An invisible industry in the aged care sector

“Cleaning as an occupation is often underrated. It’s a hugely invisible industry”

Claude Gibbs, managing director of Safety Work Kits and Careerforce trainer/assessor

Cleaning is a critical component of any business — especially for our growing healthcare and aged care sectors — yet many people only notice it when they perceive it’s not being done. It’s about keeping communities clean and safe and taking adequate care to prevent the spread of infection and sickness. It’s important to invest in the skills of those we give this responsibility to.

Quality training for cleaners is an investment in business and best practice. Trained and qualified cleaners help improve quality and safety and reduce some of the risks. Staff also benefit by gaining confidence and self-esteem and employers get more out of their workers.

What they say

“We’re really pleased with the outcome of the training. We’ve seen a marked improvement in self-esteem, and in confidence and status in the home”, said Nicola Turner, general manager of Enliven Residential Services, Presbyterian Support Central. Nicola was excited to find that there was a qualification she could put her cleaners through, stating, “Because of the support that we’ve had from Careerforce in terms of our support workers and our diversional therapists, we saw them as a really good organisation to assist our cleaners with as well”.

Nicola commented that their business had seen an improvement in staff performance. Some trainees were very nervous to begin with. Most of them had no other qualifications and had struggled in the school system. “We did see a significant improvement in the standard of cleaning. We now know that they are following proper processes … equipment and furniture is much cleaner”, said Nicola. “We’re really pleased with the outcome of the training.”

“I was so excited to complete the cleaning programme”, said Tara Wati Sharma, cleaner at the Cashmere Home, Presbyterian Support Central, when finishing her cleaning qualification. Tara explained how the cleaning training has been practical in her work and very helpful for her day-to-day duties.

“The training is to help them understand the principles behind why things work … to understand what they are doing — so they understand not just what to do, but why they are doing it”, says Claude Gibbs, managing director of Safety Work Kits and Careerforce trainer/assessor. Claude further commented:
I expect that they’ll be a better cleaner.
The Careerforce Cleaning Programme is excellent because it’s aimed at cleaners who have some experience. People come into the training session with some idea of what they are talking about and what they’re looking at.

They have a sense of worth with respect to what they’re doing. Cleaning as an occupation is often underrated. It’s a hugely invisible industry. Most people only notice it when they think it’s not being done, so the benefit to them is that they can think, “I’m doing something that is worthwhile and that people need”.

Story of the cleaning qualifications
With the new cleaning qualification being launched, we thought we’d take a look back at the journey so far. In 2009, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) undertook a targeted review of the qualifications system. Its goal was to ensure that the New Zealand qualification system provided learners with clear pathways to their goals, as well as equipping employers and industries with a skilled workforce.

As an industry training organisation (ITO), NZQA asked Careerforce to lead the review of qualifications across the sectors that Careerforce works with — including health and wellbeing and aged support. Following the merger with Building Services Contractors ITO (BSCITO), Careerforce also picked up the leadership role for the review of New Zealand’s cleaning qualifications. In the review, Careerforce worked with stakeholders nationwide to design New Zealand qualifications that would be flexible and fit for purpose, based on workforce and workplace needs.

This led to the approval of the New Zealand Certificate in Cleaning (Level 2) with optional endorsement in Healthcare Facilities Cleaning. Careerforce has since developed programmes and learning resources, and a Level 3 cleaning qualification is currently being developed.

Qualification
The New Zealand Certificate in Cleaning (Level 2) has been designed for people entering the cleaning industry. The qualification will also recognise the skills and knowledge of those already employed in the cleaning industry. The Health Care Facilities Cleaning optional endorsement builds on the core skills and knowledge to recognise the skills required for cleaning specifically in health care facilities under supervision.

Footnote
Careerforce is New Zealand’s ITO for the health (primary, secondary and public), mental health, aged support, disability, social services, youth work, cleaning and pest management industries. The Careerforce training model is employer led, with more than 90 per cent of the training occurring in the workplace and aligning with workplace practice.

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