

## Emerging Diversity and Inclusion: Youthtown

Launching an equal pay initiative is one of the ways Youthtown is demonstrating its commitment to playing a part in closing New Zealand's gender pay gap.

The Youthtown Equal Pay Project began early in 2016 as part of an increased focus on fairness, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

“Equal pay is often framed as a women's issue, but we see it as a family and an economic issue that affects the security of New Zealand families and therefore New Zealand as a whole,” says Youthtown People & Performance General Manager Jannine Mullany.

Youthtown is a nationally operated, not-for-profit organisation offering a range of programmes designed to engage and develop young people. It has about 350 staff, 100 of whom are permanent employees. Forty of those permanent staff work on a part-time basis.

The Youthtown Equal Pay Project consisted of three main areas of work. An equal pay audit was done comparing males and females doing the same work and taking into consideration whether they worked full or part time. The audit also looked at comparisons of pay progression between males and females with similar performance, people taking career breaks, promotional activity, and performance ratings pre- and post-parental leave.

The second step was to review policies, systems and processes, such as recruitment, appraisals, recognising and rewarding staff and talent management, to ensure these were not restricting employment and development opportunities for staff with family responsibilities.

Several improvements were made, specifically to the remuneration system, the learning and development framework, the remote working policy, the appraisal process, the parental leave policy and the talent management and succession planning process.

The third step in the project was to develop and implement new policies, procedures and systems to support the goal of paying staff fairly, and having a workplace which encourages diversity and inclusion.

New initiatives included remuneration information sessions to increase transparency for staff, and a review of all starting salaries for new hires to ensure the new employee and existing staff on the same grade are paid fairly, remedying any pay inequities.

A Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Policy was introduced, along with an Equal Pay Policy, a Flexible Work Practices Policy, and a Domestic Violence Support Policy and education module. Unconscious bias training was also developed for staff and was incorporated into learning modules around recruitment and appraisal in the organisation's New Leaders Toolkit training programme.

The equal pay initiatives were first discussed with the Youthtown Board and Senior Leadership Team.

“Youthtown was already committed to young people and their families and to a culture of fairness, and this was easily extended to include fairness in pay. By introducing and framing the issue as a

family and an economic issue, it was far easier to gather support and include the Board and Senior Leadership Team on our journey,” Jannine says.

All new policies were approved by the Board.

The CEO sent an email out to the whole organisation outlining Youthtown's commitment to equal pay and senior Youthtown leaders communicated the revised and new policies to their own teams (who then communicated with their teams) through the organisation's linked triangle communication structure.

The Chair of the Youthtown Board and the CEO of Youthtown both attended the YWCA Equal Pay awards in support of Youthtown's work in this area, and the organisation has sought opportunities to discuss the work it's done and wider issues surrounding equal pay in the media and public forums.

The Youthtown Equal Pay Project has had a significant effect on staff engagement at Youthtown, Jannine says. Last year the number of people classified as 'Engaged' in the IBM Kenexa Best Workplaces Survey increased by 15 per cent. “Youthtown now has an engagement score of 45 per cent, which is far higher than the not-for-profit benchmark of 28 per cent.”

She also believes it's enhancing Youthtown's reputation as a great place to work. “Our last job advertisement attracted more than 70 applicants, whereas the same role was advertised a year ago and attracted approximately 35 applicants.”

Existing staff are benefitting too – pay inequities have been remedied on several occasions when salaries of all staff on a similar grade have been reviewed as part of the new hire process. They have also been able to take advantage of the new policies and procedures.

One recent example is a person from the Finance team, who returned to work after parental leave by working 10 hours per week for a period of three months, before returning to fulltime work. She now works flexible hours from home (in Thames) four days a week, and commutes to Auckland and works in the office one day a week.