

For immediate release

Valuing Caregiving for Older New Zealanders

Wellington, New Zealand - 21 December 2011 - In the last two weeks there has been an increasing groundswell of unrest from Caregivers believing that they are undervalued and underpaid. While rest home workers from Radius Residential took to the streets in Christchurch in support of a pay claim last week¹, the Obama administration released proposed regulations to give nearly two million home care workers in the USA minimum wage and overtime protections².

With an increasingly aging population in New Zealand, more people are taking on the important and challenging role of working as Carers. If Carers are to be valued, how is this value represented in the way Carers are treated and remunerated. Most paid Carers in New Zealand work in the publicly-funded home care and residential care industries, however, a smaller number work in the privately-funded home care service.

The Grey Power report into Aged Care (2010), states that the average hourly rate for Carers is \$14.40 per hour and that “wages have gone up by around 5% over the last five years³”. However, Coral Hodgson from the Service and Food Workers' Union, said rest home workers for Radius Residential are on a maximum of \$14.60 an hour with most on rates between \$13 and \$14 per hour⁴.

Lawrie Stewart of Elder Family Matters, a Wellington-based privately funded home care service, says, “valuing Carers comes down to three things: choice for both Carers and the older people accessing care, appreciation for the difficulty of the role, and remuneration.”

With reference to choice, Mr Stewart says, “Our Carers are offered assignments to work with older people based on a careful matching process. The Carer can choose to accept or reject the assignment depending on whether it fits their schedule and lifestyle. Carers feel valued in this service provision process. As an organisation we believe that older people have the right, as empowered citizens, to be in control of the care they receive, when they receive it and who provides it. By ensuring this happens, our Clients feel valued in this service allocation process.”

With reference to appreciating the role of Carer, Mr Stewart says, “In our organisation Carers are not cleaners, they care for people first and foremost. The Carers need to be knowledgeable and skilled in terms of handling and communication to work with older people. However, attitudes of patience, responsiveness, acceptance, and a belief that the older person is valuable in their own right, are the most important attributes that we look for. As long as people have the right attitudes, the knowledge and skills can be developed.”

With reference to remuneration, Elder Family Matters pay between \$16 and \$18 per hour. While this remuneration is higher than the national average, Mr Stewart says, “this pay still doesn't recognise the competence that our Carers bring to their role. However, unless individuals themselves, public servants or politicians value Carers enough to allocate resources relative to Carers competency then Carers will continue to be viewed as little more than housekeepers or babysitters.”

As Mr Stewart says, “The difference between people that choose Elder Family Matters and those that don't is that our clients know that quality care from a quality Carer comes at a personal cost.”

¹ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/6129080/Rest-home-workers-paid-too-little>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/16/business/wage-protection-planned-for-home-care-workers.html>

³ <http://labour.org.nz/sites/labour.org.nz/files/Aged%20Care%20Report.pdf> Page 35

⁴ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/6129080/Rest-home-workers-paid-too-little>

Contact:

Lawrie Stewart

General Manager

Elder Family Matters

04 385 8505

027 266 6625

lawrie@elderfamilymatters.co.nz