



LIKE MINDS, LIKE MINE
Whakaitia te Whakawhiu i te Tangata



AN EMPLOYER'S STORY

COUNTERING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

An Employer's Story

At the suggestion that someone with an experience of mental illness would be less productive due to needing the occasional timeout or a little flexibility from their employers, Richard Johnson laughs. "We could say that about any of the staff and they don't all have a diagnosis of mental illness," he says.

Richard (pictured left) is the Catering & Events National Manager at Hiremaster in Wellington. It's a large company with a history spanning 40 years, and has staged some of New Zealand's largest corporate, sporting and government events.

Terry Shore (pictured right) is one of Hiremaster's employees, and Richard is his manager. Terry has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and has also experienced heightened stress and anxiety. He works for three days a week at Hiremaster doing cleaning and sorting cutlery.

He secured this role through the Emerge Supported Employment Trust, a not for profit organisation which assists people with physical disabilities or experience of mental illness into mainstream employment opportunities. Such services help, with the support of willing employers, to ensure the inclusion of people with physical disabilities or mental illness in the mainstream workforce.

Hiremaster is one such employer, and Richard says he is more than happy to have Terry as an employee. "There is no issue. Terry is more than capable of doing his job," he says. "He has been here a long time, about three or four years, and [supporting him] hasn't taken up much time. He gets on with his job."

"I think working with Terry has created more awareness among the rest of my staff that there are a lot of people out there who do have some kind of mental illness. I have got a young team and it's good to make them conscious of that," he adds.

Terry, who is also a musician, says that he is grateful to be working and be able to earn money. "It's really good support, casual hours and it gives me the chance to work on my music," he explains.

Skills and traits of people with experience of mental illness and recovery can include creativity, empathy, inner strength,

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WHAT YOU DO MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

resilience, lateral thinking, loyalty, and appreciation, especially when they are given the same chance as anyone else

Richard has also worked with people who have experienced depression and says that he would be happy to work with people with experience of mental illness in the future. He adds that it is simply a matter of creating a comfortable working environment, where people feel free to speak to their supervisors about any issues they are having.



What you do matters

Kiwis pride themselves on a sense of fair play. Yet a recent Like Minds survey on discrimination showed that over 80% respondents had faced some form of discrimination as a result of disclosing their experience of a mental illness.

This is a worrying reflection of the level of unfair treatment still faced by people with experience of a mental illness today.

- For people with experience of a mental illness, fairness is as important as therapies and treatment.
- Attitudes within the wider public have improved but unfair treatment still exists.
- Fair treatment allows every person to be the best they can be.
- Every individual, family, employer and organisation can contribute to a fairer society that better includes and values people with experience of a mental illness.

What can you do to make the difference?

If someone you know has experience of mental illness, these are some of the things you can do to support them.

- Carry on as normal – just be the family member, friend or colleague you’ve always been and stay in touch.
- Offer practical support, help and understanding.
- Educate yourself about mental health and wellbeing.
- Use positive and encouraging language when talking about mental illness.
- Value and respect the person’s decisions about his or her mental wellbeing.
- Talk about the future, make plans to do things together.
- And speak up if your family member, friend or anyone you see is being treated unfairly.

“Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.”

H. Jackson Brown, Jr. (author)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This resource was produced by the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand on behalf of the Ministry of Health’s Like Minds, Like Mine programme.

For more information on countering stigma and discrimination, or the Like Minds, Like Mine programme, visit: www.likeminds.org.nz

The Mental Health Foundation works with the media in a number of ways to promote the work of the Like Minds, Like Mine programme and raise awareness of issues relating to stigma

and discrimination. If you have a media enquiry please contact our Auckland office and ask to speak to one of our communications team:

Tel: 09 300 7010 | Email: communications@mentalhealth.org.nz

For more information about mental health and mental illness, contact the Mental Health Foundation Resource and Information Service in Auckland:

Tel: 09 300 7030 | **Fax:** 09 300 7020
Email: resource@mentalhealth.org.nz
Web: www.mentalhealth.org.nz

Local Like Minds, Like Mine contact details: