

**PRESERVATION**

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An Evaluation of the

# INDEPENDENT CIRCUMSTANCES ALLOWANCE

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Evaluation Unit  
Department of Social Welfare  
Head Office  
Wellington  
New Zealand



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Copies of this report can be obtained from:

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The views expressed in the report are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Social Welfare.

## **ABSTRACT**

The Independent Circumstances Allowance was the single provision under the Youth Allowances Scheme which recognised that some young people cannot live with their parents nor reasonably expect financial support from them. The allowance relied on a filtering system to identify potential recipients instead of depending on clients to apply for the benefit directly, and the eligibility criteria contained some elements of discretion. The objectives of the ICA Evaluation Project were to learn whether or not it reached its intended population of unemployed 16-17 year olds and was delivered as intended, and what factors in the DSW administration or programme policy of ICA may have prevented young people in genuine need from applying for or receiving the allowance. The project involved a nationwide postal questionnaire completed by 532 ICA recipients and 215 Youth Allowance recipients living away from home; and six district office visits in which 45 young people, 66 community agencies, 17 district office social workers and 44 district office benefits staff were interviewed.

It was found that ICA did not appear to reach all of its target population. Some young people did appear to get missed out of the filtering process that was meant to capture those who were eligible for ICA. There was also widespread concern that there were young people who did not qualify for ICA because they did not meet the criteria, but who were in need of income support. The study found that there was a need for better provision of benefit information to young people and to those who work with them (community agencies and DSW social workers). There was a common feeling that some aspects of the ICA application process were insensitive or inappropriate to the young people involved, in terms of difficulties understanding the language used by staff, filling out forms, and obtaining identification; lack of privacy during sensitive interviewing; and problems with staff attitudes, awareness and sensitivity. It seems that the use of Youth Advocates accompanying the young people through the application process in a support capacity, would help ICA reach its target population and ensure that it was delivered appropriately. Respondents also raised issues of benefit adequacy, the need for a more holistic social welfare approach, and the importance of liaison between DSW and community agencies.

The report includes recommendations concerning the application process, the use of Youth Advocates, provision of information, staff training, other income support issues, liaison with community agencies and use of community resources.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

This report sets out the results of a study which aimed to provide Department of Social Welfare (DSW) Head Office policy makers with information about whether the Independent Circumstances Allowance (ICA) reached its intended target population and whether it was being delivered as originally intended.

The report is set out in the following way. Chapter 1 of the report describes the administration of ICA, the background to the study and its objectives. Chapter 2 outlines how the study was carried out. Chapters 3 to 7 present the findings from the study: Chapter 3 deals with responses from young people to the postal questionnaire; Chapter 4 deals with interviews with young people; Chapter 5 deals with interviews with community agencies, including government agencies working with young people, and Youth Advocates; Chapter 6 deals with interviews with Department of Social Welfare social workers and Chapter 7 deals with interviews with district office benefits staff involved in the administration of ICA. Chapter 8 summarises and discusses the findings of the study and provides conclusions relevant to the study objectives. The final chapter, Chapter 9, contains the recommended policy and programme changes.

The appendices provide further background information on substantive issues and on the study itself.

Appendix I provides a review of the literature on the incidence of sexual abuse and domestic violence, and on homelessness and poverty amongst youth in New Zealand and Australia.

Appendix II provides statistical information on unemployed 16 and 17 year olds receiving various benefits.

Appendix III contains the questionnaires and interview guides used in the study, as well as the letters used to contact participants.

Appendix IV tabulates respondent characteristics.

Appendix V lists the community agencies interviewed.

Appendix VI contains cross-tabulations and analysis relevant to the material covered in Chapter 5.

Appendix VII is a submission to the Accommodation Benefit Policy Review based on the data from this study.

The study obtained information from a number of different groups and, whilst the numbers of those interviewed were relatively small, the finding that similar issues of concern were identified by several groups, provides support for the validity of these concerns.



## Background

### The Independent Circumstances Allowance (ICA)

The Independent Circumstances Allowance was part of the Youth Allowances scheme. The purpose of the scheme was to provide financial support for 16-19 year olds which did not differentiate between young people who were undertaking education or approved training courses and those who were unemployed. The underlying assumptions of the Youth Allowances scheme were that there was a period of transition for young people from dependence to independence, and that parents should have some financial responsibility for their young people during this period. The Independent Circumstances Allowance was the one provision under the scheme which recognised that some young people could not live with their parents nor reasonably expect financial support from them. The scheme was to be progressively introduced from the beginning of 1989. At the time of the study, ICA was only available to single, unemployed 16-17 year olds who were not living with their parents and who were not receiving any financial support from them.

To be eligible for ICA, the young person also had to have a reason for not living at home which fell within certain criteria. These were specified as follows:

- 1 No in loco parentis support (for example, where parents are overseas and providing no financial support, or where young people are refugees).
- 2 Family breakdown: irreconcilable differences in sharing the family home (for example, parents who refuse to take responsibility for children's well-being, estrangement from family, sexual abuse, domestic violence).
- 3 Young people/families in special circumstances (for example, parents in prison, hospital, or temporary absence of parents and a young person has complete responsibility for care of siblings).
- 4 Young people moving to areas where there are more employment or training prospects.
- 5 Young people who have been working and living away from home for a continuous period of six months immediately prior to applying for the unemployment benefit.
- 6 Any other reason (as determined by district office staff).

