

RACE UNITY

SPEECH AWARDS

SPEAKING FOR UNITY

Reflecting on 21 years of the Race Unity Speech Awards

2001 - 2021



**“We always speak of
[young] people being
tomorrow’s leaders but
they’re leading today...”**

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF POLICE, TUSHA PENNY



WHAT THE POLICE SAY

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ABOUT THE SPEECH AWARDS

The oneness of humankind is the foundational principle on which the Bahá'í Faith rests – a principle that Bahá'ís throughout the world have striven to achieve since the very inception of their Faith in Persia (Iran) in the mid-1800s. In Aotearoa, the Race Unity Speech Awards have been one way in which the New Zealand Bahá'í community has contributed towards achieving this goal – by promoting, supporting and encouraging racial harmony in Aotearoa New Zealand.





Held in support of Race Relations Day (21 March), the Speech Awards have provided senior high school students with an opportunity to research and think deeply about the state of race relations in this country, to express their views publicly, and to learn from each other. The Awards have repeatedly shown that they have a significant impact on many participants, especially as these young people move away from high school and into further study or employment.

Each year, students have been given a specific theme, a whakataukī (Māori proverb), a quote from the Bahá'í writings, and a few questions which they must consider when preparing and presenting their speeches. Speeches are delivered in either Māori or English and are usually seven to eight minutes in length.

The Awards were first held in the greater Auckland area in March 2001. Over the next six years, the Awards spread across the nation and were most recently held in nearly every region in the country, from Northland to Otago. The most eloquent and effective speakers in each region have been sponsored to attend the national semi-finals and final in Auckland. Speakers in the national final have

received awards for specific qualities and types of excellence – delivery, impact, insight, advocacy, vision, and use of te reo Māori. An overall award is also presented to the speaker who is recognized as the national champion for having delivered the most impactful speech of the year.

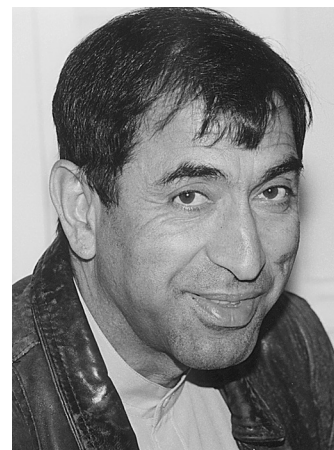
Speaking for Unity tells the story of 21 years of the Race Unity Speech Awards. In these pages you will find profiles of all 21 national champions – each one an exemplar of the power of young people to advance social change. You will find stories of how these inspiring young people have impacted society, both through their insightful speeches and through their ongoing paths of service, work and study. You will learn more about the people and organisations who have supported the Speech Awards and enabled young people's voices to be heard. You can also read the views that have been shared in recent years by a much wider pool of young people through their participation in Race Unity Hui – gatherings that have enabled individuals of all backgrounds and abilities to contribute to the national discourse on race relations.

**The major theme across all these stories is this:
Young people have a unique and powerful role
to play in the work of eradicating racism and
building true unity.**

THE BEGINNING

THE HEDI MOANI MEMORIAL SPEECH AWARDS

In 1997, New Zealand media gave extensive coverage to a series of nasty, racially motivated incidents aimed at non-Europeans: an attack on a Somali man in Christchurch, an incident in Wellington involving the verbal assault of a Māori woman, and the emergence of a neo-Nazi group in Auckland.



Hedi Moani, an Auckland Bahá'í, was deeply concerned about these incidents and wanted to highlight the need for change. An Iranian by birth, Hedi had lived in New Zealand for some 16 years, having earlier resided in other parts of the world, including the United States, Australia and the Pacific. Wherever he was, Hedi became involved with the indigenous peoples, for whom he had a great affinity and deep affection. In New Zealand, Hedi developed a special relationship with the people of Ratana Pa.

After the racially motivated attacks, Hedi suggested an anti-racism march up Queen Street in Auckland. Instead, after consultations with the New Zealand Race Relations Office, it was decided to hold a 'unity in diversity rally' in Aotea Square, Auckland. Hedi and another Bahá'í worked alongside Race Relations Office staff to organise the rally which took place on Human Rights Day (10 December) 1997. There were several speakers, including Hedi and Race Relations Conciliator Dr Rajen Prasad, as well as multi-cultural entertainment. Footage of the rally was shown on the six o'clock television news that night.

The success of the rally resulted in discussions with the Race Relations Office about the possibility of establishing a Race Unity Day in New Zealand – an idea that became a reality in 1999. The date chosen was 21 March – a date that was already on the United Nations calendar as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In October 2002, Race Unity Day was renamed Race Relations Day. It is now an annual event which involves schools, local councils, businesses, ethnic communities, and a variety of other organisations.

Hedi was tragically killed in October 1998, just a few months before the first Race Unity Day was

commemorated in this country. His faith as a Bahá'í was a factor in the assault that led to his death. The Hedi Moani Memorial Speech Awards were established in his memory, and as a contribution to eliminating prejudice and bringing about unity. The Awards brought together three things that were dear to Hedi's heart: fostering positive race relations, oratory, and youth.

In 2005, the Speech Awards were renamed and have subsequently been known as the New Zealand Race Unity Speech Awards.

The growing influence of the Awards confirmed that Hedi's example motivated many young New Zealanders to speak out against prejudice and to strive for unity; indeed, participants in the Speech Awards have often referred to him in their speeches.



2001 National Champion

YEA JI SOHN

When Yea Ji Sohn entered the Race Unity Speech Awards (then known as the Hedi Moani Memorial Speech Awards) as a Year 11 student at Rangitoto College, she didn't realise that it would have such an impact on her future outlook on life.



When Yea Ji was asked about her 2001 speech, she shared that:

The process of writing and preparing my speech raised many questions for me, which remain highly relevant to this day: How can diversity be accepted and celebrated? How can such a diverse population still achieve social cohesion? Can we all be united, and feel a sense of belonging, in the fact that we are all New Zealanders? These questions have shaped the way I think about race, culture, and community.

Participating in events like the Speech Awards in my youth taught me the value and importance of dialogue and active participation...

One key thing I took away is the value of diversity. Throughout my studies and in my professional life, I have sought, and continue to seek, opportunities where I know I will be exposed to people from many different walks of life. Having different perspectives around challenges me to think beyond the confines of my own experience. I think it leads to better decision-making, and just generally makes life more interesting.

It is clear from Yea Ji's speech that she was beginning to unpack some of these questions through her lived experience with racism:

When racism is allowed to go unchecked it hurts people. It hurts the individual who is the target of racist action. It hurts their family and friends, and it also hurts the community – our society as a whole. It creates division and bitterness, and we have enough examples in history, and currently overseas, to know what can happen when people focus on hate and division. I think we need to talk about how racism hurts.

...Racism is the feelings you feel inside when you know it's wrong, when you know it isn't necessary, when you feel inferior, when you lose that self-confident part of you. If there is no racial prejudice in New Zealand, how is it possible that I felt what I felt at primary school?

Yea Ji reflected on taking part in the Speech Awards and expressed that it was a valuable opportunity to think about what it meant to be a member of a multicultural, multiethnic community and to put her personal experiences of racism into perspective for herself.

After graduating from university with a law degree, Yea Ji practised corporate law for several years in both New Zealand and Asia. Now an in-house lawyer advising high-growth start-ups and tech companies as legal counsel, she enjoys working on the new legal

and regulatory challenges that technology brings to the fore.

Reflecting on her journey, Yea Ji said:

I remain passionate about, and committed to, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Throughout the years of my working life, it has been great to see an increasing acceptance by people in the belief that diversity is a positive thing.



THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The relationship between the Bahá'í community and the Human Rights Commission began in 1997 when representatives of the Bahá'í community approached Dr Rajen Prasad, the Race Relations Conciliator at the Commission. This relationship was established following a series of racist incidents directed towards non-white New Zealanders. The meetings that followed resulted in the decision to hold a 'unity in diversity' rally in Aotea Square, Auckland.

The rally was followed by further discussions with Dr Prasad and Bahá'í representatives which led to the establishment of Race Relations Day in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Following the death of Hedi Moani, the Bahá'í community initiated the Hedi Moani Memorial Speech Awards. Bahá'í representatives again approached the Human Rights Commission, seeking their support for this new initiative. This support was readily given and has never wavered.

The support of the Human Rights Commission was especially important in the early days of the Speech Awards as it provided a significant degree of credibility to the new initiative which helped schools to feel comfortable about encouraging their students to participate.

Over the years, the Commission has supplied judges for regional and national levels of the competition, provided financial support, helped with promotion, and offered wonderful opportunities for students to deliver their speeches to other audiences – including at conferences and multi-cultural events. The Commission has also been instrumental in strengthening the presence of the Speech Awards in the news and social media.

In reciprocation, the Bahá'í community has supported many initiatives of the Human Rights Commission, particularly in the areas of interfaith and race relations. The relationship which began between the two organisations in 1997 continues to be one of mutual respect and support. It has been greatly valued and appreciated by the New Zealand Bahá'í community, which has worked closely and successfully with the five Race Relations Commissioners who have served since 1997.

2002 National Champion

ROXANNE PILLAY

Growing up in South Africa as a member of a racial minority, Roxanne Pillay was always aware of racial differences. Roxanne sees race as a social construct, and believes that superficial differences do not alter the fact that there is “one human family” from a scientific perspective.



This thinking is what shone through in 2002 when Roxanne became National Champion of the Hedi Moani Memorial Speech Awards. Written as a 16-year-old at Auckland’s Pakuranga College, Roxanne’s speech “One human family – from scientific reality to everyday life” provided a uniquely academic approach to race relations:

Science has categorically distinguished us from any other organism on Earth.

We are not fungi, feeding off dead material, because they belong to the Fungi Kingdom and we belong to the Animalia Kingdom. We are not blood-sucking mosquitoes. Their phylum is Arthropoda and ours is Chordata.

We are not poisonous spiders as they come under the class of Arachnida and we come under the class of Mammalia. We are not chimpanzees because they are the Pan troglodytes whereas we are the Homo sapiens. This is the scientific evidence that proves we, the human race, belong to One Human Family.

Most of our reality stems from science because it is backed up by hard evidence, yet with all its evidence sadly science fails the reality when it comes to claiming you, and I, as One.

We have borders and boundaries, limits and restrictions, rich and poor, love and hate, superior and inferior, mine and yours, racial prejudices.

Yet science says we are one. One!!! We’re as one as the shards flying off a shattered glass...

What victories have we gained from our warheads of yellow, brown, black and white? No victories here! All of human kind suffers the consequences of our very own jaundiced minds – prejudices that cast our innocence down dark, damp, bottomless pits.

It is the victims who go down in this battle, bound to the chains of prejudice, never to discover their full potential. Folks, there are too many of us going to our graves with our music still playing inside. This should never be!

When reflecting on her speech in 2021, Roxanne thought that what she spoke about was still relevant to our current state of affairs. She said:

Overcoming racism begins with ourselves and your own mindset and I think it takes a lot of work to modify your own implicit forms of prejudice. But if we can provide young people with not only the desire, but also the conviction to do so at an early age, we’re

setting our society up for success in the future.

