Speak Up – Kōrerotia

Visiting Christchurch’s An Nur mosque

18 January 2023

Female This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air.

Coming up next, conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” here on Plains FM.

Sally E ngā mana,

E ngā reo,

E ngā hau e whā

Tēnā koutou katoa

Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.

Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.

We have a special show prepared today. We’re going to be following a number of people who will share their experiences and their thoughts before visiting An Nur mosque in Ōtautahi Christchurch, and their learnings and their experience and their thoughts after the visit as well. This visit was organised by LinC (Leadership in Communities) which is part of Leadership Lab Organisation here in the city. LinC was set up after the earthquakes in order to develop a network of support for those who might be feeling weary after supporting their own communities and perhaps not taking such good care of themselves.

This visit to An Nur mosque is taking place in November 2022. The visit was planned for earlier – a year or two years earlier – but due to restrictions around Covid it has been postponed a number of times and there are about 30 people registered to attend.

What’s going to happen during this show is we will speak with Abdi and Erica first of all, who are part of the organising group from LinC, about why they wanted to put on this visit. Then we’re going to speak with a few of the people who took part in the visit about their experiences and their thoughts beforehand, and then we’ll come back and interview Abdi and Erica again as well as the various visitors to the mosque to see their learnings and their thoughts afterwards as well.

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This is the first part of our show and we’re talking with Erica and Abdi about why LinC has organised a visit to An Nur mosque. I’d like to hear from you both a wee bit about yourselves and then we’ll jump in to talking about the visit.

Erica Kia ora, ko Erica toko ingoa. So my name is Erica. I am part of the Leadership in Communities, shortened as LinC, project. And one of the things that we wanted to really do with this visit is to realise, you know, how can amplify marginalised voices for advocacy and provoke systems change. So we are curating and creating lots of these community events and experiences for people to access and make available.

Sally Great. And how about you, Abdi?

Abdi Kia ora, I’m Abdi. Chris [from Leadership Lab] was talking about how he wanted to do some project and I was like why not we just go to the mosque, what do you think and then he said yes, that would definitely be a good idea, which made me have an interest in the effect… I thought it’d be interesting to go. That’s how it started.

Sally And do either of you consider yourselves religious or people who have a faith?

Abdi Yes, I do.

Erica Yes, I do too.

Sally And was that part of why you wanted to get involved in this initiative?

Erica It’s only part of why. So my background is in architecture and another hat that I wear in the community is really connecting people with place and this is a great way to you know, tell the stories of the mosque as its physical form but also how people can interact and the story behind the humans as well. And I’m just curious because I’ve never visited before so this is a great opportunity for me to learn and just that as well.

Abdi Since March 15th [terror attacks in 2019], there all the things been happening and some people were interested, either because of the March 15th or they just feel like it.

Sally Abdi, are you part of the community of the mosque?

Abdi Yes I am.

Sally I know the mosque has regularly hosted visits over the years. Do you know if these visits have increased since the 15th of March or is it more or less as it was beforehand?

Abdi There is actually more people compared to before the March 15th. So I think more community were coming to the mosque and having interest even if they just come and see their stone, there was a lot of people these days compared to before.

Sally Do people come in and do anything at that commemorative stone – lay flowers, say a prayer, these sorts of things?

Abdi Yes, some people take a photo, some people do flowers, some people just make a prayer, depends on the person and the people who come there. So yes, they do definitely do that.

Sally You’ve spoken a lot about why you want to be part of this, is there anything else to add to that?

Abdi I was just interested in the fact that LinC, who I have been working with for a while, people I consider like family, just like gather together and like see.

Sally It must be so nice, if religion is so much part of who you are, a part of your identity, to show people you consider like your extended family, that side of you as well.

Abdi Yes definitely, that is true, like having to show something that other people haven’t seen before, yes.

Erica And also for me because this is under what we call the Rourou project, under LinC, and so it comes from the whakataukī “Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi” – “With your food basket and my basket, the people will be fed”. And the way that we support as LinC is really to empower community just to use their strengths to design and host initiatives that’s open to all, that people are able to access. If we do that for this community and others, there will be overlaps and intersectionality that we can, yeah be more aware of what’s going on, especially in Christchurch.

