

A Tale of four cities: Community perception of international students in New Zealand

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Abstract

Recent research in New Zealand has shown that the amount of interaction between international and domestic students is low, despite international students expecting it to be greater. The interaction of international students with host communities is less often studied. This study explores community perception of international students in four cities representing low, medium and high concentrations of international students. In each city, researchers visited public places such as libraries, food courts and entertainment centres where the presence of international students is high, and interviewed customers and businesses regarding their perception of international students. Community organisations providing support services for international students were also interviewed to identify initiatives undertaken to promote social integration. We identified initiatives in the four cities and found these initiatives emphasise the particular character or milieu of the city: in Auckland, meeting new challenges; in Christchurch, bridging cultures; in Hamilton, education and information sharing; and in Tauranga, personalised service. The results are discussed in the wider context of intergroup interaction and relations and focus on social capacity to provide effective support for international students as well as acceptance and integration by both international students and the local community.

Key Words:

international students, community, perception, intergroup interaction, support services, social capacity

Introduction

This study is part of a wider project exploring community interactions with international students and the impact of international students on the communities they come to live in. Local communities have rarely been researched in relation to international students. In particular, this part of the research has targeted businesses and service providers in order to ascertain community attitudes about international students and how different numbers of international students impact on local communities.

Following a change in government policy in 1989 that enabled state-owned educational institutions to charge full fees for international students, the number of Foreign Fee Paying (FFP) students studying in New Zealand increased dramatically—a majority of them were from countries in Asia (Asia 2000 Foundation, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2001). Between 1999 and 2003, the number of FFP students increased by 318%. The lifting of the quotas set by New Zealand for students from the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1999 contributed to this rapid growth in FFP student numbers.

Distribution of international students in Auckland, Christchurch, Hamilton and Tauranga

Different regions in New Zealand attract international students for different reasons. The geographical distribution of international students throughout New Zealand is very uneven (Table 1). The four chosen centres in this study represent communities with high (Auckland and Christchurch (in Canterbury), medium (Hamilton in Waikato) and low (Tauranga in Bay of Plenty) concentrations of international students. These centres have been chosen to compare the differences and similarities between the impacts of differing levels of international students on the cities.

Table 1 Regional distribution of FFP students in primary schools, secondary schools and public tertiary institutions ¹, 2001

	Primary		Secondary		Public Tertiary	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Auckland	1,128	67.1	4,720	53.2	5,393	42.6
Canterbury	316	18.9	1,343	15.1	1,569	12.4
Wellington	50	3.0	671	7.6	1,448	11.4
Waikato	74	4.4	434	4.9	1,438	11.4
Manawatu-Wanganui	44	2.6	335	3.8	1,311	10.4
Otago	23	1.4	529	6.0	822	6.5
Bay of Plenty	27	1.6	251	2.8	146	1.2
Hawkes Bay	5	0.3	181	2.0	121	1.0
Northland	7	0.4	69	0.8	119	1.0
Nelson	1	0.1	87	1.0	146	1.2
Southland	3	0.2	89	1.0	62	0.5
Gisborne	3	0.2	41	0.5	30	0.2
Taranaki	0	0.0	36	0.4	36	0.3
Marlborough	1	0.1	55	0.6	0	0.0
Tasman	0	0.0	22	0.2	0	0.0
West Coast	0	0.0	7	0.1	8	0.1
Total	1,682	100.0	8,870	100.0	12,649	100.0

Source: Ministry of Education, 2002

The international education industry is the fourth largest export earner in New Zealand, in 2003 earning an estimated \$2.21 billion (Education New Zealand, 2004a). Not only does the industry impact significantly on the economy, but social and cultural benefits are similarly accrued. Particularly, increased intercultural learning and communication are valued, as “both domestic and international students benefit from exposure to other cultures and perspectives, enabling them to develop skills to succeed in cross-cultural contexts. This same effect is also apparent in other participants on the value chain (ie. homestay families) and the wider New Zealand society” (Education New Zealand, 2004 b, p.7). Institutional and social capacity are however identified as potential impediments to integration. Institutional capacity refers to the impact international students have on teaching and learning, and issues such as international versus domestic student ratios, the ‘mix’ of nationalities, numbers of teachers available, etc (Asia 2000 Foundation, 2002; Smith & Rae, 2004; Yeung, 2004). The issues of social capacity are less often studied. This paper addresses the issues surrounding international student and local community relations, and how different numbers of international students impact on local communities. In particular the issues of concerns raised in each of the cities will be discussed in relation to initiatives that have been developed according to the capacity and contexts of the cities.

