

# CREATING GREAT PLACES TO WORK

LEADERSHIP IN THE  
VICTORIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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VPSC

Victorian Public Sector Commission

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VICTORIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

The Victorian Government has vested the Victorian Public Sector Commission with functions designed to enhance the performance of the public sector – fostering the development of an efficient integrated and responsive public sector which is highly ethical accountable and professional in the ways it delivers services to the Victorian community.

The key functions of the Commission are to:

- strengthen the efficiency effectiveness and capability of the public sector in order to meet existing and emerging needs and deliver high quality services; and
- maintain and advocate for public sector professionalism and integrity.

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# 1. LESSONS FROM THE VICTORIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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'Great companies foster a productive tension between continuity and change'  
Jim Collins, Leadership expert and author

Each year the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC) surveys staff about how well the values and employment principles are applied in their organisation. While the survey tells us which organisations are doing well, it does not tell us what they are doing. This year we interviewed staff in seven organisations to find out their tips for creating and sustaining a great workplace culture. We believe these tips will be useful for other organisations wanting to achieve similar results.

## The elements of a good workplace culture

While each of the organisations differs in terms of their size, location and issues, they share some things in common:

- A meaningful purpose – The work has a positive impact on clients or on the local community and as a result the organisation has a good reputation. The organisation reflects on and celebrates its successes.
- Collaborative relationships – The organisation has well established networks with other bodies working to solve particular problems. This may include sourcing the next generation of staff, developing their skills or providing a more holistic solution to a client's problem.
- Inclusiveness – There is recognition that everyone contributes to the work of the organisation from the CEO down. Staff have the opportunity to work with colleagues from other divisions or from other professional backgrounds to achieve the best outcomes for the organisation and its clients.
- Openness to feedback – There is a willingness to consider other viewpoints. While no one is likely to hold all the information about a particular issue, decisions must be made on the best available advice at the time. Staff are encouraged to raise their concerns.
- No blame culture – Not everything that is tried will work but the lessons are important. Staff who are new to a role may make inadvertent mistakes. Their confidence will grow as they practice their skills. Staff may suggest different ways of doing things. Many of these ideas will result in better outcomes, some will need to be modified and a few may need to be dropped.
- Opportunities to develop – Everyone is encouraged to develop their skills and progress in their careers. This may be through a scholarship program, completing a formal qualification, working in another division or another organisation or through on-the-job learning.

## Things to remember along the way

The catalyst for change can include:

- Feedback from staff – Many organisations regularly monitor staff opinions through a pulse survey or the VPSC's *People Matter Survey*. They may set aside time at work for staff to complete the survey to encourage a higher participation rate. They then discuss the results openly with staff, saying what the organisation is doing well and what needs to be improved. They may also seek ideas for improvement directly from staff. Managers will often know if staff are engaged at work by noticing whether they voluntarily participate in social events such as morning teas.

- Changes to government policy or legislation – These changes may mean a change in work priorities, reallocation of funds, the cutting of red tape or an extension of powers. The changes may require an examination of how things are currently done and how they need to change to meet the new arrangements. In looking at processes afresh, organisations are able to focus on what is important to achieving the right outcomes for their clients and stakeholders.
- A merger of two or more organisations – The new merged organisation may bring together different operating systems, structures and cultures that need to be reviewed. The merger may reveal overlaps in the data collected or opportunities for a more cohesive or comprehensive service to be provided.
- The appointment of a new CEO or leadership team – This often provides an opportunity to rethink how things are done. The new leadership may have fresh ideas about how the organisation will be managed and promoted to the community.
- Workforce issues – An ageing workforce or a remote location may require creative ideas for attracting the next generation of staff. Strategies may include offering placements to new graduates, sharing resources within the region or promoting the advantages of living in regional Victoria.

Culture is reflected in how well staff interact with one another and with clients:

- Establishing values – Organisations may define their values in collaboration with staff, refresh those already applying in their workplace or adopt a set of values from legislation or some other source. What makes the values real in each of these cases is thinking about how they play out at work. The organisation may also reward staff who best demonstrate the values every day.
- Holding staff to account for their behaviour – Organisations may list acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Staff may be given the skills to raise their concerns directly with colleagues. Managers may be coached in how to have difficult conversations with staff about poor behaviour.
- Having a robust complaints process – Complaints may initially increase after introducing a new complaints process. This is a sure sign that staff feel confident about raising their concerns and having them investigated fairly. Everyone understands that poor behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Breaking down silos – The organisation keeps everyone informed about important events happening in the workplace through regular meetings, newsletters and the intranet. Staff may be involved in developing the business plan or may get to work with colleagues in other teams. Managers may try to get a practical understanding of the work their team does.
- Social activities – Morning teas, celebrations and staff balls all provide opportunities for people to have fun and interact with one another more informally. Getting to know someone socially can help strengthen working relationships and establish networks across the organisation.

These ideas are described in more detail in the following case studies. We hope you enjoy reading them.



## 2. FROM MERGER TO MATURITY

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### At a glance

Organisation: Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation

Acting Chief Executive Officer: Catherine Myers

Location: North Richmond

Size: 200+

Guiding phrases: resilience, opportunity

The merger of two organisations to form the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation brought about an appetite for change and opportunities for improvement that have continued to this day. With a broader regulatory role, streamlined processes and a move towards integrated databases, the organisation is forging cooperative relationships with other regulatory bodies, local councils and Victoria Police.

### The right mindset

The organisation's creation coincided with the appointment of a new CEO, relocation to new offices, structural reform of the gaming industry, and implementation of the star-rating and demerit point systems. This was potentially a very stressful time for staff as they tried to cope with all the changes and still continue to provide a good service to the community. A lot was learnt in those early days.

While managers drove the change in the first year, they rethought this strategy after feedback from staff. The scope of the new organisation was broader than the previous two organisations and no single person could possibly know everything about what was done. Involving staff, particularly in cross-divisional teams, led to new insights and ideas for improvement. The CEO believes that 'innovation drives engagement'. Staff are committed to the industry they regulate because of the positive contribution they are making to society. They want to see things improve. They want to be part of the change.

The organisation has matured since those early days. Everyone has come to accept the CEO's advice of 'doing less with less'. There is now less red tape, more streamlined processes and greater support for staff. Everyone had input to developing the organisation's three-year strategic plan. Similarly, the business planning process was held over two days and involved a mix of managers and staff from throughout the organisation. This type of collaboration has become a natural way of working.

Breaking down internal silos was an important part of the organisation's strategy. Understanding what others do can lead to better results. Staff may work in more than one part of the organisation, collaborate with peers on joint projects or seek their opinions on work they are doing. They also get to know one another more informally at social events.

The way the organisation communicates with staff about important information has evolved over time. Initially the all staff update was 'a big fanfare'. It was not spontaneous. After feedback from staff, it was decided to have a less formal fortnightly e-newsletter called Friday FYI. The e-newsletter focuses on strategic matters, is well presented and written in a non-bureaucratic style. There are also regular all staff meetings and team meetings. Staff are beginning to feel more settled and to show a lot of good will.

### The importance of succession planning

The CEO recognises that successful change requires an in-depth look at an organisation's 'people, processes and systems'. The merger coincided with a high turnover of staff. While it was great to recruit

new staff who had worked at neither of the two organisations and so had open minds about what the organisation did, a lot of corporate knowledge was lost when former staff left. In many cases nothing was written down and no succession planning had previously been undertaken. To make amends, the organisation has now developed a workforce-planning framework. True to its mode of operating, 30 staff were picked at random and invited to be involved in its development. The organisation will use the framework to identify and manage its current talent, build the knowledge base and recruit staff with new skills.

