

Welcoming Communities Stock-take Report

October 2023



**SOUTH WAIRARAPA
DISTRICT COUNCIL**
Kia Reretahi Tātau



**Welcoming
Communities**
TE WAHAROA KI NGĀ HĀPORI

Contents page

● Executive Summary	1
● Background	2
● Methodology	2
● Local context	4
● Strategic context	5
● Local culture	6
● Newcomers to South Wairarapa	7
● Newcomer's experiences	8
● Newcomer survey findings	10
Quantitative data	10
Qualitative data	12
● The Welcoming Standard	14
● Opportunities	15
● Recommendations	16

Executive Summary

South Wairarapa is welcoming more people each year, and this trend is set to continue. In 2023 it is anticipated that 985 New Zealand citizens and 62 international migrants will relocate to South Wairarapa. If newcomers have positive experiences integrating into South Wairarapa and feel like they belong, they are more likely to stay, contribute, fuel local industries and economies, and become a valued member of the community, which benefits the whole community.

The stock-take findings suggest that settlement experiences of those who move here varies widely. Many newcomers have extremely positive experiences moving here and find a great sense of community and home in South Wairarapa. Some, however, struggle to feel like they belong; finding it difficult to make friends, access services and have the information they need to thrive here. Of the new community members surveyed, 43% said they felt welcomed, with 14% saying they didn't feel welcomed. Additionally 40% of newcomers believed South Wairarapa is inclusive and accepting of people from different cultures, and 11% believed that it was not.

Generally speaking, welcoming in South Wairarapa is done at the individual level and it relies on locals and neighbours being welcoming, inclusive and helpful to newcomers. As well as relying on newcomers to "put themselves out there". As a rural district, there are not formal mechanisms or services in place to specifically help newcomers integrate into their communities or promote cultural inclusion and, up until this point, Council has not had the capacity or resource to truly prioritise this.

There are many groups and individuals in South Wairarapa that are welcoming and inclusive by nature, but for newcomers to be welcomed, included and integrated with the local community as a general rule, it will require intentional and coordinated effort; rather than the assumption that it should just happen unassisted. There is an opportunity for council to lead, partner with, and empower, local groups, organisations, marae and enthusiastic individuals so there is active welcoming, visible inclusion and on-going cultural conversations happening across the district.



Background

South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC or 'Council') has joined Welcoming Communities, a nation-wide programme designed to help new community members feel welcome, connected and included. A connected community is a resilient community, and one that can thrive and prosper through times of change and uncertainty. Welcoming Communities has stemmed from the empirical understanding that improving the settlement experiences of newcomers can boost local economies and industries, as well as lead to positive social and cultural outcomes for the whole community.

SWDC has received funding for three years to employ a Welcoming Communities Coordinator who will complete the necessary research, and develop and implement the Welcoming Plan. A stock-take assessment was conducted from March to September 2023 to understand newcomer's experiences of moving to South Wairarapa, and the services and support available to them, to better understand how welcoming and inclusive the district is for new people. South Wairarapa has been assessed against the Welcoming Standard; which provides a benchmark and roadmap for becoming a "Welcoming Community".

The findings of this research will help inform SWDC's Welcoming Plan, which will provide practical steps to improve the settlement experiences of new people so the whole district can benefit.

A newcomer, in the context of Welcoming Communities, is a member of the community who has resided in South Wairarapa for less than 5 years. This includes international migrants, former refugees, international students, seasonal workers and New Zealand citizens relocating from other parts of the country.

Methodology

This report is informed by conversations with, and feedback from, over 150 newcomers; as well as local service providers, SWDC elected members and officers, statistical data (such as Census 2018, Infometrics Data and statistical forecasting) and online research.

Feedback from newcomers was done through a combination of online survey, email correspondence and informal interviews conducted in person.

