



MAKE THE MAHI MATTER

RATS MAKING A DIFFERENCE: A growing supply of Rapid Antigen Tests is helping businesses to keep operating.

Omicron is proving a challenge for businesses faced with staff absence and supply disruption. Andrew Ashton looks at what those challenges mean for business continuity and why it's more important than ever for businesses to focus on core functions in order to 'make the mahi matter'.

About 5 percent of Tairāwhiti's population now either has or has had Covid-19 in this Omicron outbreak and many others have had to isolate as close contacts. This has been a challenge for businesses, but many have already adapted or refocused.

Isolation times for positive cases and household contacts reduced to seven days from 10 at the end of last week but that still means employers will have to manage multiple workers being off sick or in isolation for a full week.

"At a time when every business is facing new challenges and Covid-related issues influence everything we do it's important that, as owners and leaders, the work we do now matters," says BDO Gisborne managing partner Mike Torrie.

"For many focusing on the next two months and what is important, to keep the business functioning is the No.1 priority."

This was a clear message from the Preparing for Omicron workshop provided a few weeks ago to local businesses: "Have a mindset which is willing to take up the challenge in a changing environment and focus on the issues you can control, not those which

are out of your control."

The workshop, put together by Mr Torrie along with Stu Potter and Pete Jarratt, senior consultants from BDO Gisborne's people and performance team, focused on three key components for businesses:

- Supply of goods and services into the business;
- The resources you have — including staff — to turn those inputs into outputs and the interaction with the market to sell them; and
- The ability to know what margins you have and how you may be able to maintain them in the current inflationary world.

"Once you have identified these key components, what are the key risks which could disrupt their flow or operation? What plan do you have to mitigate these? In technical terms, you need a business continuity plan," they told The Herald.

"Once you have this, then committing it to paper and sharing it with those who can help, but also keep you on track, is a big part of tackling the current uncertain scenario we are all facing."

An important saying was, "what you can measure, you can manage".

"So, what are you going to measure every hour, every day, every week to know where you stand against your plan?"

"Communication is key. We suggest you are deliberate in a communication plan that provides for the identification of the key stakeholders you need to support your plan, and therefore you need to keep the level of communication high. This may include key suppliers or your bank manager."

"As with the business continuity plan, ensuring you take action and are proactive with your comms will go a long way to alleviating levels of anxiety, as assumptions are either dispelled or confirmed as facts are discovered. Once we have these we can then start to 'tweak' our plans based on new and verified information."

"Your plans and actions need to be ever-evolving to accommodate the changes we are experiencing."

"Finally, 'make the mahi matter'! It is the time to be focused on the NOW. We all need to shorten our horizons to manage our cashflows and reserves, engage with critical suppliers, support and work with staff to manage needs both at work and at home, and keep our customers informed of facts which may change their expectations of delivery etc."

"The opportunity to take positives from this experience and learn is real, but what it also needs is a mindset that is focused on plans which you have identified, the risks, and the actions to be taken."

Regional economic development agency Trust Tairāwhiti's focus during the Omicron outbreak has been on providing one-on-one support to businesses through the Regional Business Partner programme.

"Earlier this month we engaged BDO Gisborne to hold the Preparing for Omicron workshop . . . about 20 businesses attended," Trust Tairāwhiti regional business growth manager Midge Te Kani said.

Trust Tairāwhiti's latest CEO report said the workshop highlighted that businesses needed help to prepare for Omicron and adversity.

"It is clear that businesses are wanting to comply with government mandates and regulation, but are focused on getting on with business. It has also reassured us that businesses have become more adaptive and better prepared."

"Business highlighted key

challenges they are facing amid Omicron, including supply chain issues, increased costs, recruitment and staff retention, and a lack of clarity around government changes to business requirements. There was also a lack of information around access and use of Rapid Antigen Tests.

"The business growth team continue to assess the demand for further workshops or webinars."

Mr Te Kani said the trust was also sending out weekly communications to its business database with the latest government updates and information on support available.

"Our business growth advisers have twice-weekly calls with the MBIE business team for updates on key business-related information and to also provide feedback from what we are seeing in Tairāwhiti."

"Going forward we will focus on delivering business events and workshops online where possible to ensure continuity of support."

Gisborne baker Walter Findlay is one company having to work around the new challenges.

"With the Covid-19 Omicron variant in Gisborne, Walter Findlay Ltd has been following all government requirements and recommendations, as well as taking extra precautions to minimise the risk of the spread within our business teams. Unfortunately, the inevitable has occurred and we now have some employees isolating," company communication manager Alyx Findlay said.

"We are currently short-staffed and have had to take some measures to ensure we are able to continue to supply bread to our customers. We have made the decision today (March 8) to reduce the number of SKUs/brands being baked at our Gisborne plant — with some loaves even being brought in from other Quality Bakers bakeries."

"This may mean your favourite bread variety is out of stock over the next couple of weeks — and we do apologise for this. Please bear with us as we work to ensure it is back on-shelf as soon as possible."

"A big shout-out to our wonderful team who are working hard and doing an amazing job continuing to provide our regions with bread — thank you for all that you do."

Supermarkets are also under the pump.

