

## FILE NOTE

Date: 4 October 2007

Subject: Masterton Regional Meeting

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This meeting was attended by about 40 members of the local community. Also in attendance were several Labour Members of Parliament: Marian Hobbs, Steve Chadwick, Sue Moroney, and Jill Pettis.

### Issues raised by the audience

#### ***Should there be an Action Plan for New Zealand men?***

The Minister agreed that it might be useful for there to be an action plan for New Zealand men, particularly in order to address issues around violence and their own personal health. She indicated that this would be something for men to promote but that she would be supportive of such an initiative.

### Work-life balance

#### ***Free Early Childhood Education***

The government's introduction of 20 hours free early childhood education for three- and four-year-old children is supported but noted that in rural areas it can be difficult to access because there are few services. Local parents had approached a primary school in the area and asked about spare capacity (e.g. classrooms etc) that could be used to provide ECE for four-year-old children. The school was amenable to the idea but was having difficulty working through this due to a perceived lack of connection between the parts of the Ministry of Education that deal with ECE and compulsory education.

#### ***Terminology***

Dame Miriam Dell noted that work-life integration was a better way of describing what we know as work-life balance because it doesn't set up a division between work and life. The Minister agreed that this is probably the case but that work-life balance is internationally accepted terminology.

### Health

#### ***Maternity services***

It was noted that the combination of a rising birth rate and ageing midwifery workforce means that GPs with obstetrics experience are very important in their region. The Ministry of Health are currently reviewing provision of maternity services and that in this process the unique situation of smaller DHBs should be taken into consideration.

### ***Obesity***

Are there any possibility of removing GST from items of food that were considered to be 'good' food, rather than taxing unhealthy food. The Minister responded that there are a whole host of difficulties in trying to implement a policy like this and that it was generally accepted internationally that a low tax across all goods was the least complex form of sales tax.

Sue Moroney noted that the Health Select Committee had recently completed a report on obesity and that removing GST from healthy food was not something that was going to be recommended, especially due to complexities around what is defined as 'good' or 'bad' food. She indicated that the Select Committee was recommending food labelling that sent clearer signals about what is healthy food, as well as working with the food industry to promote affordable, healthy options. The Minister also noted the positive impact of Fruit in Schools programme in terms of changing attitudes toward healthy eating.

### **Employment and income**

#### ***Paid parental leave (PPL)***

Is there any information about the pay offs from extending PPL to self-employed women? The Minister noted that although there has been a good take up of PPL generally that there is low take-up of PPL by fathers.

It was noted that at their recent conference they had passed a remit to support the extension of PPL to 12 months, with provision for it to be shared by parents.

#### ***Shearing contractors***

There are a number of issues for women in the shearing industry such as pay parity, health issues and violence. One issue in particular is the toilet facilities available to women in these workplaces and who has the responsibility for maintaining them (i.e. the shearing contractors or the farm owners). She noted that some employees have approached the union about this issue but that they didn't see it as a major area of concern compared with other issues.

Sue Moroney has undertaken to follow this up with the person who raised the issue.

#### ***Young mothers***

It was noted the number of young mothers in the region were working with Department of Labour and Ministry of Social Development to look at how to get young mothers into paid employment, while still having the time to be part of their children's lives. In particular it was raised that the issue of how to move young women from the Domestic Purposes Benefit into employment, when often they earn less in employment.

#### ***Employment in rural areas***

It was raised that the issue of people in provincial areas being expected to do a wider range of activities in a single job, compared with in cities, and that they are expected to do multiple roles for lower wages. She said there is misperception that costs of living are lower in provincial areas and that people move to these areas for the lifestyle and are therefore less worried about income levels. This has implications for attracting skilled people to these areas.

### **Rates**

It was raised how the issue of paying rates affect women, particularly widows who live on high value properties and don't have sufficient income to meet the rates payments. The Minister responded that the government has improved rates rebates payments and also increased the thresholds based on income and property value so that more people are eligible for the rates rebate. Steve Chadwick also noted that there has been an independent report into rates which is currently with the Minister of Local Government.

### **KiwiSaver**

What is the take up rate for women in KiwiSaver? The Minister responded that this is something we don't yet know but that overall take-up of KiwiSaver is higher than projected.

### **Women in leadership**

Dame Miriam Dell suggested that many women in public leadership roles (e.g. the Governor-General and Speaker of the House) are role models rather than having input into policy (with the notable exception of the Prime Minister). She argued that women policy makers continue to follow men's policy frameworks. The metaphor she used was that rather than aspiring to be more efficient cogs in a man's machine, that women should aspire to work with men to design a new machine.

The Minister thought that a significant challenge is how we teach children and young people about what women had to do to get to the position they are now in. She used the example of young women who don't see sexism in advertising because it is so pervasive that it doesn't stand out.

Marian Hobbs also pointed out that the Louise Nicholas case had highlighted the adversarial approach of the Court system, and argued that Parliament has a similar approach. She noted that other countries use different models that are less adversarial.

### **Violence**

One person raised the issue of the relationship between male illiteracy and male violence. Marian Hobbs said that the second IELTS survey has just been completed which shows a high level of functional illiteracy in the workplace.

### **Other issues**

#### ***Grandparents caring for grandchildren***

It was raised that the issue of grandparents caring for grandchildren, noting that they often have lower incomes and poorer health and their work is less visible. The Minister said that the government has recently increased the payment they receive and are working on comparisons between payments received by grandparents and foster parents.

#### ***De-valuing skills***

One audience member questioned why women start to devalue their skills as they get older.