

2018 Graeme Innes Disability Employment Award

WINNER: Uniting Local Area Coordination Program

'Walk the Talk' - 20% Disability Employment Strategy

Origins and principles

In April 2016, the Uniting Local Area Coordination (LAC) program commenced a contract with the Federal Government, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to deliver the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS is a scheme for people with disability, to enable them to receive funding which will support them to purchase and receive support to meet their needs and requirements. The Scheme's key outcome is to ensure people with disability have an increase in social and economic participation. At the commencement of the contract, the LAC program recognised the vision of the Scheme and the importance for the LAC program to 'walk the talk' and set a deliberate disability employment target to ensure a specific number of roles in the program were offered and maintained by a person with disability.

Uniting's purpose is to 'inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice'. To do this, the LAC program would take a bold step of setting a 20% disability employment target. By taking this bold step, the LAC program had the opportunity to influence the sector to ensure people with disability gained meaningful and open employment. This also gave the program the opportunity to shape and shift the community and perceptions of people with disability, moving away from 'we will help you' to 'we welcome and include you'. Further to this, the LAC program recognised the importance and value of employing people with disability to support our LAC program customers, who are all people with disability eligible for the NDIS. The program embedded the principle that people with disability are the experts of their lives and are best placed to inform and support their community.

At the time of the submission, the LAC program employed 380 staff and is funded to employ 405 staff. Uniting as a business employs over 9000 staff, delivering services across the social services sector, which includes disability services, early childhood services, aged care services and foster care. Uniting is supportive of an inclusive employer; however, no other program area has set a disability employment target. The LAC program recognised a real opportunity to influence the wider business.

Implementation

The LAC program adopted several initiatives to attract and retain our staff with a disability.

The strategy required senior leadership commitment to ensure the target was met. This commitment was embedded into the LAC program's business plan and formed part of the 90 day plan. The NSW Operations Manager outlined his support for the strategy through communication via an internal newsletter article and through fortnightly online web broadcasts. To further support the program to achieve the strategy, each hiring manager was given an initial 15% KPI to reach. The strategy then remained as a standing agenda item at the leadership team meetings to ensure progress would be reviewed at each meeting and to enable new initiatives to be explored to assist the program to reach the target.

Uniting had an existing Recruitment and Onboarding Policy which supports the organisations commitment to equal opportunity employment for applicants from all backgrounds. The LAC program

leveraged off this existing policy by developing and implementing a workplace adjustment procedure to guide and support all aspects of the program to develop and implement individualised workplace adjustment plans for a staff with a disability. The program also went through the process of Third Party Verification (TPV) to ensure that the program met all 6 of the Disability Services Standards. While the wider Uniting is third party verified, the LAC program felt the importance to go through their verification process to ensure commitment to customers, but to also set the standard for workplace culture. The LAC program developed a series of standard operational procedures to ensure certain tasks we carried out as part of meeting the strategy. This included the completion of a diversity survey for all staff at the commencement of employment. The survey captured the staff's language skills, whether they identify from a CALD or Aboriginal background and whether they identify as a person with disability.

Collaboration with key stakeholders was important to ensure the success of the strategy, this included collaboration with internal stakeholders (Recruitment Business Partner, HR Business Partner, Management Systems Team) as well as with external stakeholders (CoAct, Disability Employment Services provider, and where appropriate with carers and families of the person with disability). The LAC program worked with the Recruitment Business Partner and CoAct to develop a LAC Diversity and Sourcing Strategy. This strategy provided a focus on how to reach the 20% disability employment target. Where necessary, the LAC program also worked in collaboration with Disability Employment Service (DES) providers to establish a successful induction program for staff and to ensure work place adjustment plans are in place for individuals prior to their start date. The successful collaboration with DES providers has resulted in many successful job placements.