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Regional bounceback in December quarter

The Tairāwhiti economy bounced back in the final quarter of last year, with provisional estimates from Infometrics showing annual growth of 7.2 percent compared with 2020.

The Quarterly Economic Monitor for December 2021 puts Tairāwhiti economic activity growth above the national average of 5.5 percent.

Trust Tairāwhiti economic development general manager Richard Searle said it was positive to see the region performing well but there were still challenges ahead.

"Labour, supply chain and international tourist constraints will likely result in greater uncertainty going forward."

The primary sector showed growth in some areas, with horticulture commodity prices up 13 percent from pre-pandemic levels and meat prices up around 6 percent. Forestry prices were only up 2 percent and higher costs affecting the primary sector were expected to

rise further this year.

Acting regional tourism manager Holly Hatzilamprou said local tourism was faring better than in other regions, with expenditure in the sector up by 10.7 percent in the December quarter, compared with the national average of 3.9 percent.

"A strong focus on domestic tourism has strengthened our position but the ongoing effects of the pandemic will continue to be felt in the first quarter of 2022," she said.

There was a 3.1 percent increase in consumer spending in the December quarter, taking annual growth to 6.6 percent in 2021. The increased spending has helped support job growth, with a 2.8 percent rise in average filled jobs for Tairāwhiti residents.

The drivers of job growth included construction and retail. However, pandemic impacts on summer events saw the arts and recreation sector shrink.

Tairāwhiti Jobseeker support recipient

numbers are continuing to trend lower, having dropped an average of 4.7 percent last year.

Construction activity was strong with a 72 percent increase in new residential building consents issued by Gisborne District Council, rising from 98 in 2020 to 169 over 2021.

The pace increased in the final quarter of the year, with 48 new residential building consents issued in Tairāwhiti in the December 2021 quarter, compared with 35 in the same period in 2020.

Habitat Solutions director Adrienne Hillman said one of the main factors behind the increase was emergency housing.

"Government funding through Kainga Ora and other organisations such as Toitu Tairāwhiti has resulted in a boost in the number of residential consents required. From December 2020 to December 2021, I have been involved in obtaining building consents for 16 second-hand or new dwelling relocations for whānau urgently needing somewhere to live."

"I think it's great. In the current housing market, some families would have never dreamt of owning their own home — now they have brand-new houses," she said.

However, capacity pressures in the industry were limiting the speed of additional construction, with building costs rising nearly 19 percent per annum in the December 2021 quarter.

The average house value in Tairāwhiti was up 23.7 percent compared with a year earlier, to \$642,891. This growth came in below the national average increase of 27.3 percent, to \$1,028,097.

"The figures show a slowdown in the market for Gisborne but home ownership is still significantly out of reach for some in our community," said Manaaki Tairāwhiti housing project manager Angie Tawera.

"Many households will require over 10 times their income to afford the current average house price."

Hybrid working: striking the right balance

BUSINESS INSIGHTS

BY GEMMA HOGG



The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly brought about a new wave of thinking in terms of how working New Zealanders envisage their ideal workplace environment to now look like.

The new buzzword is "hybrid working" — driven by an increased desire to strike the right balance between home and the office working environment. Greater workplace flexibility is seen as a huge attraction to many employees, as it provides the opportunity to prioritise what is important in their personal lives, so that when they are wearing their "work hat", they can perform at their best.

According to research conducted by employment website SEEK in January 2022, over half (54 percent) of workers surveyed had indicated they would expect a mix of working from home and in the office (hybrid working model) during 2022.

Given the world we are living in now and with the uptake and acceptance of digital

technology, employees are wanting to take advantage of greater workplace flexibility. As employers it is important to be open-minded and ready to entertain such conversations.

You might have seen media interviews with Auckland University of Technology Business School Professor Jarrod Haar recently. His research findings from November 2021 highlighted some very interesting figures:

Approximately 39 percent of workers are in the office on a full-time basis; just under 15 percent are full-time working from home; about 48 percent are working on a hybrid basis, with the majority working a 50-50 office/home split.

The findings also provided evidence around a hybrid workforce becoming the "new normal" — making special mention that "hybrid workers clearly benefit from higher levels of trust from their managers, and respond well to the independence and flexibility of hybrid working".

If the hybrid working model is becoming the "new normal", then what are some of the key considerations for employers to be aware of?

1. Be clear on what your policy is

What does flexibility mean to your organisation? Clearly define the boundaries and expectations of what it covers, and what it doesn't. Some points to factor in:

- Are employees required to be in the office

for a certain amount of hours/days per week vs working remotely?

- How does the request to work remotely impact other colleagues within the same team?

- Is there flexibility around start and finish times as long as set hours are worked?

- Is the employee requesting a change in the standard terms and conditions of their employee agreement (eg reduction of hours)?

- Is the arrangement to be permanent or only for a specific period? Is there an opportunity to review progress on how the arrangement is going?

Once an understanding of the expectations of both parties has been reached, the arrangement should be formalised in writing — no verbal agreements. The opportunity to review is important, and the arrangement should be revisited at regular intervals to ensure it's still achieving its original intention.

