

# Graduates all look to giving back to the community



Local woman Victoria Wihape has graduated with a Bachelor in Social Work and now works for Central Health Supreme Care as a support care worker.



Local woman Aroha Moeau has also graduated with a Bachelor in Social Work degree.



Former local Ripeka Kaipuke graduated with a Masters of Indigenous Studies at Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi.

RIPEKA Kaipuke has graduated with a Masters of Indigenous Studies from Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi in Whakatane.

Mrs Kaipuke is the daughter of the late Maurice and Mokopuna Te Kahu and was born and raised locally.

She is married to Wiremu Kaipuke who has local connections to Nuhaka and they have three children.

The title of her thesis was: "A culturally responsive approach to raising Maori achievements in a wananga tertiary environment".

The study investigated the effect culturally responsive strategies of best-practice had on the holistic development and overall achievement of Maori where learning was underpinned by kaupapa Maori methodologies and practices.

Mrs Kaipuke is the head of education delivery for Te Kei Takiwa and manages 300 kaimahi in Te Wananga o Aotearoa across the central and southern regions of Te Ika a Maui and Te Waipounamu.

"Always try to remain humble, kind, THE future is bright for two local women who graduated with Bachelor degrees in Social Work after three years of study with Te Wananga o Aotearoa.

Victoria Wihape and Aroha Moeau are feeling positive after achieving the qualification which will see them working with the Wairoa community.

Ms Wihape found the course challenging, academically, morally and ethically on a professional level.

"There were many barriers including my lack of academic knowledge, te reo and matauranga Maori, while at the same time having to manage family and part-time work," she said.

In terms of what she has taken away from the course, Ms Wihape said within the field of social work you learned how important family is, and appreciate what you have.

"Always reflect on your good and not-so-good points throughout your day and week to see where, what or how you may do things differently or better — or just acknowledge what good you may have done for others.

caring and giving because you never know when your time may come and you will need that same respectful action of kindness reciprocated to you."

"I have a list of things to achieve and for the time being I am in a new role working as a support care worker.

"I am also waiting on induction as a casual mental health support worker with another organisation in Wairoa.

"There is so much more I want to do, academically and spiritually."

A degree in social work was far from what she thought she would achieve when she was younger.

"I thought I couldn't tell other people what to do with their lives if mine wasn't perfect — but my life has changed in so many ways, and on so many levels.

"It was two special co-workers who inspired me to do something more with my life, and this is what I chose, believing it would enhance my position as a client representative and then as a Kaimanaaki support worker at Manaaki House Alcohol and Drug Counselling Services.

Ms Wihape is grateful to her family for their support during her studies and

members of the Wairoa Rock Church for being such a great moral support team, and also grateful to everyone else in the community who has supported her.

She gave special mention to her parents, Bernadine Ngarau Heta and Timoti Ruki Wihape for their encouragement and support.

Aroha Moeau studied alongside Victoria and was thrilled to graduate with a social work qualification.

The women were tutored in their last year by the late Danny Hona and Tania Rose Tutaki. Mr Hona was renowned in the fields of education, social work and indigenous studies.

Mrs Moeau is currently working in her role as Social Worker in Schools (SWIS). She said her family and mokos have been an awesome support throughout her years of study.

"I give thanks to my whanau who supported me and for them having to fend for themselves.

"They say you are never too old to try new things — and in my case I felt I did leave it a bit late — I should have started this career pathway about 20 years ago.

"But with a young family, full-time work and other community obligations I never thought much about extra studies to enhance my already busy life."

Mrs Moeau's background was in the tertiary education sector as a private training provider for youths aged 15 to 19 years.

"I wanted a change so I had the opportunity to extend my career expectations and decided on a degree in social work with Te Wananga o Aotearoa at Whirikoha Campus.

"It's a choice I would never ever regret, an opportunity to learn and equip students with knowledge of our heritage, our language, our culture, so we all can handle the world at large with confidence and self-determination.

Mrs Moeau was in full-time work and travelled one day a week to Gisborne for classes and once a month she would stay at a marae or campus.

Her vision is to empower and enrich whanau to seek their independence, to contribute to making the world a better place for future generations to live without fear.