Sally Great. And what is it that you’re particularly hoping or expecting to see when the visitors go to the mosque?

Abdi What I’m interested to see to be honest the reaction how people see the difference between before and after, what they feel like and what they want to achieve and what they want to see because some people have never been to the mosque in their whole life and some people may have been one or two times. So it’s interesting to see what they feel like.

Erica And I think for me it’s really hoping that people going to this experience to have an open mind and also to create relationships with the community that they may or may not be associated or know.

Sally Do you have anything particular that you’re wanting to highlight or showcase as part of the tour, the visit?

Erica For LinC, I think it’s really to… Yeah again, get people in the building and to talk with the community that are actually in it and who use it day to day and get perspectives on how they are able to use it as a building but also how it facilitates interaction as well for their own communities.

Sally I think that’s a lovely way of looking at it because that physical structure is such a key and integral part of the heart of that community so it’s a great way to kind of approach this, through the physical building.

Abdi Yes, having to connect with each other.

Sally Okay well we will speak with you in a few weeks’ time after the visit, to see how it all went and if you feel like your aspirations for the day have been achieved.

Abdi Yes, thank you. That sounds a good plan.

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Sally So we’re here now with Rémy and Krista who are going to be sharing their reflections before we head to the mosque. It would be really nice to hear from both of you please, a wee bit about yourselves, what it is that you do and why it is that you’re keen to come on this visit to the An Nur mosque.

Krista I work with leaders to get clear on where they’re heading, solve a problem or reset and that’s usually through facilitation and mentoring. For example working with a board about their strategy and I’m also on a board myself for a local social enterprise. I’m really interested in attending as… yeah, I see that community is really important, so much more now than ever. And community is about relationships, really, and about connection and getting to know people and understanding things from people themselves and so to be having the opportunity to visit the Muslim community and be invited into their space and to be hosted by them is a wonderful opportunity to listen and understand more about the mosque locally and the people.

Sally Do you consider yourself to have a religion or a faith?

Krista I’m not part of an organised religion, I would consider myself to be spiritual. Often connection and nature or from within as yoga sadhana.

Rémy From me, what I’m looking forward to or why I agreed to take up the invitation: it’s a significant landmark in Christchurch. I can remember driving down Deans Ave as a child, as a younger person, and seeing that mysterious building there that seemed so foreign and so representative of you know, a global religion and I’m curious now as to how that works inside and what it means to local Muslims in Christchurch in Ōtautahi. So I’m coming very curious to the place. I work in a library, so we see all types and I often see people who are perceived to be Muslims and I just feel like it’d be nice to go to their place.

Sally And do you consider yourself to have a religion or a faith?

Rémy Not so far, I’m curious. I haven’t been lit up or consumed by any organised religion but I’m openminded, I leave the door ajar.

Sally That’s a nice way of looking at it.

Rémy I have some family links, my sister’s partner, his family is Muslim and my boss at work, her daughter has married into a Muslim family.

Sally Does that sort of personal connection make you more curious, do you think?

Rémy Yes, well I was curious already, I’m more curious now. I guess it’s possible that my niece would either be born into a Muslim faith or choose to convert.

Krista My neighbours are Muslim, they’ve since moved but we lived as neighbours for a good couple of years. Really beautiful lovely people, great sense of humour, and just enjoyed living beside each other and connecting. And then really through LinC is the other, so not really deep links, but enough to yeah, be more curious and feel that… I feel a real warmth to the Muslim community.

Sally Lovely. And just finally then, in terms of us going to the mosque, what is it that you’re looking forward to, or expecting or hoping to get from the visit?

Krista I’m imagining a warm welcome, laughter, just genuine kindness as that has been my experience. I’m interested just to discover, I’m curious and going with an open heart and open mind to that experience and really just wanting to listen and understand more about yeah, the community that is part of Ōtautahi and the fabric of where we live.

