

## Maori champions to be celebrated

23/07/2008 11:38:00 AM

(*Waikato, New Zealand*) Maori champions of mental health will be celebrated this week at the annual *Like Minds, Like Mine* Maori Provider Hui in Waikato.

Organised by Te Korowai Hauora o Hauraki with the assistance of the Mental Health Foundation, the hui will be held over three days at Waikato Tainui Endowed College in Hopuhopu, from July 23 – 25. It brings together Maori mental health advocates and service providers from Kaitaia to Christchurch as part of the Ministry of Health's *Like Minds, Like Mine* programme.

This year, the hui is using 'Maori Champions' as its theme, building allies for challenging stigma and discrimination about mental illness. The hui is dedicated to musician Mahinarangi Tocker, an ambassador for *tangata whaiora* (persons seeking wellness), who passed away peacefully following an asthma attack in April.

"Her loss was a great tragedy for all of us," says Lila Baker, spokesperson for the Like Minds Maori Caucus. "The public became aware that having a mental illness isn't so bad, that you can achieve, and achieve at a high level. She was one of the first to stand tall, and campaign publicly based on her own experiences. We want to build on her legacy."

Maori have a specific cultural context for understanding mental illness and the discrimination faced by *tangata whaiora*.

"We want to foster a sense of cultural identity among *tangata whaiora* by recognising and celebrating Maori champions in the area of mental health – like Professor Mason Durie and Dr Rose Pere," Baker says. "But we also want to show that you don't have to be famous or at the top of your profession to be a champion. There are grass roots Maori with mental health issues who are living extremely well, and achieving successes in all facets of life."

Also presenting at the hui will be Michelle Te Ahuru and Aubrey Quinn, featured in the latest *Like Minds, Like Mine* TV campaign. They will be highlighting the role of whanau in supporting family members living with mental illness.

"Our whanau is our strength. The sheer love that goes down in this household, I think anyone feels it when they walk in the doors," Michelle says. "We've experienced a few difficulties with the

whanau , especially when Aubrey was first diagnosed. They learned, like I did, that really it's no different to any other illness – if it's treated and managed well it shouldn't be a problem."

The annual gathering is a unique opportunity for providers to share successful resources that have been developed regionally over the past year. "The needs of Maori are so different," Baker explains. "By collaborating we can find more ways to effectively get our messages across and change attitudes for the future."

ENDS

**Media enquiries to:**

Chris Banks

Senior Communications Officer

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

09 300 7028 or 021 790 236