

Prisoners create "perfect" wedding cake for NZ bride

Prisoners at Kohuora Auckland South Corrections Facility have delivered a bride her "perfect" wedding cake ahead of her nuptials in West Auckland.

Bride Naz Sharma, who works in the prison's performance team, was so impressed by the standard of baking at Kohuora's public Community Link Centre café that she requested a four-tier cake for her own nuptials. The original, made-to-order creation took bakers Liam and Peter* three days to make, under the guidance of Assistant Director Agnes Robertson, who encouraged the prisoners to extend their skills.

Agnes said the cake was a significant undertaking for the pair, who had no previous baking experience when they started work in the centre's training kitchen and had to learn the basics of cake making and decorating.

Within just 12 months Liam and Peter had earned themselves a bronze medal for a wedding cake at the 2018 New Zealand Chef's National Competition, as well as a commendation certificate for their Chinese New Year celebration cake. Following their success, cake orders have grown steadily at the café, culminating in the first commercial wedding cake order for the prison.

"Agnes gave us lots of information, recipes, pictures and equipment, so we just practised different designs and techniques on the cakes we sold in the bistro," Peter said.

"Some of our flatmates in the Residence unit we share had to sit through a lot of baking shows on TV! We like watching Mary Berry, as she has helped us see what was possible."

Bride Naz received the full wedding experience, with a taste-testing of cupcakes in a range of flavours to help her select those that would make the final cut for her November wedding. The result was a four-tier cake made of fruit, chocolate and lemon layers with a pattern on the white fondant, and roses on top. The couple paid for the cake.

"I thought the roses might be a challenge, because they are burgundy, fading to pink. But they assured me that it would be perfect," she said.

"I have been so impressed by their enthusiasm and professionalism, and they really outdid themselves.

"It tasted as good as it looked and was all gone by the end of the night!"

Twelve prisoners prepare food for the Bistro inside the prison and the Community Link Centre café, located next to the visitor car park at Kohuora, as part of their work towards earning nationally-recognised qualifications in food preparation and cooking, food service and barista, as well as training in coffee roasting. The program forms part of the facility's reducing reoffending strategy and helps prepare prisoners for employment on release. The menu includes regular café fare, multiple coffees and smoothies, and the lunch specials change daily.

The perfect cake takes time and the team start at 7am each morning to have everything ready when the bistro and café open. "We normally finish work at 2pm," Liam said. "But if we're busy we will stay as long as we need to finish an order. We try to make everyone happy. We want our cakes to be perfect."

All proceeds from the café go to supporting rehabilitative programs for prisoners.

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