



## Regional restaurant deals with the skills shortage

With labour shortages a constant problem for many companies in the hospitality sector, one Bright family restaurant has managed to overcome this issue by participating in a free workforce planning review by the Victoria's Office of Small Business (OSB) to plan ahead in anticipation of a possible hiring drought.



The program, known as *My Business, My People* is targeted at assisting Victoria's small to medium businesses in better planning for their workforce needs. The program offers businesses with a free workforce planning diagnostic followed up by a customised action plan for the business.

With 23 years in operation, the **Cosy Kangaroo** family restaurant is as much a Bright icon as are the ski resorts around the area. The eatery has won numerous awards including the 2005 Victorian family restaurant of the year, and the Alpine Business Award for dining in 2003, 2004, 2006.

With about 25 employees at any one time (with approximately eight equivalent full-time staff and the rest casuals), the 100-seat restaurant located in the heart of Bright has been busy catering to locals and visitors alike.

According to Sally Cocks, co-owner and manager of the Cosy Kangaroo, with the current low unemployment rates across Australia and the locality of the restaurant in regional Victoria, employing staff has been challenging for the business especially in recent times.

"We're finding it harder to get staff these days. Firstly, Bright is already a small community so there aren't a lot of people to choose from. To make matters worse, people's expectations of work and what they want to do have changed over the years. This is especially more so with the younger crowd that are looking for restaurant work," said Ms Cocks. "Our restaurant hours are quite long, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week, and that in itself puts potential employees off."

Some of the other challenges faced by the Cosy Kangaroo include:

- Less interest from potential employees due to more upmarket restaurants opening up in the area
- Irregular and long hours in a restaurant, leading to a decline in the number of job applicants
- Competition from other industries who can provide consistent hours for employees, which can lure employees away from work in hospitality

Tourism & Hospitality, one of the service providers commissioned by OSB to conduct this program worked with the Cosy Kangaroo on the workforce planning diagnostic and action plan.

### The challenges

- Less interest from employees
- Irregular and long hours
- Competition from other industries



“It was great that the consultant came to us. Being a small business and with time such a precious commodity, the on-site visit saved us a lot of time. If not for this, we would have thought twice about enrolling for this program,” said Ms Cocks.

#### The solutions

- Revise menu prices
- Improve website
- Reward good staff performance
- Re-assess job descriptions

In all, Sally said that the consultant spent about 12 hours with her going through the diagnostic and the action plan. “It was good to get new ideas from someone outside our business. It gave us a different perspective on our company. It also helped to have the consultant reaffirm that some of the strategies which we are currently undertaking are the right ones and that we are on the right track.

As part of the action plan put forward by Tourism & Hospitality, an employee value survey was recommended. Ms Cocks says that conducting the survey was a good process for the company. “We found out how employees felt about working with us and what they were looking for. This allowed us to look into developing initiatives that were in line with employee needs,” added Sally. “We were pleased to find out that on the whole, we received a four out of five points by most of our employees.”

Some of the other suggestions proposed by Tourism & Hospitality included:

- Revising the restaurant’s menu prices
- Improving the Cosy Kangaroo’s website
- Rewarding staff and recognising good performance
- Reassessing the appraisal process and job descriptions

“We’re not a business that just wants to keep hiring staff. We’re genuinely interested in keeping our present staff and making them happy so that they’ll continue to work for us.

It is still early days for the Cosy Kangaroo when it comes to alleviating the business’ employment situation. However, Sally reckons that having gone through the diagnostic and action plan, the restaurant is in a much better position to tackle its workforce issues.

“The program has been very beneficial for us especially since we’re located in the country and don’t have many opportunities to speak on business issues with a consultant at this level. The *My Business, My People* program is a fantastic initiative by the Victorian Government. Furthermore, the OSB website provides very practical tips for businesses which are very useful for any company,” said Sally.

“We’re very interested in proceeding onto the next step of the program which are the management capability programs. We feel that doing this would enable us to be better prepared to address our workforce situation and develop initiatives that are in line with our business objectives.”

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