



New Zealand

Rescare New Zealand Inc

Families Speaking Up for People with an Intellectual Disability



5 October 2009

Hon Tony Ryall
Minister of Health
Parliament House
Wellington

Dear Mr. Ryall,

Re Disability Support Services Workforce

Thank you for the emphasis you have put on the importance of workforce issues since you became Minister of Health. It is pleasing to have a minister who really appreciates how crucial workforce issues are to the successful delivery of good health and disability services.

I am writing to you on behalf of *RescareNZ Inc*. We are an organisation of parents and welfare guardians who speak up for people with an intellectual disability. Our goals are to promote the welfare and quality of life of people with an intellectual disability, many of whom previously lived in institutions.

As well as being intellectually handicapped, many of the people we represent also suffer from multiple physical disabilities such as blindness, deafness, paralysis, lack of speech, having to be tube fed, as well as having behavioural problems. Consequently, the work that disability support workers do in caring for our family members is complex and requires many varying skills.

At our recent Annual General Meeting the *DSS Work Force Action Plan* was tabled and members were pleased to see it completed after having had input through a consumer representative on the *DSS Workforce Reference Group*. Our meeting requested that I write to you passing on our support for the implementation of this plan as soon as possible.

You will be aware that at present the PSA in conjunction with the SFWU are running a campaign called *Up where we belong — RAISING THE STATUS OF DISABILITY SUPPORT WORK*. Our meeting also agreed to express our strong support for this campaign.

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Disability support workers are integral to the well-being of our family members. That is why we want to see them given adequate training and remuneration. Their skills and experience need to be valued and they need a career path. Above all their work needs to have the status it deserves.

To retain a stable workforce we believe that the status of disability support workers must be improved. It is very important that there is a stable workforce of people that our family members are familiar with and who know and understand them.

We urge you to look seriously at making every improvement possible to the status and conditions of the disability support workforce. They need decent pay and recognition. Valued workers make all the difference to the well being of our family members.

We endorse the *DSS Workforce Action Plan*, but we are still concerned that it will take a long time to make a difference to the status of ordinary disability support workers. We agree with the importance of developing higher levels of training, better co-ordination of training, leadership training, and improved recruitment. However, we cannot stress enough the importance of improving the pay and conditions of the ordinary workers who do the actual day-to-day caring of people with a disability.

We understand your Government has a budget for implementation of the *DSS Work Force Action Plan* and we are keen to learn from you how soon work will start on this.

We also wish to know what steps you are taking to make sure that providers are more accountable. We would like your assurance that future contracts which your Ministry signs with providers will require them to demonstrate better value for money; that they will be required to show delivery of higher basic pay rates tied into improved levels of training. We are hoping for a better reporting system which will ensure a better quality of life for our family members as a result of delivering better outcomes for workers.

Thank you for the leadership which you are giving to this important workforce issue. We look forward to hearing your positive response to our concerns.

Yours sincerely

Lena Berger
National Co-ordinator
RescareNZ