

The Labour Exchange Ltd

Skills Highway

A workplace literacy programme being delivered at an Auckland labour hire company is offering more than just technical or compliance training - it's giving workers the skills they need to get ahead and opening the door to more learning. More importantly, it ensures they can get home safely and contribute meaningfully to their families.

The Labour Exchange Ltd, started by Dave Devereux 23 years ago, caters to the civil and construction industry in the Auckland region and currently has about 200 workers, predominantly men of Māori and Pasifika descent.



Many choose to work for a labour hire company because it fits in with complex family lives or because they have limited employment options due to previous criminal convictions or patchy work history. They work long hours, doing physical labour, and need to do a great job on site regardless of the complexity of the work or the weather.

Dave and the senior management team worked with Education Unlimited to design and deliver the Better Me workplace literacy programme to a group of 20 keen, low-skilled workers who had already proven their worth to the company.

People were 'shoulder-tapped' to take part as many of the workers were reluctant to put themselves forward for the programme. A requisite for taking part was that participants had not previously achieved education to NZQA Level 2. The Labour Exchange Ltd utilises the Ministry of Social Development Skills for Industry programme, and many of the participants in Better Me came through that pipeline. Better Me was a way to provide education, training and pastoral care to this group who had been on the unemployment benefit before starting fulltime work.

Before the 20-week programme started, participants were interviewed by senior members of staff to discover their 'what's in it for me' factor. The 2017 group's needs ranged from learning to use a computer to increasing money management skills, improving written and verbal communication skills and being given a paid opportunity to discover and close their skills gaps.

Support and logistics were key to the success of the programme. The Labour Exchange Ltd drivers picked up the participants from work sites from Albany to Pukekohe to bring them to the depot for a 3.5-hour learning session each week. They were given lunch and training took place in a place they were familiar with.

HR ensured the right people were utilising this opportunity, Operations rearranged rosters, Payroll made sure workers were paid for the hours spent away from work sites training, and senior managers delivered some of the training modules.

Dave, the owner of The Labour Exchange Ltd, was also involved, both in the classroom and driving the vans to pick up participants. With two training days a week, there was enough flexibility to have catch

up sessions, allowing The Labour Exchange Ltd to manage its commitment to clients, and participants to manage their workload and personal commitments.

One of the important outcomes of the programme for The Labour Exchange Ltd is that course participants understand that time at work means more money for their families. This has resulted in higher productivity across the group.

Better understanding of the value of health and safety reporting has brought an increase in completion of lower-level incident reports and a greater awareness of how to stay safe at work. This leads to fewer serious incidents.

Clients of The Labour Exchange Ltd have reported trainees are more engaged in toolbox talks on site, and payroll staff say they have a better understanding of their payslips and how to complete timesheets.

As part of the programme, both groups presented improvement initiatives for the company. For many participants, the thought of going back into a classroom situation was scary and reminded some of unpleasant memories of school, Dave Devereux says. "But once they felt comfortable in the environment and that it was safe to engage, they seized the opportunity, committed to it, and were right to feel a sense of pride and achievement."

John Rewiri came to The Labour Exchange Ltd from Work and Income New Zealand. The Better Me programme improved his literacy and communication skills and his confidence. After noticing his improved performance, Leighs Construction offered John a fulltime apprenticeship.

"John has broadened his employment opportunities and earning capability. We are proud that he has been able to build on the opportunities presented to get ahead," Dave says.

"The Better Me programme has shown the 2017 participants that they are valued, useful, important and capable team members. The courage of these people to come forward for training and education has paved the way for more of our employees to participate in 2018."



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