

TIAKI

a poem by Belinda Tuari-Toma

TIAKI

TIAKI (meaning ‘to care’) is a Kaupapa Māori research project that focuses on the lived experiences of Māori adults who have been imprisoned (in prisons either in New Zealand or overseas) and their whānau.



For more
information on
TIAKI, check
out our podcast

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TIAKI

Tiaki, sits between the **colli****sion** of kaitiaki

add the tanga to **kaitiakitanga**

restore our earth mother

protect one another

form the brigade

to liberate the human trade

best mates within this humanity main freight

filled with honesty traits

but that's a fake?

the chessboard was set

check
mate

Shit...

I became an inmate

took the bait

sealed my fate

trapped behind these steely **rusted gates**

TIAKI

It started with a **mission**
to remove the incarcerated | division
keeping our people imprisoned
held *ransom* for an indigenous vision
an idea of cultural incision
driven by a people's decision

to love all admissions

TIAKI

But alas

the Western tore through land

burnt our flag

Left us as nomads in a whenua

we first had

There passive ambition..... tricked our vision

distorted the natural transgression

of equal position

forcing the decommission

of a first nations composition

TIAKI

We are a generational

exhibition

labelled by the ego

elitism

that continues to destroy our

symbolism

trapping our

optimism

within this institutional prism of

favouritism

The

tokenism

igniting

activism

to defend against

racism

escape the legal

system

of mechanical

narcissism

forget

collectivism

it's all about

individualism

TIAKI

Neutralise our voice

take away our c h o i c e

watch you *exploit*

the maverick of our whenua's fabric

once homely, now

lonely

TIAKI

Open the doors to those you think deserve more

the law that obviously *doesn't* work for all

I always envisioned myself living in a room

engulfed by a systemic fume

trapped in this metal tomb

The modern-day heirloom

gifted when a generation started to boom

destined to become **headline news**

standing in the longest cue_____

dreaming of a life we once knew

the warriors exploring the pacific deep blue

TIAKI

Transparency is such a **fallacy**

particularly when draped in the colonial fantasy

How I *laugh* that you think your incredibility's

supersedes indigenous capability

claiming you as the **m a j o r i t y**

hold all authority

where's your sensitivity for our *tamariki*

uplifted before puberty

trying to survive the **m o n o p o l y**

of a country that lost its *sovereignty*

that's how you serve *generosity*

TIAKI

Stage two, recruit a few
the men and women who **survived**
this penitentiary's monsoon
supported by a theatrical artistic, community,
-- research **crew**

interview their breakthroughs
define a prisoner's point of view

relieve them from the screws
remove the stereotypical **taboos**
stage an interpretative, statistical tune

experience life of the abused

TIAKI

Record their ever after

leave behind this structural penal disaster

letting go of the imperial master

become your own
broadcaster

support the podcaster

collect true *data*

TIAKI

Return to *tikāngā*

the mentorship of *whanaungatāngā*

connecting our *kaupapa*

sustain our *whakapapa*

protect all those down under

the magical wonder

teaching our younger

to ignite their *thunder*

support their cultural, spiritual identity

anchor their feelings with rongoā **healing**

grieving, but

b r e a t h ... i n g ...

TIAKI

Grounding our feet

within the **foundations** of pā harakeke peeps

the whenu tirelessly working to secure the housing

fleets

offer employment to seek

determine resilience

and the belief

we can all **beat the streets**

connecting ourselves

so, the next generation

doesn't lose themselves

building a solid vow

take a bow

TIAKI

Restore relationships *with* positive release

changing the prison beast

introducing programmes

that face defeat

the desire to live

stand on your own two feet

freely,

discretely

ignoring the

deficit

express institutional *prejudice*

remain

i n d i g e n o u s

Become *the agency*

build your own masonry

invest in an equal democracy

living the utu philosophy

never becoming a commodity

returning the prodigy, to feed a strong indigenous colony

write the **wrongs** of present-day policy

to fix *equality*

recipients of a *healthy economy*

guardians of ***autonomy***

TIAKI

TIAKI

open *the*
steely gates

never
hesitate

walk
straight

tiaki all your mates

TIAKI.

Belinda Tuari-Toma (Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-a-Apanui, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Whenua Moemoeā) is a māmā, kairangahau, kaitiaki o rongoā Māori, and poet.

Her mahi is grounded in te ao Māori and tikanga-ā-rongoā, where she uses toikupu, pūkare, pūrākau (poetry, spoken word, storytelling) to connect emotional expression to support hauora and its relationship with elements of te taiao rongoā, including using poetic inquiry as a medium to inform research data.

As a member of the **TIAKI** Rōpū Rangahau, Tū Kotahi partnership, Belinda has recently started her doctoral studies, which came about quickly after becoming a recipient of a Health Research Council development grant and receiving mentorship by Tū Kotahi, Kōkiri Marae Keriana Olsen Trust, Flax Analytics, Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pōmare, and the University of Otago

Her creative journey has afforded her collaborative toikupu and raranga exhibitions and gallery presence.

She is grateful to have her poetry shared widely and was humbled to receive the 2024 Spirit of the SLAM award. Above all, she is most proud of her tamahine; as a first-language speaker of te reo Māori, her daughter has translated her recent work.

Belinda believes her daughter is the real toikupu pūkare storyteller, and she is simply the kauwaka, the vessel that holds her.

This poem has also been interpreted in
New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)



You can
access the
interpretation
using this QR code

The TIAKI Rōpū Rangahau also wish to thank John Kingi for gifting us the beautiful tohu that we use on the back page of all of our zine publications.

Ngā mihi nui John!