2. Technology, Tools and Desk Area

Is the employee equipped with the right tools and technology to ensure a good WFH (working from home) experience?

- For example, good internet access, computer hardware such as screens, laptops, headphones, printers, all necessary computer programs/software including cyber security protocols and multi-factor authentication controls, are all key

considerations when operating in a remote space.

- Is the desk set-up also located in a separate area of the home and free of distractions? Does it have good access to natural light, and is it ergonomically compliant?

3. Regular Communication

Maintaining regular contact and staying connected with your employees is key for a successful ongoing hybrid working relationship. Regular weekly update or stand-up meetings allows management to have a greater view of workload commitments and priorities, and provides an opportunity to address any areas of concern at the time.

Along with face-to-face meetings, using digital conferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom provides teams with the capability to connect online at any time.

It is important to acknowledge that the world of work is constantly evolving. Organisations that lead with empathy and place a strong emphasis on workplace flexibility not only unite and build loyalty amongst their employees, but help to foster a culture that boosts morale and overall performance.

■ Gemma is an HR consultant and employment specialist in BDO Gisborne's People & Performance team.

Focus on tools to help keep employees, customers safe

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Pak'nSave owner Foodstuffs NZ corporate affairs manager Emma Wooster said challenges with team members isolating throughout the supply chain meant getting product to store and on to shelves was the biggest issue right now.

"Our teams are working hard to ensure we have options in every category and we may also limit the number of products customers can buy in one shop, so everyone has a fair opportunity to get what they need. This will vary from store to store. We've also been cross-training and employing more people so we can keep the

stock flowing to our stores and on to shelves.

"We're keeping all the tools we have in place to help keep people safe, including increased hygiene and sanitation measures, physical distancing in store, mask use for teams and customers, and scanning the QR app.

"As more team members are required to isolate, customers may start to see some changes to how we operate in-store; this is to make sure we can keep our teams and customers safe and the stock flowing on to shelf. Rapid Antigen Testing is also proving a valuable surveillance tool... reducing the risk of

transmission at our sites, and giving our people extra reassurance we're doing all we can to keep them safe at work."

BUSINESS NZ'S ADVICE TO STAFF:

Get your booster shot as soon as it falls due (three months after the second dose)

Wear masks as much as possible

Minimise face-to-face meetings

If meetings with customers, suppliers or other external contacts are required, ensure these are set up with one metre in between everyone (meetings) or contactless

(transactions), that vaccine passes have been checked and everyone scans in

If possible, work from home on days when no face-to-face contact is required

Wear masks while out of the building

Make frequent use of sanitiser

Go home immediately if feeling ill or if advised you are a close contact of a Covid case, and isolate for the required period

Let your employer know so they can make arrangements for supporting your ability to work from home or receiving support to stay at home.



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Fostering pathways for Māori employment

by Akula Sharma

The Government's Māori Employment Action Plan — Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori will fill a big void for Māori businesses wanting to build capacity, says Amotai-Supplier Diversity Aotearoa's general manager.

Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori was launched by the Minister of Social Development and Employment Carmel Sepuloni and the Minister of Māori Development Willie Jackson on February 17.

It aims to address disparities, remove barriers, create opportunities and foster pathways for Māori to succeed in employment.

Actions in the plan fall into three key focus areas, or pou — People (Māori have the skills and knowledge to lead, and succeed at all stages of their careers), Workplaces (Māori thrive in workplaces that have good conditions and are free from discrimination) and Futures (iwi, hapū and Māori are leaders in future-focused and sustainable sectors).

Amotai-Supplier Diversity Aotearoa manukura (general manager) Ariana Paul said the plan would fill a big void for Māori businesses that were wanting to build capacity.

"For business owners who are wanting to build the capacity or capability within their organisation, the plan identifies a market for sectors in which employment is needed, so rangatahi Māori can plan their career in it.

"In the businesses where there isn't much employment scope for whānau — such as the construction space particularly, which traditionally has not been where kaimahi Māori were accepted — the plan really starts to put in place education and training which is needed for whānau Māori to get themselves into these positions."

Ms Paul said Amotai had also begun to provide Māori and Pasifika trade training to rangatahi in partnership with the businesses registered with them, which was similar to the action plan's intent.

"More importantly, the plan gives importance to pastoral care for rangatahi who are joining the workforce.

"It is important that we identify and acknowledge our culture.

"The employers are also then challenged to say, 'hey, look, if you are an employer of a lot of kaimahi Māori, is the culture of your organisation supportive of Māoritanga, kaupapa Māori values and te ao Māori?"

"This plan is letting us ask questions about cultural awareness and competency of employers to ensure our people who are trained in all these roles, when they walk into an organisation, those organisations are ready to receive them as whānau."

Ministry of Social Development (MSD) regional commissioner Karen Bartlett said in Tairāwhiti, tikanga Māori factors were incorporated in everything the ministry did.

"Half or more of the people in our district are Māori, and it's important to us that we provide our services in the most respectful and culturally competent way possible for all our clients.