Local service providers include Featherston Community Centre, Pasifika o Wairarapa Trust, Neighbourhood Support, Kohunui marae, Hau Ariki marae, Nuku Ora (Sport Wellington), Age Concern, Featherston Library, Greytown Library, Martinborough Library, Martinborough Business Association, Business Wairarapa, Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy team, Greytown Lions, Kuranui College, Featherston School, South Featherston School, Property Brokers, Fab Feathy, Wairarapa Community Networks, REAP Wairarapa, Greytown Information Centre, Featherston Sports Hub, Martinborough iSite, JR Orchards, Craggy Range Vineyard, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry for Ethnic Communities.

In addition, feedback was sought from the Community Boards of Featherston, Greytown and Martinborough, the Māori Standing Committee and officers of South Wairarapa District Council, including the Executive Leadership Team.

This report is representative of the information that was publicly available and freely offered by generous community members and service providers. It gives a snapshot in time of experiences captured and information available in 2023 and ought to be adapted if, and when, more up-to-date information emerges. While every step was taken to provide an objective overview, and examples and evidence are used to support assessments where possible, this stock-take is informed by qualitative feedback and subjective experiences. In that way, this stock-take assessment should be considered indicative; not absolute or definitive.

It is also acknowledged that the information captured is more reflective of newcomers moving to, or near, the urban areas of Featherston, Greytown and Martinborough – as opposed to remote rural and coastal areas in South Wairarapa – due to higher migration to these urban areas, higher response rate from urban newcomers, and more information being widely available about those areas. As the programme progresses it would be worthwhile to include and address the needs of more geographically isolated newcomers.

Additionally, a lot of the feedback received, such as those who freely elected to complete the newcomer survey, did not necessarily capture the voices and experiences of all ethnic groups living in South Wairarapa. The experience of newcomers from India, Ireland, the United Kingdom (England and Scotland), Philippines, Brazil, Samoa, Australia, Chile, United States of America, Germany, and The Netherlands, as well as relocating citizens, informed this research. It is important going forward that feedback continues to be received, from a diverse array of places and people, so that the Welcoming Plan reflects the genuine and varied needs of the whole community.



Local context

South Wairarapa has a population of over 11,500 residents and consists of three main urban towns – Featherston, Greytown and Martinborough – with small rural and coastal communities across the district. South Wairarapa has a distinct culture; with a long history of Māori settlement and whakapapa, mixed with a strong farming identity. While modern day South Wairarapa is renowned for its wineries, boutique shopping and as New Zealand’s only Book Town, with its rugged coastlines, vast green, open spaces and sweeping wind, it could be said it requires a certain resilience and heartiness to live here.

Even though South Wairarapa is conveniently located between the cities of Wellington and Masterton, the towns and communities are distinctly rural. As such, many of the services, organisations and amenities experienced in larger towns or cities are not present, or require travel out of the district to access them. Many of the things that make South Wairarapa vibrant, such as the fairs, festivals and events, are community-led and made possible by the generosity and hard work of individuals and community groups; as opposed to organisations and paid employees.

The people and the culture of South Wairarapa are slowly evolving. There is a strong population growth of over 2.2% each year, with places like Featherston being identified as a growth area in the [Wellington Regional Growth Framework](#) and SWDC’s [Spatial Plan](#). Thanks to technological advancements and flexible working arrangements, South Wairarapa is an attractive and affordable place for people working in Wellington city or elsewhere in the region. As well, while the Census stats are yet to show the population growth and demographic changes since COVID-19, observationally it has been seen that many people and families are wanting to swap their city life for the slower pace and space of country living.

South Wairarapa is said to have an ageing population. In the next 25 years, across the whole of the Wairarapa, it’s expected that residents over 65 will increase by 79%. 1 in 4 residents in South Wairarapa are over 65, and by 2050 it’s expected to be 1 in 3. Pair that with a skills shortage experienced in many industries across the region, such as medical and health care, the [Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy](#) has highlighted the importance of attracting those of a “productive age” who can fill these gaps, fuel local enterprise and grow the local economy.

