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More Asians on the beat

By Sarah Lockwood

PHOTO: NZ POLICE

THE CULTURED APPROACH: Constable Mandeep Kaur in touch with her community.

An aggressive marketing campaign by New Zealand Police has seen increasing numbers of Asian people putting their hands up to walk the beat in their own community.

The police say they are making diversity a top priority, and are working on four specific targets – youths, females, Maori, Pacific Islanders and Asians.

These targets are based on the changing demographic of New Zealand, says strategic recruitment manager Inspector Gary Allcock.

"The police have to be representative of the community – we can't all be European, male, middle class officers."

He says while recruiting women, Maori and Pacific Islanders is still a challenge, there has been considerable interest from the Asian community.

"What struck us is the passion these people have to join the police," says Inspector Allcock.

"There are people giving up full-time jobs to work on their English and physical fitness – that's the kind of dedication we're less likely to see from Kiwis."

He says ethnic diversity is beneficial – first, it helps educate existing police officers so they have a better understanding of different cultures. Second, it makes the community feel like they are more represented – so they are more receptive and responsive to police, and more likely to report crime.

> "They really want to help and support their community."

The police have used television, radio, and the Asian media, along with appearances at school career days and expos, to lure in more diverse recruits.

They also have a presence at "target events" like the Lantern Festival for the Asian demographic.

They run a course at Unitec for those who have English as a second language, another aimed at Maori and Pacific Islanders, and a pre-entry course that teaches hopefuls with a less academic background how to study for police exams.

Another initiative is the pre-college employment programme.

Prospective officers learn on the job, apply what they have learnt, observe other officers and are encouraged to practice their communication skills.

"They must have a good grasp of the English language – that's not negotiable," says Inspector Allcock.

Between 2001 and 2006, the Asian ethnic group was the fastest growing in New Zealand – increasing by almost 50 per cent, according to the 2006 census.

Asians are the fourth largest ethnic group in New Zealand, with Chinese being the largest sub-group, followed by Indians.

Strategic ethnic advisor for Police National Headquarters Keseng Chu says while there were only a handful of Asian officers in the Auckland region four years ago, there are now more than 60.

Auckland city Asian liaison officer Jessica Phuang says says a lot of Asians see being a police officer as a reputable job.

"The other thing is they really want to help and support their own community."

She says there is also a lot of commitment from the police in supporting them.

"By using a cultural approach we are able to motivate them.

"For example, every Saturday I take them running – just by being there and taking records of their running times, they feel we are interested and they want to show they are improving."

Asian newspaper editor and columnist Lincoln Tan says increasing cultural diversity in the police force is all positive, but it's been a long time coming.

"We need to build the relationship between the Asian community and police – because a lot of Asian people come from countries where they don't trust the police, and they are not necessarily your first port of call.

"You're probably going to be more effective in doing that with people within the same commu-

Correction

In the June issue of *Te Waha Nui* an article headlined "AUT lags behind Auckland Uni's childcare, say student mothers" said there were no childcare facilities at the AUT Akoranga campus.

This is incorrect. The Akoranga Childcare Centre has been in operation since July, 1988. It caters for 40 children.

Te Waha Nui apologises for the mistake.

Videos take viewers into 'news scrum'

By Veronica Johnston

Scoop.co.nz is slowly strengthening its multimedia tools, says co-editor Selwyn Manning.

The independent news site now brings press conferences to viewers via video links that put them "right in the news scrum", Manning said at a recent guest lecture at AUT University.

"We use video to try to convey messages by putting you face-to-face with the people making decisions.

"What we're doing here is what we did with press releases – taking press conferences to the people."

Manning says the rationale for this new decision is the same as that behind publishing press releases.

"We made a conscious decision to release information that [previously] only journalists were able to see.

"We decided to present that unfiltered to the public."

He asked the audience to view new media technologies as vehicles for information that help analyse the news.

Manning says making press releases readily available to the public makes politicians react faster to new updates.

Scoop was a finalist in the 2007 Qantas Media Awards for best news website and best single news report.

Anxious adult blames fizz on Diet-Coke

By Tess Woolcock

"Chronic butterflies in the stomach" is how Milla Kirk describes her experience with aspartame poisoning.

She believes her daily cocktail of diet coke and sugar-free sweeteners were responsible for unexplained anxiety problems she had late last year.

"I just started to get incredibly anxious," says Kirk, 22.

But Coca Cola strenuously deny any connection between their sugar-free products and anxiety attacks.

Kirk says: "There was nothing else happening in my life that could explain it and the more Diet Coke I was drinking the worse my anxiety became, although at the time I was completely oblivious to this. Who would think a soft drink could poison you?"

Kirk started drinking up to 2lt of Diet Coke a day and numerous cups of coffee with artificial sweetener while working as a personal assistant.

"I was trying to lose weight so filled myself up on these drinks in between meals to pang off the hunger pains."

After numerous trips to the doctor, she was no closer to learning the cause behind her anxiety. It was a television interview with American anti-aspartame advocate Betty Martini that alerted her to the idea of aspartame poisoning.

"It was so interesting," she says. "Something inside me just clicked, I thought that sounds exactly like my problem."

According to Soil & Health spokesperson Steffan Browning, a growing body of research indicates Kirk is not alone.

"Aspartame consumption has been linked to many health symptoms," he says. "These include anxiety, depression, irritability, confusion, memory loss, insomnia, dizziness, migraines, cramps, abdominal pain, numbness and personality changes."

Betty Martini has been in New Zealand this month promoting her anti-aspartame campaign with Wellington aspartame sufferer Abby McCormack. Browning says their public talks have been successful in educating others on this issue.

"According to American studies, a short spell without aspartame may assist with a marked improvement in quality of life," he says.

> "Who would think a soft drink could poison you?"

Kirk says after cutting all sugar free products from her diet she immediately felt better. "I felt like me again. It was so strange the anxiety just lifted."

Coca Cola Amatil, the makers of Diet Coke, deny there is any link between the artificial sweeter and any health issues, says corporate affairs manager Aimee Driscoll.

Dr Andrew McKenzie, New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZSFA) acting chief executive, supports Coca Cola Amatil's statement.

He says Kirk's claims are anecdotal and are not backed with scientific evidence.

"The claims being made and widely reported in the media are doing a great public disservice," he says.

"Aspartame is one of the most studied substances in the world and continues to retain one of the highest acceptable daily intake levels of any additive."

Dr John Reeve, NZFSA toxicologist, says aspartame is not toxic even when taken in very high doses.

"An adult would have to consume 14 cans of a sugar-free drink every day before reaching the acceptable daily intake of aspartame," he says.

"They would need to do that every day of their lives before possibly showing any ill effects".

Dr Reeve says that anti-aspartame campaigners are doing a disservice to those who suffer from serious health conditions who rely on these products.

"For those dealing with far more serious health issues, such as diabetes and obesity, using junk science to cast doubt on a proven, safe alternative to sugar is very disappointing," he says.

Kirk says she believes more research needs to be done in New Zealand.

"I know my body and for such a dramatic change to occur after stopping drinking diet coke it has to be the culprit.

" I am living proof that it is no good for you," she says.

Soil & Health say more awareness about the sweetener needs to be given to the public.