Room: S.G.02 - University of Waikato, Hamilton

Access through: Gate 8 - S Block (Behind The Pā),

**MAPPING THE SETTLEMENT TRAJECTORIES OF 25,000 PEOPLE FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS
AND 65 REFUGEE FOCUSED ORGANISATIONS ACROSS AOTEAROA**

This important study by Professor Jay Marlowe, examines the settlement experiences of 25,000 individuals from refugee backgrounds and explores the roles 65 refugee-focused organisations across the country. Professor Jay Marlowe is Professor of Social Work at University of Auckland and Co-founder, Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies.



RSVP

