

Ministry of Justice

Empowerment

The third largest public-sector agency in New Zealand, The Ministry of Justice, is using an employee-led initiative to promote the interests of women and support them to achieve their personal and professional goals.

The Ministry is a diverse organisation with almost 3,800 people working across more than 100 courts and offices.

The agency's mechanism for change, the Women's Network, was founded by the Ministry's Director, Strategic Performance Karin Schofield, three years ago. The network now has more than 730 members from Kaikohe to Invercargill advocating for women, and receives continuous, strong support from the Ministry's senior leaders.

"In a large and dispersed agency like ours, it can be challenging to achieve impact across the boundaries of business groups and our geographically dispersed workforce, as well as being relevant to all our people," says Karin. "We wanted to establish a network that would support all our women, no matter what their role, education, age, ethnicity, or location.

"We recognise that our women have different aspirations, different life stories, and we come from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We need to appeal to a wide range of interests and reflect the diversity of our organisation," she says.

Last year the Women's Network Working Group asked for volunteers to become local champions to help promote the network and support their local colleagues to access events. They now have 25 local champions who put up posters for events, organise virtual access to events, and encourage their colleagues to put themselves forward for the development opportunities offered. "We know that women often need a little extra encouragement to put themselves forward," Karin says.

The network also uses virtual meeting technology to engage across geographical boundaries.

"We have re-purposed technologies that underpin our services to the public for the benefit of our people. We use the audio-visual links network, normally used by the courts to facilitate remote participation in hearings, so all our people have the opportunity to participate in our events, irrespective of their location. This includes our home-based collections workers who can participate from their home offices," Karin says.

Video Link:

<https://vimeo.com/286975471>



The network receives strong support from senior leaders, who provide funding, speak at events, allow the Women's Network Working Group to run the network during work time, and encourage staff to participate.

The Women's Network runs a monthly events programme through which a wide range of speakers share their career journeys or discuss specific topics, such as nutrition, financial wellbeing, gender and Māori tikanga, and pay equity.

The network also arranges development opportunities. In 2017, more than 100 Ministry women accessed a development opportunity through the Women's Network. This year, 60 men and women have taken-up a development opportunity so far, and many more opportunities are planned.



Opportunities included Leading Communication Skills for Women workshops, attending Women in the Public Sector Summits, speed-mentoring, and Diversity Works New Zealand's Aspiring Female Leaders and Men as Allies workshops. "Many attendees have told us that they have learned something that will be career changing for them," says Karin.

The Women's Network is open to all genders. The network believes for women to achieve equality in the workplace and the home, they need the support of men, so encourages them to be part of conversations. This year it is running a Men as Allies campaign to support men to better understand the barriers that women can face and how they can help to address them.

Another network highlight this year has been leading the Ministry's celebration of International Women's Day. The network promoted the day on the Ministry's intranet and via posters at courts and offices and encouraged people to wear purple and take selfies of themselves with their personal International Women's Day pledge to #pressforprogress.

The day started with a breakfast with live-feed to the Zonta International Women's Day event at Parliament. This was followed by three speed-mentoring sessions, with the Ministry's senior leaders. The network also provided remote participation speed-mentoring sessions so people outside of Wellington could access advice from senior leaders.

Earlier this year the network surveyed members to gauge the impact it was having. About a third of members responded, with 85 percent of respondents indicated they valued being a member.

Sixty one percent of women agreed that the Women's Network provides development opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be available to them. Thirty eight percent of women agreed that the Women's Network had given them confidence to pursue their professional goals.

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