

COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORKERS

A JOB EVALUATION EXERCISE

The PSA recently commissioned a job evaluation comparing the work of community support workers (CSW) working in intellectual disability support services with Health/Therapy Assistants and Corrections Officers.

The purpose of this job evaluation has been to use an objective tool to compare community support workers with occupations of similar skill levels to accurately determine the size of the community support worker role. This exercise was supported by two major disability support providers, Spectrum Care and Healthcare NZ.

Background

Providing appropriate disability support is complex and challenging work and must meet the individual needs of people. The focus is on a support role i.e. working with people with disabilities in a developmental way to enable them to live as full a life as possible. Community support workers need a wide range of skills including problem solving, physical dexterity, being observant to changes in behaviour or well being and judging how best to respond (as well as reporting on this).

Some people requiring support have dual diagnosis (mental health and intellectual disability), others have sensory and/or physical disabilities as well as an intellectual disability. Some exhibit extremely challenging behaviour, others require minimal assistance to live independently in the community. Others are medically fragile and/or technology dependent.

All require and deserve high standards of care and support to live as full a life as possible. Providing the support and care required for the individual needs of people is complex and challenging.

The PSA commissioned the job evaluation exercise because of concern that there is an undervaluation of the work of community support workers. The skill requirements of the job are not reflected in the wages people receive.

Wages are instead determined by the level of funding available not the skills, knowledge, demands and level of responsibility that the job requires.

Community support work is predominantly performed by women (76% of community support workers providing residential intellectual disability support services are women) working in small household residences scattered throughout the country providing 24/7 support. This work was previously delivered by qualified psychopaedic nurses and assistants within hospitals.

The PSA supported and facilitated the transfer of disability services from institutional to community provision of support and advocated that community provision of support would require increased funding levels. The move from hospital based to community based service delivery occurred during the 1990s coinciding with a combination of cost cutting, the Employment Contracts Act, high unemployment and minimal funding. The PSA, along with others said at the time that increased funding would be needed to make the goal of "living in the community" a reality. Instead funding for disability support has diminished or stagnated. The level of skill required to do the work has not diminished.

Disability support continues to be funded on the basis that workers are low skill and low paid. This has led to the erosion of wages, reduced training and development opportunities and a lack of recognition of the skills knowledge and responsibility of the work. Valuing the work of caring and supporting people with disabilities is essential to providing quality service provision. Unless we can recruit, develop and retain people to stay in the sector with decent pay and conditions there will be a constant and high churn of staff leading to a lower quality of life for both community support workers and the people they support.

Currently there is on average a 25-30% turnover of staff with a 50% turnover in the first year of employment. Workforce demands for community support workers generally are expected to grow by 4% per annum¹. Employer surveys² report difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff at all levels. Employers have reported that the issues around difficulties in employing staff include: low pay; competition in wages and salaries from this and other sectors; the nature of the work is demanding and difficult; lack of confidence in working with challenging behaviours; lack of a career path and public perception of the job. It is not perceived as an attractive and well paid job that you can train for and any investment in training is mitigated by the high staff turnover rates.

Who Cares?

- ✘ Employers share the concern and recognise this as skilled work. HCNZ and Spectrum Care supported this exercise
- ✘ Family members worry about quality care and continuity of staff
- ✘ PSA representatives are concerned about fair pay and quality work
- ✘ Staff feel undervalued

The Evaluation

The Department of Labour Equitable Job Evaluation system was utilised. This system was developed to provide a job evaluation tool that can fully describe and measure key aspects of all jobs including previously under described and undervalued aspects of female dominated work. The system was tested by a working group of job evaluators and equity experts. In order to use the system, the PSA had to meet the conditions of use set by the Department of Labour, including assurance that the consultant using the system was fully competent to do so. Janice Burns from Top Drawer Consultants undertook the job evaluation. Janice is an experienced practitioner in conducting job evaluations with extensive expertise in both gender analysis and job evaluation.

¹ MOH Workforce Quality and Safety Report 2004

² NRID Report 2007

Quality control was assured by having job holders and their managers verify that the job information obtained by the consultant is an accurate and fair representation of the job. In addition, an external independent consultant validated the evaluation results.

