

# **TRANSITIONS IN THE HAWKES BAY LABOUR MARKET: WELFARE AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

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# INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems for policy makers wanting to address a host of labour market issues is the absence of sound empirical knowledge on the functioning of the labour market at the micro-level of households and firms. Most of the relevant research has been confined to macro economic analyses derived from what is often acknowledged as a limited database, principally the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS). However, the significance of collapsing or ignoring the differences between individuals and households should not be underestimated. Research that treats the households as a unit tends to under-estimate the actions and aspirations of individuals, as well as the significance of power differentials within the household. Conversely, research that treats households as atomistic individuals, divorced from any collective reality, negates the highly complex rules and practices that govern the behaviour and actions of the household. As in any other social organisation, households involve power differentials which are derived from market and work situations originating from both inside and outside the home and from agreements which are forged between individual members of the household. The organisational behaviour of individuals in households is at the centre of this study, because these behaviours vary between sections of the population and they change over the lifecycle of the household.

Although there is evidence to show that the burden of unemployment falls more heavily upon some individuals and groups rather than others (Task Force, 1994; Shirley et al, 1990), there is limited knowledge of the processes that operate within regional labour markets and even less information on the dynamic relationship between individuals, households and paid employment. We do not know the basis on which individuals make decisions about economic participation and we are not able to say how various factors impact on these decisions. It was this set of deficiencies in labour market information which prompted the current study.

The research programme on Labour Market Dynamics and Economic Participation, which has been funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST), has been specifically designed to study labour force dynamics and transitions. This was one of the major deficiencies in labour market statistics identified in the 1993 review conducted by Dennis Rose (1993:39). In focusing on the micro-level of households and individuals, the aim has been to generate new data based on an innovative methodology which examines the labour market 'transitions' experienced by individuals as they move from one labour market status to another. Such transitions include those from unpaid to paid work, from unemployment to work, and from training to employment. The reverse transitions are of equal interest. An emphasis on the interface between households and employment has meant that the research programme can explore how individuals make decisions about access to, and participation in, the labour market. Being set within the context of the 'lifecycle' has allowed a particular emphasis on identifying how household attributes, perceptions and incentive structures impact on individual choices and options. As part of this, the influence of factors such as age, education, ethnicity, gender, income, regional location and work experience can be assessed. From a theoretical perspective, the study is aimed at complementing our existing knowledge as to how labour markets clear and why. In relation to policy, it should provide valuable information that can be used in addressing unemployment and in designing targeted labour market policies.

The approach that was used in this study can be divided into two distinct phases. The first phase involved the administration of a structured questionnaire which was designed to gather basic household data (thereby ensuring compatibility with the HLFS administered by Statistics New Zealand on a quarterly basis). This was followed by interviews with individuals drawn from a smaller random sample of the households involved in the initial survey. A life events and work histories matrix was developed during these interviews and in-depth information was gathered on the attitudes and experiences of individuals in the labour market over the ten-year period, 1985 to 1995.

The research programme was conceived as an exploratory study of three distinctive labour markets. In 1995-96, Hawkes Bay was surveyed and this region was followed in 1997/98 by West Auckland and Tokoroa. Each of these regional labour markets appears to be quite distinctive and it is anticipated that each region in turn should provide valuable insights into the functioning of labour markets at the micro level of individuals and households. This report details the findings of the **qualitative** analysis of interviews conducted in the Hawkes Bay region and a summary of the make up of the sample of household and individuals interviewed and profiled is provided shortly. Hawkes Bay is an area with clearly defined geographical boundaries. The target area has a population of approximately 140,000 which is dominated by two cities and corresponds with the area administered by the Hawkes Bay Regional Council. Households in the region are diverse, thereby reflecting an adequate mix of different household types, and a variety of social, cultural and economic groups. It is a structurally diverse region with a mixture of light industry, agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, forestry and service industries. Over recent years, the local economy has experienced both contraction and expansion as firms and households in the region have adjusted to economic rationalisation and the restructuring of government services. Hawkes Bay is well serviced by local and central government agencies and it contains a wide range of educational services based in the public and private sectors.

As well as detailing the findings of the qualitative study conducted in the Hawkes Bay region, this working paper also canvasses two important facets of the research programme. Firstly, there is an exploration of the concept of transitions, as employed in this study. Then the methodology used to gather and examine the interview data is outlined and discussed. This involved the use of life and work histories, semi-structured in-depth interviewing, and a range of analytical tools. Both of these are considered in greater detail in a separate working paper (Firkin et al, 2001).

## **‘TRANSITIONS’ – CONCEPT AND METHODOLOGY**

Though the term transition is frequently used in labour market analysis and discussion, what is contained in this choice of word is a wealth of contextual detail. By its very nature, a transitional perspective emphasises the dynamic quality of such markets and focuses on “flows and not stocks” and can “reveal and explain patterns ... during the lifecycle of individuals or groups” (Schmid et al, 1999:268). Thus, although our use of the term transition incorporates the common meaning of the word – a movement or shift from one state or point to another – we develop the concept more fully to achieve such an emphasis and focus. In doing so we seek to identify the array of starting points and outcomes that can make up a transition and unpack the mix of contexts, influences and processes that are integral to any shift. The result is a detailed analysis of change at the micro-level of the labour market.

Such analysis is important for a range of reasons, one being that the labour market itself is undergoing significant change. Schmid et al (1999:268) conceptualise these changes, in part, as a greater blurring of the borderlines between gainful dependent labour market work and other productive activities. They note that the “‘standard labour contract’ is fading, but we do not know yet which new standards will develop”. A transitional focus serves as one approach to analysing these changes. However, since paid work no longer necessarily forms the outcome of, or even the motivation for, some transitions, for approach to be valuable it also becomes necessary to understand work in its broadest sense.

People’s work experiences across any period can be summarised in their work histories that are, in turn, composed of their work profiles – the combination of work activities that they were involved in at any one time. Transitions are changes to those profiles. Whilst thinking of transitions easily brings to mind shifts such as a move from unemployment to paid work, our use of this concept also encompasses more subtle and multi-layered change. Thus, transitions need not only occur when one type of work is substituted with something else or when there is a complete shift from one status to another. Rather, they can be signalled by the changing composition or shifting balance of activities within the mix of people’s various work responsibilities. That is, when a person’s work profile is altered but not necessarily completely changed nor entirely replaced.

The broad notion of work adopted here means that it would be highly unlikely that a person’s profile could be described in terms of just one role. Though many of those interviewed in this study certainly seemed to have a predominant role or responsibility, blurring was evident as each person also took on other secondary roles or activities. Accordingly, when change occurs – at either primary or secondary level – we need to consider how different aspects of a person’s profile complement, compete or conflict with one another as a result of any shift. Importantly, we also need to be alert to continuity. The maintenance of stable profiles and periods without change can be of equal interest and significance. In general, work histories were usually quite dynamic, though there was wide variation in the frequency, nature and degree of any changes, and people often demonstrated phases of relative stability or volatility.

Transitions can occur in a range of ways. In some cases they were forced on people while others were made by choice. Though certain transitions were sudden and complete – such as when a person lost a job – the study also revealed transitioning that was prolonged as people worked progressively towards a longer-term goal through intermediate shifts. Such shifts, though transitions in their own right, can also be seen as parts of a larger process. As such, they could be disjointed and unanticipated or show varying degrees of continuity, coherence and predictability. In each case there is undoubted value in focusing on the intermediate steps – which was, itself, a significant part of this study – but by drawing these into a larger or longer-term picture, equally important insights are generated.

The context in which transitions occur also forms an integral part of understanding and describing them. Context can be viewed on a number of levels and in relation to a range of factors and perspectives. These levels take in considerations beyond the household – to the local community, the industry or sector, and to the regional and national situation. Various perspectives – such as social, cultural, economic and political viewpoints – might be considered at any level. Factors that could be addressed include issues such as gender, class, ethnicity, age and so on. The subjective as well as objective dimensions of transitions – that is, the experience of the transition from the perspective of those involved as well as how it appears to an observer – also need to be incorporated. Even if transitions appear by name to be of a similar kind, their objective circumstances can still be very different. Consider, for example, all the variations possible under the heading of ‘redundancy’. The subjective dimension provides insights into how individuals and their families understand, experience and respond to the transition.

Whilst each person’s transitions, profiles and histories can stand alone and be analysed separately, they also inter-weave to form a larger picture that exposes the intimate relationships between the actions of spouses and partners. It is not hard to see how one person’s transition can affect others in the household. However, there can also be a complex inter-relationship between the transitions of spouses and partners. An obvious example would be how couples organise the care of children and other unpaid work, and consequently engage in paid employment. To adequately account for this, the household rather than just each individual must be considered. Doing so generates more complex but complete pictures.

Having given some depth to the notion of transitions, it is now possible to briefly describe how the interview data were collected and analysed. In considering the methodology employed in this part of the research programme it is worth noting at the outset that both retrospective and prospective longitudinal studies have their own sets of advantages and difficulties (Dex, 1991). A retrospective study – the approach adopted here – creates particular problems in ensuring detail and accuracy in people’s recall that is compounded by the length of any period under study. Against these difficulties such an approach offers the opportunity to gather quite detailed data from an extended time frame during a relatively short interview. To maximise the quality of information it becomes important to develop and employ an interviewing strategy which aims to both minimise the problems associated with this approach whilst building on its strengths.

Using skilled interviewers is one important part of such a strategy, as is the interview process. To create the most favourable circumstances for recall, the interviews began with people recollecting major life events during the preceding ten years. These life events then served as cues to help the person recall their work history over the same period. This allowed a matrix of their personal and work histories across time to be progressively built up. Over the course of the interview more detail was added to the matrix. Such an approach clearly aided people's recall and allowed them and the interviewer to more accurately identify the timing of events and to build a detailed picture of these. It also helped the ongoing checking and clarifying of information.

Following Miles and Huberman (1994) a more condensed matrix that provided a graphical summary of a person's work history across the ten year study period was developed using the interview materials. Recorded on each were the person's work profile at the start of the decade and any subsequent changes. Each person's work history was organised into two parts. Firstly, there were the activities that they engaged in primarily or on a full time basis. Then there were additional or secondary activities. In adopting this approach, though, particular activities were not automatically privileged over others, but each was situated according to the how the person described and 'rated' it. So, paid work, education and training, and unpaid work could all be considered primary or secondary activities depending on the person and the household, as well as their circumstances and perceptions. When the matrices of adults in the same household were combined they created a work history of the household as well.

From the work history matrix we can identify individual transitions. Whilst such a summary format is useful, the detail of these transitions is not apparent in it. To provide this, each transition was described and analysed. A template was developed to aid and standardise this process and it canvassed many of the aspects alluded to in the preceding discussion of the concept of transitions. Table 1 outlines the factors considered in each transition. As is apparent, information was gathered not solely in terms of the individual but also in respect of the household. The wider context was also considered.

General themes, that had some bearing on the concept of transitions, were also identified from the interviews. Quotes that reflected aspects of a particular transition, a type of transition, or that related to the themes were gathered to support and illustrate the analysis. However they were used, quotes were particularly important given that one of the goals of the study was to create a narrative that, whilst focused on labour market transitions, drew heavily on the actual experiences of people.

When applied to each of the interviews this process yielded three distinct yet inter-related summaries for each person:

- the work history matrix for each adult in the household;
- a set of templates that detailed each transition for each person;
- individual/household synopses of key themes and issues.

These spanned the following decades in each area:

- Hawkes Bay – 1985 to 1995,
- South Waikato – 1987 to 1997,
- West Auckland – 1987 to 1997.

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**Table 1: Factors considered in analysis of each transition.**

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- ❑ The characteristics and mechanics of the transition – what sort of change occurred and how – are described.
  - ❑ The process by which the transition occurred – how decisions were made, across what timeframe, who was involved and so on – is detailed.
  - ❑ Any factors that may be relevant to the process are acknowledged. These include:
    - Individual and household
      - Attitudes, values & beliefs
      - Milestones (e.g. birth of a child)
      - Individual considerations (e.g. a person’s desire to work)
      - Family considerations – not childcare (e.g. elderly relatives needing extra care)
      - Childcare considerations
      - Financial considerations
      - Education & Training
      - Skills & Experience
      - Other Issues such as
        - Age
        - Ethnicity
        - Gender
    - Welfare considerations (e.g. was the person eligible for a benefit or what were the abatement provisions)
    - Structural & Contextual Issues
      - Workplace level
      - Industry level
      - Locally and Regionally
  - ❑ The impact of the transition – what outcomes it generated for the individual and the household (expected and unexpected) are considered. This includes the significance of the transition – what the change meant for the individual, the household, and possibly the workplace.
  - ❑ Quotes from the interviewee or someone else in the household that illustrate aspects of the above points are included.
- 
- 

In these forms the data were now accessible for further analysis. This involved, firstly, the progressive drawing together of transitions of a similar kind. Initially, broad categorisations based on the entry or exit points of a transition were developed. The process then moved onto refining these larger categories into groups and sub-groups. These were subsequently analysed to identify common and contrasting characteristics. The comparison was based on the various features captured on the template. As well, sets were broken down further and analysed on the basis of individual (gender, ethnicity and so on) and household characteristics. What is hopefully evident is that a transition could be categorised and examined according to a number of criteria. The outcomes of applying this methodology, as have been presented in various reports, can be broader, more general findings and those that relate to narrower, more specific issues. Having transitions as a unit of analysis enables not only a strong qualitative emphasis but also allows some quantitative analysis, such as a comparison of the numbers and frequency of particular transitions for various groups. The work history matrices of people and households were also a focus of investigation. Like the transitional templates they too could be collated, based on various criteria, and analysed accordingly. Finally, the themes that had emerged in the interviews were considered for how they could enrich aspects of the transitional analysis and provide areas of separate interest and discussion.

## REPORT OUTLINE

Using this methodology, a series of detailed analyses were produced that, for practical reasons, have been organised under various headings which are the key types of transitions that emerged from the research. Naturally this approach tends to artificially fragment the continuous lived experiences of individuals and the households they were part of. This is especially true when an extended period of time is being considered such as in this longitudinal study. Across the ten-year study period, any particular transition, regardless of its nature, duration or significance, generally formed only a proportion of a person's total experiences and history. An episode of unemployment, for example, may only cover a few months, with the remainder of the decade characterised by full-time employment. This fragmentation also has the potential to conceal the inter-relationship of particular transitions with other issues under study. Continuing with the example just given, the time out of paid work may also be associated with a period of education and training. Such connections need to be made. In this case, the training might be highly relevant to understanding the person's successful return to work and their subsequent long term settled employment. Thus, despite using a framework built around types of transitions, we have tried to acknowledge to some degree, at least, the wider and longer context of any single transition within any particular discussion. Of course, the danger in trying too hard to overcome these types of problems can be a tendency to repeatedly produce extensive case histories in each section, albeit with different emphases each time. This, in turn, creates its own difficulties, the most significant being that the principal focus of this study – transitions – could be obscured.

To overcome these problems of structure, but not lose the key focus, we have adopted a style that presents shortened or abbreviated case studies framed so as to emphasise a specific issue. Whilst this keeps the focus on transitions, it is hoped that the other two reports in this series will go some way to overcoming the fragmentation – as noted above – that this might cause. In particular, vignettes and quotes – or parts thereof – are often repeated in different parts of each report as are pieces of many individual and household cases. While these are employed each time to illustrate various aspects of the findings, and are framed accordingly, their repetition also offers the reader opportunities to tie together people's varied and diverse experiences. By doing this, they can then generate a more holistic account for each individual and household case across time.

Readers will quickly see that each report draws heavily on the actual words of people from the interviews. This strong reliance on narrative was a deliberate strategy. Quotes are used, not just to add a little colour, but as a core component of each report. Rather than embedding an occasional remark in the analysis, the analysis is instead built on the content of the interviews. Our intention was to ground the findings in the experiences, feelings, opinions, beliefs and attitudes of those who took part.

The study generated analysis on transitions and themes in the following areas:

- Welfare and Unemployment
- Education and Training
- Unpaid Work
- Paid Work

## □ Other Transitions

There are three reports: one each on welfare and unemployment, one on education and training, and one on work, both unpaid and paid. The following discussion reviews the content of all three reports.

### (i) *Welfare and Unemployment*

Whilst not always coexistent, these two issues are often closely interrelated. Hence, they are dealt with together. Welfare is examined in relation to people receiving:

- ◆ the unemployment benefit,
- ◆ the domestic purposes benefit,
- ◆ accident compensation<sup>1</sup>, and
- ◆ a mix of sundry benefits (sickness, widow's, caring for an dependant relative, and national superannuation).

Transitions involving people moving into or out of welfare are explored, whether from or to employment, education and training, or unpaid work. Two issues that were of special significance to those receiving the domestic purposes benefit are elaborated. They are the stigma associated with this benefit and the special childcare problems this group faced.

A short discussion on the issue of welfare from the perspective of people who, during the ten-year study period, had no experiences of being on welfare is undertaken. Though not exclusively related to the issues of welfare and unemployment, some specific issues that are quite closely intertwined with them are examined in this section. Firstly, the motives people had for working and the impacts of unemployment and receiving welfare are explored. Then some comment is made on how people perceived the job market during the survey period and consideration is given to how this might have affected their employment prospects. Finally, the importance of social networks in getting work is highlighted. A couple of further issues, this time with more specific relevance for those receiving welfare, are then focused on. These include an assessment of the role and actions of the NZES, and a discussion of the interaction of wage rates, benefit levels, and associated abatement regimes. The effect these had on people engaging in paid work is the predominant theme.

### (ii) *Education and Training*

A wide range of education and training is canvassed. This includes workplace-based training and shorter courses. The main focus, however, is on longer education and training programmes. These are generally full-time and are of an extended duration. They include:

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst there are significant differences between ACC and the other welfare benefits considered here, given the nature of this study, the similarities are sufficient to allow its arbitrary inclusion in this section.

- ◆ Tertiary study: polytech and university based
- ◆ Skills based training programmes (such as ACCESS)
- ◆ Work placement and experience programmes

Transitions into and out of such programmes are explored, as are the outcomes of undertaking them.

The experiences of school leavers are included in this section given their relationship with this topic. However, this part of the discussion is not just limited to looking at their education and training. Whilst their experiences in relation to tertiary courses, skills-based training, and work experience and placements are canvassed, their patterns and experiences of unemployment and employment are also discussed

This report also covers some general discussion on the broad issue of education and training. It ends with a series of themes that emerged in relation to this issue. These are inequity, apprenticeships, costs and technology. The first of these looks at the differences between the DPB and other benefits (particularly the unemployed benefit) in respect of assistance for, and attitudes towards, training. The issue of apprenticeships raised quite a lot of discussion, with many people rueing the demise of this form of training. Next, the broad matter of the increasing costs of education and training is discussed. This is not solely related to school leavers and student loans as older people also commented on the limiting effect that high fees had on their ability to study or train. Finally, the growth and importance of technology in the workplace, how it is changing work, and how people coped with this is canvassed. Also touched on is the importance of adequately preparing children for this.

### ***(iii) Work***

#### ***(a) Unpaid Work***

The first part of this report looks at unpaid work in terms of domestic responsibilities – caring for a home, children, families, dependent relatives and so on. Although the division of household work is explored, in the main, the discussion is focused on the care of children. Women were primarily responsible for this unpaid work. As well as exploring their transitions into and out of unpaid work, how women balanced and co-ordinated their unpaid and paid responsibilities, particularly in relation to childcare, is also examined. Women's experiences of transitioning back into the workforce after being away and caring for children are also considered

A second area that is examined under this heading focuses on unpaid work of a voluntary nature in the community (schools, sports clubs, voluntary organisations etc). A great deal of voluntary work is associated with children so, not unexpectedly, women are heavily involved. The role of voluntary work in equipping people with skills and experience and preparing them for paid work is examined. Again, the balancing of these and other responsibilities is considered.

