

National Disability Workforce Project

Pilot Site Report

Job Redesign and Staff Retention

Keppel Community Care

Workforce issues targeted:

KCC currently has a very high staff turnover. This turnover is particularly evident amongst staff who have recently been recruited to the organisation.

We observed that some Support Workers had a lack of control over their jobs. This organisation has traditionally employed people on a part-time or casual basis for support worker positions. Many new employees are new to the sector. Some use the positions as an interim job while they look for work in higher paid areas or while they finish studies. Some have more than one job. Many have limited availability.

The work has traditionally been controlled by the service coordinators and roster staff. There is limited scope for support workers to act on their own initiative, particularly in relation to decisions about how and when the services are delivered.

Our assumptions:

- Low wages lead to poor retention rates:
It appears that most of the high turnover occurs amongst the lowest paid workers. This has been an ongoing trend over many years.
- Lack of certainty about future hours (of employment) leads to people seeking more stable employment elsewhere:
Support workers often complain of the sudden variations in their hours of employment. This occurs as a result of changes in the needs or wants of clients.
- Lack of control over most aspects of their jobs leads to a lack of job satisfaction for a significant number of staff:
Most support workers exercise limited control over their jobs. Whilst they are expected to use common sense and initiative in the exercise of their duties, there is little capacity for staff to negotiate service plans, the timing of service delivery, the way in which services are delivered or who is involved in the process.
- That people will respond well to having more authority and responsibility:
This is an attempt to redress the limitations above.
- That people want full-time jobs:
In particular we believe that people want to know what their income will be from pay day to pay day. The certainty of full-time work will address some of the misgivings that people have when their income can change suddenly as a result of changes in rostering.

Strategies trialled:

- Conducted exit interviews with staff:
Exit interviews conducted between October 2008 and January 2009 showed that of the six interviewed, three moved on to career advancement within the Community Services industry, one left the industry, but took up a professional career, two left due to lack of flexibility, remuneration and hours of work.
- Implemented a collective agreement:
The collective agreement is the tool we have used to implement a number of strategies aimed at improving career paths and retaining good staff.
- Implemented 4 full-time positions:
These are the first 4 of a progressive roll out of full-time positions.
- Salary sacrifice for support workers:
We were surprised by the low take up rate amongst support workers. We will continue to offer salary sacrifice and expect that staff will gradually take up this option.
- Pre-employment information sessions:
This has been an effective way of better targeting our recruitment strategies. Many would be applicants (and probable short term staff) have self selected out through this process as a result of gaining a better understanding of what the job would be like. Those that have been employed through this process though have generally been successful recruitments.
- Post induction follow up:
We introduced this to refresh new employees six weeks after commencement on policies, procedures and forms. This also gives the new employee a chance to feedback to the Coordinator and ask any questions they may have. To date this is working well.
- Staff satisfaction survey:
Overall staff within the organisation were satisfied with communication from management, morale, staff development, initial training and ongoing training. Job satisfaction rated high with good working conditions. Quality of service rated between good and very good along with safety. The interesting feedback from the survey was a high percentage were dissatisfied with career advancement. Why this is interesting is when positions have been advertised internally and externally for administration or coordination, little or no existing staff apply. A high percentage of staff also indicated that they had skills in all areas of the organisation except payroll.

How we measured the impact of our strategies:

- Recruitment and termination statistics:
The turnover rate remains very high at well over 60% per annum. Closer examination of these stats shows that staff employed at the new higher rate under the collective agreement is only 13% and of the staff employed in the better paid administrative, coordination and management roles, 18% terminated during the past 12 months. This means that the turnover rate at the lowest paid support worker level is 112%. Whilst money is certainly not the only issue (the higher paid jobs are more interesting and allow for greater levels of control, use of initiative etc), there is clearly a correlation between remuneration and staff retention. There also appears to be a need to continue the process of job redesign (including full-time and higher level support worker positions).
- Number of full-time support workers:
Only 4 at this stage but positions will be progressively rolled out.
- Only 11% of support workers took up salary sacrifice.
- The level 4 & 5 positions have not been implemented yet.

Conclusions:

- Both internal and external factors impact on our ability to retain staff (e.g. economic conditions).
- There is very little change at this stage to our overall staff retention but it appears that staff who are recognised with higher wages are staying.
- Cultural change is required to fully implement existing strategies.

Implications:

We believe that we will have to change both the types of jobs that are available to people and the way that we recruit new staff. The jobs will need to be higher level positions both in terms of pay and responsibility. Recruitment strategies will need to recognise that higher level skills are required. People in existing leadership positions will need to delegate decision making to staff in these new positions.

Whilst there will be some cost implications as a result of paying higher wages, this should be offset by better productivity and more stability amongst staff.