

# When whanau pressure to succeed backfires

Why do so many young Maori students supported by scholarships seem to drop out? By RAMAREA PEDERSEN.

When Jacqui Rudolph was in her last year of high school, she won a \$10,000 scholarship to help pay her way through three years of any course at AUT University.

Jacqui's family was ecstatic. A young Maori girl from a rural northern town, she was the first member of her immediate family to attend university.

But Jacqui never graduated. Like many young Maori who are awarded scholarships, she dropped out before finishing.

The Government and tertiary institutions pump a lot of funding into Maori-only grants. AUT alone has 35 direct scholarships for Maori students, each year allocating a total of around \$412,000 to them.

AUT has three categories of scholarships: 11 community partnership awards, four McDonald's - Al Dunn scholarships and 20 scholarships provided by the business faculty.

They are awarded based on academic performance, commitment to Maori tikanga (custom) and economic need, and are worth between \$10,000 and \$15,000 over three years.

Despite criticism there are no equivalent grants for non-Maori, AUT's Maori liaison officer, Hariata Mareroa, points out that of 200 scholarships offered by AUT, only 35 are available exclusively for Maori.

She says the scholarships are important for encouraging Maori to enter tertiary study.

"These scholarships are aimed at low decile schools, and without them most of these students wouldn't get to university."

Maori participation in tertiary education has been a key concern in New Zealand for years. The 1960 Hunn Report highlighted inadequacies in Government education policies for Maori.

The report identified the low Maori representation within universities. At the time Maori representation was one-eighth what it should have been.

But it was not a case of Maori being too dumb. Rather, it was Maori not having the money. Scholarships were introduced to help them overcome financial barriers.

By 2005 there were 90,765 Maori enrolled in tertiary education. Although the increase seems dramatic, the statistics can be misleading. Sixty per cent of those studying were enrolled in low-level courses. Only 16.5 per cent were studying toward degrees.

Despite her family being thrilled when she won the scholarship, she wasn't so sure if university was the right option for her.

"It kind of tore me in two . . . I wasn't sure what I wanted, but when I won that scholarship my family was certain that it was the right thing for me."

She says if it wasn't for the scholarship

she most probably would not have gone to university.

Jacqui is not alone. There are many Maori students who are pushed unwillingly into tertiary study by families and schools, and eventually drop out.

Mareroa says the business faculty scholarship has a graduation rate of only 80 per cent.

She says this is because of extra pres-

sure, increased workload, and tight deadlines mean high stress levels and a high drop-out rate.

Students struggle against whanau dislocation, a switch from collective to individualistic values, and the external pressures of not only immediate family, but also from their hapu and iwi, he says.

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According to Ministry of Education statistics, 32 per cent of Maori who began a degree in 2004 did not continue to study in 2005, compared with only 22 per cent of all other students.

Jacqui spent two years at university. She dropped out of two different courses, a diploma in business and a diploma in fitness training.

"Even though I wanted to succeed, I just had no idea about what I wanted to do and no direction," she says.

"I was always homesick and always broke. I wasn't interested in my studies and I felt like there was too much pressure from my family to stay."

Casey Kaa, a recipient of a McDonald's - Al Dunn scholarship graduated this year with a Bachelor of Communication Studies. She says it is not enough to give a Maori student some money and expect them to succeed.

"A lot of them don't expect it will be as hard work as it is. Many come from sheltered lives in rural towns and then are just let loose once they come to Auckland, out of sight of their whanau."

She believes students need to be monitored more tightly by the universities. However she also thinks students should be more responsible.

"A lot come here not even really wanting to go to university. There's no way you can pass if you're doing something you don't even want to," Kaa says.

Mareroa remains optimistic that scholarship money is not wasted on students who drop out. She says the point is to provide Maori with opportunities.

"These scholarships open doors for young Maori. Some may not finish their courses but if they leave knowing that there is more to life than working in a shop, that's great."

Jacqui, who now works at a bakery in Perth, agrees, although she does have regrets over the space she cost someone else.

"I learned a lot in my time at university, more life skills than academics. I'm thankful for the opportunity but I just wasn't ready for it. I think Maori need to be more prepared before coming into a university situation.

"They need to really think about what they want, not just what their families want."

sures Maori students face when entering the tertiary world.

"Most of these kids are the first generation of their families to come to university.

"They move to Auckland from small towns, away from their families, and get sucked in by the temptations of a big city, like drinking and partying.

**"I was always homesick and always broke. I wasn't interested in my studies and I felt like there was too much pressure from my family to stay."**

"It's a lot of change and a lot of pressure, and some just can't handle it.

"Asking why these kids are not successful is like asking why Maori are poor. There is no simple answer. But there are a lot of complicated factors," she says.

Turi Hollis, senior tutor in Maori and



DISCONNECTED: Maori students often find themselves struggling with their new lives, away from home. (Picture posed by model).

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