



ALUMNI

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



December 2025



Kapa Haka performance at the opening of our new whare

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Kia ora everyone,

Welcome to our end-of-year alumni newsletter, especially to the newest members of our alumni community – around 350 Year 13 students from 2025. They had a great graduation celebration, filling the Event Centre with their family and friends, before their NCEA exams in November.

In this issue, we are bringing news of our new whare at Westlake, and sporting and musical successes. You can read of former students winning awards and receiving recognition with a national honour. We feature Westlake authors and a filmmaker, recent graduates having early success in their chosen fields, and our prize-giving speaker, a leading New Zealand businesswoman.

We also love to hear news and updates from alumni around the world, so feel free to email us with stories and photos, and we will do our best to share them with our community.

alumni@westlakegirls.school.nz.

Cathy Roughan, Alumni Co-ordinator

Events & School News

Our Community



Year 13 Graduation function, 2025

Alumni Class reunions



Westlake High School Founders Luncheon (1957 – 1961)

The Westlake High School Founders (1957 – 1961) continue to meet annually with lunch at The Bays Club in Browns Bay. Principals from both Westlake schools attended and enjoyed the company and sharing of memories with the founders. Thanks to Robin Reid for organising this.

Three other reunions this year have focused on getting together informally, with a school tour of Westlake with Dean Flyger, Community Relations Manager and Cathy Roughan, Alumni Co-ordinator, and then heading to Fantail and Turtle for further re-connecting and fun. We are grateful to the former students who have organised these successful gatherings: Carrie George, and Paula Turner, 1995 Reunion, November 2025, Jane Knox, Nikki Horne and Verity Bliss, 1990 Reunion, March 2025, and Gayle Coplestone 1985 Reunion, November 2025.



Class of 1995 – 30-year reunion



Class of 1990 35-year reunion



Class of 1985 – 40-year reunion



Class of 1985, Form 7

Looking ahead to 2026

For our alumni reunions, the emphasis is on decade reunions, and we welcome interest from alumni to get a reunion underway. For 2026, there may be interest from the Classes of 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996 and 2006, but you don't have to wait for a decade to roll around!

The starting point for our reunions, which are generally casual gatherings, is to have one or a few from your year get in touch with us and we can give advice and assist in the planning.

alumni@westlakegirls.school.nz

We are in touch with our special group of around 16 former students who started in Form 3 in 1962, when the schools separated, and completed their 5th year in Form 6A in

1966. We hope to welcome them back to Westlake next year. We'd love to find more of our WGHS foundation pupils from Form 3, 1962.

Please contact us with your name, including surname while at Westlake, and 'foundation pupil WGHS' in the subject line.

Alumni Communications

We have added another way of keeping in touch with our new Alumni Instagram page – westlakegirls_alumni. This will be used alongside our Alumni Facebook page to share news of Westlake, events, and other alumni.



Westlake News

Opening of the Westlake Girls Whare Āhuru Mōwai

Westlake Girls officially opened its Whare Āhuru Mōwai (a safe place for all), with a moving pre-dawn ceremony led by Ngāti Pāoa. At sunrise, the whare was gifted the name Te Manawa o Hine Kahukura - "The heart of a female leader" - honouring a Māori atua (deity) symbolising resilience, understanding, and leadership.



The kapa haka brought powerful wairua (spirit) to the event, which ended with shared kai at the Event Centre. We were delighted to have some alumni returning to be part of this milestone event for Westlake.

The whare is to be a place for learning, reflection, celebration, and connection for all.



Westlake sporting successes

Westlake Girls was noted as the second-top girls sporting school in New Zealand in a recent article in the New Zealand Herald.

This followed outstanding seasons and successes at national competitions in September/October with a wonderful effort by players, coaches and managers.

Our premier basketball team won the New Zealand Secondary School championship held in Palmerston North for an amazing 4th year in succession.





Premier Netball team



Premier Sailing team

The premier netball team were 3rd in the national competition held in Wellington, in October, after taking the silver award for the Upper North Island Schools' (UNISS) competition.

Across the Tasman, the premier sailing team secured their 3rd successive win, taking the inter-dominion title for top girls sailing team. The event features six top sailing teams from New Zealand and six from Australia, so this 'three-peat' is a wonderful achievement.

Westlake Girls has a high level of participation in a large number of sports, with opportunities at all levels of play. This includes 49 netball, 32 volleyball, 12 football, 10 basketball and 5 hockey teams.

Music



'Tinā', the film with a Westlake connection

Many of you will have seen and read about the success of the New Zealand film, *Tinā* this year. It's been exciting to see its recognition through awards and box-office success, as it has a strong Westlake connection.

