

Te Toi Mahana

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

SMALL-MEDIUM ORGANISATION FINALIST



THE STORY

In te ao Māori, a marae is said to be mahana (warm) when there are old people from the area present. This speaks to the safety Māori elders provide, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally.

That is the feeling Te Toi Mahana, the largest social housing provider in Pōneke Wellington, wants to create for the nearly 3000 tenants they serve. Meaning a place of caring and nurturing, standing and belonging, the name was gifted by mana whenua groups of the Wellington region. Established as a Charitable Trust in 2023 and managing over 1600 properties, Te Toi Mahana has assumed responsibility for housing services previously provided by the city council since the 1950s.

“We believe that the key to service excellence lies in bridging gaps and helping people overcome barriers to accessing the services we provide,” explains General Manager Tenancy Daniel Tai.

Te Toi Mahana provides services to a highly diverse community. Its tenants whakapapa to 72 different countries, speak 44 different languages and come from varying age groups. To ensure the organisation’s services meet high standards, it actively recruits for diversity to better reflect their community.

Its diversity journey has been heavily influenced by its mana whenua partnerships.

“We work with mana whenua to deliver quality housing for our communities and to support the hauora of our tenants, kaimahi and hapori whānau.”

Expressing commitment to the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi, Te Toi Mahana’s Board includes two mana whenua representatives, and both groups work collaboratively on operational issues.

“Our partnership with mana whenua is fundamental to who we are and has been since our establishment. We endeavour to deepen and grow our partnership with mana whenua and work together to achieve shared goals and aspirations,” Daniel adds.

A firm belief that improving knowledge and understanding of te ao Māori strengthens the ability to deliver better and more inclusive services has driven the incorporation of Māori competencies related to te ao Māori and te reo Māori into the organisation’s development plans.

Another main driver in the approach to diversity is Te Toi Mahana’s recruitment process. This includes group short-listing by staff from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds and running assessment centres where all participants are given the opportunity to contribute to group exercises to express their views.

“Our kaimahi whakapapa to 20 different countries around the world,” states Daniel. Te Toi Mahana has developed solid standards and checklists for recruitment that allows participation from front-facing kaimahi during the application process. These opportunities also give managers a chance to discuss the value of diversity, inclusion, and collaboration.

The focus on delivering service excellence with an inclusive culture has led to a 77 per cent tenant satisfaction rate at Te Toi Mahana. There have also been positive gains for staff in only a short period of time.

“By December 2023, five months into the Te Toi Mahana journey, the internal staff engagement survey returned scores above 90 per cent across all dimensions.” explains Daniel.

With these approaches to diversity, Te Toi Mahana continues to provide high-quality housing services to its tenants, helping to make Pōneke a better place for everyone and bringing the aspirations of the community they serve to fruition.

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THE CHALLENGE

Te Toi Mahana wanted to deliver excellent and more inclusive services to the diverse community it serves.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Building strong and enduring relationship with mana whenua groups
- Mana whenua representation on the board
- A collaborative working relationship with mana whenua regarding operational issues
- Recruitment processes that are inclusive and collaborative
- Actively recruiting kaimahi from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds to reflect the diverse group of tenants the organisation serves
- Maintaining eight on-site offices to ensure that engaging with Te Toi Mahana is as convenient as possible and can be done kano ki te kano (in person)
- Adopting an inclusive approach, involving tenants in policy-making and service delivery
- Provide access to interpretation services for tenants with different language needs through telephone and in-person interpretation
- Kaimahi empowered to identify areas that align with organisational and personal development goals.
- Budget allocated to help individual kaimahi achieve their goals.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Kaimahi that whakapapa to 20 different countries.
- Over 90% tenant satisfaction at Te Toi Mahana.
- Overall staff engagement over 90%.
- Newly introduced training and development programme well received.
- Organisational development plans incorporate Māori competencies related to te ao Māori and te reo Māori



KEY LEARNING

Improved knowledge and understanding of te ao Māori strengthens the ability to deliver better and more inclusive services.