Roxanne currently works as a Change Manager based in Singapore and believes that:

Speaking openly about race relations, especially at a young age, and being recognised and celebrated for it has given me the confidence to promote positive race relations in all my interactions.





2003 National Champion

XAVIER BLACK

At the 10th Anniversary Celebrations, 2003 National Champion Xavier Black (Ngāti Whātua) offered her gratitude to the New Zealand Race Unity Speech Awards.

At the 10th Anniversary Celebrations, 2003 National Champion Xavier Black (Ngāti Whātua) offered her gratitude to the New Zealand Race Unity Speech Awards:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reflect on my own perspective of racism and difference and the meaning of racial harmony.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and consolidate my own values, ideologies and beliefs.

Thank you for recognising the wisdom of youth and not only listening but truly hearing our voices.

Since her participation in the Race Unity Speech Awards, Xavier has built a diverse and impressive career, combining public sector, non-profit, academic and private sector roles. She is dedicated to addressing the ills of poverty and to building policies and programmes that address major inequities for whanau, saying:

More Indigenous people experience extreme poverty than non-Indigenous people across the globe. While this issue is complex and without a clear solution, exercising agency has been identified as a potential vehicle to address the ills of poverty and colonisation.

As a result

Exercising agency, empowerment and engagement has been the focus of much of my career. I will continue to explore this through my PhD.

Xavier is currently working towards her PhD at the Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford).

Since she was in high school, Xavier has spoken with a clear commitment to connectedness. Here is an excerpt of her speech from 2003:

We can have a vision of racial harmony but this vision will need to be built on solid foundations. What will be our foundations? How can we do this?...

Racial harmony starts with individuals. It starts not in societies and communities. It starts with understanding ourselves. So secondly reflect on yourself, face your fears, and develop your sense of belonging, before you even begin to look upon somebody else...

She now reflects on her speech:

I think my speech had the sparkle of naivety, that you get from being a 16-year-old. While I conceptually understood there to be issues in New Zealand, I didn't appreciate the degree to which our social structures embed and reinforced inequality, and

the degree to which conscious decisions are made today which create disadvantage. As I have continued my career in social impact, I have realised how hard it is to drastically and irreversibly shift these structures. It requires an intergenerational focus, grit, and a little bit of fight.

She believes deeply in the role of the young and their loud voice shaping the future of equity in Aotearoa.

The depth of information available and the awareness that today's young people have on issues of equity could and should be transformational. As this, and future generations grow into positions of social and economic leadership, I believe they will seismically shift the landscape in Aotearoa.



2004 National Champion

RIDDHI GUPTA

In 2004, Riddhi Gupta was a Year 12 student at Auckland's Pakuranga College. In an email to the Speech Awards organiser, 16-year-old Riddhi outlined why she entered the Race Unity Speech Awards and the impact of the speeches.



I entered the Hedi Moani competition because it was challenging and unlike other topics, it forced the speaker to address issues which were relevant to today's society. I thoroughly enjoyed myself, the casual friendly atmosphere, and made some very good friends with the other contestants. I thought that all of the speeches (from the start of the regional heats) were powerful, but most of all, all speeches "asked" the right questions... questions that made the audience think and feel and ponder.

Riddhi's speech was powerful and unapologetically confronting. She spoke of becoming a Kiwi three years prior to her participation in the Speech Awards:

I became a Kiwi in July 2001. What a day that was! In a liberating moment, I was legally accepted into a society which was growing and evolving. I was grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to it. What I did not expect to see, even though the government was nurturing all members of our society, was a physical division among the cultures: Asians dominating east-Auckland suburbs; Māori, Polynesians, and Indians filling the South; and Europeans settling over the Harbour Bridge. Was this the multi-cultural society the government was trying to achieve? No, definitely not. What went wrong?

In her speech, Riddhi shared that:

The balance between unity and expression of unique identities is aided but not achieved by discriminating in favour of minority groups. There is no point in having protected sub-populations in New Zealand. Sub-populations must integrate and learn from each other, while exposing their own identity. We have to cater for all types of minorities in our country, until the change in our hearts and in our attitudes will allow us to become whole.

Regardless of our attitudes, it will be vital, crucial, for us to preserve heritage and culture in a swiftly merging world. New Zealand is lucky, because it has the opportunity to become diverse. Our country is young. Let its youth not be wasted because of our attitudes...

Following her participation in the Speech Awards, Riddhi built a diverse and impressive career in the fields of mathematics, physics and consultancy. In 2019, she reflected on diversity in her field in an interview with Soapbox Science.

Often diversity issues force us to absorb data that we might not want to believe. I have found that individual anecdotes and stories have important information that can help us to design better policies and institutions. While working on technical

collaborations with people from minority backgrounds, it's quite easy to see how my PhD experience is substantially different to theirs, under the close-knit apprenticeship model of academia.

In 2020, Riddhi achieved her Doctor of Philosophy in Physics. She described her work as follows:

My work used insights from control engineering, Bayesian reasoning, and machine learning to theoretically design hardware agnostic algorithms to improve the performance of quantum devices in realistic operating environments.



AT THE FOREFRONT BUILDING RACE UNITY AND EQUITY

The national champions are exceptional, but there are also many other young people who have participated in the Speech Awards and gone on to work for the betterment of Aotearoa. A few are highlighted below who exemplify the excellence and diversity of their contributions to society.

KELSEY BROWNE

In 2009, Kelsey Browne was a national finalist in the Race Unity Speech Awards. Five years later, Kelsey was volunteering at a youth care and protection residence while studying at Otago University when a 17-year-old resident told her to “never stop hearing and never stop helping”.

Kelsey has taken that advice to heart, carving out an impressive career in the public sector as an advocate for the interests and wellbeing of young people. In 2017, she led a project that sought the views of more than 1500 children and youth on their experience of education. The resulting report, “Education Matters to Me”, was an important contribution in the discourse on racism in the education system, bringing to light the explicit and implicit racism that young people received from both peers and teachers.

Kelsey continues to lead large-scale engagements and key reports in her role as Principal Advisor (Child and Youth Participation) at the Office of the Children’s Commissioner.

MICHELLE HUANG

Michelle Huang took part in the 2012 Speech Awards, reaching the national finals. Since then, she has built a varied career as a researcher, educator, app developer, activist, and diversity and inclusion consultant.

Michelle’s studies and career have taken her to New York, Shanghai, Sydney and Auckland, giving her a global perspective on the issues facing Aotearoa. Michelle stands out for her initiative, determination and courage – she not only speaks her mind but makes space for others to be heard and have influence.

Michelle has served as a member of the coordination team for the Auckland Race Unity Speech Awards and as a judge at the national final of the Speech Awards. In 2021, Michelle led a team of Race Unity Speech Awards alumni to found Multiethnic Young Leaders New Zealand (MYLN), Aotearoa’s fastest-growing network of ethnically diverse young leaders. Michelle currently serves as the chair of MYLN and is a member of the Ethnic Communities Development Fund Panel. She was also named on the “Top Diverse Board-Ready Directors” list.

YESHE DAWA

Yeshe Dawa was a national finalist in the 2004 Race Unity Speech Awards. She later gained a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Classical Studies at Otago University and then worked in sales and communications in the NZ fashion sector. In 2014 she founded The Midnight Baker, an award-winning bakery and café on Dominion Road, Auckland.

Yeshe is closely involved in the affairs of her wider community. A 2019 article in Metro Magazine described Yeshe as a young leader who values listening and equity:

I know this sounds really sappy, but I hate seeing people suffer... If I could get into a position where I had a little bit of power over something then I would want to make a system equitable for people. I’m passionate about helping people, and having an effect greater than yourself. I imagine it’s like ripples in a pool, reverberating outwards.

In 2021 Yeshe was named as one of the “Top Diverse Board-Ready Directors” by the Ministry of Ethnic Communities and the Superdiversity Institute. Yeshe is also a member of Multiethnic Young Leaders NZ, Authenticity Aotearoa, and a business mentor at Iti Rearea.

2005 National Champion

GEORGINA ROOD

Georgina Rood found a community of people who shared her thinking when she entered the Race Unity Speech Awards.



I found it inspiring... It gave me added confidence in myself and gave me an opportunity to meet so many interesting people and hear their ideas. I took everything from the experience on board and took it forward with me.

[The Speech Awards] made me realise that I could, and gave me the confidence to, contribute to discussions on race and politics... [they] exposed me to other people with other ideas, and taught me that nobody (including me!) has all, or even most, of the answers. Everybody's lived experience is different, and pooling our ideas and experience is the key to success....

I've always been fascinated by people and their relationships with each other.

Georgina's fascination and philosophical understanding of humanity is clear in the insightful speech she made as a Year 13 student from Sacred Heart College in Wellington:

"The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." For, despite our cultural differences, loyalties, disputes, even wars, more binds mankind than divides us. We all are capable of laughing, crying, celebrating and grieving. Our cultural and racial characteristics just make us more interesting.

Celebrating those differences as a force for unity and common good rather than using them as a source of division, is the challenge we face, and have always faced.

We recently asked Georgina about the current relevance of her speech, and she had this to say:

I think it is still relevant but doesn't tell the whole picture... If I were to add to it now, I would focus on what is stopping people from being able to understand each other and form meaningful relationships across divides... There are inherent flaws in our system which need to be addressed at the highest level so that people have the right environment and tools to make change on an individual level. None of us is perfect, and neither is any human system. We should be constantly striving to improve our system to make it fairer and more effective.

From a young age, Georgina knew that she wanted to go into law. After completing her law degree, she practised in the public sectors across New Zealand, England and in the Cook Islands where she took a role as Senior Crown Counsel.

Today, Georgina takes a critical view of adults who place too much responsibility on young people to solve the problems facing society:

It's easy to say that young people are the ones who are the leaders of the future and invest all of our hope for change in them. While true to a certain extent, I think that this viewpoint tends to shift responsibility away from today's leaders and on to youth to fix what are complex and systemic injustices... We should be putting the pressure on today's leaders to ensure change happens as soon as possible. Systemic and meaningful change requires all generations, all races, all genders – all people – to take responsibility and step up now.



NATIONAL HUI

As the Speech Awards continued to expand in the early years, a pattern of activity began to emerge. Regional champions from around the country would begin arriving in Auckland to participate in the national semi-finals one night, and the national final the following night.

For the first year or two, the day between was used as an opportunity for students to socialise with each other or to visit an Auckland landmark. In 2005 a Race Unity Hui was initiated, to run immediately before the national final of the Speech Awards.

Workshops were offered by the Human Rights Commission, New Zealand Police, the Office of Ethnic Communities (now a Ministry) and others, and feedback from students was overwhelmingly supportive. Attendance at the Hui remained limited to the national semi-finalists in the Speech Awards and a few of their supporters.