(b) *Paid Work*

This aspect of this report looks at a range of different forms of paid work and the transitions that are involved. They are self-employment, and paid work that is part-time, casual and temporary, seasonal, or full-time and permanent. Transitions might be into or out of, as well as between, these forms of work.

The examination of casual and part-time work also touches on the issue of casualisation. In the discussion on seasonal work, a particular pattern of employment – that we call the cyclical profile – is featured. This profile involves a pattern of seasonal work between periods of unemployment that some people repeated over many years. Also given special attention in the section on seasonal paid work is the meat industry.

A range of issues relating to paid work are discussed. These are:

- The growing intensification and casualisation of workplaces through restructuring, new contracts and multi-skilling
- The persistently gendered nature of paid work, both horizontally and vertically
- The Employment Contracts Act and the role of unions
- The attitudes towards, and experiences and impacts of, restructuring and redundancy
- Specific issues relating to middle aged and older people as well as youth in the labour market

As noted in the report on Welfare and Unemployment, some of the more general issues dealt with there have some relevance to, and could be read in conjunction with, this report.

(c) *Other Transitions*

A number of patterns of transition that are not covered elsewhere are examined under this heading. These include profiles that involve no transitions – where people maintained an unchanged work profile across all, or most of, the ten-year study period. Other profiles that illustrate the complex nature of people's patterns of work are also covered here. As well, this section looks at profiles that involve relocations including time-limited travel (such as the O.E.), relocation within New Zealand, immigration and emigration.

## SUMMARY OF SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Phase one of this research programme saw a random sample of 832 households in the Hawkes Bay region drawn from Household Labour Force Survey panels provided by Statistics New Zealand. These were then surveyed using a specially developed questionnaire that was designed to secure information on the labour market behaviour of individuals and households while at the same time ensuring some compatibility with the quarterly HLFS Survey conducted by Statistics New Zealand. The findings of this phase have been reported in detail in a separate working paper, Shirley et al, 1998. From this original sample, a subset were again randomly selected to participate in the second phase of the research programme that involved semi-structured in-depth interviews. These were conducted in 96 households and provided sufficient information to develop 164 individual profiles. Of these, 152 were produced using information directly supplied by the person. The remaining 12 were the result of information supplied by other informants, most usually the person's spouse or partner.

The ethnicity and gender breakdown for these profiles is provided in Tables 1 and 2. Table 3 provides a picture of the household structures at the time of interview. Children (under the age of 16 years or still at school) were present in just under 60% of households at the time of interview, though the percentage would have obviously fluctuated across the study period. Finally, Table 4 compares the distributions of gender and ethnicity between the ethnographic sample, the survey sample, and Census<sup>2</sup> data for this region.

| <b>Table 2: Make Up of Sample by Gender</b> |        |
|---|--------|
| Male  | Female |
| 43%   | 57%    |

| <b>Table 3: Make Up of Sample by Ethnicity</b> |           |
|--|-----------|
| Maori  | Non-Maori |
| 24.4%  | 75.6%     |

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<sup>2</sup> 1991 Census, Statistics New Zealand. Though this includes information on usual residents in the area and residents elsewhere in New Zealand, the latter were not included in these figures.

| <b>Table 4: Structure of Households</b>   |  |                  |
|---|--|------------------|
| Couples   |  | 66 (69%)         |
|   | <i>Married</i>                               | 60               |
|   | <i>Not married</i>                           | 6                |
| Single Parents  |  | 16 (17%)         |
|   | <i>Male</i>                                  | 1                |
|   | <i>Female</i>                                | 15               |
| Single People   |  | 9 (9%)           |
|   | <i>Males</i>                                 | 4                |
|   | <i>Females</i>                               | 5                |
| Flatting  |  | 3 (3%)           |
|   | <i>Female + Female</i>                       | 2                |
|   | <i>Male + Male</i>                           | 1                |
| Other   |  | 2 (2%)           |
|   | <i>2 Female Flatmates – one with a child</i> | 1                |
|   | <i>Female caring for aged parent</i>         | 1                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  |  | <b>96 (100%)</b> |
| NB: Total of 164 cannot be calculated directly from this table as both partners in a relationship not always able to be profiled, whilst in some households extra members profiled (e.g. adult children). |  |                  |

| <b>Table 5: Comparative Distributions (by percentage) of Gender and Ethnicity</b> |                         |                      |                             |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
|   | <i>Interview Sample</i> | <i>Survey Sample</i> | <i>1991 Hastings Census</i> |
| <i>Gender</i>   |                         |                      |                             |
| Male  | 43                      | 46                   | 48.7                        |
| Female  | 57                      | 54                   | 51.3                        |
| <i>Ethnicity</i>  |                         |                      |                             |
| Non-Maori   | 75.6                    | 86.8                 | 83.3                        |
| Maori   | 24.4                    | 13.2                 | 16.7                        |

# WELFARE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

## Introduction

Welfare and unemployment, both separately and together, are major contemporary issues within society and the economy. Obviously, there are clear connections between the two, with many people who are unemployed also receiving welfare. However, this is not necessarily the case. There are, for example, instances where people are receiving welfare for reasons other than unemployment and, alternatively, there are people who are unemployed and not entitled to or not receiving any welfare payments. This section of this report examines these issues independently and in relation to one another. Given the longitudinal nature of this study, people may have had a range of experiences at different times depending on their circumstances. For instance, a person may have been out of work and receiving a benefit at one point but is not entitled to any welfare the next time they were unemployed.

This part of the report opens with a brief discussion of relevant issues amongst some of those interviewed who, during the ten-year study period, had *no* experience of receiving welfare or being unemployed. Following this is by the main body of analysis, which begins with a descriptive summary of welfare recipients as a whole. The analysis is then sub-divided into the major welfare groupings: other benefits, Accident Compensation, Domestic Purposes Benefit, and the Unemployment Benefit. Two issues of importance to those people receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit are given additional attention in that section. They are the problems of childcare for this group and the stigma associated with receiving this benefit.

A more general discussion is then undertaken that examines people's motives for working, the effects of unemployment, and the attitudes and actions of the unemployed towards getting paid work. People's perceptions of the state of the labour market and the effects of these on their search for work are then canvassed. At this point, some observations and evaluations of the role of the New Zealand Employment Service (NZES) in helping people get work are made. In contrast to the generally negative evaluations of this organisation, the very positive and significant role of social networks in helping people find paid employment is then explored. Finally, some time is spent looking at the interactions of benefit levels and wages, and the impacts of abatement regimes. This last issue clearly illustrates one particular connection between the substantive issues in this report: welfare and unemployment.

## From the Outside Looking In

The bulk of this report is based on the experiences of those who received some form of welfare and/or were unemployed. However, it is neither unreasonable nor unexpected that people without such experiences still had ideas and opinions about these issues. In a variety of ways, outside of the actual experience of being unemployed or receiving welfare, people can develop particular attitudes and beliefs about these matters. It is useful, then, to firstly consider the thoughts on such matters of those who, during the ten years under study, never received welfare in any form nor were unemployed. Whilst people in only a handful of eligible households made comment, they were often very fulsome in their remarks. That they focussed on the current welfare situation almost entirely in terms of employment is especially useful given the particular themes of this section and the more general focus on transitions. All expressed concern at the current situation and the effects this was having on people, though often in differing terms and from different perspectives.

In trying to express how he saw the current situation, this man reflected on the changes to New Zealand society that he had witnessed, the forces behind these, and the implications, particularly for the most vulnerable.

[There are] the socio-economic changes that I have felt have taken place with the gap between the wealthy and the not wealthy increasing, the middle classes shrinking and the two ends growing, so you get more rich and more poor and less in the middle, whereas at one time it was perceived the common perception that the bulk of New Zealanders were middle class, very few rich people and hardly any poor people but that is not the case now. ...I think it is a whole hearted embracing of capitalism and the free market that has brought that about, what we have got is capitalism, the welfare state is subsiding in the face of capitalism and free market policies.

Another person picked up on this growing dichotomy and some other issues of concern.

I think in the last ten years there has been much more of an underclass developing. ...I think you tend to have the unemployed and over-employed and management. So there is a real problem with that sort of set up, where if you are actually employed you are doing too much work to the detriment of your family and yourself. Whereas if you are unemployed you are seen as a dole bludger, or a drain on society and just given enough to get by on. I think that system only promotes advantages for a very small portion of the community.

Like the previous commentators, this next person also saw unemployment as the most pressing social problem in New Zealand today. To his mind, it needed urgent attention.

The career of the unemployment, basically they are going to be unemployable. We have got a whole generation at the moment that are going to be unemployable. I think probably even two generations and unless something can happen to train the people to take up these specialised jobs on right from square one I think we are probably going to have a third generation unemployed.

Having formed her views after many years spent in welfare services, this woman agreed with the sentiments just expressed.

We are dealing with people who are third generation on benefits. We are dealing with people who have no modelling as far as work and who are now in a position where they have no idea what it means to go to work because their parents and grandparents haven't worked, and for them that is the model. And that is really sad because they have no incentive, or motivation and I presume that is one of the reasons why some of the orchards around here are finding it difficult to find pickers. Some of these people think why bother.

Whilst there may be some validity to her concerns, as will be seen in the following discussions, a majority of the unemployed interviewed in this study were very much focused on getting work. If there was some reluctance to do particular types of work, then a range of reasons for this were identified besides or instead of any lack of motivation. This woman continued with her analysis by acknowledging the hardship faced by many and cited the cause as the very meagre benefits people received. In doing so, she disputed that people's problems were necessarily because they were poor managers. This particular issue – encapsulated in a continuous sense of 'struggle' – is discussed later in the paper as is the question of benefit levels. Again, she was able to draw on her own experiences to sustain her position.

Well, I suppose as working at the budgetary advisory service and that includes the food bank I see a continual stream of people coming in these food banks. I recognise there will always be people whose income is never able to match their expenditure and having dealt with individuals as a budgeting advisor there is on the odd occasion because people are unable to organise their funds. But so many of them cannot manage with the level of the income, cum the benefit. Definitely see a level of needs, needs not just one, that can't be met. People who are living on the absolute minimum.

A colleague of this woman described similar views and experiences.

I think some are making do and some are really stretching like the food and everything, particularly the older people, they try to skimp on things. ...They are happy within themselves but I know they are just on the borderline, life is too hard. ...I didn't see it getting any better. Because I don't think it is something that you change overnight with people, because it is an ongoing thing and sometimes even when it's financially or with life skills, the little bit that you can help them along isn't going to go anywhere is it? ...I think it is mainly motivation, because I think it isn't there. I do not know what's to be done, except that work is a really important way to self-esteem. There is so much emphasis on getting things, its almost like if you have these things you will be alright, but they have no money.

In stark contrast to the above, others tended to blame the particular nature of our welfare system or individuals for the current situation. As one man summed it up.

It is a hangover from the social system that the little man is protected all the way down the line.

He gave examples from his own experiences as a landlord and an employer where tenants and employees were protected while those in his position were disadvantaged. For others who held similar views, the solutions lay in how welfare was organised, accessed and apportioned.

When you don't have a welfare system to back them up there will be a lot more work. No, a lot of unemployed they wouldn't get a job out there. I know it is hard. There were two jobs come up out there two months ago,

internal appointment, but there were 140 applicants for those two jobs. So I know people are genuine about not getting a job. But just grab anything. I know employers don't pay much above the job so you think for \$40 a week, I might as well stay in bed. This is sweet, we will stay on the dole. But if you didn't have the dole our houses wouldn't be broken into. They see what the Jones' have got up the street and think they should have it as well. ...I think those people sleep all day and they get up at night and get up to mischief. They could cut grass and paint old people's roofs so they feel tired when they go to bed. That is my philosophy.

I think two things, that there is not a big enough gap between the unemployment benefit and the basic minimum wage, and like a guy on the radio before – he has gone off the benefit and is now working and is getting \$40 more a week than he was on the dole and he still has to pay transport costs etc. and he is still going to the foodbank. ...I think there should be a minimum wage but I think by paying people unemployment benefit it is the wrong thing, we should not give them money we should give them coupons. I am a firm believer in that, they should have electricity coupons, food coupons, and fuel coupons, if you give them the money it is not directed in the right place. Some of those people never have money. ...They haven't got the basic means to budget and govern money, so why keep giving them money. Give them something – here is your food allowance etc. It is only an allowance until they get going, it is not an income.

The government has made it easy to stay on the benefit. I think they have. They keep talking about how they have made it tough here, but I don't think they have. ...I think the major problem with employment is that people can easily go on the dole and they don't have to go out and get employment, or they do a lot of it under the table.

Interestingly, the interviews revealed quite a low level of 'under-the-table' earnings though, of course, it is always difficult to determine the true level of this.

Many of the issues that these people raised – poor wages, high unemployment, competition for jobs – are those that the unemployed and people on welfare also identified. Thus, it becomes interesting to not only compare the views and opinions of these two small groups, but also to match them with the thoughts and experiences of those who had direct and personal encounters with unemployment or welfare. This is especially useful when the attitudes to, and experiences of, being out of work, getting work, and the trials of dealing with agencies and managing on benefits are presented. On these issues, the positions of the unemployed and those on welfare is closer to the sentiments expressed in the opening set of remarks in this section, rather than the latter comments. In closing, it again should be emphasised that although this section is based on the contributions of only a small number of people, their comments were usually unprompted and lengthy.

## Welfare – The Overall Picture

The benefits that people interviewed in the study received were:

- ❑ Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB)
- ❑ Unemployment Benefit
- ❑ Accident Compensation (ACC)
- ❑ National Superannuation (NS)
- ❑ Sickness Benefit (SB)
- ❑ Invalids' Benefit (IB)
- ❑ Widows' Pension (WB)
- ❑ Caring for Aged and Infirm Benefit

The receipt of supplementary assistance, such as a housing or accommodation supplement, was mentioned in a small number of cases and this issue is briefly explored as well. However, the limited references to these types of assistance naturally limit that discussion. Most of the interviews focussed on benefits of one form or another. It should be remembered that this study covers a ten-year period and apparent inconsistencies in people's experiences of the welfare system (such as differing entitlements) may be explained by changing regimes across time.

Of the 164 people who were profiled, 65 (39.6%) received some form of benefit during the study period though the length of time people received welfare varied considerably. Some had more than one episode on a particular benefit and, as will be seen shortly, a small number received assistance via more than one of the above benefits. The gender and ethnicity breakdown is provided in Tables 5 and 6. Comparing these distributions with those of the overall sample reveals that the proportion of males is higher (and females accordingly lower), and in terms of ethnicity there is a distinct over-representation of Maori in this group.

|        |       |
|--------|-------|
| Female | 50.1  |
| Male   | 49.9  |
| Total  | 100.0 |

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Maori     | 38.2  |
| Non-Maori | 61.8  |
| Total     | 100.0 |

At the time of the interviews, these people came from 55 households accounting for more than half of those where interviews took place (57.3%). The imbalance of individuals to households can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, some benefits allow two people in the same household to receive separate or merged entitlements. The obvious example is national superannuation and three couples who retired before or during the decade were in receipt of this. Accident compensation is also not affected by what others in the household earn or receive. Of course, some benefit regulations are structured to change the entitlements of both husband and wife, or

partner, when a marriage or similar relationship is in place. Thus, one woman who was receiving a sickness benefit was no longer eligible when she married her working husband. Secondly, some households were made up of people not in relationships with one another and so one person's income did not affect the other's entitlements. An illustration of this is the household made up of two female flatmates – one was on a benefit made up of ACC and DPB payments; the other woman was unemployed on a couple of occasions and received the UEB for periods. Similarly, an adult child may have entitlements not affected by a parent receiving a benefit in the same household. Thirdly, some members of a household were on different benefits at different times, such as someone unemployed for a time and their partner on ACC over another period. Finally, and this was a common feature, there is the situation created by the fact that our analysis covered a ten year period. Over this time, it was possible for people to receive a benefit outside of the current household or relationship as well as, of course, within it. This can create the situation where two people in one household can have both been on a particular benefit – albeit at completely different times.

Nine people, two of whom were men, received more than one form of welfare over the ten-year period.<sup>3</sup> In most of these cases, the receipt of different benefits occurred on separate occasions. Six of the nine instances involved a combination of the unemployment benefit and the DPB. A seventh case also incorporated the sickness benefit as well as these two. This is because of regulations that provide a sickness benefit for a pregnant woman who is unable to work. She becomes entitled to the DPB once the child is born. In the remaining two cases, one woman was on a combined benefit made up of ACC payments (following the death of her partner and father of their daughter) and DPB payments. The addition of the latter brought the total payment up to the standard level of the DPB. The other woman had full-time seasonal work in a cannery and received the UEB during the off-season for about two and a half years. She also had time off work and received ACC whilst recovering from a car accident.

From this brief overview, the experiences of people receiving welfare are now examined in relation to the benefits they received. As the last five forms of welfare listed at the beginning of this section were less common, they are looked at together under a heading of Other Benefits. The remaining three major forms of welfare (UEB, DPB and ACC) are then examined separately.

### *An Unusual Case*

Before moving on to the analysis according to benefits, one couple represent an intriguing case that bears a moment's attention. As their situation does not easily fit with other people receiving benefits, it is appropriate that their circumstances are described separately at this early stage. Whilst they will undoubtedly be referred to elsewhere, this summary will serve as the principle discussion of their situation. Although the experiences of both people are discussed, it should be noted that the woman was the sole informant. This man and woman appeared to be in a relationship and had three children together. However, although they shared care and custody of

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<sup>3</sup> This is different from a person receiving a single benefit on more than one occasion. These cases will be dealt with in the sections exploring specific benefits.

these children, they seemed to live apart for periods and it was unclear how much of the time they lived together. For a time, early in the study period, they both claimed the unemployment benefit, though it does seem that for some of this period they may have lived together. They attended an ongoing training scheme during these early years. The exact nature of this programme is not clear. Initially it was only the woman who claimed the DPB, moving onto this from the unemployment benefit at the birth of their first child. At the end, it seemed that both were claiming this benefit, sometimes for periods when they were also in full-time paid employment. They felt that this situation was in part the result of the attitudes of government agencies.

I didn't find [the NZES] very helpful. ...I would go in there and put my name down, but I'd never get a job from them. And then I got a bit sick and tired of it, so I'd go out and get my own job and not tell them.

Later, the woman conceded that the welfare agencies had improved their service and approach with the introduction of a case management system and this benefited them.

[Social Welfare] were just as bad. Until about 1993 and then I got my own guy who I had to go and see all the time. ...[But] I didn't have to sit around and wait for three hours with my kids. I could just go in there and make an appointment and he would handle my budgeting and he was a really good friend I could talk to. I could talk to him straight up and it was just between me and him. He helped me with my clothes grants and other things that I needed. He would put money away for my rates and help me with my mortgage and my insurance and he done all that stuff. He was really good and I still see him today.

Like many people, including others receiving benefits, they struggled with issues of childcare and the like and were motivated by a desire to have the best for their family. However, they tended to develop their own particular solutions to these issues. Their income was not only made up of benefits and wages (the former often claimed on top of the latter), but was also supplemented fairly substantially from time to time by the sale of illicit drugs. This allowed them to save extra money.

We have got money in the bank that we don't tell anyone about. It is like our own trust for the kids. If they need things for school we can go and draw their money out and buy them their own shoes. ...[Security for the kids], that's what we are worried about.

It also meant they could purchase a home. The means they employed to achieve these ends seemed, to them, a reasonable way of ensuring the well-being of themselves and their children, in the present and future. They also recognised that they wanted life to be different and that they were working towards these changes.

We are both sick of being on the benefit. ...[Our prospects are] pretty good. You know, start work, we stopped selling drugs. [My partner] works, like he works in the bush and he's earning good money.

## Other Benefits

In the section on the DPB, we will meet and read about two women who had, at various times, received the sickness benefit. While one woman cared for her ill husband, the other went onto this benefit when pregnant.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, elsewhere in this paper there will be an outline of the case of another woman who received the unemployment benefit for a period, but ended up on the Invalid's Benefit after becoming seriously ill in the long term. Aside from these cases, nine people received benefits other than ACC, the DPB or the UEB.

