

## Diversability Award Entrant: CQ Hotels Wellington



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/177135385/02041ddffd>

Teaching staff to communicate with deaf colleagues in sign language and setting high standards in accessibility to its premises are just some of the ways a Wellington hotel is ensuring its staff is as diverse as the guests it caters to.

CQ Hotels Wellington's Cuba Street complex has been part of the capital's accommodation scene since its inception in 1907. Today, a staff of 73 operate the complex as two hotels in one, Comfort Hotel Wellington and Quality Hotel Wellington, offering a range of cost-effective accommodation, luxury suites, conference facilities, a restaurant, bar and café.

But it's CQ Hotels General Manager Olivier Lacoua's quest to position the hotel as accessible and inclusive for everyone - guests and staff alike - that gives the company a point of difference in a crowded accommodation market.

Olivier, who took up his role in 2010, wanted CQ Hotels to be the most accessible hotel in the country and set about developing a programme that enabled everyone, regardless of their disability, to feel included - by offering a fully accessible hotel environment.

CQ Hotels Wellington was the first hotel in New Zealand to be rated by the BE. ACCESSIBLE organisation for its accessibility to and within the hotel and, in 2013, became the first hotel to offer staff New Zealand Sign Language Training by Deaf Aotearoa.

Catering for all guests, regardless of disability, was just the first part of Olivier's vision. He also wanted to ensure the hotel 'walked the talk' by employing people with disabilities to work in the hotel and restaurant.

Working closely with Workbridge, a professional employment service for people with all types of disabilities and injuries, the hotel has permanently employed five staff members with disabilities who work in various roles such as housekeeping, front office and in the restaurant.

CQ Hotels Wellington has an Accessible Champion to ensure CQ's accessible initiatives are implemented correctly and efficiently. Every day the Accessible Champion emails out and also places in the staff room, a NZSL sign of the day for staff to learn. This helps with accessible guests and also with the staff members who may have hearing impairments.

The six-week NZSL course, run by Deaf Aotearoa's highly skilled tutors, allows staff to communicate effectively with their deaf customers and colleagues. At the end of the training course, staff are able to confidently communicate using basic sign language to greet guests, in the following areas: Introduction/greeting guests, check-in, time concepts (days of the week, calendar and directions), rooms and facilities, food and drink and giving opinions.

These initiatives, driven by Olivier, have been fully supported by senior staff. Head of Departments at CQ meet regularly with their staff to ensure that all accessible initiatives are implemented. Staff members are always encouraged to attend the NZSL refresher courses (which are held at the hotel every month)

CQ Hotel's board has also given their support to Olivier's changes, recognising the positive impacts within the hotel, both financially and socially.

The hotel has won several awards for its programmes including Best Employer in the 2015 ACC Attitude Awards and the NZSL Employer Award and Accessible Service Award at the NZSL Awards 2016.

But the real rewards for the hotel management are seeing staff thrive under the new initiatives.

Tania Ali was among several deaf staff taken on temporarily in May last year to launch the hotel's 'Deaf dining restaurant experience', which featured New Zealand's first ever restaurant menu written in sign language.

Tania, who is passionate about raising awareness of the deaf community, won the Employee of the Month award in June 2015 and her role was made permanent.

"I love working at the hotel," she says. "I'm meeting lots of people and learning lots. We have a great view of the NZSL alphabet to show to customers and I love seeing them enjoying learning NZSL.

"I have great bosses."

CQ Hotels marketing manager Ania Truman says, "Through working alongside organisations such as Deaf Aotearoa, Workbridge and Emerge Trust, we hope to become known as an employer of choice in terms of our inclusiveness for all and work with the community.

"Awards such as the Diversity Awards gives us a chance to show our staff we are really making a difference and people are standing up to take notice. This gives our staff a real sense of pride and belonging, therefore reducing staff turnover and making our team a happy, thriving one based on positivity and a can-do attitude!"