

Flex Works Aotearoa

Project Overview

Developing the tools and guidance for flexible work outcomes

July 2010



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Project Summary

Flex Works Aotearoa is a national project to provide stakeholders (regional and central government, non-government organisations, employers, individual workers, unions, tertiary institutions, and broader society) with the tools and guidance to achieve flexible work outcomes.

Modelled on an initiative of the same name in Houston, Texas, the project's primary objective is to ensure that all parties can harness the economic, environmental, workplace, social and family gains offered by flexible work, capitalising on New Zealand's current legislative framework (which gives some workers the right to seek flexible work options) and the availability of digital tools that support flexi-work for many occupations.

Flex Works Aotearoa is a collaboration project, bringing together disparate stakeholder groups with a shared interest in flexible work, building on their individual progress to date, and delivering practical shared outcomes across sectors.

Accelerating Aotearoa is an established, independent Not for Profit which has delivered measurable success in collaborative public/private initiatives its five years of operation. With its history of delivering innovative outcomes, Accelerating Aotearoa is well placed to unify stakeholders through the Flex Works Aotearoa project and achieve shared flexible work outcomes, namely:

- improved worker satisfaction, productivity and retention,
- workplace efficiencies and economic benefits (for individual enterprises and the country generally),
- supporting under-served communities such as carers, people with chronic illnesses, and the disabled so they can participate in paid employment,
- reduced road congestion,
- environmental and transport infrastructure savings,
- and accelerating uptake and use of digital tools to support remote and flexible work.

Project Background

Flex Works Aotearoa evolved from the early work of national non-profit Carers NZ, the peak body supporting New Zealand's 420,000+ carers of family members, friends, whanau and aiga who are ill, elderly, or have disabilities.

Carers NZ's Work Life Care! initiative, begun in 2007 to help carers remain in paid work through the effective use of flexible and remote work, now has strong support from multi-stakeholders including national employer body Business NZ and the NZ Council of Trade Unions.

Carers NZ is an advisory participant in a Government reference group currently reviewing New Zealand's flexible work legislation, which gives New Zealanders providing care for a family member the statutory right to request flexible working conditions.

Carers NZ is also the Secretariat for the NZ Carers Alliance, a coalition of 42 national non-profits which partnered with the Government to develop and monitor the delivery of the 2008 New Zealand Carers' Strategy. The Strategy's five year Action Plan has a heavy emphasis on supporting carers to participate in paid employment, with Carers NZ a member of an across government working group which regularly meets to ensure these actions are being appropriately implemented.

Since 2007 Carers NZ has investigated flexible work legislation and programs in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, and evaluated their merits for adapted use in New Zealand. It proposes to use the large population of working carers and their employers to test innovation workplace concepts in New Zealand; these will inform the development of effective flexible work practices for all workers.

Carers NZ and its Work Life Care! partners are now building on this early work, and the milestones enshrined in the Carers' Strategy Action Plan, to deliver flexible and remote work information, advice, learning and support to a broad stakeholder network: families with health and disability needs, government, employers, and other stakeholders.

Phased Approach

During 2009 Carers NZ engaged with British Telecom (BT) and sought its guidance about how to integrate the broad range of government, business, social and worker interests inherent in flexible work activity into a meaningful, nationwide project in New Zealand.

BT's Director of People and Policy, Caroline Waters, visited New Zealand in September 2009, and an outcome of her visit was the development of a strategic collaboration framework for flexible work practice in New Zealand, modelled on a proven and successful approach used in the United Kingdom.

Caroline recommended that a phased approach be developed in New Zealand, beginning with a flexible work awareness and resource development program to support a substantial, under-served community of workers: family carers. One in three to five of every global population has caring commitments for an elderly, ill, injured, or disabled friend or family member; a majority of these people are of workforce age.

Modelled on the UK experience, successes and resources from a carer-focused flexible work program can be applied to a larger scale population (Flex Works Aotearoa proposes a large urban region such as the Auckland Super City, Phase II), and then to New Zealand's complete urban-rural population (Phase III).