Managers support the development of their staff. They might ask: 'have you done anything differently this year? Have you completed any study?' They keep a lookout for suitable opportunities for staff such as a mentoring program. They are also open to staff suggestions about training that can be completed on-line or through one of the organisation's networks.

Everyone takes a team perspective to learning and looking out for each other's career. In the recent restructure of the Licensing division, the team devised a scheme to help staff learn the new system. One team member nominated herself to offer one-on-one training for her colleagues. This initiative is likely to be picked up by other teams. The organisation is constantly learning and adapting.

## An egalitarian organisation

The organisation lives by its values of working together, respecting one another, making it happen and integrity. Everyone, from the Commissioners to the managers and staff show leadership. The Commissioners are approachable. The managers have an open door policy and a welcoming office atmosphere. Staff can email their managers or step into their offices to present an idea or ask for an opinion. Managers have a broader view of what the organisation does and can make decisions. They are smart, open and personable.

The Workplace Culture Committee organises inventive, fun and inexpensive activities that seem to happen spontaneously. The activities are not compulsory and have attracted great feedback. The committee has held four meetings to come up with ideas to promote the organisation's four values. For example, a competition for the best Christmas tree decoration was held to promote the idea of working together. The CEO judged the entries and the chairman attended the celebratory morning tea in the Client Services area. This is an area that would not otherwise get to participate in activities because staff are answering queries from the public and need to be available at all times. Staff don't feel they have to



*Staff compete for best Christmas tree decoration*

participate. It is at their discretion. Something might start with just a few people and then 'snowball' into a bigger event. A case in point was the Mini Olympics. A small mix of managers and staff were involved. People who were not participating heard the laughter and came to watch what was going on. They began to cheer people on, take photos of the event and share the food everyone had brought along. A great feeling of camaraderie ensued.

The value of respecting one another is on display when staff work in cross-divisional teams. They get to meet colleagues professionally, make enduring connections and talk about a shared project. They learn to respect each other's role and contribution. For example the Change Collaboration Forum looked at how staff were working across three floors. They found that the work area of the Compliance division could 'look like a ghost town' because they were often out of the office. The simple solution was to give the division greater presence by hanging up posters and pictures and having information about their 'work on a whiteboard for everyone to see'. The CEO says an organisation's physical atmosphere is important.

Staff are encouraged to make things happen by coming up with ideas and initiatives. With their managers' support they can try new things. The organisation has a no blame culture. It accepts that some ideas will be successful while others won't. For example the organisation tried an outsourced model for one of its functions for three months before deciding not to proceed with the idea. In contrast, the Integrated Licence Management Group Forum was able to successfully merge content from the 40 odd databases it held and to build data analysis capability amongst staff. The organisation now has a more cohesive database with better functionality. The data and analysis teams have a better picture of what they are regulating, are using terms consistently and have removed overlapping content. They have the right tools to regulate.

The organisation protects its integrity by setting behavioural standards in policies, addressing any bullying and harassment complaints in a timely fashion and providing training on respect in the workplace. The organisation has been open about any significant workplace issues it is tackling. Staff already know when there is a problem. When an issue is talked about, it often initially 'opens a floodgate' of complaints as staff have the confidence to raise their concerns. Managers have been given the skills to have difficult conversations with their staff, including being mindful of the tone they use. The organisation noticed an improvement in culture once staff started to consciously engage with other areas.

## Keeping a finger on the pulse

'Change can bring out the best and worst in people.' It can take them out of their comfort zone and feel bad at times, particularly if there isn't sufficient planning. However it can also provide opportunities for learning and flexibility. The staff worked commendably hard to get everything done, but it came at a cost. The organisation wanted to know how staff were feeling so gave them a 'time out' chocolate bar and time out of their working day to complete the VPSC's *People Matter Survey*. It was clear from the results that staff were feeling stressed. Managers followed up the results with their staff. There was 'no sugar coating. Staff know when they are being lied to'. This openness helped to build trust. The action planning process was focussed on 'making the organisation a place where people want to be'. The organisation has continued to track results and now talks more about its successes, however small, rather than what still needs to be done.

Good performance is recognised both formally and informally. The CEO asked to meet an inspector working in Compliance for the last two months to tell her personally what a great job she was doing. Peers also give feedback to one another. Staff are commonly thanked when they are doing well and 'have gone beyond what is expected of them'. The organisation also has a recognition program based around innovation and engagement.

## Punching above their weight

The organisation is proud to have co-hosted the Australasian Casino and Gaming Regulators' Conference in 2014 and to have been recognised by their industry peers as having leading regulatory practice. Many of the staff gave presentations at the conference, which were later broadcast to colleagues at work. The organisation has a high profile and attracts media attention because of its impact on the community. It has worked with VicHealth and ESTA (the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority) to develop an interactive online map of Victoria showing the location of licensed venues. Not only is this map useful for licensees and members of the public, it can also be useful for bodies such as local councils, Victoria Police and ambulances.

## Future plans

The CEO would like to promote the organisation's educational role more. Just as the organisation has benefited from listening to staff, it's taking a similar approach to engaging with its clients.

## 3. ALL ABOARD THE COMPLIANCE CRUISE

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### At a glance

Organisation: Rural Northwest Health  
Chief Executive Officer: Catherine Morley  
Locations: Warracknabeal, Hopetoun, Beulah  
Size: 200+  
Guiding phrases: fun, innovation

The organisation is both main employer and a source of pride for the local community that has weathered floods, plagues and fire. This close bond is also evident from the CEO's decision to name her dogs in honour of the townships the organisation serves: Warracknabeal (Warrack) and Hopetoun (Hope). She's been reminded that she still needs to find a Bulie in honour of Beulah.

### A fresh start

With the board's support, the new CEO and her leadership team have worked with staff to transform the organisation and the services it delivers to residents and clients.

The new accommodation being built in Warracknabeal is expected to improve staff morale. Staff will be working together as one team under the same roof not spread across a number of older buildings; some with faulty amenities. In one building, the power switches off whenever more than three appliances are turned on at once.

The organisation has adopted the Fish principles, a very successful cultural change program originally based on an initiative at the Pike's Place Fish Market in Seattle. The four principles are very relevant to the organisation's work. Staff are asked to choose their attitude, make someone's day, be there, and have fun. Together these principles have meant that staff respond positively to the daily routine and unexpected situations. They give their full attention to colleagues, clients and residents. They go out of their way to make people feel special and appreciated. They play with ideas, are creative and have fun. Since introducing these principles the CEO has seen a marked improvement in how staff relate to others.

The organisation's reputation continues to grow. It is often written up in the local media and talked about positively by shoppers in town. In 2012, the organisation won an award for Excellence in Person-Centred Care. The dementia care in the Memory Support Unit is based in part on Montessori principles. Staff work with families, carers and volunteers to engage residents in meaningful activities that reflect their capabilities and interests. They might be involved in art, music or gardening activities. This helps residents remain independent and happy. The organisation's model for dementia care is published in the Australasian Journal on Ageing.

In 2014, the hospital achieved its full complement of accreditations. The assessors listened to residents and families who spoke positively about their relationship with the staff and even residents who had concerns felt that they had been heard when they raised them and that things had improved.

