

TUIA 2026 – REPORT TO COUNCIL – 3 SEPTEMBER 2026

I would like to begin by thanking the Council for the opportunity to be part of the TUIA 2026 kaupapa. Being selected has meant a great deal to me, and having Mayor Andy as my mentor has made the experience all the more special and I'm really grateful for that.

Walking into the first wānanga and meeting everyone for the first time was nerve-wracking. I tried to get involved as much as I could with everything that was happening while my sister tended to keep to herself and held back from a lot of the activities, it was well outside our comfort zone. Even so, we managed to bond with a few other Rangatahi and we came away having learnt more about the history of the marae. Which for me, opened my eyes to a lot of things regarding our culture. By the end of it Moniek was able to come out of her shell a little and ended up interacting more with the others.

The second wānanga felt completely different. We travelled up with Mayor Andy, which for me was fun and while we were travelling I got to learn a few things around the district. On our way up the thought of seeing everyone again and getting to learn new things was something I looked forward to. I spent time learning about harakeke and the art of weaving, which I found genuinely exciting and inspiring while Moniek learnt more about Rakau and that some plants can be used as medicine. More than that though, it was a space where I learnt more about myself including how I look after my own wellbeing, both physically and mentally a space where I felt able to be vulnerable without any fear of judgment. That sense of safety was something I hadn't expected, and it has been one of the most valuable parts of the programme so far.

At the third wananga we learnt more about ourselves, who we are, where our roots lie, what pathways we've chosen, why we want to do what we want to do, why we joined This Kaupapa, I've never spoken about my Whanau and my hobbies in that much detail to people before because I have always felt the fear of judgment because i'm not like my grandparents, or my parents or my older siblings. But during this wananga, all I received was nothing but aroha, love and support from everyone who was present, it made me feel like I had another whanau. It made me feel more proud and confident of who I am.

One of the highlights has been discovering the whakapapa connections around me. We learnt that Rātana and Te Kotahitanga marae share a connection with one another. I met Piwiki Kingi, who has ties to the Tamau whānau in Rātana. We have also had the chance to connect with the tuākana of TUIA those who have walked this path before us including some who took part in Matariki and seeing familiar faces from the past.

We have also made new friends during this Kaupapa, naming a couple there's Noah Mcbirney whose part of the heirs to our oceans international Youth Leadership Council, Kairyn Bradley-kiwi who has a massive passion for videography and Tyrese Olliver who we connected with because we learnt he knew our older sister Maatariki Veuger and is part of the same Kapa Haka group as her.

The kaupapa has given me space to think seriously about where I am heading. I want to be a full-time businesswoman, working as a photographer and graphic designer, and to follow in my older sister's footsteps. She went from working at a supermarket to working with the council to now working for the government, and she has shown me what is possible.

For the rest of the year I want to keep learning te reo Māori. I'm also looking at going into Business studies. I've taken an interest in Raranga and have been looking at ways to start getting into that as well. My sister Moniek wants to get into film studies and potentially make documentaries etc. I am determined to finish getting my Photography name WHAI Studios out there and work alongside other photographers such as Kohika Creative, Capturing Cosplay and APG Media and look at making a documentary about us as photographers in the cosplay community that I put on hold for more than 2 years. The kaupapa has given me the push I needed to pick things like this back up.

I am really grateful to the Council for making this possible, and I look forward to sharing more as TUIA continues.

Mariaan & Moniek Veuger