

Diversability Award Winner: Hell Pizza



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545424/a9452e8bf7>

A nationwide pizza delivery company is changing perceptions about how valuable people with intellectual disabilities can be in the workplace.

Hell Pizza began with one store in Wellington in 1996 and has franchises nationwide, with 69 stores employing more than 1,100 people.

In 2013 the company formed a partnership with IDEA Services (a subsidiary of IHC) to set up a paid training and work experience programme for youth with an intellectual disability.

Hell Pizza General Manager Ben Cumming says the Active in Hell initiative was spawned after one of the stores delivered pizzas to Active, a local Wellington organisation for youth with intellectual disabilities, and asked how the company could support them.

Ben says that because commercial kitchens are a fast-paced and, at times, dangerous working environment, there was a perception in the industry that they were not suitable places for people with disabilities.

But after speaking to the staff and youth at Active, Hell Pizza management realised that there were some very capable individuals there who could benefit from a fast-food training programme. It would help create opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to enter the workforce by dispelling myths and breaking down those initial barriers they face, and provide a rewarding experience for Hell Pizza store owners and staff.

Active is a six-week programme, comprising of two paid two-hour sessions in a Hell store each week. The training covers everything from health and safety education to preparing food for sale and making pizza dough and bases.

Since it started, 32 young people have completed the training course in stores from Auckland to Dunedin and Hell Pizza has now committed to putting 64 trainees through the programme each year.

To set up the project, Hell Pizza's head office approached all its franchise owners to explain the programme and canvas their support.

"We've always said that we don't want to force our franchisees into the project. If they are not enthusiastic about the training programme, then the project will likely not succeed in their store," Ben says.

Around two thirds of the stores signed up to take part, providing a range of locations for the trainees, who were found by Idea Services' regional supported employment co-ordinators.

Simple but clear training plans were put together for the franchisees to follow and each trainee takes part in a one-day induction to the store with the owner and their supported employment co-ordinator.

Initially, the supported employment co-ordinators are quite hands-on in the training but become less involved as the trainee gains confidence and competence.

Once the training is complete, the trainee receives a certificate signed by the Hell Pizza General Manager, and the IDEA Services staff discuss with them what they learned and talk about the next steps in their career progression.

Hell Pizza's head office supports the project by advising store owners how to manage the training programme and get the most out of it, and by paying the trainees' wages. Idea Services provide a national co-ordinator, who has funded hours through IHC, to liaise with the supported employment regional co-ordinators and ensure a steady flow of trainees. Hell Pizza franchisees are responsible for delivering the training programme and all aspects of the employment relationship.

"For our Hell franchisees and employees it has been a very rewarding experience, and for some staff I am sure it has changed their perceptions about how valuable people with intellectual disabilities can be in the workplace," Ben says.

"An unexpected benefit of the programme is that it has also been a good refresher for our franchisees on how to train someone effectively, and how they might tailor training programmes to suit different individuals."

Another pleasing result is that every trainee who started the programme has finished it, Ben says.

One trainee from Rotorua recently gained a job outside of the food industry, in part due to the confidence and skills he developed during the Active in Hell programme.

Four trainees from the Wellington region have gone on to complete the Food Safety Certificate Unit Standard 167 and three of them undertook First Aid training at St. John's.

And recently the first trainee from the programme went on to permanent employment at Hell Pizza, securing a job in the Upper Hutt store.

Janiece Pollock says she always wanted to work in hospitality. "I feel excited every time I wake up on Wednesday because I know that in the afternoon I will be at Hell's."

Upper Hutt store manager Camden Mitchell says it was good being able to give Janiece an opportunity to train and, ultimately, work at Hell Pizza.

"Janiece's speed, hygiene and safety standards are exactly the same as all my other staff. So why not have her as one of my team members."