

# Araraurangi Air New Zealand

## IMPACT WINNER



### THE STORY

When Air New Zealanders buy coffee from the café in their Auckland offices they're doing more than getting their daily caffeine fix; they're helping young adults with intellectual disabilities gain and develop skills that will help them into further employment.

In 2022 the airline partnered with Project Employ - an organisation that supports young people with disabilities as they transition into the workforce - to open a Flourish Café at its Auckland office on Fanshawe Street, which houses about 1600 employees.

Air New Zealand Senior People Specialist Robynne Sam says the partnership was part of working towards two ambitions in Air New Zealand's DE&I strategy: 'Creating an Environment free from Discrimination' and 'Fair and Equitable Experiences for Everyone'.

"We are building disability awareness and empathy amongst our Air New Zealand whānau. Currently, only 0.17 per cent of Air New Zealanders have shared that they have a disability, compared to 24 per cent of the New Zealand population. We believe genuine, day-to-day interactions with people with learning differences and intellectual disabilities will break down

perceived barriers, and is an important step towards creating trust and a safe space for our people to share a disability that they, or their family, may have.”

Trainees are involved in all aspects of running the café which provides an authentic work environment and a genuine stepping-stone to employment and independence.

To ensure the Flourish Café was successful, one key workstream was created from multiple teams across the organisation. This included Executive and Senior Leadership Teams providing funding and support, the Properties Team creating space during the building phase and managing hazards, and the People Safety Team looking after café trainees. The Enable Employee Network, which focuses on supporting employees with a disability or caring for someone with a disability, were the key drivers of the initiative itself.

“Collaboration with Project Employ and key team members has been crucial in ensuring that the café is set up to provide meaningful job opportunities and skill development for young adults with disabilities, while also embedding and developing a sustainable and inclusive business model that benefits both employees and the broader community,” say Ed Collett, Senior Aircraft Programmes Specialist/Co-Lead of Enable Employee Network, “This collaborative effort will also have a positive impact in addressing labour market shortages through creating more opportunities for a talent pool in our younger workforce who we may otherwise have missed out on.”

Project Employ CEO and Founder Sarah Dann-Hoare says the partnership with Air New Zealand has made paid internships possible for up to six Project Employ graduates per year.

“This means that those who are keen to pursue a career in hospitality now have an extra six months of stepping out of their comfort zone and further developing their hospitality skills in a new, busier environment without the support of Job Coaches. Our interns work alongside our barista and rely on each other for support, guidance and solving day-to-day problems in the café. Being based in the CBD has also meant they have become more confident at using public transport outside of their usual North Shore area. Their worlds are already so much bigger.”

Project Employ Intern Damain West describes his experiences extremely positively.

“I am liking getting to know more people, having different conversations is fun,” he says.

“Customers are patient if I get stuck taking their order or warming their food orders. They never get annoyed with me. Travelling further on the bus has given me confidence to go to the CBD by myself at weekends too.”

Robynne Sam says the café has provided a variety of wider benefits for Air New Zealand staff. These include connecting with the Flourish team and seeing their confidence grow, having a

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meeting space to connect with other employees, and increased confidence when it comes to interacting with people with different abilities.

Flourish Café has become very popular with both Air New Zealand employees and visitors.

“Employees from nearby companies are also starting to pop in for their coffees and team meetings. There is no better way to break down barriers between different sectors of society than through natural and regular interactions. Our Air New Zealand Flourish Café is providing the space and opportunities for these interactions to take place.”