In 2016, a fresh approach to the Race Unity Hui was taken, with the objective of developing it into a space where youth could contribute to the national discourse on race relations. Since then, each year has seen the Hui grow in attendance, significance and influence. Featured speakers have included academic and activist Dr Arama Rata; human rights advocate Rez Gardi; and journalist, poet and playwright Lynda Chanwai-Earle.

Artistic workshops have given participants a chance to express their thoughts and ideas creatively. Partnerships with Multicultural New Zealand, Ara Taiohi and the NZ National Commission for UNESCO have broadened the scope and reach of the Hui. Members of Parliament and other influential individuals have attended the Hui to listen to the voices of youth.

Most significantly, the views shared by young people at the Hui were amplified and projected into the national discourse through the Race Unity Statement – a written document synthesising the key insights shared at Race Unity Hui. You can read extracts from the published Race Unity Statements on pages 36 (2018), and 38 (2019).

A further exciting development has been the emergence of local Race Unity Hui around the country, which have allowed a wider range of young people to participate in a uniquely constructive discussion on race relations. These are highlighted on page 41.



2006 National Champion

SASHIKA SAMARANAYAKA

Sashika Samaranayaka has always had a positive view on race relations, and her participation in the Speech Awards helped her realise that these views can be put into action, and action can be put into policy.



At seven years old, Sashika migrated with her family to New Zealand where she was able to overcome the barriers of culture and language with the support of her young peers. In her speech, she recalled that she knew “very little English but [was] enrolled into a school straight away.” As a Year 13 student at Otago Girls’ High School, Sashika shared:

I have come a long way from where I began and I have no one to thank but the people in that classroom who provided me with a warm and welcoming environment that I needed to help me get back on my feet...

To overcome racial tensions, people must bring the classroom environment that I experienced OUT into the SOCIETY. OUT of the school gates, into the community, INTO the nation, and INTO the world. Make the MICROCOSM the MACROCOSM.

When she presented her speech in 2006, Sashika spoke with her positive outlook, and asked us to:

Be proud of New Zealand’s multiculturalism and where it’s taking us.

Fifteen years on from her presentation, Sashika said that:

We are doing great in regards to race relations in New Zealand; however, there is always room

for improvement. We need to remember how far ahead we are in terms of race relations compared to most countries, but we also need to change with the times and evolve as a nation.

When asked about how we might see these positive changes, Sashika explained:

Young people are the future, so... change starts with them. The younger generation is impressionable, which has its advantages and disadvantages. We need to ensure we bring race relations to the forefront of education. It is in our nature to be fearful of the unknown; therefore, we need to encourage participation, discussion and interaction.

Now a doctor working in one of New Zealand’s District Health Boards, she expressed her understanding about how race, culture and religion play a significant role in the practice of medicine. Sashika stated that:

Whanaungatanga and culturally acceptable ways of treatment need to be at the forefront of management, especially in certain areas such as palliative care and birthing.

When asked about her chosen career path, Sashika responded that:

It is incredibly rewarding working with people and helping them during their toughest times... You learn that everyone is different, so being flexible and open-minded will get you far. I am looking forward to continuing to work with people and seeing where our health system goes.





2007 National Champion

BRIDGET SCANLAN

The Race Unity Speech Awards were Bridget Scanlan's early introduction to advocacy.

Now, she states that "advocacy is something I continue to develop in myself, and I feel it's a lifelong lesson."

When Bridget entered the Speech Awards to share her views on "The Oneness of Humanity", many of her peers couldn't understand why she was taking part. She recalls that:

Before the Awards, race relations weren't really talked about in my school and social circles... it wasn't an issue on their radar.

Bridget said that her participation in the Awards sparked her journey to advocate for issues close to her. After being diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at 20, she said that:

A lot of stigma clouded both the experience and conversation about diabetes. It prompted me to develop KYT (Keeping You Together) – a start-up focused on making contemporary, designed accessories for life with diabetes. Continuing my practice of advocacy, I try to open positive conversations about diabetes wherever I can and keep them going so that others feel able to take part.

Perhaps Bridget's journey towards advocacy began long before she was even a high school student. In her speech, she shared the beautiful story behind her full name, Bridget Whina Scanlan:

In 1990 a girl was born; her parents wrote to Dame Whina [Cooper], to share their joy and to seek her

blessing on a baby named in her honour, an expression of hope on the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Waitangi. They wrote:

This year gives our country a rare and fragile space in which to make peace with our past and to set our face towards a more just and tolerant future. Our daughter has been born in 1990 which, in a way, is a time for our country to be born again. She will grow up at a time when New Zealanders are learning a new way of living together. To remind Bridget of this, we have chosen to name her after you, Dame Whina; we hope for her some of your aroha, your wairua, your realism and your wisdom.

Bridget believes the content of her speech is still relevant 15 years later:

My speech talked about the oneness of humanity... the challenges to "oneness" that I talked about in 2007 were pretty much the same as today...

I counterbalanced the challenges... of anger, intolerance, intergenerational trauma, unwillingness to understand each other... with a symbol of Dame Whina Cooper taking her first step in the 1975 Māori Land March. Dame Whina blessed me with her namesake as my middle name...

Her embrace of my family was a gesture of courage, tolerance, reconciliation and beauty. That gesture is just as relevant now, and it's our best defence in the face of division.

Bridget now works in organisational development and looks after KYT in her spare time. She said:

I like to work in design spaces and spend time trying to come up with clever solutions that focus on the needs of people.



2008 National Champion

CHARON MASEKA

Charon Maseka found a place to speak her mind and learn from others when she entered the Race Unity Speech Awards. She realised there were others like herself who had opened their minds to learning about the many aspects of diversity.



Charon said that:

The Race Unity Speech Awards felt like a safe space to learn more about diversity and talk freely about it, without judgment.

Having come from South Africa, Charon wanted to share her experience of growing up in the more multicultural society of Aotearoa, New Zealand. In her speech, she shared her lived experience in a unique address to "Racial Harassment".

Dear Racial Harassment,

I am writing this letter to inform you that our relationship is officially done. You are no longer a citizen of my heart. For too long I have battled in my mind your voice versus humanity. You were everywhere with me, at the workshop, school, church, the hotel and even at the ballot box. What a deception!! You made me hate colour, so that I could spread your violence. You lived deep, deep, deep within me so that only ethnicity would rule...

Whether you have been in here three weeks, three months or three years, life around you has been afflicted by the colour line. I myself am a multifaceted girl full of heritage, but despite any talent, skill or positive personality feature I may have, others seem only to care about, and

continually remind me at the end of the day that, above all, I am a person of colour...

When she reflected on this speech 13 years later, she felt that she wouldn't change a thing. Charon explained that the Speech Awards enabled her to realise that there were others who had similar experiences to her own. In her own words:

I gained more confidence in myself and the world around me... I have become an ambassador of positive race relations [and] have since joined other causes for female empowerment and youth empowerment in my society. I am more accommodating and welcoming of people with different accents and races – I ask more about their cultures and way of life to understand a person better...

When asked about the role of young people in improving race relations, Charon said that:

When youth are given opportunities for exposure to people and environments that are different from what they are used to, new thought leadership is created... Their role is to be the change that they want to see, by actively living and participating in behaviours and initiatives that show positive race relations as well as diversity and inclusion.

Charon has been able to take these skills into the professional world. After finishing her high school education in New Zealand, she moved back to South Africa to pursue studies in engineering. She has since worked in the mining and marketing industries, and said that her love for solving problems and understanding the value chain of different business operations fuels her passion for her career.



NEW ZEALAND POLICE

In March 2005 Superintendent (then Constable) Rakesh Naidoo was serving the New Zealand Police as the Ethnic Community's Relations Officer when he was invited to join the judging panel of the North Canterbury sector of the Race Unity Speech Awards.

This turned out to be the unexpected beginning of a long and valuable relationship between the Race Unity Speech Awards and the New Zealand Police. Rakesh was so impressed by the speeches he heard that evening that he offered to try and organise some support for the Speech Awards. He hoped to secure some small financial support for the regional competition, and possibly some further funding for the national level.

Shortly after serving on the North Canterbury judging panel, Rakesh was promoted to Sergeant and transferred to Wellington where, with the support of Deputy Commissioner (then Superintendent) Wallace Haumaha he continued his efforts to secure support.

In February 2008, his efforts culminated in the signing of a formal sponsorship agreement. A photograph taken at the time shows Deputy Commissioner Haumaha and a representative of the Bahá'í community signing an agreement which guaranteed \$10,000 per year for the next five years to support the Speech Awards at both the regional and national levels. This was an unexpected result warmly welcomed by the Speech Awards team.

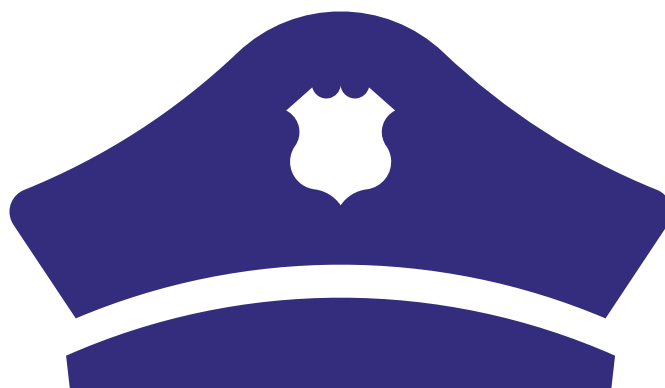
This sponsorship paid for regional champions to travel to Auckland to participate in the national levels

of the competition, as well as for shields for the regional and national champions, prize money and venue hire where necessary. The funding also enabled some of the regional competitions to continue year after year, when they might otherwise have struggled.

Even after the five-year agreement came to an end the financial support continued. At the date of writing, the NZ Police have been the principal sponsors of the Speech Awards for 15 years.

Police also provided judges for every regional competition around the country – using this as an opportunity to expose their officers to the views of young people about race relations in Aotearoa. Deputy Commissioner Haumaha has been Chief Judge at the national finals since 2009. Police have helped promote the Speech Awards through their website and by other means; provided opportunities for outstanding young speakers to share their speeches at other events; and lent considerable prestige and mana to the kaupapa.

The Race Unity Speech Awards team is profoundly grateful to NZ Police for their ongoing support and partnership, in all its aspects, and looks forward to continuing the relationship in the years ahead.



2009 National Champion

RAYHAN LANGDANA

Rayhan Langdana was a Year 11 student at Wellington College when he became the National Champion of the Race Unity Speech Awards. Now working as a lawyer in Auckland, Rayhan has provided some of his personal reflections on his participation over a decade ago:



As a first-generation immigrant, I had thought about race relations on some level long before I entered the Race Unity Speech Awards in 2009. I had experienced being “othered” (whether by deliberate or inadvertent actions) and was on a journey to find my tūrangawaewae – my place to stand – in Aotearoa. Even though I was, on some level, aware that “race relations” affected me (as a young person of colour), entering the Speech Awards as a Year 11 student was a turning point. I realised that my experiences gave me a perspective that others didn’t have. Writing my speech on why “good neighbours come from all races and cultures” made me realise that I had a role to play in creating an interwoven, multiethnic society. The realisation that I could educate others about issues relating to race relations, and that I didn’t need to be the oldest person in the room to do so, has shaped me profoundly.