### Navigating the right course

The board had anecdotal evidence that the culture was improving. Staff were smiling. The CEO wanted to monitor the success of the change program and saw the VPSC's *People Matter Survey* as one tool she could use. But there was a problem. Not many staff were filling it out. Some didn't have access to a

computer or were not computer savvy. Some were simply too busy to complete the survey. The leadership team decided to include the *People Matter Survey* in its compulsory training day – this year dubbed the *Compliance Cruise* - along with other important initiatives such as the staff wellness program, flu vaccinations and hospital protocols.

With very little money but lots of ingenuity, the leadership team created a nautical experience in the Education Room. Dressed as sailors, the leadership team welcomed staff aboard the Compliance Cruise, handed them a boarding pass and either a Free Willy or a Moby Dick lei. At the helm was Captain Calmdown (aka the Continuous Improvement and Innovation Manager). The sounds of the sea drifted on the air and fish could be seen swimming through the paper crepe portholes. Serious sessions such as completing the *People Matter Survey* were interspersed with fun activities such as 'fishing' for prizes of fresh fruit or confectionary. A message found in a bottle washed ashore reminded staff of the definition for bullying. This was to correct the mistaken belief that being given constructive feedback or reasonable instructions was the same thing as being bullied. The cruise concluded with staff dancing to the beat of *In the Navy*. All of this was done to create a welcoming and fun environment that would encourage staff to learn.

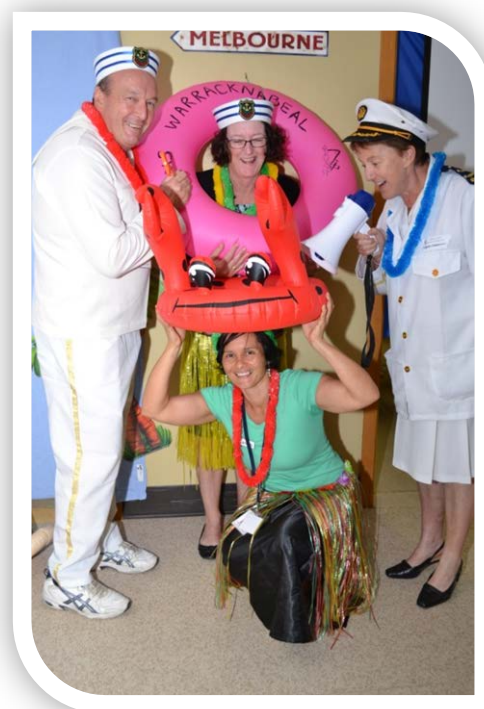
A total of 13 sessions were held twice a day in two locations over the course of two weeks. The two groups on each day shared lunch providing yet another opportunity for staff from the different campuses to mix. The leadership team continually refined the day based on experience and feedback. They are likely to hold a similar event each year but with a different theme each time.

Staff could participate in as many of the activities as they wanted. They received a stamp for completing each activity. At one session, one of the staff members chose to sit in the 'crabby member corner' with the inflatable crab. She said she was tired and not in the mood to participate so was asked to leave because she was having a negative impact on the rest of the participants. Staff are held accountable for their attitude.

## Solving problems together

Getting the right leadership team has taken time but has also provided the organisation with stability and consistency. The leaders were chosen because they are competent and confident, interested in people and able to lead by example. They won't let people fail. Recognising that everyone brings their own particular skills and strengths to the job, they have given staff a 'license to act'. Everyone can show leadership by 'stepping up' and taking responsibility for solving the organisation's problems. For instance staff can write up problems they are facing on the *Challenge Board* and have their colleagues suggest possible solutions. Staff often know the system very well and so are in the best position to fix any problems.

The leadership team values staff opinions and wants to support staff so they can do their jobs well. At the annual *People Action Feedback Day* the leadership team informs staff about the outcomes of the survey and asks them for ideas about possible improvements. Some issues are easily fixed such as the replacement of broken outdoor furniture. Other issues can be influenced by staff, such as the type of



*Peter Miller, Kerry Seater, Ngareta Melgren and Wendy Walters welcome staff aboard the Compliance Cruise*

services to be provided by the *Employee Assistance Program*. The Health and Wellbeing Officers act as buddies for staff trying to improve their fitness levels.

The organisation's focus is on continuous improvement, not blaming someone when things go wrong but reflecting on what happened and saying how they could improve. Managers follow up with anyone who hasn't demonstrated the behaviours expected of them or whose work practices put their colleagues, residents, clients or the organisation at risk. In one case, the CEO met with each individual staff member in a work unit to find out the truth about a situation. She got much better information this way than she might have done from a group meeting. She was able to decide not to discipline anyone but rather to work with them and the manager to resolve the cause of the issue.

Every member of staff including the CEO wears a nametag making it easy for people to personally connect with one another. The township is small. Workmates might be neighbours. Relatives or friends might be in residence. The staff are concerned about people's lives. If anyone has a problem that might have an impact on their colleagues or their work they are encouraged to talk about it.

The organisation is continuously looking at ways to improve its services. Staff might attend conferences or leadership programs to gain new ideas and develop their skills.

## Being thankful

The CEO welcomes new recruits to the organisation with an afternoon tea. She says: 'staff are working together to achieve change and innovate'. The organisation held an expo about aged care that included the display of photos in the main street. A brief video gives the community an introduction to health services so they can become more knowledgeable.

*Rural Rambles* is a monthly staff newsletter that is published on the organisation's website for anyone to read. It contains a heartfelt message from the CEO, important things that staff need to know or do at work, ideas for how they can improve their wellbeing and stories about the people the organisation wants to thank. This might include staff who have accepted responsibility for a challenging new role or who have gone out of their way to create a great experience for residents.

The organisation recognises staff service and celebrates their contribution at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the board. Stories about the personal and work achievements of staff are shared in *Our Award-Winning Team*, the organisation's annual publication about staff.

In another initiative all staff were invited to contribute one word about a colleague who had worked with the organisation for 40 years. The resulting two minute video clip was a funny, heart-warming and complimentary keepsake of his significant time at work. The clip was also played for directors at the AGM.

## Future plans

The organisation wants to be able to continue providing a quality healthcare service close to clients' homes. In doing this it will have to consider the challenges of an ageing workforce. It is also considering the introduction of Lean Principles to create greater value for clients and residents.

## 4. THE PERMISSION TO ACT

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### At a glance

Organisation: Benalla Health  
Chief Executive Officer: Andrew Freeman  
Location: Benalla  
Size: 200+  
Guiding phrases: trust, communication

The national health reform, increased public demand for services and an ageing population provided the organisation with the perfect storm to bring about cultural change. The organisation has a strong relationship with its board, general practitioners, other health services and education providers.

### Coaxing change

The new CEO and leadership team worked with all staff to refresh the organisation's values and identify behaviours that are above the line (acceptable) and below (unacceptable). The organisation's culture is open, transparent and respectful. Managers lead by example and are always approachable and available to staff.

The organisation has developed a code of conduct to support the values. The values and code apply to all board members, ongoing and casual staff, general practitioners and volunteers. They are included in the organisation's orientation pack. Additionally managers ask staff to voluntarily sign a document saying they have read the code at their annual performance appraisal meeting.

The CEO and leadership team attend orientation sessions for new staff and speak about the values and code. Managers also talk about these with staff. For instance, they may encourage staff to lend a hand when someone is unsure about what they are doing. This helps break down the silos.

