



Downer New Zealand

TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE FINALIST



THE STORY

Acknowledging the place tangata whenua hold in Aotearoa, Downer New Zealand is committed to attracting and retaining Māori employees and ensuring they are well-represented across all areas of the business.

The company has around 12,000 employees providing services to clients across several sectors including; roading, telecommunications, facilities management, hospitality, laundries, water, open spaces and energy.

Downer aspires to be an employer of choice for young people and Māori, and, needing to address an ageing employee demographic and skill shortages, the company has deliberately targeted young Māori in its recruitment and retention plans.

Existing successful programmes were adapted and expanded to cater to the needs of young Māori entering the industry and provide a wrap-around support system consisting of several programmes.

Whakatipu Tētēkura is designed for Māori school leavers at risk of becoming NEETs, (not in education, employment or training) and consists of a series of marae-based residential workshops, pastoral care and a supported career development pathway.

Participants are permanently employed within Downer, supported through the In Work Success programme and, where appropriate, Te Whanake ki te Ora. Both these programmes have been adapted to meet the unique challenges that young Māori may face gaining and maintaining sustainable employment.

In Work Success is a 12-month programme whereby new employees and their line managers are connected with an In Work Success advisor to provide help and support around whole of life issues which may impact on their ability to maintain employment. These include literacy, finances, wellness, and family/whanau challenges. The programme is individualised to support participants through the challenges they face joining the workforce.

Te Whanake ki te Ora is for new employees who self-disclose they may be at risk of cannabis use, and are supported to remain drug free through counselling, random drug tests, lifestyle workshops, a buddy system, celebrations, and family/whanau involvement.

General Manager Human Resources – Transport Services Debbie Kirby says the programme philosophy and content made use of the company’s experience running other programmes supporting Māori leadership.

“To ensure we were successful in bringing more young Māori into our business sustainably, we drew on our learnings from our successful Māori Leadership programme Te Ara Whanake, which had demonstrated that acknowledging and celebrating the culture of Māori within the organisation had led to very successful individual and company outcomes.”

CEO and Executive support of this initiative is very strong. The Whakatipu Tetekura concept was presented to Nga Kaitiaki o te Ara Whanake (Maori Leadership Development Advisory Board) who endorsed and supported it from concept to implementation. Three members of the Executive Team are part of this Board which also includes the Downer kaumatua Gabe Moana.

Starting in October 2018, Downer worked with iwi and schools to recruit Māori school leavers who hadn’t yet identified a career or training pathway, and managers identified vacancies around the country. Following this process, 13 rangatahi attended an initial five-day residential workshop. While one decided to return to school, the other 12 were offered permanent contracts and remain engaged and employed within the company. Two further programmes have been scheduled for this year.

“We are all aware of the significant long-term impact that establishing employment and a career pathway at this stage of life will have on their, and their whanau’s, future,” says Debbie.

THE CHALLENGE

Downer is currently experiencing skill shortage challenges and needs creative strategies to attract and retain workers. It needs young people to offset an ageing demographic and to begin career pathways to ensure the sustainability of the industry. It is committed to recruiting and retaining Māori employees.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Existing successful programmes were tailored to specifically cater to the needs of young Māori entering the workforce.

- Whakatipu Tētēkura is a programme for Maori school leavers at risk of becoming NEETs, (not in education, employment or training) and consists of a series of marae-based residential workshops, pastoral care and a supported career development pathway. Participants are permanently employed within Downer and supported through associated programmes that have been adapted to meet the unique challenges that young Māori may face gaining and maintaining sustainable employment.
- Potential participants were identified with cooperation of iwi and schools.



RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- 12 young people were offered permanent contracts.
- Programme participants presented with significant challenges to maintaining employment and some drop off was expected, but to date all remain engaged and employed within the company.
- Two new programmes scheduled for the remainder of 2019 are already over-subscribed.
- Downer considers the programme a win:win initiative. It provides employment for individuals who may have challenges gaining and maintaining sustainable employment, and the business gets loyal, committed, productive employees.
- Employees across the company report feeling proud to work for a company that is making a tangible difference to communities through employment opportunities.

KEY LEARNING

The key to rangatahi succeeding in the company has been acknowledging and celebrating who they are, and incorporating cultural aspects into their learning.

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