

## **Speech: Shannon Pakura (SWRB chair)**

### **16 March 2021: World Social Workers Day and Celebrating Mandatory Registration**

#### **Acknowledgement of dignitaries**

Minister **Sepuloni**, members of Parliament, leaders from our professional bodies, IFSW Asia Pacific President, Rose Henderson, friends and colleagues.

On this, World Social Work Day, I acknowledge all social workers both here in Aotearoa and beyond; To you all, a huge thank you for the support and services you provide to individuals, families and communities.

Regardless of location, social workers are on the front-line every day, responding to the needs of communities, answering calls for assistance, as well as being part of the key response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In Aotearoa, we know that social workers provide support to many who need assistance, they make time for those who are afraid and alone, and without fuss, they drop off food parcels to those who need a little extra help to put kai on the table for their families.

Our nation's 10,000 plus registered social workers do this work most days! They are courageous, resilient, and committed individuals.

To do this work, Social workers draw on their knowledge, skills, tenacity and their fundamental belief in social justice and human rights. Being agile and flexible, finding different ways of engaging are essential ingredients for Registered Social Workers.

Today, I want to take this opportunity to stress, that contrary to some of the discourse in Aotearoa, social work can not be undertaken by just 'anybody' nor should the safety of the public be compromised by organisations labelling a role that in essence is a social worker role, BUT calling it something different, in order to ease workforce pressures, and dispense with the need for a social work qualification.

So, our employers, if you have qualified social workers in your organisation, please support them to be registered, to hold a practising certificate and encourage them to keep their knowledge base current and vibrant by supporting their professional development. These are valuable employees who make a difference in their communities.

As the regulator, it is important that Registration works across the sector, our focus is to protect the safety of members of the public and to enhance a social worker's professionalism.

This afternoon, we are celebrating both World Social Workers Day, and Mandatory Registration for the social work profession in Aotearoa. A journey that Merv Hancock, began 40 plus years ago. *Moe mai rā te Rangatira*.

A number of us here today, were present when the Social Workers Registration Act was introduced in Parliament in 2003, and again in 2019 for the amendments to transition from voluntary registration to mandatory.

Finally, after all those years – I am proud that we belong to a registered valued profession!

In preparation for Mandatory Registration, last month, the general social work scope of practice was gazetted. Thank you to the working group which was drawn from the sector, for your hard work and strength.

SWRB had to boost its the registration team to cope with the influx of applications – approximately 90 most weeks. It has been such a lot of work!

It is right that now I pause to recognise the work of previous Board members, the chairs, since 2003, Robyn Corrigan, Toni Hockard, and Shayne Walker. The previous and current CE, Sean McKinley and Sarah Clark - you all have made significant contributions to the goal of Mandatory Registration.

I would also like to thank SWRB's staff and the current Board for their tireless work to get us to this point. To Jan Duke and Lucy Sandford-Reed you have given so much over the years. You never lost sight of the vision of Mandatory Registration for the profession – thank you both.

### **Future work**

Turning our eyes to the future, we know there is much to do in this new mandatory environment, including reviewing the education standards and workforce planning.

## **Conclusion**

For all the challenges ahead, we are optimistic for the future and the benefits that mandatory registration brings to the social work profession, and the wider public that we serve.

The SWRB's role now and in the future is to ensure the safety of members of the public and to enhance professionalism of social workers – being a registered social worker is essential in making that happen.

Tēnā Koutou,

Tēnā Koutou

Tēnā Tātou katoa