The CEO shares the results of the VPSC's *People Matter Survey* with the board, leadership team and staff regardless of whether they are good or bad. He says: 'If staff are going to take the time to fill the survey out then the results must be shared'. A committee formed this year to consider the results talked about communication skills and workplace culture. As the CEO says: 'How do we know what the issues are if we are not talking to people'.

Each team has an operational plan with discussion prompts for improving workplace culture and staff wellbeing. Staff are often apprehensive about change. It takes time to gain their trust. The CEO has told staff: 'This is not about change for the sake of change; it's about how we can do things better for our community and staff'. Under the guidance of the good natured Catering Manager, the hospitality services staff recently mastered tablet based menus. This environmentally friendly initiative provides a more accurate and timely service to clients.

The organisation takes advantage of new recruits' 'fresh eyes'. Shortly after their appointment they are invited to meet with the leadership team to provide feedback on what it's like to work at the organisation.

### Improving behaviour

The number of grievances initially increased after the organisation revised its HR policies and processes. This was seen as a positive sign. Staff were confident that their concerns would be dealt with properly. People are more likely to change their behaviour if they are subject to robust dispute resolution and disciplinary processes.



The organisation introduced an education program focussed on creating a better workplace culture. The successful program which complements mandatory online learning was delivered by two highly regarded staff members; an allied health professional and an occupational health and safety expert. The program included assertiveness training to give staff the confidence to raise any concerns they have directly with colleagues. Only if the matter can't be resolved between the individuals concerned is it raised with their manager.

Staff have access to dispute resolution processes such as independent mediators. Internal and external mediators help resolve conflicts and debrief difficult conversations and critical incidences.

Managers have learnt how to deal with poor behaviour in their team so that matters can be quickly resolved and not escalated to a more senior level. It is important that managers treat staff fairly. They respectfully hold staff accountable for their work performance and behaviour. They support staff if they need help or might move them to a different role that is better suited to their skills. In some cases they may encourage staff to retire or leave the organisation. These simple measures have made a big difference to the organisation and its staff. Managers now feel much more confident about talking to their staff.

## Setting people up to win

The organisation has adopted the Studer Group method of gathering information in a structured way about what staff want and need in order to feel valued and contribute to the workplace in a meaningful way. It engaged the Studer Group to individually coach managers on how to have an open conversation with members of their team. Managers ask staff about what is working well, what needs to improve and how to make that happen. They will take up staff ideas, investigate these ideas further or explain why some things cannot happen at the moment. Managers also ask their staff about who they would like to see recognised for their good work. This information is passed onto the board and the CEO. Staff are then personally thanked for their work. They may receive a thank you note from the CEO at their home address. Their manager might also celebrate the good work with a small treat such as a staff BBQ.

Staff excellence awards were introduced last year because staff can achieve outstanding things at any point in their career. Peers nominate staff for an award and then an interdisciplinary panel evaluates the nominations. The Chief Engineer who has worked at the organisation for 35 years said it was one of his proudest moments when he received a staff excellence award for innovation. He had installed solar power throughout the organisation's buildings.

Communication is vital particularly when trying to introduce change. The CEO takes the approach of being 'inclusive not exclusive'. He provides staff with an opportunity to influence change. He holds a regular staff forum at which he talks about what is happening at the organisation. He follows this up with a written message to all staff.

Managers also keep staff informed about what is going on in the organisation. They are encouraged to meet in person rather than email their staff. Emails can be misinterpreted.



*Christine Griffith, Rick Grubissa and Heather Jakowlew receive their award from Andrew Freeman and Janine Holland*

The organisation stays in touch with staff who are on maternity or long service leave. When they return to work, staff meet with their manager to discuss any changes that have happened during their absence. They also attend an orientation to welcome them back and make them feel a valued member of the team.

## Joining the dots

The organisation is actively managing the risk of having an ageing workforce. It has developed an internal succession plan and is developing staff to prepare them to 'step up' into roles when key staff retire.

The organisation seeks to appoint clear communicators to management roles. The leadership team eases new managers into their roles, supporting them and giving them opportunities for easy wins. Responsibility for harder decisions can come later.

While general practitioners often take the lead with the clinical workforce and are a vital part of the organisation, they are not members of staff. The strong relationship between the organisation and general practitioners has a huge impact on staff morale.

The board is closely involved with the organisation. It works with staff, talks to different managers and attends functions such as the opening of the new kitchen centre. The board initiated a scholarship program to invest in the professional development of both clinical and non-clinical staff. The scholarship must lead to the development of new skills. However it can be for a formal degree or a TAFE course. Sometimes it has enabled staff to complete studies already commenced.

Staff sometimes leave the organisation after completing their studies. The CEO sees this as a positive outcome. They have taken the next step in their career. Staff are proud of what they are doing and morale is high. The new staff recruited in their place will help to reinvigorate the organisation.

The organisation has established a strong partnership with other organisations. For instance it has partnered with TAFE to offer scholarships to hospitality services staff willing to complete Certificate III and IV in catering. The course has been tailored to the health sector. The CEO understands that 'it's a big ask to go back to school after being in the workforce for a long time'. He wants to 'set them up to succeed' and hopes that the scholarship will encourage 'a few to put up their hand'.

Midwives from the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne relieve the local midwives while they are on annual or long service leave. This partnership between the two organisations has benefited both the local community and staff. The local midwives warmly welcome the relieving midwives to the team.

## Attracting the next generation of staff

Students' interest in working at the organisation may stem from their attendance at the *Careers Day* or the *Job Expo* when they are in Year 10. They might complete a Certificate III in Years 11 or 12 or go onto study at university. They may participate in a cadetship at the organisation.

New graduates and students have a positive experience at the organisation which has well maintained accommodation that is available for short-term visits. Students are taught and mentored by staff and treated as part of the team. The organisation facilitates over 2,000 student days each year. At the same time the number of graduate nurses has increased in recent years from three to 10.

## Future plans

The organisation would like to expand its primary healthcare services, becoming more responsive to the needs of older members of the community, and making the transition from acute care out to the community seamless.

## 5. CREATING OUR FUTURE

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### At a glance

Organisation: Goulburn Valley Health  
Chief Executive Officer: Dale Fraser  
Location: Shepparton, Tatura, Waranga  
Size: 1700+  
Guiding phrases: inclusiveness, collegiality

Staff greet each other in the corridor and stop to help anyone looking a little lost. A smiling receptionist helps pacify a tearful child by admiring his proffered toy helicopter. Even the casual visitor to Goulburn Valley Health can see that it is a good place to work.

### An important part of the local community

The organisation makes a difference to the local community in many ways. It recognises the traditional owners the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang people in symbolic ways. It involves the community in decisions about the health services it provides. It establishes strong relationships with other local authorities such as universities, schools and the Country Fire Authority (CFA).

Staff and residents took part in creating an art installation dedicated to the Yorta Yorta totem, the turtle. One thousand small hand-made clay turtles were fashioned into one large turtle making it both an important cultural event and an opportunity for art therapy.

Operating for the last 10 years, the consumer advisory committee is more akin to a partnership between health service providers and clients. Community representatives attend the executive governance committee meetings to discuss their community health needs and to give firsthand feedback on their experiences. This open communication has meant that services are tailored to client needs and processes can be validated with them. The organisation encourages the group to contribute to publications and supports their good ideas such as the red socks program where patients receive a free pair of socks to reduce the risk of falls.

The organisation has no difficulty in recruiting dentists because it offers a 12 month placement for new graduates. The placements provide graduates with a very good grounding in dentistry.

