

Diversability Award Highly Commended: SSC Service Stations

Welcome to the family

Selwyn Cook, has owned and operated franchises of Shell and Z petrol stations in the Hamilton area for over 25 years. The business has grown over those years from one service station to ten, and now has around 100 employees. The culture of the organisation is one of acceptance and mutual respect, with employees from a range of backgrounds benefitting from a family atmosphere.

Over the last three years, SSC has been working with organisations such as Workbridge, Enrich +, the Blind Foundation and Idea Services in order to recruit a diverse work force and offer opportunities to those who may otherwise be overlooked for employment. Within that time, SSC has employed nearly 80 job seekers through Workbridge alone.

“The challenge we face is finding employers who do not have pre-conceived ideas about the limitations of our job seekers,” says Ross MacKenzie, Senior Employment Consultant at Workbridge Waikato.

“Fortunately a number of employers accept the reality that jobseekers with some form of disability have the potential to be excellent employees and possess a variety of skills that are needed in the workforce. Selwyn leads by example in this area.”

Job seekers sourced through organisations such as Workbridge compete for positions in an open labour market. The recruitment processes at SSC ensure that all candidates are fully supported according to their individual needs, so that everyone is on an equal standing.

Selwyn is very clear that he will employ the right person for a role, whether they have a disability or not. He understands that reasonable adaptations are necessary to ensure that a candidate can apply for and work in a role.

“Nothing is seen to be too hard if the candidate is the right fit for the job,” says Selwyn. “The support we give continues through induction to training to ensure that a person is comfortable and is able to perform any duties to the best of their abilities.”

Employees at SSC who have a disability carry out many different roles. Tasks range from customer service, administration and we even have the odd gardener. Selwyn refers to employment as “one of life’s essential elements” and understands that employment raises self-esteem and improves quality of life. Experience has also shown that candidates selected by organisations such as Workbridge make reliable, hard-working and motivated employees, bringing with them obvious benefits for the business.

Kim Smith, Team Assistant at SSC, has a vision impairment. Despite having an accountancy degree, Kim spent many years looking for work because employers could not see passed her disability.

“My interview at SSC was a breath of fresh air. I was so glad to find an employer who was genuinely interested in me and not just focused on my disability,” says Kim. “Selwyn ensured that my needs could be met and was willing to work through any obstacles to ensure that I had equal opportunity for employment.”

Working alongside a colleague with a disability can also challenge able-bodied employees to think differently about a ‘disabled’ person’s abilities. The assumption that a person with a disability is not able to fulfil the same tasks as another employee disappears when the opposite is proved on a daily basis. Furthermore, common social stereotypes and misconceptions are broken down, meaning that SSC employees not only to treat their fellow employees differently, but their understanding of customer needs also improves.

Similarly, from a wider perspective, a customer who is served by a worker with a visible disability is made aware of that individual’s capability and potential, perhaps challenging the customer’s own stereotypes.

Bju Thomas lost the use of his right hand and arm in a car accident. He was unable to find work until he came through Workbridge and was employed by Z, where his role includes serving customers’ petrol and making coffees. Last year Bju received over 150 online customer comments and he was recognised as the top Customer Service Representative in the Waikato Region.

Selwyn Cook’s positive recruitment policies not only change the perspectives of fellow employees and SSC customers, but also the perspectives of the employees themselves. They are capable and valued members of the team and are good at their jobs, raising their self-esteem and confirming their value to society.

“SSC is not a charitable institution,” clarifies Ross MacKenzie from Workbridge. “It is a modern business operating successfully in an exceptionally competitive industry whilst providing life changing work opportunities for jobseekers who face real challenges in today’s labour market.”