Methodology

In order to ascertain community attitudes about international students, this research has targeted businesses and service providers, and used key informant interviews as the main research methodology. A total of 37 key informant interviews were conducted across the four centres. The key stakeholders were from government and local government organisations such as police and city councils, accommodation providers including homestay coordinators and hostel managers, counsellors and health workers, recreation providers including sports clubs, gaming businesses, libraries and entertainment facilities, community groups including student associations and

¹ The number of FFP students in private training establishments is not shown in this table because statistics for PTEs are limited in comparison to the public sector. The top ten source countries of FFP students in PTEs given in Table 2 were derived from data from a snapshot survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2001. The survey only gave the number of FFP students studying at PTEs at the time of the survey, and therefore is not representative of the whole year due to varying durations of courses.

volunteering organisations, transport providers, businesses and services including banks, post shops, restaurants, insurance providers, and education providers.

An interview schedule was developed to aid in exploring participants' perceptions of the numbers of international students in their city, how their organisation interacts with international students, the positive and negative aspects of this interaction, issues of concern about international student and community relations and effective practice features in services that can address the issue of international student and community relations. Interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone.

The key informant interviews were supplemented by information obtained from informal discussions with the participants from the business sector. In this part of the research, we targeted retail shops, bars, restaurants, leisure facilities, banks and post offices in the four city central business districts. Participants were identified through key informants who suggested which businesses international students frequented in the city, in conjunction with some hard-calling over two days in each centre. The length of conversations often depended on how busy the participants were. A total of 65 participants took part in this part of the study. Discussions with these participants were semi-structured regarding the impacts of international students on their businesses, perceptions and interactions with the students, and issues of concern about international student and community relations.

Four cities and the impact of international students

The most striking similarity between all four cities was the perception of the lack of integration of international students into local communities. In all four cities, the informal and unstructured interviews revealed members of the communities laid the blame for the lack of interaction squarely on the shoulders of the international students. The key informants who worked providing services for international students were more likely to recognise that integration takes adjustment and effort by both the host and the visitor, and most often thought that educational institutions needed to take the lead in interventions to integrate international students.

High concentrations of international students

Both Auckland and Christchurch were very similar in terms of how community members within the CBDs perceived and interacted with international students. People saw the economic benefits, but this was tempered by the perception that international students did not mix well. There was quite a large impact in terms of high numbers of a 'visible' group. The sharp decline in international student numbers was very apparent to the business sector; but for service providers, this decline had given them a chance to evaluate their systems and processes to better cope with the needs of international students. Many service providers in both cities commented that a rise in the numbers of international students could only be possible if there was a corresponding rise in services and resources to support the students, and encouragement of the networking of service providers within the two cities. In both Auckland and Christchurch the service industries, in particular banks, catered to international students by providing specialised staff, bilingual staff and translations of information and application forms.

Medium and low concentrations of international students

The service industries in both Hamilton and Tauranga were also well prepared in terms of interacting with international students. Again, banks made the biggest impression in terms of seeing the need to make adjustments to suit the needs of this client base.

People in both Hamilton and Tauranga made comparisons to Auckland and its high numbers of students and the "problems" associated with this. People in both cities thought they could handle more students, especially in terms of business and financial benefits. However, participants in Hamilton were more concerned that numbers did not get as high as Auckland and made reference to the fact Hamilton should remain "looking like New Zealand". Participants in Tauranga associated the high numbers of international students in Auckland with the serious problems that attracted media coverage involving international students such as extortion, kidnappings, and car crashes.

The economic impacts were strongly recognised in Auckland, Christchurch and Hamilton. Whereas participants in Tauranga, while acknowledging the economic benefits, were less focussed on this aspect of international education. The educational industry in Tauranga worked closely with the city to provide “a good quality product and experience for their students”, competing with other centres, but also proud of the unique and personal experience they could offer. From the point of view of the local community international students in Tauranga did not provide any issues of concern.

Issues of concern for international student and local community relations

International students are a category of visitor to New Zealand who, in many ways, are very vulnerable. Unlike refugees and migrants, international students do not have easy access to all services because they are not New Zealand citizens. Furthermore, unlike most tourists, international students remain in New Zealand for extended periods, depending on the type of course or schooling they are enrolled in. They are also vulnerable as they are generally young and experiencing life away from families and friends for perhaps the first time in their lives (Ho, Au, Bedford & Cooper, 2002).