Staff are good community members. They work towards improving the health of the community in their own time. They may be sports coaches, sit on the school council or volunteer for the CFA.



*A staff member paints a turtle for the Yorta Yorta art installation*

## Keeping in touch

The organisation is mindful of the need to keep in touch with staff at all of its campuses. Staff in remote locations can be involved in meetings through the use of teleconferencing or other technology. The board meets at different locations so that its directors can interact with staff.

One year the organisation held a Christmas decoration competition. The CEO dropped unannounced into each work location to judge the entries. Imagine his delight when arriving at an aged care facility he heard the scuffling of feet, quickly followed by music and lights. Staff and residents had been waiting to show off their efforts.

## A contemporary executive team

The appointment of a new CEO and executive team ended an 18 month period of uncertainty for the organisation and allowed new ideas to be tried.

The CEO expects the executives to model the values. This means that executives are often seen out and about interacting with staff and clients. They support and engage staff and are open and honest with them. They help staff be their best. Communication is key to this happening.

Each month, the CEO invites individual staff members to have afternoon tea with him. He asks them what they would do if they were in his chair. He listens to their views on what's working well and what could be improved. He gives a commitment to try out any practical solutions they suggest or to investigate other matters they raise and get back to them. He also explains why some things can't be done. Staff feel that their views are valued and acted upon. They also begin to understand the pressures on the organisation. Staff who feel a genuine connection to the organisation will be more willing to give more back to it.

## A collaborative approach

The organisation reviewed its strategic plan in consultation with staff and the community. It also reinvigorated its values. The CEO says: 'Skills get an applicant an interview but values get them the job'.

CREATE is the easily remembered acronym for the organisation's values: compassion, respect, excellence, accountability, teamwork and ethical behaviour. It forms part of the organisation's slogan: Together we CREATE our future. This is a powerful message. Everyone makes a difference.

The values are a touchstone. They influence the way staff work together, how they are lead, mentored and supported. Teams might be made up of people from different professional disciplines working together for a common purpose.

Behaviours are listed as either acceptable and above the line or unacceptable and below the line. Poor behaviour does not go unchecked. Staff feel confident about moderating the behaviour of their colleagues. Managers feel supported by executives. They have been coached on how to give constructive feedback to staff and can attend a debriefing session with their manager. They can also escalate particularly difficult cases to their manager.

Staff are encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions and to learn from their mistakes. This makes them more open to receiving feedback. It is about improvement rather than punishment. Other staff understand that poor behaviour will be dealt with consistently and respectfully. Staff who won't change their behaviour are encouraged to leave the organisation.

## Raising issues, learning from mistakes

The organisation celebrates successes and is honest about mistakes. There are no witch hunts. One initially traumatic event, the death of a child, lead to a positive outcome for the grieving family and staff. *The Ruby Pack* was launched in July. It is intended to help other parents grieving from the loss of their children. Thirty members of Ruby's extended family attended the launch at which red balloons were

released into the sky. Staff feel very proud of the legacy from their work and have repaired their relationship with Ruby's family.

Everyone has an important role to play in the organisation. The roles are interconnected and staff are highly skilled. They are encouraged to seek advice from one another and to raise any concerns as part of risk management. Sometimes decisions have to be made on the best available information at the time. When further information comes to light, decisions may be changed. Decisions may also be affected by their context. The organisation values flexibility and adaptability.

The organisation also investigates what is happening elsewhere that could affect its operations.

## Recognising that staff are our greatest asset

Staff engagement is a key measure of executive performance. The organisation monitors staff engagement through measures such as the VPSC's *People Matter Survey*. The CEO wrote to all staff, personally congratulating them on what has been achieved in the different campuses and detailing what is planned for the future. The CEO is approachable. Staff feel comfortable saying hello to him.

The organisation recognises staff who are 'living the values'. Interest in winning the award is growing each year from an initial six nominations to 45 nominations this year. Staff are happy to value others and expect to be valued in return. The nominations are often detailed and have real substance. The nominees and their families are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Development is a way of investing in the organisation's greatest asset; its staff. Managers have faith in their staff's capability. They prefer trust over engineered processes. They mentor their staff to enable them to succeed and don't get in their way.

Participants at the emerging managers program can attend an 'unplugged session' with individual executives to find out what it takes to succeed. In this way the executives are passing the baton to the next generation of leaders. Thirty of the organisation's emerging leaders have also attended programs held by either Proteus or the local Fairley Leadership Program. The executives often contribute to these programs.

The organisation conducts a regular safety walk around and is proud of the substantial OHS (occupational health and safety) improvements it has made for staff and patients particularly in the kitchen and the engineering department.

## National accreditation provided a focus for change

The Chief Medical Officer took a lead role in the organisation achieving accreditation across four areas simultaneously. The process proved to be an important demonstration of faith in the organisation and galvanised everyone to work as one. It led to a greater focus on patient outcomes and business processes. Nine hundred people attended the open celebration at which the CEO cooked and the executives served food.

## Plans for the future

The organisation is part of a network of community leaders that includes local government, schools and the police working together to solve the community's problems. The CEO describes his vision as 'healthcare without walls'.

## 6. CARING FOR EACH OTHER

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### At a glance

Organisation: Peninsula Health  
Chief Executive Officer: Sue Williams  
Location: Frankston, Mount Eliza, Rosebud, Mornington  
Size: 4000+  
Guiding phrases: support, reflection

Despite being a bustling outer metropolitan health service with the State's busiest emergency department, Peninsula Health feels like it is part of a small country town. Staff and clients choose to live and work on the Mornington Peninsula. Everyone knows everyone else. The trick is to balance this innate stability with creative disruption.

### Building on a strong foundation

The organisation has always had a strong focus on quality and customer care. It is well regarded in the community for making a difference to people's lives. Being small, it can offer staff an interesting variety of work, which is great for personal development and learning. Staff might remain with the organisation for 30 years or more but move to different campuses or roles. The Mornington Peninsula is a major draw card for staff and clients alike and the organisation is the only public health service in the region.

The new CEO has built on the strengths of the organisation. Her staff describe her as dynamic, action focussed and fair. She gets to chat to staff, find out what they do and tell them about important things happening in the organisation on many occasions. On her daily rounds, she has visited every part of the organisation including the kitchen. She has even been in theatre greens. At the quarterly CEO Forums, she has fielded questions from audiences of up to 300 people at the different campuses. In her monthly emails, she updates staff about the progress of building works, organisational changes and the things she has heard on her rounds. Staff like her style of communication and openness to feedback. She talks and writes plainly, avoiding the use of acronyms.

The organisation has high standards that staff strive to achieve. While staff are quick to say what needs to change, they are now also acknowledging what is good. In the past, the organisation might have responded to bad press. Now under the CEO's direction, it publishes a calendar of positive stories told by credible clinical leads. This has led to a positive change in public perceptions.

The organisation promotes its work through events such as *Quality Week* and *Research Week*. Staff are proud of what they are achieving. They are continually refining their model of care to better meet client needs and demonstrate best practice. The organisation also hosts social events to bring people together such as the *Allied Health Ball*. These help to strengthen the workplace culture. Like other organisations, staff have access to the EAP (Employee Assistance Program). This program is particularly important for ensuring people's emotional safety. Staff are compassionate and support their colleagues who may be going through difficult times such as the death of someone close or dealing with a critical health condition.

