

Pacific community has its say

By
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Strengthening communities . . . (From left) Waitaki District Council community development co-ordinator Helen Algar, Tongan Society of South Canterbury president Siesina Latu, Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio and Pacific Island Community Group president Hana Halalele met in Oamaru last Friday to discuss issues and opportunities for Pacific people in the region. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Oamaru has a growing and thriving Pacific community, but with growth comes challenges.

On Friday, the district's Pacific communities rallied together to have their voices heard and validated on some of the important issues and opportunities in North Otago with Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio and representatives from the Ministry for Pacific People (MPP).

Mr Sio met with key stakeholders in the Waitaki community, including Pacific Island Community Group president Hana Halalele, Waitaki deputy mayor

Melanie Tavendale and Waitaki District Council community development co-ordinator Helen Algar, before a fono (meeting) on Friday night attended by about 140 members of the community.

Mrs Halalele said the fono was a fantastic opportunity to find out more about MPP's strategic vision and goals, what support was available and how the Oamaru community could build its capacity to deliver more services.

"It was an amazing opportunity for Oamaru to be chosen as the location for this fono, to work alongside in partnership with our other community group colleagues and agencies and engage in the dialogue.

"There were some really good discussions."

Issues highlighted on Friday night included the demand for appropriate housing, education and employment, youth facilities, acceptance and general wellbeing.

"There are issues of educational achievement – the plan is to help empower our Pacific parents so they can help support and champion their kids' learning," Mrs Halalele said.

"There is the future of work to consider – the plan is to advocate and facilitate professional development opportunities in current workplaces so our people have, for example, managerial or trade opportunities. Our people need to remain nimble and employable.

"There are immigration challenges – the plan is to advocate for equitable immigration planning policies so our people have sustainable permanent opportunities to remain in Oamaru.

"What we do now needs to be long-term seed-sowing work – it should positively benefit our people and community in seven generations' time."

It was also an opportunity to showcase the range of initiatives already being undertaken locally, and Mr Sio was particularly impressed with the Safer Waitaki Coalition model.

“It was a privilege to meet with him and other Pasifika leaders to talk about the issues for Pasifika in our local context and what great things are happening here and what opportunities we may seek going forward,” Safer Waitaki co-ordinator Helen Algar said.

“We talked about the Safer Waitaki model and the collaboration that is already happening as part of that conversation.

“The whole experience highlighted to me that there is some amazing leadership within our Pasifika community.”

Mrs Halalele’s family has lived in Oamaru since 1985.

“It’s such an awesome place to live, raise our children with our increasing growing Pacific population,” she said.

But there was a need to develop more cultural, social and economic infrastructure to support the Pacific community.

“In Oamaru there are lots of awesome opportunities .. with council, schools, community organisations, churches, sports clubs to develop a collaborative plan for our people to thrive and succeed,” Mrs Halalele said.

The Oamaru Pacific Island Community Group was formed in 1989.

Registered as a society in 1998, it aims to promote, develop and maintain Pacific customs, provide social, cultural, education, welfare and spiritual support for members and the wider Waitaki area, promote and maintain unity and respect among members of different cultures and work collaboratively with tangata whenua and the wider Waitaki community.