Until I entered the Speech Awards, heavy topics like race relations seemed to be for adults to discuss while the kids played. Entering the competition made me realise that I could be part of that conversation, and that my perspectives as a young person could be particularly valuable. This was an empowering

realisation. More than anything else, competitions like the Race Unity Speech Awards give young people the chance to speak, and to be heard. Once you realise your voice matters, you are more willing to be part of the dialogue going forward. In the 12 years since I competed in the Speech Awards, I have maintained my involvement with several initiatives and organisations that focus on race relations and equality. The Speech Awards were my introduction to activism, and I have tried to keep that going as I have moved through my life.

In a literal sense, winning the Speech Awards gave me numerous opportunities to contribute to discussions about race relations and other social issues. It gave me credibility and led to several invitations to speak at events. At these events, I was asked to give a young person’s perspective on issues... To be given the opportunity to find, and develop, my voice as a young person is a gift for which I remain grateful. These experiences gave me the confidence to put my hand up whenever opportunities to contribute to such discussions arose.

When asked about his profession, Rayhan said:

A legal career struck me as the clearest way to marry my interests in advocacy with the skills required to make change. I also enjoy the intellectual challenge of working on legal disputes that span a wide range of subject-matters and industries and I enjoy the collegiality of the legal profession.





2010 National Champion

APERAHAMA HURIHANGANUI

In 2010, Aperahama Hurihanganui (Te Arawa, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Ira, Rangitāne o Wairarapa me Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa) became the only National Champion to have delivered his speech in te reo Māori – a prestigious achievement.

Speaking of his experience, he said:

It was insightful and inspiring to listen to the other contestants share their perspectives... the Speech Awards was the trigger that encouraged me to gain awareness and to think more critically about race relations issues, especially here in Aotearoa.

This experience also influenced his career path, as Aperahama is now working as a consultant for:

a cultural competency business that provides professional education, training and advice in a range of areas including anti-racism, cultural intelligence, decolonisation, and engaging effectively with Māori.

Aperahama was 17 when he participated in the Speech Awards, and he reflects that:

I can honestly say that race wasn't an issue I had engaged with properly, except when I had experienced racism. The Speech Awards influenced me to learn more and to do more in respect of race issues, especially in regards to Māori. I was fortunate to be accepted into law school which provided me further opportunities to learn about race in the context of the law, including the history of Aotearoa and colonisation..."

Eleven years on, Aperahama believes that his speech is still relevant:

My speech was all about diversity in the human family and it appears that some people in Aotearoa are very much opposed to the idea of recognising and celebrating ethnic and indigenous peoples/ cultures, including Māori and our rights. For example, opposition to co-governance arrangements with Māori, or even the use of the term "Aotearoa". I wouldn't add anything to my speech as I believe the content and themes are still relevant today.

Aperahama realises that as a young person, having exposure to topics such as race relations is important to understanding the kaupapa:

I think for young people it's all about building a knowledge base and an understanding earlier rather than later... If young people at least learn about race relations, then hopefully that translates into positive actions and behaviours in their futures when it comes to building relationships and interacting with other people of different racial backgrounds.

He says he chose his career path due to the "unacceptable and unavoidable" reality that:

Māori are over-represented in most (if not all) negative social statistics... Systemic racism contributes to these poor statistics, so I am driven to create meaningful change by doing my part to eliminate racism so that Māori can achieve more equitable outcomes.



SPECIAL AWARDS

SPONSORS



TOHU RAUKURA Ā-MOTU – NEW ZEALAND POLICE NATIONAL CHAMPION'S AWARD



BAHA'I FAITH NEW ZEALAND

TOHU MĀRAMATANGA – BAHAI COMMUNITY AWARD FOR INSIGHT



Hedi Moani Charitable Trust

TOHU AUMANGEA – HEDI MOANI MEMORIAL AWARD FOR ADVOCACY



Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission

TOHU EKE PANUKU – HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AWARD FOR IMPACT



MANUKAU INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



Te Pūkenga

TOHU MANAAKITANGA – MANUKAU INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AWARD FOR MANAAKITANGA

From 2019 the Manukau Institute of Technology has provided considerable support by providing the beautiful Ngā Kete Wānanga Marae for the weekend over which the national semi-finals and final, and the National Hui are held.



TOHU AUAHATANGA – SPEECH NZ AWARD FOR DELIVERY

In 2015, the organisers of the Race Unity Speech Awards approached the Rotorua Multicultural Council with a request to support the Rotorua heat of the Awards the following year. The President of the Multicultural Council, Dr Margriet Theron, who was also a Trustee of Speech New Zealand, suggested that Speech NZ should also support the Speech Awards at the national level. This was immediately and warmly accepted by both organisations. Since then, Speech NZ has undertaken a great deal of work to publicise the Speech Awards, including by contacting Speech and Drama teachers around New Zealand. In 2019, Margriet suggested an additional award, sponsored by Speech NZ, which ultimately resulted in several other awards also being added for national finalists. In later years, Speech NZ members have provided support for national semi-finalists by offering feedback and coaching before they presented their speeches at the nationals.



TE TAURA WHIRI I TE REO MĀORI

MĀORI LANGUAGE COMMISSION

TOHU MANUKURA I TE REO – MĀORI LANGUAGE COMMISSION AWARD FOR TE REO MĀORI

From the start of the Speech Awards in 2001, there has been active encouragement of students to deliver all or part of their speech in te Reo Māori. Over the past few years Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori has sponsored Tohu Manukura i te Reo – Māori Language Commission Award for te Reo Māori and promoted the use of te Reo in speeches.

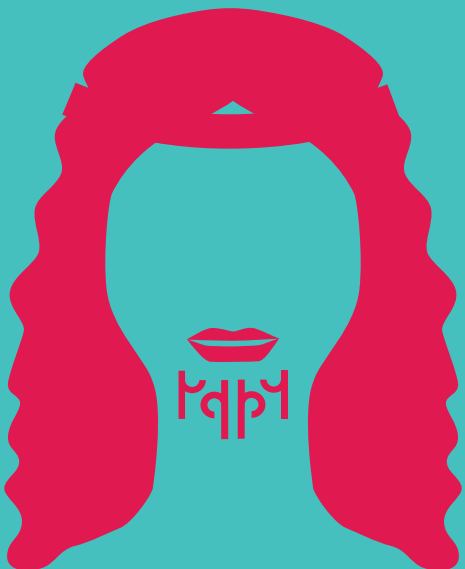
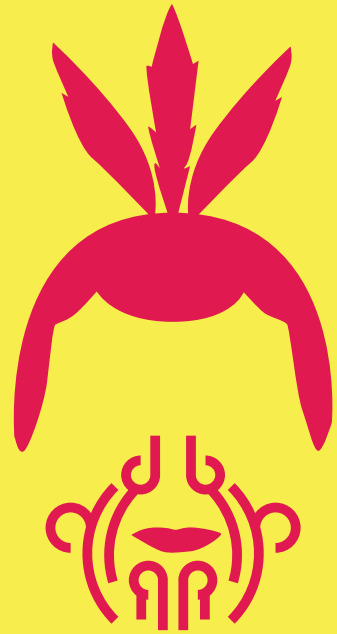
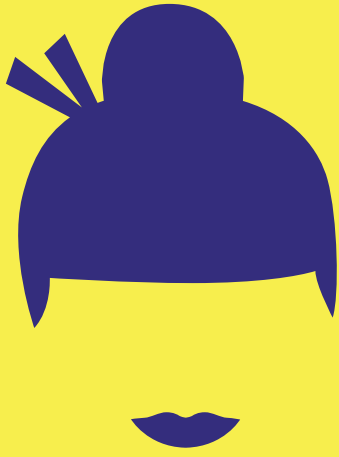


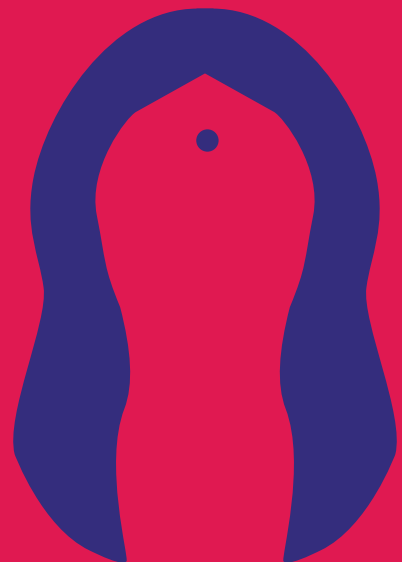
Ministry for Ethnic Communities Te Tari Mātawaka

TOHU WHETUMATARAU – MINISTRY FOR ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AWARD FOR VISION

The Speech Awards' relationship with the Office of Ethnic Communities (OEC), now the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, began in 2009 when the Human Rights Commission advised that OEC had also initiated a speech competition, which was running at a similar time to the Race Unity Speech Awards. Some rapid communication resulted in a decision to undertake a joint venture: they would run their competition with the same subject and criteria as the Race Unity Speech Awards, and their selected speakers would then join the Race Unity speakers for the national semi-finals. As it transpired, the OEC speech award did not proceed, but this marked the beginning of something wonderful.

The (then) Director of OEC, Mervin Singham, was fully supportive of both the Speech Awards and Hui, and the relationship was formalised with an agreement that they would promote the two events, provide judges for the Speech Awards and workshop facilitators for the Hui. In return, their name and logo would appear on promotional material and media. From 2015, OEC also provided much appreciated financial support. This relationship was strengthened over the years through until its promotion to an independent Ministry.





RACE UNITY

IN THE MEDIA

Over the years, participants in the Race Unity Speech Awards started making their mark on the New Zealand media landscape.

One of the earlier significant developments came in 2003 when an article about the Speech Awards was published in the New Zealand Listener along with a photograph of Hedi Moani, in whose memory the Speech Awards were initiated.

That same year The Aucklander requested an interview with Xavier Black, the National Champion for 2003, whose speech was on the topic “From the head to the heart: beyond tolerance to the celebration of human diversity”.

From 2003 to 2008, National Radio broadcast live interviews and aired the speeches of national finalists and national champions. In those early years, the Human Rights Commission produced an online magazine Tirohia which regularly included articles about the Speech Awards – some of which were subsequently reprinted (with permission) by other organisations, such as the National Council of Women.

In Lower Hutt in 2006, two Hutt Valley High students entered the Speech Awards. Mava Moayyed made it through to the nationals – and subsequently became a current affairs producer and reporter on TVNZ’s current affairs show Sunday, where she worked on getting stories about race relations and other social issues onto people’s screens. Jehan Casinader didn’t make it to the finals but is well known for being the youngest ever Sunday reporter, and for telling stories about racial prejudice, injustice and ethnic diversity. Both Mava and Jehan have come back to support the Speech Awards, with Mava working behind the scenes since 2018 and performing the Master of Ceremonies role for the national final in 2022, and Jehan as Master of Ceremonies for the national final in 2021.