### Opportunities to learn

The CEO values the stability of her workforce but also wants to broaden their thinking. She is considering offering staff two week placements in another public or private hospital or in an unrelated industry that draws on the same set of skills; for example logistics. She is also considering partnering with other organisations to match staff with other people to broaden their skills. She says: 'People working in other

places may be dealing with similar problems but from a different perspective.' This provides staff with enormous opportunities to learn.

The networks the organisation has with other bodies including the Department of Health and Human Services, Headspace (the National Youth Mental Health Foundation) and the Frankston-Mornington Peninsula Medicare Local lead to new ideas and development opportunities. They complement the networks within the organisation.

## A supportive culture

The leadership team is a consistent presence in the organisation. Its 20 members don't change very often. They are experienced, credible and willing to have frank conversations about matters. While they may hold different views, they share a commitment to the organisation and its values. They are good role models who are happy to mentor staff. The CEO meets weekly with her leadership team. She invites the medical staff to attend these meetings monthly to discuss strategy. This makes the best use of everyone's time.

The leadership team monitors workplace culture through the VPSC's *People Matter Survey*, client feedback, grievances and sick leave. The data helps them to identify any problems and to take remedial action.

The same values of integrity, honesty and respect are evident amongst managers. They support staff, particularly during crises, champion their innovative ideas and develop their particular strengths. They also advocate for the rights of their clients.

Monash University students, new graduates and external staff on placement with the organisation comment on the supportive work environment. Managers ask them what they need and encourage them to be honest and open.

There is no single pathway to higher ranks. Managers may have different professional backgrounds and experiences. There are no barriers to success. Two senior mental health specialists negotiated a job share arrangement. The arrangement works because the two women share similar values and ethics. A blind manager is easily able to fulfil his role with the aid of adaptive technology and his guide dog. Another manager who felt uncomfortable managing staff was able to 'reinvent himself' in a front-line role more suited to his skills, interests and abilities.

The organisation gives front line managers the skills to set expectations, have courageous conversations with staff and challenge inappropriate behaviour. Staff who do not improve their work performance may have their employment terminated.

The Operations Manager initiated a training program for local leaders. The program lets them understand different management and communication styles, map career paths and practice mindfulness. Managers are confident to share information and learn from one another. They see themselves as training their successors.

Staff have a good work ethic. They want to excel at work and so will take the initiative to resolve any problems they see and to pitch in to help others out. They are pleasant and friendly even when working under pressure. They might even volunteer at different health services. The challenge is to ensure that they have a good work-life balance.

The organisation has halved its work related injuries by learning from the past, preventing manual handling errors and educating staff. By assigning injured staff alternative duties, they are often able to return to work within 30 days. This aids their recovery.

## A badge of honour

The organisation understands the value of being recognised. It has introduced a sustainable recognition scheme that attracts 300 nominations each year. One hundred staff members might receive an award

from the chairperson at a special ceremony at the Frankston Arts Centre attended by nominees and their families. Award winners receive a badge for their lapel and a certificate. They wear their badge with pride.

The Associate Nurse Unit Manager was recently recognised for his outstanding care. He says he loves his job because he gets people better, gets them home and makes a difference to their lives. Although he is in charge of the ward and not involved in direct care, patients rated his care as excellent on more occasions than anyone else. This is because he is compassionate and easy going. He introduces himself to patients when they are admitted to hospital and explains what will happen to them during their stay to make them feel at ease. He plans their discharge even before their operation to ensure their return home is a smooth process. He encourages patients to be candid about everything from the food to staff attitudes when they complete their 'hotel slip' (patient satisfaction form). He encourages staff to be themselves, to do their best and to ask for help if they are struggling. He quickly addresses any racist comments patients may direct at staff members who were born overseas. Staff safety is paramount.

## Reflective practice

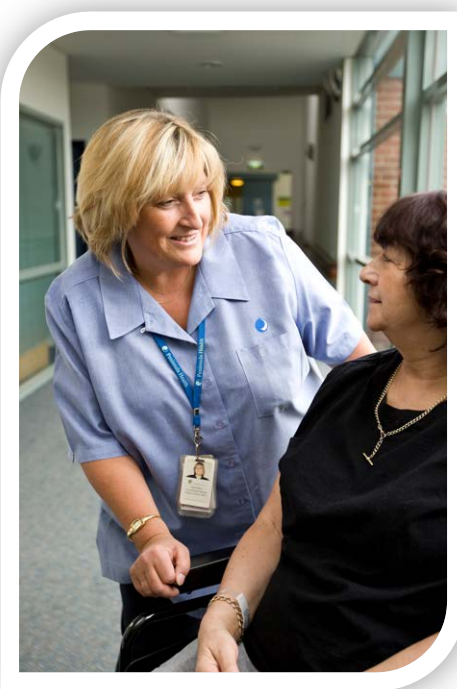
The organisation is guided by the principle of person centred care. Everyone is always looking for better ways of doing work and caring for clients. They might place a penguin mosaic in the garden to make it more interesting and welcoming to clients. They might introduce an alarm system into elderly clients' homes so they can continue to live independently in the community. They might introduce a specialist stroke unit to better cater for clients' needs. They might invite a visiting international expert in recovery to train staff working with people with Schizophrenia. They are always willing to try new things and to learn from mistakes.

Many of the clients have complex needs and so are looked after by a multidisciplinary team. Staff develop an optimal discharge plan for clients after talking to them, their family and other team members. In this way they have reduced duplication. The team debriefs each case to improve services.

Major change is handled well. Managers explain the reason for the change being made and meet with staff regularly to support them through the process. Planning days help to build relationships and bring staff together to collaborate on a common cause. The organisation is currently streamlining the documentation prepared by nurses, allied health workers and interns to enable them to spend more time with clients.

Change can sometimes mean the closing down of a service, the relocation of clients and the redeployment of staff. While these situations can be very stressful for everyone concerned, the organisation helps make them bearable through being compassionate and honest. Managers understand the impact on staff. They keep staff informed about what is going on and help them find jobs.

The organisation takes the risk of aggressive behaviours seriously. It has a full-time dedicated RISCE (Risk, Identification, Safety, Communication and Environment) Coordinator position. The Aggression Managers (a job share role) review every incidence of aggressive behaviour in the organisation and report to the board. They want to help staff understand why some clients cannot articulate their thoughts and instead resort to yelling, screaming or hitting. They also want to give staff the skills to calm situations down. One of their aims is to reduce the need for clients to be restricted or secluded.



*Stroke Nurse Practitioner, Carol Gore, attends to a patient*



The Aggression Managers have developed a training video based on their extensive knowledge of best practice when managing behaviours of concern. They provide online training and customise personal training after discussions with staff. While they prefer to observe a situation, they will step in to keep staff and clients safe. They can also deal with aggressive interactions between members of staff.

## **Future plans**

The CEO would like to share what the organisation has learned about engaging staff and improving outcomes for clients with other health services.

## 7. NURTURING A PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

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### At a glance

Organisation: Alfred Health  
Chief Executive Officer: Andrew Way  
Location: Caulfield, Sandringham, Prahran  
Size: 6000+  
Guiding phrases: trust, curiosity

Alfred Health is a major teaching hospital and attracts some of the brightest staff and students in the State. Having a questioning, open mind is natural to them. They are always ready to seek colleagues' professional opinions, question traditional approaches to work and gather clinical evidence to support outstanding patient care. They consider the impact of what they do on patients' welfare and learn from the best ideas in Australia and overseas.

