

Support on the highwire

Caraniche at Work provides psychological support and training in the workplace. John Orr, Finance and HR Manager at Victorian Opera, explains why Caraniche was their first choice when it came time to look for support.

"At Victorian Opera, we work with tight deadlines," says John. "You're always putting on a show and the show must go on." While it's not unusual for arts organisations to be stretched during show time, John knew from previous roles that external help was available and worth seeking out.

"In my previous role, we had an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with Caraniche so I knew they offered high-quality services," he explains. "People work under pressure here and that impacts what they're doing at work and outside of work too. It's really priceless, to have something available for staff that's confidential."

John started at Victorian Opera in June 2016 and introduced the EAP six months later. "Because I knew of Caraniche I immediately had somewhere to go," says John. "I knew we needed help in lots of areas, like learning how to relate to one another in the workplace and managing stress."

Victorian Opera has 23 full-time staff members who steady the ship, while a hundred or so others come and go depending on the show. Directors, producers, conductors, singers, actors and occasionally dancers, they may be fleeting visitors, but all they leave an imprint on the permanent cast.

"One of the nice things about Caraniche is that they didn't treat us any differently because we're a small organisation," says John. "An org like ours who signs up on a user-pays plan may not use many services, so we could easily be dismissed. But that wasn't my experience with Caraniche who were understanding of our needs."

For permanent staff at Victorian Opera there's little time to rest between shows – there are sometimes concurrent shows with two rehearsal schedules and two casts. It's not your typical workplace and the stressors are unique, which is another reason John was keen to get Caraniche onboard.

"The pressure can really build and our staff need to know how to release that," he explains. "It's an interesting culture because everyone wants to put on a good show but often they're so busy they don't deal with things or sit down and discuss what went right or wrong."

Through the EAP, Victorian Opera's permanent staff can access three sessions of counselling with a Caraniche clinician. John receives a bill whenever the EAP is used, but the staff member's name is never included. "I know that the program works, even if I don't know who uses it," says John.





Victorian Opera have also used Caraniche's mediation services, to help staff communicate and come to an agreement over their differences. "Mediation helped our staff work together without friction, with an understanding that they could discuss things with each other, so long as it was done in a certain way."

"It was great to take the issue out of house and work independently with Caraniche as there was no bias at all. I think that's critical in mediation," says John. Staff members are now learning to communicate more effectively and reach out for support, while managing the demands of a busy performance schedule.

John also distributes Caraniche's monthly e-newsletter to staff and has found it useful for starting conversations around coping strategies. "How people communicate is critical to everything we do here," he says. "This is one piece of a much larger puzzle that has been really helpful in the last year."

"Some people have told me when they've accessed the EAP service," says John, chuckling. "They've been happy that they've found a way to resolve their issues and had the chance to develop strategies with an external expert. They tell me too that the Caraniche staff are helpful and professional, and that they really appreciated it."

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