Couple stuck on train

A disabled couple say they were marooned on the Tranz Alpine train in Greymouth after a mix-up with a booking agency.

Shirley and Roy Dyer, who live in Rolleston, near Christchurch, said they could not even use the toilets on the 11-hour trip from Christchurch to Greymouth and back last Friday.

When the train pulled into the Greymouth railway station, Shirley Dyer said she and her husband did not want to get off because it was such a hassle getting back on.

"It took about half an hour to get on the train in Christchurch so we didn't want to go through that again."

"We had to sit there for about an hour while they cleaned the train, then there were further delays so it took even longer."

Roy Dyer suffers from severe multiple sclerosis and Shirley Dyer is a double amputee paraplegic.

She said she had heard good things about the Tranz Alpine.

"The reality was that we had trouble at both ends. We had always talked about doing the trip but it was ruined by the hassle."

Taylorville man David Brooks, a cousin of the disabled couple, said the facilities on the train were "not up to modern-day standards".

"It's absolutely slack. What annoys me is that they were on the train for 11 hours and were not able to go to the toilet at any time. Questions have to be thrown at Toll because it's a shambles."

Toll NZ general manager of corporate affairs, Sue Foley, said the fault was that of the agency the couple had used for their booking.

"We do need to know in advance of any special circumstances, and in this case we were not told."

"The passengers were also supposed to have been told when they booked that they needed someone with them to care for them but that wasn't done either. However, it is an one-off situation and we are all our agencies notify us in cases of the future."

Foley said the ordeal was troublesome for both parties involved. "Our staff went well above and beyond the call of duty. They went to extraordinary lengths to make sure that Mrs Dyer and Mr Dyer were as comfortable as possible with the short notice."

"It took three staff to get them on board and they constantly attended to the couple to deserve medals for their efforts."

Foley declined to name the company that handled the booking.

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Funding for home support

ACC is increasing the amount of money it provides for people to receive home-based support, the minister said yesterday.

From this week, it will provide an additional $25 million a year to contracted agencies providing home-based support for injured people and their families, ACC Minister Stephen Soper announced.

ACC funds about 70,000 people a year for home-based services which include personal care, childcare and home help.

"The extra funds are primarily to allow the agency to increase the amount they pay carers," Soper said. "It brings rates for home support carers to the same level as the Ministry of Health's rates."

Under the charge, rates for home care services by contracted providers are increased per hour from $22.50 for a home help worker, $24.21 for personal care, $24.21 for childcare and from $25.34 for personal care level two.

New Zealand Home Association chairwoman said providers would use the additional funds to give a much-needed support workers' wages.

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Dyslexia sculpture garden up for award

A Christchurch sculpture garden that celebrates work on dyslexia and by dyslexia sufferers is in the running for a national architecture award.

The Dyslexia Discovery Exhibit in Worcester Street has been entered in the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects landscape awards.

The garden features sculptures by Weta Workshop's Richard Taylor and English artist Mackenzie Thorpe. Both are dyslexic.

A third sculpture celebrates the work of Christchurch-born motorcyle designer John Britten, who designed record-breaking motorbikes despite struggling with dyslexia, and a fourth is dedicated to Ron Davis, an American who developed a range of techniques to help dyslexia sufferers.

The exhibit is run by the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand which is campaigning for better recognition of dyslexia.

Finalists from nearby 100 entries will be selected this week and the winners will be announced in April.