



Media Release
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ILT and Koha Kai collaborating for social good

ILT has partnered with inspirational organisation Koha Kai on its latest endeavour.

Koha Kai will be the driving force locally behind delivering the Government's Free and Healthy School Lunches pilot programme in the south. However, the increased capabilities needed for production resulted in a hunt for a new operational base.

A chance conversation with ILT led to partnership being formed for the use of Elmwood Gardens and its full commercial kitchen.

Koha Kai founder Janice Lee was excited about the positive social impact the collaboration would have in the community – a hallmark of both organisations.

"In this very testing time, as we ascend from the frozen economy of Covid-19, it has become a challenge to see the positives amongst the closures and redundancies. So, it has become important as we seek economic recovery that we consider a different way of doing business," she said.

"Koha Kai has always been an innovative game-changer in the community.

"This partnership enables us to keep the iconic art deco building of Elmwood Gardens connected to the community with a new purpose.

"Koha Kai has been well supported through our growth by local philanthropic community groups, including ILT, so it made sense to support the Trust just as they have supported us."

Focused on systemic change through the disability sector, Koha Kai works with people with disabilities to teach skills to live well and independently. For those with employment aspirations, it extends to pathways and opportunities to achieve open employment in line with mainstream expectations.

For the past six years, they have partnered with several Southland schools to deliver vocational and training programmes particularly focused on horticulture and hospitality.

Utilising school kitchens, the award-winning initiative led to healthy and nutritious lunches being provided to school children at low cost.

However, the introduction of the Government scheme has prompted Koha Kai to evolve.

"This new programme aims to reduce food insecurity by providing access to a nutritious lunch every day at school," Lee said.

"The evidence clearly shows children who have good nutrition and who are not affected by food insecurity are more likely to be successful in the classroom and engage with their learning than those whose primary focus is hunger and where their next meal is likely to come from."

Several Invercargill and Southland schools were chosen as part of the pilot programme.

"Koha Kai tendered to be part of that process because we absolutely believe in the concept and are committed to ensuring it is successful here in Southland." Lee said.

It also provided an opportunity to employ people who had graduated the Koha Kai programme.



“Koha Kai graduates, for whom employment until now has been elusive, will now have opportunities in an industry they have been trained for,” Lee said.

“As we move from lockdown and begin to rebuild our economy, partnerships and collaborations are going to be a strength in business. In working together towards a common goal, the new normal may well be one where social enterprise – being private enterprise with a social focus supporting the community – can be a strength that will smooth the path towards resilience and prosperity once again.

ILT chief executive Chris Ramsay said the collaboration was extremely positive and created significant value across several aspects.

“Not only does it contribute to the dream of systemic change through the disability system, it supports vocational training and employment for people with disabilities and helps to address issues of child poverty and food insecurity in primary schools in our region,” he said.

“We are humbled to be able to contribute to making that a reality while continuing to support Koha Kai in its endeavours.”

Ends.

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