

Skills Highway Award Winner:

Goodman Fielder NZ Ltd.

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/141146360>

Literacy programmes create life changing results in workplace: Goodman Fielder New Zealand is a large food manufacturing and distribution company with around 1800 employees, across 16 sites from Auckland to Dunedin. The company manufactures and distributes some of New Zealand's best loved brands, including Natures Fresh, Vogel's, Edmonds and Meadow Fresh.

A key priority for the organisation is to create a sustainable workforce, with development opportunities for valuable staff. This not only maintains a positive working culture within the organisation, but also benefits the families of employees and their communities. Goodman Fielder's commitment to growing their own talent pipeline and unlocking the considerable potential of factory staff, creates visible and achievable career pathways for employees.

Improved literacy was seen as a necessary stepping stone for employees looking to gain relevant work-based qualifications and take up promotion opportunities. Working with training consultancy specialists Upskills, Goodman Fielder developed 'Make it Happen', a language, literacy and numeracy programme that met organisational goals, but could also be flexible enough to meet site level needs and individual needs. The programme looked at a wide definition of workplace literacy, encompassing digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, as well as form filling and spoken communication.

With such a broad context for literacy and numeracy, Goodman Fielder was able to address some really practical skills gaps that were necessary for the safe and effective running of its production lines.

For example, instructions in factories are often given in a high paced, busy environment and it was discovered that a number of staff would nod 'yes' to indicate they had understood a verbal instruction, when in fact they had not. 'Make it Happen' increased employees' confidence in communicating understanding, or lack of understanding, leading to a safer more effective working environment.

Another target of the course was to focus on the importance of completing 'near miss' forms when an aspect of health and safety in the workplace needed to be highlighted. The course not only increased the completion of 'near miss' forms, it also provided a skill that could be transferred to other forms and paperwork, improving the accuracy of the organisation's administrative processes.

Similarly, numeracy was addressed through refreshing employees' understanding of weights, unit measurements and understanding metrics and graphs – all skills needed for the accurate completion of daily tasks.

"I'll use the maths I've learnt to work out quantity of pallets for the order," says one participant. "It's helped me work out numeracy problems faster in my head."

A unique aspect to 'Make it Happen' was the course focus on critical thinking. Problem-solving skills, alongside confidence and language tools, aimed to engage shop floor staff in solutions-focused thinking about every day manufacturing issues. For instance, when a machine breaks down, capturing the operator's thinking and perspective can be incredibly valuable in reducing down time.

Further to this, the programme included the opportunity for staff to work with senior managers on projects to promote continuous organisational improvement. This not only enabled learners to gain valuable knowledge about how the business was run, but also gave a meaningful reason for participants to interact with their managers beyond the day-to-day tasks, helping to break down barriers to communication and creating better functioning teams.

Project-based working not only helped to develop communication, it also developed analytical and problem solving skills that could be transferred to other ongoing and new initiatives. Through 'Make it Happen', Goodman Fielder has encouraged employees to be part of organisational development in a real way, valuing the input of experienced workers.

One Supervisor comments "We have a team philosophy now that encourages shift members to make suggestions and participate in discussions".

The skills learnt within the classroom have also transferred into the community. Participants note how they can now help their children with their homework, or feel more confident using the home computer. Employees, such as Jacob Leungwai from Quality Bakers Auckland, introduced financial literacy tools to family and friends.

"There's a couple of people who told me they were trying to buy houses or cars or furniture, and now they're beginning to come to me and say 'Hey, I managed to get that,'" says Jacob. "They're not doing hire purchase, just sticking to ATMs and avoiding paying those extra fees - they can really pile up as we learnt on the course".

Product excellence, as well as continuous improvement, are points of pride for the organisation. Goodman Fielder recognised that improved literacy would empower staff to fully participate in growing and developing themselves and the company for the better, with obvious benefits for employees' families and the wider communities.