

Skills Highway Award Entrant: Radius Residential Care Limited



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545437/e8d9f2a391>

When your core business is creating a home for elderly, vulnerable New Zealanders, it's critical that your staff can communicate effectively with clients and their colleagues. For one nationwide residential aged care provider, that's meant investing in a workplace literacy programme to support its culturally diverse staff to do their best work.

Radius Residential Care employs more than 1,400 care and non-care staff across its 21 sites in New Zealand to deliver its vision of "being leaders in care" and ensuring residents are safe and happy.

Aged care is a heavily regulated industry and there is a high level of documentation required to record levels of care to ensure the workplaces pass regular Ministry of Health audits. The company's expectation is that workplace communication in Radius Care homes must be appropriate and professional at all times.

"The level of literacy and communication skills required of all our workers is increasing and yet our pool of workers is traditionally unskilled, presenting with low levels of literacy and numeracy," says Human Resources Manager Susan Hoskin.

More than 60 per cent of the Radius Care workforce is non-European, the majority have no tertiary level qualifications and many have English as a second language.

To help staff to grow their communication skills to effectively work in teams, communicate appropriately to residents, visitors and families and work within the Radius Care expectations, the company developed its Reach Up With Radius programme.

The company approached Training for You to help it devise a workplace literacy professional development programme that was contextualised to Radius Care and could be customised to address the issues presenting at each residential care facility.

The timing was perfect as a Radius Care healthcare assistant had recently been through a disciplinary process for failing to comply with a key policy. When asked why she didn't follow the policy, her answer was, "I can't read it."

The Radius Care management team was involved in designing and refining the framework of Reach Up With Radius, which is presented to facility managers at the company's quarterly regional meetings.

Significant time is spent on answering the facility manager's operational questions as they are key to the success of the programme, which is being rolled out systemically, with priority going to sites with the highest needs. Branding the initiative appropriately was also important to remove any stigma associated with a literacy and numeracy programme.

A group of 34 healthcare assistants took part in a pilot programme beginning in August 2014 and a Workplace Literacy Employer Fund contract was secured in April 2015 to put another 100 staff through the programme in the 12 months to June 2016. A second WPL Employer Fund contract secured in November 2015 will provide for an additional 250 employees to complete the Reach Up With Radius initiative and currently there are 100 staff participating in the programme every six months.

Radius Care's senior management team is committed to a national rollout of the programme, which is an essential component of the business plan around workforce effectiveness. Its success has been discussed at Board meetings and Radius Care Managing Director Brien Cree was recently at Radius Taupaki to present certificates of achievement in training to the staff. He was impressed that employees had the confidence to volunteer to be part of a recruitment video and marketing video and speak on camera about their roles and resident care.

One of the positive results of the Reach Up With Radius programme has been the increased level of engagement, confidence and positive communication in the workplace, Susan says.

"Previously issues were more difficult to resolve as there was a lack of understanding of different roles and an unwillingness to communicate. For example, the maintenance man and cook at Taupaki are now problem solving with care staff and cleaners to better manage the tasks that need to be performed.

"Staff complete handover notes with more accuracy, which shows an increase in confidence and in writing and observation skills. Participants are engaging with management in a more confident and positive way. In Northland, the staff are participating in the development of the communication protocol, learning the skills to present this to their facility manager.

There has also been a dramatic decline in disciplinary action being taken at the sites where the programme is running and more staff are participating in the annual staff survey, with the level of positive feedback and comments increasing.

Assessments on the 34 staff members involved in the pilot programme indicated a significant improvement in reading and numeracy scores and Susan expects to see similar improvements for participants in later programmes.

For the staff, Reach Up With Radius has given them a renewed sense of pride in what they do and the opportunity to experience successful teamwork.

Feedback from participants in the programme reads:

"This course has been really good. We work more effectively as a team now. We have an awareness now of how to watch our behaviour towards others so we can be more constructive."

"We can share our ideas when we do the presentation. I am more confident now. I also know to be clear and specific when I communicate in the kitchen."

"It's really good - I now have better skills to talk with others and how important clear communication is. The course has taught me to be patient and accepting."