At the time of the study, young people who were granted ICA received the same amount of money as unemployed 18 and 19 year olds. This was \$109.79 per week. Other 16 and 17 year old unemployed people who were living at home or who were living away from home but not getting ICA, received \$82.34 per week.

### Administration of ICA

When the scheme was introduced it was intended that a young person in need of ICA would undergo the following procedure. The young person would go to a DSW office and apply for a Youth Allowance by completing an unemployment benefit application form. The young person would then be asked whether they lived at home with their parents or guardian (included under the term "parents" below) and whether they received any money or other financial assistance from their parents. If they responded "no" to both these questions, they would be referred to a specialist interviewer and informed of the eligibility criteria and the provisions of the allowance. The young person would also be informed that, when they were interviewed for ICA, they could be accompanied to the interview by a Youth Advocate. A Youth Advocate was a person who could verify the young person's circumstances and provide personal support. Young people would also be told about referral agencies and other support that was available to them. If the young person wished to apply for the allowance, an interview would then be arranged to determine eligibility. The interviewer would grant or decline the application based on whether the eligibility criteria were met.

### Aspects of ICA Relevant to its Evaluation

Two aspects of the allowance were particularly relevant to the evaluation. One was its use of the filtering system, described above, to identify potential recipients, instead of depending on clients to apply for the benefit directly. It was not expected that young people would have prior knowledge of the availability of ICA and apply specifically for it. Unemployed people in general would apply for the unemployment benefit and it was left to benefits staff to identify the 16 and 17 year olds, ask them the filter questions and assess for ICA the ones who answered "No" to both.

The second aspect of ICA that was particularly relevant to the evaluation was that although the framework for granting ICA gave it the appearance of a non-discretionary benefit, the eligibility criteria contained some elements of discretion. This must be taken into account when interpreting differences found between district offices in granting the allowance. Differences may be due to variable administrative procedures, and they may be due to the discretion exercised by the interviewing officer. In dealing with areas of discretion, staff decisions may be influenced by the tension between meeting clients' needs and ensuring that only those who are eligible for benefits actually receive them.

The areas in which discretion could apply were in the interpretation of the filter questions (are you living at home or receiving financial support from your parents) and in the application of the eligibility criteria. The situation where young people were based at home or used their parent(s) address but were not actually living at home is mentioned in later chapters, as are differences in cultural concepts of "home" and "parents".

### Reason for Evaluating ICA

The Youth Allowances Scheme constituted a major departure in the income maintenance provisions for young people in New Zealand. The need for properly planned and adequately resourced monitoring and evaluation of the scheme led to the establishment of the Inter-departmental Co-ordinating Committee on Monitoring of Youth and Student Allowances. This Committee decided that the Departments of Education and Social Welfare (who had also recognised this need) should each conduct an evaluation of the administration of ICA to their respective clients. The study described in this report was selected in October 1988 as part of the work programme of the Evaluation Unit by the Assistant Directors-General Policy Development and Programmes and Services.

### Relevant Statistics

At 31 March 1990, about 6500 16-17 year olds were receiving the unemployment benefit (this figure excludes about 1400 young people who were already receiving the unemployment benefit prior to the introduction of ICA). Almost one-third (1908) of these were receiving ICA, about one-tenth (536) were living away from home but were not receiving ICA and the remainder (3976) were living at home (see Table 1 Appendix II).

Over the year that followed the initial three months of ICA's existence the overall numbers of young people receiving the unemployment benefit doubled while the number receiving ICA tripled. (See Table 2 Appendix II). There do not appear to be any major differences between young men and women with regard to whether or not they receive ICA (see Table 3 Appendix II).

Since the introduction of ICA, the eligibility criterion under which young people receiving ICA were most commonly categorised was "family breakdown". The next most common criteria under which ICA recipients were categorised were "no in loco parentis support" and "working and living away from home continuously for six months" (see Table 4 Appendix II). The proportion of ICA recipients categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion has increased since the introduction of ICA, whilst the proportion of ICA recipients categorised under each of the other criteria has decreased (see Table 4 Appendix II). At 31 March 1990, two-fifths of ICA recipients were categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion. There do not appear to be any major differences between young men and women with regard to which eligibility criteria they were categorised under (see Table 5 Appendix II).

At 31 March 1990, for more than three-quarters (77%) of district offices, more than 70% of young people who were registered with DSW and who were living away from home, were on ICA. This represented an increase since October 1989, the time when most of the study data were collected. At that time, for 65% of district offices more than 70% of young people who were registered with DSW and were living away from home were on ICA.

