

National Conversation about Work

Northland Regional Report



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Introduction

The Northland region is made up of the Kaipara, Whangarei and Far North districts and has a population base of 155,000, spread throughout urban and rural communities.

About 68,000 employees work for over 11,000 businesses in predominantly small to medium enterprises. Major sectors contributing to the regional economy are pastoral, forestry, tourism, and building and construction. Horticulture and specialist engineering are also increasingly significant contributors.

The majority of Northland's businesses are small (less than five employees), and employ a significant number of part time staff.

Northland's future prosperity currently sits with a very limited number of competent, profitable, growth capable businesses and while the potential for Māori economic development in the region is huge, the possibilities have not adequately been scoped and are currently inhibited by the lack of a significant economic base from Treaty settlements.

In the year to June 2009 the working-age population in the Northland region was 115,200. The labour force participation rate was 64% with 73,700 people in the labour force and 41,500 people 'not in the labour force'. Of those people in the labour force, 7.8%, or 5,700 were unemployed and 68,000 were employed.

Northland has a high proportion of Māori with 45,527 or 31.7 percent of those living the region identifying as part of this group. Northland is the fifth highest Māori population out of the 16 regions in New Zealand. Apart from English, the most common language spoken in Northland is Māori, which is spoken by 10 percent of people, compared nationally with 4.1 percent of people.

The most prominent ethnic group in Northland is European New Zealanders at 68 percent compared with 67.6 percent for New Zealand as a whole. For people born overseas who now live in the Northland region, the most common birthplace is England.

The median age in Northland is 38.9 years slightly more than the national average at 35.9 years. Northland has a higher proportion of people aged 65 years and over at 14.5 compared to 12.3 nationally. Northland also has a higher than average percentage of people aged 15 years and under at 23.4 percent compared to 21.5 percent nationally.

Employment

The 2006 Census showed:

- Unemployment was 6.5% for people aged 15 years and over compared to 5.1% for all of New Zealand.
- Unemployment of Māori aged 15 years and over is 13.0 percent, compared with 11.0 percent for New Zealand's Māori population.
- The most common occupational group is 'Managers' and 'Professionals'. For Māori, the most common occupational group is 'Labourers'.
- The median income was \$20,900 compared with \$24,400 for all New Zealand.

Process of engagement

The Commission is targeting the following groups nationally: disabled people, organisations supporting the employment of people with disabilities and employers; businesses; cleaners; women's groups with a focus on employment; young families; local government; migrant workers and sustainable businesses.

We also seek meetings with employers and/or employees in at least one key industry and include meetings with local groups who have expressed an interest in the project and where possible "new voices" – individuals and community groups who may not have participated in dialogue with the Human Rights Commission before. Engagement is reliant on access to individual employers, employees and groups who want to participate and the following summary regional report follows discussion with the 114 people we met and focuses on EEO patterns and trends.

Engagement with employers and employees for the National Conversation were structured around face-to-face meetings. The

final, national report recommendations will also include information gathered from regional reports and on-line engagement.

This report summarises conversations held in Rodney and Northland in July 2009. Rodney district is added to our visit to Northland.

The following groups were participants in these two regions:

Rodney

- Rodney Economic Development Trust
- Irwin's Tools

Whangarei

- Amokura – Family Violence Prevention Consortium
- Enterprise Northland
- The New Zealand Refinery Company – Marsden Point
- Toll United
- New Zealand Police
- Ngati Hine Health Trust
- Whangarei District Council

Kaikohe

- Northland Regional Corrections Facility

Kaitaia

- Juken New Zealand Ltd – Tribord and Northland Mills

Kerikeri

- Kerikeri Business Network of 25 SMEs
- Kerifresh
- Living Nature

Conversations with groups of employees were structured around the following key questions;

1. What would make a difference for you to achieve equality at work?
2. How would this affect your family?

These questions were followed by a general discussion about equality and fairness at work and what was needed to effect the

desired change. Typically these discussions elicited a wealth of personal work experiences, stories both positive and negative, and highlighted a number of issues related to fairness at work.

