

With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive

As the sun set on the 9th of August, I took a moment to pause and reflect upon the two phenomenal days that I had the opportunity to experience at Toitū Te Reo, the first ever Māori language festival, in the heart of the Hawkes Bay. For two days I was privileged to see the best of what we can do as a nation and diverse communities when we come together and celebrate our unique place in this world, our cultures, and our beautiful te Reo Māori.



VOICES

Dr Hana O'Regan

Hana O'Regan ONZM is a respected Māori language advocate, academic and leader from Ngāi Tahu, whose work has played a significant role in the revitalisation of te reo Māori and strengthening cultural identity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It was a timely event. One that provided comfort, hope, inspiration, and much needed reassurance at a time in our country and history when the Māori language has once again found itself as the target of racist policy, rhetoric, and attack. It is fair to say that the past 18 months have been personally triggering for me as someone who has spent over 30 years in the world of education and te Reo Māori revitalisation efforts.

For context, I was born the year after the petition for the Māori language was laid on the steps of Parliament in 1972 and its plight shared across the nation.

I benefited from the efforts of those champions of change, justice, and inclusion that meant I was able to not only learn this heritage language of mine, but also in time, achieve a level

of proficiency that allowed me to raise my two children with te Reo as their first language, as bilingual citizens of our country. Throughout my lifetime and theirs, now aged 20 and 21, we have witnessed as a whānau, the efforts by Māori and non-Māori alike to give breath and hope again to our reo within our homes and communities.

My children and their generation have grown in a time where they have had access to Māori language television, Māori radio, and an increasing amount of Māori language literature, games, and resources. They have experienced the transitions occurring at community and political levels where it has been safer and more positive to speak and promote te Reo Māori and celebrate their Māori heritage.

Every year has seen further milestones achieved, the growth of Māori medium education, the normalisation of te Reo in bilingual signage, the commitment to correct pronunciation, and basic Māori commands and phrases now being the expected standard for our teachers, broadcasters, and public figures, and so the list goes on.

For those who remember the state and treatment of Māori people, language, and culture at the beginning of this journey, these milestones are significant, and because of them, my children and their generation haven't had to feel the pain and trauma of the fight and attack in the same way as those before them.

It's a key driver for us as parents and educators for all our children, that we may protect them from harm, trauma, and struggle that we may have experienced or been aware of in our own past.

However, I haven't been able to shield my own, or those I care about from this new round of racial bigotry and hate aimed at Māori and others over the last 18 months that rode on the back of many political campaigns as we entered into our election year, and have continued through to the current time. It has been the first time in my life, and therefore my children's lives, that I have felt as a nation, we have regressed and lost important, and hard fought ground. They now know, as do the tamariki of this generation, what it feels like to see and hear their language and culture being belittled, discarded, and violated by an increasingly vocal and loud minority, who seem to have been given licence to do so within the current political climate. They have never experienced overt racism and hate at such a level before.

So I took them both with me to Toitū Te Reo. I took them to be amongst the Reo Māori leaders of our nation and to engage with their peers and pakeke in the hope it might give them the strength and space, at this critical time in our history, to feel the collective pride, unity, support, and trust of so many others around them. We got all that and more! We have also borne witness and experienced the beauty of allyship with Pākehā, and other ethnicities from all backgrounds, showing up to the festival to support and uphold the kaupapa.

It was simply wonderful to be in a place where our language was being elevated, spoken all around us in the shops, on the streets, in the conference venues, and everywhere we turned.

It was, and is a time to be stronger than ever – for our tamariki and everyone in our communities. We have all heard the escalation of racist hate and rhetoric, and we all know the cost and hurt it exacts. As teachers, and educators, as parents and colleagues, we cannot afford to simply ignore it and dismiss it, without recognising those same statements and sentiments are being heard by our tamariki and mokopuna. We have a duty to call it out when we see and hear it. We must, now more than ever, let our tamariki know we don't agree and don't hold those same views, and we need to do so more loudly and intentionally than ever before. And let us also remember to celebrate the positive – the milestones and achievements for our reo, our cultures, and all our people.

E tū tātau – the time is ours!