### Relevant Literature

While there is not much literature directly relevant to ICA, this allowance does raise a number of issues on which there is a significant literature, specifically: homelessness; the transition to financial independence; Australian experiences with a similar benefit; and family poverty, conflict and violence and child sexual abuse as factors contributing to youth homelessness. An overview of this literature may be found in Appendix I.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to determine:

- a. whether the ICA provision reaches its intended target population, that is, those young people who cannot live at home nor reasonably expect financial support from their parents;
- b. whether the allowance is delivered as intended, that is:
  - (i) is accessible to young people in genuine need;
  - (ii) takes into account the particular characteristics of the client population;
  - (iii) is culturally sensitive;
  - (iv) guarantees confidentiality to the client;
  - (v) does not further traumatise clients, especially those who have experienced sexual abuse;
  - (vi) is flexible enough to cope with differing circumstances; and
  - (vii) maintains the integrity of the Youth Allowances Scheme.
- c. what factors in the DSW administration or programme policy, both in the criteria of eligibility and process of application, may have prevented young people in genuine need from applying for or receiving the allowance.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### General Study Design

The study aimed to provide information on the level of knowledge about ICA amongst young people, youth workers and community groups and DSW social workers working with young people; what happened during the application process; the use of Youth Advocates; the need for ICA; and to obtain suggestions for improvements to the ICA programme. This chapter outlines how the study was carried out.

With regard to young people, the population of interest for the study was all recipients of ICA, recipients of Youth Allowance who were not living at home and young people who lived at home in an undesirable situation. Recipients of ICA were of interest because they had experienced the application process for ICA. Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home were of interest to the study because they were potential recipients of ICA. Young people living at home in an undesirable situation were of interest as potential recipients of ICA if they moved away from home.

Due to ethical considerations and the practical difficulties of identifying the group classified as young people living at home in an undesirable situation, information for the study was not obtained directly from this group. However, DSW social workers and community agency workers were asked for some information about this group. They also provided information about young unemployed people who did not receive a Youth Allowance when they were asked to describe young people in need of ICA who were not receiving it. This group was not included in the original population of interest because the non-receipt of a Youth Allowance was considered more an issue of the accessibility of DSW services in general, than an issue of the provision or administration of ICA.

ACCESS trainees were excluded because at the start of the study, their eligibility for ICA was assessed by DSW but they were paid by the Department of Labour. It was considered that whilst some information might be available about ACCESS trainees who were receiving ICA, it was unlikely that trainees who were living away from home and who were not receiving ICA could be identified. Some ACCESS training providers were included among the community agency representatives interviewed because of their experience working with unemployed young people.

The study involved sending postal questionnaires to all ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home. In addition, six districts (plus a pilot test district) were visited to conduct in-depth interviews with young people, youth workers and community agencies, DSW social workers working with young people and district office benefits staff involved in the administration of ICA. It was intended that interviews would be carried out with people who were not

DSW social workers or community agency workers and who had acted as Youth Advocates for the young people interviewed. However, very few of the young people interviewed for the study had had a Youth Advocate who went with them when they applied for the unemployment benefit and, of those very few Youth Advocates, none could be contacted.

The districts visited - Christchurch, Central Auckland, Grey Lynn, Otahuhu, Rotorua and Whakatane - were selected because they covered a range of rural/urban, employment/unemployment and ethnic composition. Wellington district was selected as the location for a pilot test of the interview guides because it was easily accessible to the interviewing team.

The nine members of the interviewing team included Evaluation Unit staff, other Head Office staff and one person from outside the Department who worked for a community agency working with young people. The team was predominantly Pakeha, but included one Cook Island Maori, one Samoan and one New Zealand Maori person. All but one of the team were women. This team was given training in interviewing.

The sections below describe in more detail how the study was carried out. This information is presented separately for each of the main groups who participated in the study, that is, the young people, district office benefits staff, district office social workers, and community agencies and youth workers. Several young people who responded to the postal questionnaire and some representatives from community agencies made positive comments about being provided with the opportunity to participate in the study.

## Young People

### Postal Questionnaire

Two questionnaires in booklet form were developed, one for ICA recipients and one for Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home. Both questionnaires explained what ICA was and asked respondents about the information they had received at Social Welfare, the people who accompanied them to Social Welfare, and their views about what happened at Social Welfare. In addition, Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home were asked about whether they were interviewed for ICA and, if so, the results of their interview. They were also asked if they thought they might be eligible for ICA. The questionnaire booklets contained both closed and open-ended questions. Copies of the questionnaire booklets are included in Appendix III.

In order to guarantee confidentiality, young people were told in the questionnaire booklet that "only our research team will read what you write down here." So that respondents could be anonymous, the booklets were not given an identification code prior to being sent out. The project team considered that young people needed to be guaranteed both anonymity and confidentiality unless they indicated otherwise. This was mainly because of the sensitive nature of many of these young people's circumstances. It was also considered that it might increase the likelihood of young people responding to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire booklets were pilot tested with a random sample of 109 young people throughout New Zealand who were either ICA recipients or Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home. The SB/UB database was used to obtain the names and addresses of these young people. Only 28 completed questionnaires were returned. This represented a response rate of 26%. It should be noted that the questionnaires were not sent out until some time after the names and addresses of the young people were obtained, so it was likely that some of the addresses would have been out of date. This may have contributed to the low response rate. The questionnaires were revised on the basis of the young people's responses to this pilot test.

