

## Emerging Diversity and Inclusion: The Warehouse Group



Video link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229799913>

Recognising that New Zealand has some of the highest family violence rates in the world, The Warehouse Group (TWG) has put in place an initiative aimed at empowering team members affected by this issue to get the support they need and stay in employment.

The Family Violence, It's Not OK initiative was introduced in late 2015 to break down barriers that could prevent staff at TWG bringing their whole selves to work by providing channels and knowledge to address a serious and prevalent social issue that affects many New Zealanders.

TWG has grown from a single store founded by Sir Stephen Tindall 35 years ago, to being the largest general merchandise retailer in New Zealand. TWG employs more than 12,000 people across the country, and has more than 240 retail stores, as well as nationwide distribution networks.

Chief People Officer Anna Campbell says that TWG's staff is broadly representative of the New Zealand population. "Research shows that women are generally more impacted by family violence and given women represent 60 per cent of TWG's workforce, we want to tackle the barrier family violence may cause for this group."

As part of the initiative, TWG offers up to 10 days' paid leave to family violence victims that can be used at to attend court, meet with Women's Refuge or relocate if necessary. It also provides unpaid leave for team members to support family violence victims and unpaid leave to people using violence who want to stop.

The initiative was developed in partnership with Women's Refuge and White Ribbon New Zealand. "We recognised we're not experts so it was important to engage professionals to help develop a meaningful initiative," Anna says.

A training programme raising awareness around the signs of family violence and covering how to start a conversation with and support a team member who may be experiencing family violence was rolled out to people leaders.

TWG developed and launched a "shielded website" that allows anyone in New Zealand who is experiencing family violence and wants help to get it from [www.thewarehouse.co.nz](http://www.thewarehouse.co.nz). The shielded website won't appear in a browser history.

It has also shared resources from the initiative with more than 30 other businesses to help them kick-start their own programmes to support staff experiencing family violence.

Family Violence, It's Not OK was rolled out company-wide through a range of communication channels including the internal Facebook page, CEO emails, Store Manager team briefings and posters across the stores.

TWG's Executive has supported the initiative internally and externally, engaging with other New Zealand businesses and sharing policies and training material.

"A large briefing session at TWG which was attended by around 60 people from some of New Zealand's largest companies and government departments showcased the visible endorsement of leaders, who were happy to share their own experiences of the positive difference the initiative made to TWG," Anna says.

"By making it easier for others to adopt similar policies and training material within their own organisations, TWG is hopeful that the wider issue of family violence in New Zealand can be reduced. We are very aware that such an issue cannot be solved by one business alone and that is why TWG has taken a thought leadership role in advising others."

Senior company leaders have also given media interviews and spoken at a Human Rights Commission panel on this issue, and CEO for The Warehouse and Warehouse Stationery Pejman Okhovat has made a personal commitment to drive change by becoming an ambassador for White Ribbon New Zealand.

This support has resulted in a great deal of positive media and social media coverage of the initiative and a high-level of engagement from TWG's staff, other businesses, government departments, ACC and anti-violence organisations.

But more importantly, it's had an impact directly on TWG team members affected by family violence.

"We have upskilled our leaders in this space, we have enabled people to stop using violence and we've had feedback from staff who believe we are changing lives," Anna says.

"Because of the confidentiality that we pledged to our team members, we have decided not to report on the amount of people who have taken the family violence support. We can confirm that we have supported a number of victims so far and enabled them (without loss

of pay) to do the things they needed to do to protect themselves and their families from further abuse. Sadly, we expect the numbers of people to grow as more people feel confident in asking for help.”