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### **Nothing but net as the inaugural Indigenous Youth Basketball Tournament wraps up**

As the inaugural Indigenous Youth Basketball Tournament 2017 called time last week, the participating teams have returned home with lifelong connections and an ongoing commitment to healthy living in their wake.

Hosted by Kaitiāia Basketball Association, in partnership with Te Rangi Āniwaniwa and Healthy Families Far North, the tournament and traditional games saw 12 under-14 boys' and girls' teams from as far afield as Canada converge on Te Rarawa, NgaiTakoto and Ngāti Kahu marae to participate in a week of sports and cultural exchange.

Healthy Families Far North took the opportunity to support teams to sustain healthy lifestyles.

Healthy Families Far North is a Ministry of Health approach to public health that encourages New Zealanders to live healthy, active lives by making good food choices, being physically active, sustaining a healthy weight, being physically active and moderating alcohol consumption.

The tournament launched a sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) free framework, while offering free fruit as the ideal convenience food for players and spectators. A healthy meal kit for teams was also compiled, in partnership with the Northland District Health Board and the Health Promotion Agency, that included meal ideas to optimise sports performance.

In addition, the event provided a means of upholding smoke free rangatahi. According to the Census 2013 statistics, 25% of Northland Māori youth aged between 15 and 19 years of age are regular smokers, but 75% are smoke free, a statistic that Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says is something to celebrate.

"IYBT2017 provided a fantastic opportunity for Healthy Families Far North to support positive messaging around good health. We are thrilled that the event also provided



the impetus for the Kaitiāia Basketball Association, Te Rangī Āniwaniwa and the host marae to sustain practices in the future that support healthy kaupapa," she says.

Haida coach Dan Burton says the experience for his players was invaluable. "Many players brought their entire families. They were full participants and immersed in the experience. They've gained so much and they will carry that with them forever," he says.

He adds that seeing the Muriwhenua teams performing with so much pride was an awesome experience. "They are not shy; they are proud of who they are. It is exceptional," he says.

The exposure to authentic Māori culture was likewise powerful for visiting New Zealand-based teams. Samoan coach Steve Hettig, whose girls' and boys' players predominantly hail from west Auckland, says that only a handful of the players had been to a powhiri on a marae, prior to last Monday's official welcoming ceremony.

"The big thing for our kids is that they're urban Samoan and had lost their culture in some ways, through no fault of their own but the environment they live in," he says.

Participating in the games afforded the teams the opportunity to learn traditional Samoan songs from one of the player's mothers prior to coming, which the team was more than happy to share at their host marae until the wee hours.

Ngāpuhi coach Mel Rameka says his players from Kaikohe also researched their own histories and places of significance in the lead-up to the event.

"We did this to help them connect to other people; basketball was just the tool. This experience was everything I hoped it would be," he says.

Furthermore, the tournament upheld a healthy living kaupapa, whereby healthy eating options were provided, smoke free rangatahi were celebrated, sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) were removed in favour of water and free fruit was made available as the ultimate convenience food.

Teams were also provided with healthy eating packs that included meal suggestions for optimal sports performance.

"We always kept our meals as healthy as possible and made sure our young people had their lunches pre-packed, which they made themselves. They also cooked their own dinners and we're putting the information into packs of their own to take home to their families," Mel says.



Talks are already underway to invite Northland-based wharekura and kura kaupapa Māori to participate in another mini-tournament in the coming weeks in preparation for the national tournament due to take place later in the year.

**Ends**