

Cultural Celebration Award Entrant: Elizabeth Knox Home & Hospital

Video link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229798955>

With 65 nationalities among a staff of just under 200 and approximately 800 volunteers, Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital has evolved hugely since the organisation was set up more than a century ago.

It would have been a very different staff make up when the community facility was first established and these days, cultural diversity brings a richness that is seen as a strength.

It does not, however, come without its challenges and so in September 2016, Knox Home started a new initiative which was to have a celebration of a different culture each month.

Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital is a charitable trust which provides a home to residents of all ages and needs. It offers hospital level care to elders and young adults living with physical disabilities.

The idea for the monthly initiative stemmed from a complex situation which arose when two team members had a clash of cultural values.

The situation occurred between a senior member of staff who is originally from the Philippines and another senior team member who is Pakeha New Zealander. The Filipino residents and staff were recognising a senior team member by addressing her by "Ate" or sister, a sign of respect. However, a Pakeha team member mistook they were addressing her this way because of her position of power which didn't sit well with the flat structure of the organisation.

The Filipino community at Knox were, however, not recognising her positional power so much as her mana, her leadership and the way she protected and nurtured the whole of the Knox community. Both sides were looking at the situation through their own world view, influenced by their cultural norms and upbringing.

A group of team members from a variety of backgrounds came together for discussions.

With communication, clarity and understanding, everyone came to an agreement that this was a culturally appropriate way to communicate and that it was extremely meaningful. There was a significantly better understanding of one another after these talks and it brought about the need to understand one another's cultures better in order to become more well-known to each other.

Senior Care Partners from each home and Clinical Mentors then came together with members from other areas of Knox to discuss the issue and what challenges cultural miscommunication can bring.

What came up time and time again was the importance of cultural diversity and the richness it brings to our community. The team at Knox really see diversity as strengthening the community. They recognised that in order to utilise diversity as strength Knox's people must better understand each other.

From that grew the cultural months where team members would educate the entire community on their culture. The cultural celebrations involve learning the history, music, dancing, food, learning languages, cultural dress, cooking demonstrations and more.

At the end of each month there is a large celebration, combining many of the things learned and shared as well as a big feast.

The cultural celebrations have improved employee work life significantly at Knox.

Some of the major outcomes seen include improved team function due to fun and enjoyment at work. When staff are happier at work and enjoying one another's company this creates a positive flow-on effect to the residents in that household.

As staff and residents have become better known to each other, their trust has increased and they have formed deeper relationships, enabling the development of more autonomy and creative problem-solving skills.

Improved relations between staff and families also evolved because families could see team members for their unique qualities and strengths and recognise the importance of their individuality beyond someone who cares for their family.

"It opened us up to new ideas and the bigger world out there," says Liz Walker, Care Partner. "It reminds us it's not all about us and our own culture, and broadens our horizons. It makes people come out of their shells and we can understand each other better, and love each other. This makes us work together as one and it builds up Knox."

Monica Staveley, Volunteer Coordinator, has noticed the impact: "Combined effort and contribution is so much richer because of that difference, and residents receive so much more than if everyone thought and acted like I do. As the Volunteer Coordinator, it is my biggest hope that this diversity is always celebrated, and volunteers always feel welcome in our community. The cultural celebrations at Knox has been a wonderful initiative to understand other cultures, which will no doubt have a lasting impact on the experience of each volunteer."