The inspiration for the film was a performance of a Samoan love song by the Choralation choir at the National Big Sing choral competition in 2013. Music by the choir is featured in the film, and some alumni had parts as extras. Choralation's Musical Director, Fiona Wilson, was a Musical Director for the film, and Choralation sang at the New Zealand premiere in Auckland, in February 2025.

The film tells a poignant story of a Samoan mother grieving for her daughter lost in the Christchurch earthquakes, and the healing power of music.

[Watch the 2013 choral performance](#)

Festival Awards

Westlake choral and instrumental ensembles had outstanding success at their respective music festivals.

At the Big Sing choral festival in Dunedin in August, Cantare (premier girls' choir) and Choralation (WGHS and WBHS mixed choir), both directed by Fiona Wilson (WGHS), won gold awards, with Choralation's performance of *Rytmus*, also taking out the Tour Time Best Performance of a Choral Art Song – the 4th consecutive year a Westlake Girls' choir has been awarded this trophy.



At the KBB Festival in Auckland, Westlake instrumental groups won multiple top awards, including gold for Westlake Symphony Orchestra, Westlake Concert Band and Westlake Big Band; silver for Westlake Chamber Orchestra, and bronze for Westlake Girls Symphonic Band, Westlake Girls Jazz Band and Westlake Girls Taharoto Strings.

Two former long-serving staff members

We wish to acknowledge the passing of two former long-serving Westlake staff members in 2025 – Annette Sharp and Alison Boak.

Annette Sharp gave over 20 years of service to Westlake through the 80s and 90s in the Science Department, as a dean and as a deputy principal. She was subsequently principal of New Plymouth Girls High School and Epsom Girls Grammar School. She was an active sportswoman herself and supported Westlake sports and music events keenly.



Alison Boak was in the PE and Social Sciences Departments and was a dean for several years. Her Westlake service spanned 20 years from 1979. She coached and managed several sports teams through her 20 years of service and was involved in the musical life of the school, taking part in and assisting with productions.

Alumni Updates

National Honour – Kate Sylvester ONZM



Photo: Governor-General Facebook

We extend our warmest congratulations to former Westlake student, Kate Sylvester, one of New Zealand's best known fashion designers, on being recognised as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for her services to the fashion industry. She received the insignia at an investiture ceremony in July, at Government House in Auckland.

Kate was a student at Westlake in the '80s, followed by studies in fashion and design at Wellington Polytechnic.

She opened her first standalone fashion store in 1993 in Auckland, co-founding the label, *Kate Sylvester*. Her first fashion show was in Sydney in 1999, which launched her international career in fashion, and by 2011, her brands were stocked across Europe, Australia, Southeast Asia and the United States.

In 2018, she co-founded *Mindful Fashion*, a not-for-profit collective of New Zealand designers, fabric suppliers and manufacturers, aiming to unite the industry to create a sustainable and thriving future.

There was special recognition for her at the NZ Fashion Show in 2023, which marked 30 years in business as a designer. The show featured a collection reflecting numerous iconic moments in her fashion career.

Last year, Kate announced that her fashion label would be wound down and would close in mid-2025. Her three sons, who share their parents' creative talents, recently decided to relaunch one of her labels, *Sylvester*, in a new fashion enterprise.

While taking a step back, Kate and her life and business partner, Wayne Conway, continue to encourage and support a new generation of New Zealand designers and champion the New Zealand fashion industry.

North Harbour AIMES Awards

Two former Westlake Girls students won AIMES awards at the North Harbour Club awards this year. It was a wonderful achievement to have two Westlakers as category winners at the prestigious award gala evening, which marked 30 years that the club has been rewarding talented North Shore youth in their academic, sporting, cultural and community pursuits.



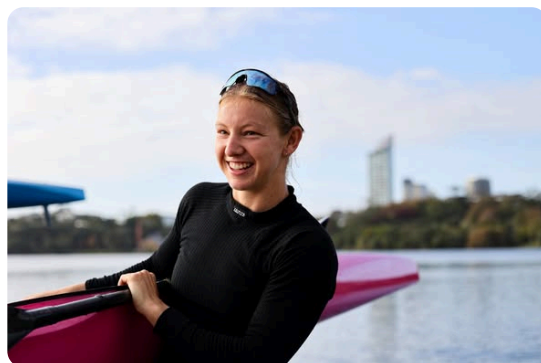
Sanaa Nair (2018) won the Community Service Category, sponsored by Albany Toyota, with a cash grant of \$15,000.