The postal questionnaire was originally intended to be sent to a random sample of ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients throughout New Zealand who were not living at home. However, due to the low response to the pilot test of the postal questionnaire and to requests for interviews (see section below on Interviews), it was decided to send the postal questionnaire to all ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients throughout New Zealand who were living away from home. This was to ensure that a substantial number of completed questionnaires were returned. A reminder letter was sent to all those who were sent a questionnaire booklet only, about two weeks after they were sent the questionnaire booklet. A copy of the reminder letter is included in Appendix III.

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young people. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain detailed information about the experiences of young people when they went to Social Welfare to apply for the unemployment benefit. The interviews also covered areas similar to those in the questionnaire booklets.

A detailed guide was developed to assist interviewers with preparation for interviews. It identified the key areas in which information needed to be obtained from young people, the reasons why this information was needed and possible questions which could be asked in order to obtain the information. A "long" checklist was prepared which listed key information areas, and points to be covered in each of these areas, on the left hand side of several pages. This left space for interview notes to be written alongside the relevant information area. A "short" checklist was also provided which listed, on a single page, the key information areas and relevant points to be covered during the interview. This was designed as a reminder list for use during the interviews themselves. Copies of the detailed guide and the checklists are included in Appendix III.

A letter requesting an interview was piloted by sending it to 62 young people (all ICA recipients who were registered with Wellington District Office and all Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home who were registered with Wellington, Porirua, Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt District Offices). Eight young people who responded to the letter were interviewed. This represented a

response rate of only 13%. A further three interviews were conducted with young people who were contacted in other ways. The guides and checklists were not revised after pilot testing because it was considered by the researchers that the information needed from the interviews with young people had been obtained.

Due to the low response to requests for interviews, it was decided to provide all young people in the six districts being visited with alternative ways of participating in the study. The options provided were participating in an individual or group interview at a venue of their choice, completing a questionnaire booklet (this was enclosed with the letter) and not participating in the study at all (this was included as a specific option so that young people who selected this option would not be followed up). A form was prepared which listed the options for participating in the study and which had the young person's name on it. Young people were asked to tick from the list of options provided whether and how they wished to take part. Young people were also asked if they wished to speak with a person of a particular ethnic group or gender. Few stated a preference but when they did, each request was met. A stamped, addressed envelope was provided for the return of this form. Another envelope was provided for the return of the questionnaire booklet, so that young people who chose to complete the questionnaire booklet could remain anonymous. The letter and the return form sent to young people are included in Appendix III.

Approximately two weeks after the letters requesting interviews were sent to young people in the six districts being visited, a reminder letter was sent to those who had not responded (see Appendix III). In the districts which were visited, young people who had not responded by the time the researchers arrived there were followed up by telephone and, in the case of the rural districts, by a hand delivered note if they could not be contacted by telephone. When these young people were followed up, if they were willing to be interviewed, they were given the choice of a telephone or face to face interview.

#### District Office Visits and Distribution of Questionnaire Booklets

Christchurch District Office was visited before the other districts were visited because there were not enough interviewing team members to allow all districts to be visited simultaneously. A list of the names and addresses of ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients living away from home who were registered with Christchurch District Office, was taken from the SB/UB database at 15 September. They were all sent a letter requesting an interview and a questionnaire booklet. The visit to Christchurch took place between 16-20 October 1989.

The same process occurred for the other districts which were visited, using the database at 20 October 1989. These districts were visited between 13-24 November 1989. The list of names and addresses of young people throughout New Zealand, who were sent the questionnaire booklet only, was also taken from the SB/UB database at 20 October 1989.

The questionnaires were sent out shortly after each list of names and addresses was obtained. The questionnaire was sent to 1746 young people, 1257 ICA recipients and 489 Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home.



### Response Rate

Overall, 43% (754) of the questionnaires were returned. A further 6% (99) were returned because the address was incorrect. In addition, 45 young people were interviewed. Thus, 49% of the young people in the study population (excluding those who had their questionnaires returned because the address was incorrect) participated in the study. The response rates for ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home were similar.

The relatively low response rate for the questionnaire booklets was of concern to the researchers. However, a low response rate was expected. This was because of the low response to the pilot test of the postal questionnaire and the likelihood of young people in the study population having limited literacy skills and being very mobile. Their mobility was supported by the review of the literature and the difficulty interviewers had contacting young people during the district visits. Of those young people who had not responded to the initial request for participation in the study, over three-quarters (79%) could not be contacted during the district visits. However, of those who could be contacted, three-quarters (76%) were willing to be interviewed or said that they would complete the questionnaire booklet.

In the event, the response was substantially higher than that obtained for the pilot (probably due to the reminder letters and the sending out of questionnaire booklets closer to the date of collection of names and addresses). In addition, very few (3%) young people who replied to the initial request for their participation in the study refused to take part.

The demographic characteristics of young people who responded to the questionnaire and who were interviewed are described in Appendix IV. In terms of age and gender, those who responded to the questionnaire booklet were representative of the study population. In view of the apparent mobility of young people in the study population, it is possible that the more mobile young people were less likely to respond.

### **Community Agencies**

The term "community agencies" includes government agencies, other than DSW, for example, Police and Probation Service, as well as non-government agencies which were working with young people in the community at the time the study was carried out. People from these agencies were interviewed to obtain information on young people who needed ICA. They were also interviewed because they might have acted as Youth Advocates and, thus, might be able to provide information on the ICA assessment process.