One woman was caring for her frail elderly mother for which she received a special benefit. Whilst her mother's state of health was an obvious and significant consideration in her decision to give up paid work, this was the outcome of a number of factors. Firstly, her own health was poor. Secondly, she had been working for eighteen years in a government department as a telephonist. With the introduction of new technology, these roles were to be done away with. Although she was offered retraining, she felt given her age and the narrow work role she had elected to pursue, that this would not really suit her.

[A different position] was offered but I was not trained, because I have been a telephonist for 18 years. I wasn't trained in clerical and the stress level would have been horrific to have gone into a clerical position.

After her mother had become ill and needed more care, and following the introduction of the first wave of new technology that had reduced the need for people in her position, she elected to cut down her hours. Eventually her job disappeared altogether and she made the decision to leave. She maintained a philosophical view of the transition from being in full-time paid work to caring for a relative and living on a benefit.

So I went on the benefit and I thought well if I come out with \$3 at the end of the week that is fine, you manage, you adjust.

There were undoubtedly, many adjustments to make. However, she felt better able to care for her mother and under less stress than when she was working as well. Her own health also improved.

Another woman was on the Widow's Benefit throughout the study period. She had brought up two children, worked part-time – sometimes under the counter – and was heavily involved in voluntary commitments. Her experiences are incorporated into a later section that looks at the struggle that many people experienced living on a benefit. This woman was particularly critical of the impacts of the benefit cuts and was very pessimistic about her future. Having been on ACC for a time after a car accident, a third woman was transferred to a sickness benefit as she was unable to work and her problems seemed related to, but not primarily contingent upon, the accident. She was on this benefit for a number of years, three of which were at the beginning of the survey period. After marrying, she was required to come off this benefit as her husband was in paid work.

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<sup>4</sup> The rationale for this has been explained earlier.

Three couples received national superannuation. They represent a small cross section of experiences. In one case, both people had been employed and the wife took early retirement from the public service at the start of the survey period. She received income from a private superannuation scheme until her husband retired three years later. At this point, they both became eligible for national superannuation. Though they themselves were quite comfortably off, they acknowledged that many people, even in their relatively affluent area, were finding it more and more difficult.

Then you come across people, you know women who dress well but you suddenly realise they're not entering for this or that ... then they're not going to something because you've got to pay and you realise that they're having to watch the money.

The husband of the second couple became eligible for the pension early in the survey period but he elected to continue to work as the surcharge at the time made it very unattractive to retire. However, changes at his workplace made him unhappy and he retired once he turned 65 years, though the surcharge was still in place. He and his wife both qualified for national superannuation at this time, though she continued with her voluntary commitments and worked casually teaching ballet. Like so many others living on a benefit, they found managing quite a struggle.

We manage, but I think the only reason that we do manage is that we own our own home. It's tight when it comes to money.

As alluded to before, a later section focuses on the difficulties many people experienced managing on a benefit.

The final couple had been farmers during the majority of their working lives. They sold their farm just prior to the start of the study period having decided to develop an orchard. This was to be both a retirement investment and a source of income for their children. Although the wife had serious doubts over the viability of this project at their ages, she supported her husband. Whilst this was an innovative development, a series of problems saw it ultimately fail and they struggled financially and emotionally throughout the project. They made very little money out of their venture and were sometimes unable to draw any kind of earnings from it. Ultimately, a year or so prior to being interviewed, they were forced to sell the business at a loss to clear a mounting debt. This had a marked effect on the quality of their retirement and lives in general.

## Accident Compensation

Eight people (12.3% of the welfare group and 4.9% of all those profiled) received ACC for a period during the ten years under study. This accounts for only those people who, during this time, reported time off paid work and being in receipt of earnings related compensation. Given the retrospective nature of this research, it is possible that only the more serious and longer episodes have been recounted. Each person received ACC on only one occasion. One woman, as noted earlier, received a benefit made up of ACC and DPB payments; her case is discussed in relation to the DPB.<sup>5</sup> This leaves seven people whose cases will be examined here. Two of these people were in the same household, though they received ACC at different times and for unrelated injuries. The group of seven is made up of three women and four men.

Four of these seven incidents were work-related – two men had injured their backs through heavy manual work and two women had developed Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) through repetitive butchery-type work. At the time they were interviewed, one of the men and one of the women were still unable to work because of their injuries. Of the three non-work accidents, one was due to a car accident, another was not specified, and the last involved the only incident to occur before the ten-year study period. This person suffered a serious head injury and he received ACC prior to, throughout and, in all likelihood, beyond the survey period.

In addition to this man, only two others remained on ACC at the end of the study period. Of these, one man was injured outside of work and had only gone onto ACC in the last months of the decade. The second had hurt his back at work and had been on ACC for about three and a half years. The four other people were on ACC for periods of 6 weeks, 15 and 18 months and four years. Although one of the women with OOS could no longer work because of her injury, as we shall see when her case is examined, she was no longer receiving any compensation.

Although this is only a small group, some comments regarding their experiences are still worth noting. ACC is often considered generous in relation to other benefits since compensation is paid at 80% of a person's income prior to any accident. However, if one is on a low income at that point, then subsequently one is forced to cope on 80% of a low income. Life can be difficult, therefore.

As with those on other benefits, some of this group commented on the attitudes and performance of the agency assisting them. ACC received mixed reviews. One woman voluntarily stopped receiving compensation because of her lack of confidence in their ability to successfully treat and rehabilitate her OOS condition (which she notes was less common at the time). Others considered ACC more favourably. Naturally, there are always problems with matching inanimate legislation with very human circumstances.

If you have a good case manager it is fine ... It just seems to be like you are hitting your head against a brick wall now. ...[The] 1992 legislation ... it is very good for physical disability but if you have got like me, a head injury, these complicated reasoning things don't always work.

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<sup>5</sup> Though an arbitrary allocation, given her circumstances this seems the most appropriate place to consider her case.

Like many of those who were unemployed, most of this group displayed, both in their words and actions, a strong desire to work. This was no more apparent than in the efforts of the man who was on ACC throughout the survey period. He was unwilling to let his serious injury prevent him from making every effort to get into paid work. Indeed, at the start of the ten-year period, he was in employment (as well as receiving an abated ACC payment). Frequent operations and hospital stays interrupted this paid work and he returned from one period away to find the factory closed and he and others redundant. He struggled to get further employment although he did manage two short work placements. Neither of these led to paid employment. As well, he took on numerous courses to try and equip himself with work skills in an area he could cope with. Being employed (in its broadest sense) was very important to this man and his family.

I was turning into a vegetable basically. I couldn't do anything ...I wanted to be alive. I didn't want to be an object anymore.

Whilst he helped with the care of the family, there were limits to what he could cope with. Similarly, he took on a range of voluntary work at different times. However, one of the work placements was to offer him a priceless opportunity. Although this firm could not give him paid work long term, they were happy for him to "work" whenever and for as long he wanted as an unpaid member of staff. This was in a type of mechanical work he enjoyed. Whilst some might feel this exploitative, he spoke warmly of his workmates and the job.

They love it ... they are very concerned about me, it is a very family sort of place. If I get frustrated with a job they say – go have a coffee, do something else and they take over. I am not being paid and because of that there is no pressure to perform.

His wife adds,

It might not be financial payment but he is paid socially it has done heaps for him, the fact that he is doing something useful, it is worth more than money.

This job meant he could match the demands of work to the limitations of his injury. In addition, he was still able to share family responsibilities with his wife and allow her to do voluntary work at their children's school.

Others who echoed the importance of work included the two women with OOS. Both were committed to their rehabilitation and returning to paid employment, and both were successful. After surgery and rehabilitation, one of the women found her current employer was retrenching just as she was ready to return. Undeterred, even though she was out of work and no longer entitled to ACC, she found a similar job with another company. The other woman even went so far as to voluntarily stop receiving her ACC payments. She felt that the regime ACC was employing with her was not helping. She embarked on her own rehabilitation programme and gradual return to work. This appeared to pay off for a while but the injury flared up again and she and her husband decided she should not risk working again for fear of even worse problems developing.

[If] I go back to work I'll probably become crippled. I hated the idea of sitting around and not able to use my hands at all.

For those receiving ACC, it was often not only being out of work but also new limitations that were hard to accept.

In the beginning it might have affected [my family] because I was grumpy as. Because I have worked hard all my life. I couldn't do anything like starting the lawn mower, pushing the mower.

As well, for this group, work played additional roles, such as its part in the rehabilitation process itself.

I have improved no end since I have been six months working, better than six months lying around home.

This man had undertaken a short polytech course in orchard work whilst on ACC which opened up new opportunities. He had previously been involved in heavy manual work. Though still physical, orchard work was within his capabilities. He got some part-time work through friends and was gradually increasing his hours to the point that he was almost full-time at when interviewed. The success of this careful return to work had, as the quote shows, contributed to his well being in many ways. However, not everyone feels able to retrain, especially at a later stage in their working lives and after many years in a particular area or sort of work. Thus, it's not just a simple matter of getting into a new line of work.

If I had a better brain I could do office work and things like that. ...I don't know what they want me to do, sit in an office or something like that. There is plenty of people in offices and all that now. You have to have a good brain. My brain is not so good.

Given the importance of work, it is not unexpected that some may try too hard or too soon to return to their jobs and thus jeopardise rather than improve their recovery. The hidden nature of back injuries (and, possibly, the scepticism with which they are often viewed) contributed to this man's problems.

I can do certain things. ...I've tried to go back to work but it made things worse. ...I went to ACC and they thought I was foolish to even try to work. To do that sort of work [carpentry]. I thought because there was no lifting and that it would be easy, but it wasn't and I enjoyed it too. ...People want to give me the work, and think I am nice and strong and the first thing they want you to do is lift everything.

For those with serious or long-term injuries, there is the added issue of discrimination to face. Two people recounted their experiences.

They [employment agency] say it is hard to find who employ people like us now. ...I go along there all dressed up. ...as soon as they know I am an ACC recoverer, like a back injury recovering they are pretty frightened about that because it puts on them.

I send people my resume or CV and they think that sounds quite good, come and see us. I walk in the door and the shutters go down. They go through the motions, so we'll call you later. Basically its because I've got a two and a half inch build up in my right shoe and I walk with a limp. I walk into a room and because there's a physical disability they think you must have a mental disability.

In summary then, this small group faced all the issues that any job seeker does and showed a similar enthusiasm for work that we will see with other welfare recipients. In addition, they had to cope with or overcome an injury and its effects. This could have implications not only on their working lives but personally as well. At the extreme, this might mean coping with discrimination or having to consider a complete change in the type of work they could manage.

## **Domestic Purposes Benefit**

In this section, the stories of those involved will be told in some detail, before some general observations about transitions are offered. Eighteen people (27.7% of the welfare group and 11% of all those profiled) received this benefit during the study period. Only two were men, both of whom were Maori, as were 57% of the women. Just two people remained on this benefit for the entire ten-year period having been on it prior to this time (one was the woman who was on the mixed benefit). One woman, who had also been receiving the DPB for a number of years prior to 1985, moved off this benefit during the study period. A little over three years into this timeframe, she moved into full-time paid work. During the decade being researched, ten people went on to the DPB and remained on it at its end. Two of these women had some time off the benefit: one only received it again with the birth of a second child after some time working, and another lived with the child's father for just over a year and so was not eligible during that time. These people had been on the benefit for between nine years and a few months when interviewed. The remaining five people were on the DPB for periods of between 18 months and five years during the study period and were no longer receiving it at the end.

The most common single reason for people going onto this benefit was the break-up of a marriage or de facto relationship. Of the ten people to whom this applied, two people (one man and one woman) went onto this benefit after their partners initially had custody of the children following the break-up. The woman's children originally chose to stay with their father, but after a year decided they wanted to be with their mother and it took a legal battle to achieve this. The male was forced into giving up paid work when his estranged wife became ill and he needed to take care of their three children. At the end of the study period, his wife was recovering and had two of the school age children. He still looked after the youngest. Four women went on to this benefit following the birth of a child whilst they were not married or living with the father. Two of these women, and one of the women who had received the benefit for the entire period, had subsequent children whilst receiving the DPB or returned to receiving the DPB with the birth of further children. The remaining four people who at some time received the DPB represent a mix of circumstances. One couple voluntarily split after the male was made redundant. They felt they would be better off financially if the woman received the DPB and the man received the unemployment benefit. They reunited after a year when she returned to full-time work. As noted earlier, one woman was on a mixed benefit following the accidental death of her partner. The final two people are the couple whose unusual case was discussed separately earlier

Of the twelve people still receiving the benefit at the end of the study period, all but two expressed some desire to move off the benefit in the near future. One of this pair had been on the DPB for the entire period and had resisted efforts by the Income Support to get her into employment. She did not want to get involved in paid work until her children were older (the younger was eight). For the other woman, although her son was fast approaching school leaving age, she was now obligated to care for her ailing father. This was consuming more of her time and was likely to necessitate a shift to another district. Accordingly, a move into paid work was not on her agenda.

The others in this sub-group recognised that they needed to prepare for a time when their children were older and/or were keen to be in some form of paid work when their

domestic circumstances allowed. Childcare demands and difficulties as well as financial considerations were major factors in these decisions. The changing circumstances of a single parent family – such as the age of children – meant that this could be a dynamic decision-making process with single parents having to continually re-evaluate their circumstances. The specific demands that childcare made on this group are explored in the next section. For some people, the practicalities (finances and childcare for example) were often alongside or even secondary to other considerations such as those that are more personal. Although the next two women were not part of this sub-group as they were already in full-time work, they had been receiving the DPB and their experiences illustrate the nature of these personal motivations. The comments of the first woman illustrate the dilemma they faced and the kinds of reactions they received to the decisions that they made.

I have always been the sort of person that has hated staying at home and I liked being with people, in fact I really missed work. I found it really hard being a mum and that was really another reason. ...I am just the kind of person that six months is long enough to be at home and I just hated it. ...I think I would have gone totally mad if I wasn't doing something out of the home. I couldn't stand it and I am not a greatly maternal person who gets a lot of – that sounds terrible – but, you know, a lot of women are happy being at home and running a house and that is their whole thing, but I am definitely not like that. ...It wasn't a difficult decision to make going back to work for me, I did get some flack from family members and my mother for one was not impressed.

The second woman was driven by similar feelings to move off the benefit altogether.

I didn't like staying at home, even though the children were young, at that time going through the marriage break-up I just thought I had to get off the DPB, I always liked being independent. I always worked prior to my marriage. And even when we were married I tried to work in between times, like part-time when the children come. So I have continued in that line and they said get out of here rather than stay home. ...And I just, I guess for piece of mind for me too.

It is important to acknowledge that single parents face the difficulties of considering these various issues as well as balancing paid and unpaid responsibilities without the presence and support of a partner.

A few examples might be useful at this point to show how some of this group demonstrated their desire and intentions to move off the DPB at some stage. The examples will also serve to illustrate the different stages that people were at in this process and how this was often dependant on many factors. These examples are drawn from those cases where the women were receiving the DPB at the time of interview. The woman on the mixed benefit recognised that, as her daughter got older, she must consider her own future. She had done a couple of courses for interest and got some casual work but wasn't quite ready to commit herself fully to something yet. For some, pregnancy had meant having to give up work opportunities. One woman had spent much of her working life unemployed. Finally, a work training scheme had provided her with skills in an area she was interested in – woodwork – and the possibility of full-time work. As she was soon to give birth she could not take up this opportunity but there was the possibility of some part-time work. Managing this, and she was keen to do so, would depend on what childcare arrangements she could make. Another woman had just spent three months back in full-time employment. This was

after two years receiving the DPB with her first child during which she had worked part-time. The possibility of a permanent position was stymied by her pregnancy. This created a great deal of disappointment.

A [permanent full-time] job did come up not long ago. I spoke to them and I turned it down. It was about a month ago and it wasn't long before baby is due and it was a full-time job. And I was really quite angry with myself because I wanted it, but I didn't take into account for that, I would only just start and I would have to take time off, and it was made quite clear that he [the manager] wouldn't allow that. ...You had to be working there for over six months I think it was before you are entitled [to maternity leave] and I hadn't been so I missed out.

As the father of their first child had previously taken time out of paid work to care for the baby, there were possibilities that she could at some point take on full-time work.

A third woman had just completed a Task Force Green placement doing clerical work for the police. This had led to casual work that she considered she would continue once her baby was a little older. She had engaged in a range of full and part-time work opportunities over the preceding years. The children's father shared their care so she was able to work full-time at one point and could consider paid work again. However, the legacy of her earlier experiences might tell against such a move. She found the lack of quality time and the heavy demands both at work and at home very stressful. Eventually she gave up work, despite the continued efforts of NZES to re-engage her. She had only accepted the TFG placement as it fitted in well with her children's school hours.

Two women were studying as part of their preparation for returning to the paid workforce. They had both realised that they needed to do something to better equip themselves for this time. Having been unemployed at the start of the survey period, one of these women gave birth just over a year into the decade under study. Her partner lived with and supported them for a year, but otherwise she received the DPB. Once her daughter turned five and went to school, this woman began a journey aimed at preparing her for some meaningful paid employment. Interspersed with some seasonal fruit picking, she completed a couple of courses and work placements. The first was specifically aimed at women returning to work. This gave her the confidence to later tackle a pre-nursing course and then start her nursing training. Though challenging, she was enjoying this. She was able to undertake this programme, in part, because of the favourable approach to such training that is provided for people on the DPB. Although the financial concerns may have been eased, being a single parent and studying, both separately and together, created large demands. As this woman had received both the UEB and the DPB, and had undertaken a range of education and training courses, her profile is expanded on in the later section on education and training.

The second woman who was doing some study had older children – just two were teenagers, the others adults – making life easier in many respects. She had chosen to do part-time extramural study for a BA which also eased her situation. A few years earlier she had managed to make some extra money from her hobby of woodturning but an aggravated injury and other factors saw her give this up. In recognising the need to be self-supporting in the future, she expressed the hope that it could involve some meaningful work.

I can't bear the thought of just doing menial jobs and trying to make the most of what I could do because people don't want older women or men, they want younger people ... That is why I thought the only thing to do was get my brain cracking. There is always a solution. ...I feel it is a wonderful opportunity to learn. ...I want to be self supporting ... I want to be able to make a good living ... I feel that even if I don't manage to achieve what I want to achieve, that at least it might possibly lead me into something I can.

Thus, while nervous about her abilities and the demands of the course, she was keen to give it a go. It was, she believed, important to take this risk. As her course progressed she hoped it would offer her ways to fulfil her desire to work with people. Although these two women were both still receiving the DPB and were mindful of the opportunities it offered for training, they were obviously working towards the time when they would be independent of such benefits.

One of the other women in this sub-group had earlier completed a polytech course – in supervisory management – and also taken extramural papers towards a BA. Echoing the importance of personal motives, she readily admitted that being a mother, alone, was not enough for her. The courses, then, offered something for her to do and were also preparation for the future.

I have always been the sort of person that has hated staying at home and I liked being with people, in fact I really missed work. I found it hard at home being a mum. ...The Massey [university papers], really I did it because I wasn't working and I was bored. ...[My daughter] said I should go and do some study because she knows I am a person that needs to keep my brain busy, I have always been like that. ...I really enjoyed being in business ... I loved it and I thought I had to get some skills to get back into the workforce because everything has changed so much these days and I am not getting any younger. It was basically out of just pure wanting to update my business skills and management skills [that] I also did in that time a certificate of supervisory management at the polytech here.

Subsequently, she became heavily involved in voluntary work with an NGO. At the time of the interview, she held a senior position – still voluntary – in the organisation. This was equivalent to a paid role and she saw that it would undoubtedly be of use in moving into paid employment. However, despite the magnitude of, and responsibilities inherent in her job, she expressed reservations similar to those held by many women in her position.

