

Cargill Enterprises *Skills Highway*

A social enterprise is working to help raise the literacy and numeracy skills of its workers, many of whom were provided few opportunities to learn when they were younger, improving their ability to perform in the workplace.

Cargill Enterprises, based in Dunedin, employs 89 people with intellectual and physical disabilities, providing them with jobs doing work ranging from timber processing to e-waste decommissioning, food packing and assembly services.



Many of these employees are older and were institutionalised as children and provided few opportunities to learn, and Dunedin lacks tertiary study options which accommodate people with intellectual disabilities. So, two years ago Cargill Enterprises started to institute policies and programmes which would allow their employees to further their learning while at work.

The organisation's first attempt was an online programme through a tertiary provider, but for a number of reasons this was not a success. Then, Cargill Enterprises was approached by The Good Training Company, a specialist training provider for people with intellectual disabilities.

Based on analysis of the demands of the workplace and the employees, Cargill Enterprises decided that the programme had to:

- Be voluntary rather than prescriptive
- Be completed in paid work time
- Utilise online tools which would move people towards autonomous learning while building digital literacy skills
- Include both workplace and personal goals
- Involve groups of maximum three people, as one-to-one time is often missing from these employees' lives
- Provide learning from experience and fun, as employees often had negative memories of education
- Provide paid peer support by a person who also has an intellectual disability and has completed a similar programme

The first programme of this nature started in February 2017. Funding was approved for it to run again in June 2017 and February 2018. The programme has also grown from 44 hours of training to 82 hours, and now includes Unit Standards.

Even as production demands increased the workload of participants, they were all able to meet attendance targets throughout the programme. The trainees also participated in discussions and presentations with all of the organisation's leaders about workplace improvement, and all of their ideas were taken further. Tutors have noted that some trainees are now actively seeking opportunities to speak with the CEO, who has an open-door policy.



Supervisors have seen an immense improvement in the workplace as a result of the training. One supervisor in an area where counting skills are needed says that there has been a 100 per cent increase in the number of trainees entrusted with counting tasks. Hazard reporting is now being done by employees as well as leaders, with a 600 per cent increase year on year. Supervisors also report that employees are much more aware of health and safety processes and have more confidence to speak up in the workplace.

Many employees have shared their stories, and how the programme has helped them.

One employee, who made a statistically significant gain in numeracy abilities, said, "I've learnt more than I've ever done. I love it. I'm learning lots of new things and making new friends."

Another says they now practice counting at night, and learnt "alphabet, maths, filling in a form, numbers, new words, how to say I don't understand if I don't know how to do something and how to be careful at work, and be safe."

One trainee presented an idea for a company-wide newsletter which involved interviewing colleagues. The newsletter went ahead. He also completed unit standards in health and safety, form filling and teamwork, and spoke at the programme graduation in front of 110 people.

This employee now wants to study journalism and is continuing their literacy studies to access Level 2 tertiary study, alongside five other employees. "I have learnt how to communicate more with other people and with supervisors especially when I am stuck. Sometimes things are not clear, so I go check with the supervisor first."

"Rather than guessing and making a mistake I go check so we get it right first time. I have never done that before."

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