

## **Media Notes for Suicide Prevention Action Plan Launch 17 March 2008**

The National Depression Initiative youth website – [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

A new website and associated online and text-based support services for young people, launched in December last year as part of the National Depression Initiative (NDI) campaign, is showing very promising results. Feedback about the site itself has been overwhelmingly positive, with 6,683 unique visitors to the site by the end of January. In this time over 9,000 text messages and nearly 900 emails were received and responded to by the lowdown support team, who provided counselling support to young people at 216 email addresses and on 274 cell phones.

The NDI aims to reduce the impact of depression on the lives of the thousands of New Zealanders affected by it. The campaign encourages people to become more knowledgeable about and responsive to depression, in themselves and others, and improve community and professional responsiveness to depression.

The campaign features a mass media advertising campaign, fronted by ex All Black John Kirwan. So far, the results of the NDI have been far reaching with an outstanding 78% awareness in the general population of the television ads. One week after the launch of the TV campaign, helpline staff numbers had to be doubled to deal with the increase in calls. 18,499 people called the helpline in the first six months.

### **About The Lowdown**

[www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz) is an interactive online space that has been created to help young New Zealanders understand and recover from depression, by seeking help.

Young people have higher rates of depression than the general population, with suicide being the second most common cause of death for young people. About 1 in 7 young New Zealanders (aged 16 – 24 years) will experience serious depression every 12 months, but young people often don't get the help they need.

Research shows that even though 78% of young people recalled the John Kirwan ads, they are less likely to respond to these commercials by seeking help than adults. They tend not to visit GPs and are less likely to use helplines, preferring to get support from other sources such as their friends, family, the Internet, magazines and school counselors.

**thelowdown** encourages and enables young people to seek appropriate help, or puts them in touch with trained professionals. Through encouraging early treatment of depression, it is intended that the impact of depression will be reduced, now and throughout their adult lives. The site also promotes self-help strategies such as exercise, which has been shown to be helpful for dealing with mild and moderate depression.

A welcoming community environment, the site features high profile Kiwi role-models, who youth relate to, talking about experiences with depression that they, or friends and family, have had and how they managed this. The contributions from musicians, sports people, and TV and radio celebrities help remove the stigma around depression and encourage young people to get help.

The website features several innovative functions to help visitors navigate the site and more importantly, help them feel they are not alone. They can choose from 4 online guides to show them around the environment. They can view video stories from role-models, and their peers, talking about their experiences of depression and offering words of encouragement and support.

Another key feature of the site is the online support facility where visitors can get expert advice from qualified counsellors. After sending a message by email or text to a counsellor they will receive a personalised response as quickly as possible, and within 12 hours.

The website also has a forum where visitors can join **thelowdown** community and talk to each other about how they are feeling. People can share their experiences and offer support to their peers. To ensure that users are kept safe, the forum is monitored by an online moderator.

It is important for people who are experiencing depression to get help as early as possible, it is also important for them to find a treatment that works for them. To assist this process a host of useful information and advice is available, with fact sheets, Frequently Asked Questions, a self assessment questionnaire and details of other help services.

**ENDS**

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[www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

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- **Celebrities contributing to thelowdown**

P Money/ Scribe/ Brooke Fraser/ Dave Gibson - Elemeno P/ Brad Carter – Steriogram/ Angelo Munro – The Bleeders/ Jason Kerrison – Op Shop/ / Tau Manukia – Spacifix/ Young Sid/ Awa– Nesian Mystik/ Junior – Nesian Mystik/ Paul Roper – Mint Chicks/ Joel Little – Goodnight Nurse/ Tim Arnold – Pluto/ PNC/ Francis Kora – Kora/ Jon Austin - 48 May/ Victoria Girling-Butcher – Lucid 3/ Ben Read – 8 Foot Sativa/ Savage – Dkonz/ Aidee Walker – Outrageous Fortune Actress/ Antonia Prebble – Outrageous Fortune Actress/ Nisha Madhan – Shortland Street/ Lee Donaghue – Shortland Street/ Kimberley Crossman – Shortland Street/ Jaquie Brown – TV Presenter/ Sonia Gray – TV Presenter/ Jane Yee – C4 Presenter/ Phil Bostwick – C4 Presenter/ Tamati Coffey – Breakfast Presenter/ Mike Puru – The Edge DJ/ To'ofiga Fepulea'I - The Laughing Samoans Comedian/ Ma'a Nonu – Ex All Black/ Lisa Li - Miss Chinese NZ