

March 2009

Purely Positive is a Plus

According to a recent report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in 2006, over 9% of Australia's workforce was employed in health and community services occupations - a 26% increase from 2001. Between 2001 and 2006 the health workforce and community services workforce increased by 22.8% and 35.6% respectively. (National health labour force series no. 42, 6 March 2009)

'The aged care industry is a significant employer in Australia. With the rapid ageing of the population, this industry will continue to grow exponentially. And it offers many challenges and rewards – making a real and tangible difference for older people in their daily lives.

'Yet, the image of the aged care industry, of working with older people, has been struggling against a predominance of unreasonable and negative media portrayals.

'For the past decade, Resthaven has focussed on promoting older people and the aged care sector in a more positive light. We actively advocate through both our key peak bodies, Aged and Community Services Australia and UnitingCare Australia, and directly through Government reviews to seek to raise awareness of the key needs associated with delivering services to older people.

'One of the biggest challenges we face is our ability to attract appropriate staff. Another is our ability to remain financially viable in order to continue providing our essential services whilst trying to meet the wage expectations of our staff in an environment where the government, our primary source of funds, steadfastly refuses to listen to expert advice regarding the financial constraints the industry is grappling with.'

'Three years ago, we stepped up our campaign – promoting positive images of older people - through the media and conference presentations. So we are delighted that the aged care peak body, Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA), as well as the Australian Nurses Federation, are launching their own, national campaigns with a positive focus.'

'We welcome the positive campaigns being undertaken by both ACSA and the ANF to increase resources in aged care, ensure adequate provision of services to vulnerable and frail older Australians and to do this in a context of positive portrayal of aged care services.

'These campaigns complement our own, continuing, advocacy for industry reforms. The good work our staff undertake in the direct and indirect support areas is very important, and the campaigns add

to the public awareness of the issues we want addressed without focussing on negative imagery. However, we do have some concerns about the ANF push for increased regulation for care staff.

‘There is a shortage of nurses and the sector needs to best utilise their skills now and in the future. We affirm the important role of nurses in aged care, as well as the essential roles of our personal care assistants and home support workers. To ensure an appropriately skilled workforce, we offer excellent competency based training programs for staff without formal qualifications.

‘The estimated 20% of those who work without a minimum qualification are a critical source of workers now and in to the future. They ensure that there are sufficient numbers of staff to provide services to older people and their dedication and commitment is to be commended.

‘We do not believe any further regulation and restriction is required at this level.’

‘The caring, dedication and commitment of our staff makes a difference every day – through simple things, a smile, a chat or a friendly hand. These people are the backbone of the industry, and we couldn’t do it without them.’