Rémy From my part, much the same. I’m expecting that kind of human connection, that very real kind of person-to-person, and also I’m expecting the architecture and the building to have its own voice and its own presence. I’m expecting that I will be doing a lot of listening and as a guest be humbled and I’m looking forwarding to learning a little bit more about the faith and the people who practice that faith. Plus I’m looking forward to connecting back in with LinC.

Sally Really nice.

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Sally So we’re here with Marie, Bailey and Noella who are going to talk us through some of their expectations and what they think might happen when we go to the mosque. It would be great to hear from each of you just a wee bit about yourselves, your names, what is it that you do and I think also interesting in this context is do you consider yourself as being someone who is religious or having a faith.

Marie Kia ora, my name is Marie and I’m the Community Development Advisor with Christchurch City Council and we’re based in the Halswell-Hornby-Riccarton Community Board which the mosque falls into that area. We’ve got a bit of a relationship there but it’s an opportunity to extend that knowledge and that relationship and yes I do have a faith, yes I do come from that background.

Bailey Kia ora, I’m Bailey, I’m also a Community Development Advisor for the Halswell-Hornby-Riccarton Community Board area. I’m new to Christchurch and I haven’t been to the mosque and I don’t have much relationship or at all with the people there so kind of what I know is through Marie and the work that she’s done with the community there. So I’m really excited to go. Well I guess I must have some expectation just from what I’ve seen, what I’ve heard about the mosque. I lived in a town for my whole life and I didn’t even know we had a mosque there so that kind of shows the relationship that I had with that community and it was really small where I lived.

But I’m just like really excited to see, I guess, the space and what it means for those people in that community. Before the interview I was thinking of what I have or what places I’ve been that might be similar or might not and just like thinking about the marae and what that means for our people and the Māori culture and then fale Samoa which are again slightly different but are also those meeting spaces and places for those people. So really cool to see how that space is used, I guess, informally, rather than just my perception of people go there for prayer.

I guess we do have some Christian faith values in my family and then also through te ao Māori and Samoa, the values that probably have come through from those Christian values as well.

Noella Kia ora, I’m Noella and the Support Officer with the local Halswell-Hornby-Riccarton community governance team. I’ve never been to a mosque before so I’m looking forward to visiting and seeing the space and building some of those relationships with the community there. Our family has some Christian values but I wouldn’t say we’re practicing.

Sally Bailey mentioned that Marie has done some work with the mosque community. Marie, if you wouldn’t mind expanding on that a bit, that would be great.

Marie I’ve been working in this area, the Riccarton area, since 2007 so of course when March 15th happened, the Riccarton area had to mobilise to basically support communities around the mosque and also the Muslim community somewhat as well although a lot of Muslim community were being looked after from council, central government. But it became very apparent at the time that there was the community around the mosque who were quite affected and I think they were a forgotten community who were victims of that shooting because people who live in that area, they had their lives changed forever. Some of them saw some absolutely horrendous things as people jumped their fences and as they were walking down the street and for months afterwards their lives were restricted with travel and their every day living and through working with those residents, they also wanted to get to know the Muslim community a lot more so we started to have a look at some of those partnerships, sort of working on brokering the relationship between those local residents and the mosque as a neighbour because previously the mosque had been seen as… It was there but it really wasn’t a part of the active community that the residents interacted with every day.

Sally Have any of you been aware that the mosque has been running visits, since March 15th but also before that as well?

Marie I’ve become aware of it and I have been there and visited myself on a number of occasions but I wasn’t aware of it beforehand. And I think that was part of this perception that the community had and I know a lot of the locals in that area, they had that as well, that they were their own enclave and there wasn’t that ability to go and visit. I think as a result, the Muslim community around there did a lot more active outreach to the local area to say hey, come in and join us and so I attended some barbeques that they run and coffee mornings and things like that.

Bailey I’ve only been in Christchurch a year but yes, where I previously lived like I already said, I actually didn’t even know we had a mosque until the terrorist attack and we did some work to support – memorials and things with that community.

Noella Yeah I wasn’t aware of the mosque visits until Marie brought it up with our team.