This is not my job, it is my work but it is not paid like in money, but they pay my expenses and my travelling expenses and everything. ...I am area rep. down here and I am on the regional committee down here too so that is involved with the body that runs the [organisation] throughout New Zealand, plus I am on the management committee here as well as just being a volunteer. ...I sort of saw [voluntary work] as bridging to me not being in the workforce and finding a full-time job and I suppose the longer you are out of the workforce you lose your confidence as far as work goes. I could never imagine going back to being a manageress of a busy business and doing that now, because I have lost a lot of my confidence as far as work goes ... and it is hard to actually find something to go back to where you have been, it doesn't always work, you can't go back. I am a different person now to what I was back then.

Although this was voluntary work, it still posed many of the same problems that a paid job would, particularly in respect of childcare. She relied heavily on her family for help and support. In this way, it was further preparation for any future shift to paid

employment. Whilst she still felt that this was still a way off – as her daughter was only seven – there can be no doubts that she was actively readying herself for that day.

The final case that will be discussed concerns the only man in this sub-group. Having taken over the care of his children when his estranged wife was ill, he was now keen to return to paid work. She was recovering at the time he was interviewed but he still cared for their toddler. Although he readily took on these responsibilities when needed, his remarks revealed a particular view of this role in relation to paid work.

There is nothing you can't get done by 12 o'clock and then you've got the rest of the day to sit around, running around with your kids is fine but I don't like being on the benefit.

After being unemployed most of the study period, he was finally in settled full-time employment when he took over caring for his children. Despite his enthusiasm to return to work he, like many women in his position, wondered about his future prospects. He remained keen to try, however.

Half a dozen women were able to stop receiving the DPB during the survey period. However, this does not mean that they all made simple or direct transitions into paid employment, or obtained even employment. In one case we have the couple who voluntarily split for about a year after the male was made redundant. It appeared unlikely that he would get another job quickly and this seemed the only solution to their dire financial situation. Surviving on one benefit would have been extremely difficult for them apparently. The woman was an extremely hard worker who, despite having just had their second baby, was also working two part-time jobs. She continued at this whilst her estranged husband cared for the children. Once she got full-time work about a year later they reunited. Although he got some part-time work and some work placements, he is now on ACC so their struggle continues. Another couple also split up for a period, though their situation was more usual and centred on marital problems. The woman went onto the DPB and cared for their children. After about eighteen months they got back together and she went off the DPB. However, her husband had a relapse of a long-standing illness and they had to go onto the married sickness benefit while she cared for him during his recovery. Later, she makes some interesting comments on the comparative experiences of being on both these benefits.

After separating from her husband, another woman had begun her nursing training at polytech. A year later her children, who had been living with their father, decided they wanted to live with her. She was experiencing quite a financial struggle at the time. Going onto the DPB eased her money worries and provided more financial assistance for her training. However, having custody of the children raised new challenges for her when combined with her studies. She completed her programme despite these and gained full-time employment as a nurse. Later she trained as a midwife without requiring any support from the state. When not studying, she maintained full-time employment. Other aspects of her experiences are explored in more detail in the section on education and training, particularly in relation to the perceived inequities between various benefits regimes.

Three other women were also able to stop receiving the DPB and take on paid employment. For one woman, the associated stigma and low level of payments were sufficient motivations to force her off the DPB. Having continued some part-time

work that she had begun before her marriage broke up, she found that the abatements hardly made it worthwhile continuing. Her solution was to get other work so that she could give up the benefit entirely. After about eighteen months on the DPB, she 'survived' for three and a half years with two jobs - one part-time and one casual. Then she was able to get a full-time position. Although better money, the demands were great and she could only keep this up for a year. She then got a part-time position that, whilst making for a financial struggle, still allowed her to stay off the DPB – her main ambition – and to be more available for her son. Indeed childcare had been an ongoing problem since her marriage broke up even though she had a strong network of friends who supported each other and her family helped as well. Her latest employer had also been very helpful and flexible in this regard. She felt she would consider full-time work once her son went to high school. Despite the ongoing struggle, she was pleased to be off the benefit. As the whole issue of the stigma associated with the DPB is an important one, it is dealt with separately. More detail on her experiences and feelings regarding this is contained in that next section.

The other two women who came off the DPB both got full-time work. That their children were teenagers when they decided to make this transition likely helped their situation. Interestingly, as well, they both utilised their heavy involvement in voluntary work to assist in getting paid employment. A couple of years into the study period one of these women was offered a position with a government agency as the result of her voluntary activities. She had become involved in these activities when her marriage broke up – she didn't want to simply remain at home and was keen to develop outside interests. The paid role she subsequently took on was both stimulating and challenging and she was also studying for formal qualifications. Similarly, the other woman also took on some voluntary work with an NGO when her marriage broke up. She had a number of paid positions while married and was also keenly involved in voluntary work. However, when she and her husband separated she gave up paid work to help her sons through the difficult period. The voluntary work, which grew into quite a senior role, was in part to keep busy during this transitional phase. As it turned out, she was able to get a paid senior position in the same organisation when she and her children felt ready for her to return to work.

We have, then, a number of women who moved from this benefit to paid employment. The involvement of education or training and voluntary activities in this transition indicates the important role they can play. As we have seen, such a move was in the minds of many others. These proven strategies – education or training, and voluntary involvement – were being employed in some of these cases. Aside from the strategies mentioned above, others were involved in part-time, casual, or seasonal work. This allowed some easier balancing of their unpaid responsibilities. It could also serve as an entrée into more permanent or full-time employment. The successes in making this transition, the preparations underway, and the attitudes in evidence all seem to indicate that most of this group held a positive inclination towards, at some point, making the transition from the DPB to paid employment. Only a fifth of those who received the DPB were not involved in any study, nor any work of a paid or voluntary nature.

There are, however, many things to consider in making this transition, as this woman explains so well.

I would like to get off [the DPB] but it is really hard, you have to find enough. You have to find a job that pays enough to pay your mortgage and

all that sort of thing, it is really a big risk. In the workforce you don't really know if your job is secure and the thing is it is very hard to find a job that works within the school hours.

A number of these issues arose in the analysis of the interviews of those receiving the DPB. Some of these have a bearing on the person's ability and willingness to engage in some form of activity over and above the DPB. It appeared, for example, that recipients of the DPB were entitled to favourable assistance for education and training programmes, and received support from agencies in this regard. Whilst this enhanced their subsequent work opportunities, other interviews revealed that many of those receiving different benefits felt disadvantaged in comparison. It was an issue that raised considerable debate and it is canvassed later in this report. Another recurrent and related theme that was to emerge throughout the section on welfare was the multi-faceted issue of benefit levels, wage levels, and abatement regimes. As this was a common issue for many beneficiaries regardless of what specific benefit they were on, it too is discussed separately and in detail later. In respect of the DPB, a couple of themes emerged that can be localised to those on this benefit. These were the issues of childcare and the stigma associated with receiving the DPB.

### *Childcare*

Caring for children when combined with the need or desire to engage in paid employment provides immense challenges for parents. Whilst this issue is canvassed more generally in other sections, it is also a particular issue for single parents and it in this context that it is discussed here. Indeed, without a spouse or partner in the household, the challenges can often be great. Some of the experiences and quotes already included to this point have touched on this issue. For some single parents, the possibility of paid work is frequently all but excluded because of childcare responsibilities. The age of the children is often a major consideration with babies or very young children posing greater difficulties.

As this next person observed, not everyone works nine-to-five which created certain problems. In addition, even if caregivers can be organised, a single parent often has no one else to turn to if problems arise.

I can't work and manage three kids when I get home and get them organised in the morning, and because I had to start at 7.30. Getting someone to come in and look after the kids at 7.30 in the morning is not the easiest thing to do until 6, 6.30. ...I've got people offering to look after the baby during the day ... but if things turn bad or go bad I still have to be there full-time.

For those who decide they will try and accommodate both work and home responsibilities, it may still be difficult for them to easily achieve this. Two women identified some of the problems they and others experienced.

[Couldn't get work] to fit in with [my daughter]. No because I had to be home 'cause she was a kid that really needed me to be home after school. ...Plus I didn't have much family support or somebody close that could take care of her.

If I didn't have help, like my mum or [older daughter] being here, I couldn't do it. That is quite frustrating when you want to get on and do

things with your life but when your kids are little you just can't because those times you have to be there after 3 p.m..

Of course, just getting a job could be difficult; getting a job that matched their other responsibilities could be even more challenging.

Women always used to think when their kids went to school – I'll just go and find a wee part-time job. There is no such thing as a wee part-time job anymore. It is really difficult to find such a thing. You can go and work in a supermarket, but then long hours still and it doesn't always fit in with school hours, holidays, after school care is not always available.

This woman went on to acknowledged the considerable demands that fall on single parents as they try and balance these two sets of responsibilities. She also hints that many of these responsibilities (and thus, problems) fall to women regardless of their relationship status.

I've got no-one else to do that, like a partner to fall back on, although if I had a partner they would probably have to work full-time too. Sole responsibility for everything; the house falls on your shoulders.

It is not only paid work that can pose challenges. As the comments of this next woman show, study can also be difficult to balance with the demands of being a single parent. She was training to be a nurse while her daughter was at school. Whilst there were times when these fitted together well, this was not always the case and a great deal of organisation was still required.

[My daughter] goes to school and our timetable is sorted, the only day I have to leave before her is Monday and other than that we work it out.

Working it out meant relying on a network of friends to care for her daughter at the times she was not able to. There were still the unexpected problems to cope with. As well, nursing courses have clinical placements during the day (starting quite early in the mornings) and evenings, meaning that the challenges for “working it out” would only increase.

To manage childcare, people often turned to family, friends, and other social networks. Occasionally, and reluctantly given the cost, some people used paid services. The ability of the children's fathers to be available to help with this often allowed women to take on more regular work or study. As these comments from one woman illustrate, a whole host of strategies were often employed to cope with childcare demands. They also show that the age pattern of families can have an influence on which strategies are employed.

I waited until she was six months and I went back on [the training scheme] and took her to work with me. ...I took them to work with me. ...All the whanau took their children with them. ...Two kids were at school and [the other] was with his grandmother. ...They used to go to kohanga. ...Well my mum took them back to our marae, with our aunties and grandmothers looked after them. ...The father was at home with the kids. ...Their grandmother comes down and looks after them. The grandmother cares for the children.

Though this clearly shows the important role of whanau, non-Maori also used family in this way.

Another woman, this time with older children, describes the problems she faced and the types of solutions she employed to try and resolve them. Although she did work for a time, in the main she was studying full-time for a period whilst on the DPB. Her goals were to get full-time work and ultimately improve her and her children's situation.

[The youngest] went to a day care or she was at kindergarten in around '85, and most of the time they actually looked after themselves while I was working, or at school. ...The kids really had to bring themselves up I suppose. I didn't really participate in many of their activities because I was too busy studying. So as far as quality time with the kids, that was a really difficult time for them, but I think they coped really well. They tried to keep out of trouble as much as they could. ...They were good because they had responsibilities and they took on those like preparing vegetables and that sort of thing. Of course they had their own activities to go to and they had to find their own way there basically because I needed to study, because I thought I've got to get through this for your sakes, because in time I will be able to achieve your goals as well. ...They were left home between 3.30 and 6pm. One of the good things was that they were sports minded, which was good for me because I didn't have to mind them. I encouraged them to join the various things like netball practise and I tried to fill their time in.

Even if childcare was organised, there were still less than desirable outcomes. In the above interview, the woman was grateful that her children came through the experience without major problems. There is a sense that it could easily have turned out differently. In another case, a woman thought that short periods of employment might be an acceptable compromise. She worked evenings and weekends during the fruit picking/grading season. It was still difficult for her to get care for her daughter and she elected to not seek work for a while at the end of each season.

I just felt I had had 3 months and weekends without [my daughter] and I thought I owed her.

In another case the woman recounted the demands that working placed on her and her daughter. These were demands that she ultimately felt were unacceptable.

When I first went back to work when she was first born it was really hard because it was really, really long hours. Like I was having to travel ... and I was leaving at about 8 in the morning and I wasn't getting back until about 6 o'clock at night, and she was a bad asthmatic and that was the reason I had to give that work up because her health was suffering.

One particular case further illustrates these various issues, and the shifts that can occur across time. In planning for the future when she would need to return to paid work, this woman was exploring some training options when she heard of a part-time waitressing opportunity close to her home. This gradually grew into a full-time position and she was later promoted to a supervisory position. Whilst not desperate at that point to be in paid employment, she found the extra money helpful. She also got a lot of satisfaction from her work and was very successful. These various work undertakings had been facilitated in part by the availability of her estranged husband to share the care of their children – initially in the evenings, but then for longer periods when he was unemployed. This was not the only way she managed, however.

Because I'd separated from the father he was copping most of the babysitting. ...Because we had a half-and-half week anyway, I only had half a week to worry about so therefore it was easier for him. Because I worked nights, he was usually home at nights and when he wasn't like my parents would take up the slack or friends would take up the slack.

Even though she had a network of support to allow her to work, like others she eventually found the demands and the costs too high.

I mean seeing them to pick them up and drop them off at the babysitters, grab them from school, throw them to the babysitter, you don't see them until the next morning and by that time you're haggard, you're rushing them off to school. Weekends you just want to do nothing, they want to do everything. It just doesn't work.

She gave up her job to spend more time with the children. Despite this, there was still pressure to return to work with NZES frequently contacting her about jobs. They did not seem to understand her rationale for giving up work. Eventually she did accept a Task Force Green placement doing clerical work for the police. This suited the needs of her children because of the hours and the attitudes of her employers.

That was day work, it was different because my children at that stage were actually at school. The three of them so that was great. ...When I was working for the community constables they were good. If I needed to go off early to pick the kids up from school they were great.

At the end of the placement, she was offered casual work with the police. As she was soon to have a baby she did not pursue this offer immediately. Given her previous experiences, she was loath to recreate the same situation and stresses, which she had only recently abandoned. Casual work did seem, however, to be a possible way to better balance various demands.

I'm not too keen on day care centres and I don't know of any family members that I'd really like to leave her with full-time but initially I'll just go back relieving to see how it goes with her.

At the time of interview she had yet to return to any work

Others also felt this way. We have read earlier of women who found that the pressures and effects of trying to manage work and childcare were often too much for both parents and children. In response to this, some people chose to work part-time or casually; others for periods and then have time at home; and some, as has been noted, simply decided not to work at all. Childcare, then, was a difficult issue to cope with for any single parent considering working or studying outside the home. It was an issue closely linked to the age of children, attitudes of parents (and others), and the availability of supports. Certainly, balancing the care of children with other responsibilities was an issue that markedly affected this group's transitions in the labour market. Though this particular discussion has focused on the experiences of single parents, it is an issue with implications for all parents and families and it is explored in this wider context in the section on unpaid work.

## *The Stigma of the DPB*

It is evident from much of the preceding discussion that people receiving the DPB faced many challenges. Those interviewed were often eager to work and be involved in their community, and they were all keen to have the best for their families. Despite these positive characteristics, a very real and strong stigma has become associated with the DPB. There were certainly some strong words spoken by those interviewed, about how they perceived and experienced this. As one woman put it, many of them didn't "ask" to go onto this benefit, but they are tarred with one brush that portrays all recipients of the DPB in a particularly negative light. This issue is perhaps most simply and poignantly dealt with using the words of the people involved. The selected quotes are representative of many others.

The remarks of this woman show that a commonly held view about people who receive the DPB is even shared by some of the other recipients. She does go on to point out that many find themselves on the DPB because of circumstances over which they had very little control, such as when she and her husband split up for a time.

I notice a lot of young girls today on the DPB and "ha, ha, I am getting 'x' amount of money out of the government" and they haven't earned or been out and worked to know what the workforce is like and to pay tax. They have gone and got themselves pregnant just to go on the DPB, and have a cushy life. They don't know what it is like to work hard for your money, or go without and have to stay at home because, like in my situation my husband being the main breadwinner and me quite happy to stay at home and raise the family, and then benefit time because my husband was the sole breadwinner ... and we didn't ask for it, I didn't ask to be on the DPB but it was a forced thing that had to happen.

She then talked about her experiences of being a beneficiary in general. Not only did she spend time receiving the DPB after she and her husband separated, but once they were back together, the family was then in receipt of a sickness benefit, as her husband had become very ill and could no longer work. She remained at home to care for him. Thus, she was well qualified to comment. She saw the main disadvantage of being on a benefit as lack of money. But there were other issues too.

You have also got the social stigma that you are nothing but a dole bludger. Being able to get a full-time job, you know with being on say the Sickness Benefit or on DPB you are always knocked back because you are a beneficiary. Not having respect from a lot of the general public, you are always looked down on. ...[You are a] dole bludger, you are nothing but a scum. I feel horrible because I didn't want to be on the benefit but we couldn't survive without one. ...It wasn't so much people saying these things face to face, it was the glares and the looks that one gets and they are the hardest to knock back and say – well look it is not my fault we are on a benefit.

Finally, she compared her experiences on the two benefits and was in no doubt which was viewed more negatively and who were treated poorly as a result.

Very much more stigma on the DPB than Sickness Benefit. With Sickness Benefit you can actually see that you are not a dole bludger, you are not another one of the *solo parents* stigma. Even somebody on an Invalids Benefit you can actually see why they are getting the benefit. I noticed that on the DPB it was "ha, you are nothing but another bloody solo mother, why aren't you in the workplace supporting your bloody kid?" I noticed

that with a lot of people, shop retailers in particular. I noticed that 'low class, DPB, solo mother' and that sort of situation and that got to me.

Another woman echoed these views.

They see you as just a bludger on society, especially if you are a single parent. They just think you are completely bludging and that you are lazy and that, honestly they have no idea how hard it is.

As was acknowledged earlier, one woman found the stigma associated with the DPB so great that she made huge efforts and sacrifices to get off it. She spoke, like one other woman, of being under constant surveillance and feeling like a criminal.

There seems to be so many restrictions on what you do, and you have so many people watching you all the time. When I was on the DPB I had my brother staying with me for a while and the next thing I know I've got social welfare at me saying you have a male living at your house. You are living with a male. They never bothered to find out that it was my brother staying with me. He was staying with me for 6 weeks while he waited for a house. Fine, but no – social welfare come round 'you're living with a male'. But never mind I turned around and said he's my brother and he's living in that room and my son's living in that room ... I wouldn't go near a supermarket, I wouldn't go near a dairy or nothing, on a DPB day. I just didn't like it.

The impacts were deep and lasting and eventually contributed to her decision to struggle with paid work and caring for her son independently of the DPB. While it is to be admired that she worked hard to support herself and her child, her pride in no longer being associated with this benefit reveals a great deal about just how negatively it is viewed.

You know, people say to me ... separated. And I can see it going through their mind. You know, DPB, and I think, no, I'm working. I feel quite proud of the fact that I did come off the benefit. I'm getting ahead slowly.

As well, the hardships and demands that this choice created should not be underestimated.

### ***Summary - DPB***

The preceding discussion has incorporated the very different experiences of a number of people who were receiving the DPB. Not unexpectedly, ninety percent of these were women. Just over half received this benefit following a marriage break-up, almost a third because they had a child whilst single, and the remainder in a mix of circumstances. People remained on this benefit for various lengths of times. Most expressed a strong desire to engage in paid work at some future point. Aside from the pressures they often felt in this regard, these feelings appeared to be largely prompted by financial considerations and personal motivations. Many were active in making preparations for this. These preparations ranged from considering their options, doing study or training, being involved in voluntary activities, or taking on some part-time or casual employment. The positive benefits that being on the DPB offered in terms of study or training were clearly recognised. Of course, any preparations and eventual engagement with study or work for those receiving the DPB were contingent on a key

factor – their children. The preparations for any such transition required that careful consideration be given to how childcare would be provided and by whom. For those who engaged in work or study, balancing their various responsibilities proved extremely demanding. The stigma associated with being on this particular benefit, even when compared to that associated with other beneficiaries, was another substantial issue for people receiving the DPB.

