

## **SPEECH FOR BRENDA PILOTT – OPENING ADDRESS – SSPA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2016**

Chateau on the Park, Christchurch

Thursday 27 October 2016: 9.30am-9.55am

### **Greetings**

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rangatira mā

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Ingarangi ko toku whenua

Ko Aotearoa taku te kainga

Ko Brenda Pilott toku ingoa

No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

### **Welcome**

Thank you, Shane, for your kind words of introduction. It is an honour for me to open the 2016 Social Service Providers Aotearoa Conference. I want to welcome you all: social service leaders, government officials, academics and commentators, people with an interest in our sector, our sponsors and funders and – above all – SSPA members.

And what could be more appropriate than to hold this conference in Christchurch, given its theme: *Taking Charge of Change: Transformation through Innovation*. From the moment the earth began to shake in 2010, Cantabrians have become experts in transforming their city from the ground up. They've taken charge of change, shown endless innovation and courage under the most gruelling circumstances. It's a pleasure to be back here and to see the rebuild in action in this inspiring city.

Thank you for making the effort to attend. I know how difficult it can be to tear yourself away from the urgent task of supporting children, young people, families and communities,

especially when you operate frontline services. Not to mention being away from your own families.

Over the next two days, there is an impressive line-up of keynote speakers, workshops and presentations. Given the significant changes being proposed for the social services area, and child and family services in particular, this conference will give us all the opportunity to find out more about what those changes really mean and how we can respond, innovatively and confidently. And it will help focus the direction of SSPA and its members as we look to the future.

The power of a gathering like this lies in our collective wisdom: the potential to share experiences, reflect, learn from each other, and work together towards common goals. Often the most profound learning happens outside the formal conference programme: the networking and support, the opportunity to recharge our batteries, to be reminded there are a raft of other people who care as much as we do.

### **Personal introduction**

This is my first opportunity to address a national forum of SSPA members and friends from the sector as SSPA's new national manager. I've been in the role for six months now. When the position came up, it seemed a wonderful opportunity to work in a field that has always been close to my heart. To join with all of you to make a difference to the lives of others. I feel like I've come home!

I want to acknowledge the work of my predecessor, Tara D'Sousa, and her contribution to establish SSPA as a credible voice for its members. Tara's leadership and groundwork has smoothed the way for me, for which I am extremely grateful.

I'm delighted to be able to draw on my experience across the broad spectrum of the community sector, government and union movement. Over the last two decades I've been head of Women's Refuge, policy manager for Child, Youth and Family, and most recently, national secretary of New Zealand's largest union, the Public Service Association whose membership includes thousands of social and community sector workers.

## **A time of change**

Over the last six months, I've been talking and listening to the concerns, issues and success stories of you – our members. I've started to build a picture of how SSPA can be more effective. As with any period of change, there is both challenge and opportunity.

What is happening in our sector is being reflected globally. Around the world, politics is looking extremely volatile. Those who feel marginalised and don't feel well served by the traditional political process are making their voices heard. Voters are showing they are willing to risk the uncertainty of change when the status quo isn't working for them.

There's no reason to think NZ is immune to these winds of change. While some people are doing well, many are struggling to get by and are living on the margins. All of which makes it vital that the NGO sector sets a fresh and challenging agenda for change, and lobbies effectively to get political parties and other key players on board.

I don't need to tell you that social services – you!- are at the sharp end of responding to the pressures our communities face.

That there is deep concern about homelessness, income and wealth inequality, health services struggling to meet demand, families under financial and social pressure, people – including children – living in garages and cars. The list goes on.

I know that static or shrinking budgets make your job even harder. It is intolerable that there has been no funding increase for many of your organisations for at least eight years, particularly in the face of:

- The increased demand for social services and their growing complexity.
- Changes in care and protection and the doubt, uncertainty and disruption these bring.
- The impact of government demands on the shape and nature of your organisations.

This can't go on.

## **NGO social services sector funding**

All of us who work in the sector want the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children to succeed – although I’m with the Children’s Commissioner who intends to refer to it by its more positive Te Reo name, Oranga Tamariki: children’s well-being.

We support the funding being made available to enable CYF to make significant changes. The missing piece of the puzzle, however, is increased funding that recognises the greater role of community agencies in the proposed new operating model.

Even before these changes, many of our members told us they cannot keep up with demand. We have heard from some who have had to create waiting lists for their services or turn people away. That goes very much against the grain for community agencies committed to supporting whanau in our communities but there is a limit to how much cash-strapped services can do.

After canvassing members’ experiences of this years’ contracting round, we had a free and frank discussion with MSD about the impact of the delayed and fragmented process and the poor communication that accompanied it. I want to commend MSD Community Investment senior officials for being willing to discuss our feedback in an open-minded way and for their positive response.

There will need to be very careful planning to avoid a repeat of this next year, given that the start-up of the new Ministry will coincide with the contracting round. Problems will be compounded by the apparent intention to split social service funding across MSD and the new Ministry. Potentially this will create additional complexity and compliance costs for providers whose services cover all age ranges – children AND their families.

## **It's about more than money**

It is my clear intention that SSPA will provide a strong and independent voice to keep the pressure on for more funding whether it's by working behind the scenes or speaking publicly about the potential effects of underfunding on children and young people.