Sanaa is studying a Master of Science in marine research at AUT and volunteers extensively with organisations such as Manta Watch Aotearoa New Zealand, BLAKE, and LegaSea. Her work includes manta ray surveys, public outreach and citizen science initiatives, and she plays a key role in marine education.

The AIMES award helped fund an internship opportunity with the Manta Trust in the Maldives.

At Westlake, Sanaa was a prefect, an Amnesty International leader, and keen hockey player. She says Westlake played a huge part in developing her foundational skills.

Tara Vaughan (2021) received the AIMES Sport Award sponsored by AUT Millennium Stadium, and a cash grant of \$15,000. This recognises her gold medal in the Women's K4 500m event in the Paris Olympics, and her run of international successes since she joined the Women's High-Performance team in 2022.



She works as an Olympic Ambassador while she is pursuing a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science at AUT. She was recognised as AUT's Female Athlete of the Year in October last year.

Her goal is to compete in the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028, hoping to build on her successes and keep New Zealand at the forefront of international sprint kayaking.

The Arts

Hazel Phillips – author



Hazel has a Master's in Creative Writing, an MA in Media Studies, and a background in newspaper and magazine journalism, with writing published in media across New Zealand and Australia. She was the guest speaker at the Westlake Girls Leavers' dinner in 2013, the year she published her first book.

Talking about the inspiration for her new book, she says, '*I wanted to know Ruapehu more thoroughly, but I also want people to think about our impact on these mountains, particularly in advance of Te Kāhui Maunga cultural redress processes. These mountains are real treasures, and they need to be looked after.*'

Hazel is currently working on her next book about early women climbers and adventurers of Aoraki Mount Cook.

Hazel Phillips (1996) is an author and adventurer who has recently published her fourth book – *Fire and Ice: Secrets, Histories, Treasures and Mysteries of Tongariro National Park*. Her previous book, *Solo: Backcountry adventuring in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2022) was shortlisted in the New Zealand Mountain, Film and Book Festival book awards (2022), and was a non-fiction bestseller.

She has recently been named as the recipient of the inaugural Luna Foundation Writers Residency and will spend 14 days writing in Hawke's Bay with a stipend of \$3,500. The judges commended her on her 'compelling vision and bold voice'.



Photo Credit: Adrian Cook

[Read more](#)

Dr Ngarino Ellis – academic and writer

Congratulations to former student, Ngarino Ellis (1987) on winning the BookHub Award for Illustrated Non-Fiction in the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards 2025. Her book, *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*, co-authored with Deidre Brown, and Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, is a landmark account of Māori art from the time of the tūpuna (ancestors) to the present day. It was 12 years in the making and has received wide acclaim.

Ngarino Ellis (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou) is a professor in art history at Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland. She has received multiple awards for excellence in teaching and research and for previous books she has written and edited.

At Westlake, Ngarino particularly loved art, and was inspired by her art teacher, Sue McBride. She initially studied law and arts and was admitted as a barrister before deciding to follow her passion as an art historian.

Ngarino has strong family connections with Westlake, as her twin sister attended, as did her two daughters, with her son also a Westlaker. Her mother, Elizabeth Ellis CNZM, who was named 2025 Senior New Zealander of the Year, taught in the Westlake Art Department in the late 60s.

[Read more](#)



Photo Credit: Chris Loufte

Jennifer Onyeiwu – Actor and Film Producer



Jennifer Onyeiwu (2012) has recently produced her first feature film, *Now or Never*; an independent project shot in Auckland with a team of emerging local creatives. The film has universal themes of family, mental health, and resilience. It is hoped the film will be released in international film festivals in early 2026.

Her creative path has taken her through acting, writing, and now producing.

She honed her performance skills with acting training in New York at Atlantic Acting School (2018) and T Schreiber Studios (2023) and she has had numerous acting roles on screen and on stage. These include several series on Netflix, and *The Vagina Monologues* at The Pumphouse Theatre, for which she received the Best Female Actor in a Leading Role award in 2021.

Jennifer has also completed a Bachelor of Health Science degree in Public Health Education and Promotion from AUT, where she is a teaching assistant, and has a keen interest in health and wellness.

[Read more](#)



International Sporting Debuts

Emme Shearer – Tall Fern

Emme Shearer (2019) made her 2degrees Tall Ferns debut in the Trans-Tasman Throwdown early in the year. This was



followed by playing In the FIBA Asia Cup in China in July.