PLAN WELCOMED: Turanga Ararau employment services manager Ingrid Brown (centre) says the Government's Maori Employment Action Plan is an awesome extension of what has been happening already for kaimahi Maori and business owners in Tairawhiti. Pictured with her are (from left) Turanga Ararau regional apprentice lead Rocky Monika, Maori trades and training lead Becks Waihape, He Pou Rangatahi facilitator Maria Hawkins and employment support placement lead Luke Barbarich. Picture by Liam Clayton

"MSD is a delivery agency for several of the Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori actions.

"We are working to showcase the success of Māori students, workers, employers and business owners."

Ms Bartlett said the ministry was also partnering with Māori to promote employment opportunities through initiatives such as He Poutama Rangatahi and the Māori Trades Training Fund.

"The Māori Trades and Training Fund supports Māori entities by funding initiatives developed by Māori, for Māori, to deliver paid, employment-focused training and pathways to employment.

"Under a redeployment project following the first wave of Covid-19, a pastoral care component was established alongside iwi partner Tūranga Ararau. We developed a pastoral care model in partnership with them, that they delivered under manaaki support for newly redeployed whānau.

"Around 300 people were offered this service. Tūranga Ararau went on to 'train the trainers' using this same model and the model has now been adopted across the region."

Tūranga Ararau is the iwi tertiary education and employment services provider of Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui ā Kiwa.

Employment services manager Ingrid Brown said the Government's Māori Employment Action Plan — Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori is an "awesome extension of the existing mahi already happening in our rohe".

"It supports kaupapa Māori and working kano ki te kano (face-to-face) with our whānau, hapū, iwi and wider hapori to improve employment and

social outcomes for our people."

Services provided by Tūranga Ararau include the Regional Apprenticeship Initiative — placing 25 Level 4-qualified apprentices in a variety of trades.

And through the Tairāwhiti — Mahi Tu Mahi Ora project and Māori Trade Training Funding, 50 trainees complete qualifications while they work.

He Poutama Rangatahi is another initiative they provide which builds the employability skills of rangatahi and works with them to seek and sustain work, or relevant training and education leading to employment.

"We provide intensive manaaki support (pastoral care) as well. It integrates kaitiakitanga, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga to support overall well-being of our people across all our programmes.

"To achieve this our dedicated kaimahi extend their support to engage with wider whānau, which is critical for sustainable employment and improved social outcomes for our people."

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) general manager for employment, skills and immigration policy Ruth Isaac said the plan would remove barriers and create opportunities for Māori to improve their work and employment outcomes.

"It is a national plan, focused on actions that the Government can take across the education, training and employment services sector to address the known key issues which have an impact on Māori employment outcomes.

"What else do we need to do both in the short term (immediately), and in the medium and longer term, to make some changes, to build on the work which is already under way and to reflect the feedback which communities have given us?"

"We know there is some progress yet to be made."

Business New Zealand director of advocacy

Catherine Beard said they welcomed the plan but "we need to look at whether this Government-led action plan is essential, or if existing programmes are already leading to the desired outcomes".

"For example, labour market data from MBIE shows the proportion of Māori in skilled occupations has grown over the past three years.

"Businesses need a skilled workforce and Tairāwhiti has as many as a quarter of young people not in education or employment.

"It is important to tap into this potential to ensure companies get the skills they need, and the local community can thrive on benefits that come from sustainable employment."

Trust Tairāwhiti chief executive Gavin Murphy said the trust was pleased to see the action plan come to fruition.

"It maps out a holistic, cross-agency approach to ensuring Māori have the knowledge to succeed in all stages of their careers, that they thrive in the workplaces and are free of discrimination.

"The plan aligns with the trust's existing workstreams around business support and workforce development but will also support us to bring more focus and consideration to equitable and fulfilling careers and businesses for Māori.

"One of the particular challenges we face in Tairāwhiti is we have a high number of NEETs, which is young people not in employment, education or training, and the plan has a range of short and long-term actions to address this.

"The vision of Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori is to exercise rangatiratanga to create intergenerational wellbeing through work.

"The trust fully supports this kaupapa through He Rangitapu He Tohu Ora, our regional wellbeing framework.

"The CARE Regional Skills Leadership Group will be meeting in the next month and will look at the initial steps of rolling out this plan in Tairāwhiti."

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Daniel Contreras-Rojas (front) and Maninder Singh within their Ballance Street office in Ormond Road.



A FEW CLIENT REVIEWS

Gisborne Holdings Ltd: *Best professional experience! Best IT services in Gisborne!*

Chrissy Aldridge, Skin Deep: *Very professional, friendly and respond quickly to find solutions to problems.*

Leanne Hammond, Gillies Electrical: *Always fast to respond. We love the remote access control to speed up quick fixes.*

John Pittar: *InfinityIT provides a simply outstanding service. I subscribe to Managed Services so always receive a very quick response. Efficient and effective service and great value for money. I rest easy my files are always backed-up to the cloud and I'm protected from all manner of threats.*

Read more at infinityit.co.nz

InfinityIT offers unique managed IT service from Ballance Street Village to the world

Inside InfinityIT's Ballance Street Village office, multiple monitors reflect what's happening around scores of sites across New Zealand and overseas. It's like a CCTV control room pumping out information 24/7. But instead of monitoring people movements, the computer screens show the inner workings (and non-workings) of a variety of businesses' IT systems.

