

Aaliyah's year: Friends for life and many learnings

Aaliyah Fowler is just finishing her year as our local representative on the Tuia Programme.

Designed to develop the leadership capability of young Māori in communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, the programme involves local mayors selecting rangatahi (meaning youth or young person) from their district to mentor on a one-to-one basis. We caught up with Aaliyah to find out more about the programme and what she's learned.

WHAT HAS YOUR YEAR INVOLVED?

This whole year of Tuia has been full of many different emotions: excitement, fear, nervousness, joy – the list goes on.

Each wānanga had a different kaupapa and meaning. Tuia i runga which translates as 'weaving above' was all about learning and knowing the history of our tupuna; tuia i raro 'weaving below' was about knowing and being one with the whenua; in tuia i roto 'weaving within' we shared our journeys with each other in a safe space you probably couldn't find anywhere else; tuia i waho 'weaving out' focused on community contribution; and finally tuia te here tangata 'weaving together' had us reflecting back on the year and all of our experiences.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHTS?

I have met so many like-minded rangatahi and made friends for life. I now have connections all over Aotearoa and have come out of Tuia with so much more confidence, not only in myself but also my culture.

ANY CHALLENGES YOU'VE HAD TO OVERCOME?

I was really scared of not being able to fit in – being a fair-skinned Māori that's always been on my mind. But almost



Aaliyah with Mayor Lewers (above), and with some of her 'friends for life' (right).

as soon as we were all together I knew I was in the right place and everyone quickly became whanau. Tuia taught me to be proud to be Māori.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE PARTICULAR BENEFITS OF MENTORING SESSIONS WITH THE MAYOR?

Having Glyn as a mentor this year and just getting to know him has been really cool and something that I'll look back on with many learnings. I was able to get a glimpse of what mahi goes on behind the scenes in the community, and even spent one morning with Glyn volunteering for KiwiHarvest out in the snow!

HOW HAVE YOUR FUTURE GOALS BEEN INFLUENCED BY YOUR PARTICIPATION?

My passion is rangatahi Māori. Meeting everyone in the kaupapa and hearing about all the amazing mahi they do, or are planning to do, was a massive eye-opener and gave me so many ideas for my future. One of my goals has always been to become fluent in te reo. Coming out of Tuia has motivated me to start my journey next year when I'll do my Level 1 and 2.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE CONSIDERING APPLYING FOR THE PROGRAMME?

DO IT!! Tuia is such a beautiful kaupapa. Anyone wanting to grow – whether that be in their knowledge of Te Ao, whakapapa, how to give back to your community, leadership skills or even just growing as a person – will find all that and more in Tuia.

For more info visit mtfj.co.nz/our-work/tuia-and-mtfj-rangatahi or email topaz.river@qldc.govt.nz