



Imogen (front row, second from right) at the final wānanga at Ōrongomai Marae in Upper Hutt.

Imogen with Mayor Glyn Lewers at a citizen ceremony in Wānaka.

Imogen's Tuia journey

Imogen Smith 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 (a young person) from their district to mentor on a one-to-one basis. We caught up with Imogen to find out more about her experience on the programme.

WHAT HAS YOUR YEAR INVOLVED?

Being a part of the Tuia Kaupapa this year has given me so many inspirations for my future as rangatahi Māori. I have realised how important it is to be an influence and voice for Māori within the Wānaka community.

Each wānanga has had a different kaupapa/theme. Tuia i runga 'weaving above' involved learning about our tupuna, the path they walked before us and their history. Tuia i raro 'weaving below' involved learning about the

whenua and was held in Rotorua. Tuia i roto 'weaving within' allowed us to hold space for each other to share our own personal journeys, in whatever way we felt most comfortable. Tuia i waho 'weaving outwards' was based around community outreach and contribution. Unfortunately, I was unable to go to this wānanga, but I heard some amazing things from the rangatahi who attended. Finally, Tuia te here tangata 'weaving together' was a four-day wānanga all about celebrating and reflecting on the year that has been.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHTS?

It's difficult to choose! There were so many. But my main highlight would be tuia i roto. All of us were encouraged to share something about ourselves, our journeys in life and who we are. This wānanga was so powerful and had such a deep impact on me and my personal growth. All

of us shared some really personal kōrero which I felt really solidified our connections with each other as a whānau. The relationships and connections made throughout this year are ones I hope to have for life.

ANY CHALLENGES YOU'VE HAD TO OVERCOME?

At the beginning of the year, I really struggled with who I was and what it meant to be Māori. I have been on a personal journey of growth with learning who I am and where I come from. This was something that I was incredibly nervous about coming into Tuia. I was worried I would be out of place or left behind. But the support and safety I felt throughout the year really encouraged me to be confident within myself.

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

I was unsure of what to expect from the mentoring sessions with Mayor Glyn. But quickly found Glyn to be relatable, encouraging and inspiring. We have had some really great conversations together. He supported me in my journey of growing confidence by providing me with opportunities that were for sure outside of my comfort zone. I delivered the opening and closing karakia for the Welcoming Communities Hui and the Citizenship Ceremony in Wānaka. I am very grateful for these opportunities and look forward to many others.

HOW HAVE YOUR FUTURE GOALS BEEN INFLUENCED BY YOUR PARTICIPATION?

Some of my future goals have stayed the same but have been solidified in more detail thanks to Tuia and the encouragement we received. Both the Tuia kaupapa and my mahi with Kāhu Youth Trust have allowed me to express and exercise my passions for working alongside and supporting rangatahi within the Wānaka community. However, I am very excited that an opportunity has popped up where I am now able to begin a course in Te Reo Māori in person beginning in February. This is a goal that has been influenced by my participation in Tuia.

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

Absolutely do it! You will learn so much about yourself, grow personally and be provided with many inspirations and direction. I would say that you will learn how to navigate the uncomfortable feeling of being pushed out of your comfort zone, but we were all in the same waka! The main motto we all lived by was "trust the process". You will never find

another space like Tuia, and I say go for it! I have found it difficult to explain what it meant to be involved in the Tuia kaupapa, but coming away from each wānanga gave me a sense of pride to be Māori, inspiration and excitement for the future. You will come out of the kaupapa a different person in the best way!

ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?

I would like to mihi to Darren Rewi for encouraging me to apply for this kaupapa and share that he has been a massive support for me personally and professionally with my mahi at Kāhu Youth. I would like to share my appreciation for my manager Anna Sutherland and the amazing kaimahi at Kāhu Youth for being so supportive and enthusiastic for my journey this past year. Lastly, a massive mihi to [the Mayor's EA] Topaz for always checking in on me, and Glyn for the opportunities he has provided me with. More specifically within the Tuia whānau – our tuakana who facilitated all the wānanga and supported all of us through the kaupapa were amazing! Their mahi, logistical organisation and support were a big factor into getting me where I am today.



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