Conversations with employers focused on key questions which included:

1. What are the pressing labour market issues you face?
2. What services/support would assist you?

We also asked about possible impacts of the global recession and recruitment issues given projected labour and skill shortages in the region.

Responses from employers and managers portrayed a variety of views and experiences.

Weathering the recession in Rodney

To learn more about the economic conditions in the Rodney district, we met with the Rodney Economic Development Trust (REDT) in Orewa, and Irwin's Tools in Wellsford, before travelling to Northland.

REDT's Chief Executive Officer said the district had a very small rating base and that this restricted spending on infrastructure and other local initiatives. There was no single community of interest in the district and Orewa is the biggest town with a number of other smaller communities geographically isolated from one another.

There are very few large employers in the Rodney district, with the local council and Irwin's Tools employing the most staff. The recession, however, has resulted in the loss of 105 jobs from Irwin's Tools and another 40 jobs from another local employer. This amounts to an estimated \$8 million dollar loss from the local economy.

Commercial construction has dried up as a result of the recession and business confidence is at a low. "Three out of five employers are finding it hard to do business at this time and too many small

businesses are not taking a longer term view to keep themselves safe in tough economic times”, according to REDT.

Bucking the trend, the aged care and tourism sectors have seen increases in business. There is a growing retirement village and aged services sector in Orewa, and tourism in the town has been less affected due to Auckland residents holidaying closer to home. A spin-off of the buoyant tourism sector has been enquiries by visitors about investment opportunities in the area.

One of the biggest issues facing the Rodney district is youth unemployment. Cuts to funding have meant the REDT has wound-up the Youth Transition Service programme despite efforts by local Work and Income New Zealand staff to keep the programme going. “It’s a shame, last year we placed 43 youth in employment”, REDT said.

Funding for programmes is not the only issue facing youth in the district. Youth who want trade training have to travel as far as Manukau City which is costly and prohibitive for most. “There’s no public transport allowing youth to travel for employment or training opportunities”, REDT said. A report into local youth titled “Project 300” shows there are considerable youth problems and that no one is catering specifically for youth needs in the district.

A lack of geographically disaggregated statistical data inhibits understanding and analysis about the labour market and economic development, and in particular youth issues. “We want Rodney district data that enables us to differentiate Orewa, Wellsford, Kumeu and Whangaparaoa”.

Weathering the recession in Northland

The most recent regional labour market reports produced by the Department of Labour and the Ministry of Social Development put Northland at the top of New Zealand’s unemployment rate at 7.8 percent compared to 5.0 percent nationally.

Discussions with employers and employees reflect the official figures and unemployment, redundancies and job security top the

list of concerns. A Whangarei based transport company listed “job security as the most pressing issue for staff”. Other employers believe there is some “nervousness about jobs” amongst staff.

In the pip fruit industry, employers complained about the poor attitude of local workers, a sentiment shared by other industries in the region. Employers noted however, that “during the recession more locals are willing to stick around”, testament to the fact that people were willing to hold on to any job in tough times.

Enterprise Northland, the regional economic development agency, spoke about the retail sector “being hammered” by the recession. Others, too, recognised the impact of tough economic times on retailers.

“Main street Kerikeri is struggling. Fifteen to twenty shops have closed down”.

The development agency indicated that there were no major receiverships in the region, though one large employer has “stripped out people” and others “had taken away shifts to reduce costs and save jobs”.

Māori social service organisations were candid in their comments about the impact of the recession on Māori. “This is a low income region with poverty issues. The recession just makes things a little harder for those on the poverty line”, they told us.

One Māori worker said that for the first time in recent memory her family resorted to killing two of their own livestock to feed extended family members. “We’ve always been able to afford meat at the supermarket in the past”, she said.

Colleagues from the same organisation pointed out that “Māori workers are more likely to be supporting two or three families. A loss of income for these people would have a wide reaching impact. It is middle income Māori families that will feel it most”.

The manager of a national facility in Kaikohe thought there was a distinct class issue in the North “especially in Kerikeri”, he said. “I think there is a definite Māori and non-Māori economic divide which is an important feature of the region”. He said that the

“class attitude” had in part been imported by wealthy migrants new to the area. “Poverty definitely exists amongst Māori”.