Community agencies were identified in several ways, including through Citizens' Advice Bureaux and through networking, using the personal contacts of members of the interview team and referrals from other community agencies. They were contacted by telephone, letter or in person. None of those who were asked for an interview refused.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with one or more representatives from 66 community agencies (where the same agencies were interviewed in different districts, for example, Probation Service in Auckland and in Whakatane, they are regarded as separate agencies). A list of agencies who participated in the study is included in Appendix V.

People from community agencies were asked about the young people they worked with, their knowledge of ICA, their knowledge of young people who had applied for ICA, their experience as Youth Advocates, their knowledge of young people who needed ICA but did not receive it, their knowledge of young people who lived at home in undesirable circumstances and their views on ICA. As for the interviews with young people, a detailed guide was prepared, along with "long" and "short" checklists. A copy of the detailed guide is included in Appendix III.

#### **District Office Social Workers**

Structured interviews were carried out with 17 social workers who work with young people. They were selected from a list of names of staff provided by a district office manager so as to include a mix of ethnicity and gender. Social workers were interviewed for similar reasons and were asked similar questions to community agencies. A copy of the interview guide for social workers is included in Appendix III.

#### **District Office Benefits Staff**

District office benefits staff were interviewed in order to obtain information on the administration of ICA at the district office level. Structured interviews were carried out with five reception staff and 26 interviewing officers across the six districts visited. Reception staff were not interviewed in two districts because it was considered by senior staff that useful information would not be obtained from them because of their limited role with young people. Appendix IV provides a description of their demographic characteristics. In addition, unstructured group interviews were carried out with 13 senior benefits staff in order to obtain an overview of the administration of ICA in each of the district offices visited.

Staff who were interviewed individually were selected in one of two ways. Some district office managers supplied only a relatively small list of names of staff, so all staff on the list were interviewed. For other offices, where a list of names of all the reception staff and interviewing officers involved in the administration of ICA was provided, interviewees were selected to obtain a mix of ethnicity and gender.

Reception staff were asked about their knowledge of ICA, training and information they had received on ICA, advertising of ICA in their office, their involvement with young people applying for unemployment benefit, and their views on ICA. A copy of the interview guide for reception staff is included in Appendix III.

Interviewing officers were asked about the interview process, use of Youth Advocates, the granting and declining of ICA, training and information received on ICA and their views on ICA. A copy of the interview guide for interviewing officers is included in Appendix III.

### **Data Analysis**

After categorisation of responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire booklets, a coding specification was prepared and the coded information from the questionnaires was entered onto a computer database. Five of the returned questionnaires were not entered onto the database because they were incomplete and two were not entered because they were not received until analysis of the questionnaires was almost complete. Thus, 747 questionnaires (532 from ICA recipients and 215 from Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home) were analysed. Frequencies and percentages of the coded responses to each of the questions were produced.

Information obtained from interviews was analysed by summarising, by categorising and by developing case studies.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESPONSES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE POSTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Introduction

This chapter of the report describes information obtained from the questionnaire booklets sent to young people. Two questionnaire booklets were used in the study. One was sent to recipients of ICA and the other to 16-17 year old recipients of Youth Allowance who were not living with their parents (referred to throughout this chapter as YA (Away from Home) respondents). Five hundred and thirty-two questionnaires were returned by ICA recipients and 215 by YA (Away from Home) recipients. This represents response rates of 45% and 46% respectively.

Information from the questionnaire booklets is presented under the following headings: provision of information, filter questions, Youth Allowance recipients not living at home, support persons, feedback on the application process, staff and other issues and a summary of the main themes.

As previously mentioned, an undertaking was given to respondents that "only our research team will read what you write down here." This was intended as a guarantee of confidentiality, but interpreted literally, meant that young people's responses were unable to be directly quoted. To enable the comments made by respondents to be used, they have been altered but in such a way as to retain the flavour of young people's responses as much as possible.

Responses to many of the questions in the questionnaire booklets were examined for differences with regard to a range of demographic characteristics. These included gender, ethnicity, age, rural/urban location and the highest form reached at school. There were no major differences in responses with regard to these characteristics.

Thirty respondents made favourable comments about the study. It should be noted that these were unsolicited. Some of these comments are presented below.

- \* *I think this is a great idea. I hope my answers help you so that you can help other 16-17 year olds to get a better deal.*
- \* *I hope this is of help to you. I know some of my comments aren't very nice but I was being honest.*
- \* *I have enjoyed doing this survey and in time to come I hope things change for the better, not only for myself but for others like me who are unemployed. I hope that this helps you. Thank you, it's nice to see people are taking more interest in young people.*

- \* *I'd like to say thanks for giving me the chance to write down how I feel, so thanks.*

### Provision of Information

This section discusses the information provided to young people by DSW. It includes whether they knew about ICA, how they found out about ICA and what information was given to them by Social Welfare when they applied for a benefit. Comments made by respondents on the provision of information, including suggestions as to the sorts of information that should be provided, and suggestions for how to inform young people about ICA, are also summarised. The relationship between the provision of information and how respondents felt about what happened at Social Welfare is investigated. The section concludes with a summary of the main findings related to the provision of information.

