

Tomorrow's Workforce Award Winner:

Ministry of Social Development

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/101046398>

Cadet programme - A 'foot in the door' for young job seekers

New Zealand's largest government department is promoting its goal of helping people into paid employment by welcoming young cadets into the fold.

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) consists of more than 9000 professionals in 280 locations around the country.

Touching many lives

Work and Income is one of the Ministry's service lines. Every New Zealander has contact with MSD at some stage in their lifetime and the service helps out around one million people each year.

Contact and service centres are the first port of call for people needing income support, assistance to work, getting a job or finding staff. Work and Income pays up to \$7 billion in financial assistance each year, case managing over 310,000 people and supporting 85,000 people into work. In addition, around 120,000 calls are taken at contact centres each week in up to 12 languages.

The country's welfare system is currently undergoing reforms, to try and create a benefit system that promotes independence and personal responsibility through the goal of supporting more New Zealanders into work.

Encouraging independence

In keeping with this approach, Work and Income offers cadetships to a select group of young people, aged 21 years or younger, through a programme established in 2004.

The cadet programme offers unique opportunities, says Kate Wareham, Director HR & Capability Development, Work and Income. "Most other modern apprenticeship programmes provide trainees with the skills required for a specific trade or particular job. But Work and Income cadets serve a variety of roles as case managers and customer service representatives. As well as learning about our organisation, they also gain a high level of knowledge and understanding of the public sector, effective communication and engagement skills."

Work and Income managers were initially apprehensive that young people would not have sufficient life experience to accomplish frontline case worker roles and that they would require a greater level of management oversight.

Cadets excel

However the cadets have instead brought fresh energy and enthusiasm to the organisation, says Kate.

Jessie Donald was 18 when she started as a cadet with Work and Income in New Plymouth, graduating in 2011. She has worked in several regional and national office roles and is now an investigator in the Ministry's Fraud Investigation Unit.

"I enjoy learning about different parts of the organisation and being able to apply my learning from the cadetship programme in these new roles. There are so many opportunities in this line of work now open to me," says Jessie.

Leanne Chipchase was one of the first cadets in Rotorua in 2004. She quickly progressed through various roles and now leads training for all Work and Income Contact Centres as national manager for contact centre training and quality.

"I left school quite early (at 15) and didn't really have any ideas on what kind of job I wanted to do. So when I saw the Work and Income Cadetship advertised, I thought why not have a crack at it as I didn't have too many other options at the time. Little did I know that accepting that opportunity would lead me to where I am now."

The cadet programme is comprised of National Certificates in:

- Public Sector Induction – level 3
- Public Sector Services – level 4
- Business Administration and Computing – level 3

Streamlining

Last year, the cadetship programme was revised to make it easier for young people to apply and succeed. Trainee numbers had dropped in 2011, mainly due to more competition for jobs with more skilled people seeking work. During this tough time, Work and Income made an ongoing commitment to enlist 50 young cadets each year. The interview process was revised to make it easier for young people and trainees were given the opportunity to work in a wider range of roles at the contact centre, service delivery sites and in regional project teams.

Other changes focused on retaining young trainees after their graduation. Qualification workshops were extended to all staff to provide ongoing professional development. The opportunity for growth and progression has seen many cadets appointed into new roles at regional and national level.