

Optimal care behind upskilling IHC's vehicle drivers

When you have almost 4,000 drivers out on the road, transporting people with disabilities all over the country, you need to know they're totally focused and driving to the very best of their ability.



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Community services organisation improves safety with Fleetcoach's online driver training

IHC is New Zealand's leading provider of services for people with intellectual disabilities, supporting more than 4,000 people. Services include residential care, supported living, specialist support, vocational support and social housing through Accessible Properties.

IHC eager to increase safety and reduce fleet costs

With such a large fleet on the road, IHC wanted to improve safety through driver training and reduce the cost of vehicle repairs.

"With a fleet of this size, the cost of repairs due to accidents can be substantial," says Trish Brosnan, IHC's Learning and Development Manager. "The bulk of these were slow-moving, reversing incidents — it can be more of a challenge handling a big vehicle like a van, when you're used to driving a car. But primarily our aim was to manage risk and make sure that our staff and the people they're driving are safe."

Driver training wasn't new—it had always been provided to IHC's staff—but as IHC began to leverage technology, specifically with online learning, they recognised an opportunity to upskill their drivers.

"We'd put all of our other learning online," Trish recalls, "so we started looking at the available options."

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TRISH BROSANAN



As Trish and her team evaluated the online driver training options on the market, it soon became clear that Fleetcoach not only ticked all the boxes but stood out from the crowd. "We wanted a solution that would integrate with our systems," Trish says, "that was a big plus. It meant the user experience was the same for the learners as for everything else. We also looked at how easy it was to use, and how well it reflected real-life situations that drivers could come across on a day-to-day basis."

Fleetcoach provided insights for drivers to learn and improve

New Zealand has gone through several lockdowns over the past two years due to COVID-19, and this has been challenging for many organisations. However, when the decision was made to go with Fleetcoach, Trish and her team were able to use the opportunity to get to grips with the driver training solution.

"We started talking to Fleetcoach just before the first lockdown last year," Trish recalls. "The team that was evaluating the solution had the opportunity to actually do the training while we were in lockdown. We had plenty of time to play with it, and we had a great experience particularly with the Skills Awareness course."

Having the time to get to grips with the driver training solution was a major plus for Trish's team, and an enjoyable experience. "Although I did find out that I wasn't quite as good a driver as I thought I was!" Trish admits with a rueful laugh.

Trish and her team were impressed with the solution, and thought it would be easy for their staff to undertake. Initially, the programme was made available to everyone at IHC who is allocated a work vehicle. Once their training was underway and clearly a success, IHC began rolling it out to all their support workers - beginning with their new staff. "It's part of their onboarding," Trish explains. "The aim is to get everyone across the country trained."

An upskilled happy workforce

Feedback from IHC's drivers has been wholly positive. "People really enjoyed the training," Trish says. "They like the modules and the tools, and they've been surprised at things they weren't aware of, particularly around their own inattention."

Good-natured, healthy competition has also been a big part of staff buy-in and engagement. "There are plenty who don't want to just get three stars," Trish explains. "One of my team went through several attempts to achieve five stars—nothing less was acceptable to her!"

Trish goes on to say that this is just one of a number of interventions and they've noticed an improvement in driver performance, due to increased awareness when they're out on the road. "We're seeing the benefits for sure," she says. "It's definitely having a positive impact."

Part of the overall positive experience has also been due to IHC's relationship with Fleetcoach. "They've been so great—they're a big part of the joy of using the solution," Trish says. "They're super helpful, always available, and certainly willing to support whatever we need."

Looking ahead, Trish says that the team are enthusiastic about continuing to work with Fleetcoach. "We're looking at some individual development," she explains. "Particularly around driving vans. A lot of the staff have actually done the four-wheel drive module, so I think if we had a van module they'd be really engaged with that as well."

For Trish and her team, one of the most valuable aspects of the program was how the training helped IHC staff reflect on themselves as drivers, giving them an understanding of what skills they needed to be safe. This is significant, because research has shown time and again that self-awareness, and awareness of surroundings, are both crucial skills that need to be used together when driving. "We all think we're good drivers, but the truth is we're not as aware as we should be. It's worthwhile just being able to test that."

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