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COLES TO INCREASE INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT TO 5500 PEOPLE

Coles grows to largest corporate Indigenous employer in just eight years, defying national trend

Coles has committed to further increase its Indigenous workforce to more than 5500 team members by 2023, equivalent to five per cent of the company's total headcount.

Coles in 2011 set a target to raise the number of Indigenous team members to 3,000 – up from just 65 Indigenous employees at the time the target was set – which would bring the Indigenous representation in the Coles workforce to around 3.3 per cent, in line with the overall Australian population.

Coles not only achieved that milestone two years early, the company is now Australia's largest corporate employer of Indigenous Australians with more than 4,200 Indigenous team members – and has now committed to further increasing that number to 5,500 by 2023.

In addition to the new employment target, Coles has also committed to growing the number of Indigenous team members in trade-skilled and leadership roles by three-fold in the next four years.

The announcement from Coles follows the release of the Federal Government's Close the Gap 2019 report, which highlighted a lack of improvement over the past decade in Indigenous employment¹, a critical factor in the health and prosperity of Indigenous people.

Coles Head of Indigenous Affairs Russell James said Coles' focussed strategy and emphasis on providing a diverse and inclusive environment continues to enable Coles to be recognised as a leading employer of choice by the broader Indigenous community.

"Coles is seen as a safe, supportive and welcoming place for Indigenous Australians to work, a place where you can develop a career, and we've worked hard to achieve this," he said.

"Our initial ambition was to employ 3,000 Indigenous team members by 2020. We're pleased to have well and truly exceeded this, and have now set the bar higher to 5,500 people. Our high retention rates of Indigenous team members will go a long way to achieving this.

"Today Coles employs around 200 Indigenous team members in trade or leadership roles and we want to raise this number to over 500 by 2023 by investing in training and dedicated mentoring to help them gain trade skills and management opportunities."

Coles' approach to increasing Indigenous employment includes working in partnership with Aboriginal employment specialists, including Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), the Australian Indigenous Business Alliance Group (AIBAG), MEEDAC Aboriginal Corporation and Wunan Foundation.

Wunan General Manager Programs Dr John Scougall said the organisation was proud to assist Coles in supporting the local Indigenous community.

¹<https://ctgreport.pmc.gov.au/employment>

“We appreciate the contribution of all of our partners, but it’s especially fantastic for a national organisation like Coles to work with us to empower the Indigenous communities by investing in their abilities and providing real work opportunities to strengthen their futures,” John said.

Renewal Support Manager Therese Laverty, who has worked with Coles for 32 years in a variety of leadership roles, said Coles is leading the way for Indigenous employment.

“There is a lot of opportunity for Indigenous people at Coles. Coles has broken down the barriers where Indigenous people can think they can come and work with us, because the support is genuinely there,” she said.

“I believe Coles is giving Indigenous people an opportunity that they may not otherwise receive because of their situation or upbringing.

“I started as a checkout operator back in 1987, and have since worked as a store manager at seven different Coles stores and in the store support office. Coles offered a number of in-house training programs like Retail Leaders, as well as provided funding to obtain a Certification 4 in Work Health and Safety and a Diploma of Business through Deakin University.

“It’s like it doesn’t even need to be a box anymore—it’s just part of how we do business. Now, everyone shows up, and if you’re the best person for the job, you’re in.”

Currently 3.6 per cent of Coles’ workforce identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, with more than 5.5 per cent of all new recruits at Coles this financial year identifying as Indigenous.

Coles’ Indigenous employment strategy has achieved the following highlights in FY19:

- 5.5% of all Coles team members hired have been Indigenous;
- Coles’ biggest growth in Indigenous team members this year has been in Darwin (45 hires), Alice Springs (38), Tamworth (35), Cairns (32) and Tasmania (26);
- A 46% increase in Coles Express Indigenous team members hired;
- A 27% increase in Indigenous Liquor store managers; and
- Coles currently has more Indigenous graduates than at any time previously.

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