Marie I don’t live terribly far from the Linwood mosque as well and to be honest, I really hadn’t interacted with the Linwood mosque either. I knew there was a mosque in Linwood but I actually didn’t know where it was so I couldn’t have told you that. So again, it’s that visibility in the community.

Sally Have you got anything else you’d like to say before we go: what you’re expecting, what you’re hoping to see or learn about, anything like that?

Bailey When you think of a place of worship, for me I probably also wouldn’t go unless I was probably overseas going to visit a church. That’s just like my perception of what that space is and I already said it before, what else is that space used for and actually the importance of I guess the physical building for those communities because then like when I think of a marae and people just rock up and come visit, that’s totally normal and we would love to show them around. So on that side of the fence it seems normal but then I don’t expect that of others but obviously they opened it up and they want people to come see what it’s all about. So yeah, just be cool to see how they use that space.

Noella Similar to what Bailey said, I’ve never been to a mosque before so I’m just open to the experience and just learning more about the culture and yeah.

Sally It’s actually interesting that you’ve talked so much about the physical building because speaking with Erica who is one of the LinC organisers, she comes from a background of architecture and she also spoke quite a lot about the physical structure and how we can kind of build community through relationship with a building. Marie, as someone who has been before, why is it that you wanted to encourage your colleagues to come along?

Marie Several reasons, first of all when I first visited there was just this barrier. Okay this is where the Muslim faith is practiced particularly in this local area but it was like this well what’s behind closed doors I don’t know about and it just showed me something very, very different and gave me an appreciation of it and because we work in this area and we work with other communities in this area, it’s also a good opportunity for us to get to know the different spaces and different communities that are in our area so that we can work on supporting all communities in the wider area here.

So that’s why I sort of said to our whole team does anybody want to come along, it’s always a good opportunity to go along and build on the existing networks. It is quite a special place but as I said before I had been there, there was just this shroud of mystery around it and I realised after the shootings, particularly that the Muslim community were a lot more welcoming than I had perceived them to be and I think that’s part of it and it’s not just a building but it’s also how the Muslim community are perceived and I think since March 15th that has changed and I think being able to see their space and walk in their space is another good way of being able to see how that community interacts.

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Sally It’s the day of the visit to An Nur mosque now. What happened was we all met out the front of the mosque, outside the mosque. We all grouped together and had a bit of a debrief, we took off our shoes as is custom and walked into the mosque, into the physical space. Jumayah and Sarah, who were organising the visit, took us through the different rooms and explained what happened in each different space before we ended up in the library where we watched a PowerPoint presentation about Islam 101 which had lots of interesting facts about Islam and its linkages to Christianity and the place of women and these sorts of things and then there was a very long and very honest question-and-answer session between the organisers and the participants. We then finalised the visit with some kai, we all had some delicious halal food out in the courtyard, before we all then headed off home.

 So now what we’re going to do is revisit or re-speak with the people who we interviewed before the visit, to ask them about their reflections having just been to the mosque. What were their key learnings from the day and what did they take away the most.

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Sally So I’m here with Krista and Rémy, we’ve just got back from An Nur mosque after our visit. It would be really nice to hear from you both your overarching reflections or comments from the morning.

Krista Yeah it was really enjoyable, very welcoming, really informative and just really nice to be in the space and feel very welcomed just as we were.

Sally In terms of what you were looking for or expecting to get out of the visit, do you think that it did that?

Rémy For me, there was a sense of mystery about the building having, you know, gone past it so many times and never gone inside. So I feel thankful for having gone inside and kind of that curious itch has been scratched and the mystery has been dispelled and it was a very human place, full of warmth, of welcome – like you were saying, Krista – and a super important place for members of the faith, the congregation. It was great, yeah.

Sally And how about your Krista, do you think your expectations were met?

Krista Yeah, yeah and I feel I learnt a lot, yeah it was really wonderful. They shared a lot about what it means to practice Islam and to be Muslim and kind of dispelled some myths, too, which I thought was really helpful and really great. It did meet my expectations and there was more that I learnt from it, yeah, there didn’t feel like there were any barriers, just a real openness and a wanting to share and not convert. I quite appreciated that. There was a real respect of hey this is who we are and you’re very welcome here and you have choice of… you’re a human being too and you get to choose what you do in your life and what you choose to believe in your life. Yeah.