Emme was the 2019 Sportsperson of the year at Westlake and played in premier basketball, netball and volleyball teams. She spent five years at the University of Portland and gained an undergraduate and Masters degree in Finance, alongside her stellar basketball career.

In July this year, it was announced that Emme would join the Tauranga Whai team to play in the Taihi Basketball Aotearoa league.

[Read more](#)

Kaia Tupu-South – New Zealand Athletics team



Kaia Tupu-South (2020) made her debut with the New Zealand Athletics team this year, competing in the shot put event at the World Athletics Indoor Championship in Nanjing, China, placing 16th overall.

She was Head Prefect and Sportsperson of the Year at Westlake, and won gold and silver medals at the U20 New Zealand Track and Field Championships in shot put and discus in her senior years.

She was awarded an athletics scholarship to the University of Washington in Seattle and graduated with a BE in Mechanical engineering in June this year.

Recent Graduates



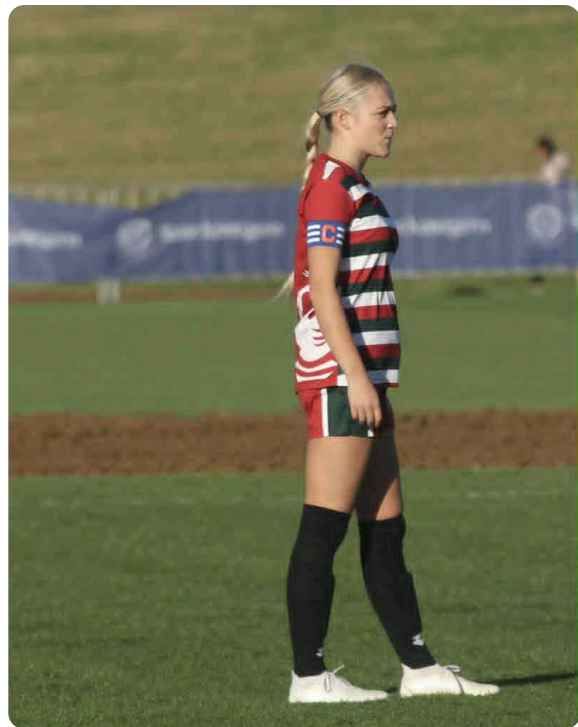
Katie Brown - Prestigious Drama School

Former student Katie Brown (2024) was a standout performer in Westlake choirs and Westlake productions during her time at school, including being named Best Leading Actor in a Musical in 2023 (Into the Woods), and 2024 (Crazy for You), at the annual Showdown Awards. She has gone on to achieve remarkable success while auditioning for drama schools in London.

Katie was offered a place at every school she auditioned for — an extraordinary feat in itself.

She settled on the highly competitive Conservatoire at the Guildford School of Acting (GSA), securing one of just 22 places in their prestigious BA (Hons) Musical Theatre programme. Graduates of this school include Bill Nighy, Celia Imrie, Brenda Blethyn, and Michael Ball.

We look forward to following Katie's progress in this next exciting step in her performing career.



Sienna Vercauteren - English football club

Congratulations to former student, Sienna Vercauteren (2024) who has recently signed with Watford, a prestigious professional football club in Watford, England.

She was our First XI Football captain in 2024.



Bella Allan-Moetaua (2023)

Congratulations to Bella Allan-Moetaua, Class of 2023 who has recently competed in her first arias competition. She took first

place in the prestigious Dame Malvina Major Foundation competition in the section for young performers aged 16 – 21 years.

Alumni engaging with Westlake in 2025

Thanks to all former students who have returned to Westlake and given their time as guest speakers at prize-giving, graduation functions, career presentations, organised and attended reunions, and helped in a variety of ways with the sporting and cultural life of the school.

These include **Naomi Ballantyne** (Prizegiving) and **Courtney McCormick** (2015) (Prefects' Graduation), and Careers presenters **Haylee Lemon**, **Lizzy Ogle** (2008), **Saffron Sharp** (2012), **Wing Chan** (2011), **Lily Winchester** (2021) and **Jenny Chan** (2010).

Prizegiving Speaker Naomi Ballantyne ONZM – Entrepreneur and Businesswoman

We welcomed Naomi Ballantyne (Lassen) back to Westlake as guest speaker at this year's prizegiving. Naomi is one of New Zealand's foremost entrepreneurs and businesswomen. She is a former student of Westlake Girls from the Class of 1981.

She has spent over 40 years in the insurance industry, 35 building three of the largest life insurance businesses in New Zealand.

Naomi has been recognized with many accolades and awards, acknowledging her success as an industry pioneer, in job creation, and making a difference.