Selection of Comparators

The PSA sought advice from the Pay and Employment Equity Unit of the Department of Labour in the selection of jobs for comparison with community support workers. Key criteria were:

- ✠ entry requirements to the occupation
- ✠ level of occupational classification within the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations 2005 – the classification indicated the predominant skill level of each of the sub-major occupational group
- ✠ the level of the professional qualification available to the occupation
- ✠ gender occupancy

None of the three occupations (community support workers, corrections officers, therapy assistants) has mandatory entry qualifications. 'Life skills' and 'life experience' requirements are common to all of them. Induction after appointment predominates as the way to gain the skills necessary for the job. The modules in the induction processes can be translated into credits towards NZQA qualifications. While the period of induction of correction officers is about 2-3 weeks longer than the other occupations³, the range of core topics covered is reasonably similar.

While the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations 2005 (ANSCO) relies on matching job titles (which are not always an exact match), the following occupations are all described as skill level 4: prison officers, personal care assistants, child or youth residential workers, aged and disabled carers, nursing support workers and therapy aids.

After appointment, there are formal qualifications at equivalent NZQA levels (supported by the employers) available to staff.

For correction officers progression beyond the starting salary of approximately \$41,615 is dependent on undertaking the National Certificate in offender management Level 3

The courses available to community support workers are Careerforce's⁴ National Certificate in Community Support Services, Levels 3 and 4 and Human Services – National Certificate NZQA level 4.

While the gender occupancy of the three occupations was not a primary criteria for the selection of comparators, the Community Support Worker occupational group is about 76% women and part of the rationale for undertaking the evaluation is the belief that CSW work is undervalued partly because it is female dominated work. The correction officer occupational group is 77% male. Therapy Assistants are also predominately women although exact proportions are not available.

Reviewing the above material led to the conclusion that Corrections Officers and Therapy Assistants were appropriate comparators in the Community Support Worker evaluation.

The PSA in conjunction with employers supplied job descriptions and located job holders to interview in each of the occupational groups. All but one of the interviews was face to face, generally in the place of employment.

³ This is possibly because the induction is a centralised residential event – presumably to manage the large number of recruits for prisons across the country.

⁴ The ITO for the non regulated health workforce

The remaining interview was by telephone. All interviews were completed by the consultant due to this being a small evaluation exercise. Auckland and greater Wellington were chosen as sites and the job holders were PSA members. The PSA and employers jointly selected people to be interviewed.

The Results

The weighted total scores for the three jobs were similar (full report available through the PSA). The data supports a view that these jobs are of substantially similar value.

Comparison of Pay rates of Community Support Workers, Corrections Officers and Health/Therapy Assistants

Community support workers are employed by a number of non government organisations and private providers throughout the country. A survey in August last year (2007)⁵ showed their average pay rates nationwide were well below corrections officers and therapy assistants.

Starting pay:

The average starting pay for community support workers is \$13.23 an hour or \$27,518 a year.

The normal starting pay for therapy assistants is \$ 29,266, \$1748 more than community support workers, a 6.4% pay gap.

Corrections officers pay starts at \$41,615 a year, \$14,097 more than community support workers, a 51% pay gap.

Top pay rates:

The average top pay rate for community support workers is \$16.20 an hour or \$33,696 a year.

Therapy assistant pay increases after 5 years to \$39,908 with a top rate of \$41,109, \$7413 more than community support workers, a 22% pay gap.

Corrections officers pay rises with internal training to \$51,257 a year, \$17,551 more than CSWs, a 52% pay gap.

What Next?

This information has been sent to the following people:

- Chairperson and members of Parliament's Inquiry into the Care and Service Provision for Disabled People
- Minister of Health
- Minister for Disability Issues
- Ministry of Health officials
- CTU/Govt Low Pay Forum

It is proposed that the PSA along with other organisations such as NRID and the CTU utilise this information to provide objective evidence to support an increase to the level of funding for wages for workers providing disability support services.

⁵ NRID survey