#### Prior Knowledge of ICA

Respondents were asked whether they knew about ICA before they were told about it in the questionnaire booklet. Table 3.1 shows their responses.

Table 3.1: Respondents' Prior Knowledge of ICA

Had Prior Knowledge	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Yes	54%	289	30%	65
No	44%	234	69%	148
Other/did not respond	<u>2%</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>2</u>
	100%	532	100%	215

Nearly half of the ICA respondents did not know about ICA, although they were more likely than YA (Away from Home) respondents to know about ICA. Some respondents specifically commented that they did not find out about ICA until they received the questionnaire booklet.

For those respondents who knew about ICA prior to receiving the questionnaire booklet, the most common way of learning about ICA was being told by DSW staff when they applied for the benefit.

#### Information Provided by Social Welfare

According to DSW Circular Memorandum 1988/164 Youth Allowance and Independent Circumstances Allowance, anyone who answered "no" to both filter questions ("Do you live at home with your parents?" and "Do you receive financial support from your parent(s)?") should have been referred to a specialist interviewer. The young person should have been told about ICA, their right to

a support person (Youth Advocate) and the availability of agencies which might be able to help them if they were worried or upset.

ICA respondents were more likely than YA (Away from Home) respondents to report being given information about ICA. Twenty-seven percent (141) of ICA respondents and 67% (143) of YA (Away from Home) respondents said that they were not told about ICA nor were they told they might be able to get \$109.79.

Most respondents (74% or 392 ICA respondents and 80% or 171 YA [Away from Home] respondents) said that they were not told that they could bring someone with them to help them apply for the benefit. Most respondents (78% or 416 ICA respondents and 85% or 183 YA [Away from Home] respondents) reported not being told about agencies which might be able to help them.

Respondents were also asked about other information they were given by Social Welfare. Less than one-third of the respondents reported receiving some other information and this was most commonly related to administration of the benefit: first payment date, reporting to the Labour Department, declaration forms and documentation (for example, identification, IRD number) needed to accompany their benefit application.

Several respondents who reported receiving very little or no information commented on the lack of information they received. For example, they said that they needed to ask for information from DSW staff or that they found out about the benefit from other people such as friends. Some said that they felt DSW staff were not very helpful.

Respondents were asked to indicate how they found out how much money they would get. Just over half of the respondents (53% or 280 ICA respondents and 53% or 114 YA [Away from Home] respondents) said that they were told how much money they would get when they applied for the benefit. The next most common methods were respondents being informed by a letter and/or when they went to the bank to withdraw their benefit payment. Although the most common way of being informed about how much money they would get was being told when they applied for the benefit, it should be noted that nearly half of the respondents reported that they did not find out this way. Also, a number of respondents (14) commented that they were told (usually verbally) that they would receive a particular amount but actually received a different amount (usually less).

Respondents were asked whether they received an accommodation benefit and, if they did, how much they received. Thirteen percent (97) of all respondents said that they did not know whether they were getting an accommodation benefit. Twelve percent (41) of all respondents who reported receiving an accommodation benefit did not know or could not remember the amount they were receiving.

#### Feedback on the Provision of Information

Comments made by respondents about the provision of information by Social Welfare were usually made in response to the question which asked about

suggested changes to make it easier for 16-17 year olds applying for the benefit. One hundred and thirty-eight respondents (18%) made negative comments about or suggested improvements to the provision of information.

Forty-three respondents suggested that more information should be provided but did not specify the sorts of information that should be provided. Other respondents specified the sorts of information that should be provided. The most common sorts of information they suggested are described below. Some respondents mentioned more than one sort of information.

#### Entitlements (68 respondents)

This category included respondents who asked for more information, usually about ICA. Some comments made by respondents are provided below.

- \* *I think that Social Welfare should have told me about ICA more because I didn't have a clue what they were talking about and didn't know what was going on.*
- \* *Tell more people about it. No one I knew about ICA so I explained it to them. There are many 16-17 year olds living in bad situations that could get out if they knew about ICA, but they don't.*
- \* *They should explain ICA and also accommodation benefit in full. Most people have no idea that such benefits are available. I didn't find out about them from Social Welfare, my flatmate told me.*
- \* *I think it would be a very good idea to provide a pamphlet like this [referring to questionnaire booklet] which explains how to apply for different benefits and what you're entitled to. It's easy to read and it's fun.*

#### How to Apply For the Benefit (24 respondents)

This category included respondents who would have liked to have been told about the documentation needed to accompany the benefit application, such as identification, bankbook and IRD number, before they went to Social Welfare to apply for the benefit.

- \* *When I applied for the benefit I had to ask my friends how to apply and where to go. I think that that kind of information should be made more clearly for unemployed persons.*
- \* *At first I was scared to go on the benefit because I didn't know how to.*
- \* *They could pin up a notice in the Social Welfare, informing people what you need ie. birth certificate, leaving certificate, etc to apply for the dole. It would mean I wouldn't have to go backwards and forwards between home and Social Welfare to get more information. And it would also save waiting in line.*

### Best Ways to Inform Young People about ICA

Respondents were asked about the best ways for Social Welfare to let 16-17 year olds know about ICA. The most common way suggested by respondents was by telling them either verbally (usually when they applied for the benefit) or on the Unemployment Benefit application form. About one-third of respondents suggested that ICA should be advertised (usually by pamphlets). Other relatively common suggestions included informing young people about ICA through schools and/or by sending information to young people. Several respondents made more than one suggestion.