In terms of Council welcoming newcomers, there are citizenship ceremonies several times a year for new citizens and their families and, since joining Welcoming Communities, the Mayor sends a welcome letter with community and council information to new ratepayers. While we do not have settlement services, new people often visit our Libraries, Featherston Community Centre, Greytown Information Centre and Martinborough iSite to ask questions about their new community.

Strategic context

Welcoming Communities aligns with, and supports the delivery of, important local and regional strategies and plans.

Welcoming Communities aligns with the outcomes intended through SWDC's 2021 – 2031 Long Term Plan, as well as the overall purpose of SWDC. The Local Government Act 2002 states that the purpose of local government is “to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future.” Strategic drivers in the Long Term Plan that align with Welcoming Communities includes to:

- Strengthen social connections within the community
- Encourage civic pride and participation
- Provide universally accessible, safe and diverse spaces to strengthen connection between people and place
- Encourage economic diversity and local vibrancy
- Take opportunities to embrace and celebrate diversity, and
- Take opportunities to advance and showcase arts, culture & heritage

Welcoming Communities, and more specifically the Welcoming Plan, can be a key vehicle to achieving some of those drivers.

The Welcoming Communities also supports the aspirations of, and has natural crossovers with, the Te Rautaki Rangatahi o Wairarapa (“the Youth Strategy”). The Youth Strategy’s first of seven priorities, decided by young people across the region, is to: “Celebrate who we are”; including celebrating cultural diversity and ensuring their “culture and identity is visible across the region”. The Strategy highlights the key role Council has in providing “a range of opportunities for rangatahi (youth) to express themselves and for communities to celebrate their diversity”; as well as the need to “acknowledge and celebrate the cultures, backgrounds, and diversity of Wairarapa rangatahi through our events, programmes, and services.”

In addition, the Te Hōkai Nuku Wairarapa Positive Ageing Strategy highlights the importance of culture for the well-being of older people in Wairarapa. One of its six goals is “cultural diversity”; stating the priority that “our community is proud of, and inclusive of all cultures through supporting and capacity building of cultural groups and events.”

Welcoming Communities has the potential to support the aspirations of the Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy, and its emerging Workforce Plan. Wairarapa’s employment growth is behind the national average and the Strategy highlights the need to attract more people to fuel local workforces and industries; with one of its priorities being “attracting, training and retaining people.”

Local culture

The communities of South Wairarapa still strongly represent the indigenous and colonial history of this whenua/land, but greater diversity is flourishing more with each passing year. The 2018 Census showed that, while 90.5% of our population identify as European (encompassing Pākeha/NZ Europeans and international Europeans) and 14.2% as Māori, 48 different ethnicities make up the communities and 6.6% of the population have different ethnic origins.

The largest ethnic groups outside of NZ European/ Pākeha and Māori as of 2018, in order, are Dutch, Chinese, Indian, Filipino, German, Japanese, Thai, South African European, French and Polish. The most spoken languages, in order, are English, Dutch, German and Tagalog (Filipino), with Afrikaans, French, Northern Chinese and Thai spoken equally.

Furthermore, 17.4% of the community were born overseas, with the highest amount from the United Kingdom and Ireland, followed by Australia, continental Europe and Asia. In addition, 9.5% of residents had arrived in the country within 5 to 9 years, and 1.7% had lived overseas within a year.

South Wairarapa also has a large seasonal workforce that supports local vineyards and orchards; many of whom return year after year. These seasonal workers usually come from Pacific Islands, such as Vanuatu, Cook Islands and Solomon Islands, and are significant to the district (particularly Martinborough), as they enable South Wairarapa to be renowned nation-wide as a wine village and tourist destination.



Newcomers to South Wairarapa

South Wairarapa has a lot of migration. According to recent statistical forecasting commissioned by Greater Wellington Regional Council (completed by Sense Partners), it's anticipated that in 2023 there will be:

- 985 citizens moving to South Wairarapa (with 907 departing), and
- 62 international migrants arriving (with 57 leaving).