Rémy It was nice to have the learning kind of facts and figures and proportions of where the most Muslim people in the world live and then to have that kind of zoomed in to the Christchurch setting. It hadn’t occurred to me that lots of the Muslims would be either refugees or immigrants and also the whole how do you keep your child in the faith, that just seems to go right across all the religions in my experience and I found counter to that factual learning, the warmth of welcome and the personal stories and the sharing some food together gave it a nice sort of intimacy. I didn’t feel lectured at at any point.

Krista No neither yeah, and picking up on the variety of people that visit mosque and are part of the community there – 26 different ethnicities, I think…

Sally I think 36.

Krista 36, yeah I mean that’s beautiful. You know, what a multicultural community, yeah really diverse. Was it a quarter of the world’s population are Muslim? It’s a really important part of humanity actually, yeah a lot of people’s experience and belief.

Rémy Yeah I was thinking on my bike on the way here, there’s so much in our world just changes all the time and I’m imagining that when you’ve got those five prayers in the day and you’ve got your faith set so clearly and strongly, that that would give you something to hold onto, you know. Just what I picked up from that extreme structure and timeliness of Muslim life.

Krista There’s like a rhythm or a like a routine but in a supportive way. Yeah, a regularity.

Rémy Yeah break out of your office worries and your first world problems aye, to sit down and reconnect.

Sally I appreciated as well hearing about the fact that prayers multiply if you pray together, I really liked that element of it.

Krista And they talked about that multiple times, there were multiple different people that were supporting us through this experience that mentioned that, aye. It was really meaningful for them, so yeah together as community was really important.

Sally In terms of what we’ve spoken about before, and particularly around the mosque as being a focal point for community, do you think that was reflected in what we saw today?

Rémy I suppose having that place to be together and having that symbol of Islam would be important and there were other people in and around who weren’t part of what we were doing who I noticed too, just being in the place. Yeah.

Krista Yeah and I think our experience was kind of as visitors and prayer wasn’t happening at that time, I think it was about to happen maybe about half an hour after we left and so we were very much welcomed into that space but I suppose what we didn’t have the experience of was observing or being part of their own togetherness when they were praying together. But you could see and imagine, you know, I mean the space and yeah very wide and open and every person was very welcoming with a smile and very kind. So yeah, felt great in that way from a community perspective.

Sally What do you think was your key moment from the visit?

Rémy Working in libraries and being inclined towards books and language and the richness of words, it was really great for me just to learn that about Islam, the importance of the text and the recital and the oratory and taking different lines from translation and talking about that. It just seemed like such a rich wealth spring contemplative conversation, at least that’s what I took from it. It’s like you guys are having a great time talking about that stuff together.

Sally And the number of translations and how none of them are exactly the same because they can’t translate some of those concepts and words so easily.

Rémy Yes and learning about how some of the translations are more kind of Shakespearean was the example given where others are very clean modern language. I’d be going with the Shakespearean one too.

Krista I appreciated where they were talking about human rights and the role of women and they were saying we get asked about this a lot and also there’s a lot of misinformation and perception, often exacerbated in different places. So they were talking about the helpful approach of almost kind of separating Islam from the cultural aspects of the country or the community or the people that might be practicing that and also the state or the government and the laws and that Islam means peace, and that there are the series of kind of rights that they talked through referred to in the texts or in the Qur’an, which actually they said was more meaningful verbally, wasn’t it, not just written.

Yeah that was really, really fascinating and really wonderful to think about it in that way and also as an example, to think about how so many different countries in the world have a Muslim community and so you can see the differences. You know, Indonesia having such a huge population, Singapore, Iran, you know so many different countries and then actually when you think of those different groups and communities, you can see how actually there’s aspects that are cultural or put upon by the government or the state that’s not coming from Islam. I thought it was a really great, helpful, cleaner kind of way to be able to kind of in terms of clarity of mind.