#### Tell Them When They Apply (246 or 33% of respondents)

The most commonly suggested method of informing young people about ICA suggested was telling young people when they apply for the benefit.

- \* *They should be told all about it when they apply for the benefit. This would be better than just getting forms to be filled in and passed on to the next person. It is pretty frightening.*
- \* *Just to tell them when they apply for it, like they did with me. I didn't know about it until they told me and they made sure I understood everything, such as why I was receiving it.*

#### Tell Them (115 or 15% of respondents)

Many respondents just said "tell them" and did not specify when they should be told. Several respondents made specific comments about how young people should be told, for example, "clearly", "simply", "thoroughly".

- \* *Explain ICA to them using simple words so that 16-17 year olds like me can understand.*
- \* *Please talk to us about ICA and make sure we know about it and understand it.*

Many respondents (63) suggested telling young people verbally in conjunction with providing pamphlets.

#### Pamphlets (151 or 20% of respondents)

This category included eleven respondents who suggested that a booklet similar to the questionnaire booklet should be available. Others (9) commented that pamphlets should be easy to understand.

- \* *Have pamphlets which are easy to understand and are easily located.*
- \* *Booklets with pictures and diagrams, something that is understandable.*



- \* *When they apply give them a pamphlet about ICA which is written in a simple way that they can understand.*

#### Posters and Notices (50 respondents)

Many respondents identified specific places to put posters/notices. The most common of these was in Social Welfare offices.

#### Advertise in Media (38 respondents)

The most common media suggested by respondents were television (23) and the newspaper (11).

- \* *Put an ad on TV because most unemployed people a lot of TV.*
- \* *By advertising like they did on the programme Life in the Fridge Exists; that way when you go to Social Welfare you know what you may or may not be eligible for.*

#### Send Information to Young People (83 or 11% of respondents)

Suggestions from respondents included sending letters and pamphlets to young people and information with the monthly declaration form.

#### Schools (68 respondents)

Suggestions from respondents included making pamphlets available at schools, a representative from Social Welfare visiting schools to talk to young people and school guidance counsellors/careers advisors informing young people about ICA.

- \* *Social Welfare should visit schools and give talks about what you should do if you should become unemployed.*
- \* *There should be a Social Welfare person going into schools and telling them that this benefit is available for those who leave school and cannot find a job.*
- \* *Guidance counsellors should have relevant information as a first visit to Social Welfare can be unnerving.*

#### Relationship Between Provision of Information and Respondents' Feelings About What Happened at Social Welfare

Responses were analysed to find out if young people who were provided with information were more likely to report positive feelings about the application process (see Appendix VI). Respondents who were provided with information were generally more likely to report positive than negative feelings about what happened at Social Welfare. This result needs to be interpreted with some caution, particularly as more than half of the respondents reported "mixed"

feelings about what happened at Social Welfare, regardless of the information they were given.

### Summary

Nearly half of the ICA respondents and over two-thirds of YA (Away from Home) respondents reported that they did not know about ICA. The most common source of information about ICA was Social Welfare. ICA respondents were more likely than YA (Away from Home) respondents to have been told about ICA. Relatively few respondents, reported being told they could bring someone with them to help them apply for the benefit and about the availability of agencies which might be able to help them if they were worried or upset. Less than one-third of respondents reported receiving other information from Social Welfare and this information was most commonly related to the administration of the benefit. Whilst just over half of the respondents found out how much money they would receive when they applied for the benefit, a considerable proportion did not find out how much money they would get until they received a letter and/or went to the bank. Many respondents said either that they did not know whether they were getting an accommodation benefit or that they did not know the amount they were getting.

Nearly one-fifth of respondents either made negative comments about or suggested improvements to the provision of information. The most common sorts of information that respondents specified should be provided were information about entitlements and information about how to apply for the benefit, including documentation needed to accompany the benefit application. The most commonly suggested ways to inform young people about ICA were: telling them, such as when they apply for the benefit or on the application form; advertising, such as pamphlets; sending information to young people and through schools. Respondents who were provided with information were more likely to express positive feelings about what happened at Social Welfare when they applied for the benefit.

### **Filter Questions**

DSW Circular Memorandum 1988/164 Youth Allowance and Independent Circumstances Allowance, stated that 16-17 year olds should have been asked two filter questions to identify those not living with their parent(s)/guardian and not receiving any financial assistance from their parent(s)/guardian. The filter questions were "Do you live at home with your parents?" and "Do you receive financial support from your parent(s)?"

The wording of these questions in the questionnaire booklets was changed to enhance their clarity for respondents. Respondents were asked to indicate whether, when they went to Social Welfare to apply for their benefit, they were asked if they lived with their parent(s) and if their parent(s) helped them with their living costs. Their responses are presented in Table 3.2.

Most respondents reported that they were asked the filter question about whether they lived with their parent(s). Considerably fewer respondents reported having been asked whether their parent(s) helped them with their living costs. However, ICA respondents were more likely to have been asked this filter question than YA (Away from Home) respondents.