The collapse of public sector services and the dismantling of labour market infrastructure that provides data about Northland is a major concern to the local council and economic development agencies.

This collapse has also led to reduced staffing numbers. “There are lots of regionally based public sector businesses making people redundant”. Examples include the Department of Labour which is to cut its knowledge management responsibilities from the region, and Career Services and Enterprise Northland, which have both cut staff. At the time of our visit these redundancies combined with CEO appointments still to be made at the Chamber of Commerce and Te Puni Kokiri means there is considerable flux for lead regional agencies.

Staff in the New Zealand Police also referred to cuts in social agencies and programmes as having an impact on Police work. “The impact of these decisions could put more pressure on Police i.e. with higher crime”, one staff member said.

Whangarei District Council officers noted an increase in the number of rate defaulters in the area. “We’re seeing a whole lot of people who don’t fit the profile of those we usually see”, they said. They also pointed to an increase in social services such as food banks as an indicator that the recession was beginning to bite in the region.

In contrast, building consents were at their highest since November 2008 with increased residential and flattened commercial property development. One far north manager reported his community being oblivious to the recession. “I don’t think Kaitaia has realised that there is a recession”, he said.

What do people like about their work?

When employees, managers and business owners are asked what they like about their work, there is almost universal enthusiasm for its socialisation, genuine expressions of pride in products and services, appreciation of the variety of tasks undertaken in a working day and strong explicit and implicit acknowledgement of the value of work expressed in professional and personal satisfaction.

Staff in the New Zealand Police enjoyed the variety of their roles. “You never know what is going to happen”, one officer said. His colleagues enjoyed the challenges of Police work and “the freedom and autonomy I have to do my role”.

In Kerikeri, staff at one place of work liked the predominantly female and family feel of their workplace. “We’re a lot more open about how we’re feeling around here”, a manager told us. Staff also relished the relaxed and tranquil setting of their workplace and took tremendous pride in their product and services.

Employees in several locations told us they liked the lifestyle that came with living and working in Northland. “We socialise outside of work, we all go fishing together”, a group of mill workers said.

At another site, shift workers enjoyed the amount of time they had to spend with family and for recreation. “I’ve got the boat ramp to myself several days a week”. A manager at the same site claimed that “lunch time swimming at the beach” was the best.

Employers and employees cite the people they work with as a major benefit of working. “Everyone clicks and gets along with one another”, one group of workers told us.

A group of workers in the pip fruit industry said they enjoyed working with people from different cultures, especially seasonal migrant workers. One worker told us, “they (migrant workers) sing every morning and it’s great”. The variety of work including being out in the orchard combined with inside jobs kept the job interesting, staff said.

For Māori health workers giving back to whanau, hapu and iwi was extremely satisfying and being in a Māori work environment with a tikanga focus and practices, most rewarding. “This place suits me”, one manager said. “It looks like me and sounds like me”.

At the regional correctional facility, staff enjoyed the contribution they were making to the community and in particular, the skills and knowledge they passed on to inmates. A nurse at the facility said, “I like my work. I can leave it behind when I go home. This is probably the first job I’ve had where I’ve had that separation”.

Issues

The following issues were raised by both employees and employers alike. They have been grouped by themes:

- Skill shortages and work attitudes
- Cost of living
- Youth unemployment
- Ageing workforce
- Women and diversity
- Redundancy
- Geographic isolation
- Flexibility
- Leadership
- Māori service provision
- Prisoner employment
- Importance of SME business networks

Skill shortages and work attitudes

Northland employers struggle to attract, recruit and retain suitably qualified and skilled staff. The labour shortage issues that beset other regions in New Zealand are felt acutely in the region.

Despite tightening availability and job losses across various industries in the region, skills shortages remain a constant issue for employers.

The manager of a manufacturing business thought that “in terms of attracting staff we don’t have too much of a problem, but we would

struggle to find the specialist skills we need in terms of laboratory staff.”

Māori social service and health employers find it difficult to employ staff that are both technically skilled and who are culturally competent to be able to work within a kaupapa Māori environment. According to senior managers, “it’s particularly hard to find Māori men with these skills”.

