

Skills Highway Award Winner:

City Care

Video Link <https://vimeo.com/104677149>

City Care's investment in employees has led to a happier and more effective workforce.

City Care, owned by Christchurch City Holdings, has more than 1,350 staff working in water and wastewater, parks, roading, construction and facilities management across New Zealand. It's a diverse workforce with a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities, education and personalities.

But there came a time, says City Care's Human resources general manager Adrian Watson, that the quality of written language in City Care forms, reports and other documents was causing concern. The company also wanted to boost employees' computer literacy.

City Care's partners in staff Literacy and Numeracy training were the Tertiary Education Commission and Hagley Adult Literacy Centre, with the latter's initial assessments showing that some staff members had a six-year-old's reading level. A pilot 2010 programme to improve numeracy, literacy, communications skills and computer ability among managers and supervisors was successful - and then extended to everyone else who wanted to do it.

A key goal was to ensure people at all levels of the company were able to take part, and managers encouraged staff to get involved.

City Care then decided to offer the programme throughout the country, so formed an alliance with three other training providers, Sadlers, McGirr and the Horowhenua Learning Centre.

Has this training been beneficial?

Adrian says that for the staff who took up training, the result has been a million-dollar saving as people complete reports and fill out forms more quickly and accurately. There were some surprising insights, too: "We hadn't realised how high the literacy demands of some of our forms were. But one manager spontaneously commented that there was something going on at City Care, as for the first time, she had received all the information required on an incident form and this had saved her a lot of time and effort."

An analysis showed that arborists were inputting data to spreadsheets three times faster, tradesmen were able to read the health and safety manuals more easily, road-surfacing foremen were completing job sheets properly and managers were reading and analysing documents more efficiently.

Morale and motivation also increased. For example, 27 employees stated that thanks to training, they enjoyed increased confidence, improved communication skills, computer literacy and better all-round literacy.

A total of 47 employees said they were saving more time each day as they could fill out forms faster, better understand instructions and communicate with staff and clients. Many other employees' computer skills had increased dramatically. "One operations manager told me it used to take a couple of days of sweating it out to do his monthly report, and it now takes him 20 minutes," says Adrian.

The company's return on investment is "ground-breaking", he says; the amount of time saved by having a more literate team adds up to \$783,000 per 100 employees. Talled up across the company, this amounts to more than \$1.2 million per annum.

"This training was not that difficult to do and with such a return on investment it's not hard to justify its continuation," Adrian says. "City Care sees this as a successful model that will be continued - we are not going to stop."

He adds that the success of employee training has led to a shift in business thinking. "We are aware how the lack of a good level of competency in these basic educational building-blocks of numeracy and literacy directly and dramatically affects workplace productivity, and now it's a fundamental part of our training strategy from here on."