

Empowerment Award Entrant: YWCA Auckland

Empowering young women is in the YWCA Auckland's DNA. Its breadth of support for women spans leadership programmes, flexible working and a significant drive for equal pay across all organisations.

YWCA Auckland (The Y) is a charitable organisation with a heritage of providing free community programmes in Auckland for more than 132 years. The Y is part of the world's largest women's organisation, a global network of 25 million women leading social and economic change in more than 125 countries worldwide. The organisation employs 16.5 fulltime employees and is assisted by approximately 100 volunteers.

Core to the YWCA Auckland's work is its Future Leaders Self Development and Mentoring Programme which was initiated 15 years ago with the vision of empowering young women to become capable and confident leaders in many areas of society, acting as role models for other young people and taking their leadership skills back into their homes and communities.

During that time, more than 700 young women have been through the four-year programme. Each has been empowered to make informed choices in their lives, careers, relationships and communities, and have developed the resiliency to meet and deal with life's challenges.

Without this programme, many of these young women would not otherwise have had these opportunities. The young women in the programme are from low-socio economic communities who face many challenges throughout their lives and have limited access to opportunities and supportive adult relationships that enhance their life prospects. Many young women in this position leave school without adequate qualifications and struggle to find gainful employment. This sets them up for a life of low earnings and they struggle to exit this cycle of disadvantaged living.

The four objectives of the programme are: to increase young women's self-confidence by providing access to a range of experiences; to support and encourage young women to achieve their self-defined goals; to support young women's educational achievement; and to facilitate opportunities for young women to actively lead.

At the end of 2016, Future Leaders participants were well represented at school prize givings, with one head girl, nine prefects, three house captains, one dux and five who gained university scholarships.

In addition 85 percent of the programme's graduates go on to further education. In 2017, YWCA Auckland is working towards having 155 young women with 90 mentors matched with Year 11 to 13 cohorts.

In the words of one young woman when she graduated last year: "I gained confidence in myself and in my ability to apply myself to tasks and see them through. I'm thankful for Future Leaders because I believe if I wasn't in the programme I would have left school and not finished well. I'm thankful to my mentor who really helped me to focus and remain on track."

The YWCA Auckland has also had an enduring impact on equal pay for women. The organisation initiated the YWCA Equal Pay Awards in 2014 and the Equal Pay Best Practice Compact in 2016. The Awards were initially driven out of the Y's dismay that despite its efforts to help young people reach

their potential, once they entered the workforce there remained a high probability they would be undervalued compared to their male counterparts.

Compact provides an entry-level platform for businesses that have started their equal pay journey but are not yet ready to enter awards. If successful the business is able to display a certificate to prove their commitment to equal pay.

Since 2014, more than 50 organisations have participated, and last year alone, more than 55,000 employees benefited from organisations that entered the Awards or took part in Compact.

Seminars and workshops complement the programme, offering equal pay leaders the opportunity to share their story with likeminded businesses looking to make a difference in gender pay and gender inclusiveness.

YWCA Auckland Business Development Manager Debbie Burrows says: "What we know from our applicants is that organisations committed to equal pay are not just addressing equal pay, they're ensuring they have leadership targets for women, they're tackling discrimination and bias, they're developing their female talent pipelines and they're creating policies to make sure women aren't disadvantaged when they enter the workforce or when they return to work following a career break."

Internally all of the YWCA's staff salaries are externally sized and benchmarked to make sure the organisation is walk the talk itself.

The Y provides offers a highly flexible workplace.

"Our CEO Monica Briggs leads our belief in work life balance by example, finishing early each Friday to pick her primary school-age child up from school and taking leave most school holidays, role modelling to our team that it is acceptable, and desirable, to do so," says Debbie.

"Staff are empowered and encouraged to express their needs - a staff-driven initiative saw us reviewing our Christmas shutdown policy at the end of 2016. Some staff felt that their leave entitlements could be better utilised at other times of the year, in order to, for example, tie in with school breaks and their partners' leave conditions, and the board agreed to reduce the shutdown period in recognition of how important this was to staff."

Staff acknowledge the benefits of this and how for many, this is the first experience of such a workplace. "Our staff often talk about the absence of the normal stress related to school age-children drop offs and pickups, family illness and school holidays. It is not only acceptable, but we encourage our staff to enjoy their family time and not to feel burdened."