One CEO would like to build up the capacity of Māori in the region and is looking to generate greater vocational opportunities. “About a third of our employees are Māori”.

A pack house business in Kerikeri has turned to migrant seasonal workers to fill vacancies. “Migrant workers recruited from Tonga and Vanuatu have been a saviour for us”, one manager said. “They have high productivity, high attendance and have a better work ethic than New Zealanders, like the ones we get from WINZ”.

A manager in the business suggested, “WINZ should send fewer people out to work and better look after the ones they do. They shouldn’t just try to get people off their books”.

Another small business had struggled to attract a quantity surveyor and other professionally qualified staff to the region.

The attitude of workers is a concern to a number of employers we spoke to. “The workforce is a little less reliable nowadays. Attitude is more important”, one said. Others agreed, “focusing on the attitude of local workers and the local market would help solve some of our employment problems”.

The local council had recently filled a position that was vacant for three years. “We could not find the skills we needed from the local labour market”. Although a customer services role at the council attracted 80 applicants, they were not necessarily qualified for the job. “We are seeing people just wanting a job”, a council staff member said.

At the regional correctional facility, employing suitably skilled prison staff is the number one employment issue according to the facility manager.

“I may need to recruit an additional 80 staff because of the new double bunking policy. Almost half who apply don’t make the cut because of criminal convictions”, he said. “Numeracy and literacy are major issues for us when employing staff”.

A prison officer agreed that “recruitment was an issue at the prison”. She believed that there was not enough emphasis on recruitment testing for communication and interpersonal skills, which she considered were the real skills required to do the job.

In the freight industry, a regional and national shortage of drivers and store personnel is a major concern for the manager.

Cost of living

Throughout engagements in Northland, employers and employees found increased living costs to be a burden on individual and household budgets.

Universally, most staff wanted more money to cope with increased costs.

One Kerikeri worker said, “They don’t keep up with the cost of living. I’m still being paid what I was 11 years ago”.

Staff from another iconic Kerikeri business which had restructured and undergone changed ownership said there were ongoing pay issues and that staff had not seen pay increases for three years. “Even if they (pay increases) do happen we’re still going to be behind everyone else”, one manager said.

Staff in the same company said, “Salaries are less here than they are in Auckland, but it is an expensive place to live up here. This is reflected in the high decile schools, but the kids attending those schools are not from wealthy families.”

The limited opportunities in Northland mean people cannot easily change jobs to earn more unless they leave the district.

Youth unemployment

Youth unemployment, education and skills attainment are major issues identified by economic development agencies in both Northland and Rodney.

In Northland, youth unemployment is “a foundation issue” according to business development staff at Enterprise Northland. “There are far too many youth leaving school without qualifications which defines your future workforce”, we were told.

Following the Northland jobs summit, a project plan was formulated to establish a regional apprenticeship database. The project’s intention was to undertake a stock take of Northland modern and general apprenticeships.

A large Māori employer believed that local education providers were woefully inadequate when it came to training young Māori. A manager from the organisation saw work readiness issues as imperative to youth employment. “How ready are some of our kids? There is a real disconnect between teachers and kids, and then kids and work”.

Confirming this point of view, Project 300 a major research report on youth, found that the quality of relationships experienced between students and teachers is the biggest factor contributing to young peoples’ desires to stay at school and attain the skills required for work.

The isolated nature of communities in Northland and Rodney, with a lack of public transport, meant that training and work were difficult for many youth. The REDT told us, “there is nothing for our youth to do here; they can’t easily get around for work or further training. A fully funded Youth Transition Service programme is the answer”.

The strategy for Sustainable Economic Development of Northland noted the need to strengthen skills and education and grow local talent. The focus is on core education; literacy and numeracy, life skills, motivation, work ethic, accountability, work skills, and specific vocational training.

Ageing workforce

The ageing workforce in Northland presented issues for some while others were not “too concerned” about the greying of their staff.

At a Kerikeri worksite managers told us, “we have slightly older workers but that gives us a more stable workforce and doesn’t particularly concern us”.

