

Social Impact



Lion has been involved in the Sustainable Business Council's Welfare to Work programme, which aims to increase the number of sole parents in work, from the outset.

As one of New Zealand's largest beverage companies, Lion sees the Welfare to Work programme as a way to actively help address high unemployment levels in New Zealand while embracing a more diverse workforce.

"Welfare to Work is great for us as it opens minds in our business, encouraging us not to be too narrow in our thinking around organisational fit," says Susan Verner, People & Culture Functional Leader at Lion.

"Hiring for a more diverse workplace benefits us, allowing our business to better represent New Zealand's wider society through the people we employ."

And Lion has been willing to significantly modify their recruitment strategies to embrace that diversity in taking on young mother Shontelle. She's been doing a great job working in her new position as a merchandiser, but would most likely not have made it into the organisation without Welfare to Work.

Lion recognised that with their current recruitment process, which includes screening mechanisms to narrow down the flood of applications they typically receive, employees like Shontelle would not be hired.

Experience is one of the main screening criteria, which tends to mean only those with relevant experience will be shortlisted for high-applicant positions. Like many other Welfare to Work participants, Shontelle lacked relevant work experience and would not have been shortlisted for the roles she may have been interested in.

The next stage of the recruitment process - a phone interview during which recruiters look for people who will be confident around customers - can be a barrier.

"Many Welfare to Work participants like Shontelle are too shy and humble and can't sell themselves, so they would be screened out."

Recognising these challenges Lion made adjustments to their process when hiring Shontelle and are delighted to have seen her confidence grow alongside the work she's doing.

"We had to almost reverse our recruitment strategy," says Susan. "Instead of advertising and finding the best-suited candidate in terms of attributes, we started by looking at the attributes of people who might participate in the Welfare to Work Programme and then find the best role that would suit them."

"Then we went straight to Work & Income instead of advertising on the likes of Seek and Trade Me (where we usually get a flood of applications). So Shontelle did not have to be compared with applicants with experience. She could be considered on her own individual merits."

While it's a slower process than traditional recruitment methods, and therefore not suited to immediately available roles, Lion will continue to use the programme for other roles.

"We know that this process is still suitable for bigger bulk recruitment where there is less time pressure. We will use it to hire our Christmas staff giving us plenty of time in advance. And, we want to continue to bring Work & Income into our normal process. It's opened our eyes to who can actually work in the role, rather than being relatively restrictive and screening people out. For certain roles, we will definitely look at our recruitment differently", Susan said.

Lion recommends that other interested employers, or those already participating in the Welfare to Work programme, should make Work & Income the first port of call "and give these young parents a fighting chance".