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Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry Panel | Marion Square | Wellington 6141 | PO Box 27396

Recommendation to implement Pause Breathe Smile and ATAWHAI school mindfulness programmes in Aotearoa for mental wellbeing

Dear Inquiry Panel,

I wish to provide a written testimonial in support of the Pause Breathe Smile and ATAWHAI school mindfulness programmes in my professional capacity as a Public Health Physician.

I completed the training to become an educator for Pause Breathe Smile last year and can attest to the quality of this programme. It draws on a robust evidence base combining cutting edge science with practical experiential learning and aligns beautifully with the New Zealand curriculum. It also incorporates the Māori holistic wellbeing model Te Whare Tapa Whā making it relevant from a bicultural and health perspective. Unlike some ad hoc mindfulness programmes that are emerging in schools Pause Breathe Smile is backed by several studies published in peer reviewed academic journals demonstrating its beneficial effects on mental wellbeing.

I recently attended a hui where rangatahi who had completed the ATAWHAI programme presented their stories. These are disadvantaged youth who were on a path to being high users of both the mental health and justice systems. It was inspiring to hear how ATAWHAI had helped them turn around their lives and the empowering effect this was having not only on the individuals but also their whānau and communities. Evaluations of this programme have shown reduction of stress in all participants.

With the alarming youth mental health statistics we are seeing, such as suicide rates and antidepressant prescribing I fully support implementing the Pause Breathe Smile programme in all schools and ATAWHAI programme for disadvantaged youth.

Sincerely,



Dr Brigid O'Brien
Public Health Physician (MBChB, MPH, FNZCPHM)