

Case study: Supporting parents and carers



Stockland



Property Operators



1,500
employees



60%
female



40%
male

Challenge

For many years, Stockland has been focused on providing competitive parental benefits to attract and retain employees. The challenge has been to continue evolving the parental offering in a way that reflects the changing needs of parents and carers.

Strategy

Understanding that the caring requirements of employees vary widely, the company's priority has been to review its existing offering, looking for improvements that provide employees with a greater degree of flexibility in how they structure their parental leave benefits.

Actions

To ensure that the diversity and inclusion strategy was meeting the needs of its people and focusing on issues most important to them, Stockland decided to create employee networking groups.

As part of this, a Parents and Carers Employee Advocacy Group was formed in 2016. Meeting every month, the working group discusses ideas to maintain and improve the experience of carers – such as the recent change in the definition of 'carer' to include elder care in addition to parents caring for children.

An Executive Committee sponsor attends every meeting to make sure that ideas get aired at the highest level and to help cut through red tape where necessary.

Stockland Supporting parents and carers

This working group has been the catalyst for changes to parental benefits at Stockland, including new leave benefits which took effect in May 2017. These include:

1. Changes to long service leave so people who have taken time out of the workforce are entitled to pro-rata long service leave on their 10-year anniversary date with Stockland.
2. Managers now have discretion to allow primary carer's leave within 18 months of birth or adoption to encourage more males/secondary carers to subsequently take primary carers' leave.
3. A new parental leave benefit, Parental Flex Options, gives employees a choice of one of three new benefits when taking primary carers' leave:
 - a) Two additional weeks of paid parental leave.
 - b) The employee's regular rate of superannuation paid during unpaid parental leave for a maximum of 36 weeks.
 - c) A lump sum of \$3,000 (gross amount) on return from parental leave.

Existing parental leave benefits

- All employees are eligible for paid parental leave after six months of permanent service and superannuation accrues while on paid parental leave.
- The employee's full salary is paid for 16 weeks, in addition to the government's paid scheme, whether it is taken in 16 consecutive weeks or spread out over a longer period.
- Two weeks of paid parental leave is provided for secondary carers.
- Secondary carers are also eligible to take an additional 14 weeks paid leave if they become primary carer.
- Encouraging more males/secondary carers to take primary carer's leave encourages broader gender balance in the workforce as well as helping fathers/secondary carers to bond with children which supports employee wellbeing.

With this in mind, Stockland is working to highlight male parental leave stories on the intranet, particularly fathers who have taken primary carer's leave.

Improving return-to-work rates

A high return-to-work rate after parental leave improves staff morale and productivity, and creates a sense of community and belonging within an organisation. A cost-effective way of retaining skilled staff and reducing recruitment and training costs, it can boost organisational efficiency through the retention of institutional memory, industry knowledge, networks and contacts.

Stockland's return to work support

- One of the key return-to-work supports is an on-site childcare facility, Treehouse, purpose built in 2009 at Stockland's head office in Sydney. Managed by external provider KU, Stockland staff have first preference, and, with the aim of keeping fees as competitive as possible, Stockland covers rent, building costs and maintenance of facilities. Parents also have the option to salary sacrifice child care fees at Treehouse.
- For those on parental leave, keeping-in-touch events are held throughout the year in each capital city. These are attended by managers and a direct report to the CEO. Two hours free child care is provided so parents on leave can participate fully in the events.

Flexibility supporting all staff

- Stockland has created a culture where flexibility is offered to everyone and those who have flexible start and finish times to meet caring responsibilities shouldn't feel guilty. Stockland works on the premise that when people feel trusted and valued, the company can harness that goodwill to create a motivated and productive workforce.
- One Simple Thing (OST) is an internal campaign that focuses on encouraging all employees to think about one simple thing that will help them manage

their work-life balance, and are encouraged to discuss that one simple thing with their manager and then put it into practice. OST is not set in stone, and can change as life and circumstances change. OST can be leaving work early to attend a dance class, starting work late to do the school drop off, leaving early to coach a child's sporting team, or caring for an elderly parent, with the key objective being to make the concept of flexibility mainstream rather than something just for certain employees.

- To complement the flex policy, the BYO device scheme allows all employees to apply for remote work access and to purchase a device from a partner retailer that suits their needs.

Outcomes

The Parental Transitions program has helped achieve a consistent, more than 90% return to work rate since 2010 (92% in the 2016 financial year), compared to 70% before 2009.

Employees who are primary carers and/or who returned from primary carer's leave in the previous twelve months have higher than average engagement scores.

Employee experience

Gennaro Folino, a Retail Design Manager for Stockland Melbourne, took primary carer's leave.

"My wife took leave after our son Julian was born, but wanted to return to work as she had studied so hard to get where she was, and she wanted to keep up her skills.

I wanted to support my wife and help around the house but I also wanted to be a dad. I lost my father a couple of years ago – I didn't get to see him that much when we were growing up, because he was working long hours in a factory and I didn't want to miss out on time with Julian.

When I first raised the idea of taking time off work, people outside work were quite negative saying it would be career-limiting, but when I brought it up at Stockland, my colleagues were incredibly supportive – I was amazed and so grateful they made it so easy.

In my previous job, after my father passed away, I took time out to look after my mother and the company made me fill out a 'stat dec' saying where I was and what I was doing – it was terrible.

The culture is just so different at Stockland – it's about the company respecting and trusting workers – when



I was on leave I was approached by recruiters for other jobs but there was no way I'd leave. It's a fantastic place to work.

I even sent an email to the CEO thanking him for putting this kind of culture in place because I know these kind of things come from the top down – there are lots of good stories on the intranet about men taking parental leave, so it's not just talk about flexibility – people are actually doing it."

Davina Rooney, General Manager Sustainability, used the on-site childcare for her son, and her daughter will start later this year.

"I have received a huge amount of support from Stockland over the last nine years, in particular their flexibility around my family's needs. I was promoted by Stockland just after I announced my pregnancy with my first child, while on maternity leave with my second, and recently again as a member of the part-time workforce.

As a new mum returning to work, I was worried about how my son would adapt. Having high quality childcare on-site that exceeded all of my expectations was a huge part of making me comfortable. The childcare provider, KU was integrated into Stockland's return-to-work events, and when my little Jonah became a toddler and moved into day care, it was a key part of my transition back to work.

I've been working part-time for the last five years and I don't work in the office on Fridays. This means that while I have a busy work role, I can still be involved with my children – I'm about to start reading groups at my son's school and this is very important to me.

The people at Stockland have an amazingly flexible attitude – I once received an urgent call from one of our executives and while on the call, my daughter fell over. The executive patiently waited for me to console Eva, then apologised for interrupting me. This strongly contrasts to other workplaces where people have been made to feel less committed or professional for having caring commitments in their life."

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