Transport company management said, “there is an ageing workforce in the organisation which we don’t see as an issue because it delivers you quality”. However, the same company was worried about the health of their older workers. “We recognise that as you get older, fatigue and stress are things you have to watch out for. We’re committed to educating our drivers about these two things in particular”, they said.

One large employer told us that an ageing workforce presented a unique set of issues. “Staff are wearing out and are not able to do the job. There are disabilities associated with ageing which can cause problems”. Managers thought, too, that older workers “may be blocking younger guys from coming through the ranks”.

The same company identified the reluctance of older male workers to retire “because they are afraid of losing their social networks”. To help alleviate this fear the company has instigated a programme so retired staff can remain at work as non-paid mentors. “This allows them to wean themselves off site when they feel comfortable”, the CEO said. “Many are shift workers who become members of small select groups where the social attachment is high”.

Women and diversity

Employers in male dominated occupations like engineering, manufacturing and the Police are quick to point out the benefits of integrating women into their workforce.

“The influence of women here outweighs their numbers”, one CEO told us. “We’re looking to achieve a general meritocracy, from unconsciously incompetent to consciously competent”.

Management in the milling business said, “We’re a male dominated industry but there’s no gender bias on site. We’ve had women supervisors here before”.

The Police Superintendent for Northland has been a staunch advocate of women in the New Zealand Police. The reason he says he has championed women in the Police is because, “it’s

about fairness. I can see obstacles created by our own people that are stopping women from doing their jobs effectively. It's about removing barriers. Women help with the overall culture of the police".

An HR manager in the Police said, "50% of the senior management team in the region are women with the first sworn female senior manager about to start. This is important for role modelling".

When talking about greater diversity in the police, one staff member mentioned that there were no openly gay male police in the district and that there was "still some way to go before it is a safe environment."

Redundancy

While there can never be good redundancy the way it is handled within organisations can alleviate distress and grief for both managers and employees. The actions of one large employer had helped to soften the blow of recent redundancies for its staff.

After redundancies in 2004 and 2006 the company had tailored an assistance programme to assist affected staff and help them cope. Outplacement, CV writing and counselling services were part of the offering. "We're getting much better at it", the programme administrator said.

"It's important to be empathetic with people, especially in rural areas where everyone knows everyone. In difficult times it's important to be honest with staff and tell them what is going on. Tell staff what the business looks like. Warn them that things are not particularly good, they can see for themselves from forward orders and production if things aren't right", said the plant manager.

The company named the three elements of open communication, union involvement and limited negative media coverage as lessons to other employers faced with redundancies, he thought.

"Media coverage of the plight of the company has been quite well contained. We're a tight group and we needed to support each other. Staff were getting quite annoyed with the media", the manager said.

The distress felt by management during redundancies also needs to be addressed. In the same company the manager said, “I focus on what I can do, it helps me get through. I focus on people and say what can I do to help? Focusing on golf helps me too!”

Māori service providers told us that Māori men needed greater support during tough times. “We have to help our men adapt to new situations as a consequence of job losses and redundancies”, a manager said. It was noted that some providers had little or no understanding of how to deal with redundancies in their organisations and that specific redundancy and general EEO guidance was needed.

One manager made redundant recently was surprised by the amount of support he had received. “I’m humbled at the amount of opportunities I’ve got. I found Career Services to be helpful. I thought they were just for young people”.

He had been offered work in several different areas and believed he “still had a significant contribution to make”.

Other companies in the region were using job redesign and a raft of other innovative measures to avoid redundancy situations. For instance in Kaitaia, mill management had retained staff by contracting them to labour hire companies on a short term basis and then returning them fulltime to the company’s payroll when the mill’s orders picked up. This way fulltime jobs were retained.

Flexibility

Flexible work arrangements are not a given in the organisations we met with.

One worker described how she was fortunate to have previously enjoyed some degree of flexibility to raise a family but that nowadays the attitude towards flexible work practices in the company had changed. A colleague in the same business had recently requested flexible work and had been turned down by management. Other staff agreed that flexibility was a moving target. “If the work is there you just have to stay and do it”, they said.