## Unemployment Benefit

The unemployment benefit (UEB) was received by thirty-nine people (60% of the welfare group and 21.3% of all those profiled) during the study period. They came from 35 households.<sup>6</sup> It again needs to be pointed out that although this group are a highly visible proportion of all those who are unemployed, they are not the only people who are out of, but seeking, paid work.<sup>7</sup> Table 7 provides a breakdown of the gender and ethnicity of those who received the UEB. In addition, it compares these distributions with those of the study as a whole. The distribution of a “sub-group”, made up of those people with the longest or more frequent exposure to unemployment, is also provided for comparison; these cases are discussed in more detail later. The distributions by gender and ethnicity show marked differences between the study proportions and those receiving the UEB. Maori are dramatically over-represented and this becomes even more pronounced in the “sub-group” category. The gender balance is more than reversed. This is possibly because of the eligibility criteria that sees only one partner in a marriage or like-relationship receive the UEB, and this is most often the male.

**Table 8: Comparison of Sample, UEB & Sub-Group by Gender & Ethnicity (%)**

|                  | UEB   | Study | Sub-group |
|------------------|-------|-------|-----------|
| <i>Gender</i>    |       |       |           |
| Male             | 60.6  | 43.0  | 66.0      |
| Female           | 39.4  | 57.0  | 34.0      |
|                  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0     |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> |       |       |           |
| Non-Maori        | 54.5  | 75.6  | 36.0      |
| Maori            | 45.4  | 24.4  | 64.0      |
|                  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0     |

Episodes of unemployment are also worth examining. For our purposes, an episode is considered to be a period where a person is in continuous receipt of the UEB. It might feature times of casual, seasonal or part-time paid employment, or some training. Depending on the income generated and the person’s circumstances, sometimes paid work of this nature was sufficient to make the person ineligible for the UEB for a time. In other instances, it was not sufficient. An episode remains continuous even if a person is employed but the income does not reach this ineligibility threshold. The 39 recipients of the UEB experienced some 78 episodes between them. Although this obviously gives a mean of two episodes for each person, almost half experienced only one episode of being on the UEB. Twenty people had more than one episode. Of this group, fourteen had two episodes (nine were women) while one person was represented in each of the categories of three, four, five, and seven episodes; two people had six episodes. Those with several episodes were most often people who worked seasonally and earned enough to no longer qualify for the UEB. If, at the end

<sup>6</sup> The explanations for having more people than households were explored in the introductory part of this discussion on welfare.

<sup>7</sup> That said, in this section the term unemployed is used to refer to those people who are out of but looking for paid work AND receiving the UEB.

of the season, they could find no other work, they returned to receiving the UEB.<sup>8</sup> Apart from a woman with five episodes the rest of the people in the categories of more than two episodes were men.

A variety of reasons were given for going onto the unemployment benefit. Since some people received the UEB on more than one occasion, the reasons for this may be different each time. Thus, we are looking at what precipitated a person becoming unemployed and qualifying them to receive the UEB. The transition from paid work to unemployment was made predominantly in circumstances that were out of the individual's control. In a very small number of instances, an individual was forced onto the UEB when they were dismissed, their short-term contract ended or their own business collapsed. However, by far the most common circumstance that lead to enforced unemployment was redundancy. Sixteen people (41% of those who received the UEB) – eleven of whom were men – had been laid off or made redundant from their job prior to receiving the UEB. For five people – all but one being male – this traumatic event happened twice during the ten-year period. Of the group who received the UEB as the result of being made redundant, six people had been involved in the closure of two meatworks<sup>9</sup> in the district. The outcomes of such events were various, illustrating the different experiences that people can have of the same event. Apart from those who went onto the UEB, others similarly affected went on to get full-time, casual or seasonal work immediately. Some were not entitled to the UEB (people whose partners were in paid employment for example), and in one case, the man took over caring for the family while his wife went into full-time paid work.

A range of circumstances accounted for why others received the UEB. There were the dozen people whose first – and often only – experience of unemployment came after leaving school or completing some form of education or training that they undertook directly from school. Their collective experiences are considered in more depth shortly and the group of school leavers as a whole is dealt with in more detail in the section on Education and Training. There were other cases where people could not get work upon their return to New Zealand from overseas travel (including those who returned from a period of relocation overseas). A group of five people were able to receive the UEB despite voluntarily resigning from their jobs. Although this would seem unlikely in the current climate, from what was reported in the interviews, this appeared to be allowed by the regulations at the time.

Only four people (three of whom were women) entered the study period already receiving the UEB. It is unclear what precipitated their movement onto this benefit or precisely how long they had been on it at the start of the study. Three of these people stopped receiving the benefit after about 18 months and the fourth within three and a half years. Two of the three females went onto the DPB and another found full-time employment, as did the only male. At the other end of the ten-year period, five people were still receiving the UEB at the time of interview. Each of these cases represents people who had lengthy or frequent experiences of unemployment. Four of them are canvassed in some detail shortly.

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<sup>8</sup> For a small group of people this pattern of receiving the UEB with periods of seasonal employment either replacing or supplementing this benefit was to emerge as a notable feature. Some people maintained this cyclical pattern for many years. It is discussed in greater detail in the Seasonal Work section of the report on Unpaid Work and Paid Work (Shirley et al, 2000b)

<sup>9</sup> Whakatu closed early in the study period; Tomoana closed later.

Analysis based on the frequency and length of any periods receiving the UEB revealed some interesting sets of experiences. Whilst the majority of people had one or two episodes, or spent less than the three year average on this benefit,<sup>10</sup> some people did have prolonged or more frequent experiences. A group of twelve people (30.7% of those receiving the UEB) had more than two episodes of unemployment (regardless of the total duration) and/or they were unemployed, in total, for longer than three years (regardless of the number of episodes). Table 7 shows the make up of this group by ethnicity and gender. From this figure, it can be seen that whilst the proportions of men and women receiving the UEB are a reversal of the sample distribution, the ratio of men to women in this sub-group is even further distorted. It is also apparent that the over-representation of Maori in this sub-group is even greater than was the case when considering those receiving UEB as a whole. The majority of these cases are worth exploring in some detail to uncover not only these people's experiences of living with unemployment, but also their work histories and the transitions that occurred during this time.

Many of the people in this sub-group had experienced redundancy. Two men were made redundant in 1985 with the closure of one of the meat works. In the first case, the man was not in paid work until mid-way through 1994 when he did six months work on a Task Force Green (TFG) project. He remained unemployed for a further ten months before getting a full-time position at the beginning of 1996. However, like most of those who were unemployed, he did not remain idle during his time out of the paid workforce. He elected to take on more responsibilities caring for the home and family. Although his wife did not get full-time work, she was free to take on seasonal work each year. Together the couple also committed themselves to community work with the local children and the man was heavily involved in other voluntary activities. Some of these eventually lead to his employment on the TFG project.

At the time we were in an area of what they call low socio-economic area, mainly just to give the [local] kids something positive to do. ...I suppose to me it was important, but unpaid important. ...I was still keeping myself occupied but on a voluntary basis. ...During my time off I was sending time with the schools, with the sports teams, with the Maori culture groups and the principals were impressed, I suppose, with my skills. This principal at this particular school had heard from another principal that I was working with over here. They had a boy who needed one-on-one attention and so I was referred to that job from principal to principal and that is how I ended up with that job.

In addition, he learnt Te Reo, though more for personal than employment reasons.

I went to polytech to learn the Maori language. I didn't basically learn it to get a job, I learned it because it was another skill I could add to myself.

Although he had productively filled his time out of paid work, this TFG placement seems to have marked a change in his attitude and endeavours. Following this, he decided to more actively seek out paid work. In part, his children were also behind this.

To be honest, a lot of nagging from the kids – why haven't you got a job dad, why haven't you got a job. ... They see their father as a, not so much a no-hoper, but one who can do something but is not doing anything.

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<sup>10</sup> This figure is an average of the total time people spent on the UEB, across all episodes.

It was also the result of personal reflection, a recognition of the material loss than prolonged unemployment had contributed to, and the cumulative experiences of being unemployed for so long.

I have seen a lot of my friends who have been working since they left school and materially are doing very well for themselves, they have got their own houses their own vehicles. I'm 35 years old now and I am still renting a house ... to that extent I suppose I am missing out on a lot of material things by being long term unemployed.

After a further few months of unemployment, he managed to get a full-time voluntary position at a local Kohanga Reo. This soon turned into full-time paid employment for he and his wife. Getting this position seemed, in part, to be the outcome of much that had occurred in the preceding ten years: learning Te Reo, his heavy involvement in community and voluntary work across a range of areas, the TFG experience, and his connections with the local Kohanga Reo.

My son attended kohanga ... and the original Kiako and her husband were due to leave town and they needed a replacement at short notice and they knew that I knew a bit of the Reo, the language, and I was able to help.

The second man made redundant in 1985 remained out of work until late 1990, something he blamed on his lack of education. From 1990, he began a cycle of seasonal work. Although not enamoured of the prospect of spending the rest of his working life doing this, he did feel that there would be plenty of this type of work for him in the coming years.

There is heaps of jobs, but it depends on what class of jobs there are. There is heaps of jobs in the fields, that is basically what I am going to be doing for the next twenty years because I have not furthered my education.

However, he recognised that technology was having a significant impact on the manual work he did.

Sometimes I would go out and pick tomatoes ... now they have machines doing all these jobs... You don't see people tomato picking now, you see these big harvesting machines. ...It is nice to have machines, lovely, but who is going to be working?

This issue is canvassed in more depth elsewhere in this report.

In some years, this man managed up to seven months continuous work; other years, it was as little as three months. The longer periods were related to work in the packaging industry. He became well known and respected in this area and would have been the next to get a permanent position if he had not spent a short time in prison. After this, he was once more only able to get seasonal work. The pay rates were such that, even though he was married and had three children, he earned sufficient to be able to come off the benefit during some of these periods. He continued receiving the UEB at other times and saw this as a pattern for the foreseeable future. At the time of interview, he was not involved in seasonal work and so was one of the five people on the UEB at the end of the study period. His wife remained principally responsible for the care of their children and she did not engage in paid work until the last few years of the study period. Her husband seemed to gradually become more involved in sharing the care of the children, particularly when she started working seasonally. Indeed, they tried to

'co-ordinate' their seasonal work so that one of them was able to look after the children whilst the other worked. However, he resented when it was 'all' left to him. His wife's involvement in seasonal fruit work also helped lift their income so they could spend time off the UEB. However, they were careful as a couple to watch their earnings so as not to jeopardise any supplementary assistance or to cause tax problems such as they had experienced at one point.

Whilst not associated with the closure of meatworks, other people experienced unemployment as a result of redundancy, often more than once. Another man – married with two children – had been made redundant twice. He was a builder and, judging by various people's experiences, workers in the construction sector appeared quite vulnerable to layoffs (especially during this turbulent timeframe). It took him a year to find a job after the first episode – in a related area – but he managed only twelve months of paid work before it happened again. After about a year on the UEB this second time, he did a three-month TFG placement. This was made more or less compulsory by NZES, but it was something that he and his wife felt comfortable with. It was to also pay dividends, albeit slowly, in opening up work opportunities. After a further nine months, two part-time positions were offered to him.

Being a builder he went out to a private school where he was on maintenance, and then through [that] school he got his feelers out and [another] school got to hear that he was [there] and [yet another school] got to hear that he was [there], because being schools everyone gets to talk among themselves. ...The principals going out to schools could see the difference in what [he] had done.

These two jobs finally lead to full-time work, but this took a further four years to eventuate. During this time, his UEB was abated. In total he had spent over six years on the UEB. As they had two children and because of a long-standing medical condition, his wife did not work during this time.

Also made redundant twice was one of the single women. She was laid off on both occasions from the clothing industry. However, she did not qualify for the UEB the first time, as she was required to stand down for a period because of redundancy payments and found work before this ended. On the second occasion, she was unemployed for over four years. Given her experiences in this particular industry, she wanted to retrain. During the early stages of her unemployment, she did some skills training courses and had some casual and part-time work that, on occasions, reduced but did not stop her UEB. The courses did not lead on to work, but one opened up an area of interest. Although she remained unemployed at the time of interview she was studying for a childcare qualification despite the reluctance of the NZES.

Another single woman was unemployed three of the five years between the beginning of 1986 and the end of 1990. This was spread over five episodes. Like some of the men she too was made redundant twice. Also, like others, she took on periodic seasonal work some years which got her off the UEB for a few months. This was her own choice and reflected her willing attitude towards work.

There is always jobs around. Just three or four months during the winter is the hard part ... there's always something to earn a bit of money ...Some people are a bit too lazy to get out and do seasonal work ... because you have to work for your money, you can't have a holiday out there ... I know quite a few people that would rather just sit on the dole and be happy.

She eventually got part-time work that lead onto a full-time position.

One of the members of this sub-group began the first year of the study period employed as a lifeguard at the local pool over summer. Though he was unable to get other work when this ended, he was re-employed the next season. After this, he managed to get another seasonal position until early 1987 when he was again unemployed and remained so for the balance of the ten years. Initially he did a training course but, unable to find any other continuous work, he did a period of seasonal fruit picking each year. This did not amount to sufficient to see him off the UEB altogether; rather it was abated. While many people voluntarily sought out seasonal work, an element of compulsion often lay behind the participation of some. As he put it, the attitude of the employment service and changing employment patterns left him little alternative.

Prior to '85 we'd been out picking and here in Hawkes Bay its the only thing you can do. Nothing else. You have to take what's there. Regardless whether you like it or not if they say you've got to go and pick fruit, you got to go and pick fruit.

He also assumed more shared responsibilities with his wife in caring for the home and their six children. She did seasonal work as well but when they were both working, like other couples in similar circumstances, they faced problems with childcare. They used all sorts of coping strategies – friends, family, adjusting work hours. The wife even paid for an outside sitter but had to stop this because of expense. Often they were forced to work *and* care for the younger children,

And so [my husband] took them out to the orchard with him.

It seems that they were fortunate in this regard as seasonal employers had different attitudes to this practice – in this case it was accepted, but others discouraged it.

Though the reasons for some people's unemployment were more unusual, the long-term implications were no less significant. One man gave up his full-time job at the beginning of 1988 to respond to whanau commitments in another district.

I didn't make the decision, my family made the decision ... they had problems up there so I had to go back. I was the only one that could go back home. ...It seemed more appropriate for me to go back because my brother being married, the one down South Island and another one in Australia, married and with family. It seemed more appropriate for me seeing as how I am single and easier for me to move.

This transition marked a significant change in his work profile for the ensuing years. He was away and unemployed for about four years. During this time and the subsequent years, he became heavily involved in voluntary work with Maori Wardens. Once his obligations were completed, he returned to the Hawkes Bay district but could only secure periodic seasonal work. However, by combining a range of activities he managed around eight months work a year. He also earned enough during these times to no longer be eligible for the UEB. Despite his preference to be employed full-time, he saw little chance of this pattern changing.

I would prefer [full-time work] yes, in the orchard it is pretty hard to get full-time right through. I was lucky back in the early 80s'... we were putting in new orchards and planting trees. There is plenty of work out there with the experience I have got, seasonal work. ...I would do other

kind of work but being in the Bay here, well orchard work is the number one job around.

At the time of interview he was currently employed this way.

Whilst the preceding cases illustrate the experiences of a number of the twelve people with lengthy and/or frequent periods receiving the UEB, other people had shorter and/or fewer periods. Seventeen people had single or cumulative periods of unemployment of between one and three years, with only seven of these exceeding eighteen months. The remaining ten people were unemployed for single or cumulative periods of between four and nine months. Even though these are shorter than others experienced, their interviews clearly indicated that they were still difficult and often traumatic times. Certainly, remarks that indicated people somehow enjoyed or simply accepted being unemployed were extremely rare.

Instead, what was readily apparent from the interviews of people receiving the UEB was their desire to be employed and their efforts to find full-time work. Indeed, many of those interviewed who were unemployed made the transition from unemployment to paid work. Twenty-seven of the 39 people (69.2%) who received the UEB during the decade under study had managed, at the time of interview, to get settled and long-term work. That is, they were employed full-time, self-employed, or working as many hours as they wanted part-time. Some people had managed this after more than one episode of unemployment. This seems to indicate that whilst the transition from unemployment to paid work is contingent upon many factors, people are generally keen and frequently successful in making it. Of the remaining twelve, one was the woman who was studying and six went onto other benefits, mainly the DPB, although one woman was forced onto the invalids' benefit after a serious illness. Only one of the others who were still unemployed at the time of interview was not one of the longer term or more frequently unemployed people (whose cases were focused on earlier). This man had managed to find work when he was unemployed previously; on this occasion, he had been out of work for just over a year.

### *School Leavers and Unemployment*

Before leaving this area of welfare, the experiences of school leavers are worth highlighting. When assembled from the perspective of unemployment these are fairly startling. Although spoken about in terms of unemployment, most of these people also received the UEB during these episodes. Excluding the two<sup>11</sup> people who were still doing their courses at the time of interview, this left 19 people to consider. Of these, only two had spent no time unemployed. Both were women who had gone directly from school into full-time jobs. For the others, these episodes varied in duration and frequency. They were often interspersed with some paid work – seasonal and casual, for example – but not as much as the person was looking for. People often did skills training programmes or work placements/experience as well. Despite these difficult beginnings, only two of those who wanted or were available for full-time employment did not manage to get such work. There were variations, however, in the number, length and make-up of the periods of paid employment and the level of security these

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<sup>11</sup> The third person still at polytech had first done a course through the NZES and had registered as unemployed.

people experienced in their patterns of work. Surprisingly, those who had completed some form of tertiary training were often unable to get jobs and spent some time unemployed. Work placements proved very useful for them and this initial phase of unemployment was generally their only episode. The most vulnerable group were those who experienced unemployment immediately after leaving school. They struggled to get settled work despite frequent exposure to training courses and placement programmes. The work histories of all the school leavers can be tracked in some detail in the section that explores their experiences in the separate report on *Education and Training*.

### ***Summary – UEB***

Those on the UEB were the largest category of people receiving welfare, making up well over half of this group. They were also a fifth of all those profiled. It must be remembered that many others were unemployed and not receiving or entitled to this benefit. The reasons for unemployment have been shown to predominantly lie outside the individual's control with the most likely cause being redundancy. School leavers also appeared a vulnerable group. Of those unemployed and receiving welfare, there was an over-representation of men – though an explanation for this in terms of benefit structure/regulation has been suggested – and Maori. Just over two-thirds of people had one or two periods of unemployment and their total time out of work was under the average of three years. The remainder had longer and/or more frequent unemployment periods and here the over-representations just noted were even more skewed. The examination of a number of cases from this latter group demonstrated the complexities of this issue and of some people's experiences. Training, work placements and temporary work – such as seasonal employment – were often employed as ways of bridging unemployment and more settled work. For a few, seasonal work became their only longer-term option. The discussion and quotes in the next section are intended to show the value that people placed on work, and the motives for and benefits of engaging in paid work. What they also show is that being unemployed consequently robbed people of these benefits and had other negative impacts. This has been implicit in the experiences of people outlined in the preceding discussion. The strongest theme to emerge from this discussion was the desire of these people to work. They seemed remarkably successful at this despite a difficult labour market and a period of substantial change. This seems in stark contrast to how the unemployed are often negatively portrayed.

## Work and Unemployment – Experiences and Attitudes

This part of the discussion considers a number of inter-related issues – people’s motivations for engaging in paid work, the effects of unemployment, and the attitudes and actions of the unemployed toward getting paid work. Whereas the last section dealt with people who were receiving the UEB, this section looks at the unemployed more generally, thereby allowing a broader range of experiences and views to be drawn on. Where appropriate, this also includes those of people in paid work.

In general, whether they had received welfare at any time or not, most people shared similar motivations for working. Whilst each individual’s motives were a mix of various factors, some common themes were discernible. People reported working for the financial benefits, the lifestyle and security it offered. As well, they valued the personal satisfaction and esteem they derived from their work, and the social contacts it provided. Many people also alluded to the value of work in usefully and purposefully occupying their time. These remarks illustrate many of these motives.

