

COOL COMPANIES



The business of finding sense in dubious choices

COMPANY NAME St James Ethics Centre

GIVEN that ethical dilemmas often result in headlines or heartache, it's useful there's an organisation on the front foot helping individuals and organisations consider their ethical choices.

"Ethics help the fabric of society," says the general manager of the St James Ethics Centre, Sally Treeby. "If people don't have trust in each other, we risk having a different type of society than many of us would like."

The non-profit centre offers ethical counselling services, courses in ethics, and it plays a role on boards or committees looking at sensitive issues, from stem cells to soldiers. "We're an applied ethics centre, so we try to support people in a practical way," Treeby says.

INITIATIVES

- The ethical counselling hotline, 1800 672 303, is among a host of society-focused programs.
- The company has a committed group of skilled volunteers, in addition to paid staff. Regular volunteers are treated like staff members; being included in staff meetings and communications and given job descriptions.
- Flexible working arrangements allow staff to work from home or work part-time.

- "Success agreements" similar to KPIs help staff stay focused on priorities in a busy, non-profit environment.
- Advisory council, mostly made up of large corporates, meets quarterly to offer assistance with strategic thinking.
- Shared leadership model between two leaders (general manager and executive director) allows each to play to strengths.
- New inner-city premises will offer rent-free lease for 25 years; part of a community commitment from the commercial developer and the City of Sydney.
- Present focus on upgrading technology will ensure not-for-profit status doesn't mean systems are left behind.
- Staff given extra leave over Christmas break.
- Strong focus on partnerships with global initiatives and national networks: home to the Global Reporting Initiative in Australia.

Two floors of (rent-free) office space will soon house staff in the heart of Sydney's business district. "We've worked with the developer and the City of Sydney to do this," Treeby says.

"Ethics is a great thing to have in the city; it gives back to the community and ... helps us retain and attract staff."

SUE WHITE