### A deep connection to work

The organisation's culture is professional rather than corporate, managerial or hierarchical. The place feels dynamic. Professional opinions are respected regardless of role. Managers might be overheard commenting positively on things that the many students or interns have said. Staff work with a common purpose, taking great care and giving their full attention to everything they do. Everyone understands how each role contributes to the quality of patient care. The Ward Clerk says that while she doesn't work with patients directly, she helps those who do. When conflicting views arise, they are quickly settled in the patients' favour. 'What impact will this decision have on patients and does it make a difference to them?'

Research is core to how the organisation operates. Research findings influence clinical practice, which in turn can suggest future lines of inquiry. For example, in the absence of any international evidence about which form of infection control was best, the organisation conducted its own research. The resulting robust evidence gave clinicians greater comfort in deciding how to treat patients.

The CEO encourages research. It might reveal promising correlations to improve patient care. In some cases the organisation won't immediately find the answer to a research question; 'It's OK for staff to discuss mistakes and to learn from errors.'

The organisation wants to be the very best it can be. It looks far afield for inspiration including the Mayo Clinic. It is currently benchmarking its geriatric care against international standards. However, it is also showcasing its own practices to others. This includes analysing registry data, providing trauma training to the developing world and applying simple techniques to assist trauma patients and their families. In an emergency, people often don't remember much about what happened. Working with the patient's family, staff remind them about the reason they were admitted to the hospital, and give them practical information about their condition that will help speed recovery.

Staff have a 'can do' attitude. While they are open to suggestions for improving operations, they prefer to be involved in solving the problems themselves rather than in being told the answer. Managers support them in doing this.

### Strong teams

The organisation is lucky. 'It's a classic destination employer with the right culture to attract talented applicants.' While the specialist nature of the work might mean that there are only 25 people in the world

who can perform a particular role, the organisation does not 'drop its standards'. It will only recruit people who have both the right skills and values for the job.

The organisation's staff are diverse. They come from 'all walks of life'. They are generally polite, friendly and respectful towards one another, from the CEO to the most junior staff member. They are good with patients, carers and family. 'People stick out if they don't fit this mould.'

While the work itself provides intrinsic feedback, this does not replace the regular feedback given and received between managers and staff. At induction, the CEO tells new recruits: 'If you don't remember anything else from today, remember the importance of getting feedback on your work'.

The organisation recognises that health outcomes are sometimes not as good in regional Victoria as in metropolitan Melbourne because of limited access to specialist medical services. It wants to share its expertise with other parts of the State and is using some innovative ideas such as joint appointments, partnerships and technological solutions. Technology can be used for both teaching and quality care.

The CEO sponsors projects to create and sustain a culture of collaboration, innovation and excellence. When needed, these culture change projects have helped teams tackle problems, name unacceptable behaviours and reconnect with the organisation's purpose. Managers have come to respect such projects as they have seen a positive shift in team culture.



*Staff pledge to make improvements*

All staff are treated respectfully and honestly. The work is very intellectually demanding. If staff are not able to do the work, their manager will coach them, try to find them another job or encourage them to leave or retire. The manager's first priority is to support their staff and make the employment arrangement work. By taking this approach, staff don't later feel aggrieved or hurt. 'Their professional group does not close rank around them causing disharmony in the workplace. They leave the organisation well.' In other situations, the staff member may not be a good cultural fit for the organisation. If they are found guilty of wilful misconduct, their employment will be quickly terminated. If they are guilty of a criminal offence, the matter is referred to the police for investigation. If the behaviour concerns a patient, the organisation will ask the patient for permission to refer the matter on.

## Living the values

Everyone considers the organisation's vision, mission and four values to be important. There are many examples of how the values play out at work. Staff are open to being questioned and challenged. This leads to robust decisions. They collaborate well with each other and always want to make improvements. Clinicians make difficult decisions about the allocation of rare resources, such as organ donations, within the constraints of a moral and legal framework. They must decide on the right person to receive the transplant.

The CEO meets informally with his direct reports each Friday. A few other key forums bring the right people together to gain alignment and integration between the organisation's activities. The organisation

needs to make budgetary savings each year. It might look at alternative ways of doing things that meet Government priorities while also providing a better experience for patients. Staff and their managers have a shared understanding of why some things can't be done at the present time and are willing to adopt new ways of working.

In 2013, the organisation won the Victorian Premier's Award for Advancing Healthcare – Putting Patients First. This award was in recognition of the timely quality care (TQC) team based redesign initiative. A collaborative group of senior medical, nursing, organisational development and administrative staff with a range of clinical and leadership expertise was formed to influence change across the organisation. The group developed principles for the timely assessment, admission and treatment of patients to ensure they received the best possible care and stayed in hospital only for as long as clinically necessary. The group meets every Tuesday to review the data, note progress and solve any problems.

The organisation is currently reviewing its branding. The Organisational Development Team, Communications and other parts of the organisation are asking patients and their families for their opinion about the organisation. The feedback will help the organisation to decide how it wants to be seen in the future.

## Building trust

The organisation is open and honest with staff, patients and the media. 'Trust inoculates people against cynicism.' Staff won't follow people they don't trust. Disrespectful and incompetent people don't inspire trust. The organisation uses the VPSC's *People Matter Survey* in part to measure the level of trust amongst staff. It displays colourful infographic posters in each work area to summarise the survey results, what the organisation learnt and what it needs to do differently from now on. Teams are encouraged to discuss the results. Staff can provide the CEO with feedback on a specially designed postcard that is sent out with the survey results.

The organisation's performance data is updated and published daily on the intranet for all staff to see. It includes information such as the performance of HR and clinical teams, Emergency Department waiting lists, the rates of infection and the number of induction programs held. Some of the information is also published on the organisation's website and attracts very little media attention. With nothing to hide, there is nothing to report.

Falls and infection data is displayed on public notice boards in each ward. It provides a snapshot of the day and records progress against action plans. Patients are encouraged to 'Let us know' if they have important information for staff or any concerns about their treatment. Patients have an entitlement to understand what is happening and permission to ask questions. Their query can be escalated to a higher authority if necessary. Patients don't misuse the service. In the last seven months, the organisation has had eight phone calls from patients wanting more information. The organisation will correlate the number of phone calls against the number of incidences.

## Future plans

The CEO would like to see interdisciplinary education across the health service so that staff understand what the organisation does well and can learn from the 'pockets of excellence'. Communication between people is also important including communication between staff, between managers and staff, and between patients and clinicians. An important consideration is what needs to be communicated. For patients, it is about improving their health literacy so they can take charge of their own health.

## 8. A GREAT PLACE TO LEARN AND WORK

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### At a glance

Organisation: Eastern Health

Chief Executive Officer: Alan Lilly

Location: From Fitzroy to Matlock in the east including: Upper Ferntree Gully, Box Hill, Healesville, Ringwood East, Burwood East, Wantirna, Lilydale, Fitzroy

Size: 7000+

Guiding phrases: methodical, integrated

Eastern Health strives to be great in all that it does: partner to the local community, provider of health care to patients, employer of capable staff and sustainable manager of resources. Its efforts have been rewarded. For the past two years Eastern Health has been named the Victorian Premier's Metropolitan Health Service of the Year. Core to this remarkable achievement is the organisation's culture and the values that staff display every day in their interaction with others.

### The values are central

The CEO has been inspired by the research findings of The King's Fund, an independent charity working to improve the health system in England. The research has proven that culture is of paramount importance to the quality of patient care. The CEO wants everyone to understand this relationship and so has become a champion of the organisation's values. The organisation regularly measures how well the level of staff contentment correlates with patient outcomes.