[I work for] the money. Personal gain, personal satisfaction. This particular job that is very much. They have got a good super scheme, I am very happy with the salary. They have transport to and from work, a lot of training provided. It is quite satisfying. ... There is a little bit of history. I have had over 100 jobs since I left school.

For me it wouldn’t feel right if I didn’t work. I have never been out of work in my life, never been unemployed. ... To pay the mortgage. I think one of the biggest reasons is that I enjoy doing it, I love doing what I am doing in the particular area I am in so that never crosses my mind, not to want to do it. That is the thing that motivates me is that I want to do it.

That is why I work, for a better lifestyle really. We have got a scholarship fund going for both the children. If I didn’t work we wouldn’t be able to afford the lifestyle we have got now.

The last woman also added that other, more personal motivations could be involved in working. Aspects of this were raised in the discussion of people receiving the DPB.

I don’t think I could ever be home with children, I don’t think I could stand it. I am not the housewife type.

Such intrinsic drives were also evident in the remarks of the next woman. Her comments show as well that sometimes one factor outweighed others as her decision, to write professionally, showed.

It is just something I wanted to do. I like writing because of the way it makes me feel ... How do you say if you are ... a writer or anything like that it is just that it feels great to do it. ... One thing that has always annoyed me being a writer is that you can work long hours at times and still not be paid very much for it. Obviously if I wanted to make more money I wouldn’t have stayed writing, I could have got a full-time job somewhere and ended up with more money. I guess it is the satisfaction of it. You are really influencing people.

In addition, this woman’s case demonstrated that whilst money may be a major factor, it was not always the only or central drive. Further evidence of such a claim is

provided by a man who accepted lower pay in order to be in a workplace with people he felt comfortable with and where he had some prestige, built on his experience.

I went to [a company] and they says – OK come back you have got a job. But I saw a rich man bought the company and there had been a big change, new systems running, so then you go and look elsewhere. ...When I came [here] it was much easier, see some old fellows there, a sixty year old still boning. So I said OK ... it was a bit less money but it was better ... they put me in boning straight away. [At the other] I have to be a labourer.

He added that work meant being independent, a view reiterated by this next person as well.

We don't want to rely on anyone else, even the government to pay us the money from the dole. I don't like that idea. ...Our family has always made a go of whatever kind of job, ...When we get the opportunity we take it.

If you don't work then we are really reliant on other people for what you don't have. By working at least you give yourself a bit of freedom and you have your choice on what you do and what you can spend it on. ...I think if you are not working you don't have that choice.

Tied in with these very positive motivations and rewards, is the very high value our society places on engaging in paid work. Thus, people who are unemployed, especially if they have been out of work for a lengthy period, are felt by many to hold a poor view of work and to not be motivated to get employment. This man experienced such reactions.

I have found as far as people discriminating is that if you don't work because if you don't do something people think you are hopeless and they really put you down and you feel really hopeless and stupid. If I am not doing something, if I just stayed at home and did nothing when [my daughter] went to school, I would feel like I wasn't contributing to society in any way.

On the other side of the ledger, it is not unreasonable to assume that, given the benefits of and the value placed on paid work, being unemployed must have a range of detrimental effects on the well being of people and their families. The following remarks address these issues from the perspective of those who were unemployed. They provide some evidence of the detrimental effects which in turn motivated people to continue the search for work. The nature of these remarks tend to dispute the negative perceptions of the unemployed.

[Unemployment] would have had a bit of effect on our family and I would be sitting at home wondering when I was getting a job. Getting bored and agitated, I'd go out and come back. Just drive myself up the wall really, with boredom, it wasn't good. ... I don't like being on a benefit.

[He] finds it very hard to motivate himself because he has been made redundant so many times and I find myself yelling and screaming at everyone, but that is because people that have been made redundant eventually lose all motivation.

When I am working everything seems to be a lot better that when I am just sitting around at home on the unemployment benefit, for myself and for the house that I rent. There is a lot of better things around me when I am

working... Not just the fact that we are getting paid for it and the money is there, it is good to pay the bills but I feel a lot better in myself when I am working. ...When I came home I know I have done a days work. It gave me more of an urge to do more around the house, I think I do more around the house when I am working than when I am just sitting around and not working. I know during that break when I haven't got any work the shed seems to be in a mess, the lawns need mowing and the garden is full of weeds. But when I am working I go to work and come home and get into jobs, so everything seems to be in place.

[Being unemployed again was] really hard. ...Having no money and... because you were used to having your week full and suddenly there is nothing. ...I think if you are sitting around doing nothing, if you are unemployed it is like you are wasting your life. ... [Work] is the only way to survive really. ...and also sitting around doing nothing all day would be, it is a monetary thing as well as being occupied and keeping my mind going all the time.

Overall, the comments thus far clearly show that not only were unemployed people still keen to get work, but also that they recognised the value and importance of employment and, in range of ways, felt its loss very acutely. Consequently, being unemployed did not mean sitting back and waiting for work. Rather, people were generally very active in the search for jobs despite the difficulties and setbacks.

He was looking for work all the time, he wouldn't sit back and wait for them to come to him. He used to walk down to New Zealand Employment every day.

I find it hard having to be at home and I am always looking for a job and I don't like just sitting.

I looked up the paper every night for something different, something that was involved in farming that I could do.

I'm always watching the paper and I'm registered at the thing. ...I can go and look at the board... You go in there and look at the board and when you ring up nine times out of ten they are already gone.

[Fruit picking] was better than sitting at home doing nothing. You had to get out and mix with other people. ...I just took on anything that went.

I think the worst thing was that people always asked me had I found a job yet. ...No I haven't and I've applied for jobs and haven't.

He is not a person that likes to sit around...He was forever looking in the paper but basically [found] nothing. Nothing in the sense that would actually pay well to survive. ...[He] was trying for that six months and there was just nothing there ... he had to go and report ... he would go in and still nothing.

While they would have preferred permanent jobs or longer hours, some people were willing to take on seasonal, part-time, casual or temporary employment as an interim measure. A couple of people even began building up their own business whilst

unemployed. As has been evident and will be discussed further, in addition to job hunting unemployed people often undertook study or training, and completed skills programmes or work placements. Those who were not successful at getting work sometimes chose to keep themselves occupied in different but equally meaningful ways and combined other activities with the search for work. For some of the men, the increases in free time meant taking on more of the domestic or child care responsibilities. One couple actually swapped roles (she went to work full-time, he cared for the family) though most changes were not this dramatic. Others chose to take on voluntary work. In capturing an array of experiences of being unemployed – often using the words of people themselves – two key ideas emerged. Firstly, the detrimental impacts of unemployment are very real but people worked hard at overcoming them. Secondly, the negative perceptions of the unemployed that many people hold, seem highly questionable for those interviewed.

### ***Summary – Welfare and Unemployment: Attitudes and Experiences***

The experiences recorded in this section highlight the variety of motives that people who were interviewed had for working. Obviously financial drives were important but they were not always central. Lifestyle, social and more personal motives were also described. That said, the reverse is that unemployment can be a very negative and detrimental experience and this too was born out in people's comments. Unlike some negative stereotypes that are often associated with those who are out of work, most people who were interviewed displayed a strong desire to work and were active in seeking out jobs. They were often willing to do fill-in work of a casual, temporary seasonal or part-time nature. Even if they could not get any type of paid work, many people appeared to productively occupy their time in a variety of ways.

## **The Job Market and Local Economy**

One factor that can influence people's ability to transition from unemployment to paid work is the job market. The job or labour market is often considered in terms of official statistics. On another level, individuals create their own picture of the job market. This perspective is closely tied to, and influenced by, people's various perceptions and experiences. For example, the chances a person feels they have of getting a job may be based on what they perceive to be the availability of jobs that match their experience and qualifications. This, in turn, may influence how active or aggressive they are in seeking work. Alternatively, the success or failure of people in getting work can affect how they perceive the current state of the labour market. Such perceptions may be the result of personal experiences, the views and experiences of others – including those conveyed by the media – and official statistics. Though accurate to varying degrees, these perceptions can still be very influential.

A selection of comments is presented to illustrate the range of people's perceptions during the study period. Some effort is also made to demonstrate the impact of these on people's attitudes and actions. The local economy is often one barometer used by people to evaluate the job market and comments relating to this that have a bearing on this discussion are also included. While people were asked at one particular point about how they viewed the labour market or economy, they often reflected on their experiences and perceptions across the ten-year timeframe. This gives some comparative descriptions across time and allows us to appreciate the changes that people saw. A future perspective is sometimes offered as well. The comments in this section reflect the views of people in a range of circumstances: those in work; those out of work but actively seeking employment; and those not looking for work.

A majority of people tended to view the job market in negative terms, though the strength of this position varied. A small group was ambivalent, unsure of the real situation. This might be because of mixed messages – numerous job advertisements versus stories of people having problems getting work. Alternatively, it may have been the result of them considering the situation more critically – for example, though there may have been lots of seasonal work, what did this mean for people's sense of security long term. Others were positive in their outlook, though only about a third of those who expressed an opinion held a favourable disposition. Having been a recipient of welfare, unemployed or, conversely, in continuous steady employment did not seem to alter this balance. Whilst a person's employment history might not have been the single determining factor in predicting people's views, their experiences and those of others they knew (family, friends etc) certainly appeared influential.

As these comments from those people who viewed the labour market in negative terms illustrate, they saw a range of problems. The closures of major employers like the freezing works were seen as critical.

As far as our kids are concerned I don't think there are going to be more jobs available for them. Just in Hawkes Bay alone we have had two freezing works close down, so if that is an indication of things to come, no there is not going to be more jobs. ...I still think there isn't enough jobs out there. It was the same ten years ago even with the freezing works closing down.

Well the changes are that the jobs are not there. Like when I was out panelbeating you could go from one job to another. ...You can't do that sort of thing these days.

There is not a lot of job prospects around really ... [orchard work is] hard work and ... what they want to pay them is ridiculous.

There is not much job opportunity really. They say there is plenty of work out there but nobody advertises, it is usually by word of mouth. ...I don't think there is the work like there used to be.

I think that, definitely, unemployment is higher. Jobs are much more short term and a lot of the big employers have disappeared. Places like the freezing works and even places like the Council have changed the way they operate.

I think a lot more kids are probably staying at school now. It's a fact that more kids are staying at school in that seventeen/eighteen year age bracket. Because there's no employment out there for them. ...There's not just the employment around that there used to be and when the freezing works actually closed down, you know that had a huge impact.

Although they, too, had negative views of the job market, another group of people qualified their perceptions in terms of some critical issues. As their comments show, education and training, as well as experience, were increasingly important.

The availability of jobs is basically education, you need education to get yourself a proper job. ...there is bound to be heaps of jobs for people who do have qualifications for those big jobs.

[Jobs] would be harder now I reckon because people are asking for experience and not just the labour part of it. They want experienced people. ...either that or be in the know, that somebody knows what you can do. ... Impress yourself on people. You sell yourself. ... You have to go in there and say look I'm your man. I can do this, I can do that. That's not a problem.

I think it is a pretty weak environment as far as [jobs] goes. They are looking for more skill. Even labour workers, people just on the labour force, unskilled, they are finding it very hard.

When I came down here first time in the Bay 1980, I was only here for two days and I had a full-time job. I had no experience at the time. It is not the same now. I told the manager I had no experience and he spent the time teaching me the thinning side of orchard work. Now if anyone comes down this way for an interview to get orchard work, 99 out of 100 they won't get it. That is what has changed, experience counts more now.

You see lots of jobs advertised in the paper but they're for, you know you've got to have quite high qualifications.

The spread of technology was also recognised as influential in relation to the availability of jobs.

Computer machining and all that. Taking over peoples' jobs ...when I was working at the (meat) works when I got here to NZ they were using manpower, muscle and all that, pull out the skin and all that boning out the things and today it is all done by machinery. ... Today, well you can see many young people grown up now, they go to university and learn but when they put that into action they can't do it because when they come the machinery will do the job. So all that skill and all that knowledge will not be any use any more.

The impacts such negative views of the job market can have on people's actions are often implicit in the comments reproduced here. They are easily seen in the following comments. Even those in work are affected.

[Now] you have to stay at that job even if you hate the b.. thing, you have got no choice.

Of course, those out of work and looking are especially vulnerable.

If you have been on unemployment and you get another full-time job you think twice about skipping that job and trying to get something else.

[He] finds it very hard to motivate himself because he has been made redundant so many times and I find myself yelling and screaming at everyone.

The interviewee with the longest episode of unemployment – around nine years – put it plainly.

Basically it was the lack of jobs that suited me.

This, he said, was a major factor in him remaining unemployed for so long. Through not finding and consequently coming to believe that there weren't any suitable jobs for him, he gradually became discouraged and stopped looking.

As noted earlier, people often had an ambivalent or uncertain position. This ambivalence reflected, in part, the complexity of the labour market. Although this woman saw a weaker job market, she qualified her remarks with the observation that, equally, more was available to help the unemployed find jobs than ever before.

[T]here is more unemployment now than I was aware of 10 years ago. ...There seems to be more opportunities for people now. Unless I'm just more aware of them. ...Training courses and things that have been put into perspective for unemployed people. Like I didn't really [think] there were as many opportunities for an unemployed person as what there is today.

Another woman tried to explain the mismatch between knowing people who couldn't get work and seeing lots of jobs advertised.

You certainly hear about people having problems getting a job and I know several fine young people who have a lot of problem getting a job. I don't know why. ...There is always jobs around. Just three or four months during the winter is the hard part ...[Otherwise] there's always something to earn a bit of money ...Some people are a bit too lazy to get out and do seasonal work ... because you have to work for your money, you can't have a holiday out there ... I know quite a few people that would rather just sit on the dole and be happy.

Other contradictions within the labour market were also noted.

It seems that jobs are getting fewer, but at the same time there are still jobs around. I've seen two major freezing works in this area close down and yet 80% of them still move on to find secure permanent jobs.

The practical impact of such contradictions can be seen in this next comment. Though this man had the sense that the job market was improving, it was not affecting his particular circumstances.

I know things are definitely picking up, there are more jobs in the paper, but I don't see anything for me personally.

Others were clearly more positive in their evaluations. In recognising that plenty of work was available, many did concede that the type of jobs and rates of pay might not be ideal. Interestingly, some, but definitely not all, of the people who had experienced unemployment held these views.<sup>12</sup> The following quotes capture the general sentiments widely held by this group.

There are jobs out there, but people are too lazy and too fussy. I know friends who have been laid off and walked into jobs right away. They are not ideal jobs, not what they want, but it is a job at the moment and you can stay there until you get what you want. People are too fussy that is the problem and the other people don't want to work. ... There is jobs out there, if people want to go and work, it's out there. ... You only have to go out and look at the orchards they are screaming out for pickers, yet people still say that there is no work out there. It is just that they don't want to go and do that, because they know that it is a hard job ... and the wages are not necessarily great. If the wages were a hell of a lot better you would get people out there because of it.

There are still opportunities. Working in factories like Growers and Watties, farm jobs, there are always farming jobs, they are looking for shepherds and things like that. ...I think there will still be a fair few jobs out there, there are a lot of vacancies that are not being filled even in the flush of the season.

Some, who were more cautiously optimistic, tied any improvements to the state of the local economy and the health of the primary producers

If the primary producers don't do well the country doesn't do well. I think as far as that goes we should help the primary producers.

As the economy picks up the work will pick up. We have some of the farm stuff to pick up and as the payments even out. We are hooked up into the rural economy and once that picks up and farmers are buying cars and spending money. The place will pick up once the rural economy is sorted out.

Industries are becoming a bit more diversified in the Hawkes Bay – the grapes which are expanding, sheep and beef probably come back a bit, but

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<sup>12</sup> As a means of confirming this, in previous quotes that looked at the attitudes and actions of unemployed people to getting paid work, we saw that some people were quite happy to engage in seasonal, casual or temporary work regardless of the pay.

forestry has extended itself and deer farming and some of these other ones creeping up, ostriches even.

I think [the job situation] has a lot to do with the money situation ...With a bit more money a lot of places can employ more people. I think [the job situation] has improved a bit, there seems to be more jobs coming up.

Hastings [was] affected a lot more by unemployment due to the collapse of the meatworks, but however there are good signs on the horizon.

Well I see it being pretty good with Watties just having bought Tomoana and think that can only be good and I hope things will move along.

Whilst this last set of opinions do take a wider perspective, it seems that many in this optimistic group often simply viewed the availability of any work, regardless of pay and conditions, as a positive thing. Consequently, those who held this view were willing to consider any job, as the comments of this frequently unemployed woman show.

There is always jobs around. Just three or four months during the winter is the hard part ... there's always something to earn a bit of money ...Some people are a bit too lazy to get out and do seasonal work ... because you have to work for your money, you can't have a holiday out there ... I know quite a few people that would rather just sit on the dole and be happy.

Although this 'work at any price' attitude might be applauded by many, as some of the interviews showed it was not always a feasible or sensible option for those out of work. For example, the forthcoming section on abatement regimes illustrates the problematic side of such a view.

It was often not clear how the optimists viewed the job market long term or more broadly. This is in contrast with those people who held more negative opinions. They seemed concerned with this broader picture, with qualitative aspects of employment, and with considering the interaction of more complex issues.

### ***Summary – Job Market and Economy***

This section has looked at perceptions of the job market, and has occasionally incorporated views on the local economy. A range of opinions was offered regarding the state of the labour market with people's personal experiences, and those of people close to them, appearing to be the key influences on their views. Some people were positive, though for many of these, the views they held were narrowly focused. Fewer people with an optimistic outlook considered the wider or more general perspective. A small number of people were uncertain or ambivalent about the situation. This seemed to be primarily the result of conflicting information and experiences. For the majority of people, the job market was viewed quite, or very, negatively. This was from both a personal and broader perspective. Some of these people also noted that education and training, demands for experienced workers, and the growth of technology were increasingly important issues in relation to the job market.

## The New Zealand Employment Service<sup>13</sup>

A significant factor in the process of many unemployed people gaining paid employment is the role of the state through agencies charged with helping people find work. During the period under study, the principle agency in this respect was the New Zealand Employment Service (NZES). How this Service performed was described and evaluated through the eyes of some of its clients. Naturally, people had mixed experiences of it. Some reported that the Service had played a crucial role in finding work for them. However, the dominant views were much more negative. Complaints included NZES being seen as having a blinkered approach to finding people work and being viewed as not very pro-active in this regard. They were also considered to be rigid and unhelpful. These failings were seen as creating a situation where people could remain on the UEB for extended periods.

Among the positive evaluations were the appreciative reaction of one couple who credited the ongoing actions and support of the NZES with the successful placement and then employment of their very shy daughter after three years receiving the UEB. Other positive reports included:

If you went to see them they tried to help you the best way they could. Sometimes they would ring around a lot of places while you were there to actually see if they had anything going. And if they did find you something they would ring you straight away. Which was, I thought it was really good.

I was very employable, the employment service always had work available for me ...[they were] constantly finding me jobs.

Others were much more critical in their evaluations of the NZES. As their comments show, they encountered first-hand some of the perceived problems with the Service. Take, for example, the comments of these two couples as they describe their experiences with NZES.

Couple 1

*Husband:* I was a fully qualified tradesman, I had sales management experience, sales repping experience, so there was 101 different avenues of employment for me ...they never came through with a job for me in the whole time [8 months] ... they tend to pigeon hole you, invariably the last position you had is all they tend to consider you for ... They never contacted us at all so it allows you to milk the system in some ways. ...I can't believe there was no jobs going through the Employment Service in 8 or 9 months.

*Wife:* I actually went down there and I enrolled and my experiences are quite vast and I got, within the first two or three days, an interview to go to and but since then I have heard absolutely nothing.

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<sup>13</sup> It should be acknowledged that this Service is no longer in existence following its merger with the Income Support arm of the Department of Social Welfare to form the *Department of Work and Income* on 1 October 1998.