In 2008 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade contacted Charon Maseka – that year’s National Champion who spoke on the topic “Finding Common ground / He Rapunga Tahitanga”. The Ministry wanted

to use Charon’s image as part of a banner to promote New Zealand’s campaign for membership on the United Nations Human Rights Council. The banner was displayed in the NZ Embassy in New York. It featured a brief extract from Charon’s speech: “We are all responsible for each other’s rights” – Charon Maseka, winner of the 2008 NZ Race Unity Speech Awards.

One of the striking features from 2015 onwards was the growth in coverage of the Race Unity Speech Awards in both news and social media. In 2015 Kāpiti College student Finian Galbraith made national news with a viral video of his speech about pronouncing Māori words correctly. It was viewed by over 500,000 people online.

In 2016, Te Ariki Te Puni gained widespread coverage for his winning speech that asked whether we are living up to the words of our national anthem “God Defend New Zealand”. National coverage continued in 2017 with Tauawhi Bonilla’s speech about the “ingredients” that make a true Kiwi, and in 2018 with Hena Dugh’s speech about the need to stop feeding the wolf of racism, which was viewed over 150,000 times.

In 2019 National Champion Robbie White and standout Takunda Muzondiwa appeared on TV programmes The Project and Breakfast to talk about their speeches. Takunda’s speech went viral internationally, gaining a total of 1.5 million views on social media and a write-up in The Guardian.

Since then, TV coverage of national champions has continued, and print coverage has broadened to the point where regional champions were often the subject of multiple articles in their local papers.

The increasing impact of the Speech Awards on the media is significant. Media play a pivotal role in shaping public consciousness and public opinion, and in turn race relations. Media provide a broader forum for the Speech Awards to amplify the voices of young people.

2011 National Champion

LEPAU FEAU

When Lepau Feau reflected on his participation in the Race Unity Speech Awards, he thought about his growth as a young person.



I can honestly say that I went into the Awards as a nervous wreck. On the contrary, I left the Awards aware – aware that my experiences in confronting race relations were not isolated, aware that plenty of others had something to contribute, but also aware of the power that we had beyond being high school students participating in a speech competition...

Participating in the Speech Awards was really my first introduction into thinking deeply about race relations. Things that I would have previously let slide, became things that I had the courage to call out.

Lepau said:

Creating the speech was a journey in itself. What I thought would be a simple construction of a speech on a topic that was already predetermined, turned out to be a confrontation of experiences I hadn't fully overcome. I realised that in order to do myself and this speech justice, I'd be required to outwardly speak on times where race relations affected me personally and that was challenging to say the least. Already, in preparation for the Speech Awards, my thinking about race relations changed.

It was through the sharing of these personal experiences that Lepau found his voice. While completing his degree in Political Science and

Religious Studies at university, he sought opportunities to continue sharing his experiences as an executive member of the Pasifika Students' Council. As a result, he found himself questioning systemic biases, and he credits the Speech Awards for his confidence to do so:

Why was there a need to raise the GPA in the first place? Why do many Pacific Island graduates struggle to get their foot into the corporate door? What is the preventative solution so a reactionary fix isn't needed?

These are the race relations and social issues that I think about, amongst so many others – but the commonality is that they're so close to home... the Speech Awards affected my ability to contribute to discussions, initiatives or activities surrounding race relations and social issues that concern my people. My community.

When asked about his speech, Lepau said that:

When I was 16, I just wanted the world to be better – for people to be treated equally, fairly and justly, regardless of their skin colour.

In his speech he elaborated:

Aotearoa was once a bi-cultural nation; we have progressed to being a more multicultural and multiracial country....

These gains are only beneficial to New Zealanders if we embrace the diversities positively, by educating and embracing...

It is OK to acknowledge and address the differences, it is not OK to assume immigrants and refugees are troublemakers taking jobs away from New Zealanders and draining the education and health systems. The reality is these groups are yet to develop unity, strength and a voice to overcome these insults, let alone having to deal with day-to-day life in a new country.





2012 National Champion

RIMA SHENOY

Rima Shenoy was in her final year at Wellington’s Queen Margaret College when she became the National Champion of the Race Unity Speech Awards. In a media interview following the Speech Awards in 2012, Rima said “I enjoyed the whole event, it was a great experience, and very inspirational.”

In 2012, the topic was “A Fair Go for All”, and an extract of Rima’s speech can be found below:

One of the greatest things about living in New Zealand is the diversity. We celebrate it at Matariki, Pacifica, Chinese New Year and Diwali. But we need to do more.

It’s time for New Zealand to embrace its different cultures, recognising Kiwis can be of all colours. Acknowledging an obvious difference is not the problem – placing a negative judgment on them is...

Organisational discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of an individual because of the policies of government agencies and the like, an example being that rich neighbourhoods with higher decile schools are likely to be more “white” and have better teachers and more money for education.

What can we do about it? The New Zealand belief is to give everyone a fair go. We like to think our futures will be determined by ability and hard work, and not by race or ethnicity. So how can we give everyone a fair go? It is up to us to make a difference,

as students, teachers, parents, employers, and neighbours.

We need to explore similarities as well as celebrate differences. Parents can raise culturally aware children who appreciate differences and know superiority based on race or colour is a pigment of the imagination.

Teachers can influence children’s mental models by helping them recognise racism and making sure classroom resources are diverse. Let’s not ignore job applicants because they have unpronounceable names, and as neighbours let’s interact with everyone, not just those who look like us. There is only one human species.

Let’s make that true in our society.

Rima is now a solicitor, and has continued her passions for leadership and advocacy into her professional life. She has coached winning teams in the Asia Pacific and International Chamber of Commerce Mediation Negotiation and Alternate Dispute Resolution Competition. In 2022, she was appointed the co-manager on the advocacy team at the New Zealand

Women’s Law Journal – Te Aho Kawe Kaupapa Ture a ngā Wāhine, which promotes feminist intersectional values throughout the legal industry.



RACE UNITY AND THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT

The Race Unity Speech Awards have enjoyed support from various agencies of the NZ Government since its inception in 2001. Over the years this support has deepened and broadened, involving more government agencies, officials and parliamentarians.

As the number of government agencies and Crown entities sponsoring and supporting the Awards grew, so too did the Awards' ability to make young people heard. Staff at the NZ Police, the Human Rights Commission, and the Ministry for Ethnic Communities have served as judges, witnessing in person the passion, eloquence and determination of the young people participating in the Awards. Over the 21 years of the Awards, hundreds of government officials, police officers and other people of influence have had the chance to be moved by the voices of youth.

Support from elected officials has grown as well. In 2010 the (then) Minister of Ethnic Affairs, Hon Pansy Wong, hosted the 10th anniversary of the Speech Awards in Parliament at the instigation of Dr Rajen Prasad, former Race Relations Conciliator, who was then serving as a Member of Parliament. Dr Prasad, along with fellow MP Hon Kelvin Davis, also hosted a pre-function event for all previous national champions who were able to attend, along with a number of regional coordinators, national judges and Judge Heather Simpson, representing the NZ Bahá'í community.

In 2014, Dame Susan Devoy, then serving as Race Relations Commissioner, presented the NZ Bahá'í community with an award for its "outstanding efforts to strengthen race relations in New Zealand," saying:

Everyone knows young people are crucial to the future of our country, but the Bahá'í Race Unity Speech Competition and Conference addresses the importance of engaging young people now, not waiting until they're adults. New Zealand's Bahá'í community have demonstrated great leadership, insight and mana and we will all benefit from their commitment to the people and future of New Zealand.

From 2017, members of Parliament such as Melissa Lee (National Party) and Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan began consistently supporting the Speech Awards, showing up each year, offering messages of support and attending roundtable discussions on the kaupapa of race unity. Their longstanding interest in this area has been recognised by their parties, with Melissa serving as the Opposition Spokesperson for Ethnic Communities since and Priyanca currently serving as the Minister for Youth and Minister for Ethnic Communities. Other supportive MPs in recent years have included Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi, Hon Peeni Henare, Hon Michael Wood, Golriz Ghahraman, Chlöe Swarbrick and Naisi Chen.

In 2019, support for the Speech Awards came from the highest level – Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern wrote acknowledging how the Awards have enabled youth to have a voice in the conversation about race unity:

Over the past eighteen years, the Race Unity Speech Awards have provided young people with a space to deepen their understanding of race relations issues, and share their views on how we can all help to promote unity in Aotearoa. Following the tragic events in Christchurch, this year's Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui hold even greater significance. We need to think deeply and carefully about our country's rich and precious diversity, and what we need to do to remain an inclusive, multicultural country.

The Speech Awards' influence on government has continued to grow, especially as alumni move into careers in the public sector and related fields. This growing influence is crucial because of the role government has to play in eradicating racial prejudice and injustice, and the power that government holds to either perpetrate or confront racism.



2013 National Champion

NAOMI SIMON-KUMAR

Naomi Simon-Kumar says she has made significant strides in her personal development since participating in the Race Unity Speech Awards and that her experience affected her thinking about race relations. Eight years on, she reflected on her journey since 2013.

As an adolescent growing up in Aotearoa in the oughts, race was never especially visibilised as a subject of public discussion, much less in the classroom, despite its obvious inflections on the everyday lives of people. It felt as though race was only ever invoked in the unspoken scrutiny of communities of colour, and the deficit-focused representations we were handed that ultimately limited our opportunities for self-actualisation; that was assumed to be our lot, something many of us were cajoled into accepting though most of us were well-aware of the deceit. New Zealand's civic discourse has historically been marked by a veneer of feel-good progressivism that has had the unintended consequence of inhibiting constructive or aspirational discussions about the state of race relations in this country. We have been expected to be grateful and courteous members of the community, never to rock the boat, never to ask for more – never mind our desire to be part of the grander changemaking and leadership in the place we call home...

I recall writing my speech as a 16-year-old and feeling

surface for the first time a special kind of frustration about it all; the process of writing and articulation was an exercise that gave clarity and reason to my experiences in the world. Racism's greatest and most veritable sin, in my mind, was the fact it could drive us into a culture of collective silence, impoverishing us of our very human capacity for compassion.

It was acutely comforting to be in the presence of a community of young people who shared in this sentiment with me and shared in the desire to bring about a more inclusive future for all. I felt reengaged, hopeful, and inspired by the atmosphere of support when we broke bread together and shared kōrero amongst ourselves. Anything seemed possible as there was opportunity and will to reimagine Aotearoa in ways that might have seemed impossibilities for the generation before.

I realised that solidarity by far was the most important currency in the road to equity, and that also meant removing my own cultural blinders and appreciating that while my own experiences and worldview were important in a race relations kaupapa, they were

not all-defining. Everyone needs a seat at the table.

The Speech Awards took me out of my own comfort zone and made me consider quite earnestly my own privileges and partakings in the social system more broadly. I knew very little of Te Tiriti or Maoritanga and its history in Aotearoa, and it was a significant moment for me to begin to place myself as tauiwi in this country and reflect on my responsibilities thereon.