Leadership from Accelerating Aotearoa

Concurrently, various government initiatives to promote the benefits of flexible work since 2007 have not led to the broad, sustained social messaging needed to encourage remote

and flexible work as an everyday practice in New Zealand. This leadership gap is a barrier to worker, workplace, and economic productivity in our country.

New South Wales' Working Carers Gateway, Britain's Employers for Carers, and Houston's Flex in the City (now Flex Works) initiatives have provided sound context for a flexible work project in New Zealand, providing tools and guidance to stimulate innovative work practices and draw stakeholders together for this purpose.

A strong collaboration partner is needed to lead this work, and it is fitting that the Flex Works Aotearoa initiative progress under the auspices of Accelerating Aotearoa, which has a shared interest in supporting, developing, and/or delivering collaboration based programs that improve New Zealand's economic performance, worker and enterprise productivity, the lives and careers of under-served New Zealanders, digital learning opportunities for youth, and the collective social good.

Flex Works Aotearoa Rationale

Phase I: Carer Leadership Initiative

Up to one in five of the New Zealand workforce has caring responsibilities for an ill, injured, disabled or frail elderly friend or family member. Census 2006 found that at least 420,000 New Zealanders care for a family member or friend at home, or in another location. Carers NZ believes the true number of New Zealand carers to exceed 750,000, based on global metrics.

As the population ages, more working New Zealanders will have caring commitments, and all New Zealanders can expect to give or receive family care during their lives.

Nearly 90% of New Zealand carers are of workforce age (15 to 65), and almost 10% of young New Zealanders (aged 15 to 25) have caring responsibilities at a time when they are juggling secondary and tertiary education, and building a foundation of workplace experience and saving for typical family goals such as home ownership (*Source: Census 2006*).

A study by the University of Auckland in 2008 found that of 300 carers interviewed, just 8 have remained in paid employment due to the stresses of juggling caring and employment. Often carers work below their qualifications and experience to remain in paid work.

Opportunities for flexible work, and the use of technology and communications to work remotely from home, offer scope for carers to make full use of their qualifications and experience, and for employers to have access to (or to retain) these. This ability enhances personal wellbeing, household income, ability to save for retirement, and carers' ability to contribute to the national economy.

For young carers, the demands of their role can be a cause of early departure from the education system; concern for these students is a factor in Auckland University's review of human resource and student support policies, to work toward making them more carer friendly.

BT: Global Benchmarks

BT has adopted flexible work policies for carers as a means to retain skilled digital, design, management, and general staff, and has found that across its workforce such policies have led to improved worker productivity, significant cost savings, reduction in absenteeism, and other benefits.

Its successful piloting of flexible work programs for the carers it employs led to a broad rollout of flexi programs across BT's worldwide workforce.

An outcome of BT's focus on carers has been recognition of BT as a global leader in flexible work practice, and a more international role for Caroline Waters, who now shares BT's

knowledge with businesses, governments, learning institutions, and stakeholder conferences around the world.

She acts as an advisor to the British government about flexible work policy, and is the chair of Employers for Carers, a multi-stakeholder non-government organisation in the UK with public, private, and NGO participants.

Caroline Waters has agreed to act as a formal mentor to Carers NZ to support the development of a national flexible work collaboration for carers, and to share with Flex Works Aotearoa BT's significant body of research, corporate metrics, human resource policy, and other resources to inform the New Zealand project. In her senior role for BT, Caroline will also provide ongoing advice and mentorship to the broader Flex Works Aotearoa project.

Phase I Objectives

Flex Works Aotearoa will be a three phase project modelled on the successful BT (UK) and Flex Works/Flex in the City (US and Australia) flexible work initiatives.

