



Metro South Health

Queensland's Metro South Health celebrates its diverse workforce and patient base

Metro South Health provides health services for Brisbane's south side communities including Logan, Redlands and Scenic Rim. The cultural diversity of its patient base is reflected in its staff, with approximately one third of employees having been born overseas.

So, it made perfect sense that this organisation was motivated to take part in A Taste of Harmony! Metro South Health is committed to creating an environment in which its employees feel encouraged to bring their whole selves to work, including elements of their culture. A Taste of Harmony was trialled with two groups of corporate employees first - with the outcome being two very different events, both equally successful.

In 2020, Metro South Health is looking forward to expanding its A Taste of Harmony involvement by inviting all staff to take part in activities, helping to recognise and celebrate the wonderful cultural diversity that exists within the organisation.

We spoke with Javed Khan, Strategic Advisor of the Planetree initiative (an initiative focusing on person-centred care) about her passion for the event.

How did you hear about A Taste of Harmony?

I have known about the concept for many years, having previously worked in a cultural diversity role. I did initiate the event a couple of years ago, but at the time it didn't really take off. I started my new role as part of the team implementing the Planetree initiative, which created an opportunity

to start again in connecting with staff on culture. It was a very different (and positive!) experience this time round.

How does it link with your role in delivering the Planetree initiative within Metro South Health?

Metro South Health joined the Planetree International Certification Program a couple of years ago. Planetree International is a not-for-profit organisation based in United States, the organisation certify healthcare services for demonstrating excellence in Person-Centred Care. The Planetree philosophy of care is focused on caring for our patients/consumers and our staff as the 'caregivers'. MSH is the first HHS in Australia to have achieved Planetree International Certification as our demonstration and commitment to Person-Centred Care.

The A Taste of Harmony event is one step in helping our staff to feel belonging as well as energised and inspired through recognising the importance of sharing and celebrating cultures.

How did you participate in 2019?

A Taste of Harmony was trialled with our corporate staff across two buildings. It was really interesting to see how the two events ended up being so very different!

At the first event, everyone was asked to bring a dish that represented their cultural background and come prepared to say something about their culture (this could be related to their dish or they could bring something in to talk about). There was a flag to represent every staff member's cultural background, which was also turned into a game.

The second event had an 'Australiana' theme with a greater focus on the Australian and Indigenous cultures. People were asked to bring in dishes to represent Australian culture, which resulted in another great mix of food. It was fascinating to see how people interpreted Australian food from a multicultural lens.

We had terrific attendance at both events, and given how much everyone loved it, I have no doubt this will continue in 2020.

What are your plans for 2020?

We want to expand it out so that all employees at Metro South Health have the opportunity to take part in a cultural diversity activity. We'll invite all of our staff to host lunches and morning teas (where possible) and also offer ideas for our people in hospitals to take part in an activity to celebrate culture.

Why is it important in your workplace?

Like many organisations we have diversity guidelines in place, but we need to find ways to go beyond documentation alone and put words into action. A Taste of Harmony gave us that chance.

So often you walk into the building, say hello but never have a chance to say more than this as everyone is so busy in their day-to-day to work. Taking part in events like Taste of Harmony gives us a chance to acknowledge and respect everyone's identity. It also gives staff confidence and is just a great platform for connecting on a deeper level.

Are there any particular stories from A Taste of Harmony that you can share?

I brought Sindhi Biryani in and was asked many questions about the different ingredients and different spices that I used to make my dish. It attracted a lot of interest because it was new for most people and not what they were expecting from a Pakistani dish. This naturally led to other questions about my culture, which I felt very happy to share.

Why is celebrating cultural diversity a priority in your organisation?

As well as connecting with the core philosophy of Planetree and person-centred care/staff centred care, it helps to bring team members together and provides a chance to really connect on a deeper level. It's also helpful in our roles supporting patients of diverse backgrounds to have an awareness and cultural sensitivity.

We can all bring something from our culture that is good and take great learnings from this.

Why would you encourage other organisations to get involved?

Make it a priority because it will benefit your staff by helping to create a sense of community at work, and participation also demonstrates how your organisation is focused on its people. I remember one person saying to me, "This is so nice to be a part of and we need to do more events like this more often." This is exactly what we are going to do! I can't wait for A Taste of Harmony next year.