Where international student numbers were in high concentrations and in the more established centres, such as Auckland and Christchurch, there was quite a high level of concern about how international students were adapting to New Zealand and how we could better provide services for their needs. Service providers in both these cities were proactive and wanted to make sure systems were put in place to support the students before they got into trouble. Issues of concerns range around culture shock and unmet expectations, lack of integration with the local community, health and gambling issues, accommodation, driver licensing and car insurance.

On the other hand, Hamilton service providers were generally more positive about international students, while still having issues of concerns about gambling, financial mismanagement, and health issues. From the point of view of service providers in Tauranga there were not really any issues of concern surrounding international students. This was due mainly to the very small numbers of students, small size of the institutions and the personal attention and care that could be given to individual students.

All centres were battling against media driven public perceptions that stereotype international students as wealthy kids who buy fast cars and drive badly.

Effective practice initiatives

In our interviews with key stakeholders in the four cities, we asked participants to suggest initiatives that have been undertaken in the various centres to address the issue of international students and community relations. Some of these initiatives are discussed below. It is important to note that the initiatives that have been suggested by the participants in this research are not exhaustive of the initiatives being used in each of the four centres. The initiatives are used as examples of good ideas that have worked well, and they are not ranked in any particular order.

Auckland – Meeting New Challenges

An interesting feature of the initiatives we identified in Auckland was they were all proactive services designed to meet the new challenges and new needs that providing for international students presents.

Citizens Advice Bureaux International Students Service Centre:

The International Students Service Centre (ISS) opened in June 2004 and is a non-profit voluntary organisation which provides free, unbiased, independent advice and advocacy for international students citywide. The ISS has four key features that allow for effective support of international students:

- ISS is a “one-stop shop” where international students can find impartial information about any issue they have.

- The centre employs international student volunteers so offers bilingual and bicultural support.
- ISS is situated in Queen Street and located in a building which also houses a language school and many other businesses and service providers. The anonymity of the ISS amongst many other locations helps to protect the privacy of international students who may feel embarrassed about an issue they need advice about.
- The centre uses a multi-agency approach. It allows many different service providers, such as Family Planning and the Problem Gambling Foundation, to hold clinics and also provides space for group meetings such as homestay providers. Therefore, the ISS provides information for service providers and the education industry as well as international students.

New Zealand Police Initiative:

Creating awareness and networking opportunities are the key features of the New Zealand Police Initiative. In August 2004 the Asian Liaison Officer of Auckland Central Police, assisted by the Community Liaison Advisor of the Office of Ethnic Affairs, held a workshop involving 22 people who have direct interactions with international students to discuss the concerns and issues surrounding the students. Consequently, six more workshops have been held for service providers in the Auckland region to create awareness of the services provided which benefit international students, and to discuss the difficulties or ideas and initiatives that different service providers have experienced in their dealings with international students. The aims are to bridge service gaps, share information and learn from one another about international student experiences. Issues that have been discussed include: gambling, driving, accommodation, recreation, and 'living in New Zealand'.

Youthtown:

The key feature of Youthtown's effective practice is its refocusing of its service to accommodate the new needs of international students. Originally, Youthtown targeted troubled New Zealand youth, 13-18 years. Recreational activities such as basketball and table tennis were provided to keep the youth off the streets. However, because of the influx of international students into the Auckland CBD, the centre has changed its mission statement to accommodate international students and actively seek this client base.

Similarly, changes to systems and processes have occurred in city libraries because of the impact of high numbers of international students. Both Auckland and Christchurch libraries have been proactive in employing bilingual staff and in increasing funding of ESOL materials (which are the highest used resource in the libraries) to cater for the demands of international students. Libraries offer a safe and secure environment for students to meet with friends and study. During the peak of international student numbers, and the high international student use of city libraries, pressure was put on resources, study space within the libraries, and staff time dealing with communication issues and high school and tertiary assignment questions. Some of these issues such as study space are not easily resolved for libraries. However, the libraries are proactive in their response to international student needs.

Christchurch – Bridging Cultures

A strong focus in Christchurch's effective practice initiatives was the emphasis on "bridging cultures". Service providers in Christchurch were interested in finding ways to best encourage people of different cultures to interact.

