

Tautoko Mai - Supporting the supporters

Tautoko Mai Sexual Harm Support just took home two business awards for its approach to people and culture, and social enterprise.

It's no surprise - the organisation focuses on keeping not only its clients safe and supported, but also its 150 staff. In a tight labour market, Tautoko Mai needs to attract good people and retain them in a challenging area, and they've worked out how to do it.

CEO Blair Gilbert manages a team of doctors, paediatricians, crisis support and long-term counsellors as well as facilitators who work in schools, a social change team and those who run group programmes.

They deal with about 800 clients a year throughout the Bay of Plenty, Eastern Bay and Waikato, as well as providing education and prevention programmes to thousands. Their school programmes cover respectful relationships of all kinds, as well as sexual consent.

"We're unique in New Zealand in that we offer end to end services including medical, crisis services as well as longer-term counselling and prevention programmes." They recently ran a national leadership conference for business with top speakers, acknowledging that sexual harm happens throughout all levels of the community.

Blair says reported cases of sexual harm dropped away during the first Covid lockdown, but took off soon after and have stayed high ever since. That suggested a demand that could only be dealt with after lockdown ended and survivors felt they could speak freely.

The staff are also cared for. Professional excellence and development is a major part of the organisation's ethic. Tautoko Mai has developed graduate roles for final year social service students, providing them with smaller case loads and developing their skills safely.

There are placement opportunities and practicums, professional development opportunities, peer reviews, case conferences and a 'no blame' culture where all are learning from the cases they deal with.

"We have a wellbeing fund where each worker gets \$60 a month to spend on their wellbeing, such as a gym membership, or miri miri or yoga classes - whatever will help with their wellbeing."

"We aim to work in the Zone of Fabulous. There's a risk Counsellors and Social Workers can slip into a disconnected state or become over connected with their clients. The Zone is somewhere in the middle and we all work together to stay there, this includes separating home and work life."

They also offer hybrid roles where staff can have different roles, such as counselling and facilitating in schools, or providing cultural support. This variety between therapeutic and prevention work helps in keeping a vibrant workforce, who know they are making a difference.