It's a service model unique to Gisborne, designed to keep businesses running – a specialised managed service in which Infinity becomes the IT department of any company it works with. Among its clients are Gisborne Holdings (Waikanae Top 10 Holiday Park, Tauwhareparae Farms, Wash'nGo, Property Holdings), legal firm Woodward Chrisp, Permacrete, Four Seasons and Riverland packhouses, Rhythm & Vines and Victoria Childcare.

InfinityIT monitors, maintains and supports IT infrastructure 24/7, connecting remotely to fix any problems – often before the client is even aware they had one. And the team sells all the hardware and software that businesses need – computers, laptops and work stations, Point of Sales, EFTPOS, VOIP, solar and wireless CCTV, internet services, mobile apps and mobile phone repairs.

Business has boomed since Chilean Daniel Contreras-Rojas

formed his Gisborne company as a one-man-band in 2016, having started in the industry in 1992. He operated first from home but exponential growth during Covid restrictions led to the fully resourced IT group of today working from stand-alone premises in the Village.

"We helped many companies ensure their workers could operate securely on desktops and laptops at home, set up cloud servers so they could work from anywhere, then – as they reassessed the importance of their on-line presence – helped with all their website needs."

Work, and the need for staff, snowballed. Daniel's six staff hail from Chile, Argentina, India, South Africa and New Zealand. The IT staff all belong to IT Professionals Association of NZ. Together, they have more than 80 years' IT experience between them, Daniel accounting for more than 20 years in computers and their operating systems.

Lead engineer Maninder Singh and Gagandeep Singh both have more than 10 years' expertise managing IT infrastructure and 24/7 technical support. Maninder has set up a new InfinityIT branch in Wellington, which utilises the Gisborne staff and resources.

Paul Horak has built websites since the 1990s and is experienced in everything "internet" including helping businesses get their brand online or improve their online presence. Hernan Galimberti is a Help Desk Support Engineer with more than seven years in the industry. And Matt de Luze spent more than four years working with Gisborne farmers and software developers before joining InfinityIT. Administrator Valerie Hulme

brings decades of experience working for chartered accountants and another IT company.

Daniel says the cost of InfinityIT's managed service is a fraction of the cost of employing a permanent IT person in a 40-strong company.

"Corporates are all outsourcing IT as they realise it is more cost-effective than having an IT person on-site fulltime. Businesses on a managed service reduce downtime and increase productivity.

"We can fix problems remotely. These include a computer running out of space, an operating system not updating, anti-virus not running, back-up not completing or at-risk or infected systems.

"Businesses can trust us to look after them 24/7."

Daniel, his wife Oriana and almost three-year-old son Matias escaped a one million-strong big city for Gisborne 15 years ago. He worked first in IT then as systems engineer at Gisborne Hospital. Daughter Josefa, 13, and son Tomas, 7, were born in Gisborne.

The family is immersed in the Gisborne lifestyle while holding fast to its Chilean roots, speaking Spanish at home and playing Latino music with family and friends. Daniel is lead vocalist and keyboard player for a Latino band, surfs, mountain-bikes and plays football – last year for Thistle Massive. His company provides pro bono support and discounted hardware to the Gisborne Brain Injury Association.

He is a member of Business Network International and, as the only IT specialist in his BNI chapter, gains many referrals from across the country. InfinityIT is also part of a BNI chapter in the capital, which Daniel expects to bring in even more corporate IT systems to keep a close eye on.



InfinityIT's base at 132 Ormond Road, Ballance Street Village.



InfinityIT team (from left): Daniel Contreras-Rojas, Maninder Singh, Paul Horak, Gagandeep Singh, Matt de Luze, Valerie Hulme and Hernan Galimberti.

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Youthtown takes on Licence to Work

After six years in the region, a youth employability programme is changing providers.

Licence to Work (LTW) is a cross-sector, business-led initiative designed to respond to business and industry concerns that young people may not be developing the employability skills needed to succeed in the workplace. The aim of the programme is help get young people aged 16 to 24 work-ready.

A total of 404 young people have graduated from the programme in this region.

Not-for-profit organisation Youthtown, which operates around Aotearoa and was established in 1932, will take over the programme from regional economic development agency Trust Tairāwhiti.

To receive their licence, students complete

a minimum of 10 hours community work, 80 hours work placement and 18 hours of training modules.

Gill Higgins will remain in her role as regional programme coordinator.

"It's fantastic to see Licence to Work continue in our region and to provide an opportunity for tauira (students) to gain lifelong skills that will support them to gain employment and maintain their employment throughout their career journey."

Youthtown chief executive Fay Amaral said it was "a pleasure and privilege" to support the successful foundations laid by Trust Tairāwhiti.

"We are proud of the wonderful work in placements that our Licence to Work graduates have achieved and the recognition by local employers of the value of the programme."



GROWTH MODE: A section of the buildings at PGG Wrightson Seeds' new state-of-the-art plant at Matawhero, due to be operational in the next few weeks. Right, a computer rendering of the company's new facility.

