Iwi Community Panels Co-ordinator Mana Wright Attends United Nations Conference in Geneva

Mana Wright, 25, was selected to attend through the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Peoples on the basis of the work Nga Kete is doing in collaboration with the NZ Police, developing alternative resolution processes that seek to reduce Maori and community entry into the criminal justice system for low-level offending.

Mr Wright had the opportunity to participate around issues of economic, social and cultural rights presenting a New Zealand perspective.

Participating in a United Nations conference had been a long-standing ambition for Mr Wright.

“It gave me the opportunity to see how our government is implementing the articles of the UN covenant on social, economic and cultural rights to see what criticisms and compliments their committee has for our Government, and to see how myself and our organization could further implement these articles in our day-to-day work.

NKMP CEO Tracey Wright-Tawha says Invercargill is such a diverse city of skill so what an amazing opportunity for us to be able to participate in a forum on the world stage regarding the rights and equality for all people.

While at the conference, Mr Wright met with a number of people from the Human Rights office as well as representatives of ministries from New Zealand. Mr Wright says Iwi Community Panels were well received. So much so, the Human Rights Officer for the Asia Pacific Region has asked him to send all of the information he can on Iwi Community Panels as he believes it could be a best practice model for a number of countries around the world.

To watch the digital story head to www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVGL2EMSk3c
Mr Wright says “It was important to be able to represent my community, this NGO and the initiative I’m doing to get the word across to this level of politics, and also to see what recommendations the committee would have for the Government and how I could take those recommendations and we could implement them into this work.”

Upon Mr Wright’s return, he, CEO Tracey Wright-Tawha, community panel member Phil Ngeru and Invercargill Police Kaitakawaenga Iwi Liaison Officer Simon Kairau travelled to Wellington for the parliamentary opening of Iwi Community Panels. Te Pae Oranga launched with a commitment from the Minister to roll out many more. Currently 13 Iwi Community Panels have been approved and Murihiku was rolled out with the first 8.

**Iwi Community Panels Update**

Iwi Community Panels were launched at Nga Kete Matauranga Pounamu Charitable Trust at the end of February with the first panels being held.

Referrals have been rolling in for the new service, which has seen more than 15 local community people from a wide range of interests train as panel members.

Four panels have been held, which have seen a total of 11 participants.

Co-ordinator Mana Wright says: “The hearings themselves have been incredibly powerful and moving so far. Some have seen quick compliance from participants and some are still engaging but very much on track.

“Our panelists are doing incredibly well in unravelling the stories of each participant, identifying the underlying reasons for why they’re in front of us and in determining outcomes that are relevant and effective in addressing the reasons for offending. Early days but we are progressing well and extremely confident that ICP will be a sustainable and enduring alternative resolution process for our community.”
NKMP CEO Tracey Wright-Tawha says Iwi Community Panel participants are always nervous from the outset wondering what the hearing process is going to result in. However, panel participants overall have rated ICP 8-9 out of 10 in terms of satisfaction of the process and satisfaction of how they’ve been engaged throughout. They have also been accepting of the range of outcomes.

Some of those outcomes have included reparation to victims, apology letters, drug and alcohol counselling, learner license course referrals and career mentoring sessions.

In addition a number of referrals have been made to Whanau Ora here at Nga Kete, which has resulted in people being able to look proactively at employment, accommodation and specific needs they have for them to live healthy independent lives.

Panel members are made up of community representatives who are trained in ICP practice. Panel members have unreservedly fed back that ICP is a useful practice, minimizing recidivist offending by asking the participants to be responsible for the offence but to move beyond it by looking at the help they require in order to not re-offend.

**What are Iwi Community Panels?**

- ICP are a community-led alternative to court for low-level offenders.
- Offenders (known as participants) appear in front of a panel of three volunteer community members.
- Inquisitive hearing with a purpose of discovering the underlying reasons for offending and determine outcomes to address these - We want to affect long-term social and behavioural change to reduce reoffending.
- Eligible participants avoid court and conviction.

**Who is eligible?**

- Police can refer a participant to the ICP if they are aged 17 years or over, the offence carries six months’ imprisonment or less (and is not an offence related to family violence or methamphetamine use) and the participant admits guilt.
- Police have full discretion as to whether they choose to refer to ICP as opposed to diversion or court.
- ICP is completely voluntary, participants have every right to plead their innocence and pursue it through court instead.

**Who can be a panel member?**

- Anyone aged over 17 years.
- A prominent community member with a desire to create change.
- An ability to treat all participants the same and with respect and dignity.
- A diversity of age, ethnicity and gender.
- Training will be provided to all panel members.