



MOTIVATED STAFF SLASH AGENCY COSTS

Spectrum Care

Auckland-based disability service provider Spectrum Care wanted to turn what was sometimes a negative or apathetic workplace culture into one that was a platform for great service for the people it supports. With the help of the Partnership Resource Centre, a more vibrant and focused culture is now embedded in the organisation.

- Double digit improvements in satisfaction
- Reduced staff turnover
- More training being undertaken
- Wide knowledge of organisation's plans and management roles
- Staff outsourcing costs slashed

VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

Creating happier workplaces has helped form a virtuous circle at Spectrum Care.

For example, contented and motivated staff in Spectrum's community homes helped slash one of the organisation's biggest costs – bills from external nursing bureaus called in to cover gaps in rosters and sick staff.

Under a new regime, supported by the Partnership Resource Centre (PRC), that focused on a partnership between management and staff, Spectrum has cut its usage of bureau staff from about \$2.5 million a year to hundreds of dollars a month. And the money saved was returned to staff in bonuses.

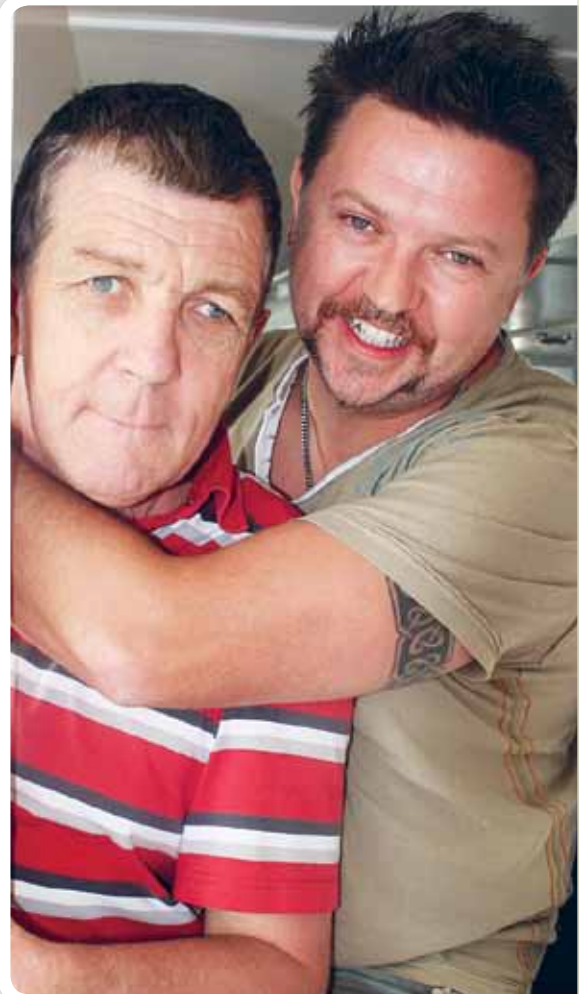
Result: even happier staff.

GETTING FROM GOOD TO GREAT

How to move from being a good organisation to a great one was the challenge set by Spectrum Care.

Central to the independent charitable trust's challenge was creating an excellent workplace culture in an environment where its 870 staff were widely dispersed, often felt disconnected and unengaged in a demanding job.

It knew getting staff culture right would inevitably strengthen its philosophy of treating the people it supports as individuals



– a philosophy that relies heavily on a committed, focused and enthusiastic workforce to provide a consistently high standard of tailored care.

Spectrum decided in 2006 to invest heavily in change, well aware this was not going to happen overnight, nor without buy in from staff.

Brett Marsh, General Manager Organisational Excellence at Spectrum, says “we were not asking staff to work harder, we were asking them to work differently”.

And the key to doing that was instilling throughout the organisation a set of values based on person-centred services, innovation, partnership, excellence, commitment and passion.

From the start this was recognised as difficult because of the nature of Spectrum’s community-based work – it runs 86 homes (with usually 8 staff for five residents) scattered throughout the Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions. The homes are managed 24/7.

Spectrum staff, like throughout the sector, are commonly middle aged, unskilled, earn below average wages and are predominately female.