In 2019, Naomi received a Provost's Scholarship, which allowed her to pursue graduate study at the University of Oxford, where she completed a dissertation with the Department of International Development in the area of global environmental policy.



2014 National Champion

NGUYEN THAI AN VO

Just six months after he arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand as an international student, Nguyen Thai An Vo became the National Champion of the Race Unity Speech Awards.



During his time in Aotearoa, he attended Auckland International College and involved himself in many events and initiatives where he was able to share his voice. One of his teachers who recalled his classroom presence glowingly, stated that he was a “very diligent, intelligent, highly motivated, and impressive student.”

When Thai An Vo arrived in New Zealand, he had a limited understanding of English. Remarkably, he was able to learn the language, complete his work to an excellent standard and champion a national speech competition all whilst adapting to a foreign environment. In 2014, Thai An Vo spoke with an understanding of “big words and big promises”:

Racism is a colossal and somewhat bizarre issue. Because of that, people usually approach the topic in very big ways: big speeches, big words and big promises. And as human nature, those big words and promises make the audience feel empowered and elated. But, how many times have you felt great when the speech begins, just to be knocked down by moments of sheer silence, awkwardness and emptiness when it ends?...

I am a small Vietnamese from small Vietnam, and I've been here

for a small six months, but I was born with a big voice. And a big voice speaking about crucial problems like racism will make a perfect match. However, let's broach this big issue in a small way. Let's broach this big issue in a way that nobody will have to ask themselves how they could partake in “I am Aotearoa, together we grow”. Small things are dull and ordinary; hence speakers don't speak about them and audiences don't want to hear about them. Yet, small can be big in its very own way...

The factor that ignites discrimination is judgement. That's why big speeches tell us

not to judge. But, can we not? The term judgement is actually a harmless action... and the negative feelings are only evoked upon the realization of disparities... Discrimination and comparison keeps us alive. And so, unless we all are willing to give up the ability to think, we are still judging. Judging is not a choice, but hating is...

After his year as an international student in New Zealand, Thai An Vo returned to Vietnam. In the the short time he was in Aotearoa, he was able to accomplish much with an openness to learning, growing and cross-cultural communication.



The lotus flower is the national flower of Vietnam

INSPIRING ENTRANTS IN THE 2021 SPEECH AWARDS

The 2021 Speech Awards saw an inspiring return to physical presentations following the pandemic era online Awards in 2020. Over 100 young orators graced the Race Unity stage and shared their hopes, experiences and aspirations for the future of race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Not only are the Speech Awards a platform for the expression of ideas, but an event for like-minded young people with a keen interest in social issues to come together. Three of the outstanding rangatahi who presented in 2021 were asked: “What drives your advocacy?” Their reflections are presented to the right.



NORA QUIGLEY

Nora Quigley is a 16-year-old environmental activist, social justice advocate and organisational volunteer. She is also one of the youngest members of the 2021 “YWCA Y25” list – a collective of 25 trailblazing young women in Aotearoa. With over 500 hours of community service under her belt, Nora is the proud founder of the South Canterbury Sustainable Youth and the Multicultural Aoraki Youth Council. She is also a member of the Embassy of Ireland Youth Council, volunteers with Amnesty International and is in the process of developing a sustainable, biodegradable alternative to polystyrene. Nora was a national semi-finalist at last year’s Speech Awards and when asked about what drives her all-round advocacy, she said:

I think my advocacy stems from my faith and is fuelled by the hope that my testimony is one worthy of being emulated by other rangatahi. I know that I will never “give someone a voice”, but I aspire to continue using my privilege to amplify undermined voices until we reach a place where there is equity and unity among all people, always and everywhere. Many people’s advocacy comes from their lived experiences with racism but because of my privilege I was never subject to it, and I believe no one should ever have to be. I think we become overwhelmed with the multifacetedness of the issue and that we forget it’s simple actions that accumulate to big change such as being kind, celebrating others, educating ourselves, educating others and never tolerating racism in any of its forms.

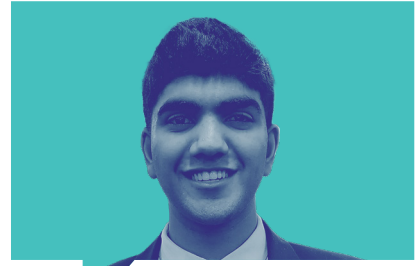


TAMARA LIVINGSTONE

As the first person to use sign language in the Race Unity Speech Awards, Tamara Livingstone is invested in accessibility for all. She is also a passionate member of the Marlborough Youth Council and was the first speaker in the 2021 Speech Awards to run a local Race Unity Hui in her area (refer to page 41). Tamara is an exceptional student and active member of her community; she is an advocate for equal rights and has been a member of the Marlborough Youth Trust Advisory Group. She was selected to participate in a 2021 GirlBoss Edge programme and is currently leading a team of passionate youth in the Marlborough region to continue the work in improving race relations in Aotearoa. Tamara was one of six 2021 Race Unity Speech Awards national finalists and says that “advocating for people when they don’t have a [physical] voice is something I’ve been interested in.” When asked about what drives her advocacy, Tamara said:

I was raised in a family with four sisters and so I have always had to speak up if I wanted something or I wasn’t going to get it. I was also encouraged to stand up for my siblings and anyone I saw who was facing any form of bullying or prejudices... lots of people can’t stand up for themselves and there is always power in numbers...

I love using my voice and resources to speak up for those who can’t speak for themselves and have been actively doing this in my community and through my work with the 2021 Race Unity Aotearoa Local Hui Initiative. My family have supported me throughout my advocacy journey and have always been the first people I call after any achievement or whenever I need a helping hand. They drive me to be a better person and I am constantly grateful for them.



NIMISH SINGH

Nimish Singh is no stranger to success. He was a national semi-finalist at the 2021 Race Unity Speech Awards and the champion of last year’s REINZ National Auctioneering Schools’ Championship. He has won both the Education Perfect World Language Championships – taking out the top student prize for Spanish – and the inaugural Education Perfect Whakataetae Reo Māori for Aotearoa students. In 2020, he placed second at the world’s first international virtual reality language competition and took out the top prize for Mandarin Chinese. Nimish spoke eloquently as a guest speaker at the national final of the 2021 Speech Awards and was a stand-out contributor to the National Hui. Nimish was invited to read a poem at the national launch of the Waitangi Exhibition of the Children’s Holocaust Memorial. When asked about what inspired him, here is what he said:

Some people maintain that New Zealand has the best race relations in the world. We do not. I believe that as a nation we must move away from tolerance and tokenism to build genuine oneness. To do that, we must acknowledge our unconscious biases towards one another and work actively to build more meaningful connections. For me, witnessing the high level of covert racism in Aotearoa has led me to speak out and share my experiences about facing prejudice and standing up for others. By sharing our own stories and actively seeking understanding and harmony over racial acceptance, we begin to paddle our waka beyond a vast sea of disunity towards the waters of a brighter and more unified tomorrow.



2015 National Champion

KIMBERLY D'MELLO

Kimberly D'Mello feels that presenting her speech in the 2015 Race Unity Speech Awards was “a catalyst in helping me learn how multi-ethnic connections and understandings can only enrich one’s tapestry.”

Growing up in New Zealand as a person of colour, Kim shares that:

There was a lot of cultural alienation and ‘othering’ in being a minority, which was accepted as the norm for us. My participation in these awards was pivotal in realising how important my voice, and the voice of people like me, is.

When she entered the Speech Awards, Kimberly used the iconic Mitre 10 ad “Do It Yourself” to challenge New Zealanders to tackle racism:

MITRE 10 ad?? No! That’s what you think. This is actually an underlying subliminal message... for race relations in New Zealand. It’s a “do it yourself” attitude, don’t wait for someone else. Do it yourself. Don’t get someone else to fix the problem... Do it yourself...

Wouldn’t it be cool if we built bridges between cultures rather than building bridges to contain our differences? We are aiming at building those bridges of Race Unity. So, are we gonna get some bloke in? Come on mate, DO it yourself!

When asked about the relevance of her speech six years on from her 2015 presentation, Kim shared that:

Today this theme extends to us being active participants in challenging racism and taking the initiative to be anti-racist...

In learning from the Black Lives Matter protests, I would also include their intersectional philosophy in my speech. This philosophy centres around how all parts of your identity are important. Traditionally, people of colour, the disabled community, or women were forced to choose one identity and cause. In my speech, I would include that we are not just fighting for one narrative, but we are fighting for all marginalised peoples...

Kim says her participation was:

instrumental in helping me recognise my power, as a first-generation immigrant, to challenge biases and prejudice within western discourse and ideals. During group discussion in my medical studies, I am able to contribute a multicultural perspective and share the experiences of my whānau. I genuinely believe that real changes in access, employment and other opportunities only come when we acknowledge that we are fighting for all of you, not just some of you.

Kim sees hope in young people:

We have begun to harness the influence and power we have ... we have taken charge of the narrative “Nau te rourou, naku te rourou, ka ora te manuhiri” – “With your food basket and my

food basket, the people will thrive.” With a focus on inclusion, we ask: “What can we bring to the table?”

In today’s world, the University of Auckland medical student seeks to continue building those bridges of Race Unity as she transitions into the professional world:

Throughout my degree, I’ve learned how deep systematic and systemic healthcare inequities run, so I am passionate about advocating for minorities in healthcare. In future, I would love to craft more equitable health policies.



2016 National Champion

TE ARIKI TE PUNI

Te Ariki Te Puni (Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Raukawa, Rangitāne o Manawatū, me Ngā Rauru) believes that the New Zealand Race Unity Speech Awards “fosters a space for individuals with similar aspirations to come together, celebrate, discuss, and promote race relations here in Aotearoa.”



As a Year 13 student at Palmerston Boys' High School, Te Ariki's 2016 success saw him continue his legacy from the year before, becoming one of the first high school students to hold two consecutive national speech titles. In 2015, Te Ariki competed in the Korimako (Senior English) section of the prestigious Ngā Manu Kōrero Speech Competition. He succeeded in taking out the trophies for the overall, prepared and impromptu categories in a rare clean-sweep. Not a year later, he became National Champion of the 2016 Race Unity Speech Awards.

Having been interested in social justice issues and advocacy from a young age, Te Ariki felt that rather than changing his perspectives on race relations, the Speech Awards cemented his beliefs:

It has encouraged me to be both more proactive and more actively reactive in my work environments and life in regard to racism.

In his speech, Te Ariki spoke about the lines of our national anthem and interwove them “as a mechanism to test whether we are true to our patriotism.” He spoke about the need for New Zealanders to unite in our individual differences to grow as a collective:

Racism cuts deep, without conscience. We are all affected by its corrosive impact, and nothing

will change until we fully accept diversity. Today I appeal to each individual – solidarity is critical in our quest for racial unity...

God defend our FREE land. It is not just the flag, haka or national anthem that we pledge allegiance to, but what they represent – unity, equality and freedom. As New Zealanders we are humble about our national symbols, but perhaps it is time we look to them as a way of refurbishing our civic culture.