Asian Youth Trust:

The Christchurch Asian Youth Trust was set up in February 2001, initially to help young migrants in Christchurch. More recently it also targeted international students. International students now make up almost 80% of the Trust's client base. The international students the Trust identifies as most in need are those studying at private language schools, mainly because the students at primary, secondary and state tertiary institutions have their own support systems. Most students find out about the Trust through word of mouth.

The aim of the Asian Youth Trust is to provide support for international students. It also aims to provide a bridge between international student cultures and the local community culture. The Trust provides information seminars for students, as well as encouraging international students to become involved in sports, recreation and other activities and running events such as bus tours. The Trust is active in creating and maintaining networks between themselves and service providers. The main problem the Trust encounters is getting Pakeha New Zealanders involvement in Trust activities and events. The Trust is successful in creating a support network for international students and can mediate between students, the educational institution and the local community.

Bilingual Newspaper:

A private initiative to provide a bilingual newspaper also aims to bridge cultures. The newspaper has been in circulation in Christchurch for over a year now. All stories in the newspaper are written in both Mandarin and English. The mainstream business community advertises in the paper and the letters to the editor are from both Chinese readers and the wider community. There has been a positive reaction from many people—one Chinese student stated it gave her issues to discuss with her homestay family. The editor also publicises more ‘negative’ responses in an attempt to “say it like it is”. The stories are both positive and negative regarding international students, in order to show both the differences and similarities between the international student/migrant community and the host community.

Likewise, a Christchurch tertiary institution publishes a bilingual student magazine. Mandarin is used because it is by far the widest language spoken on campus after English. The aim of the bilingual magazine is to include international students in the student culture of the institution. There have been positive spin-offs in terms of international student participation on committees, becoming active in the student association, and an opportunity for the international students to increase their English language proficiency. Similarly, the student association president noted an increase in international student use of the student advocacy services.

Operation Friendship:

Operation friendship operates in several universities throughout New Zealand and began in Christchurch in 1991. This organisation is a Christian organisation whose aim is to be friends to international students and to assist them in any way that is needed as they settle in to New Zealand culture. In Christchurch, Operation Friendship is made up of four (at present) groups of Kiwis who invite their group of students to their homes for meals and social occasions every month or so. These social gatherings provide opportunities for students to experience New Zealand culture, practise English, have fun, and form significant friendships with New Zealanders. Operation Friendship’s aim is to help make the students’ time at university and in Christchurch a highlight of their lives. The objective is to provide support and friendship to students throughout their stay, although challenges include maintaining communication and contact during that time. There is also some difficulty gaining enough New Zealand participants to host the students.

Hamilton – Education and Information Sharing

As a result of the success of the Auckland Police Initiative, we organised a similar workshop in Hamilton to provide information sharing and networking opportunities amongst service providers. This workshop was held on 10 December 2004, and was attended by representatives from the education, local government, law, health, and community sectors. Many of the participants in the Hamilton workshop expressed concern about information provision for students. The initiatives we have found in Hamilton tend towards information provision and education, both of the mainstream community, and international students and their families.

Waikato Chinese Students and Scholars Association:

The Waikato Chinese Students and Scholars Association is primarily involved in the education of international students to help their adjustment to the new society and environment they are living and learning in. This

organisation was established in 1993 to support Chinese students in Hamilton who were sponsored by the Chinese government. These students were usually post-graduate students, not necessarily young students. Today, however, the Waikato Chinese Students and Scholars Association is geared to help young students, usually 17 or 18, who are sent by their families to gain a Western education and English language practice, which is seen to be able to result in better job opportunities, either in New Zealand, overseas, or when the students return to China. Many of these students have not lived away from their families before, and “suddenly find themselves in a foreign country, with no parental controls and sole responsibility for their own finances” (Cunningham, 2004). One of the members of the association became involved in helping Chinese students because he noticed many students on his street were not recycling their rubbish in the correct way, and the street had started to look very dirty. He decided to do a pamphlet drop to explain to students how to look after their street and recycle their waste. Another related aim of this pamphlet drop was to show Kiwis that many Chinese do good work, and the intention is to help to dispel the negative connotations about international students that often appear in mainstream press.

Furthermore, a project has been initiated with some media students to make a ten hour documentary about the experiences of international students in New Zealand, as well as the experiences of New Zealanders towards international students. Steps are being undertaken to request to have the documentary shown on both China and New Zealand mainstream television.