## Couple 2

*Husband:* I found them totally useless. At the time there was jobs for diesel mechanics and I wasn't told about them and when I went to register I wasn't informed by phone about the jobs.

*Wife:* [T]hey had made comments that were like. That basically I wasn't very attractive and would greatly improve my appearance. And that really, I'm not okay, oh well it was the way you dressed and you didn't dress up tidily and everything. ...And the fact that all they could comment on, not about me or my abilities or anything, but that the use of make up would improve my appearance. ... I thought it was disgusting really. It really upset me. I thought oh my God. I thought they were a bunch of wallies. ...They don't suit the job to the person.

The male in the first couple went on to explain how he saw the approach of the NZES contributing to the problem of unemployment rather than helping solve it.

[NZES] are leaving themselves open, like there is a lot of people will sit there on the dole because the Employment Service is so lax in policing the people on their books and actually saying "Hey look there is a job application for you, you go for this job", you could sit there for eight months and then all of a sudden – "oh you're a long term unemployed, we better do something".

Given that the men in both couples were unemployed and receiving the UEB, their wives were eligible to register as unemployed but not to receive benefits. In the eyes of another woman in these circumstances, this made someone a low priority with the NZES.

I'm always watching the paper and I'm registered at [NZES], but they more or less told me, you are not on a benefit so there's nothing we can do for you. ...I can go and look at the board but they won't ring me and tell me if something comes up. You go in there and look at the board and when you ring up nine times out of ten they are already gone.

Others had further negative experiences, though there was a resonance with the issues identified already.

I found [NZES] were not helpful at all. They never rung me up once about any job. ... Oh, I think [jobs] were available I just don't think they were bothering to, like they associate people with certain jobs, 'cause you tell them what you want to do but they just weren't working people.

I was registered with them from the time I left school to '94 and they only offered me one job and that was on an orchard out of the back of Katikati and I said I didn't have a car and it was totally inadequate. As for providing a service – they put jobs on the board. As for matching them up with people, no. I got the last job through the employment service [off the board]. The experience [I had] was supposedly there on my file but they never rang me and said well we have a job that might be good for you. ...I think they only find jobs for seasonal workers and that's about it. The busiest days are when the apples are going. ...They didn't match you up with a job as well as their ads make out they did.

I didn't find [the NZES] very helpful. ...I would go in there and put my name down, but I'd never get a job from them. And then I got a bit sick and tired of it, so I'd go out and get my own job and not tell them.

I think the Employment Service is just statistics, I don't like them at all.

One woman recounts a set of particularly unfortunate experiences. Initially the NZES tried to get her to apply for the job she had just been made redundant from in unpleasant circumstances.

The only jobs the Employment Service were offering me was the same job that I got laid off from and they tried to force me to go for an interview there ... they offered me that job about three times.

This was, in part, because they were keen to place her back in the same field – as a sewing machinist. However, as she had been made redundant twice from this type of work, she was keen on retraining. Consequently, she had done a couple of training courses and was particularly interested in moving into a care-giving role. The NZES weren't as enthusiastic however. Although the Service was running a course in this area, she only found out about it by accident.

I actually just arrived one day at the Employment Service and they were just about to start a new course on that [Caring and the Community] and I saw it on the board. And that's how I found out about that course ... they [NZES] never told me about that course.

As a result of this course, she found that childcare was an area of strong interest for her and she decided to do some polytech training. As is discussed in the report dealing with inequities in education and training between different benefit regimes, this created some significant problems for her.

### ***Summary - NZES***

As the lead government agency in respect of employment at the time, NZES was one of the major institutions that unemployed people, particularly those who were registered, dealt with. As beneficiaries appeared to be the priority, people not receiving a benefit tended to feel that they got little help from the NZES. Whilst a small number of people regarded the NZES positively, the overwhelming majority who commented on the work of this agency were negative in their evaluation. These unfavourable views portrayed NZES as not very pro-active in their dealings with the unemployed. They were also felt to be rigid and unhelpful, and blinkered in their approach to placing people. In contrast, people seemed to want a more active agency that was creative and innovative in responding to their individual situation and circumstances. They also seemed to want a more collaborative approach. Though the NZES no longer exists, these comments would appear to be worthwhile for any similar organisation to consider.

## Social Networks and Employment

Given the unfavourable views of the NZES, it is clear that this agency was not the only way that people got jobs. Many did regularly review the Service's job boards but other relationships and actions were often more crucial to people getting employment. As we have seen, people did all the usual things to get jobs – they read papers and knocked on doors for example. However, in over 70% of households, at least one of the profiled occupants indicated that they had made use of their social networks to assist them in some way in obtaining a job. Often both people in a household employed them and it was not uncommon for social networks to be used on more than one occasion. People in around half of these households made very specific and detailed mention of the role and importance of these contacts or networks in their getting work. These were certainly credited with considerably more value and results than agencies (government and private) or answering advertisements – the approaches we usually associate with 'getting a job'. At times, they were the keys to people getting work; on other occasions, they were but a small part of the process. Networks were of use in connecting all sorts of people with all forms of paid employment. Whether a person was unemployed and seeking work, or already in paid employment and looking to change jobs, one of the most consistent threads in successfully making these transitions was the presence and use of networks. They took on many shapes, such as when employers show preference to people they have previously employed. Alternatively, they also included former fellow workers, friends and family offering people work, hearing about opportunities and passing this information on, and offering support and influence to help people secure jobs.

Sometimes people went about building up their networks very deliberately. A Task Force Green Scheme offered this man the opportunity to make a range of contacts. Of course, having 'the word' spread often depends on other people.

Being a builder he went out to a private school where he was on maintenance, and then through [that] school he got his feelers out and [another] school got to hear that he was [there] and [yet another school] got to hear that he was [there], because being schools everyone gets to talk among themselves. ...The principals going out to schools could see the difference in what [he] had done.

This approach eventually paid off with full-time employment, though it was a long gradual process. More often, networks were built over the normal course of a person's social engagement at work and in the community, and their role in linking people to work was a spin-off effect.

Whilst people often had their own network, they also made use of indirect networks that they accessed through family and friends.

I have made lots of contacts at the coffee shop and they all know that we have finished and know that we are looking for work. There will be somebody who knows something. ...I am very fortunate in that my friends know when I am looking for a job and they know someone who knows someone, so I am very lucky.

Workplaces, work experiences and workmates were also direct and indirect sources of contacts and information.

You could say all the jobs you have ever got have really been word of mouth and by your own good name that people have said yes I know him, I know he is a good worker. As opposed to getting a job out of the paper and going off and applying for it.

In a similar vein, this woman reflected on how her husband managed to get work.

He went down and saw the boss that was there when he was there and they remembered him ... and so he got a job.

Neighbourhoods, church, service and social organisations, and sporting groups all served as places where networks were formed and nurtured.

I was down at basketball and a friend of mine who works at pest control said to me would I be interested in pest control and I asked what sort, and he said bugs and things like that and I thought that wouldn't be too bad a job and I thought I'd be interested in getting into that sort of thing. He said there could be a job going at his work and I went down and had an interview and that was it.

The following quotes capture some other circumstances where contacts played a role in people getting employment. They also illustrate the nature and characteristics of networks and how pivotal they can be in some cases.

I think I got [my wife] the job because the guy that I worked with, his wife is the boss there, so we were actually dancing on the dance floor and I said have you got any jobs down there and she said well yes we are looking for someone at the moment. I said well [my wife] is after a job and she said well tell her to come and see me and the next day that was it.

Really, it was knowing somebody, knowing people in council and hearing changes were coming up. It was really the old word of mouth thing, really, so I knew changes were happening and said this is me, this is my CV before the job was even a vacancy basically. I'd sort of made myself known. I was lucky really that it just happened that I knew people who'd worked for council.

I had already had a lot of contact with community health, I think that they let that there were some vacancies coming up, They advertised as well but I definitely know they let me know and sort of encouraged me to apply.

Most of it [getting jobs] is by word of mouth. It's not what you know but who you know. ...Yes I will probably go back to part-time work and I will get it through a family member or something.

Rather than just 'getting a job', networks also opened up other sorts of opportunities. After being made redundant, this man's foray into self-employment doing fencing and other farm work was encouraged by the range of contacts he had established during his years working in the farming sector. Contacts meant work for his business.

I have been through a lot of contacts in working on farms and that. By having those contacts you do find quite a lot of those jobs.

Similarly, without having a relative who had started a business, this man would never have had the opportunity to become self-employed. It also allowed him plenty of time to consider the move before taking the plunge.

I used to help him on the weekends ... My brother-in-law said "I am a mug, I should be doing this myself and you should be helping me". So we mulled it over for a year and it came to the crunch.

The importance of networks was no less true for those unemployed people who were receiving welfare. Whilst this concept proved important for lots of groups of people, given the failings of the official agencies, as noted in the preceding discussion, networks became an important part of the other ways that people in this group sought work. Indeed, half the households with unemployed people in them made specific mention of the importance of networks in finding jobs. This first quote illustrates how a husband and wife, who were each unemployed at various times, both relied heavily on networks to secure a succession of jobs.

Husband:

[Got that job] through a friend of my brothers, he got it for me.

[Found out about that job] through a friend of my sisters.

A friend of mine, her and her partner were involved in running a farm so they approached me about doing their farm work and while I was on that farm a fellow asked me if I could do his trees for him.

On the off chance I applied to the factory that I used to work at and they rang me up.

Wife:

I actually got [that job] from my sister.

My mum actually rang me up and told me about [this job] and I just went down and got it.

Other people in these circumstances describe how networks worked for them.

A lot of people have been letting me know if anything comes up, which has been really helpful.

I put some feelers out with some contacts that I had for sales jobs ... and I think I actually would have got one.

However, in this last case, the man decided to start his own business instead.

This next man's gradual return to work after recovering from an injury was solely the result of an opening that he heard about through friends.

It was just the neighbour up the road, his son had the orchard, and he said “What are you doing?” and I said “I’ve been on ACC but I want to have a go at getting back into something, and he said, “My son is looking for someone to put up wires” ...so I did that and that was six months ago, it just went on from there and kept going.

As we saw in the section on ACC, he felt that this job – both the hours and type of work – was an essential part of his recovery (which was nearly complete).

Of course, there can be a downside to networks playing a principle role in people getting work. One young woman was very disappointed to learn that it wasn’t simply qualifications and experience that were the keys to getting a job. This was especially difficult to accept after she had worked hard to complete a polytech course.

When I left polytech and I went to apply for all these jobs, to me it wasn’t really what you knew it was who you knew. That wasn’t really good because it would have been a waste of time all these people going to polytech, university, if what they know didn’t really count. Like, I have the qualifications ... and my cousin doesn’t and she has got this really high job because one of the ladies that she knows got her in it, and I thought that wasn’t fair. ...The workplace now is who you know not what you know. You can get the training when you start. Those who already have the qualifications need to work harder to get the job.

Occasionally others mentioned some dissatisfaction with networks as a basis for allocating jobs. There was also the odd suggestion that the prominence of networks might be declining in the changing labour market. However, the strength and frequency with which others mentioned networks tended to reinforce their ongoing importance in how people found or changed jobs, and this showed no signs of weakening.

### ***Summary – Social Networks***

Despite the reservations some had about the place of networks in people getting jobs, and any feelings that their role may have been reducing, the range and number of comments on this subject clearly showed that it is hard to underestimate how important social networks were to many. They were influential in linking people in all sorts of circumstances with a variety of work options. Even for those who saw them as only part of their strategy to get work, they were still noted as integral to the whole process. For others, they were the principal way they found jobs. People utilised their own networks, built up through family and friends, and those they met in organisations and social settings, as well as drawing on the networks of those close to them. Relationships which had been developed through prior work experiences also proved valuable. Most often networks were diffuse and informal but occasionally they were deliberately built up with the goal of securing work.

## Benefits, Wages and Abatements<sup>14</sup>

This section examines a set of related issues: the level of benefits, the relationship of benefit and wage levels, and the impacts of abatement regimes. All three are discussed in respect of their effect or influence on transitions from welfare to work. Whilst those who did not receive benefits sometimes had comments to make on these matters, it is the views and experiences of the recipients that are the focus here.

For a few people problems began even before they received a benefit. In these cases, the first or only issue was not the benefit level but getting – or not getting, as the case may be – the correct information about entitlements. Benefit regulations are often complex and oblique, making this difficult. Even when people acted in a way they genuinely believed was in the best interests of all concerned, they were sometimes shocked to find that they were the ones most disadvantaged. Take the following case where a couple struggled to stay off the UEB for as long as possible. After being made redundant, the husband, and later his wife did seasonal work. Though they tended to work at the same times, occasionally they couldn't. Their eligibility for the UEB depended on the level of their single or combined incomes. On one occasion whilst he was out of work, his wife was working full-time and they were not receiving the benefit. Gradually his wife's hours were reduced and though they tried to cope financially, eventually they decided they would be better off if she resigned and they applied for the UEB.

[My wife] was working only 12 hours for the whole week and that was not viable ... this can't even pay our mortgage off or pay our bills ... we went to the unemployment service to get onto the dole and they said – no you fellows can't go on the dole because she had given a voluntary resignation. It took us four weeks before we got our first payment ... [Apparently] she could have got a top up from Inland Revenue, well we didn't know nothing about that. The unemployment people never told us our entitlements of what we could get.

Because they were unaware of the regulations regarding resignations, they were stood down for four weeks waiting to qualify for the UEB. Nor did they know about other entitlements that they were eligible for whilst the woman was working that could have eased their situation.

As another two people noted, there were always ups and downs when trying to deal with a government agency and learn their protocols and procedures, and the regulations they administered. All this was on top of coming to terms with the significant changes and losses occurring at the same time. In this case, the man was dealing with ACC after an injury that forced him off work.

[ACC] have been good to me. ...When I first started off I didn't like them because I would get all upset with them and they would get all wild. ...It was only because of the money and they used to hold it up and I didn't used to know what was going on. But now I know what to do and it just goes along alright now.

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that across the ten-year period the abatement levels have changed so comments must be recognised as relating to a particular time period within that decade.

The second case involves the Department of Social Welfare and the experiences of a man who had to give up work and go onto the DPB in order to care for his children when his estranged wife became seriously ill.

I don't like being on a benefit. You have to answer to Social Welfare all the time. They are always cutting your money because you don't talk to them enough. ...when I went into see them about getting on a benefit they were good saying there would be no stand down, they could understand the circumstances, but still they wouldn't cover me for a lot of the things I had purchased ... What was I supposed to do, give them up and take them back to the shop? Give them up and ruin my credit rating? ...It's just the financial side of it that is such a frustrating thing because these guys are so blasé about the way they are treating you. They gave me an ultimatum ... see us in three months and if you haven't reduced your bills we are going to chop the special benefit.

From amongst those who were receiving benefits, many commented on the low levels of welfare payments. In only a couple of households did people consider the benefit levels generous. One such case was the father of a woman on the UEB for three years. As she could not be interviewed, her view is not known. Perhaps reflecting the low level that wages had fallen to, in another instance a man found he was clearly better off on the UEB.

I actually got more money on the unemployment than I got while I was driving. ...When I went in to get the dole, the lady said I was in for a pay rise. ...And I thought I'd be going backwards.

For most, however, benefits were less than people had been earning in paid work and were considered difficult to manage on. As some simply put it: there just wasn't enough money. Others were a little more descriptive of their feelings and experiences. The following comments illustrate the difficult circumstances – both practically and emotionally – that most people on benefits experienced as a feature of their lives. This was regardless of the benefit they were receiving.

I don't like being on a benefit. ...If I stay on the benefit I don't see a very good [future]. I can't see myself advancing very far, financially or anything like that. It's just a struggle to get by week to week.

It's pretty scary because sometimes it is just a matter of living out of op shops and making all your own things. Soup's good and you use the vegetable garden.

In the beginning it was pretty hard on my wife. ... a big drop in pay ... [my wife] used to only work twice or once a week for four hours and now she has to work quite a lot. ...Because you don't have to travel to work it cuts it down a bit, but we just have to be careful.

It was a very difficult time for us because with the sole income being from the unemployment benefit and a residual amount from the business we found it very hard. In fact, some weeks we didn't know where we were going to get food from. It was a very difficult time and not something I would want to live through again.

Basically we have to live on my half of the benefit because my husband's half pays the rent and child support arrears, and he is not left with very much. So basically we are living on my half of the benefit to tide things over and keep the house running. Trying to run a house on \$187 is not enough to live on, especially with bills to pay and food. ...[For example] our daughter's schooling, school fees, if we can afford to pay it or if we can't afford to pay well stiff luck. ...Like when the power bill was going to be paid, how much was going to be put on the power bill, that was always the biggest decision that I would make and it still is, we never get that paid up to date.

We got the cutbacks and I just had to find what I could do to survive.

The mention of 'cutbacks' refers to the benefit reductions that were part of the 1990 Budget. Though few people mentioned them specifically, they experienced their legacy through the significantly lower benefit levels that resulted. This woman did recall them and went on to offer her own poignant account of their impact. She had brought up two children after being widowed.

The government says all these cutbacks are meant to encourage us to go to work – I was wondering where the hell a 59 year old lady, with a standard 6 education finds work like that today, enough to support herself. To me there is no prospect ... I have wondered whether life is worth living ... I am not a person that would think of suicide and I am not looking for sympathy, but I wonder what my life is? ... my life is my house which I can't afford to keep up, no prospects, I am going to be living from hand to mouth for the rest of my life. ...I have no hope for the future.

From various comments, it is readily apparent that many people found life on a benefit a 'struggle', either by their use of that particular word or by the circumstances they described. In response to this struggle, the woman just quoted, like a few others, generated a little extra income through 'under-the-counter' activities. In this case, she did not declare a small portion of her earnings from the housekeeping work she did. The incidence of these type of activities disclosed in the interviews was both sporadic and limited in nature. Whilst the income that was generated was usually fairly meagre, it was still important, as these other cases illustrate.

I have sneakily got a couple of boarders. ... If I didn't have my boarders I would be short \$120 a week.

Any perk work he did was word of mouth. I know it was very naughty of us but we had to find some way of surviving because although we got help from Social Welfare Department, it wasn't really enough to keep us going because of our mortgage.

I did a bit working at shops with family friends – just under the counter – but it didn't last very long because the children were getting upset, they were fretting, they were too young to leave so I came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth me doing it.

As was shown in a previous section, those people who were unemployed were keen to work and were active in this regard. Given the sense of struggle that those on benefits experienced, it is not surprising that the search for work was given added drive by

monetary concerns and financial imperatives. Depending on the circumstances in these households, it might have been the unemployed person, their spouse or partner, or both who were seeking full-time or other hours of work. However, despite the prospects that paid employment offered in personal, social and financial terms, people were acutely aware that there were many things to consider before blindly making such a transition. For example, the demands that working placed on parents in caring for their children needed careful consideration. In earlier parts of this discussion of welfare, we have seen that this was an issue, for example, for single parents and parents in households with the UEB as the main income and where, as a result, both partners took any opportunities to work seasonally.

Alternatively, consideration might have had to be given to a range of income related issues. One of these was the fact that the wages on offer were sometimes only marginally above the level of benefits. Indeed, in one case just cited, the UEB was more than the man earned in full-time paid employment. Where earnings were slightly ahead of the benefit, the additional costs that arose through working (travel, clothing, and the like) often meant that these small gains were heavily and quickly eroded. Similarly, there was the need to consider the negative impact that any earnings limits and abatement regime might have on people's overall income. In addition, changes to people's income might affect other supplementary entitlements without fully compensating for any loss. This last issue also impacted on those already in paid work. The following comments illustrate various aspects of these considerations.

If they got a job where they were paid more than the dole I would think that most of them would take it, but for a lot of jobs for single guys now are less than the dole.

If you took your petrol into account and the fact that you had to take your lunch every day, all this sort of thing, and the clothes that got ruined with the cement ... we could get more on the dole.