Pictures supplied



Icehouse
a seat at the table

JOIN THE CONVERSATION: The Icehouse chief executive of growth Liz Wotherspoon, Socialites co-chief executive Melanie Spence and The Icehouse community manager Bryar Stewart.

Picture supplied

Celebrating diversity in business

Small business incubator The Icehouse has started a new series of podcasts across its social media channels, with Gisborne business people expected to feature in future broadcasts.

"A Seat At The Table podcast is about celebrating the different types of diversity and community in business," The Icehouse Hawke's Bay and Gisborne customer growth partner Kate de Lautour said.

"It's about diversity of thinking, views, fears, diversity of regions, lifestyle and people."

"The podcast guests are business owners and leaders from around the country. New episodes are released the fourth Wednesday of each month — we hope it will empower business owners in Gisborne and the regions facing similar challenges."

Each month, regular A Seat At The Table hosts Liz Wotherspoon, chief executive of growth at The Icehouse, Bryar Stewart, The Icehouse community manager, and Melanie Spence, Co-CEO at Socialites, will invite special guests for courageous conversations under the theme of championing diversity and community in business.

The first episode is available now through listening platforms Spotify, YouTube and The Icehouse's social media channels.

"We want our listeners to feel like they also have a seat at the table and can be part of the conversation. We hope the stories told will create a feeling of empowerment — that it's OK to be yourself, to get it wrong sometimes, to be honest with what you are good at, what you are not good at, to feel the fear and do it anyway," Bryar Stewart said.

"Liz and I had been talking for months about The Icehouse community and how we can authentically lean into diversity, how we

can provide a platform for unheard or under-represented voices and perspectives, so the podcast idea aligned so perfectly with our own values," she said.

Liz Wotherspoon said A Seat At The Table was a no-brainer as far as The Icehouse was concerned.

"We started with the idea of podcasting around gender diversity because we are asked how many women we have on our programmes. Our answer has always been 'not enough!'"

"However, A Seat At The Table is not just about gender or ethnic diversity, it's about diversity of thinking — a diversity of views, fears, and how to celebrate that diversity. If you don't create a forum in which it can be expressed or observed, how will it be celebrated?" she said.

Mel Spence said the podcasts were about smart business and giving people a voice that they possibly wouldn't ordinarily have.

"As a businessperson you can sometimes walk out of the house with an armour guard on, almost having to pretend to be someone else. I am done with that — and it's what I think so many other people want now, to be themselves and be successful at the same time."

Kate de Lautour said it had been great to welcome Sandra Matthews as an Icehouse coach last year, based in Gisborne and specialising in high-performance teams, business planning, family, agri-business and more.

"She is a great asset to The Icehouse Gisborne team and we are excited to have her expertise within the network."

"Our Gisborne business community is filled with smart minds, clever business owners and leaders."

See: **Unlisted YouTube Link of Episode One:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4K05VWMacn8>

Seeds business expands, new facility set to open

by Andrew Ashton

A decade after first setting up in Gisborne, PGG Wrightson Seeds has been developing new premises to cope with increased demand from two major markets.

The company has sold its Solander Street site and is in the process of moving to a new 1.5-hectare site at Matawhero with warehousing and state-of-the-art seed processing.

"We are expanding our businesses across two business areas that we work in," PGG Wrightson Seeds' Brent Sycamore said.

"In Gisborne we produce and process maize

seed for the domestic Corson Maize brand, and we produce and process sweetcorn seed for international vegetable companies.

"The new site enables future expansion and is across the road from our five-hectare research and development site at Matawhero. Future expansion is anticipated because we are experiencing good demand for seed products being produced in Gisborne."

Mr Sycamore said the new warehouses would have "state-of-the-art seed processing and cool store technology".

PGG Wrightson Seeds purchased the Corson seed operation and its Solander Street premises about 10 years ago.

China FTA upgrade to see tariffs come off wood and paper exports

by Andrew Ashton

Tairāwhiti's forestry industry is welcoming an upgrade to the New Zealand-China Free Trade Agreement.

The upgrade comes into force on April 7, Minister for Trade and Export Growth Damien O'Connor confirmed last month after New Zealand and China ratified the upgrade protocol and agreed the start date — the final step following the signing of the FTA upgrade in January 2021.

"The upgrade also includes new market access commitments in goods and services, and additional trade facilitation measures," said Mr O'Connor.

"In terms of goods, the upgrade will deliver further market access improvements, resulting in tariff-free access for 99 percent of New Zealand's \$4 billion wood and paper trade to China, once fully implemented. Our existing FTA will also be augmented by new chapters in e-commerce, competition policy, government procurement and the environment."

Eastland Wood Council chief executive Philip Hope said members were supportive of any Free Trade Agreement, "especially one that phases out tariffs on processed wood exports to China".

"An upgrade on the Free Trade Agreement, with mutually agreed rules, provides more surety to our industry and enables our sector to consolidate its position."

"Production forestry provides important economic and social benefits for our region and

is an efficient means of sequestering carbon.

"The log trade agreement is important for both countries and vital for Te Tairāwhiti."

A spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade said China had agreed to eliminate customs duties on 12 additional tariff lines of wood and paper products previously excluded from tariff elimination commitments under the existing FTA.

