

Diversability Award Winner: Odyssey

Video Link <https://vimeo.com/104979420>

Past experiences no barrier to the future for Odyssey team.

At any time in New Zealand, 450,000 people are suffering from a substance misuse disorder. Ten per cent of these people seek help each year from addictions treatment services such as Odyssey.

As an organisation, Odyssey has grown from just one staff member in 1980 to providing employment and personal and professional development opportunities for over 140 staff in 2014. In building its teams, Odyssey seeks to provide employment opportunities for a broad range of differently abled people including those with mental health conditions and addicts in recovery and those with previous criminal convictions.

Business and Service Development Manager, Gabby Clezy says, overcoming struggles and coloured pasts is not a disability but experience that provides the employee with greater insight, empathy and an understanding of the challenges faced by Odyssey's clients.

"The experiences gained by staff during their own rehabilitation are essential to ensure we remain responsive and empathetic to client needs - and to help ensure Odyssey is always in touch. Around 20% of our staff are in active recovery, and to these people we offer additional support, including specialised supervision, one-to-one counselling as required, and a team of colleagues that understand and can meet the needs of these people."

The recently implemented Odyssey Opening Doors programme has strengthened Odyssey's organisational support systems, reduced staff turnover and seen the addition of induction initiatives, personal development plans, Health Science graduate internships and a nurse placement.

"We are dedicated to fostering diverse abilities in the teams that run our programmes across our seven residential treatment centres and four community programmes in Auckland and Whangarei."

The Odyssey senior management team, which has equal representation of men and women, fully supports and leads the organisation's drive to provide opportunities for differently abled people with innovative, needs-based programme identification, development and delivery.

Odyssey also provides employment opportunities for clients who have graduated from the Odyssey programme. Each year the organisation places programme graduates in paid internship positions as 'support workers' for up to 12 months.

Participants gain the opportunity to use their skills, experience and understanding of undergoing 'alcohol and other drug treatment' to support new clients within the programme. After completing their internship, most graduate interns go on to gain permanent employment in the social support sector.

Odyssey's open-door employment policy ensures a rich and colourful staff expertise, allowing them to lead the way in the experiential therapeutic community treatment model.

“Odyssey is not just giving individuals with addiction and mental health issues a chance at a new life and career, we are taking their unique experience on board to make a better Odyssey.”

The platform for this progressive approach to employment and opportunity is a strong culture of mentoring, shared knowledge and ongoing training.

The majority of Odyssey’s staff are trained therapists, involved in delivering the therapeutic community model to support our client’s needs. The CEO and Board of Directors are directly involved in meeting the needs of both staff and clients, transcending traditional management roles to support work alongside the community within the therapeutic programmes.

All senior management staff are responsible for mentoring and internal coaching of junior staff, and the Clinical Management Team are responsible for identifying the needs of front-line staff in delivering according to the needs of clients.

The Organisational Development Team is responsible for providing learning and development opportunities, ensuring that all staff meet their core training obligations, directly supporting staff to meet their individual goals. This team is also responsible for facilitating the achievement and maintenance of professional endorsements amongst all staff, including membership to DAPAANZ, the Alcohol and Other Drug workers’ support body. Odyssey funds membership to the Addiction Practitioners’ Association Aotearoa New Zealand for 80% of its staff.

“All staff, regardless of their educational background, are encouraged and supported by management to pursue further educational opportunities.”

Odyssey provides up to five paid study days leave per year, and all staff are eligible for Odyssey Learning and Development Awards to complete further education that supports their identified goals.

A portion of the staff members study fees are paid directly by the organisation (up to \$3000). Since this initiative was launched in 2013, study costs have been reimbursed upfront to the value of over \$34,000 with at least 10% of staff making use of this development initiative.

The organisation is also committed to building and supporting cultural diversity and understanding in the Odyssey team. They have a close working relationship with Ngati Whatua, engage a fulltime, iwi-appointed Cultural Advisor and a Manaaki Tangata and provide staff with training around the Treaty and specific training relating to working with Maori.

Core Pacifica training was developed in 2013 by Odyssey Pacifica staff for their colleagues with the aim of supporting all staff in the treatment and engagement of Pacifica people with mental health and addictions.

Odyssey recognises, values and understands the challenges of staff that come from diverse backgrounds and encourages and utilises each individual’s strengths to create a healthy, therapeutic community changing the lives of clients and staff.