“Men of every creed and race, gather here before Thy face...” The best pathway forward is accepting that we are all equal because we are all different, we are all the same in that we will never be the same, we are all connected to earth by the same force of gravity, but most importantly – we all share this country Aotearoa.

Te Ariki has undertaken a conjoint Law and Commerce degree at the University of Auckland. He is also a full-time professional rugby player, in the process of launching a start-up and sits on two boards:

One for my iwi and one for a very new and promising group that aims to develop and encourage ethnic leadership among youth.

When asked about his studies and professional life, Te Ariki says he is passionate about everything that he does:

My studies reflect my chosen path of learning to hopefully venture into the mystique that is politics later in my life... My board commitments are largely due to my passion for developing Māori and the entire ethnic community... My rugby is a personal passion and dream that I have had since a kid... my start-up is reflective of a personal passion to grow.





2017 National Champion

TAUAWHI BONILLA

Tauawhi Bonilla (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou) felt that the Race Unity Speech Awards had a significant impact on his perspective of race relations.

It forced me to confront and unpack a lot of the intergenerational trauma and my own experiences growing up here in Aotearoa, on the very land my ancestors traversed and made their own. This process was further exacerbated when I won... I felt like I needed to best reflect the kaupapa in everything I did from that point onwards; that was the standard.

...It [the Speech Awards] certainly provided a platform for me to talk specifically about race relations and a variety of other topics. I am a strong champion for my Māori culture and my Māori language. However, I've found that being those things doesn't necessarily make me anti-everyone else, and fundamentally I believe the issues that Māori have had to confront over all these years reflect the obstacles that all minority races face in some way, shape or form in Aotearoa. I believe addressing those obstacles on a united front will bring us all one step further to a better Aotearoa for the next generations.

In the 2017 Speech Awards, Tauawhi spoke about how harmony can be achieved not by resentment but acceptance. He spoke from a te ao Māori lens, interweaving many whakataukī to help us understand that a collective effort is required to address racism.

Tauawhi continues to advocate and strive for racial unity in his daily life:

I remember listening to the speeches and being inspired by like-minded rangatahi, who all shared their frustrations with all forms of racism experienced in our country. From that observation, I got a sense of unity in our aspirations. And that was perhaps the salient idea that I reflect on in how I live my life – the hope that this is the new generation of professionals, artists, writers, scientists and athletes that transcends race and religion and what makes us countrymen and women.

When asked about the role of this “new generation” in improving race relations, Tauawhi said:

I think we are a critical part... primarily since racial division is taught to our young instead of something naturally attained. This idea is consistent in te ao Māori as a proverb states, “Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi” – “Once the old fishing net is worn, put it aside to make way for the new fishing net.”

Tauawhi went on to study law and commerce and said:

I'm aspiring to enter the investment banking sector when I graduate. Furthermore, I want to play rugby/rugby league while

studying and see where that goes. I chose the International Baccalaureate career pathway because we need more Māori in that sector, especially in more senior positions. I want to become an enabler for more significant opportunities for our country and Māori. I also want to become an athlete because I believe in reaching one's full potential, and sport is a massive passion of mine, and in my life, I want to make sure I have left no stone unturned.



2018 National Champion

HENA DUGH

Since participating in the Race Unity Speech Awards in 2018, Hena Dugh has become an active advocate for the kaupapa of race unity in her daily life.



Before the Speech Awards, I didn't have the courage to call out day-to-day conversations that had undertones of racial stereotyping.

...Listening to other people's experiences in a safe and welcoming environment really encouraged me to have open discussions on race relations in Aotearoa at work, university or even just at a coffee catch-up with friends... It's not just about bringing up the topic at race relations events... Big changes always start with people raising awareness.

Hena's speech was targeted at the unconscious biases that we all possess, and she used the metaphor of our internal "wolves" to convey this:

An Elder was teaching his grandchildren about life... He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me, it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf is evil—he is resentful, jealous and negative. The other is good—he is peaceful, positive and content. The grandchildren thought about it for a minute, and then one asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The Elder smiled and replied, "Whichever wolf I feed."

The good wolf [represents] the values that teach us love, compassion and acceptance whereas the evil wolf is racism,

the wolf everyone has fed at some point in their lives. Now, before we labelled ourselves by geographical lines on a map, we were simply Homo sapiens. Homo. The same...

...Every day a fight is going on inside you; it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. We all have a choice – whether to feed the wolf of compassion, peace and acceptance or the wolf of resentment and racism. So now, I ask you, which wolf will you feed?

Following her participation as a student, Hena continued her involvement with the Speech Awards in a volunteer capacity. She has been able to serve as an MC for the Hawke's Bay regional heats and was a volunteer facilitator at the 2021 National Race Unity Hui. Hena says that her participation was instrumental in helping her to further contribute to social justice issues and states that she had "hoped to run a Race Unity Hui back home in Hawke's Bay [in 2021] as well, but with my university workload and hospital schedules, this goal was cut short."

Currently completing a medical degree at the University of Auckland, Hena said that:

I've always wanted a career with service at the core of it... Once I started learning more about the intricacies of healthcare and the vast disparities faced by different

ethnicities, I found myself linking all of my involvement with the Race Unity kaupapa to it and found myself drawn to the career even more. I hope that one day I am capable enough to not only reduce a person's physical suffering, but also any emotional suffering linked to it.



RACE UNITY STATEMENT 2018

RACE, UNITY AND JUSTICE

The following is an extract from the 2018 Race Unity Statement – a summary and synthesis of the views shared at the 2018 Race Unity Hui. The Hui brought together around 60 youth and supporters – including participants in the Speech Awards – to consult together about how race relations in New Zealand can become more unified and just.

True unity cannot be achieved without justice. Justice requires balance – distributing resources in ways that allow all parts of our society to flourish. At times this means that we have to prioritise equity, rather than equality. If we want our society to flourish and be unified, we would do well to support initiatives that aim to restore the balance of our society, including those that reallocate economic, political and other resources.

Many institutional changes will be required if race relations are to become just and equitable. If our schools are to teach our history, we need not only curriculum change but education for our educators. If our criminal justice system is to be truly just, it will need to change to reflect the ethics and tikanga that New Zealanders value. Institutional change depends on making spaces for minority voices, and youth voices, to be heard and represented wherever power is exercised. Finally, we need to consider together how our constitution could be transformed to fully reflect te Tiriti o Waitangi in our institutions of government.

To achieve unity, we will also need to transform the culture of our communities. We will need to create both physical and social spaces where people of different backgrounds can mix, consult and befriend one another...

As individuals, we must be persistent, patient and understanding. We need to learn both to challenge racism when we see it, and to examine our own thoughts and behaviour. We must strive to be loving, forgiving, and we must be willing to learn. We can work towards overcoming our biases by befriending people who do not look like us or sound like us. This can start in our families, from the earliest years of our lives.

2019 National Champion

ROBBIE WHITE

In 2019, Robbie White was just 15 years old, making him one of the youngest national champions in the history of the Race Unity Speech Awards.



He reflected that upon his return from the Speech Awards to life as a high school student, he was shocked. He felt that his eyes had been opened to how harmful the little comments and jokes could be.

In 2021, Robbie was in his final year at New Plymouth Boys' High School and was determined to make changes to race relations within his school community. He credits his participation in the Speech Awards for this drive, saying that his participation in the Speech Awards "was certainly the catalyst for my personal journey to improve race relations in our communities."

Robbie shared that:

I learnt about the issues facing so many each day and it certainly brought to the forefront the importance of campaigning to achieve unity in Aotearoa, New Zealand. As Pākehā, it was so easy to not be aware of these injustices before taking part in the Speech Awards and Hui. My journey since then has certainly made me acknowledge that privilege and realise to try never to sit so comfortably like that again.

Presenting his speech in 2019 following the horrors of March 15th, Robbie recalled:

It had never been so crucial for New Zealanders to unite in the face of this hatred and adversity...

a key message was also to reflect on why it always seems to take a tragedy for people to unite. If we actually think about moments of greatest unity, they occur when humanity is at its lowest.

His speech eloquently addressed the topic of "Speaking for Justice, Working for Unity":

To be unified means to be joined as one whole. Now, I am not meaning my friend and I agreeing on something, or the groups at our school getting along; I am talking about something much more momentous – the unity of all different kinds of people, everywhere. In the past, when we think of examples of unity on this huge scale, I think... war, disaster, segregation, death.

Why is it that, in our most recent history, it so often takes a tragedy or adverse event for all different kinds of people to unite – to see past the colour, to see past the jobs, to see past the religious beliefs.

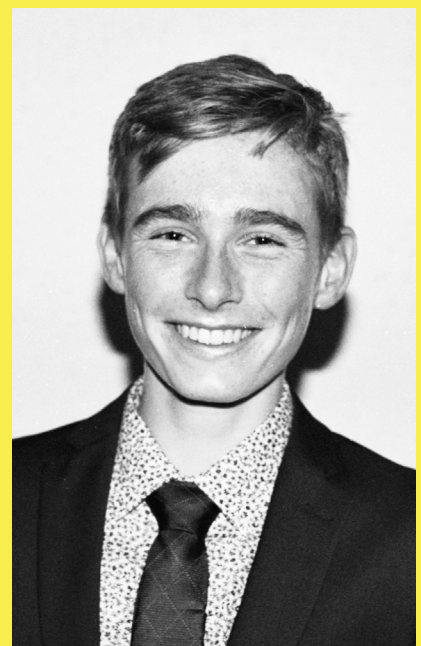
Robbie urged:

We must continue with our ambitions to achieve unity around race relations, even when we aren't immediately reminded of the extremely negative outcomes that can occur due to such hate.

In the future, Robbie aims to continue raising the standards of his

efforts to improve race relations. He said:

I have no doubt that my experience with the Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui was life changing. No matter what path I take, I will continue to advocate for race unity and will actively encourage anyone with the capacity to participate in events similar to these.



RACE UNITY STATEMENT 2019

CONFRONTING RACISM WITH JUSTICE AND UNITY

The following is an extract from the 2019 Race Unity Statement. This document represents the views of over 150 youth and young adults aged 15 to 30 from around Aotearoa who gathered to discuss race relations in Aotearoa at the 2019 Race Unity Hui.

1. EVERY NEW ZEALANDER MUST CONFRONT RACIAL PREJUDICE

Every individual in Aotearoa is responsible for confronting racial prejudice. Instead of attacking one another we need to examine our own prejudices, and help others to do the same. This is difficult work, requiring compassion, empathy, humility and courage.

2. EDUCATION CAN REINFORCE RACISM, OR HELP ERADICATE IT

Our young people need an education that helps them overcome individual and institutional racism, both at home and at school. We are calling for greater diversity in school leadership and changes to curriculum, education policies and school culture.

3. WE NEED PLACES TO TALK ABOUT RACE AND CULTURE

If we are to become a truly inclusive society, we need social spaces in our communities where people of all backgrounds can talk about race relations and share their culture. These kinds of gatherings can help us move beyond mere acceptance or tolerance of different cultures to identify shared values, aspirations and goals.