The non-clinical managers take it in turn to walk around the wards each quarter to talk to a few patients about their personal experience of the hospital. Capitalising on the diverse background of both staff and patients, some of these conversations are conducted in languages other than English.

Values underpin everything the organisation does from orientation to the annual performance review. The organisation has no difficulty in recruiting staff, attracting applicants from within its catchment area and more broadly because of its positive employer brand. It actively manages the talent and career aspirations of its staff to ensure a sustainable workforce. The organisation employs few agency staff, relying instead on its enormous nurse bank and the retention of graduates.

Everyone wears a name badge to be welcoming and friendly to staff, patients and their families. The CEO welcomes new staff to the organisation at a series of special orientation and welcome events during the course of the year. New staff are assigned a buddy for the first three months of their employment to introduce them to team members, help them feel at home and provide them with a sounding board. They undergo mandatory training and meet with their manager to discuss their learning needs. They are expected to understand how the values apply to their work. This initiative has had fantastic results. Staff retention is high and the culture has improved.

Managers help staff to focus on the behaviours that best demonstrate the values. They regularly provide staff with feedback on their performance and identify terrific performers. They also counsel staff who have poor behaviour and may encourage them to leave the organisation.

The CEO says 'communication is not an optional extra'. He personally writes a fortnightly e-news update to keep everyone informed in addition to other weekly communications. The leadership team meets bimonthly to discuss how the organisation is performing across program areas. This meeting is regularly opened up to a wider audience of all managers. These staff forums might be attended by 300 people. The

CEO wants people to participate and contribute to discussions. However, he is also mindful of the need for managers to have meeting free weeks throughout the year to allow them to plan priorities, organise workloads and build resilience. He sends out a calendar reminder about this in January.

## Inspirational people

The chair of the board is well known for her service to medical administration and to the community, particularly in the areas of practice standards, regulation and professional education. She chaired the Australian Medical Council working party that developed *Good Medical Practice: A Code of Conduct for Doctors in Australia*.

The chair and her directors create the right environment for the values to be embedded in the organisation. They support the CEO and set the tone from the top. The CEO is a good role model. He is enthusiastic, committed, warm and personable. His stable leadership team inspires confidence and trust.

Staff and volunteers are rewarded for their exemplary behaviour. The *Aspire to Inspire (A2i) Awards* are a significant event on the organisation's calendar each year. They are akin to 'The Oscars'. Last year 92 nominees from across all sites and services were recognised for their commitment to the organisation's seven values and five key priorities at a marquee event attended by more than 300 people including distinguished members of the community. All nominees received a beautifully designed commemorative booklet outlining their contribution to the organisation. Award winners also received 'the gift of time' - one additional week's leave - and had their photos on display at each site. The awards program is made possible by the generous financial support of corporate sponsors. Information about the program is published in the annual report and EHQ (Eastern Health Quarterly).



*The 2014 Aspire to Inspire award winners*

## The right strategic direction

The organisation has taken a very methodical approach to developing its strategic directions, goals and initiatives. The process took one year because the leadership team wanted everyone to get involved. They established a reference group chaired by the CEO, conducted a literature review and identified issues from the VPSC's *People Matter Survey* and exit interviews. They invited managers to identify local issues and to rate priorities for the organisation given its limited resources. They presented information at staff forums. They used feedback to promote, embed and practice new ways of working.

The organisation's many sites and services were once siloed. They are now integrated with one creed: 'Eastern Health in name, in thinking and service delivery towards attaining its vision of great health and wellbeing'. They are proud of what they have achieved but always willing to evaluate, refine and change to become even better. The organisation monitors performance across all sites using a score card with 91

KPIs (key performance indicators) including 18 related to people management. They report on this data monthly to the board and use it to drive organisation-wide improvements. They also encourage staff to 'speak up' and give feedback directly to the CEO who responds in a timely manner.

The organisation achieved full accreditation from the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards for providing high standards of care and safety across all sites and services. Recently, the organisation was able to temporarily accommodate Epworth staff and patients at the new Box Hill Hospital while their water damaged premises were being repaired.

The organisation offers a range of attractive benefits to staff, including salary packaging, the option to purchase extra leave and opportunities for personal development. Staff are comfortable that people of any age, gender or racial background will be treated equitably. The organisation seeks to retain its skilled mature-aged staff. It conducts forums on living well and living long, and offers support to staff planning their retirement. The organisation also seeks to increase the number of Aboriginal staff it employs through promoting opportunities to college students, offering traineeships and inviting existing staff to disclose their Aboriginality.

The organisation celebrates its diversity through events such as the *Taste of Harmony* where people bring along their special homemade dish or local take-away favourite. It also celebrates its successes, including the winning of awards or the opening of new buildings, with special events such as the *Great Cake Celebration*. Food in the cafeteria has also been improved and a gym introduced to improve fitness.

The CEO is a safety leader and champions both physical and psychological health. He regularly meets with local OHS (occupational health and safety) representatives to discuss safety issues. In a recent audit of the health sector, the Victorian Auditor General's Office commended the organisation on its safety culture and better practices. The organisation also conforms to all requirements of the Australian and New Zealand Standards.

The organisation encourages staff to achieve a work-life balance by taking planned leave so that they return to work well rested. The savings from the reduction in unplanned leave is then reinvested in staff development. The CEO quips: 'If we spend our money wisely, we can still have Nescafe Blend'.

## Providing opportunities

While the Organisational Development Team is small, it has a big impact on operations. Many new or aspiring managers have no formal training in management. The team helps them to assess their readiness for a management role by explaining what is involved, the type of experience they will need and the support systems in place to help them reach their potential. The support includes a panel of external coaches and internal mentors. All managers have a 360 degree review of their management style and can learn to become more effective. It's important to have the right people in the right jobs.

The organisation has close partnerships with Monash, La Trobe and Deakin Universities. It provides professional development opportunities, research grants and staff scholarships. For example, more than 70 staff received scholarships to support their undergraduate and post graduate studies.

The National Health Service Study Tour Scholarship gave 11 talented staff the chance to visit the United Kingdom in 2014. They came back motivated and ready to report to the managers forum on what they had learnt and what they planned to do differently. The next tour will be to New Zealand in 2015. The organisation has had an overwhelming response to the program.

The organisation's change management model is influenced by staff experience and has a number of sensible controls. The basis for the change must be sound. It must have been approved by the leadership team and be communicated well to those affected by it. When a ward was recently closed, the staff held a farewell ceremony. Their HR case manager dealt quickly with any issues that arose and helped staff find new jobs. For some, the new job was better suited to their interests.

Staff can call HR Connect at any time to get a quick answer to their HR related questions or concerns. The organisation anticipates the type of questions staff might ask from previous calls and from things

happening at work. In this way, the right information gets out. More complex matters are referred to HR for advice.

## Future plans

'Success breeds success.' The organisation now has a good reputation in the community. Staff are willing to recommend its services to family and friends. While the organisation's performance has improved and staff are engaged and happy at work, the CEO believes 'there is always opportunity for improvement'. He would like to 'minimise variability so that every interaction is positive'. Staff at all levels can show leadership by being agents of culture. They see issues firsthand and can intervene. He wants to see them developing their confidence and capability.



## 9. OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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We would like to thank the following people for sharing their stories about great workplaces in the Victorian public sector:

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