The LAC program recognised that to recruit and retain 20% of staff with disability, the strategy needed to be innovative and flexible. To do this, the program offered job role flexibility as part of the workplace adjustment plan. This was particularly important for staff with mental health needs where they may not be able to complete their job requirements during times of illness. The LAC program created a centralised fund for wage subsidies, the purpose of which is to be flexible and agile in the support for staff identified with a disability. This means that the fund can be tapped into at any point in time to support any staff with disability in their role, as well as the funds being used in a creative manner to support disability identified staff. The program has achieved this by using the funds to train our wider workforce in AUSLAN. This has enabled staff in the program to develop AUSLAN skills to communicate with their colleagues who are hard of hearing. The LAC program developed targeted District Support Officer roles. To advertise these roles, the LAC program worked with the Council of Intellectual Disability to develop targeted position descriptions. In addition to this, the recruitment team made an exemption to the Anti-Discrimination board to apply for an exemption.

The LAC program recognised that as a new program, it had the opportunity to shape the culture of the workforce by addressing the key barriers to access and inclusion in the workplace for people with disability. This included providing education and training, addressing misconception and stigma, promoting an inclusive workplace environment for all people. All staff will commence their first day in their job role with an induction program. From the outset, all staff are 'Welcomed exactly as you are' and staff with disability are provided with the necessary support to attend the induction with all staff. This is an important first step to communicate to new starters the inclusiveness of the workplace. As part of the induction process all staff are required to complete online training which covers off disclosure sensitivities and the Inclusion and Diversity Policy.

The LAC program used Yammer and Internal LAC newsletters to embed to the strategy into the program culture. Staff with disability posted their stories online and their colleagues also shared posts online to celebrate the success and achievement of staff with disability. Program leaders have post on LinkedIn to reach out to the wider professional community to highlight the benefit and possibilities of the 20% Disability Employment strategy. Comments to the post from key stakeholders (e.g. NDIA Staff and Directors) shows support that the strategy is aligned with the community/environment within which the organisation operates.

The LAC program provided Mental Health First Aid training to all program staff. At present, 20% of all staff are Mental Health First Aid accredited enabling staff to provide mental health first aid to support any staff member or customer when they present in a mental health crisis, such as suicidal ideation. Fortnightly video messaging from the NSW Operations Manager is streamed live with an AUSLAN interpreter. The message is then recorded to enable staff to revisit the message if they missed elements of it. Further to this, business as usual activities have valued and incorporated the skills of all staff, including staff with a disability. On the 8–9 January 2018, the program held a co-design planning day to assist in the design of resources for people with disability who currently use our service. Staff of all abilities and background were invited to participate, brainstorm and input into the design process.

Benefits and Outcomes

In September 2016, the LAC leadership team made the commitment to ensure 15% of the LAC program workforce hired was someone with a disability. In November 2017, the LAC program achieved the 15% disability employment target. In line with Uniting's value of being BOLD, the leadership team then raised the disability employment target to 20%. By March 2018, the program achieved this target.

20.2% of staff in the program currently identify with a disability. The LAC program has been able to successfully on board, support, maintain and develop 77 staff with disability in their roles. Staffs with disability have successfully been promoted into senior roles and developed skills for other roles in the program. Further to this, staff have subsequently disclosed their disability due to the observation of the workplace culture and feeling safe to do so.

Through tracking from the beginning of the program 100% retention of staff with disability has been achieved. Staff with disability feel appreciated and are supported to grow and develop in their role. Each staff member is provided with monthly reflective supervision. This is an opportunity to reflect on their role, how they are feeling, what is working well and what is not. It also provides opportunity for professional development discussions through the 70:20:10 development method. Staff with disability have had the opportunity to diversify their skills and work in other parts of the LAC program, further to this, staff with disability have successfully progressed into leadership roles.

Yammer posts and internal news articles and good news stories demonstrate the positive outcome. Staff members with disability feel supported and excited about their roles and look forward to continuing to grow and develop.

Summary

- Uniting LAC believe everyone should have access to meaningful paid employment, as it impacts on a person's health, wellbeing and social independence. The organisation's values are about being bold, respectful, compassionate and imaginative and they dare to dream of a better future for people with a disability. The motivation for this initiative was to 'walk the talk' and make a commitment to ensure people with disability had the opportunity to gain paid and meaningful employment.