

Cultural Celebration Award Entrant: Key Assets – The Children’s Services Provider



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545429/66cdecef16>

As an organisation with a diverse workforce and a high proportion of Māori young people in their care, dynamic foster care agency Key Assets has introduced initiatives to increase cultural connection and deliver locally based activities in support of local communities.

Key Assets is an international group of not-for-profit foster care agencies providing high quality and innovative family placements for children and young people.

With a diverse workforce of Māori, South African, Pacific Islanders, NZ European, UK and other European/rest of world migrants to New Zealand, with different religions, cultures and sexualities, the Manukau-based agency cares for children and young people from a range of backgrounds throughout New Zealand.

Given the diverse range of people that dynamic foster care agency Key Assets works with and the number of children/young people who are Māori, it was important to have an office environment that encouraged connection to Māori culture.

Through consultation with the New Zealand team, lead by Director Angie Simpson, and the senior leadership team, initiatives to increase cultural connection were developed and implemented.

As one of 13 countries in the Key Assets group, Key Assets New Zealand was successful in changing the international Key Assets Visions and Values document to reference the agency’s commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi.

Says Angie, 'We work respectfully within the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. This reflects our cultural commitment externally to stakeholders and to all potential and new staff members as our Visions and Values are shared through the recruitment process and during staff induction. They also are the basis of our Performance, Development and Review process for three, six and 12-month reviews. Key Assets New Zealand is the only jurisdiction to have an altered Visions and Values document internationally.'

A group waiata is held every morning at 8:45am. Powhiri is held for new employees and there are regular cultural kai shared lunches. "We love food at Key Assets so the idea of cultural kai shared lunches was well received! Not only is this important from a cultural point of view, it also increases our sense of working together as a team, increases morale and encourages healthier eating habits with delicious fresh salads quite often shared," says Angie.

Word labels around the office display both Māori and English language for objects and daily tasks for children like counting. "Word labels were an easy idea to implement with both the Māori and corresponding English words printed on a plain piece of white paper and displayed around the office. Toilets, doors and offices are labeled in this manner and the numbers from 1 - 10 are also displayed."

Te whare tapa wha runs through all the agency's work - assessments, monthly reports and children's reviews. "Through this process we have acknowledged that wairua (spirituality), whanau (family), hinengaro (mind) and tinana (physicality) are all equally as important to maintaining placements. This is particularly important in the assessment stage with Foster Carers as we can readily identify any potential issues and move to address these as part of an approval process," notes Angie.

The cultural connection was extended to Key Assets directors who travel from Australia for quarterly leadership meetings and were welcomed onto a local marae to learn about Māori history of the area and to experience Māori culture first-hand.

Cultural connection is supported by New Zealand Director Angie Simpson and her senior leadership team. Developing our understanding of Tikanga Maori is central to our emerging cultural competence, says Angie and we are privileged to be lead and guided in this by mana whenua

Everyone in the team are active participants in all activities and everyone shares the responsibility for ensuring all new employees are inducted into Key Assets culture, including cultural aspects of the workplace

Key Assets New Zealand has directly benefited from increasing its connection to Māori culture. Staff are more engaged and have increased their knowledge of Māori culture. And Māori members of staff feel a greater level of respect and value from the business, which has flow on effects for increased morale and decreased staff turnover.

Leanne Mills, HR Manager for Key Assets adds, "In 2016 we undertook an employee wellbeing survey across the staff group in New Zealand, the data analysis has shown that 91 per cent of staff feel respected at work and 83 per cent of staff feel both satisfied with their work and are also content with the way Key Assets treat them."

An additional added benefit is that non-Māori social workers and youth workers are better able to support foster carers and the children/young people placed in care. The

understanding and knowledge gained from activities such as powhiri, waiata and shared cultural kai, combined with the experiences from attending local festivals, have all helped to make a positive and lasting difference for children and families.

The Māori cultural connection initiatives have been so successful in New Zealand that they have been used as an example for the Australian-based Key Assets organisation in dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural connection

“After all,” says Angie, “the work that we do is all about the wellbeing of our tamariki and rangatahi and making a positive and lasting difference for them and their families.”