They estimate in 2028 there will be around 186 new international arrivals, suggesting that South Wairarapa may become home to more international community members exponentially over time.

Common reasons that people move to South Wairarapa are:

- To retire, or in the lead up to retirement.
- Wanting a slower pace of life, to enjoy country living and have “more space”.
- For work (including seasonal work).
- To be closer to family.
- Often lower house prices than elsewhere in the Wellington region.

South Wairarapa is not a refugee settlement location, therefore, we do not have refugee settlement services working with South Wairarapa. However, it has been indicated that, former refugees may move to South Wairarapa in the future after their initial settlement period in Masterton, for instance, or that they may attain work in South Wairarapa while living in Masterton.

The Welcoming Communities Newcomer Survey indicates the highest proportion of newcomers move from other parts in the Wellington region; followed by other areas in the country, then other countries. It was also observed that international newcomers that moved to South Wairarapa had often lived elsewhere in the country or region and had therefore been somewhat inducted into New Zealand culture, before moving to South Wairarapa.



Newcomer's experiences

Many newcomers spoken to expressed how much they enjoyed living in South Wairarapa. For those that had moved from a big, “impersonal” city they often found their neighbours and locals particularly friendly; as well, they thoroughly **enjoyed the space, privacy, and nature** (minus the wind) that South Wairarapa offers.

It was found that having **welcoming and helpful neighbours** often made the biggest difference in how welcome people felt, and how well they settled in. Having someone who could point them in the right direction, connect them with local networks, share “who’s who”, give recommendations and invite them to events and gatherings left a lasting positive impression on newcomers.

“I had to ‘find’
all info myself”

“The people are so friendly, I have lived in many towns/countries and never have I been welcomed and felt more at home .”

For the newcomers who had moved from bigger towns and cities, there was often a **mismatch between their expectations and the services and amenities that are available** in a rural district.

When asked what could be improved, many newcomers felt that having **more frequent public transport**, with longer operating hours, would make a meaningful difference.

As well, many newcomers **struggled to find information** to help them settle in and learn about their local community, and what was available. For instance, a lot of information about activities, groups and services are word-of-mouth or promoted through Facebook pages and groups that newcomers do not necessarily know to look for. In larger cities more information is available online, or summarised in convenient and accessible pamphlets; which is less prevalent in South Wairarapa.

Many **newcomers found the social side of moving to South Wairarapa challenging**. Common quips of “it’s hard to meet people” and “there’s not a lot to do here” were heard regularly. They noted that people were friendly, in terms of smiling or saying “hi”, but a lot of newcomers found that going beyond surface level pleasantries and actually making lasting friendships was more difficult.

“We’ve joined in with social events, sports and got to know our neighbours which has given us a greater sense of community”

“I didn’t see any visible or vocal welcoming”

Those who had the most positive experiences of settling into the community often volunteered, joined groups and clubs, regularly went along to activities and, essentially, “put themselves out there”. They had the time, and also the confidence or extraversion, to build connections in the community; which has been suggested may be more difficult for some people and some cultures.

Of those spoken to, most had not experienced overt or direct racism; however, there were some feelings of being culturally isolated, or experiencing the subtle racism or discrimination that comes from a lack of understanding or cultural sensitivity. In many ways it seems newcomers are inadvertently expected to assimilate into local culture, as opposed to being supported and encouraged to integrate their culture into the local fabric.



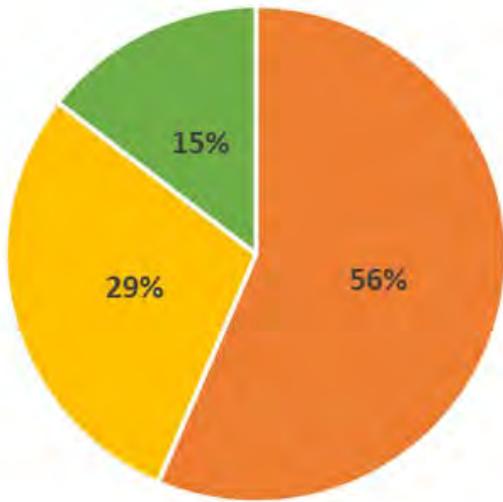
Newcomer survey findings

119 newcomers to the district completed the Welcoming Communities Newcomer Survey. This survey was promoted through the Council’s social media page, the Council website, and in the different local newspapers. International newcomers who completed this survey include residents from the United Kingdom (England and Scotland), Brazil, Australia, United States of America and The Netherlands.