However, our role goes beyond simply calling for more money. It goes beyond tinkering with the current contracting model, and demanding more and better consultation with the sector. All of these things are needed – but they don't get to the heart of the issues our sector is facing.

If we want to see real change, we have to do things differently.

We need to set a fresh and challenging agenda for change.

We need to act together. And we need to join with others to do this.

We need to be positive, and spell out genuine alternatives.

We need to lobby effectively to get political parties and other key institutions on board.

Our role must be to challenge bad law and policies detrimental to services and to families.

But we must also be a constructive voice that welcomes good decisions and will work alongside government to build success.

SSPA has, and will continue to have, active engagement with government and with political parties across the spectrum. While we have a lot of shared objectives, we must retain a strong and independent voice.

That voice will be constructive, positive and factual, and it's my job to make sure we get heard.

## **Changes to CYPF Act**

In the short time I've been in this role, SSPA has lobbied on a number of critical issues through the submission process, including the far-reaching changes to the CYPF Act.

We endorse Cabinet's decision to extend the age of care support and to support these young people making successful transitions into adulthood. Most children are not fully independent at 17.

We commend the government's aim to put child-centred practice at the heart of the new model.

However we must not lose sight of what that means in terms of working with Maori tamaraki and strengthening whanau. As the previous Children's Commissioner noted in his *2016 State of Care* report, children want to belong to their culture and to their family and whanau, and it is up to agencies working with Maori children to support that.

We are engaging in a challenging debate about MSD's intention to require providers to supply individual client data – some of you already have contracts with this requirement; for others it is on the horizon.

I'm sure Minister of Social Development Anne Tolley will have more to say about this and other issues in her keynote address tomorrow.

### **Social workers' registration**

Mandatory registration of social workers is another issue looming for our sector in which some 2600 social workers – more than half the NGO social work workforce – are not registered. We support the call for mandatory registration in principle because of its positive effect on standard setting, public confidence and professionalism. But we have expressed our reservations about the cost and complexity of registration, and the importance of recognising it does not guarantee standards of delivery without other mechanisms in place.

We also strongly recommended retaining S13 registrations that recognise practical experience including cultural knowledge as a basis for registration.

In light of the registration debate, we called on the Ministry of Social Development to reverse its decision to cancel the NGO Study Awards for social workers. Sadly, the Ministry is not going to change its mind about this but we will continue to press for financial support

for qualification as a key part of the implementation of mandatory registration. The head of the registration board will be speaking tomorrow and I hope will be able to talk about the path forward.

### **Practical support for members**

I want to turn now to SSPA and where we're heading as an organisation.

I came to work for SSPA because I firmly believe there is a strong contribution we can make to bringing about positive change. Our job is:

- To support you to make a difference for the children, families and communities with which you work.
- To keep your concerns to the forefront.
- To represent your views and issues to those in power, whether in Parliament, or in the government agencies we all deal with and rely on for funding.
- To help build a strong, effective and sustainable social services sector.

Your National Executive is determined that SSPA will not only be an effective advocate for members and the services you deliver, but also provide practical support. In the year ahead, our focus will be on developing useful resources for members and access to expertise that will make it easier to manage your organisation and avoid problems.

Expect to see improvements in our communications and online resources. But first we need your feedback on what matters. We are doing a survey in the next month or two on the information we send to members. What works and what doesn't. What you would most like to receive and in what form. Please take time to respond so we can know when we have got it right and what needs to change.

And at any time, if you have a view on what SSPA could be doing or saying, I would like to hear it.

### **Members' role**

For our voice to be heard it has to be authentic and speak from the knowledge and experience of the front-line. I can't do that without you.

Members have an important part to play in shaping our response to policy and legislative changes and in other engagement. We are setting up structures to make it easier for members with shared interests to connect and contribute to our thinking. The social workers in schools network, just recently set up, is a good example of this.

We will be setting up reference groups to draw on your expertise in critical areas of development. And we must ensure Māori have a strong voice in SSPA.

We're partnering with other services and agencies to provide professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of not-for-profit organisations.

We are also working to increase our membership base. Our influence comes from the size, diversity and experience of our membership. We represent a good portion of providers who contract with MSD but there is room to grow.

### **Act together**

It is a great privilege to work with the National Executive to lead SSPA during this time of change. They and I will be working hard to ensure our members are well supported, and to provide a strong and respected voice for children, tamariki, families, whanau and communities throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand.

We cannot go it alone. I know from personal experience that no one sector can solve the challenges and problems we face: that we have to work with others who share our goals.

That's why we are now a formal supporter of Hui E! which plays an important umbrella role in the NGO sector. We also work closely with the NZ Council of Christian Social Services and Community Networks Aotearoa.

Debate is already underway about what kind of relationship we want to see between our sector and government. It will be an issue in the 2017 general election campaign. SSPA will be part of that debate.



The NGO sector makes a huge contribution to our society. According to Statistics NZ, more than 114,000 not-for-profit organisations contribute \$9.4 billion to New Zealand's GDP annually. Our NGO workforce of volunteers and paid workers make up about one-third of the voting public.

SSPA's membership has a collective capacity of some 6500 paid workers and some 5000 volunteer workers.

It's a powerful collective voice. Let's take the opportunity to use it to improve the lives of all our children, families and communities.

There has never been a more important time to speak out.

Thank you.