Sally Yes definitely. Have you got anything else you would like to say in terms of your experience this morning?

Rémy I did some research leading up to this experience, did some listening and a bit of reading – articles and stuff – and then it was really nice to have the Q&A in the mosque and now I’m just left with so many more questions and I think that’s the beautiful thing, right. That is part of the learning journey and gaining a deeper understanding of the different faith practices that are present in our city.

Krista Yeah I’m just quite grateful for the experience.

Rémy Same.

Krista And yeah I feel really welcomed and yeah I feel more informed so then I can then approach things that I see or information that I see with maybe a bit more clarity, with some background and information that is from the community itself.

Sally Awesome, really cool.

Krista Thanks, Sally.

Rémy Yeah thank you, Sally.

Krista Yeah this has been fun.

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Sally Marie and Bailey and Noella, I’m really looking forward to hearing from you all about how you felt about the visit to the mosque, yeah just any top of mind reflections from you.

Marie I’ve visited the mosque before but I also learnt a lot of new things and it was great. I thought the Muslim 101 session was fantastic and I learnt some interesting things and learnt how close actually Muslim is to Christianity; that was really great.

Bailey I also really, really enjoyed it and also learnt a lot. I think the actual space was probably what I expected, like quite calming and welcoming. The people were just incredibly kind and yeah, I just felt really thankful that they were so generous, like offering their time, inviting us into a space that is really special to them and I think because of what’s happened at that mosque, like it’s potentially even more sacred for them. So yeah it was really cool to go in there but yeah, I learnt lots. I didn’t know that the women and the men were separated. It was cool like literally seeing the TVs that are up in the women’s room so that they can be a part of the… I learnt a lot about how they do what they do, why they do what they do, yeah it was awesome.

Noella Yeah I really enjoyed it from the time we got there, it was very welcoming. Quite laid back, so we got to walk around, see the space and then the 101 session was great, I learnt so much and as Marie was saying I didn’t realise the links between Christianity and Islam. They were so knowledgeable and happy to answer any questions. It was a really great morning and I felt it just went so fast, I could have sat there probably all day and just listened to them speak, it was really worthwhile and valuable and just thankful that they opened up the space to us. They could have easily, I guess, not been so open with the traumatic events that have happened there. Yeah they were just so open and welcoming and compassionate and a really great morning.

Marie Previous visits I’ve had, the last one was not long after the March 15th event, and it was with the local community where they had invited the local community in to talk about what changes they were going to be making to the mosque in response to that event and so the space is actually quite different. The really interesting thing that I found was the doors that they now have open in that big space because they didn’t have those there previously. They’d been able to successfully adapt their way of prayer to adapt to today’s world to make people safe, feel safer there.

Sally A very sobering moment, wasn’t it? Do you think that your expectations or what you’d thought was going to happen were met?

Marie Oh absolutely, yes.

Bailey I think I probably learnt more actually. I thought maybe we might just go in, have a look, talk very briefly about what they do in that space but yeah, I learnt so much and I went home and I was talking to my kids about it and they [the hosts] had offered some books for us to take – the Qur’an – at the end if we wanted to and initially I wasn’t going to grab one and then I thought no actually I will, I’ll take one and then I can show my family what it is and talk about what I’d learnt. So we did that last night which was really cool and my little girl has friends who are Muslim and she’s asked me questions that I haven’t been able to answer before so I was able to take that back and show her that. So yeah I definitely probably learnt far more than I expected.

Noella Yeah I’m the same, I thought it was really informative. Yeah. Really great.

Sally Bailey, you mentioned what you’ve learnt, do you think that that’s part of the message that you’ve taken from the day is the need to spread the word and educate wider?

Bailey I think so and they even spoke about it yesterday, you know how Muslims are portrayed in the media and I guess just in general we know what the media are like and we often struggle with how the media portray some things that we’re working on and how the community are being portrayed and receiving information. So I think just hearing that from them and them reiterating actually this is what we’re about and this is what we want people to know. Definitely. And my dad had said, “Oh yeah actually I walked past there the other day and I kind of like had a look but didn’t want to go in” and so I said to him, “Well next time, do. If there’s people out front go in and say hello; like, they would love that”. And I think that’s all people would need is that small invitation. So hey yes, come on in, we will happily welcome you here.

