

Work Life Balance Award Entrant: Palmerston North City Council



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545434/efcc3026c9>

Palmerston North City Council has made some solid inroads into rectifying challenges in staff recruitment, retention and engagement, by introducing a comprehensive wellness programme.

Over the last few years it has become increasingly difficult to attract talent to PNCC. Often vacancies have had to be advertised multiple times, and some were not filled at all. The council's remuneration policy is to meet the median of market rate, and so they realised they needed to provide non-financial incentives to attract and retain staff

More and more staff were leaving and in 2015, 23 per cent who left, listed work environment as a key factor for moving on.

And worryingly, staff surveyed this year reported only 15.7 per cent are engaged at work. The majority (63 per cent) are ambivalent and 21 per cent are disengaged.

PNCC has a permanent staff base of 530, with another 46 on casual and fix-term contracts.

PNCC's strategy to address their staffing issues started with a rebrand to raise awareness of what services were already available and then moved on to introducing new aspects. This was supported by the Chief Executive Paddy Clifford, who allocated \$70,000 for the project and established a working party comprised of representatives from all units of the council.

Over six months the working party put together a wellness studio, called Activate. The space includes cardio equipment, weight machines, free weights, stretching mats and an area for group classes. Activate is free for all staff to use, and is accessible 24/7. In key stages of the development, all staff were given the opportunity to provide input via polls to

gauge best space use and equipment preferences. Activate was officially launched Council-wide on 13 August 2015.

Since Activate was officially opened, 273 employees have completed inductions. In January 2016 Activate was used 438 times, by 64 different staff members. All new staff are contacted within two weeks of starting, to arrange an induction to the Activate Wellness Space if they are interested

There are currently plans in place to start up group classes, something that staff have shown considerable interest in. It is also planned to develop storage rooms in Activate to a 'Zen Zone'. This will be a place where staff can go to relax, and for quieter activities such as meditation or yoga. Other new initiatives included in the Wellness Programme are Swiss balls for use at desks, and mole-mapping for all staff working outdoors.

Feedback from employees about Activate has been overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority, (94%), of respondents of an evaluation survey stating that Activate adds to the overall employment package. There have also been multiple comments from staff saying their health and wellbeing has improved. People have reported improved fitness, better moods, weight loss, more energy, improvement to injuries, better work/life balance, and more.

"... have gone down almost 2 dress sizes. Coping with stress better and sleeping more soundly at nights," said one employee.

"Fantastic initiative! I've really benefitted from having access to a workout space at work. Our team has become a lot closer too from working out together and sharing a bit of banter about our gains," said another.

The Wellness programme also appears to have improved retention, with comments from employees indicating that they are now more inclined to stay at PNCC: "Activate is definitely one of the pluses for me working at PNCC. To change jobs to a different employer would mean losing access to a fantastic free gym so it certainly is something that pulls in PNCC's favour retaining staff," said a staff member.

Recruitment time has also improved. In the July-September 2015 quarter time to hire dropped to an average of 21 days, an improvement from the April-June quarter of nearly eight days. The role that the Wellness Programme has played in the recruitment is reflected by the fact that 76% of officers starting in September-November 2015 period have signed up to Activate.

PNCC is also hoping their Wellness Programme will be picked up outside the council and signs are good. In a recent regional Local Government HR Forum, the council showcased its programme. Attendees were all impressed, and talked of implementing aspects of the programme in their own organisations.