This includes being appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2017 New Year's Honours, being inducted into the New Zealand Hall of Fame for Female

Entrepreneurs and the North Harbour Business Hall of Fame, and a Lifetime Achievement award for services to the Insurance Industry.

While Naomi stepped back from a fulltime role in insurance after her highly successful company, Partners Life, was sold to an international company in 2022, she has continued to follow her passion and give back in many ways, using her skills and experience to mentor and support others, educate about financial well-being, and foster change.

Naomi delivered an inspiring speech at the award ceremony, sharing some of the key things that have helped her reach this stage in her career. These included advice for students to take early steps to learn about money, be brave enough to take risks and make mistakes, be curious to learn more, to find people in life who can be an inspiration and moral compass, and to think about *who* you want to be, before thinking about *what* you want to do.

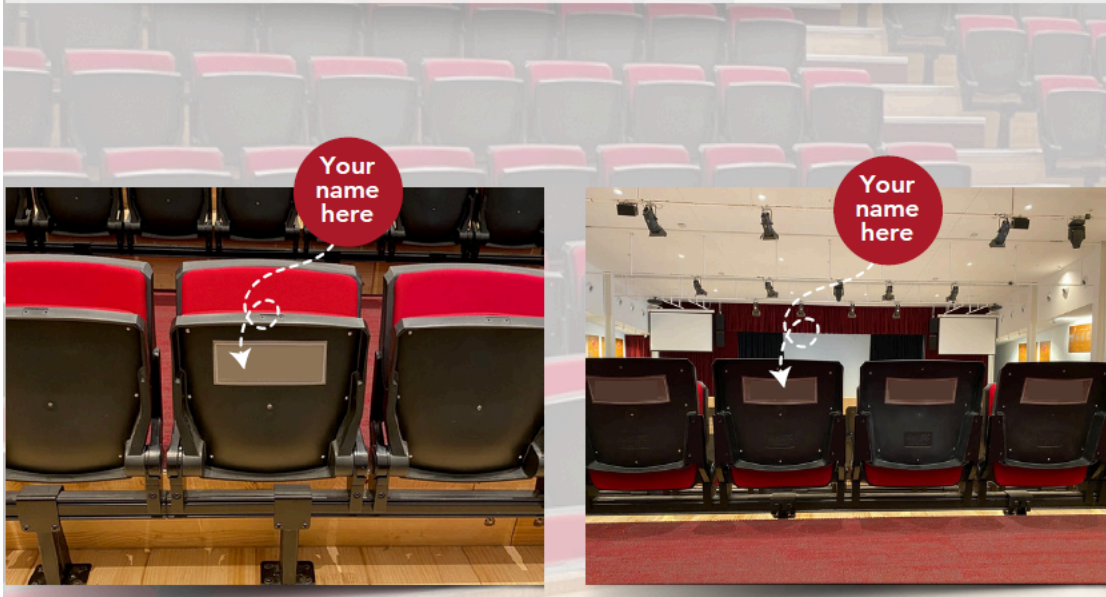
[Watch here](#)

Legacy Seat at Event Centre

EVENT CENTRE LEGACY SEATING

Make your mark with a \$500 donation and have your name on a mezzanine seat in our Event Centre - for life!

Personalise your seat with a custom dedication on both sides (250 x 100mm) and leave a legacy in our community.



Dedicate a seat – Leave your mark at Westlake Girls.

The Westlake Girls Event Centre is a wonderful facility used extensively by the school and the wider community. There is an opportunity to personalise a mezzanine seat in the

Event Centre with your name or a special dedication. Your plaque (250 x 100mm) will be displayed on both sides of the seat, ensuring your legacy is part of every event for years to come. A donation of \$500 secures your legacy seat. Further information is available from Dean Flyger, the WGHS Community Relations Manager, or on the school website – dflyger@westlakegirls.school.nz

The Westlake Girls Class of 1995 have recently set up a legacy seat, the first alumni year group to do so.



Connect With Us



We are on Facebook, LinkedIn, and now, Instagram. Click the icons to navigate to the pages.

We'll keep you informed of Westlake events you may be interested in, any alumni reunions, and alumni news.

Facebook groups for each alumni year can be found on the school [website](#).

Contact us anytime with queries or news of our alumni. We love to hear stories of our former students – alumni@westlakegirls.school.nz

Subscribe to this Newsletter

If this email was forwarded to you and you'd like to subscribe, click [here](#).

We love hearing stories about what former students are doing; please get in touch if you have news to share!

Westlake Girls High School

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