



# Chorus - diversity is good for business as well as the country

15 March 2021

Chorus is the largest provider of telecommunications infrastructure in New Zealand and is responsible for the roll out of the majority of fibre broadband. It is the owner of most telephone lines and exchange equipment in the country and employs 850 people nationwide.

Chorus wants to help make New Zealand better. Its board believes diversity is good for business as well as the country and approved the establishment of a Belonging Strategy three years ago. One of the pillars of this strategy is gender equity.

The first step in Chorus' journey toward gender equity was analysing its gender pay gap and finding out what the barriers were that were creating the gap. They measured this based on median hourly earnings, and measure the overall organisational gap but also look at the gap by career level. This data is reported to the Chorus Executive team on a monthly basis, to the Chorus Board, and is also published in the Chorus Annual Report.

Chorus focussed on closing differences in pay for similar roles but found there was still an overall gap due to having more senior men than women. To change this, Chorus started a number of initiatives including running 'UP', a women in leadership programme aimed at those at mid-career level, and offering the Breakthrough Leadership programme run by Global Women, to its people. This has had a positive personal impact, and some participants have since been promoted or moved to different roles. Chorus is also currently running mentoring circles in Wellington and the company is in the process of expanding these nationally. Initially trialled by the Chorus Wellington Women's Network, mentoring circles bring together a group of people from across the business with the aim of providing each other with connections, support and advice. The circles are now gender inclusive and offered virtually to support people working remotely.

Chorus also understands that flexible working conditions enable women to be able to stay in the workforce and enable them to keep progressing their careers into senior roles if they wish to. As well as offering flexible working to all, in July Chorus launched a new parental leave policy. "Evidence shows paid parental leave improves retention of women over time. That's positive both for families and society as paid work increases family economic wellbeing. But it's also positive from a child development perspective if parents can spend more time with children in their early years.

Evidence also shows dads are more likely to take parental leave if it's paid. Supporting dads to take parental leave enables them to be more involved in the early care of their children", says Kim Culpan, Chorus' Head of Organisational Development. "We wanted to enable parental leave to be taken flexibly, and in a way that suits individual family circumstances, as well as addressing the financial impact on retirement savings that taking unpaid leave can have". Chorus now offers eight weeks of

paid leave for all parents that can be taken anytime in the first 18 months as a block of time, 1-2 days per week, or both, with full annual leave accrual. Kiwisaver contributions continue. All these benefits make it easier for women who go on leave to take the time they need and then re-engage with work when it suits them.