Quantitative data

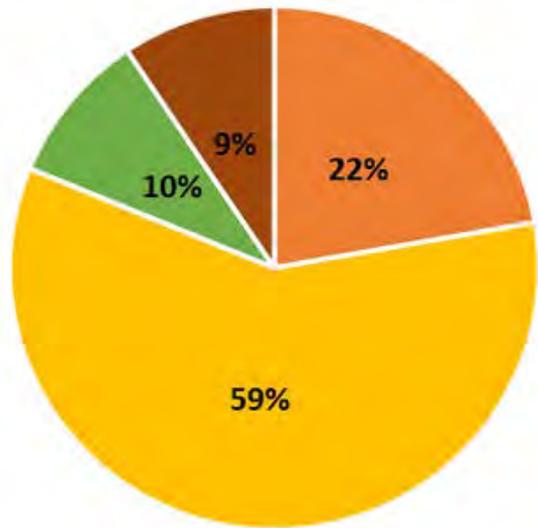
The high-level results* showed:

Newcomers moved from



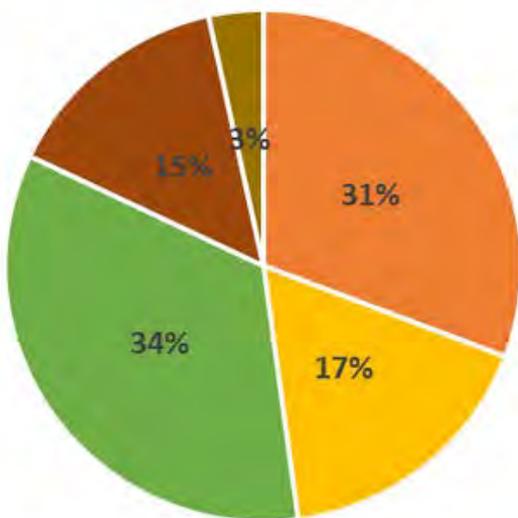
- Another Wellington town
- Another NZ town
- Overseas

Newcomers had lived here



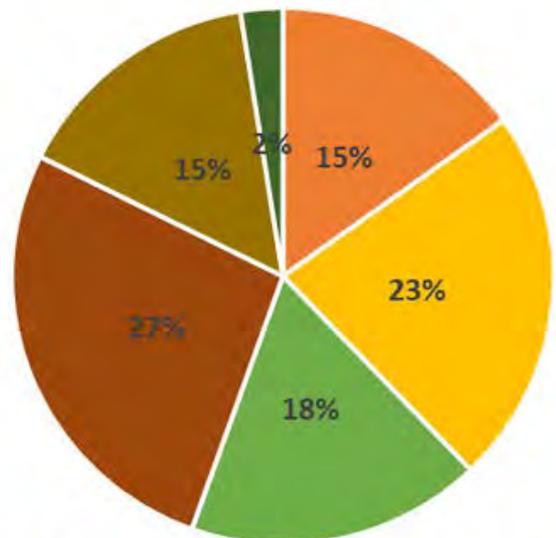
- <1 year
- <5 years
- <10 years
- 10+ years

