

Taylah's Tuia reflections

WHAT HAS YOUR YEAR INVOLVED?

Throughout the year, there were five Tuia wānanga: Tuia i Runga, Tuia i Raro, Tuia i Roto, Tuia i Waho, and Tuia ki te Heretangata. Each wānanga focused on a different kaupapa, such as connecting with the whenua, deepening our relationships, and reflecting on and celebrating the year we had spent together. For many — including me — this year has involved a huge amount of personal growth, cultural reconnection, and stepping into spaces that once felt intimidating. Every weekend provided an opportunity for me to embrace my culture, connect with other rangatahi Māori, and enjoy some incredible kai.

During the final wā, we also had the privilege of hosting the 15-year celebration of Tuia. We reflected on the kaupapa's evolution, honoured its legacy, and listened to past recipients share their experiences and the impact Tuia has had on their lives.



WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHLIGHTS?

One of the biggest highlights of this kaupapa has been being surrounded by other rangatahi Māori in a truly safe and supportive space. Over the year, I have formed so many special connections with rangatahi from all across the country, and I am immensely grateful for the impact each one of my Tuia whānau has had on me.

Like many other participants, my overall highlight from the four wānanga I attended would have to be Tuia i Roto (weaving within). This was the wānanga I was most hesitant about, especially after being told to prepare something to share with the group — whether a song, dance, poem, piece of writing, or even a game. I originally went in with the mindset that I wouldn't share anything. However, once the group sharing began, I listened to the powerful stories and vulnerability of the other rangatahi. Their courage inspired me to prepare a piece of writing of my own. Standing in front of everyone to share my kōrero was challenging, but stepping into that vulnerability — surrounded by support, encouragement, and aroha — became one of the most meaningful moments of my year.

ANY CHALLENGES YOU'VE HAD TO OVERCOME?

One of my biggest challenges this year was learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. At the start of my Tuia journey, I found it really difficult to break out of my shell. Growing up as a Māori wahine in Queenstown — disconnected from my whānau, culture, and reo — often left me feeling like I didn't quite belong within Te Ao Māori. Going into Tuia, I was nervous that I would be judged for my lack of knowledge and confidence in my reo. But this kaupapa shattered all of those worries. For the first time, I was able to share openly about myself and my journey without feeling judged or out of place. A saying that was repeated often throughout the wānanga was, "Be comfortable with being uncomfortable," and this mindset truly transformed my experience.

HOW HAVE YOUR FUTURE GOALS BEEN INFLUENCED BY YOUR PARTICIPATION?

As we have wrapped up the year with Tuia, I've spent a lot of time reflecting on what I want my future to look like. I've noticed that every time I return from a Tuia wānanga, I feel more grounded, connected, and whole as a person. This kaupapa has inspired me to continue integrating Te Ao Māori into my everyday life and has encouraged me to seek out more opportunities that strengthen my identity and cultural journey. I am now planning to continue studying Te Reo Māori so that one day I can teach my children to kōrero fluently and carry our reo proudly into the next generation. Although I am not yet set on what my future career or pathway will be, I know with certainty that Te Ao Māori will always be at the heart of it.

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

If I could recommend anything to a Māori rangatahi, it would be Tuia. This kaupapa has been one of the most rewarding and transformative experiences of my life. When I first entered the programme, I wasn't sure it was meant for someone like me. Even though I had heard so much positive feedback from past Tuia participants and those around me, I worried that my shyness would hold me back, and I was genuinely scared to give this kaupapa a chance. But choosing to step into it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. The people you meet, the connections you build, and the sense of belonging you feel are truly unmatched. Tuia is the first space where I felt I could be authentically myself, without hesitation or doubt. Leaving this journey, I feel whole — grounded in my culture, confident in who I am, and more connected to the world around me than ever before.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

Ngā mihi nui to Aunty Meaz and Matua Gilbertson for giving me the push I needed to give this kaupapa a chance. I really appreciate the efforts you put in to help prepare me for applying and attending the wānanga. I would also like to thank Topaz and Glyn for this amazing opportunity. I am so grateful that I was pushed to have this experience.

I would also like to give my biggest thank you to my mum. Without your eagerness and persuasion for me to apply for Tuia, I'm not sure I would have given it a go. You gave me confidence in myself that I didn't yet see, reminding me that I am capable, deserving, and ready for opportunities like this. You made sure that I didn't miss out on such an amazing experience, pushing me in the moments I hesitated and celebrating every step I took. Thank you for believing in me so strongly that I learned to believe in myself too. Thank you for believing in me so strongly with so much love and care

For more info and enquire about joining the programme visit www.mtfj.co.nz/youth-development or email topaz.river@qldc.govt.nz



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