



Spark

EMERGING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION FINALIST



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VIDEO**

THE STORY

In October 2017, at a Spark innovation camp, some of the delegates ran a session with an ambitious premise: “How we could make Spark New Zealand’s most mentally-healthy workplace.”

It was born out of a growing consensus that the company could, and should, do more to deliver better mental health outcomes for employees. A handful of Spark people committed then to bringing this vision to life and began a journey towards better workplace mental health.

Spark is one of New Zealand’s biggest connectivity companies and employs around 6,000 people nationwide. Since it is such a large organisation, robust practices around mental health in the workplace can have widespread benefits for many people both at work and at home.

The Mental Health at Spark programme came from that initial session in 2017 and is centred around the key principle of “help, not harm.”

Every event and initiative is tested against this directive and must align with one or more of the programme’s three strategic priorities:

- Stigma reduction and awareness-raising
- Better supporting Spark’s people in the area of mental health
- Creating an open and supportive workplace mental health culture

The programme was created and implemented by a small cross-functional team of volunteers with support from Spark's senior management. Its most prevalent incarnation is a digital community which allows employees a safe and supportive space to share their stories, share resources, ask for help and start having more open conversations about mental health in the workplace. This community has grown from just a handful of people to more than 600, and almost half of the company is reading and engaging with content about mental health.

The first part of the implementation of this programme was listening to employees. Spark developed a short survey in consultation with the Mental Health Foundation, which allowed the business to understand key themes and focus attention on priority issues.

The Spark mental health community has grown and thrived off the back of the work of a core team of six mental health champions who meet regularly to plan and undertake specific initiatives. This team also promotes its work internally and works to connect and build the community.

The team has run a number of initiatives as part of the Mental Health at Spark initiative. This has included invited speakers such as Sir John Kirwan and Mike King, promoting Mental Health Awareness Week, Pink Shirt Day and Gumboot Friday, running training on wellness and resilience, and recognising trailblazers who are showing leadership in the area of mental health.

Spark asked its staff to rate the programme's performance in key areas and received very positive responses: 80 per cent of respondents strongly agreed that Mental Health at Spark has had a positive impact on business performance; and 95 per cent consider the approach taken an innovative one.

Nick Butcher, Agile Coach, says "The mental health programme has caused a phenomenal improvement of understanding about mental health across Spark."

Sarah Warrander, Spark Assistant, says "The Mental Health at Spark programme has helped me to not only understand myself better and how I see the world but also how to support my family member going through a hard time.

"I feel way more empowered and confident being able to give that support to loved ones."

THE CHALLENGE

As a large organisation, it was important that Spark supported its people in all possible ways, including mental health and wellbeing, with a programme that was authentic and sustainable.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Conducted a survey, developed in collaboration with the Mental Health Foundation, to create priorities for a mental health strategy
- Formed an open digital community for discussions of mental health

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- Promoted events that grew awareness of mental health issues
- Invited guest speakers to talk about their experiences with mental health

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Digital community has more than 600 members, and more than half of the company reads and interacts with content in the community.
- Good turnout for external speakers and events, with up to 120 people in person and participation via live stream from other major centres.
- 12 per cent increase in the use of External Assistance Programme services
- More open discussions around mental health internally
- People feel confident to talk about mental health and act as bridge to support for workmates, friends or family who might be experiencing mental distress.

KEY LEARNING

A community-led approach means that people can engage more deeply with initiatives, which is key in big organisations in particular.

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