

More than a bundle of joy

Some businesses are going beyond the Government's paid parental leave package of 14 weeks by offering parents a range of support to show their appreciation and help retain valued staff and institutional knowledge.

Westpac, a past winner in the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards, is one employer that supports parents by topping up the Government payment so employees receive two-thirds of their usual income for 12 weeks of their parental leave. It also gives expectant parents a baby "basket" or satchel with an assortment of nappies, baby wipes, teething toys, drinking cups, a branded bib and other goodies. There is a \$100 voucher, which can be deposited into baby's first Westpac account, as well as Harold the giraffe soft toy, and a one-year membership to a Parents Centre in their area.

"We've given out about 300 baby packs in the last year and over 60 people signed up for their 12-month membership with Parents Centres," says Marianne Wilkinson, Westpac's Head of Policy & Consulting.

Parents Centres' corporate partnership, which provides the option of Parents Centres membership, adds a personal touch to paid parental leave packages. Parents Centres focuses on creating community networks, support systems, and education programmes for new or expectant parents – and has been doing so for 50 years. Its 52

branches throughout the country offer childbirth and breastfeeding education programmes, practical parenting skills, and professional development for parents.

Helping parents cope

Each Westpac employee that takes up the offer to join Parents Centres receives an information pack with a magazine, resources on pregnancy and childbirth, and information on child birth education programmes. They can also register for a newsletter, store discount card, and coffee groups to share their experiences with other expectant parents. Support networks are developed and parents have access to a varied suite of parent education programmes.

Baby business

Westpac has an 87.5% rate of return from parental leave for women at management level and latest figures are just under 80% across the bank. "We recognise the important contribution working parents bring to our organisation, and for over ten years Westpac has been going that extra mile to make employees with new babies feel valued," says Marianne.

Tania Potaka is Westpac's Wellington call centre operations manager, and was happy to take up Westpac's corporate partnership with Parents Centres. "I went to a childbirth programme over two weekends: it may have been because the others attending had sought out the

course and paid to join, but they seemed to be very similar to me. I have made lasting friendships," says Tania. "Some of the programmes I went on were free, others like *Introducing Solids* I paid \$10 for, but got a free recipe book. I didn't really realise the full benefits I was going to get out of the membership until actually becoming a parent. I received fantastic support."

Another staff member, Bev Costain, took up the year-long Parents Centres' membership both times she has been on parental leave from the bank. "I found the newsletter had some helpful information, and I made good use of the discount card," says Bev.

Bev has been with Westpac for twenty years and had her first child three years ago. She took nine months parental leave after her second child and is happy to be back as Hornby branch team leader. "I have a really understanding boss and find the job itself rewarding. I wanted to come back – I missed adult company and earning money, but more importantly getting these gifts from Westpac made me feel very valued. The fact that the bank thinks that having a family is important impressed me," she says.

Chief Executive Officer of Parents Centres, Viv Gurrey, says that a number of organisations including the Reserve Bank, Kimberly Clark NZ, Auckland City Council and Westpac are corporate partners of Parents Centres. "Our corporate partnerships are a key component of our growth strategy and

reflect employers' recognition that they need to support parents during this challenging and exciting time," says Viv.

"Over 3500 volunteers run Parents Centres programmes throughout the country and we influence around 16,000 parents each year. That is a large sector of the new parenting workforce so a Parents Centres corporate partnership is a smart way for businesses to support

employees, and communicate their sense of corporate responsibility and community involvement."

"Corporate funding goes a long way. Our centres are not just about child birth education and support, we also offer ongoing strategies for conscious and positive parenting, and our upgraded website initiative will increase the opportunities for support through on-

line learning and e-commerce."

Parents Centres' corporate partners appear in the Kiwi Parent magazine and will be listed on the new Parents Centres website. Parents Centres' projects include programmes for teenagers, for parents in prison, as well as for migrant parents trying to integrate into society.

You can find out more at www.parentscentre.org.nz.

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