



WELLfed

#LearnerStory



Raynida

When Raynida first attended WELLfed as a learner, she would never have believed that she would become part of their leadership programme and be teaching her own learners.

She was referred to WELLfed by her social worker at Wesley Community Action. She is a Pacific woman, who had recently returned to the Wellington region with her three children, escaping a controlling and abusive relationship. She recalls as a child being brought up in the Church, and having the self-confidence to perform in front of congregations. The abuse that she suffered took that confidence away, and when she first came to WELLfed, she was nervous not knowing anyone.

She met Kim [CEO at WELLfed] once before her first class, and she was the only person she knew on her first day. It was daunting turning up, but she quickly came to realise what a welcoming place WELLfed is. Whatever people look like, or wear, or where they come from or how they speak, does not matter. Everyone is accepted for who they are. To be welcomed and accepted was a new experience for Raynida.

How has WELLfed changed her cooking and eating habits? Raynida took part in 16 sessions as a learner. It wasn't only about cooking, she also learnt about shopping and value for money. The WELLfed tutors would tell the learners where special offers were on, what to buy where on a particular week. This knowledge has remained with her. When she shops, she knows what to look out for – Maxine [senior leader at WELLfed] has taught her what different vegetables are, how they can be cooked, and what a good alternative can be. If bok choy is \$4.99 – she simply substitutes silverbeet. She is also making other healthy choices, such as to use less oil, and to swap fizzy drinks for water. Raynida now feels empowered to make those decisions.

Before WELLfed, Raynida used to get home late, and not have time to cook, so they usually had takeaways. If she did cook, she often could not afford to include vegetables. Now, cooking each night is normal, including for her three children, parents and older family members. She is proficient at a range of recipes, and can have dinner on the table within 45 mins of walking in the door.



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And what about her children? Mostly the children love her cooking, and are happy that takeaways are just a treat. They are sometimes dubious about unknown ingredients – but often only after they have eaten and enjoyed them! Raynida is clearly proud to be able to offer them a healthy dinner.

What's the best thing about WELLfed? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata. Raynida had had a job previously, and described a usual work culture with a mix of personalities. She is quick to point out that WELLfed is not like that. Each and every person at WELLfed helps to create a warm and inclusive atmosphere. From the first visit, people knew her name, and welcomed her as she entered the building. It is now like the best sort of family, there at every challenge, to share laughs and support her through harder times.

Despite the hard work that Raynida has clearly put in, she is incredibly thankful to the WELLfed team. When her family all had COVID-19 and were isolating at home, she was beyond grateful at the grocery delivery that WELLfed brought to her door. This level of going well beyond the delivery of cooking classes is what makes the WELLfed community so special.

What is it like being on the leadership programme? After graduating from WELLfed, Raynida volunteered her time, to give back to the place that had given her so much. She was delighted this year to be offered a paid contract, as part of the leadership programme. Raynida admits that it is not always easy, she has to challenge herself. At the beginning, she used to escape to do the washing up, to avoid the face to face teaching of learners. The senior tutors encouraged her out of her comfort zone, but were always ready to be beside her as needed. Little by little, her confidence is increasing, with the new skills that she is learning and passing on to the next generation of learners.



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What else has changed for Raynida? She tells me proudly that she is joining some of the other tutors and learners at an exercise class tonight – just a gold coin donation, and her confidence is sufficiently high to just go along and see how it goes.

Raynida’s life still has challenges. However, she describes Mondays and Tuesdays (the days she works at WELLfed) as the highlight of her week, the time she can be herself, leave her worries behind, and fill her soul up, to last her through the week. It is clear that she places high value on WELLfed, and rightly so.