PRC INVOLVEMENT

At the same time as Spectrum management were looking to change the way the organisation operated, the Public Service Association (PSA), which represents the majority of Spectrum staff, was examining how to get its members at Spectrum more involved in decision making and better recognised for their expertise.

PSA Organiser Kerry Davies says this push came from members who took their jobs and responsibilities very seriously, but felt their expertise and contributions were often undervalued or ignored by management.

To turn this around, the PSA approached the Partnership Resource Centre to help.

Marsh says Spectrum was happy to see the PRC involved. “We already had a good relationship with the PSA and we appreciated that if we were going to tackle our problems, there needed to be a joint approach.

“If one party dominated, there’d look to be a lack of fairness.

“The PRC was able to provide balance – it straddled union and business interests.”

PRC involvement focused on increasing interactions between employees and management and later on encouraging staff to engage in discussions.

From this flowed small teams of trained staff who acted as agents of change in the homes, providing other staff with ideas and plans so they could work more cohesively and deliver a better service.

Marsh says the systems and organisational focus put in place by the PRC are now an organic part of the way Spectrum operates. “It has taken on a life of its own.”

STAFF RESULTS

Christine Cleave is well placed to judge the impact of changes at Spectrum on staff. She has worked at Spectrum since 1991, at first in the homes and now in its head office in Onehunga as a service co-ordinator. She is also a PSA delegate.

When Cleave first got involved in the PRC process, she was well versed in old school Spectrum thinking. “It was feeling of us and them around the table. The management had its own agenda and it had the power. That’s how I thought.”

And among staff there was a feeling that that the work place culture did not foster encouragement of staff, respect and good communication.

The PRC meetings were the first time she had sat around a table with managers and she became aware of a new style of management. “They would listen to what we had to say, they were no longer autocratic and no longer in the blame game.”

Cleave joined one of the off-site training teams and found staff to be wary and frustrated, sometimes from niggly issues built up among themselves, sometimes from management inaction or lack of understanding.

Each house developed its own tools to overcome these issues.

“Now people have fun and they smile.”

One unintended consequence of the creation of the training teams has been opening up a path to promotion in Spectrum for staff like Cleave.

This has provided an incentive to join the teams and take part in the associated training, lifting skill levels throughout the organisation.

MANAGEMENT RESULTS

Marsh says it is sometimes difficult to isolate the PRC-generated progress, and quantify it, because a number of organisational initiatives can be happening at the same time, and it is their collective impact that delivers the desired results.

For example, he says Spectrum will often have a number of staff satisfaction projects underway at a given time, not all related to the PRC. The largest element of its 2009–10 strategic plan is workforce development and staff satisfaction.

And the 2008–09 recession would have encouraged staff to stick with their jobs.

But Marsh says PRC involvement in Spectrum has led to improvements in a number of previously troubling areas.

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Staff satisfaction surveys, and their response rates, are improving. In 2008 staff satisfaction improved 12.8 percent after three years of decline. In 2009 it rose another 3.3 percent.

For the same survey, response rates rose 9 percentage points.

And the creation of a happier workforce has flowed through into a steady decline in staff turnover since 2006. Staff vacancies have reduced from around 20 percent of total staff in 2007 to 12 percent in 2009.



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BEFORE PARTNERSHIP	AFTER PARTNERSHIP
A widely dispersed, often disconnected workforce pockets of which were disengaged in a demanding job	Workforce committed, focused and enthusiastic about providing a consistently high standard of care
Knowledge and contributions of staff sometimes undervalued or ignored by management	Staff consulted in decision making and better recognised and respected for their knowledge and practice
Autocratic style of management with a blame culture	Increasing interactions between employees and management and staff to encouraged to take part in discussions
‘Us and them’ feeling in some management-staff discussions	New style of management makes staff feel part of the business
Staff satisfaction declining	Staff satisfaction improving leading to reduced staff turnover and other workforce advantages

**PARTNERSHIP
 RESOURCE
 CENTRE**

What is the PRC?

Workplace partnership programmes increase productivity, innovation and efficiency by helping create constructive relationships between employers and workers.

The Partnership Resource Centre assists businesses and unions to identify long-term mutual interests and put in place programmes that ensure the businesses and their workers thrive.

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For more information

Partnership Resource Centre – www.dol.govt.nz/prc