E-Buddies:

Many international students experience mismatched expectations when they arrive in New Zealand (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). The University of Waikato International Centre is beginning a programme in B semester of 2005 as a way to address this problem. This programme gives international students who have been accepted by the university but have not yet left home, the chance to make contact with a new Kiwi friend using email. Valuable and realistic information can be provided to the international student before she or he even leaves their home. International students are invited to make contact with an e-Buddy who has been trained by the international centre. The brochure states “If you become an e-Buddy, you will be contacted by a new student who will want to ask questions about Waikato University, Hamilton, Kiwis, Kiwi culture – lots of things that will help them know what to expect when they get to New Zealand!”.

Because the programme is new there are no evaluations or indications as to how the idea will be received by both local and overseas students. However, preparation at home before the student leaves their home country is very important. E-buddies tries to improve this situation of information provision and is especially useful because the information is going from student to student.

Volunteering Waikato :

Volunteering Waikato is an organisation that is very positive about international student contributions to the local community, and they are active in advocating and highlighting these contributions. Volunteering Waikato maintains a positive relationship with the high numbers of international students that come to them seeking work in the local community. The organisation reports students to be very highly motivated and wanting to get out into the community, and make the most of the opportunities on offer. Some students want jobs related to their field of study, which can be impossible; however, most are happy to be in the community, learning about New Zealand and improving their English. The only difficulty the organisation experiences is attracting enough community agencies to employ international students. Volunteering Waikato is proactive in recruiting international students and regularly attends the international student orientation day. International students are also involved in volunteer work at the organisation itself as volunteering interviewers and training is provided. Volunteer Western Bay of Plenty is also proactive in recruiting international students in the Tauranga area. In particular they run Japanese student internships and actively evaluate the experiences of the students and the community agencies. Difficulties encountered for both parties include communication difficulties and a mismatch in expectations, particularly students who presume they will carry out their volunteer work in the business sector rather than the community sector.

Tauranga – Personalised Service

Tauranga is a small centre which is currently establishing itself in the international education industry. To do this, the focus is on providing a quality product. Because of the small number of international students in the city, providers are able to give their students a personalised experience.

Personal networks between educational institutions and service providers:

The real benefit of the small numbers of international students and small size of the educational institutions in Tauranga was the personal services and support that could be given directly to individual students. Teachers and support staff were able to know their students individually. One language school we spoke to were able to personally escort students to the doctor or bank to help them if they were experiencing difficulties. On the other hand, the educational institution was also able to maintain close contact with the service providers whom the students most need to visit; therefore, the service providers are prepared for the students.

Similarly, two accommodation providers who participated in Christchurch also prided themselves on the very personal service they were able to provide their international students. One, a tertiary accommodation provider, made sure that all staff tried to learn the names of the students under their care as well as making sure that the residences were culturally mixed and many activities were planned. The other, a homestay coordinator for primary and secondary students, advocated close contact to be maintained with the students' families and that the student should be treated like a member of the family. Therefore, the larger centres, like the small centres which attract international students, can provide a personalised service at the organisation level.

Issues of concern and the variations between the four cities

Auckland and Christchurch are well established in the international education sector. The rapid rise in international student numbers caught both cities off guard, in terms of service provision and resources available to properly provide a quality service. However, the decline in numbers over the last 18 months has afforded service providers the opportunity to put systems in place that enable them to better deal with the different dimensions of issues that international students present. However, many service providers and those interested in the pastoral care of international students would be concerned to see a rise in the number of international students in these two cities, because they do not believe there is enough support in terms of issues to do with finance management, mental and sexual health, and culture shock. Both Auckland and Christchurch have Asian Liaison police officers who are concerned with the care of young adults who are not equipped with the right information to protect themselves. However, the police can only step in to help after the student is in trouble. The group which is seen to be most at risk in Auckland and Christchurch are those who are between 18 and 25, who are not covered by the Code of Practice as thoroughly as students who are under 18 attending primary and secondary schools.

In Auckland there is a real sense of needing to act to help students during their time in Auckland. Service providers are reacting to problems that have already arisen but are taking on a collaborative approach in order to be successful. Collaboration between service providers is an effective approach but there is also recognition in Auckland that student involvement is fundamental (Gresham & Bryce, 2002). Students know what they need and can work with staff at educational institutions or community service providers in order to develop successful interventions. Community linkages with educational institutions need to be encouraged so that both community groups and international students engage with each other (McGrath and Butcher, 2004). Information centres for international students, like the "one-stop shop", as suggested by McGrath and Butcher (2004) provide information that addresses the particular needs of international students while also providing a specific entry point for the interaction of community groups with international students.

