

Stuff Diversability

Two initiatives by media company Stuff have created more than a dozen jobs for people living with disabilities and had a profound and tangible effect on awareness about diversity in the corporate workplace.

Stuff (previously Fairfax Media) is a media outlet with more than 1200 employees. Its mission statement is "helping Kiwis to connect and thrive in their communities" and the organisation is committed to using the reach of its newsroom as a force for positive social change.

According to the 2013 New Zealand Disability Survey, issued by Statistics New Zealand, almost a quarter of the population were identified as having some form of disability.

Annamarie Jamieson, then a senior manager and now People and Culture Director for the company, was keen to see Stuff better represent this diversity. Creative Spirit was launched when Annamarie saw that there were jobs that needed doing and young people willing to do them.

"That job became two jobs, then four, then eight - and today Stuff has a fully-fledged programme. Creative Spirit positions have been created in Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton and Christchurch. And Stuff has committed to employing at least one person under the programme for each site of more than 100 staff. The impact has been profound on those employed, their families and our company," says Annamarie, who says Stuff is insistent the jobs are not charity.

"They are real jobs for real pay. We are committed to providing employees with disabilities with the same conditions and opportunities as the rest of the Stuff family."

However, staff employed under the initiative are fully supported in their role. This support include a comprehensive induction, tailored duties to suit their capabilities, and flexible working hours.

Emma Barrett is an example of an employee who has benefited, and grown with the initiative. She progressed from a part-time role to a full-time one, in line with her capacity to upskill and the changing needs of the business. Last year, she graduated from the Creative Spirit programme and no longer requires the services of the supported work agency.

The company's second initiative, The Coffee Co-op, grew from a challenge.

"A senior manager at another organisation commented, more as a matter of fact than a question, that, 'you wouldn't employ a deaf person, would you?' during a discussion on diversity and inclusion. Well, we would. We did, and we built a micro-business around that," says Annamarie.

In collaboration with a local coffee shop that provided the infrastructure, Annamarie and other employees took a weekend to erect the pop-up style cafe on the 7th floor of Stuff's office in Ponsonby, Auckland. Stuff worked with local recruiters to find suitable people with hearing impairments to staff the shop.



Once set-up was complete, the next challenge was to work out how to ensure employees knew how to order their vital morning cup of coffee.

“Over a week, we taught 350 staff in Auckland our third national language, New Zealand Sign Language [to place their orders]. We also erected posters, produced a video that ran on a loop on an iPad showing how to sign for common coffees and provided how-to flip charts on the counter,” says Annamarie. “The coffee shop has been a roaring success, breaking even from the get-go and is now not just a sustainable business but a model for similar social enterprises.”

Both ventures have the full support of senior leadership, with the executive team endorsing a Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, with inclusion as one of five strategic branches. This means every manager is required to follow through on diversity and inclusion in real and practical ways.

The initiatives have provided work for people who may have struggled to find it elsewhere. But the impact isn't limited to those employed under the programmes; other employees have spoken positively about Stuff's commitment to diversity.

“Initially, we thought the greatest benefit was from how we helped these individuals. Undoubtedly, that has been important. But the company has derived as much, if not more benefit, by helping us to frame everything we do through a new lens,” says Annamarie.

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