4. INSTITUTIONAL RACISM EXISTS, AND IT MUST BE DISMANTLED

The continuing lack of diversity in positions of influence, the cultural bias of institutions, and racial inequalities of wealth, health and education are all examples of institutional racism: social structures that reflect and reproduce racial prejudice and inequity at a societal level. Responsibility for dismantling institutional racism sits not only with the leaders and members of institutions, but with all of us as citizens, stakeholders, employees and consumers.

Each of the four themes are explored in more detail in the full statement, which can be read at <https://raceunity.nz/youth-statement>.

2020 National Champion

JESS JENKINS

Amidst the uncertainties of a global pandemic, Jess Jenkins (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa) became the National Champion of the 2020 Race Unity Speech Awards.



Despite being conducted in an exclusively virtual setting, Jess believes that her participation in the Speech Awards changed her life. She has shared some of her experiences before, during and after the awards:

Participating in the Race Unity Speech Awards was one of the most mentally and emotionally transformative experiences of my life...

When I entered the Speech Awards, I wanted to share the ways in which racism had affected my forebears, and the impacts that this knowledge has on me to this day. Little did I realise that participating would have a far greater impact on me than just communicating my own views: I was exposed to those of my peers; raw, connected and emotional, the 2020 Speech Awards were one of the most informative experiences I have had the privilege of being involved in...

The explorative process of writing my speech was one that has undoubtedly shaped my outlook on the world today. It commenced as a simple delving into my thoughts surrounding the "conflicts" between my whakapapa and appearance. Quickly, the process became

much more than an exercise; it was a journey of self-discovery, learning and one that I continue to traverse today...

Following the awards, my thinking about race relations was irrevocably changed. Not only did I find myself in a position of enlightenment, but one of influence as I participated in television, radio and spoken interviews. I felt immensely humbled to be representing my peers in this way... My perspectives were broadened further as I felt the responsibility of communicating to a wider audience – I wanted to bring light to the ideas, suggestions and experiences of all those who entered the awards, not exclusively my own.

After completing secondary school in 2020, Jess deferred her offer of admission to Harvard University until the fall semester of 2022. During her gap year, Jess said she has felt "privileged to work with a fantastic team of inspiring individuals" as a National Coordinator for the New Zealand Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui. She has focused on diverse and inspiring mahi, and has felt that the experience has given her "an invaluable awareness of the professional world and its operations."

She has also been able to continue her passion for advocacy. In 2021, Jess co-founded the Multiethnic Young Leaders New Zealand (MYLN) alongside a small group of Speech Awards Alumni and represented New Zealand as one of four youth delegates to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation "Voices of the Future" Summit.

Jess was a finalist for Young Wellingtonian of the Year 2022. She believes that:

When it comes to race relations, the idea of advocacy shouldn't have to prevail. It is a collective and continuous effort to constantly challenge both conscious and unconscious biases. All generations must work together in harmony to catalyse tangible change.





2021 National Champion

LUCIA-TUI BERNARDS

Lucia-Tui Bernards (Te Aitanga-a-Hauti) was no stranger to the Race Unity Speech Awards when she became the 2021 National Champion. As a Year 12 student at Tawa College, she became the first national champion to have been awarded a Special Award the year before.

As a two-time finalist, Lucia-Tui said that:

Taking part in the Speech Awards for two years and having to research the different topics exposed me more to the state of race relations, racism and bias within New Zealand.

In her 2021 Speech, Lucia-Tui spoke about “finding solutions for today’s issues using the wisdom of our tipuna from the past – problem solving with a te ao Māori lens.” She said that:

It is also about focusing on our rangatahi to be the change at the secondary school level. Having clear race relations strategies, educational packages and identifying advocates.

Her speech was highly practical and direct. Her concluding statements created a profound “call to action”, leaving both the audience and the judges spellbound:

Let’s be ambitious. All secondary schools in New Zealand are to have a specific Race Relations Policy and Strategy. Included is how they will address inequities and discrimination. What actions they are taking to support all ethnic students, their families and community.

Implement a Race Relations Youth Council to ensure the voices of our ethnic minorities are heard. Provide training and education packages concerning race relations to staff and students and promote positive race relations stories within the school community.

We will have national inter-school forums and create a network of Race Relations Youth Ambassadors to advocate and inform Parliament and government agencies on future policies, practice and legislation from a youth perspective.

A year on from her presentation, Lucia-Tui said that she would add accountabilities for the government if she was to alter her speech. She wants the ideas of herself and her peers to not only be heard, but genuinely considered and acted upon. Talking of rangatahi as change agents, key advocates and role models for race relations, Lucia-Tui wants to see the ideas of youth at the fore of tackling race relations in Aotearoa.

When reflecting on her participation in the Speech Awards, Lucia-Tui said:

I found hearing the perspectives of the speech participants very enlightening... It was exciting to hear and see the passion of those

who participated in the Speech Awards, and I was pleased to be part of this growing number of rangatahi who are leading the change in race relations and equity in New Zealand.

In her final year of secondary school in 2022, she has an active passion to address race relations issues. Following her participation in the Speech Awards, Lucia-Tui feels she acquired:

A greater desire to serve my community. To this end I actively advocate for race relations within my school community, Māori community and wider community. I have volunteered to support community events, am a member of the local Multicultural Council and have been accepted into Youth Parliament 2022.



LOCAL HUI

Local hui have been an exciting extension of the New Zealand Race Unity Speech Awards and National Hui – events that encourage and facilitate young people’s contributions towards the discourse on race relations in Aotearoa.

The Speech Awards tend to attract a particular type of individual who is willing to stand and speak; not everyone has the desire or confidence to share their ideas through public speaking. In 2021, an increased interest in the National Hui and its capacity-building potential led the organisers to consider how more individuals could be exposed to the race unity kaupapa. The idea of holding local hui was developed to enable greater numbers of young people to join the conversation and contribute to the discourse on race relations.

In 2021 the Speech Awards team supported interested national semi-finalists of the Speech Awards to organise and deliver a Race Unity Hui in their area. Following well-run initiatives in both Aoraki and Southland, the first of the North Island Hui took place in the Wairarapa. One of the supporters shared their observations:

The group conversations were marked by a spirit of sharing, of frankness, and of mutual support among the participants. In one case, tears were shed by an individual when relating their personal experience with racism, and this was particularly touching for the members of the group. A bond of trust and love was quickly established among participants, even between those who had only just met that morning. This was evidenced at the end of the hui when there was a flurry of Instagram and phone number exchanges along with heartfelt goodbye hugs. As an observer, I could see that there were high levels of empathetic and respectful listening in all the groups as various individuals expressed their viewpoints.

The attendees were appreciative of the Police participation, and in turn the Police representatives who took part were moved by their experience.

One of the youth facilitators commented, “My experience at the Race Unity Hui gave me hope in this world. It showed me there are so many youth who see the problems in the world and are passionate about fixing them. I became so close with these youth in only one day, and it shows what happens when you bond over shared hope.”

There was a strong sense, repeatedly expressed by participants, that these conversations about race, identity, diversity and unity are important and need to be ongoing in our communities.

After the success of the initial Local Hui, more rangatahi were inspired to have conversations: Hui for Wellington, Rotorua, Auckland and Northland were all organised. Due to the 2021 pandemic lockdowns, these were understandably postponed or cancelled but demonstrated the interest in these spaces for coming years.



Tom Mackintosh Photography

VALUED SUPPORTERS



MULTICULTURAL NEW ZEALAND

Through the involvement of individual members of the Bahá'í community with regional Multicultural Councils in different parts of the country, it became clear in 2012 that there were opportunities for collaboration. Initially, this collaboration focused on individual councils where Bahá'ís were already involved, but in 2014, a member of the Race Unity team was invited to speak about the Speech Awards and Hui at a Multicultural NZ conference. This resulted in a proposal that Multicultural NZ officially endorse these initiatives – a proposal that was unanimously supported. Since then, Multicultural NZ has helped promote the events, and provided judges, timekeepers and other support as requested. In the past few years, they have become active partners in arranging Race Unity Hui, especially a regional Hui held in Lower Hutt in 2019 and the national Hui held in Auckland in 2021.



unesco

New Zealand
National Commission
Te Kōmihana Matua o Aotearoa mō UNESCO

NZ NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

The NZ National Commission for UNESCO first supported the Race Unity Speech Awards in 2015 when it provided a grant to create a Race Unity website to promote and support the Awards. This was especially useful in promoting the Speech Awards and also providing a record of the speeches of past national finalists.

In 2021 and 2022 the Commission provided further grants to support the National Race Unity Hui.



ASTOR FOUNDATION

The Astor Foundation first supported the Race Unity Speech Awards in 2020, generously providing both funding and the time of its expert staff to bolster the communications and media engagement for the Awards.



OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has supported the National Hui by providing MCs and workshop facilitators. The manaakitanga, expertise and experience they bring when working with our rangatahi has been deeply appreciated.

MARQUE

MARQUE

Marque, www.marque.co.nz, an extremely talented branding and design agency, has provided pro bono support since 2019. They have created attractive new designs each year which are used on the promotional materials and on the website they built for the Speech Awards – www.raceunity.nz.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As we go to press, we have just caught our breath after the rush and sprint of the National Final of the 2022 Race Unity Speech Awards.

We have, for the first time, crowned joint National Champions – Sheryl Chand of Solway College and Joe Howells of Kerikeri College. Each speaker brought us to a deeper understanding of the theme for this year: 'Ngā matimati nō te ringa kotahi – the fingers of one hand'.

Sheryl's speech was full of powerful and practical suggestions for dismantling racism, including abolishing academic streaming in schools. She compared the relationship between young people and adults to harakeke (flax), where the rito (inner blades) must be sheltered and protected by the awahi rito (outer blades):

You want the rito to survive and mature so it can be weaved into society," says Sheryl. "You see the flax leaves – when they are warped, weft, and cross-threaded, it draws humanity together. All are woven together to make a non-racist, more respectful, unified society.

Joe's speech was eloquent and dramatic, using the analogy of the fingers of the hand to explore our interdependence as human beings:

To be able to move forward in our society we need to respect all cultures, embrace diversity and learn from one another. All aspects of our hand working in unison with respect and aroha.

Joe also set out a great wero (challenge) for all of us to consider:

Aotearoa is known for being a nation of pioneers... Why don't we become the first to eradicate racism?

And of course, there were five more award winners this year – each one a champion representing their generation in the struggle against racism, and a leader on the path to true unity and justice. We can see, across the years, incredible growth in the capacity of young people to express themselves on the topic of race relations and to offer real solutions. More New Zealanders are listening than ever before, and yet it feels like this is just the start.

So when we look to the future of this kaupapa of race unity, we feel a deep sense of hope and confidence. We do not know what the coming decades will hold for our nation, but we are sure that young people will play a pivotal role in our progress towards the eradication of racism and the realisation of true unity. We hope and pray that our work can continue to play a role in this broader process of change and growth.

Arohanui,

The organisers of the Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui



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[RACEUNITY.NZ](https://www.raceunity.nz)