The initiatives explored in Christchurch represent a focus on bridging cultures. The aims of the bilingual newspapers are to initiate intercultural dialogue, which is the beginning point for intercultural interaction and learning. There are many community newspapers which provide information for new settlers and importantly

contribute to linguistic and cultural maintenance of ethnic groups within New Zealand. However, while acknowledging the inherent difficulties of mainstream media reporting, Spoonley and Trlin (2004) raise the question of whether “these media [ethnic community] contribute to a common public debate about a culturally diverse and inclusive society”. The bilingual media used in Christchurch attempts to bridge this divide.

In Hamilton, quite a lot of emphasis is put on proactive prevention of problems, as well as pre-empting problems arising in Hamilton that have already arisen in Auckland. As well, service providers are confronted with issues such as how to get information to students, how to get them interested, and how best to match up mismatched expectations which are often formed before international students leave their home country (Campbell & Xu, 2004; Ward and Masgoret, 2004). Education and information provision to the student is fundamental, however, there is also concern to educate and inform the host community about international students.

Tauranga, on the other hand, relies on its accessibility to individual students, in order to provide support when it is most needed. Tauranga’s small numbers of international students afford this opportunity, and provide a feeling of security and closer relationships that is often not felt in larger centres. These types of relationships are important to international students (Gresham, 2003). However, the students in Tauranga are mobile and it is a very small centre, therefore international students may visit Hamilton and Auckland regularly in order to meet other friends and experience a faster pace of life. Therefore, the students in Tauranga are also at risk to some of the problems which have surfaced in Auckland.

An interesting feature of this research was that community members in Auckland, Christchurch and Tauranga mentioned Brazilian students as mixing with local communities much better than Asian students. Brazilian students do not feature significantly in FFP student statistics therefore, it was surprising references were so often made about this specific group. Key informant contacts suggest that Brazilian students are, as the community views them, “loud”, “boisterous”, “fun” and “adventurous”. There were some who thought that a few Brazilians could add real life to classrooms and activities, but more than a few could be a little more difficult to handle. They tend to “stick together” themselves, as was perceived of the Asian students; however, the Brazilian students go out into the community as a group, are very social, and are inclined to let people know “we’re Brazilian”! In Christchurch, a particular Burger King restaurant was always mentioned as the ‘hang out’ for Brazilian students. An informant validated this, saying that they seem to know about the Burger King meeting place even before they arrive in Christchurch. This would suggest Brazilian students’ have access to pre-arrival information, although it is difficult to say whether it is formal or informal. Further research is required to explore the differences between the very large population of “quiet and exclusive” Asian international students, and the smaller number of “loud and social” Brazilian students, and how these differences impact on community attitudes and on the experiences of the students themselves in terms of adjusting to the new environment.

Overall though, interaction between host communities and international students were viewed by community members in all four cities to be lacking. Homestays are regarded as being an excellent place for intercultural interaction (Richardson, 2004); however, all parties must be fully prepared for the experience and understand the reality of the homestay experience (Campbell & Xu, 2004). A care provider in Christchurch suggested bilingual support was a necessity during the first part of the students stay, and handbooks in the students’ first language are necessary. Similarly, she recommended contact between the host family and the student’s family prior to their arrival in New Zealand, and maintenance of this close contact while the student is living with the family. This information sharing could include exchanging photos, email and telephone calls. Sports, recreation and church groups are other good avenues for intercultural interaction (McGrath & Butcher, 2004) but collaboration is needed between educational institutions, local communities and international students to facilitate this. This research showed that international students volunteering in community organisations offers excellent opportunities for interaction, learning about New Zealand ways of life, and practicing English. The exchange is two-way and further research on the impact and influences of international student participation in community organisations would be useful. Community volunteers who have time and an interest in people from other cultures can offer successful support to international students (Gresham & Bryce, 2002).

The different cities have responded in different ways, depending on their different capacities and contexts. The effective practices described above show Auckland to be responding to and meeting new challenges. Christchurch has attempted to bridge cultures through fostering interaction and understanding. Hamilton is proactive in its attempts to inform students and pre-empt the difficulties and challenges students have faced in the larger centres. Tauranga, through its lower number of international students, is able to offer personal care and support. Communities, educational institutions, local governments and government agencies must work together in order to encourage two way interaction between international students and local communities (McGrath & Butcher, 2004). The cities have responded to the presence of international students, but further collaboration needs to be developed and evaluated, involving both international students and local communities.

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