



Ministry of Social Development

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

FINALIST

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More than half of working-age New Zealanders who receive a benefit have a disability, so the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) is committed to leading the way for inclusiveness by shining a light on disability responsiveness.

MSD is one of New Zealand's largest government departments, with more than 9000 staff across 200 locations, and is responsible for overseeing the country's social welfare system.

Principal Advisor Culture and Inclusion Adrienne Girling says MSD plays a strong role in supporting disabled New Zealanders. "We demonstrate this by leading the way for disability across the Public Service as a whole. It is critical for our success as an organisation and the wider Public Service that we reflect, understand and value the people we serve."

A collaborative working group led by MSD's Principal Disability Advisor Anne Hawker with accessibility experts from IT and Communications, and Diversity and Inclusion (People Group) sets the direction for work on accessibility and disability at MSD. The work is primarily split across two programmes. The Accessibility Charter makes information accessible for disabled employees and clients, while the Lead Toolkit increases the employment of disabled people at MSD and across the Public Service.

“There has been a great increase in awareness and visibility of accessibility and disability within MSD. This has brought greater demand for support. Our response had been to increase our resourcing of trained accessibility experts. In one year, MSD expanded our resourcing from one accessibility expert in the IT Web Team to forming a new Accessibility and User Experience Team with five fulltime staff,” says Adrienne.

“The team provides advice and services on accessibility audits and compliance checking, accessibility education and training sessions, accessible web design advice, Web Standards support, and accessibility and procurement guidelines.”

As part of the Lead Toolkit programme – which focuses on increasing the employment of disabled people –MSD was the first Public Service agency to create a Reasonable Accommodation in Employment policy with supporting guidance for managers and employees. Reasonable accommodation relates to workplace adjustments in the recruitment process and the workplace to ensure a person can participate fully and do their job.

Feedback from an employee who received a reasonable accommodation following a diagnosis of a medical condition that affects her breathing, highlighted the success of the initiative. She said it had “changed her life”.

“I am just so much happier, everyone has noticed.”

“It is critical for our success as an organisation and the wider Public Service that we reflect, understand and value the people we serve”



Being able to work from home has cut down her commute time and lowered her fatigue from chronic levels to mild, also removing stress. She reports she is 25 to 50 per cent more productive at work.

MSD is also responsible for coordinating the all-of-government management of alternate formats – translating documents into Easy Read, New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), braille, audio and large print. This was particularly relevant for the

government’s Covid-19 response, highlighting the importance for all New Zealanders to receive information in a way that is accessible to them.

THE AIM

With more than 50 per cent of working-age New Zealander receiving benefits having a disability, MSD wanted to reflect, understand and value the people they serve, thereby leading the way for disability support across the Public Service as a whole.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- MSD's Chief Executive Debbie Power has designated responsibility for disability in the Public Service. She and a team of MSD officials feed disability perspectives and recommendations through to Papa Pounamu, the CE-led diversity and inclusion programme for the Public Service, for wider dissemination.
- A collaborative working group sets the direction for work on disability responsiveness, primarily across two programmes: Accessibility Charter, making information accessible for disabled employees and clients, and Lead Toolkit, increasing the employment of disabled people.
- The Accessibility Charter is signed by all 40 government agencies, a commitment made by government agencies to enable disabled people to experience the same access to information as other New Zealanders. The scope of the commitment includes people who use government services and people employed by the Public Service.
- The Lead Toolkit resource pack is publicly available on MSD's website for anyone from the public or private sector to use
- An Accessibility Management Team (AMT) was established in 2020 to provide governance for accessibility at MSD. It is made up of senior leaders and builds accessibility into initiatives from the start.
- MSD's employee-led Disabled Network is increasingly consulted on MSD programmes to ensure they meet accessibility needs and requirements.
- Monthly Zoom-based workshops are run for the Public Service providing an introduction to accessibility

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BENEFITS

- The Accessibility Team is regularly approached for advice by teams across MSD
- Other agencies have been encouraged to adopt their own policies on the back of work done by MSD
- Existing internship programmes across the Public Service are more accessible and inclusive of disabled people.
- During the 2020 financial year, almost twice as many Easy Read translations, including Covid-19 related resources, were completed compared to the year before.

KEY LEARNING

Initiatives primarily focusing on accessibility and accommodation contribute to raising awareness of disabled people and the barriers they encounter, leading to attitude shifts.

**DO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WELL
AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

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