

NEWSLETTER



PEARL OF THE ISLANDS
FOUNDATION INCORPORATED

Mid-Year Highlights: January – June 2026

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FROM ONE CHAPTER TO THE NEXT...

As Pearl of the Islands Foundation (PIF) continues to grow and serve our communities through dialogue, education, and humanitarian aid, we mark an important leadership transition within our organisation.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Yalcin Solak for his dedicated service, vision, and commitment to the mission of PIF. His leadership has contributed significantly to strengthening community connections and advancing our initiatives over the years.

At the same time, we warmly welcome John Demir as the new Executive Director of PIF. We look forward to this new chapter and the continued growth of our shared vision.



A CHAPTER OF GRATITUDE: A MESSAGE FROM YALCIN SOLAK

It has been an honour to serve as Executive Director of PIF since 2013. Over the years, I have been deeply inspired by the strength of our community and the shared commitment to dialogue, education, and service. Together, we have journeyed through many meaningful initiatives and programs that reflect the spirit of unity and inclusion we strive to nurture across Aotearoa. From

cultural engagements and interfaith collaborations to community outreach, each milestone has been made possible through the dedication of our operations team, volunteers, Advisory Board, Committee Members and the unwavering support of our friends and partners.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has been part of this journey. Your encouragement and trust have been the foundation of all that we have achieved together.

As I transition to take up a similar leadership role in Texas, I do so with deep appreciation for the PIF community and confidence in its continued growth and impact. I remain grateful to have been part of this shared mission of building bridges across cultures, faiths, and generations.

BEGINNING A NEW CHAPTER: A MESSAGE FROM JOHN DEMIR

I am honoured to join PIF as the new Executive Director and to be part of its meaningful journey of fostering dialogue, education, and service across diverse communities in Aotearoa.

With over 30 years of international experience in education and leadership across Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the United States, I have been privileged to work in diverse academic and cultural environments.

I look forward to building on the strong foundation established by PIF and continuing its important work in strengthening intercultural understanding and community connection.

I warmly invite and value the ongoing support of our volunteers, Advisory Board, Committee Members, partners, friends, and wider community as we continue this journey together and expand the impact of PIF's mission.



PIF RAMADAN CALENDAR

During Ramadan 2026, PIF hosted around 20 Iftar programs across New Zealand, bringing together over 3,000 participants from diverse backgrounds. Highlights included major gatherings in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin, as well as interfaith Iftars in collaboration with churches and a synagogue. The calendar also featured youth-focused and women's-focused events, engagement with a wide range of faiths and communities, and a number of warm, home-hosted Iftars.

PIF 17TH ANNUAL FRIENDSHIP & DIALOGUE RAMADAN DINNER - PARLIAMENT 2026

PIF held its 17th Annual Friendship and Dialogue Ramadan Dinner at the New Zealand Parliament on 12 March, under the theme "Unity in Diversity: Aotearoa's Shared Path to Peace." The event was hosted in collaboration with MP Dr Parmjeet Parmar, whose support made this meaningful gathering possible.

The evening brought together around 90 distinguished guests, including Members of Parliament, faith leaders, and community representatives, for a time of meaningful exchange and reflection.

Keynote speaker Assistant Commissioner Tim Anderson highlighted the importance of trust, partnership, and open dialogue in building safe, inclusive communities.

The program also featured the presentation of the Public Leadership Award to Meng Foon, former Race Relations Commissioner, in recognition of his outstanding service and contribution to public life.

The evening was enriched by the masterful hosting and singing performance by Lucy Summerfield, along with a performance by Group Huzur, adding warmth and vibrancy to the occasion.



PIF EDUCATION & DIALOGUE RAMADAN DINNER 2026 - AUCKLAND

PIF hosted its Annual Education and Dialogue Ramadan Dinner on 23 February at Akarana Event Centre, under the theme *"Raising Generations of Peace: The Role of Education and Dialogue."* The evening brought together 150 distinguished guests, including Members of Parliament, councillors, representatives from Education, government agencies, community & faith organizations.

Keynote speaker Pauliane Cornwell, Principal of Papatoetoe Intermediate School and Co-Chair of the PIF Advisory Board, delivered powerful reflections on the role of education in nurturing empathy, understanding, and future generations of peacebuilders.

The PIF Awards recognised outstanding contributions to community and public leadership:

- Sheikh Mohammad Amir – Community Leadership Award
- Prof. Douglas Pratt – Public Service Award

The program also featured musical performance and interfaith reflections from distinguished guests.



PIF RAMADAN FRIENDSHIP EVENING - DUNEDIN

PIF, in collaboration with Mornington Methodist Church and the Dunedin Interfaith Council, hosted a heartfelt Ramadan dinner on 4 March in Dunedin. The gathering brought together members of diverse communities for an evening centred on friendship, meaningful dialogue, and the sharing of traditions.

The event reflected the true essence of Ramadan, fostering understanding, compassion, and connection across faiths and cultures.

