TE URU TĀNGATA
Centre for Workplace Inclusion

DIVERSITY AWARDS NZ 2026

CASE STUDY

Mums in Blue

Gender Equity Award Winner



The Mums in Blue Network is a groundbreaking frontline-led initiative within New Zealand Police that is addressing the unique challenges faced by mothers in law enforcement. Through advocacy and collaboration, the network has transformed from an online support group into a catalyst for organisational change, improving retention and creating a more inclusive, family-friendly Police culture.

Mums in Blue began as a simple idea – an online coffee group for Police mums to share advice on parenting and stay connected during parental leave. Today, the Facebook group has more than 1300 members and has become a lifeline for women navigating the tension between motherhood and policing.

Assistant Commissioner Tusha Penny is the Executive sponsor supporting the Mums in Blue network.

“Mothers in policing were experiencing a range of practical barriers, from staying connected during parental leave to navigating pregnancy, flexible work and the return to frontline duties. Mums in Blue created a way for those experiences to be heard and brought into the organisation’s decision making”

“The transition back to work can bring its own challenges, including rebuilding fitness and confidence while balancing wellbeing and family responsibilities. The network has helped us better understand where more consistent and practical support is needed.”

Network members voiced frustrations about policies that hadn’t kept pace with real life, prompting network leads to take these issues to Police National Headquarters. Assistant Commissioner Tusha Penny took a partnership approach and the Mums in Blue Committee was established, creating a direct line from the Facebook group to the Police Executive.

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Frontline mums raise concerns through the network, and the most pressing issues are taken to the committee, where network leads sit alongside senior leaders and subject matter experts with an equal voice. This ensures the work remains community-led while building organisational accountability.

Together they have improved parental leave policies, enabled mothers to retain their work cell phones during parental leave and addressed human rights concerns around firearms training for pregnant employees. Trauma-informed fitness programmes now support a safe and confident return to work, while the committee is progressing changes to ex-gratia payments to provide financial support when mothers need it most.

The network also provides practical support when individual barriers arise. When one policewoman was unable to attend a detective course because she needed her newborn with her, she posted on the Facebook group. A committee member contacted the Director of the Police College, who organised on-site accommodation for her family so she could attend the course and have her baby nearby.

“There are many stories like this, and they take place on a platform that all staff can access, whether they are at work or on parental leave, and can post anonymously or as themselves – there are no barriers to participation,” Tusha says.

Direct support from the Police Commissioner, who makes himself readily available to network leads and provides funding and practical support, signals that the work is part of NZ Police’s long-term commitment to gender equity.

The model is also attracting attention beyond New Zealand. Mums in Blue has inspired a Canadian Police Service to establish its own network and has presented at an Australasian conference, sparking interest from other jurisdictions.



Te Uru Tāngata Centre for Workplace Inclusion Chief Executive Maretha Smit says Mums in Blue represents a rare and powerful example of bottom-up change that has successfully influenced institutional systems.

“What makes this particularly compelling is the authenticity of its origin — grounded in lived experience rather than organisational design — and its ability to translate that into tangible policy shifts within a highly structured, hierarchical environment. Its simplicity, emotional resonance, and sustained impact position it as a deeply credible and inspiring model for gender equity in complex organisations.”

Strategies for success



- Created a safe, accessible online community where Police mums can share experiences and raise concerns.
- Established a direct pathway from frontline employees to senior Police decision-makers.
- Gave network leads an equal voice alongside senior leaders and subject matter experts.
- Used lived experience to identify and address barriers in policy and practice.
- Secured visible support and practical resourcing from senior Police leaders.
- Kept priorities community-led, with network members determining the issues taken forward.

Results and benefits

- Mums in Blue has grown to more than 1300 members and is NZ Police's largest employee-led network.
- Mothers can retain work cell phones during parental leave, helping them remain connected to the organisation.
- Pregnant employees have clearer protections and exemptions around firearms training.
- Trauma-informed fitness programmes support mothers returning to frontline policing.
- Policy changes have reduced barriers for women on flexible work arrangements to qualify as detectives.
- The network's model has inspired a Canadian Police Service to establish its own Mums in Blue network.