Sally A couple of people mentioned to me yesterday that they felt the tikanga of entry into the mosque was a wee bit similar to tikanga of entry into a marae. Maybe there’s that kind of initial hesitation around entering somebody else’s space but actually, it’s a very, very welcoming kind of a space.

Bailey And like even that was new to me, I just had never thought about it, I think, but I didn’t even know that you took your shoes off at the front door. So that probably made me feel more welcome because it was something I could relate to. So yeah literally the first step into the door I learnt something. And I think also like with them feeding them at the end, I’m not sure if that was because of the type of day we were having or if that is something that would be normal but that was very similar to lots of other cultures and in the Māori culture you would definitely always finish that type of workshop or day sharing food with people. So yeah, lots of similarities.

Sally Yeah great. What do you think was your key moment from the day?

Marie I think I’ve already mentioned about the similarities with Christianity but also just the positive of women in Muslim society. It can be perceived that women are very subservient but actually it came through that they’re not, you know, and that they actually have a very, very special place within the culture. That was the thing that really came through to me.

Noella For me, I guess it was throughout the morning just the feeling of compassion and kindness which just came through their beliefs, through their practices. There were obviously lots of other small things that I learnt but that was kind of the overwhelming thing that I took away from it. Yeah.

Bailey Yeah mine probably piggybacks off Noella’s. I just felt like they didn’t need to be doing that, they didn’t need to be sharing what their sharing and is it their responsibility to be teaching people these things or is it the responsibility of the rest of us to actually just learn on our own. But they do, they did open it up and they did choose to teach us all so I just felt really grateful that they were doing that when maybe it’s not their responsibility to be doing that.

Marie That actually sort of leads onto a bit of a wider question in communities in general about demystifying not just Muslim faiths but various faiths, that often if you do not belong to a particular faith or denomination of Christianity, you don’t understand it. And having opportunities like we had to be able to sort of demystify some of the various religions. It could be Buddhism, it could be Catholicism so that people can feel a lot more welcome in those spaces but also around different people.

Sally Actually that’s something I wanted to ask you all, too, is now that you’ve been to the mosque, has it made you more curious or more… got a greater design to visit other faith institutions, other faith-based places.

Marie Obviously yeah.

Noella I was just surprised at how little I knew and after yesterday I was thinking oh it’d be really great to go and visit other faith-based organisations and just widen our knowledge.

Marie Also I think the challenge for us as community leaders, is how to take this out to the wider community. Bailey has already mentioned that she’s discussed it with our family but also just the wider community around to be able to participate in opportunities like this.

Sally Yes the mosque does hold open days and those sorts of things but it’s not particularly widely publicised, I don’t think.

Marie And as I said, we work locally in this Riccarton area and I mean that’s something that we would be really, really happy to put out through our networks, our weekly newsletter to the community. So being able to pass that on to the communities would be fantastic.

Sally Okay just as we wind up then, have you got any final comments and anything else you’d like to say?

Marie No just thanks for the opportunity, that’s the main thing yeah.

Bailey Definitely.

Noella Thank you.

Marie And for me thank you also, so taking it beyond the LinC team to be able to include my colleagues, that’s been really great so thanks for that.

Bailey That was awesome and it won’t be the last time we go there I’m sure or the last time we connect with that community, they were just awesome.

Sally Thank you very much all of you, it’s super lovely to kōrero with you, I really, really enjoyed hearing from everybody’s pre-visit thoughts and expectations and also how you’ve reflected on it afterwards, it’s been really lovely and there’s been some very strong parallels and themes coming out between the different groups, not surprisingly.

Marie Nice. Thanks Sally.

Bailey Thank you.

Noella Thank you.