The keynote address was delivered by Professor Douglas Pratt, offering thoughtful insights into the importance of dialogue and mutual respect. Reflections from the floor were also shared by Dr Rula Yousef, Rev. Dr Mary Huie-Jolly, and Dr Richard Cannon, further enriching the conversation with diverse perspectives.

A special highlight of the evening was the presentation of the PIF Community Leadership Award to Rev. Greg Hughson, recognising his longstanding commitment to interfaith engagement and community building in Dunedin. The evening stood as a meaningful reminder of the power of coming together in shared values, strengthening bonds across communities, and building a more inclusive and harmonious society.



PIF RAMADAN FRIENDSHIP EVENING-CHRISTCHURCH

PIF hosted a wonderful Ramadan Friendship Evening on 5 March in Christchurch, in collaboration with Durham Street Methodist Church and the Canterbury Interfaith Council.

The gathering brought together friends from diverse faiths and communities to break the fast, share a meal, and engage in meaningful conversations. It was a truly special evening marked by friendship, understanding, and a strong sense of community spirit.

Rev. Philomeno Kinera and Nolene Rodgers warmly welcomed attendees on behalf of Durham Street Methodist Church and the Canterbury Interfaith Council, setting the tone for an inclusive and reflective evening.

The occasion was further enriched by remarks from Councillor Tyla Harrison-Hunt, along with Razi Syed and Shono Deguchi, representing local government, the faith community, and the police. Their reflections highlighted the significance of this being PIF's first Ramadan event in Christchurch and the importance of continued collaboration in strengthening community connections.

The evening stood as a meaningful step towards building lasting relationships and fostering greater understanding across communities in Christchurch.



WOMEN'S RAMADAN FRIENDSHIP EVENING

On 8 March, PIF hosted a special Ramadan Dinner that also marked International Women's Day, celebrating the strength, resilience, and invaluable contributions of women within our communities. The evening brought together around 60 women from diverse ethnicities, faiths, communities, organisations, and professional backgrounds. It was a meaningful occasion of reflection, friendship, and dialogue, highlighting the importance of supporting and empowering one another as we work towards a more inclusive and compassionate society.

The keynote address was delivered by Pauline Cornwell, Principal of Papatoetoe Intermediate School and Co-Chair of the PIF Advisory Board, on the theme "Blessed to Give, Empowered to Lead." Reflections were thoughtfully shared by Naomi Johnson, Anne Digia-Pala, and Rhonda Cowell-Bari, offering diverse perspectives and personal insights.

Adding warmth and vibrancy to the program, singing and dance performances by the Little Pearls Educare teachers delighted attendees and enriched the celebratory atmosphere.

The evening concluded with a vote of thanks by Prof. Hatice Ozer-Balli, marking a memorable gathering centred on unity, empowerment, and shared values.



PIF RAMADAN DINNERS WITH CHURCH COMMUNITIES

PIF collaborated with the communities of Churches in Auckland, Wellington and Motueka to host Iftar gatherings that brought people together in a spirit of friendship, interfaith dialogue, and shared traditions.



BREAKING FAST TOGETHER WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITY GROUPS



IFTARS AT PIF MEMBER'S HOMES



SHARING THE SPIRIT OF EID: SUPPORTING FAMILIES LOCALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

In the spirit of Eid al-Adha, PIF in collaboration with the Asylum Seekers Support Trust and North Shore Islamic Association distributed meat packages to needy families within our local communities. Further, with the support of the ICAD Foundation, PIF extended assistance to families in need in the Philippines.



PIF's Mother's Day Celebration, held on 8 May at the Elevate Youth & Community Centre, brought together women from across our community to celebrate and honour motherhood.

The evening featured vibrant cultural performances, shared meals, music, gifts, and meaningful fellowship, creating a warm and joyful atmosphere. It was a wonderful opportunity to recognise the invaluable role of mothers while strengthening friendships and community connections.

MOTHER'S DAY PROGRAM



RACE RELATIONS COMMISSIONERS'S VISIT

We were honoured to welcome Dr Melissa Derby, New Zealand's Race Relations Commissioner, to Little Pearls Educare and PIF.

She observed learning at our centres, engaged with teachers, and shared her passion for education as a human right, highlighting the importance of early literacy, equitable access to education, and strong partnerships with whānau.

The visit concluded at the PIF office, where discussions focused on education, social cohesion, and the role of community organisations in building inclusive and connected communities.



During the family camp held in Q1, PIF community members deepened their connections through shared experiences, reflection, and learning. In Rotorua, participants enjoyed a two-night stay filled with meaningful group discussions and sightseeing activities.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY BONDS



PIF COMMUNITY HUB PROGRAM



The PIF Community Hub was launched this year with funding support from the Ministry of Education. Since its inception, PIF has successfully delivered three community-focused sessions, engaging parents, families, and young people on timely and relevant topics.

These programs provided valuable opportunities for learning, discussion, and community connection. Building on this positive momentum, PIF looks forward to continuing the initiative through a series of monthly programs that will raise awareness and encourage conversations on topics that matter most to our communities.