



Read our CEO **Jonny Wilkinson's** regular column in The Northern Advocate

## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 28<sup>th</sup> September 2024 – “ Funding freeze a recipe for our most vulnerable to be decimated”**

It was hard before, but now it looks out of reach, unattainable, a mere pipe dream. I am talking about residential facilities for disabled people. More particularly, the simple notion of a disabled person with very high needs and nowhere else to go moving into such a facility. For the last few years it has been damn difficult in Northland to say the least, with the few residential facilities we have running at full capacity, with no room at the inn. Last year I wrote about a 20-year-old intellectually disabled woman who desperately need to move into residential facility. Months and months were spent by myself and others requesting an alternative living situation from that with her aging carers, who were suffering physically and emotionally from her behaviour. The blanket response we got from the sector then was that there was nothing available. In the end the only option the carers had was to lodge a complaint of assault to the police, so a court order could be triggered to deem her unfit to stand trial, so that she could then be sent to a secure residential facility.

Yes, it was bleak times then - now it's nothing short of diabolical!

Last month the Government announced a range of cut backs and restrictions to Disability Support Services, which included a freeze on residential facility funding. At first, I thought the freeze just pertained to the pricing model used to fund residential facilities. How naïve I was! No- the freeze also covers the actual number of people in residential facilities. The new guidelines, for Needs Assessment Co-ordinator (NASC) agencies stipulate that there will be “no net increase in the number of people in residential care.” Wow -so that essentially means no one can enter a residential facility until someone leaves it. That's brutal!

To achieve this no net increase the guidelines set out priorities for any possible entry to residential care. The exceptions are where the person:

- is subject to a court order requiring care under the High and Complex framework (forensics)
- is subject to an order under the Oranga Tamariki Act 2019
- is exiting Mental Health care (including secure care), and there is no other appropriate option for the person to be discharged to

- is exiting hospital care and there is no other appropriate option for the person to be discharged to and
- has escalating needs with a medical or nursing component that can only be met through hospital-level care (usually in aged care).

None of these priorities include the scenario of the young woman I wrote about. None of them cover the situation of parent in their eighties caring for their adult son or daughter when an inevitable crisis occurs. The guidelines do talk vaguely about situations outside of these priorities like “family members are no longer available to support the disabled person due to a change in their own circumstances”.

They do, however go on to explain that “we expect that these situations will best be met through shorter term transitional arrangements. This need not be achieved through a residential care contract, and guidance on creating these alternatives is supplied through the non-residential guidelines”.

Straight forward? Nah guess what? Turn the page and you soon see that in the non-residential guidelines these “alternatives” are subject to funding freezes as well!

A Review Panel will be established to approve any new individual rates for residential care and any essential planned entries to residential care. This Review Panel appears to be rather medicalised in it’s make up and will no doubt form another barrier. The Panel represents another barrier to whanau who are vulnerable, desperate and quite possibly conflicted about whether to have their adult son or daughter move into a residential facility, before their current living situation implodes and there are no options left.

The ramifications of this funding freeze are as inevitable as they are grave. It is a recipe for a most vulnerable to be decimated.

Come and support the Tai Tokerau EGL Leadership Group which is organising a protest about these radical draconian changes to our Disability sector! The protest is on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October at 12.00 in the Civic Square outside the new WDC building on Rust Avenue. Let’s raise our voices. For more information contact [tessa@tiaho.org.nz](mailto:tessa@tiaho.org.nz)

FIGHT THE POWER!

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