"These commitments will be phased in through a process of tariff cuts over a 10-year implementation period. This will result in

significant duty savings for New Zealand exports and, once implemented, it means that 99 percent of our wood and paper trade to China will receive tariff-free access.

"In addition, a side letter was negotiated which provides a new process for implementing a commitment made in the existing FTA that, should China grant any third party more favourable

treatment in the future on wood and paper tariff lines, then this treatment would be extended to New Zealand.

"Under the protocol, the FTA Joint Commission will have a new oversight role in confirming and recording New Zealand wood and paper products benefiting from these existing commitments."

"The new process will provide better transparency of China's implementation of its obligation to extend to New Zealand any future tariff cuts agreed with other countries, and ensure up-to-date information on tariff treatment for New Zealand wood and paper exports to China."

Once the FTA upgrade is fully implemented 10 years from now, 99 percent of New Zealand's \$4 billion wood and paper trade to China will have tariff-free access.

Disciplinary process: the do's and don'ts

EMPLOYMENT TODAY



BY CRAIG SIDORUK

No matter the size of your business or resources available to you, it can be costly to get the disciplinary process wrong — especially when the dismissal of an employee is involved.

The 2020 average “hurt and humiliation” payment awarded in the Employment Relations Authority for our region was \$19,038. This is a 63 percent increase over the 2019 figure of \$11,657.

On top of these figures, a successful claim of unjustified dismissal is also likely to incur a claim for legal fees and lost wages. These figures are published each year by the Employers and Manufacturers Association and Business Central.

As a result it's important to get the process right, not only because it's good practice to do so, but because in most cases, the costs outlined above are avoidable.

As an experienced HR professional, I acknowledge that the whole disciplinary process can be tricky. Often one or more of the parties involved will be anxious, on edge, frustrated and in some cases, suspicious. And let's be honest, no one wants to be there.

At Business Central, we regularly advise employers on the do's and don'ts of the disciplinary process.

Here are some of our key tips:

Do seek advice before you start the process. Whether it's from your own HR team, or an external consultant, a 10-minute phone call can end up saving you thousands of dollars. In my experience it is often the first interaction with the employee, often in the heat of the moment, that ends up being problematic.

Don't suspend an employee without first advising them that you are considering suspension. Give them the opportunity to respond, and importantly, consider their response before making a decision whether suspension is necessary.

Do conduct a fair investigation prior to entering into a disciplinary process.

Don't dismiss an employee without following a formal process. Although many employment agreements state that an employee can

be instantly dismissed in cases of serious misconduct, this means dismissal without notice, not dismissal without process.

Do follow the process outlined in your disciplinary policy or employment agreement. If you're unsure about the process, seek professional advice.

Do invite the employee to a disciplinary meeting in writing. The purpose of this meeting is to seek their explanation and allow them the opportunity to respond to the allegations. Set out the detailed allegations, invite them to bring a support person or representative, and advise them of the potential outcomes should the allegations be substantiated.

Do provide to the employee all of the information you will use to assess whether the allegation is true. This must be provided in advance of the disciplinary meeting, typically at least 48 hours beforehand.

Don't predetermine the outcome. It's important to examine the facts and consider the employee's explanation objectively before reaching any conclusions. At this point the outcome could be to: take no further action; undertake further investigation; or make a decision regarding a disciplinary outcome.

Do try to link the alleged offending to a

category of misconduct or serious misconduct in your policies or employment agreement. Provide a copy of any relevant clauses in the disciplinary letter to the employee.

Do seek formal assistance when things get tricky, even if it is just a quick telephone call to check that you are on the right path.

Ultimately, by law you must justify any disciplinary action as being what a fair and reasonable employer could have done in the circumstances. This test applies to whether the potential outcome is a warning or termination of employment.

When it comes to disciplinary action, always double-check your process. This is especially important given the escalating costs for getting it wrong.

Disclaimer: This article is necessarily brief and general in nature. You should seek professional advice before taking any action in relation to the matters dealt with in this article.

■ Craig is the HR and employment relations specialist for Business Central in Hawke's Bay and Gisborne. Email: craig.sidoruk@businesscentral.org.nz



NEW SET-UP: enable.me director Kobus Venter and company founder Hannah McQueen in enable.me's new Gladstone Road office. Picture by Liam Clayton

Slowdown not a barrier to property investment

by Andrew Ashton

New Zealand's property market slowing down should not mean an end to investing in property, Gisborne's newest financial advice company says.

Enable.me founder and managing director Hannah McQueen said for many, the ability to access leverage through property investment was still important for growing wealth.

“Some people want to get on to the property ladder or to buy an investment property — whether they should have an investment property depends on their actual circumstances — but if you need to grow wealth, you often need leverage, which in New Zealand is only readily available through property.”

“No one should be buying an investment property for a short-term gain, they should be buying it for medium to long-term gains. We know historically over the medium to long term, things stabilise and then strengthen. If you take a macro view of the economy, we are at the inflation stage, then we will go into a recession or a low-growth environment, and then we should move back into economic growth.”

But that doesn't mean any old property is guaranteed to be a winner.

