

# Youth employment

## A BUSINESS CENTRIC SOLUTION

Leah Gates, General Manager of Employment with the Auckland Chamber of Commerce explains how an employer centric programme to prepare youth for employment, benefits business and also provides solutions to the broader implications of engaging youth in productive outcomes.

'High youth unemployment statistics impact on the standard of living across our whole city. It leaves large sectors of our community battling the effects of negative self-esteem and social exclusion, not to mention hampering economic productivity and the growing costs of social welfare to the tax paying public,' explains Leah.

To make headway with this economic and community problem the Auckland Chamber has invested eight years in building an impressive youth employment service that would challenge business' idea of the Chamber as a conservative, pinstripes and CBD focused entity.

In addition to the central city office, the Chamber also runs an office of 20 staff in the centre of Manukau.

'Unemployment is a major issue for South Auckland but it is also the home to our city's main industrial areas where businesses need access to a pool of talented labour. Our employment initiatives work because we are where we are needed most,' says Leah

Technology has become the youth candidate's competitive advantage.

Leah's team facilitate two youth programmes – CadetMax and Career Start. The success of the CadetMax youth model has meant that over the past 12 months the Auckland Chamber's efforts have expanded and its sister programme, Career Start, has taken off in Glen Innes, Panmure and Point England.

Career Start operates in partnership with the Tamaki Redevelopment Company and is integral to achieving the wider objectives of helping the Tamaki region achieve its goal of social and economic revitalisation.

'We are making a real impact. This is because we have the networks within the business community to connect talented and motivated young people with local industry and to guide them into becoming productive members of our workforce,' says Leah.

Auckland Chamber of Commerce has placed 700 young people into meaningful employment thanks to the CadetMax and Career Start Youth Employment programmes.

As the success stories mount up other businesses step up to take this opportunity to have young, motivated talent join their team and bring with them the backing and mentorship of the Chamber for their first 12 months of employment.

'When times get tough for business, it's always the new entrants to the workforce who suffer most,' says Leah. 'But as our economic climate improves employers become more willing to give first time job hunters a start and they see the potential and economic imperative of developing their own skilled workforce.'

Roles in the field of administration which traditionally valued past experience are now becoming hot options for young people because of their competence with new technology, especially in relation to social media and telecommunications. Technology has become the youth candidate's competitive advantage.

## CHALLENGES

### Casualisation of the workforce

'Unfortunately we are seeing a casualization of the workforce by businesses. Casual contracts have their place in companies with fluctuating workloads. However, many job opportunities for young staff are initially casual as a means of proving their value before being offered a permanent contract by the business. Some employers believe this

will provide them better protection in case untested staff members don't measure up,' explains Leah.

The Auckland Chamber's view is that employers will be better placed to get the most out of new staff if they embrace permanent contracts and the protection the 90 Day Trial Period term is designed to give them.

'By putting youth who are new to the work environment on casual contracts employers are actually creating a sense of uncertainty which tends not to lead to fully committed working relationships for either party,' says Leah.

### Transport and Drivers Licences

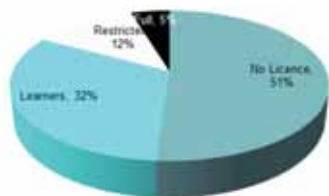
Auckland Chamber has been at the forefront of advocating and seeking solutions around the single biggest barrier to entry for young people getting into jobs – drivers licences. Leah estimates that 70% of entry level jobs in Auckland require a minimum of a restricted or full driver's license.

'The jobs that require a driver's license include most trades and any kind of shift work, like the hospitality sector, manufacturing or warehousing and logistics. These industries represent prime opportunities for young career starters to make their mark but they just can't get past the basic hurdle of being able to reliably and safely get to work,' says Leah.

'We know that employer tolerance for lateness or no shows due to transport issues is zero and public transport access in many areas in Auckland is inadequate or unreliable outside of normal 9 – 5 commute times,' says Leah. 'In Auckland that means that unless your place of work is on the main train line or within safe walking distance then your job prospects are extremely limited.'

This wouldn't be a problem, except that 80% of CadetMax and Career Start job seekers have no licence or a learner's licence and are therefore unable to drive to work. ♦

\* CRSI Young Driver Intelligence Assessment 2013.



» This is not just an issue for youth from low-socio economic backgrounds. In New Zealand today, amongst those aged between 15 – 24 years, 90,000\* have not even started the driver's licensing process.

Leah is convinced providing this core skill is the silver bullet to addressing the problems surrounding youth unemployment.

Auckland Chamber's CadetMax and Career Start shepherd cadets through the driving licence process including instructors and paying for tests. The Auckland Chamber is one of the largest driving licence providers in South Auckland.

In addition to facilitating practical training the Chamber is also active on the Young Drivers National Working Group alongside the NZTA and ACC.

'We want to have a voice in any decision making on this issue as it plays such a strategic part in the solution to Auckland's youth employment statistics,' insists Leah.

Addressing youth unemployment will require a shift in thinking for many businesses and perhaps a leap of faith. But the Chamber believes that their CadetMax and Career Start programmes provide a positive and safe model for both employer and employee.

#### Career Advice

Taking a longer view, the other critical barrier to employment for young Aucklanders, according to Leah, is access to good career advice during their final years of school.

David Turner, International Consultant in youth employment for 30 years recently advocated in a presentation to Auckland leaders, that in order to make good career training decisions during the final three years of schooling and on into relevant tertiary training, young people when aged between 12-15 years old need a minimum of four meaningful engagements with employment including work experience, site visits, guest speakers and support from home e.g. observing family members in their workplace or a family business.

'Our work to date has shown us that most kiwi kids, especially from lower socio economic groups, are not getting anywhere near this sort of influence and guidance,' says Leah. 'As a result they make subject and course choices without any awareness of actual job opportunities.'

We have a major debt problem looming as a new generation is left with student loans to repay for courses that are not consistent with the individual's job aspirations, not the right match or that offer skills few if any employers actually want.

It's almost immoral that we allow young people to take on these levels of debt without testing a job to see if it's a realistic fit or without any sort of assurance of job prospects at the end of it all,' adds Leah.

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## What are CadetMax and Career Start?

CadetMax is an eight year partnership between the Auckland Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry of Social Development. CadetMax offers young people from South Auckland a path away from welfare dependency and into careers.

Career Start is a sister programme in partnership with the Tamaki Redevelopment Company. The programme connects local youth with local employment opportunities, thereby helping the Tamaki region achieve its goal of social and economic revitalisation.

- Young people (aged 18 – 24) complete a rigorous induction course designed and run by the Chamber team.
- The Chamber taps into its business networks to source job opportunities and work experience for Cadets and works to connect cadets with those opportunities.
- The Chamber and the Cadets embark on an intensive job hunt process. Computer facilities and internet access is provided on site within the Chamber's Manukau office base.
- Cadets are prepared and supported throughout interview stage.
- Cadets study, practice and sit their drivers' licences. They may attend other short courses to improve skills, such as forklift licences.
- Once employed the Chamber supports cadets for 12 months, providing mentor support to ensure the transition into employment runs smoothly for both cadet and business.

For more information on how your business can participate and benefit from the CadetMax or Career Start programme please call **0800 709 907**.