New Coasters bring diversity to region

Most people do not think of the West Coast as an ethnically diverse region but the Coast now boasts over 50 nationalities.

That diversity was highlighted this month when Hokitika’s Newcomers group featured on TVNZ’s Neighbourhood programme. The programme highlighted different nationalities who now call Hokitika home featuring German, Welsh, South African, Solomon Island and Filipino residents.

Birte Becker is the co-ordinator for New Coasters in Greytown and Hokitika and, despite an economic downturn on the West Coast, says she still deals with around 12 new immigrants monthly.

“Migrant and newcomer support programmes are key to attracting and retaining skilled workers for the region. Different nationalities bring different perspectives, skills and life experiences which really do impact positively on the community,” she says.

Birte says Greytown Hospital is now the most diverse employer on the Coast but she deals with both international and Kiwi newcomers who are involved in industries as varied as farming, construction and the health sector.

“It is easy for people to feel lonely and isolated when they move to a new district or country so we rely on a lot of support from the community and employers to help integrate newcomers into the district.”

New Coasters had its beginnings back in 2008 when the Department of Internal Affairs and DWC set up ‘West Coast Migrant Services’ with the help of funding partnerships from the Ministry of Social Development and Solid Energy. At that time there was a growing migrant community on the West Coast, coinciding with increasing employment opportunities in the mining, agriculture, teaching and health sectors.

In 2009 a Migrant Services project was passed into community hands and the responsibility for administering the project became the job of the newly incorporated society, New Coasters, which is now part of the national Newcomers Network.

Liz Sugrue says the Westport Newcomers Network runs regular events for both migrants and New Zealanders moving to the district and recently they have noticed a change in the demographic of people.

“In the past, 90% of new arrivals were involved in the mining industry but now we are seeing a move to people involved in the health and education sectors. There are also more retirement aged people,” she says.

West Coast newcomer groups offer support to those new to the district and run regular get-togethers like pot luck dinners, film nights and excursions to local events. New Coasters also offers migrant support services, including a one-day intercultural awareness and communication workshop which helps in the understanding of how to deal with people who don’t have English as a first language.

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Westport motelier optimistic about summer season

Westport’s newest moteliers believe the summer season will be a good one and are keen to see Buller promote itself more as a tourist destination.

Chris and Erica Cooper opened their ten unit Carter’s by the Sea in December. When we looked around there had not been a new motel opened in Westport for quite some years. We are feeling really optimistic about the summer season and want to create an environment where people want to stay more than one night to enjoy this northern part of the West Coast,” says Chris.

While the winter has been relatively quiet, that was not unexpected and the couple was heartened to find a lot of their summer guests were just driving by and decided to stay, often more than one night. They believe Buller needs to consider something to help integrate tourists into the district.

The northern beaches of the West Coast, Cape Foulwind and Tauranga Bay are all so beautiful but they are relatively unknown. It is a great place for Coasters to come up for the weekend and we need to stop tourists going straight to Nelson”.

Joining the tourism industry has been a big step for the couple and they approached DWC for advice when they started the business. They were happy to act as mentors. Through the Regional Business Partner network, administered by DWC, they were also able to access training subsidies to attend social media and website marketing courses.

“It was all pretty new to us so it has been good to get some help and DWC has got some good schemes. We would not have done the courses if DWC had not helped,” he says.

Chris says Tourism West Coast has also been supportive and he is confident the 2015/16 summer season will build on the record tourist numbers of last year.

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