

Skills Highway Award Entrant: Training For You and Radius Care

A culture of communication. Radius Care is a New Zealand owned and operated aged care provider with 20 locations and 1400 staff, serving more than 1400 residents nationwide. Working alongside Training For You, Radius Care recognised how low levels of literacy and numeracy can have an impact on the ability of employees to participate in the workplace, undertake formal study and feel engaged with the vision of the organisation.

Over 61% of Radius' staff identify as non-NZ European (Maori 17%, Pasifika 13%, Asian 31%) and the majority are women in part-time roles who have had little or no success within formal education. Language skills, cultural norms of communication and the ability to engage in formal learning created challenges for Radius in terms of raising the skill levels of employees.

Training For You worked with Radius to design the Workplace Literacy Programme for Health Care Assistants, which was introduced into the training pathway after the new staff induction and before offering employees the opportunity to gain a formal qualification.

The programme was customised at each site to reflect the needs specific to each residential facility and further to meet the needs of the Health Care Assistants within each group.

The Workplace Literacy programme was shaped around the organisational mission, to "bring some good old-fashioned Kiwi values and standards back into the aged care sector and make Radius Care the best aged care provider in the country." Managing Director Brien Cree identifies Kiwi values as "doing the job well", "all pulling in the same direction" and "making people a priority".

The programme was also seen as an opportunity to strengthen the understanding of core documentation, such as the Radius Code of Conduct, Health Care Assistant job description and the Health and Disability Code of Rights. Brushing the dust off these documents and really getting involved with the content invited employees to gain a common understanding of what was expected of them within their roles at Radius.

HR Manager, Susan Hoskin, commented that the programme made these "living and working documents, relevant to the daily performance and tasks for individuals and teams."

Training For You Managing Director Denise Scott-Lister also saw the benefit of using the programme to further employee's understanding of the business. "Radius have a passion for their people and doing things really well," said Denise.

"They understood the importance of integrating Workplace Literacy and Numeracy into business as usual so it wasn't seen as an 'add on'. Radius understood the real impact that low literacy and numeracy was having on their business."

Improved literacy and numeracy has changed the culture of the organisation. Before the programme, there was a considerable amount of management time and energy being spent on troubleshooting staff issues, addressing poor communication and performance of teams and resolving employment relations matters.

One Facility Manager now claims that she has “extra productive hours each day” because she does not have to deal with team communication complaints and there are dramatic changes in how her team works together.

“I instructed staff to do a big clear out of rooms and return unused items to relatives....they have done a fantastic job and organised it all themselves. They would not have done that before.”

At one particular site there were on-going disciplinary concerns requiring regular senior management intervention, mediation and conflict resolution, costing approximately \$20,000 over six months. Since the programme the team has been working smoothly together and there have been no employment relations issues at this site.

Susan Hoskin, HR Manager, has been impressed by the way the programme has affected staff turnover.

“Most sites that have participated have reduced their turnover costs and created a more stable roster. Having a stable roster also reduces costs as less staff cover is required, directly reducing staffing and recruitment costs.”

The programme has also led to an improvement in the induction process, or ‘on-boarding’ for new staff. On-boarding requires existing staff to work closely with new employees so they can learn on the job. Previous tensions associated with the on-boarding process have been dramatically reduced as observed by one Facility Manager.

“They [programme graduates] take their time a bit more, they talk more quietly and kinder and gentler...it may just be a touch on the shoulder but it makes a difference. They seem to recognise it takes time to learn.”

Overall, 99% of participants who completed the Workplace Literacy Programme for Health Care Assistants made gains in either literacy or numeracy. Going forward, Radius are now analysing employment relations issues, conflict resolution and on-going work place concerns in order to identify whether the root cause could be associated with poor literacy and numeracy.

Identifying and addressing these needs has shown to have countless business benefits. Not only are Radius creating a more cost-effective organisation with an improved recruitment brand, but also they are nurturing a happier and more productive workforce.