At another work site a female staff member thought that attaining flexible work hours was difficult. She had been told by other staff

that asking for flexible work hours was a waste of time, although she had never requested flexible hours herself.

However, another female worker at the same site was employed part-time and enjoyed great flexibility in her role as did others in her team.

District council officers were enthusiastic about the menu of flexible work initiatives they had. “We acknowledge that staff have things going on in their lives, with elderly or child care, and we encourage people to do those things”, they said. “We have flexible work practices like allowing staff to work from home, we support people taking time off to study and have set up the tearoom so that staff can bring their kids into work”.

Māori health workers also enjoyed the flexibility in their roles and especially the ability to be able to work and be with family.

Leadership

Good leadership was applauded by many as the best way to help and inspire staff, guide workplace practices and provide certainty in tough times.

Employees at New Zealand’s only oil refinery praised the efforts of their CEO. “He’s tried to open the place up more to the public, to tell our stories and let it be known this is a great company”.

The same CEO said, “Absolutely it’s about people. The thing that makes a difference is the people. We want to be the company of choice in four years or less”.

The manager of Northland’s biggest mills had ingeniously reduced costs and avoided redundancies by outplacement of staff for a period of time to contract labour hire companies and by bringing in-house subcontracted services such as security.

The innovative approach of one new Northland manager who held impromptu coffee sessions with staff to check staff satisfaction levels was received with amazement by some staff. “They think they are in trouble, but I am only trying to get them to tell me how they are, how work is and what is going on”, he said.

The same manager praised his staff telling us, “this is one of the best staff groups I’ve ever had. I hope they feel supported”. As part of his management style he held “appreciative enquiries” where staff would interview other staff about what is going on. “All they needed was some leadership”, he said.

Staff from the New Zealand Police were full of praise for the leadership style of one manager. “He always puts family first, trusts his staff, recognises diversity and doesn’t micro manage. Once staff get in his team they don’t want to leave”.

Another leadership initiative introduced by the region’s Superintendent is a staff forum. “I just sit there in their work space and listen. There use to be lots of cynicism and whingeing and now we’re at a stage of discussing things. It’s more open and comfortable now”, he said.

Commitment to staff was also a feature of another manager we saw. “We are a Northland company and we have a community commitment and responsibility. There is no “big smoke” attitude here”, he said.

Employees in Kerikeri wanted to see more of their Auckland-based managers. “We want a manager on site”.

Staff at another Kerikeri site wanted more open communication with their managers. “Management don’t talk to you anymore, its typical big company behaviour”, one worker said.

Geographic isolation

High travel costs are an issue in the Northland region for those who cover significant distances between rural and urban communities for work. Managers and workers agreed that travel costs were an issue and an added burden for people.

A health provider whose staff travel great distances said “the cost of travel for workers in Northland is a major issue. Geographic distances and no public transport means it’s expensive”.

The manager of an iconic Kerikeri business said, “in Northland we’re a collective of very small towns. If you want to work you have to pay for travel”. Most other staff we spoke to agreed.

In an attempt to assist with travel, an energy sector employer provided transport from Whangarei to its site 30 minutes away. There was some staff resentment, however, that this was not a universally available benefit and some wanted subsidised travel extended southwards in the region as well.

Despite the high associated cost of travel in Northland, the correctional facility in Kaikohe was looking to recruit from as far away as Whangarei if local staff could not be found. The facility manager told us, “we’ll try for a minivan or car pooling situation if that’s the case”.

The absence of public transport options and the limitations of car pooling clearly restricts the employment options and access.

Different approaches from employers and employees to combat the cost of long distance travel are a feature of Northland’s Sustainable Economic Development Strategy to 2011.

Māori service providers

Māori service providers told us of a different set of pressures and expectations they faced.

Managers in one organisation felt that adequate funding and resourcing was a major concern. “Māori organisations are always under resourced but over deliver. Plus, we are virtually in competition with the mainstream that pay more for skills and poach our staff after we’ve invested time and money into their training”, they said.

Of those staff that left the same organisation, 50% had left for better paying jobs.

