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| Dr Judy McGregor | Sue O' Shea |
| EEO Commissioner | Principal Advisor EEO |
| Human Rights Commission | Human Rights Commission |
| emilias@hrc.co.nz | sueo@hrc.co.nz |
| Ph: 04-496 9770 | Ph: 04-496 9774 |

The Inquiry into Equal Employment Opportunities in the Age Care Sector in New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional body for a national collective of more than **4,000 social workers**, who have day-to-day involvement with the most vulnerable people in our society. Our work is guided by a Code of Ethics that is aligned with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

Social work is founded on principles of human rights and social justice. We are guided by the Treaty of Waitangi and respect the equality, worth and dignity of all people. As stated by the 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy, we believe "*social well-being exists when all members of the community have a reasonable expectation of achieving those things which are generally accepted as necessary for a healthy and happy life*". Our mission is to enable people to develop their full potential; our skill-set is problem solving and facilitation of positive change in individuals, organisations, whānau and communities. We recognise the environment contains opportunities for people to be both agents of change and victims of factors beyond their control. As a profession, we strive to alleviate poverty, foster social inclusion and liberate those who are vulnerable or oppressed. Social work is evidence-based and draws on theories of human development, behaviour and social systems.

Social workers respond to crises and emergencies along with the personal or social problems that arise from experience of barriers, inequities and injustices within our society. Our interventions involve problem solving, development of coping strategies, one-on-one counselling and therapy, family and group work, agency administration, community organisation and helping people to access services, resources and support systems within their community. We work across government and non-government settings including community organisations, iwi agencies, private practice, youth justice, child protection, mental health, addictions and disability. We are involved in research, training, education,

professional development, competency assessment, data gathering, risk assessment, structural analysis, interagency protocols and the improvement of social policy.

ANZASW's submission on the Inquiry into Equal Employment Opportunities in the Age Care Sector in New Zealand

Whether they are resident in their own homes or in residential care facilities the elderly are frequently vulnerable members of the community and deserve the highest quality care in order to maintain a quality of life.

The very low wages paid to the non-regulated section of the workforce, residential care workers, personal care providers and domestic assistance workers makes these positions undesirable or unsustainable for many New Zealanders.

Community based workers are not currently paid for travel time or any time when they are required to wait for professional assistance such as an ambulance to provide professional care for their client. In this respect it could be argued that the low paid workforce is subsidising the companies and NGOs that are providing the age care services. Thus employment in this field is often supplementing another low paid role or is supplemented by a second job. This can render the workforce tired, stressed and generally not well positioned to fulfil the role adequately.

Another scenario is that positions are filled by workers from the migrant community many of whom have poor English language skills. This can be a barrier for a client who is unable to convey their needs; the employer who may have difficulty making the requirements of care plans clear and the worker who may find it difficult to understand instructions and requests.

Qualifications for the workforce are frequently limited to:

- Foundation Skills NZAQ Level 2
- Core Competencies NZQA Level 3
- Residential NZQA Level 3
- Dementia Limited Credit Programme

These are very low level qualifications and provide little in the way of career path opportunities. ANZASW regards this level of qualification as inadequate for a workforce providing care services for the elderly.

The Age Related residential Care contract for example specifies a list of training that must be completed by care staff with direct contact with residents. The training however can be

provided either within the unit or externally. This means that there is possibly little consistency in the training provided and if provided in house offers no NZAQ credits. The Rehabilitation and Support Services contracts make no reference to education and training expected for the workforce providing services such as home help, personal care, carer support and socialisation services.

Apart from the Health and Disability Code and any employment contract requirements the workforce does not have supporting quality assurance structures such as:

- A Code of Ethics
- Practice Standards
- Independent competency assessment systems apart from any internal performance appraisals that may or may not be provided by the employer.

A Social Justice Perspective.

ANZASW identifies that there are social justice issues within the age care sector in relation to the following areas:

1. Members of the aged community are cared for by a work force that is low paid, poorly educated and frequently made up of migrants with poor English. All of this can compromise the quality of care a vulnerable sector of the community receives. This may put individuals at risk by compromising quality of life and potentially their safety.
2. The workforce is low paid and for many it is a matter of either working long hours or holding alternative employment in order to be able to earn a sustainable wage to meet day to day living costs. This has the potential to compromise the ability to provide high quality care.
3. Qualifications for the workforce are not mandatory. Generally the workforce therefore either does not have skills appropriate to providing care for the elderly or have a very low skill level. This approach to the requirements for a qualified workforce only serves to diminish opportunities for quality support to be provided.

Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers urges the Inquiry into Equal Employment Opportunities in the Age Care Sector in New Zealand to set realistic standards in relation to the age care support workforce including:

- Setting minimum qualifications required for the age care workforce who provide services such as residential care staff, home help, personal care, carer support and socialisation services and a clear career pathway.

- Establishing a realistic wage for the workforce in order to facilitate the development of a long term and sustainable workforce who will be able to provide quality care.
- The development of a set of service delivery frameworks including Codes of Ethics, Practice Standards and assessment of minimum competencies on a regular basis. For greater independence this could be by way of the establishment of a professional membership body or could be established by the industry.



Lucy Sandford-Reed

Chief Executive

DDI 03 349 0190 extn 4

Mobile 027 349 0190

E-mail lucysandford-reed@anzasw.org.nz

Web www.anzasw.org.nz