“If a client wants to benefit from leverage, then in that situation we are really specific about the criteria that work, and it's a lot tighter than it was even six months ago. To find a good property is becoming harder and harder, but the role of property hasn't changed.”

“The other thing to note is that if they are not buying property then their only other mainstream options are to put money into the sharemarket or to leave money in the bank.”

“If you leave it in the bank, you are going to lose 5 percent or more to inflation, and if you put it into the sharemarket, you are entering at

the most volatile time. So, when you look at the risks of a particular asset type, you must also compare it with the other options available.”

The current environment poses different questions for those who need to sell down to help fund their retirement.

“They may have lots of assets, but they don't have a lot of income — so they're trying to solve a different problem, which can be stressful in its own right.”

Enable.me Gisborne director and strategic coach Kobus Venter said the Gisborne office opened a month ago and he had been “flat out”.

Mr Venter said clients' needs varied — they might be looking to get into the property market, need some “cashflow re-alignment”, want to get rid of their mortgage faster, be looking to build a property portfolio, invest in managed funds, or plan for retirement.

“It all depends on the age and stage, where you are financially — and what you want.”

Mr Venter, a former investment banker for Barclays, said there was a general lack of financial education in New Zealand and globally.

“Wealth is a language only a select number of people can speak, and they pass that on to the following generation. That's why I'd been looking to do financial education — and in my research I stumbled on enable.me.”

Hannah McQueen says now is a great time to be launching the business in Gisborne.

“What we know about enable.me is that it's a fairly recession-proof business. People think more about their money in a recession than they do in the good times.”

“Kiwis are particularly good at not caring if things are going well — they only seem to care when they are stressed. The trouble is, when things are going well is the best time to try to maximise — but if it's not going well, that certainly provides the motivation to address it.”

Busy on mortgage front

by Akula Sharma

Gisborne mortgage advisers say they have been busier than ever since the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mike Pero Gisborne franchise owner and mortgage adviser Kirsten Morris said when the pandemic started experts had predicted that the market would crash, but the opposite happened and the market had been booming since.

Ms Morris had started her franchise business in February 2020, five to six weeks before the first lockdown.

“I was still quite new and setting everything up, building a client base.”

“It was a bit stressful not knowing how the pandemic would impact on my business. “When we moved down to Alert Level 3, we had a lot of inquiries.”

“There has been a lot of interest from people wanting to buy a house, and one of the reasons could be the high rent prices.”

“There's a lot of work.” Enough work for Ms Morris to bring on board two more mortgage advisers to help with the growing inquiries.

While the demand remained high, getting a home loan had just become a little trickier for prospective homebuyers, she said.

The new law around lending money in New Zealand comes from an update in December last year to the Credit Contracts and Consumer Finance Act 2003 (CCCFA).

The changes had imposed stricter duties on all lenders, including banks, around how they make inquiries and verify information to ensure lending to consumers is likely to be suitable and affordable.

The new law required all lenders to capture and check specific information about a customer's income and expenses before granting them credit — personal loans, home loans, home loan top-ups, credit cards, overdrafts, and increased credit limits.

Ms Morris said the new stricter rules had “definitely” impacted her clients.

“Before these changes you could put an application to amend mitigating past risks and negotiate with the lender that the spending behaviour would change once the home loan was approved.”

“For example, a bachelor living with his

mother, goes out drinking every weekend and buys takeaways each day. We could say once they get their house they'll be cooking dinner at home and not going out drinking so much.”

“This doesn't work any more. The lenders need to see the improved spending behaviour before they grant you a loan. At least three months of bank statements.”

“Now more than ever it's important for people to see a mortgage broker first. We are

working with a lot of people months in advance to put spending plans in place with them, make sure their statements look tidy, if they have a history of unplanned overdrafts, direct debits bouncing, we make sure we sit with them and stop it from occurring again.”

“Main banks won't look at you if you had any of those account blips — even if it's something like forgetting to transfer money from one account to another.”

Ms Morris said the change was good in the way that it helped people manage their finances early on.

“It's about making sure people aren't put in a position where they will end up in trouble. As tricky as it is, it has a bit of positive side to it as well.”

Gisborne Financial Services business manager and mortgage adviser Shelley Mullooly said the pandemic had made them “busier”.

“The CCCFA hasn't had much impact on us, the biggest impact has been Covid-19.”

However, “the increasing prices of houses in Gisborne has influenced first-home buyers because with the new CCCFA, banks are requiring 20 percent deposit.”

“For first-home buyers, it is about having a plan. They need to see a broker as a starting point.”

“The price increase has slowed down a bit but I am waiting to see how people will react with the interest rates increasing.”

Mrs Mullooly said their biggest concern at present was people being under-insured for their houses due to the increasing price of materials.

“If a house burns down, the owner needs to replace the house . . . because the costs of the materials have increased considerably due to the pandemic, what the owner might have insured their house for may not be the correct amount now.”

“That's why we want our community to be aware of it, or contact us.”



MANY NOW UNDER-INSURED: Gisborne Financial Services business manager and mortgage adviser Shelley Mullooly says the mortgage side of their business has been busy during the pandemic, and their biggest concern now is existing home owners being under-insured due to the increasing price of materials. Picture by Paul Rickard