The level of compliance placed on Māori service providers was also a concern. “We had 15 audits last year”, one provider said. “The level of compliance and the complexities involved are far more than for mainstream organisations”.

Employers and employees told us of extra hours that some Māori staff put in. “It’s all the extra stuff like being at a hui at 5.00am in the morning and having dinner after getting home at 10.00pm at night. Then there’s more hui on the weekend. It doesn’t stop.”

Despite the added pressure workers felt being part of a Māori organisation, employers and employees universally enjoyed working with other Māori, as Māori, in Māori kaupapa led initiatives.

“One of the good things of working in a Māori organisation is that you are carried by the tikanga which is infused in your work. We move as one, as a collective together”, one worker said.

Frontline staff told us, “We like being able to deliver our services in a Māori way that is innovative and suits us”. Others thought that being able to deliver services to whanau was a “big bonus”.

One Māori service provider operated a successful consortium model with seven iwi. “The organisation operates from a strengths based model and is built on whanau. The iwi consortium model is one that could be replicated in other organisations. Māori are inclusive by nature and relationships are important. We have a principles based approach to collaboration”, a manager said.

Staff from the same organisation said they felt “quite attuned” to the environment they lived in. “The feedback loop is immediate. I’ll get tapped on the shoulder in the supermarket if I’ve done anything that concerns someone”, a person said.

Prisoner employment

Corrections Inmate Employment (CIE) aims to provide a range of initiatives to improve the future employment prospects of prisoners, making a long term contribution to their rehabilitation. The initiatives deliver employment skills, training and formal qualifications to prisoners while they are serving their sentence.

At the Northland correctional facility, all staff endorse the aims of CIE and thought that every prisoner should be put into some sort of employment or skills programme.

“Everyone should be doing something positive and not just sitting in their units” one officer told us. “The downfall of the prison is that you can’t send everyone out to do something”, another staff member said.

The prison’s manager told us, “we have struggled to get prisoners into work programmes, but this has increased to 61%. They work

either doing forestry or grounds work, laundry and kitchen duties or get onto other work programmes. About 51% of prisoners would go outside their units and only about 25% get to work outside the wire”.

Importance of SME business networks

During the Northland regional engagement the Commission met with twenty-five SME's for breakfast at their weekly network gathering in Kerikeri.

Part of Business Network international (BNI), the assembled members represented a range of local businesses from accountancy and other professional services to trades, retail, construction, printing, panel beating and automotive, health, architecture and commercial banking.

The network meets regularly to share ideas, contacts and most importantly to gain new business by passing and receiving referrals. At the meeting, organisations are given one minute to talk about their business. Following this, each member refers new or potential business onto other assembled members. At the end of our session with this network forty nine referrals and six shoulder taps were made.

We observed that this format built both collegial relations between businesses in the town and generated forward orders and future business. Despite what we were told about the economic downturn in Kerikeri, the network's businesses were vibrant and busy.

The BNI model incorporating proactive business generation appears to differ from other networks and service organisation models that focus more on support and business socialisation.

Conclusions

Northland has the highest unemployment figures in New Zealand with the recession resulting in job losses and business closures. Local authorities and service providers have noticed a greater need for social services.

The recession has exacerbated the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in the region showing a definite economic divide between Māori and non-Māori. Affluent communities sit alongside poorer communities, though there is no sign of great animosity between the two.

Despite the recessionary pressures felt by employers and employees, workers remain optimistic and buoyant about their work. Good relations with co-workers, contributing meaningfully to communities, pride in products and services and having good leaders are among the many things that employees said they liked about work.

Employers identified skills shortages, attitudes towards work and the lack of work readiness especially by youth as being major issues. Both employers and employees acknowledged the additional cost and burden associated with travelling great distances between communities for work and the absence of public transport indexed to employment opportunity.

Recommendations

- The provision by government agencies of labour market data more specifically relevant to smaller towns within regions.
- Youth employment and education to work transition programmes such as the Youth Transition Service should be prioritised in the region.
- A programme for the delivery of EEO into the wider NGO community should be developed in partnership between the Human Rights Commission and NGO's including Māori service providers.