

Speaking notes from Mayor Cull

Centre for Global Migrations Research Theme launch Wednesday 26 April 4.30pm – 5.30pm Hocken Collections

Thank you Professor Blakie - and thank you to Professor McCarthy and the many people behind the Centre for Global Migrations Research Theme for the invitation to take part in its launch.

Dunedin sits near the bottom of the globe - seemingly isolated from the rest of the world. That's why global migration has been a part of the ebb and flow of our life here - albeit a welcome part - for only a little over 1200 years. Quite a short time when you consider the inter and trans continental migrations of humankind over millennia.

Indeed, Aotearoa/NZ was among the last major lands (more like significant island group) to be reached by human migrants.

Dunedin, on the other hand, can claim a proud history of welcoming new migrants from its very inception.

Certainly, in 1848, when the first Scottish settlers arrived, local Maori helped them with housing and food, especially over that first crucial year when they had few means of supporting themselves. Some of their surviving diaries acknowledge that they might not have been able to get by without that help.

Hopes of a cosy, pure Presbyterian settlement were challenged by the inclusion of English (the Little Enemy) in the nascent Dunedin community, but were well and truly dashed with the discovery of gold in the 1860s. Migrants poured in from all over the world.

The result is that cultural and ethnic strands and colours, some broad, some just a thread, have been woven together to make a multi-coloured plaid, a city of Dunedin community tartan.

Chinese, French, Lebanese, American, Irish, Poles and European Jews all added their distinctive strands to the district. And, indeed, that is just the people who came willingly. Taranaki prisoners from the land wars and confiscations, unjustly imprisoned here, also contributed enormously to the building of this place and its mixed whakapapa.

But our Dunedin tartan doesn't stay exactly the same for more than a few months at most. As new cultural and ethnic threads are introduced, it changes.

As it turned out, the tyranny of distance couldn't drown out the serene promise of a new life and through subsequent decades Dutch, British, Germans, Pacifica people, Americans, Indians, Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodians, among many others, have further added to Dunedin's cultural tartan to the point that it is now a gorgeous, highly chequered plaid, and Dunedin becomes even more diverse by the year! Today I conducted a Citizenship ceremony for 78 people. They came from 19 different origin countries. The previous month new citizens originated from 25 origin countries!

Diversity is great for our city. New migrants bring many skills and, as Dunedin's history has shown us - many times across many decades - they are a long-term benefit to a supportive community. And indeed, the city needs them.

In order to achieve economic and community sustainability, Dunedin needs to change its population balance. We need to attract more people of a working/family age here to fill the gap between the large number of 18-25 year olds (mostly students) at one end of the demographic spectrum, and the rapidly ageing older population at the other.

Many new migrants to the city fit right in to this category.

It has now been a year since the latest thread was added to our cultural tartan. I refer of course to the first group of Syrian families following the government's announcement at the end of last year that we would be a new refugee resettlement location.

Right from when Dunedin was first mooted to be a new refugee resettlement location, people began to offer their practical support. This desire to welcome people from the other side of the globe led to the formation of the Dunedin Refugee Steering Group - made up of a number of agencies, religious, church and community groups. Community support continued to grow.

Dunedin has much to offer. A strong set of services, where a number of Government agencies have a presence. Good employment opportunities and suitable housing - all enhanced by excellent community support.

A year down the track from when Dunedin embraced its first Syrian refugees, I remain humbled and proud of the generosity and positive response from our community, and its efforts to make them feel welcome.

It is good to see so many different migrant communities here tonight to mark this occasion. And I must congratulate the University of Otago for the way it has supported and nurtured this initiative and make Dunedin the home for this global migration research theme.

I might be biased - but I can't think of a better city for it.

I hereby officially launch the University of Otago Centre for Global Migrations Research Initiative.