Newcomers moved to



- Featherston
- Greytown
- Martinborough
- Rural SW
- Coastal SW

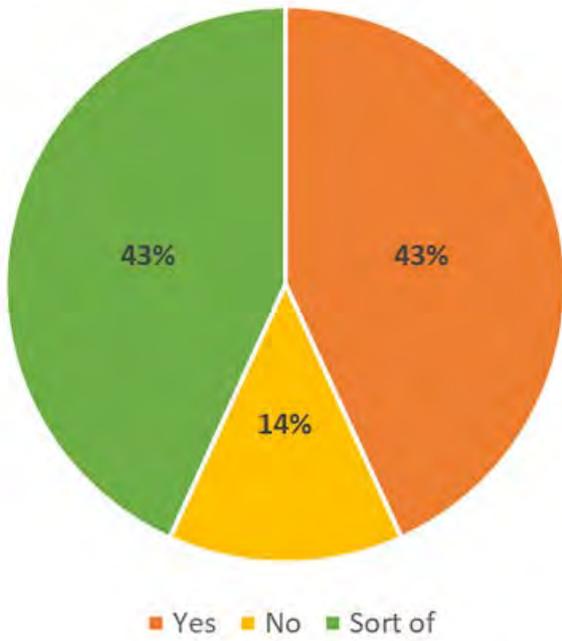
Age of newcomers



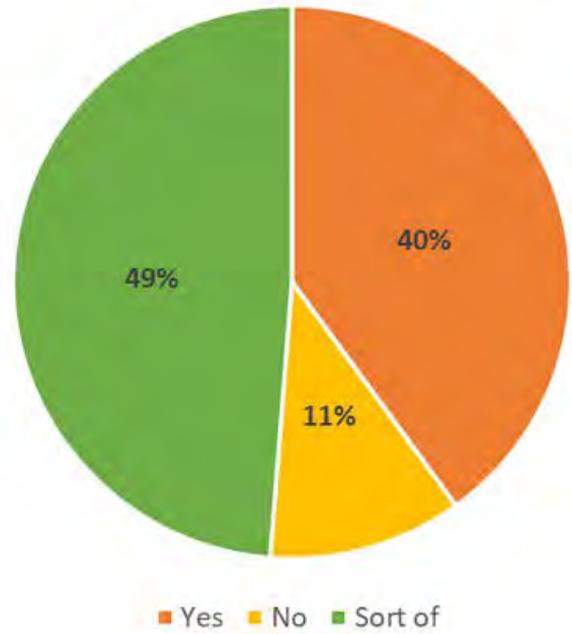
- 20s
- 30s
- 40s
- 50s
- 60s
- Over 70s

