



Preston Whare & Lisa Allan

## Reo Rua - Our bilingual journey

### For the love of te reo

Preston Whare doesn't like to say it, but he knows what true love is – and te reo Māori has helped him find that in his partner, Lisa Allan, who fully embraces the language out of respect for his culture.

The couple own the Lakes Road Toa Advance Health and Fitness Centre, and have welcomed with open arms Bilingual Rotorua.

Preston and Lisa say members who come to the gym are welcomed with a cheerful “kia ora” or “mōrena” and it's warmly welcomed by their clients.

“I think the name Toa resonates with the local culture within Rotorua, I think it's only fitting to speak the native tongue even as a Pākehā Oz,” says Lisa.

The gym, which recently celebrated its second birthday, adopts the slogan “A new beginning” as its mantra and is whanau-oriented, becoming a hub for a number of community-led projects.

In the past the gym has hosted community-driven beginner te reo classes and Preston is open to the idea of hosting wānanga reo (Māori classes) in future.

Lisa has fully immersed herself in Māori culture and te reo. “So how I first started how to speak reo is when we'd drive from here to Auckland I'd start with all the suburbs and it's grown from there. Now I've gone off and bought te reo Māori books and do my 30 minutes of reading at home in bed,” says Lisa.

Preston is touched at how wholly Lisa has embraced Māoritanga.

“To be honest, it's influenced me a lot. I've been in Australia or a while- about 23 years- and I was back and forth to New Zealand. But just watching Lisa as a non-Māori wanting to learn my culture blows me away. Just listening to her speak or trying to speak our language – it's really touching. I love it,” he says.

The couple made the move to New Zealand a few years ago after visiting Aotearoa while on holiday.

Lisa and Preston are big supporters of the initiative to make Rotorua a bilingual city and district and will be expanding their efforts to support the kaupapa at Toa Advance Fitness and Health.

In August Rotorua officially declared its commitment to become a reo rua (bilingual) destination. Te Tatau o Te Arawa is leading the initiative with support from Council and Te Puni Kōkiri.

Te Tatau o Te Arawa chairperson Te Taru White says it's a logical fit for Rotorua as the birthplace of cultural tourism in Aotearoa.

“Bilingualism is already visible in Rotorua with the beauty of te reo coloured right throughout the district and city street names and suburbs.

“This new initiative, Bilingual Rotorua, is an opportunity to enhance and build on our foundations. I have no doubt the rewards- socially, culturally and economically- will be enduring and will make a major contribution to enhance and strengthen the social fabric of our community,” he says.

Rotorua Mayor, Steve Chadwick says the reo rua (bilingual) initiative fits with the district's Vision 2030, which identified culture as a key component of what makes Rotorua special. She believes it could be a game changer for the district.

“This commitment to becoming a bilingual city acknowledges the history and whakapapa of our district and reinforces our reputation as a heartland of Māori culture,” she says.

The board, which represents the diverse voices of Te Arawa and provides advice to Council, is working with Te Puni Kōkiri on a planned programme of work that will help bring Rotorua's reo rua aspirations to life. Individuals, organisations and businesses are being encouraged to look for ways to encourage bilingualism through signage, use of te reo among themselves and to clients and customers and initiatives like incorporating Māori translations in the likes of menus and other documents.

**For a guide to best practice go to: [goo.gl/XxtDSD](http://goo.gl/XxtDSD)**

Tell us about your bilingual initiative.

Korero mai.

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