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Sally Abdi and Erica, we have just come back from our mosque visit. Firstly, I want to say congratulations, I think that was a really successful event and I’ve had some really lovely feedback from the participants. I think that most people really valued the experience and just being able to be present in such a fantastic space. I’d be keen to hear from you both how you felt the visit went, though.

Erica Kia ora, Erica here. The visit for me was really, really eye opening. I’ve never visited a mosque before and it was my first exposure to how the faith was created to facilitate certain practices and understanding of the culture and also with the safe space. It was really nice to be able to, yeah, hear what questions people had and also again learn about some terminologies that I often hear in the community but not necessarily understand what they mean. So that was really good.

Abdi Kia ora, I was actually interested in the fact that I wasn’t expecting that to be honest there was going to be a large amount of people come in. It was great to have them ask questions and learn something new that they never had experienced before.

Sally I think we maybe had about 40 people in the end.

Abdi Yes.

Sally Why hadn’t you expected such a number?

Abdi Just the fact that especially like you know, after March 15 people tend to be aware that they feel like something is going to happen like that again, like to both sides. So sometimes like you know there’s visitors who come to the mosque, they see the memorial but they sometimes want to go inside the mosque but they feel like they can’t enter. They like ask permission and when you told them you can enter there if you like. Oh is this is okay, that kind of question so it’s like a bit of distance between the two communities.

Sally Are you saying that people can just arrive at the mosque and enter?

Abdi It depends to be honest, like if there’s someone there then of course. Just ask the person if you can enter and like show you around. It’s not like you know you are forbidden from entering.

Sally And from both of you, what was your key moment from the visit do you think?

Erica I think for me a key moment was for us to stand in the main space and when Jumayah was explaining the direction, you know when they are praying and where they’re facing relative to Mecca… that she referenced and it was just really interesting with that in mind and directional, the traditions of doing that and how you know, they were able to utilise that space as a group and collectively think when they are praying together. That was a really strong moment when I felt the energy of the space.

Sally You had talked quite a lot in your interview beforehand, Erica, about the building itself and how much you were looking forward to being present in the building. Did you feel that today?

Erica Yes I think when we were walking through the entrance and then there were multiple rooms and there was a really thin walkway and then it revealed the main space. I think from a design perspective, that journeying through the building made a big difference into how that experience shapes out and once you enter the space, you feel the sense of collectiveness and I really enjoyed being in person in that space and I know Jumayah talked about learnings, using Zoom and how young people are now turning into the digital space but there’s also value in being in a space like that in person.

Sally Definitely.

Abdi One of my highlights would be when Jumayah was talking about women rights, people tend to misunderstand what is women rights in Islam. Wearing hijab, most people will assume think it’s submissive so it was interesting to explain a bit of that.

Sally Yes definitely. Do you feel like other people’s takeaways or expectations would have been met from today’s visit?

Erica From what I’ve heard from other people and having conversations during the lunch break… It was really great that there was time for people to spend having food together and reflect. Lots of people came for different reasons but I think they all had this common thread of being able to learn and experience this space. So I think their expectations were met and potentially beyond, that’s how I felt.

Abdi Personally I was busy with drinks so I didn’t have enough time to actually chat with everyone but I think what Erica said, that’s what everyone was thinking about.

Sally I would agree with that too. Is there anything else you would like to comment or add as we wrap up this show? Any messages for people?

Abdi Personally I would say don’t be shy when you come to the mosque. Just ask someone to let you enter and see, don’t be afraid of like when you meet someone wearing Muslim dress, they shouldn’t be any need to be any that kind of stuff. So I feel like people can get along well.

Erica I would add to that is like embrace the curiosity and don’t be afraid to ask any questions, nothing is a silly question and it really showed that when we do provide these opportunities, people really engage so continue to be curious and speak up.

Sally That’s a good message for life generally, isn’t it?

Erica Yes.

Abdi Yes.

Sally Thank you both so much and for organising this show as well and for also for sharing your reflections. I think you’re probably both correct, I’ve had a really nice sense from everybody else who visited as well, I think they had a really good time.

Erica Thank you Sally for hosting this conversation and we can hopefully continue this journey together.

Abdi Yes.