

Auckland Transport Cultural Celebration

A new range of staff networks, a comprehensive Māori learning programme and cultural celebrations are helping Auckland Transport build a more culturally inclusive workplace.

Auckland Transport has introduced the initiatives over the last year as part of its new Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

Auckland Transport (AT) is responsible for all of Auckland's transport services, from roads and footpaths, to cycling, parking and public transport. The organisation has around 1,700 staff with a diverse mix of people from more than 50 different countries.



The first of AT's initiatives, the networking programme AT Connects, was created to bring together people who share aspects of their identity to connect and support each other, including with growth and development, as well as to celebrate and share their culture across the organisation.

Since AT Connects was launched in December 2017, three cultural staff networks have been established with a strong level of membership from across the organisation. Each network has developed an action plan.

To get AT Connects going, staff were encouraged to come up with their own ideas through an internal communications campaign. Soon, staff were volunteering to lead Māori, Pasifika and Indian networks. The networks held launch events attended by approximately 150 staff and members of Auckland Transport's Executive Leadership Team.

"At the launch events, the network leaders shared their vision for the network and ran an interactive activity to gain input from staff into what the network meant to them, what they wanted to get out of the network, and the type of cultural celebrations and events they would like to see," says Auckland Transport Organisational Development Manager Anna Paris.

This input was used to form an action plan. Key areas of focus included providing opportunities for staff to connect and support each other, cultural education and awareness, enhancing their voice in AT, growth and development of staff, and cultural events.

The networks meet regularly and have formed working groups to progress their various plans. Membership continues to grow - the Māori staff network has 40 members, (including Auckland Transport CEO Shane Ellison), Pasifika 65 and "Incredible India" 35 members.

Cultural celebrations are another focus area. They had been in place informally across the business on a much smaller scale and have now been given an injection of new energy.

"Last year when the majority of AT's staff were relocated into one central office, it was a great opportunity for AT to be able to share and celebrate special cultural occasions together as one team," says Anna.

The first was a shared lunch to celebrate Diwali, which 300 people attended.

Chinese New Year was marked with a range of activities developed by Auckland Transport's Diversity and Inclusion Leadership team. This included festive imagery, history, fun activities, Chinese fortune cookies and ang pow packets (traditional red envelopes with gifts).

AT's Persian staff organised a celebrations for Nowruz, the Persian New Year, including a Haft-Seen, a traditional tabletop arrangement which consists of seven symbolic items all starting with the same letter in the Persian alphabet.

A programme has also been developed to celebrate the Pasifika language throughout the year, starting with Samoan Language Week held each May.

Lastly, Auckland Transport strengthened its focus on Māori culture in April this year, with a new integrated learning programme called Ngā Kete Kīwai.

Ngā Kete Kīwai is a series of four workshops focusing on Te Reo and Tikanga, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori responsiveness, and Māori engagement. About 230 people attended the first workshops. More will be delivered quarterly in the future.

Auckland Transport's CEO and Executive Leadership Team (ELT) visibly support all cultural celebrations and initiatives, by attending and engaging in person, as well as with supportive messages through internal communications channels.

Overall Auckland Transport's initiatives have improved employee engagement, Anna Paris says.

"Staff have learned from other cultures and now have a wider view point which supports inclusion and improves collaboration, decision making and customer service. People feel more valued, have pride and are more comfortable in sharing their culture. For example, this is noticeable in the lunchroom where you can see people from different backgrounds and cultures sitting together. The spinoff from this is an appreciation for different backgrounds and perspectives, resulting in a more engaged, high-performing culture."

Staff feedback across the programmes has included:

"I have found my people at AT - and I mean it 100 per cent. Everyone has been authentic and truly accepting of us all bringing our true selves to work. Not a common workplace culture, so keep that going AT!"

"The workshop provided me a better understanding of how we are applying the principles of the Treaty and the way we partner and engage with mana whenua in Tāmaki Makaurau."

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