



Watercare

INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

MEDIUM-LARGE ORGANISATION FINALIST

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VIDEO**



THE STORY

When trans man and Watercare team member Max Lawson transitioned while working for a previous employer, there were times when his anxiety around bathroom access prompted him to drive home to use the toilet.

His courage in sharing the trauma he experienced and the wisdom he gained during the transition process has been the genesis of Watercare's new Gender Transitioning at Work Policy and the associated resources and education programme rolled out across the organisation.

Watercare is New Zealand's largest company in the water and wastewater industry. It supplies more than 400 million litres of water to Auckland every day and collects, treats and disposes of around 409 million litres of wastewater daily. The company is also responsible for building and upgrading infrastructure.

People & Capability Systems Administrator Larisa Kamysheva first heard Max's story when she selected her fellow member of the Watercare Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging committee as an empathy interviewee for a Moving Beyond Diversity workshop series she participated in.

Max transitioned 15 years prior to working at Watercare. While his employer at the time was supportive, a lack of awareness and education around the transitioning process and a power imbalance in the workplace created friction with other staff and impacted Max's experience.

"Max shared that one of the reasons he is so out at Watercare is to try to prevent what happened to him occurring to anyone else in an organisation he works for," says Larisa.

The pair realised that a formal policy aimed at supporting people who are gender diverse, non-binary or transitioning their gender would be a powerful mechanism to take the implicit support for gender diversity in Watercare and make it explicit, formal and non-negotiable. It would also provide a foundation to drive education and awareness across Watercare to better enable all Rainbow and gender diverse employees to feel supported and acknowledged.

The policy was drafted in August 2021, after Larisa had conversations with trans staff, compared policies from other organisations who had done this work already and examined academic research on trans issues in the workplace. It also incorporates Rainbow Tick guidelines and information from the Employment NZ website and was written to be relevant to Watercare and the organisation's current diversity, equity and inclusion maturity.

"The outcome of the design process was a researched, well-balanced policy which is written in conversational English by Watercare employees, for Watercare employees," Larisa says.

It includes references to medical transition information, guidelines and expectations for people leaders and policy statements relating to self-determination regarding dress code and use of bathroom facilities etc.

The policy was approved and endorsed by the Watercare Chief of Corporate Services and the Watercare Board before being released and a comprehensive go-live communication plan was created. It was designed to encourage a sense of celebration around gender diversity, while still ensuring employees decide when and how their information is shared.

The new policy was shared with all staff, and education sessions and workshops were held alongside two panel discussions featuring Watercare Rainbow Network members.

A team member, also the parent of a gender diverse young person, says, "This will be a huge step forward for the business and part of our culture. It sets the foundation of who we are."

Larisa says it is no secret that trans people face significant discrimination both socially and in the workplace. "We wanted to put a line in the sand and set clear expectations for managers and staff that we support and embrace our minority groups."

"One of the reasons he is so out at Watercare is to try to prevent what happened to him occurring to anyone else."

THE AIM

Watercare wanted a formal policy that would ensure all staff were recognised and enjoyed a feeling of belonging to the organisation regardless of their gender characteristics.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- The Gender Transitioning at Work Policy was drafted using information garnered through conversations with trans employees and other organisations that have done this work

and by reviewing academic research and Rainbow Tick guidelines. It was then amended to ensure it was relevant to Watercare.

- The new policy was rolled out via an extensive communication plan including:
- An email from the Head of People to all Watercare staff and contractors and an intranet article announcing the new policy
- Support from Chief Executive Jon Lamonte at a regular monthly briefing to all staff
- A workshop for People & Capability Business Partners and six weeks of education sessions for all people leaders.
- Two panel discussions featuring Watercare Rainbow Network members where storytelling was used as a powerful engagement tool



RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Reports of increased discussion within teams about gender identity, human rights and what being inclusive means.
- Positive feedback from staff about how proud they were that Watercare was mandating inclusion and support for gender diverse staff
- The creation of a network within Watercare for the parents and caregivers of gender diverse young people.
- The work has set a new precedent for future policy implementation by demonstrating the increase in awareness and engagement when storytelling is used to give stakeholders a real insight into the 'why'
- Watercare is now planning education sessions around the upcoming revision of its Diversity & Inclusion Policy to maintain momentum around inclusion issues and create space for storytelling and sharing
- Watercare is working with its facilities partner on new ways to cater to accessibility in toilets, showers and changing facilities, which will benefit staff with accessibility needs as well as providing safety and privacy for transgender employees

KEY LEARNING

A well-researched and well-implemented policy addressing inclusion issues can be an important business tool to educate workplaces and reduce or eliminate negative experiences for minority groups.

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

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