*Results are rounded to the closest percent

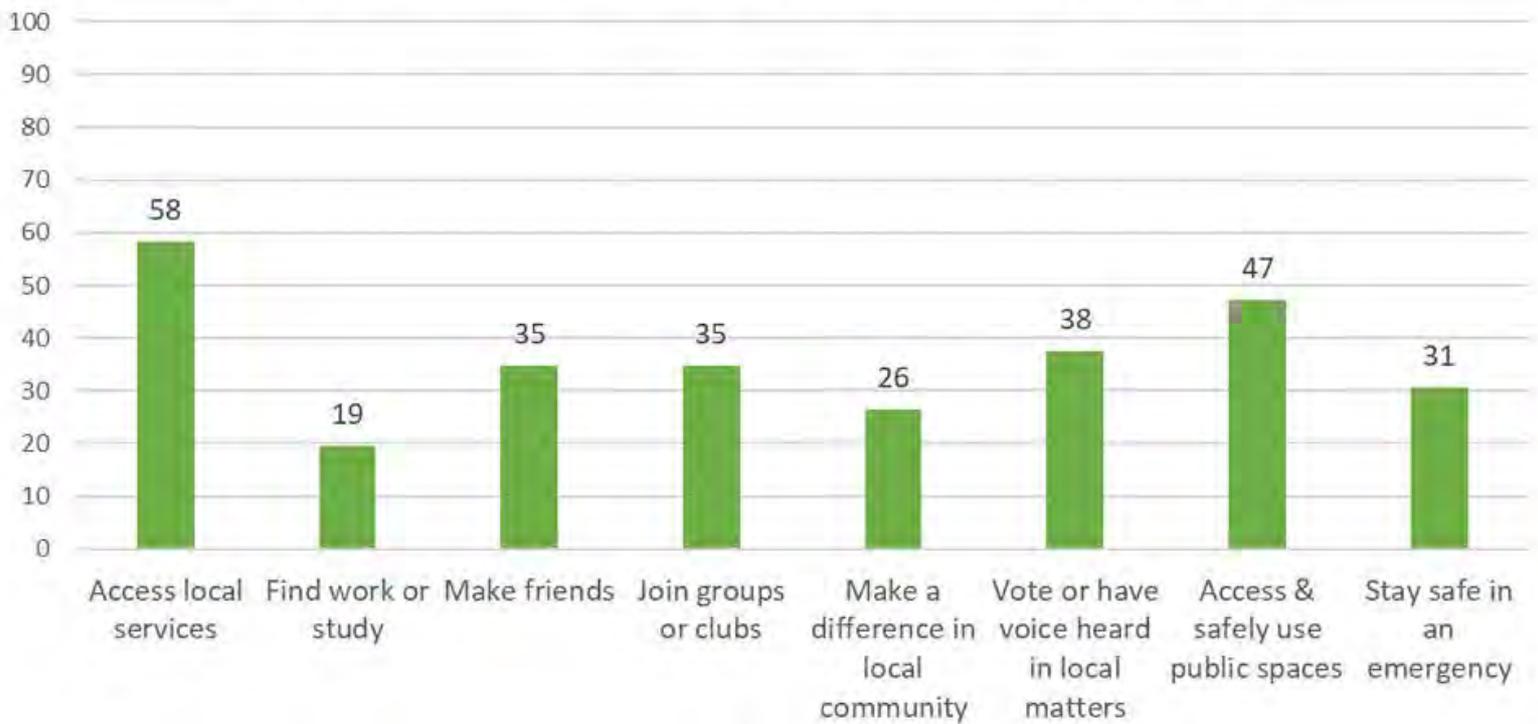
Newcomers felt welcomed



Newcomers believe local community is inclusive and accepting of different cultures



% of newcomers that had the information they needed to:



Qualitative data

A number of open-ended questions were asked and the following survey responses offer a snapshot of commonly expressed views:

What made you feel welcome / not welcome?

- “It works both ways we had to get out into the community.”
- “The people are so friendly, I have lived in many towns/countries and never have I been welcomed and felt more at home than Martinborough”
- “There was not much happening and was difficult to know of things happening [in] the area”
- “I knew nobody and there weren’t or didn’t seem to be any options to change that.”
- “We were just about to have our first child and both still working in Wellington so our focus was elsewhere. Over the last few years we’ve joined in with social events, sports and got to know our neighbours which has given us a greater sense of community.”
- “There seems to be an undercurrent of tension between "locals" and people who are new to Featherston and wanting to make this their home.”
- “The people are very welcoming, but everything is done on Facebook and I don't have that!”

Did you have the information you needed to [access local services etc.]...

- “I had to ‘find’ all info myself”
- “Wouldn’t say I had any of that information when I moved in. Not very obvious what groups to follow on social media to keep up to date. Though the Phoenix is fantastic!”
- “I appreciated the council updates on Facebook during bad weather. I'm not sure if everyone would think to follow council pages on Facebook though?”
- “Wow literally none of these!”



What, if anything, did you find difficult about settling into your new community?

