

New residents meet neighbours

by Alison King

Luda Shelton found true love over the internet — now she's living thousands of kilometres from her home country of Ukraine but loving every moment.

Next Friday, visitors to the inaugural Neighbour In Our Community session will be able to find out more about the Ukrainian culture and taste traditional bread.

The free monthly sessions are being run by Settlement Support and English Language Partners at Rotorua Arts Village every last Friday of the month.

Luda, 35, has been in New Zealand for three years after falling in love with Rotorua man Alec Shelton over the internet. They chatted for three years before he flew to the former Soviet republic to meet her and her family. Six months later, Luda — whose full name is Lyudmyla — spent Christmas in New Zealand

with Alec and her son Myroslav, 9, to see if she could see her future Down Under.

The idea became a reality and now the Sheltons are settled in the sulphur city; they have been here three years.

Myroslav is at Lynmore Primary School and Luda is working at The Salon as a hairdresser.

"I love it here," Luda says.

"At first it was quite hard as my English wasn't very good but I went to ESOL for free lessons and did some volunteering in salons, which helped me pick up more English."

When she was granted permanent residency she took an English course at Waiariki Institute of Technology.

"They were really good teachers and did a great job with me. It helped me get a job.

"Now I plan to open my own



FRIENDSHIP: Luda Shelton (right) will give an insight into her home country of Ukraine at the first Neighbours In Our Community Event, organised by settlement support co-ordinator Heather McAllister.

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business at home."

She says she used the Settlement Support service as she

didn't know anyone in the city.

They introduced her to other Ukrainian immigrants and "made

life comfortable".

"When you come to a new country you don't know anything and some people can panic, give up and go back. Settlement Support were a great help."

Settlement Support co-ordinator Heather McAllister says they took the idea for the monthly sessions from the North Shore where it's been proven to help new residents.

"There are lots of different cultures in Rotorua — about 150 different nationalities and that's amazing," she says.

"Locals seem to do a lot of travelling so we can give them an idea of different cultures and give them a few basic phrases for their holiday."

■ **Neighbours In Our Community** meets on Friday, February 26 at RAVE from 12.10pm to 12.50pm. BYO lunch.