We sort of had to work it out that if we were going to get a full-time job we had to get at least over \$8.00 an hour plus your top ups. ...But, yes, I never earned enough not requiring those little top ups and things like that. ...We probably would have been only \$20 or \$30 better off than if we'd been on the benefit. There is not a helluva lot of incentive to go to work. ...You need to go out and get \$12 an hour and 50 hours a week and do overtime before you can break free of the benefit or needing a supplement on your income. ...[I]f you are on the benefit they can stop your benefit and you can only earn x amount and it is so ridiculous. I think it is \$50 before tax. That is not even worth going out, because it all affects your top up benefits as well, your accommodation supplements. You go out and earn \$20 they take \$20 out of your benefit so you are not really making anything.

I found that by working there I was virtually worse off than I was on the [widow's] pension. I was working for nothing, by the time I had been taxed and the travelling to and from work twice a day, I was working for about \$5 a week. ...[I was only earning] \$20 a week in those days, you were only allowed to earn \$10, so the other was being deducted, before tax, you were paying secondary employment tax. I thought maybe it was costing money to go to work. ...I felt I could do more with my time than work for \$5.

The woman in the next case found the abatement regime so severe that she decided to work towards getting off the benefit.

I let them know I was working. And because I was working over the amount you were allowed to they cut it. And they cut it that much it wasn't really worth me working and that made me more determined and I went out and got another part-time job. And I went from there to full-time work, because you couldn't survive on the way they cut it. ...And in the end I said it's not worth me collecting it and doing what I'm doing.

Although many people would consider this laudable, the demands on her and her son as she tried to manage off the DPB were huge. As we saw in the section on the DPB, part of her motivation also lay in the stigma she felt as a result of receiving this particular benefit.

The earnings limits and abatement regimes could also apply to the partner or spouse of a person receiving a benefit if they engaged in paid work. The negative effects in such cases were just as pronounced and discouraging. For example, in one household, the husband was on the UEB on two separate occasions. His wife was working part-time during each of these. As a consequence of the abatements, she decided working was simply not worth it when this happened the first time.

The government was taking too much money out of my wages, it wasn't worth it to work, we actually ended up \$40 richer than if we were on full unemployment ... I was going out and doing about 30 hours work for \$40.

On the second occasion, because of their dire financial position, she felt obliged to keep on working regardless of how little she was effectively bringing into the household and the effects on her.

I am sorely tempted to throw in this job but we can't afford me to. I am only earning 30c in the dollar after I have earned my \$80, because that is how much you lose. You pay back the government 70% of your wages once you've earned over the amount you are allowed to earn while the spouse is on the unemployment. It doesn't really pay me to go out to work, to make enough money I have to work very long hours and I get terribly tired.

Another dimension of these issues was raised by a small number of people who, in terms of abatement regimes, recognised and questioned the greater earning flexibility and more generous maximum income levels afforded by regulations relating to the DPB, as compared to other benefits. This perceived inequity was summed up by the comments of this man.

My employer ... he had got me a job as summer pruning ... but then I couldn't get anything above \$50, so I had to tell my employer – sorry mate, I would rather stay on the dole instead of working the 40 and I can only earn \$50 off you. ...It may have been worth it if I had been a solo parent, you can earn up to \$3000 without questions, but on a married benefit you can only earn \$50 a week.

Though not subscribed to widely, it is presented in order to illustrate the range of factors that people identified in relation to this issue. A similarly perceived inequity, this time in respect of education and training support, is discussed in a later section.

A final matter that needs to be highlighted in the context of these issues, is that of supplementary assistance (such as the accommodation benefit) and tax credits. These are available not only to beneficiaries but also low-income earners. Again, only a small number of people made mention of these but it was apparent that some people lumped these in with other welfare entitlements. The affects of certain transitions on these supplements and credits had to be weighed up carefully too. Such transitions include moving from an unemployment benefit to paid employment, and increasing a household's income from paid work by the principal income earner working extra hours or if a spouse or partner got work. These last two scenarios were encapsulated in the following comments. The first is from a man who was in full-time paid work and the second is from a woman who was considering returning to some form of paid employment after devoting herself to unpaid responsibilities for a time.

I used to work Saturdays but that eliminated the Family Support and we get more from Family Support than for working on Saturday. From Social Welfare, if you can only earn a certain amount on you income with the number of children you have, and we earn under that so they give you that extra money. ...Then I worked several Saturdays and they took it back. What we get now is more than I would get if I worked Saturdays.

If I did go to work I had to find a job that was worth at least \$250 a week because I would lose the children's family support and the tax as well. With me who has no qualifications and has had a car accident ... I can't see anyone wanting to employ me for \$250. ...And that would make the children suffer because that money is for the children and is used on the children.

In these cases, the income from taking on or increasing one's paid work would not compensate for any losses in terms of supplementary or tax assistance.

From the various scenarios and quotes provided in this section, it is possible to develop a negative picture of those who were out of work and receiving welfare. Indeed, the comments in the previous section could be taken, at face value, to simply imply that supplements and credits had a negative impact on participation in the workforce and, thus, should be done away with. An alternative perspective that emerged from the interviews positioned the low level of wages for certain groups as the critical issue. People saw this as failing to provide sufficient incentives for people to move into, or increase their participation in, paid work.

As has been shown previously, people were keen to work and struggled with being out of paid employment. Certainly there were those who felt that being employed far outweighed any negative impacts and others who were able to get paid work with wages and conditions that made the transition sensible and worthwhile. However, low wage rates and the disincentives of the benefit system meant that at times some people were reluctant or ambivalent when confronted with opportunities to work. This created very real dilemmas for them and a feeling of unease could be sensed as they described their situations. It wasn't that people routinely decided to just manage on the benefit, but rather that the decision to take up paid work required careful consideration of many factors, not the least of which were those covered in this section. It was not simply a matter of getting or taking any job but involved weighing up the relative merits and implications of any possible transition. As a result of this process, many people felt that taking or keeping a job at a particular wage might not to be

worthwhile, or too big a price to pay. Some, who took on paid work, did so for only short periods. The general affect of these issues was not to make people work-shy but to force them to be very considered and careful in their approach to moving into paid work. This decision-making process was ongoing and highly responsive to changing circumstances.

Undoubtedly, the various policies that people coped with across the ten years were implemented with the intention of encouraging people to transition from unemployment into paid work. However, it appears that for a variety of reasons, they were not always effective in this respect. Such is the complexity of the issues that trying to strike a balance between the various factors, many of which have been raised by people here, seems an extraordinarily difficult task. The matter is further complicated by the inter-relatedness of these issues with others in relation to labour and welfare policy more generally. Many of these difficulties are recognised by one acute observer who had experienced this policy conundrum first hand.

There are a lot of vacancies that are not being filled even in the flush of the season. [Because of] lack of qualifications, lack of pay by the employer. The employer can only pay as much as the budget allows him, granted some of them have got the money to pay extra, but there are a lot of them out there that just haven't got the money and just can't pay top dollar for the seasonal worker. ...That is why a lot of them don't bother to work. You have to give them an incentive to go out and do something and if they are only going to get \$50 over and above the dole then they might as well stay home. That is the way it is. I have seen it in the past five years that I have been back down here. That is what I didn't see back in the '80's. A lot of people just went go and work because of that. That is not the only reason but that is one important thing that I have seen. If the orchardist is not going to pay them enough money then they are not going to bother and that is why a lot of outsiders have been coming and getting the jobs. ...At the other end it could knock people back, they could go out and they might be getting \$150 a week on their weekly benefit and then they go out and have to mow a couple of lawns or do three or four hours work and get \$80. That is \$230 so that is going to make it harder for the orchardists again to get workers from there into here. They are going to have to come up to \$300, maybe \$350 before they will draw those workers in. [The unemployed] look at it that at \$150 they are getting paid for nothing.

The beneficial effects of higher maximum earning levels is nicely illustrated by his positive reaction to being allowed to earn more on the UEB at one point.

On the unemployment benefit you are now able to earn up to \$80 extra a week. The last five years [that] has given me a lot more reason to want to work. I just keep pushing, when I come off for my seasonal break I am always looking around for anything to do, it doesn't matter if it is mowing lawns or whatever.

### ***Summary – Benefits, Wages and Abatements***

This section has attempted to demonstrate some of the ways that the interrelated issues of benefit and wage levels, abatement regimes, and earnings limits affected participation in paid work for those interviewed. The experiences and comments presented here illustrate that they were a highly influential set of issues that affected the employment patterns of people in households receiving benefits or on low

incomes. They clearly pose some difficult policy problems that demand attention but that cannot be easily solved. One important proviso that was raised in the discussion needs reiterating here. The effects of these issues in making people cautious about taking on some form of paid employment were not an indication that people did not want to work. Just the reverse was shown in an earlier section. Rather, people tended to carefully evaluate such moves for the effects – both positive and negative – that they would have on their personal and family well-being. Because of the particular interaction of policy regulations and personal circumstances, not all transitions to work guaranteed positive outcomes. Indeed, as this discussion has shown, many produced detrimental effects. Hence the caution – which is entirely different from being work-shy – that many people displayed when considering their options.

## **SUMMARY – WELFARE AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

Clearly welfare and unemployment are important issues for any community and this was readily apparent in the interviews. It is also borne out by some very simple statistics drawn from this data. Just over a third of people in our study received some form of welfare benefit and this affected well over half the households involved. Similarly, unemployment, when those outside of the welfare system are included, affected large numbers of those who were interviewed. Even people, who themselves had not received welfare or had been unemployed, considered this an area of concern. This group was given some voice in an opening section. Some of them felt that massive structural changes had led to severe disadvantage for particular groups and that urgent attention was needed to address their needs. Others considered that the welfare system itself was creating some of the problems faced by people. This diversity of opinion is probably a fair reflection of the views held more widely on this issue.

Welfare and unemployment have been explored in a range of ways, both separately and together. For those who had received some form of welfare or been unemployed, the analysis centred on their experiences and the transitions that saw them move into or out of the welfare system or unemployment. In many cases, these were tracked across time, sometimes over a number of years. Unemployment was obviously handled in part through an examination of those receiving the UEB, but also in wider terms with a look at the experiences of people who were unemployed (but not limited to those receiving the UEB). This covered the predominantly negative impacts and effects of unemployment and the value and importance placed on paid work. Despite the detrimental effects of being out of work and the various setbacks they experienced, this also showed how the unemployed kept active in their search for work and generally maintained a positive attitude towards this. The role that perceptions about the labour market played in people's experiences of unemployment and job seeking were also considered. Strong negative perceptions seemed to have some impact on people's thinking and behaviour. Some found it difficult to get any clear sense of the state of the labour market, which also had an impact.

Welfare was discussed in relation to particular benefit groups, the make-up of which were analysed along with some detailed accounts of people who received each benefit. Some people had experiences of receiving more than one benefit, and/or of receiving welfare on more than one occasion. A brief overview was given of a small group of people on a range of benefits, and then to those receiving ACC. The latter group experienced all the difficulties that those receiving other benefits did, but also coped with having to recover from a serious injury and sometimes the effects of discrimination. The largest group of welfare recipients, those receiving the UEB were considered in some detail. Receiving the UEB was, for those interviewed, mostly due to circumstances out of their control. Whilst most who received this benefit did so on one or two occasions, a small group had more frequent episodes. The experiences during these times and the eventual transitions off the benefit are tracked for many of the people interviewed.

The experiences of those receiving the DPB were also examined in some depth. All but two of this group were women. Despite common impressions to the contrary, those receiving the DPB were keen to work. Most also recognised the need to plan and

prepare for this. However, childcare was a critical consideration for single parents when contemplating paid employment. The intense stigma associated with the DPB was another major issue for many of this group.

As this discussion has shown, relying on welfare can be difficult and demanding. Moving off welfare or getting work is not simply a matter of getting any old job but involves many careful considerations. This was particularly evident in the revealing discussion about the detrimental impact of benefit levels and abatement regimes on transitions from welfare and unemployment to paid work. Transitioning off welfare and into work was not helped either, according to those interviewed, by the approach and attitudes of the New Zealand Employment Service. Though this service no longer exists, the observations of this group of clients serve as valuable insights for any organisation performing this function. On the other hand, the important role that social networks served in connecting people with opportunities and jobs was very apparent in the interviews.

## CONCLUSION

In contrast to those theoretical and empirical studies that are based on micro-economic constructs and national trends, this research programme focuses on the way in which labour markets function at the micro-level of individuals and households. The development and utilisation of a broader concept of transitions as the unit of analysis in this study was central to achieving this focus. As has been shown it is a complex and versatile idea that proved ideally suited to the various aims of this research. Specifically, it has allowed an emphasis on relations within the household and between individuals, households, and the labour market, allowing us to explore the decisions or choices which are made with respect to economic participation and, as a consequence, making it possible to identify a range of factors which either promote or impede labour market participation. To achieve this also required the development of a methodology that established a strong framework within which to firstly capture and then analyse the interview data so as to address the key questions which this study set out to answer. Whilst much of what has been presented here will likely only reinforce what is already well established in the existing literature, statistics and research, the strength and value of this report lies with the detailed accounts of people's actual experiences which have been tracked across a considerable period of time. As the various parts and sections of this and the other reports have been summarised already, it is not intended at this point to revisit that material. Rather, by way of conclusion, a series of themes which emerged from people's experiences and which had a recurring presence in all the Hawkes Bay reports are presented as a final response to the research questions.

Given that this study examined many dimensions of work, it provides an intriguing insight into the multi-faceted nature of people's work profiles and histories. Even when this was of a fairly 'standard' or usual pattern, it could still mean that people maintained a range of activities and responsibilities, and the interaction of these was often complex, with various components complimenting or competing with one another. Despite this diversity, the importance of paid work was still very evident. Whilst demonstrated in many ways, it was especially apparent when people lost jobs. The impacts of this, both on individuals and their family, as well as the efforts they made to get new work, all emphasise the value placed on paid employment. The attitudes and actions of most of those receiving welfare and/or who were unemployed were in stark contrast to the popular and usually negative perceptions of people in these circumstances. Consequently, they often felt frustrated by what they perceived as obstacles to their getting a job. These included welfare abatements that acted as disincentives, difficulties and inequalities accessing quality training and education, and the ineffectiveness of the state employment agency. Against this last issue, a major positive influence on any transition into paid employment, regardless of the circumstances, was a person's social network.

The ten year period over which data was retrospectively collected was characterised by change and uncertainty both at the local level, as well as nationally and internationally. This was borne out in a number of ways and at various points of the analysis. Hawkes Bay as a region experienced both localised and more general effects of these turbulent times. The former was most apparent as a result of a major downturn and restructuring in the rural sector, which was particularly evident in this study through the closure of two large meatworks. Restructuring was felt in many

other areas as well. As a consequence, the shape of the labour market changed considerably and people were forced to adapt accordingly. These adjustments were often hard to make, though some people appeared little affected by what was occurring and they maintained very stable work histories, whilst others flourished in new work environments and sizeable numbers risked self employment. When there were negative impacts, these were often unevenly distributed. Redundancy was all too common an experience and some people had frequent and/or lengthy experiences of welfare. Most of those interviewed felt negative or at best unsure of the prognosis for this region. Many had difficulty getting a true feel for the state of the labour market and local economy, though some positive signs at the time of the interviews were noted. Changes such as the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act, which prompted greater restructuring of workplaces, alterations in conditions and wages, as well as greater casualisation and intensification of work, only added to the unsettled nature of this period.

The uneven distribution of negative impacts was most apparent in relation to Maori. Reflecting findings elsewhere, those interviewed in this study were over-represented in the group of longer term or more frequently unemployed. In response to this many opted or were forced into seasonal work, often repeating this cycle – of unemployment to periodic employment and back to unemployment – across a number of years. Though their higher representation amongst those taking some form of education and training appeared to provide a positive note, this is somewhat diffused by their prominence in training schemes for the unemployed. The quality and value of such programmes was questioned by many of the participants, a position supported by their poor outcomes.

The reference to education and training, made in relation to Maori, signals a prominent feature of this study. However, whilst people viewed this as a critical and growing component in relation to someone's employability, they still recognised the influence of others factors in contributing to this. Though some form of education or training was often undertaken as a response to the changing labour market, skills and experience were still seen as important. Even more fundamental was the availability of jobs. As noted earlier, despite its importance in relation to unemployment, the limited nature of programmes and courses for those out of work, together with their poor quality and outcomes was of concern to many who took them. Access to training and education seemed unevenly distributed across the welfare system creating what some saw as disadvantage amongst groups. More generally, questions regarding access and cost were raised and the loss of a sound apprenticeship programme was bemoaned by many people. Alongside full-time and part-time programmes, there was a growing emphasis on workplace based education and training. One clear reason for the general growth of education and training came out of the recognition and first hand experience of the spread of technology.

Another major theme in this study was gender. This had several facets. The gendered nature of work was still very evident, both in the workplace and the home. In respect of the latter, women were still responsible for the much of the housework and remained the primary caregivers in relation to children. Their responsibilities regarding children had significant effects on their participation in paid work. For example, they often disengaged from paid work for periods and then had to manage a return to employment. This might have to be done several times. When working they

had to balance paid and unpaid responsibilities, and managing these proved highly demanding in many cases. Because any paid work was often conditioned on their unpaid responsibilities, part-time and casual employment were prominent amongst women. If education and training was used as a means to aid a return to or to enhance opportunities in paid work, part-time courses were the norm, with women again strongly represented in the group doing these. Whilst producing benefits, this was another activity to balance with their unpaid responsibilities and sometimes with paid work as well. So too was their prominent role in voluntary work. This was the result once again of their primary role in relation to child care, as much of this work was associated with children. It should be added that this voluntary involvement sometimes generated opportunities in paid employment. In contrast, men usually accorded their paid role the highest priority and any unpaid work was secondary to this. Paid work was seldom predicated on their other responsibilities, though men often responded to becoming a father by increasing their involvement in this. Considering these various issues from another angle, childcare can be seen as a highly influential factor in relation to the distribution of work within and outside households, and between men and women.

As to gender and paid work, two contradicting trends emerged. On the one hand, changes were clearly occurring in relation to gender-based work role segregation. This was practically evidenced by people's work experiences. Of course there were varying degrees and types of change. However, against this, people's attitudes still revealed clear and persistent prejudices in relation to what was considered appropriate work for men and women to do. The physical aspects of any job seemed to be a major means of delineating work by gender.

Though the issues were consolidated at either end of the spectrum, age proved to be an important theme. Older people described feeling quite insecure in today's labour market. This usually arose from a combination of their vulnerability to being laid off, often during restructuring and sometimes in favour of younger workers, and their subsequent difficulties getting further employment. Despite more emphasis on workplace training and the benefits it might have for their employability, older workers seemed less inclined than others towards this growing trend. Low rates of pay and difficulties getting work were issues confronting younger people. The latter was often compounded for some by having few qualifications, and more generally by a lack of experience and difficult job market. This is borne out by the experiences of the group of school leavers, almost all of whom were unemployed at least once during their early working lives. Even those who did tertiary study struggled to get jobs.

Finally, the focussing of this study on the Hawkes Bay area, creates another central influence on people's experiences that is worth considering. The vulnerability of this region to the impacts of the downturn and restructuring of the rural sector have already been noted. It also had to adjust, like the rest of this country, to the broader application of economic rationalism including the restructuring of government services. These various factors had detrimental affects on the local economy and employment, and consequently, on people's experiences. However, this region is also structurally diverse with a particular strong mix of agricultural, horticultural, aquaculture, and forestry industries. Though vulnerable in many respects, these industries provided ongoing and developing opportunities within the changing local economy. A

prominent feature of these industries and this region is a heavy reliance on seasonal employment, which created both benefits and disadvantages for people.

Given this focus on Hawkes Bay, one of the interesting tasks that lie ahead is a comparison of the qualitative findings from all three regions. This will not only illustrate common areas but will also throw up contrasts between areas. While many findings will likely be applicable across all the regions and beyond – like those relating to gender, as outlined above – others will no doubt more specifically reflect the region under study. Such a comparison will follow the production of reports for the South Waikato and Waitakere City areas.

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