- “Website.”
- “How on earth do you connect with people? There's no entertainment in Martinborough on a Saturday/Friday night to go out to apart from the movies. Very boring!”
- “It was difficult to know where information was shared”
- “Meeting other locals our age”
- “The lack of a Community Centre, a hub for the Village with organized recreational activities, craft, social services etc”
- “Who's who. Lots of things are relationship based, rather than public knowledge”
- “Opportunities to meet people without having to go to a pub. I work in Wellington, but live in Marty, so i dont meet people as part of my working day which makes it harder, but a lack of social groups or adult learning opportunities etc makes it harder.”
- “Tricky to get info to know who are the reputable people that you can call for any tradie work/issues. Hard to meet and make connections with people own age (lots of friendly retired people, and I'm sure lots of friendly parents if you had children). Almost everything have found out about the community is from Facebook - which means if you want to limit social media time, there's no other way to really stay up to date with this.”
- “Basic council info, bin collection days and costs, if I have to pay for water or not, etc”

Is there anything you believe would have made it easier to settle into your new community?

- “Having events/groups that are specific for new members to the community.”
- “Welcome meet and greets at town hall - every couple of months”
- “A welcome pack with contacts and info on what's available and what events are on.”
- “More info on local happenings and groups”
- “More community events”
- “Evening social activities”
- “At least one of the town's council facilities open on an evening or weekend. Some sort of casual networking event. Info on things like water issues (boil water notices) coming via an email database rather than just on social media.”

Do you believe your new community is inclusive and accepting of different people and cultures?

- “I definitely see more diversity now than when I first arrived which is great; whether those people feel accepted or not I'm not sure.”
- “I don't see any visible or vocal welcoming”
- “I haven't noticed discrimination but its hard to fit in when most of the people around you are locals by several generations and they all know each other and you're left on the outer without that history”
- “There are only a few haters of new people - some believe you have to be here 20+years to have a say”
- “I'm white. And this seems to be a predominantly white area with a very white centric history. Not sure how welcoming I'd have found it had I been a different ethnicity.”

The Welcoming Standard

The Welcoming Communities national programme has created the ‘Welcoming Standard’ to benchmark how welcoming and inclusive a community is, and to measure its progress over time. More information on the Welcoming Standard can be found here or in Appendix 1. The Welcoming Standard consists of eight overarching outcomes (with 30 sub-outcomes), including:

1. Inclusive Leadership
2. Welcoming Communications
3. Equitable Access
4. Connected & Inclusive Communities
5. Economic Development, Business & Employment
6. Civic Engagement & Participation
7. Welcoming Public Spaces
8. Culture & Identity

South Wairarapa has been assessed by the Welcoming Communities Coordinator in relation to each of the eight outcomes and sub-outcomes. The full breakdown and rationale for scoring can be found in Appendix 1.

The assessment highlighted **opportunities for improvement across all areas.**

In the first instance it's suggested that the Welcoming Plan considers prioritising Welcoming Communications, Connected & Inclusive Communities, Welcoming Public Spaces and Culture & Identity; for the opportunity for improvement, and the likelihood of being able to make a meaningful difference in the duration of the programme.



Opportunities

Some opportunities for Council were identified through this stock-take. As a starting point, there are opportunities for Council to make a meaningful difference by:

- Being actively and intentionally involved in welcoming new people to the district, in partnership with community organisations and groups; including providing useful, easily accessible information for newcomers
- Partnering with, and empowering, local iwi, hapū and marae to connect with newcomers and share Māori culture, tikanga and language
- Being intentional and strategic around promoting, role modelling and enabling cultural inclusion across the district
- Partnering with community organisations and groups to create, support and/or promote cultural and community events that enable newcomers and local community members to connect with, and learn from, one another
- Creating or adapting public spaces to celebrate and enable culture and inclusion for all.



Recommendations

As a result of the stock-take findings, it is recommended that:

- Stock-take findings be socialised with Council, the community and key stakeholders, and updated as needed so the Welcoming Plan is accurately informed.
- A Welcoming Plan be developed collaboratively with Council, key stakeholders, community members and newcomers; as well as confirming the priority areas of the Welcoming Plan.
- The Welcoming Plan should attempt to improve all eight outcomes of the Welcoming Standard, however, in the first instance priority could be placed on:
 - Welcoming Communications
 - Connected & Inclusive Communities
 - Welcoming Public Spaces
 - Culture & Identity





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