Phase I Objectives are to:

1. Confirm a Project Steering Group with participation from (in the first instance) Accelerating Aotearoa Inc, Carers NZ, the NZ Carers Alliance, Business NZ, the NZCTU, the Department of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development (encompassing Work and Income and Career Services), Bupa NZ, and Caroline Waters (representing BT and Employers for Carers UK).
2. Develop and make freely available helpful information to raise awareness among carers and employers of the mutual benefits of remote and flexible work for this population, and to promote the benefits through media, workshop, and stakeholder collaboration activity.
3. To migrate this information to Carers NZ's website, which acts as a portal for support information for carers (and include, through a contracted partnership with MSD, government information for carers).
4. To establish strategic online linkages to this information for carers and employers across multi-stakeholder networks.
5. To initiate and promote opportunities for collaboration and participation in Phase I activities to support stakeholders that wish to engage in productive remote and flexible work activity.
6. To build on global collaboration opportunities with BT, Employers for Carers, Flex Works Houston, Flex in the City Melbourne, and the NSW Working Carers Gateway, to inform the activities of Phases I to III of the New Zealand project.
7. To build awareness of and support for Flex Works Aotearoa to ensure commitment to Phases II and III of the project, flowing from goodwill and outcomes achieved during Phase I.

Note

Some Phase II and Phase III activities will be undertaken concurrently with Phase I: developing partnerships within a large urban population base (Super City), and a national rollout of social messaging about the economic, productivity, family, and environmental benefits of flexible work (achieved through communications, messaging via stakeholders' 'network of networks', government engagement and promotion, and integrated media strategies with all Flex Works Aotearoa stakeholders).

Early work on Flex Works Aotearoa began in 2009, with participation for Stage I already advanced with key stakeholders, and many information resources already developed and available for project use.

Strategic Linkages and Outcomes, Accelerating Aotearoa Inc

A significant focus of Accelerating Aotearoa's current work is enhancing the skills and opportunities of under-served New Zealanders. Other aligned purposes with the Flex in the City Aotearoa project are:

- ***Attracting youth to tertiary courses with digital content,***
- ***Providing youth with opportunities to make informed choices in tertiary education and ensure their study is relevant to future labour market needs, and***
- ***Connecting youth to the job market and supporting them on the pathway between tertiary study and work.***

Accelerating Aotearoa successes in these areas complement the aims of Flex Works Aotearoa, including a Phase I objective to help young carers identify tertiary learning pathways, and make informed choices about learning and work opportunities. Its leadership will ensure enduring, strategic flexible work outcomes across sectors.

Flex Works Aotearoa Project Assumptions

- While New Zealand now has legislation giving some workers the right to request flexible work, and many projects (public and private) have confirmed the social, economic, and family advantages of flexi-work practices, currently this work has not been strategically integrated across stakeholder networks for enduring outcomes.
- Accelerating Aotearoa has the mandate to lead the Flex Works Aotearoa project given its history of delivering strategic outcomes for under-served communities, and building collaborative linkages between government, tertiaries, employers, working people, and general society.
- Considerable existing commitment to Phase I project objectives has evolved amongst Steering Group participants since 2007; this commitment will accelerate linkages and outcomes for Flex Works Aotearoa during Phase I of the project.
- Without Flex Works Aotearoa, the strategic benefit of past work relating to flexible work policies and practices by government, NGOs, unions and the private sector may not yield long-term benefits for individual stakeholders, or for the New Zealand economy.

Project Constraints and Dependencies

Flex Works Aotearoa is a collaboration project involving multiple stakeholders. Limitations and internal/external dependencies that could impact the success of the project include:

Constraints:

- Steering Group members are senior people with limited time to participate in frequent meetings, so the Project needs to make good use of the Internet and telecommunications, and regular reporting, to ensure quality participation.
- Multi-stakeholders and Steering Group members are geographically dispersed, so there is a high dependence on the Internet, telecommunications, and reports for Project communications.

Dependencies:

- Project success is dependent on quality participation across sectors (public, private, NGO and community entities).
- Phase I has a strong partnership element between Accelerating Aotearoa as the project sponsor, and Carers NZ, the national peak body representing New Zealand's community of carers and their supporters (including government).
- Delivery of Phases II and III of the Flex Works Aotearoa project will depend on the ongoing involvement of many Phase I stakeholders.
- Phases II and III cannot be fully delivered without resource commitments (including funding) from relevant stakeholders/sponsors.

Key Project Linkages

- Employers for Carers (UK): www.employersforcarers.org
- Flex Works Houston, USA: www.flexworks.org
- Flex in the City, Melbourne, Australia
- Working Carers Gateway, NSW, Australia; www.workingcarers.org.au
- British Telecom's Flexible Work Policies/Initiatives/Research