



Travelling body tackles skills shortage

For many non-profit organisations, finding skilled talent and volunteers can be a challenge, especially when having to do this on a tight budget.

Travellers Aid, a not-for-profit organisation in Melbourne, found that this was the main challenge it faced in recruiting and retaining staff.



Travellers Aid has been offering travel and support services to Australian and International travellers for over 90 years. The organisation provides assistance to travellers at the point of need through the provision of material aid and social support through its Homeward Bound and Emergency Relief Service.

In 2006-07, Travellers Aid assisted more than 100,000 travellers in need across its two Melbourne CBD locations – Travellers Aid at Southern Cross train station, and at its city centre location in Swanston Street which comprises of a 74-seat social enterprise café.

While the organisation was travelling well from a commercial sense, its Chief Executive, Jodie Willmer, decided that the organisation would benefit for participating in the State Government's *My Business, My People* program.

The program was launched in early 2007 and provides a free diagnostic to small businesses as well as an action plan to address any issues raised through the diagnostic.

"The benefits of being able to talk to someone outside our organisation and to receive some practical tips and solutions on how we can address our workforce situation, has been invaluable," said Ms Willmer.

Travellers Aid has 25 equivalent full-time employees and 45 volunteers. "As a non-profit organisation, the biggest obstacle for us has been finding creative ways to incentivise and reward employees," Ms Willmer said. "Unlike commercial companies, we don't have big budgets, so we have to be clever about how we go about this."

Ms Willmer said she learnt about the *My Business, My People* program through Tourism & Hospitality's newsletter. Tourism & Hospitality is one of three organisations that successfully tendered to conduct the program.

"We felt that this was something that was going to be beneficial for Travellers Aid and would help us address and find solutions to our workforce issues," said Willmer. "We hoped that by undergoing this free workforce planning diagnostic and action plan that it will help us to increase opportunities for our staff and volunteers within our organisation, be it through promotions or taking on different job functions within Travellers Aid."

John Sweetman, a consultant from Tourism & Hospitality, conducted the workforce planning diagnostic on Travellers Aid and prepared an action plan.

The challenges

- Finding skilled volunteers
- Tight budget
- Not-for profit organisation



The solutions

- Review organisational structure
- Improve HR procedures
- Develop an IT plan
- Create performance management system
- Develop mentoring program
- Increase staff skills

One of the recommendations was to provide multi-skilling opportunities for staff and in doing so increase productivity for the organisation and expand employees' skill sets. "John talked us through the steps we needed to consider to do this and the timing for the program."

Ms Willmer said that some of the other suggestions Mr Sweetman proposed included:

- Reviewing Travellers Aid's organisational structure
- Reassessing and upgrading the organisation's HR procedures
- Developing an IT plan and up-skilling employees in this area
- Creating a performance management system where all staff are set key performance indicators for their job roles and receive up-to-date job descriptions
- Developing a mentoring program for employees
- Increasing staff workforce skills

Ms Willmer said Travellers Aid intends to take on board and roll out most of the initiatives recommended.

"Our employees are keen to receive more training and development as well as learning new skills," Ms Willmer said. "The suggestions put forward have been extremely helpful and we hope that the end result for this would be that Travellers Aid is viewed by other businesses as a leader and innovator for the non-profit sector."

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