

WISE HEADS AT BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL

Brisbane City Council has developed a program to value and retain its older workers while capturing their knowledge and experience.

Senior HR Consultant with Brisbane City Council Margaret Harley said council piloted the Wise Heads program in 2006 in divisions with high proportions of mature-age staff.

“The program continued in 2007 as we took an even broader approach to Council’s ageing workforce - looking at issues like superannuation, flexible work arrangements, transferable skills and preparation for retirement through seminars and workshops,” said Margaret.

“The branches which took part in the pilot have both white collar and blue collar workers so there are varying issues affecting their older employees.

“Through the Wise Heads program they each developed strategies and approaches that have improved the retention rates of their older workers and the documentation of corporate knowledge.”

CITY ASSETS TEAM



Brisbane City Council Wise Heads team leader and Principal Engineer Peter White

Nearly half of the staff in Brisbane City Council’s City Assets branch are aged over 45 years working in mainly white collar roles including account management, engineering and program delivery.

City Assets branch Manager Paul Cotton said they also had a high number of employees who had been with council for 15 to 20 years and therefore held a lot of corporate knowledge.

“We were concerned that at aged 55 and over people would be leaving with that knowledge,” said Paul.

“So we identified people in that age group and gave them the opportunity to be involved in the Wise Heads pilot.

“Around 20 people took part in one-on-one interviews, sessions about flexible work arrangements and superannuation, and succession planning work as people identified their plans for the next five years and beyond.

“People are now informed about their options and we are seeing some of them take them up.”

Ken Memory, 69, was a retired traffic engineer who left with special expertise the City Assets branch could not replace.

Ken came back after 12 months in retirement to work three days a week, taking three months off at a time to travel.

“Ken’s return has meant he has been able to document and pass his knowledge on.”

Ken has now decided to return into retirement but the City Assets branch is now in a better position to maintain the role.

Wise Heads team leader Peter White, 60, now has a four day week arrangement using annual leave to fund his Monday off.

“This is working pretty well for Peter as he has grandchildren and is able to spend more time with them,” said Paul.

“We are prepared to look at any option to fit in with people - we have so many over 45, people are willing to make it work.”

Paul said because of the City Assets branch’s involvement in the Wise Heads pilot valuable knowledge and experience can be retained because staff are more aware of their options..

“The Wise Heads program is helping to keep people and get them to think about moving to other arrangements while keeping involved with the organisation.”

Brisbane City Council is continuing the Wise Heads program in 2008 to retain mature-age employees as valuable contributors to the council’s workforce and is encouraging managers to support and assist older staff by offering a range of career and retirement options.