

Emerging Diversity and Inclusion Award Entrant: The Warehouse Group



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545457/8ba5c1baeb>

Paid leave for staff who are victims of domestic violence is just one of the innovative ways The Warehouse Group is breaking down barriers that may stop team members from “bringing their whole selves to work”.

This benefit is open to the 12,000 employees working across The Warehouse Group’s retail brands, which include The Warehouse, Warehouse Stationery, Noel Leeming and Torpedo7.

“Through our work with Women’s Refuge, we understood that people experiencing domestic violence would often choose to leave their roles due to difficulties created in taking time off work. Once out of work, the loss of income compounds the situation and the wellbeing of the family as a whole,” says Head of Employment Relationships Julie Simpson.

The Warehouse Group’s Family Violence Is Not Ok initiative, which is offered in strict confidence, offers up to 10 days of paid leave, to provide domestic violence victims time to do what they need to remove themselves from violence (attend court, meet with Women’s Refuge or relocate if necessary). The initiative also provides unpaid leave for team members to act as a support person for anyone dealing with domestic violence. The Warehouse Group also provides unpaid leave for anyone using violence so that they can seek help such as anger management or counselling.

“We wanted to ensure that our team members were supported through family violence situations and to make it ok to ask for help,” Julie says.

The programme is one of four initiatives The Warehouse Group set up in 2015 in an effort to be truly diverse and inclusive.

“Ease Back to Work” allows staff returning from parental leave to work 80 per cent of their normal hours on full pay for their first four weeks back.

“Be There” leave provides five days additional paid leave for team members to be there for the birth or adoption of a child.

“Career Break” allows a team member to take up to 12 months unpaid leave to undertake an activity that builds transferable skills, including study or travelling, and gives assurance that they have a job to return to.

The aim of these initiatives, Julie says, is to provide team members with forums where they can raise issues or opportunities that will enhance their overall wellbeing and where the company can provide additional support for them and their families through the important times in the lives.

“These may include experiencing violence in their family home, adjusting to a new addition to the family or acknowledging that they just may need a bit of a career break to follow their passions without leaving their retail career with The Warehouse Group.

“We really want our team to feel supported when going through a life change such as having a new child. In the past, we have run focus groups with our teams and found that there was apprehension about returning to work after having children and so we really wanted to provide some practical support.

“We also acknowledge that team members can benefit significantly from time out from work to pursue a different goal which provides them with some great skills. Therefore Career Break provides a legitimate option.”

Julie says the initiatives have been developed as a result of conversations with team members about the difficulties they were facing. “We have a regular working group with a specific focus to look at the diversity of our teams and how we can support them to be their whole selves at work.”

Leadership teams were taken through the programme to ensure their engagement, then the information was distributed to all employees throughout the organisation. Three of the initiatives were launched internally and publically at the same time, creating positive media coverage and a social media buzz.

“We also partnered with Women's Refuge, The Parenting Place, and Plunket, who have supported our recognition of our diverse workforce,” Julie says.

Due to the strict confidentiality pledged to the team, The Warehouse Group cannot share how many staff have used the Family Violence Is Not Ok programme. “But we can confirm

that we supported a number of victims and enabled them to do the things they needed to do to protect themselves and their families from further abuse.”

Fifteen team members have taken advantage of the Ease Back to Work programme and 55 staff have used Be There leave. Three people have gone on a Career Break since the initiative was launched late last year and the businesses is seeing a reduction in the number of staff resigning to go on an OE.

Organisations such as Humans Rights Commission, Women’s Refuge, White Ribbon New Zealand, Skylight Trust and political parties have publicly praised the Family Violence Is Not Ok programme.

Feedback from staff about the initiatives offered has also been incredibly positive, Julie says.

The Warehouse jewellery specialist Hannah Pilkington says Career Break has enabled her to go out and experience life while having something to come back to.

Joe, a commercial specialist with the Noel Leeming Group, shared his experience with Be There Leave.

“We had a high risk pregnancy this time after some complications about 10 months earlier where we lost a child at 35 weeks of gestation. The leave helped me spend more time with my wife in hospital and also time with our other five-year-old son. Without the Be There leave, there was no way I would have got that precious time with my new daughter and to help out around the house so my wife could focus on what she needed to do.”