**Table 3.2: Whether Respondents Were Asked the Filter Questions**

Were Respondents Asked	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Live with parent(s)/guardian?				
Yes	83%	442	77%	165
No	11%	58	14%	31
Could not remember	6%	32	7%	14
Did not respond/other	<u>0%</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2%</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	215
Parent(s)/guardian help with living costs?				
Yes	60%	321	42%	91
No	30%	158	49%	105
Could not remember	9%	48	8%	18
Did not respond/other	<u>1%</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	532	99%*	215

\* rounding error

Note: "Other" includes respondents who ticked both "yes" and "no" boxes.

Both ICA and YA (Away from Home) respondents should have been asked both filter questions. There may be respondents who were asked the filter questions, do not remember this happening and therefore reported that they were not asked. However, there is no obvious reason why the YA (Away from Home) respondents would have a poorer recollection of the questions than did the ICA respondents. It appears that fewer YA (Away from Home) respondents were asked the filter questions. It seems probable that those not asked the filter questions would be less likely to be assessed for and receive ICA.

### Youth Allowance Recipients Not Living at Home

This section presents information from the questionnaire booklets specifically related to YA (Away from Home) recipients. It reports on whether they had been assessed for ICA and, if so, what happened. It also reports on whether YA (Away from Home) respondents appeared to be eligible for ICA. Finally, the main findings from this section are summarised.

#### Assessment for ICA

YA (Away from Home) respondents were asked whether they had ever applied for ICA or been interviewed by a Social Welfare staff member to see if they could get it. Table 3.3 shows their responses to this question.

Table 3.3: Whether YA (Away from Home) Respondents Had Applied For or Been Interviewed for ICA

Whether Applied/Interviewed	YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n
Yes	21%	46
Not sure	7%	16
No	69%	149
Did not respond	<u>2%</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	99%*	215

\* rounding error

Most YA (Away from Home) respondents said they had not applied for or been interviewed for ICA. Results from this question need to be interpreted with some caution, however. Young people do not usually apply for ICA, rather they are assessed for ICA at the time they apply for unemployment benefit. Respondents may not have known that they were being assessed for ICA unless they were told about ICA during their unemployment benefit interview and it seems that many were not (see Provision of Information p.14). Seven respondents who reported that they had not applied for or been interviewed for ICA, wrote down that they had not known about ICA until they received the questionnaire booklet.

Respondents who reported that they had, or were not sure whether they had, applied for or been interviewed for ICA were asked what happened at Social Welfare and whether they were granted ICA or not. Few respondents provided a detailed response to this question. Of those who did provide some detail, the

most common response was that they were told by Social Welfare staff that they could not get ICA because they could live at home, that their parents could support them or that their reason for leaving home was not good enough. Six of the nine respondents who said one of these things, wrote that they could not live at home.

#### Eligibility for ICA

The questionnaire asked YA (Away from Home) respondents the two filter questions, namely who they lived with and whether their parents helped them with their living costs. They were also asked for their personal views as to whether they thought they could get ICA. Respondents who thought they might be eligible or were unsure if they were eligible were also asked about why they had not applied for ICA. For ethical reasons, they were not asked to identify the eligibility criteria which matched their circumstances.

About three-quarters (164 or 76% of respondents) reported that they did not live with their parent(s) and that they did not receive any help from their parent(s) with their living costs. Responses to the question about whether respondents thought they could get ICA are presented in Table 3.4. Almost half of the YA (Away from Home) respondents thought that they could get ICA. Relatively few reported that they thought they could not get ICA.

Table 3.4: Whether YA (Away from Home) Respondents Thought They Could Get ICA

Thought They Could Get ICA	Percent	n
Yes	49%	106
No	11%	24
Not sure	36%	77
Did not respond	<u>4%</u>	<u>8</u>
Total	100%	215

Note: Eight respondents who reported that they thought they could get ICA and one who reported that they were not sure whether they could get ICA, appeared to be receiving ICA ie. said they were already getting ICA.

Respondents' views about their eligibility for ICA were compared with whether they were potentially eligible for ICA, that is, whether they reported that they did not live with parent(s) and did not receive help with their living costs from them. This comparison of respondents' views about their eligibility for ICA and the researchers' assessment of their potential eligibility was meant as a way of finding out whether there were young people who might be missing out on ICA. It was

not meant as a measure of staff competence in assessing potential ICA recipients. It is recognised that the comparison is unlikely to provide an accurate figure for the proportion of young people missing out on ICA. There may be other reasons for respondents not receiving ICA, such as reluctance on the part of young people to provide information which was considered private and not understanding the questions asked by DSW staff (see Feedback on Application Process p.29 and Feedback on Staff p.34). However, it is considered that the comparison provides some indication of the proportion of young people who might be missing out on ICA.

Of all YA (Away from Home) respondents, 43% (92) thought that they were eligible for ICA and appeared to the researchers to be potentially eligible for ICA. YA (Away from Home) respondents who reported that they thought they could get ICA or were not sure whether they could get ICA were asked to indicate why they had not applied for ICA. They were asked to select from a list of eight possible reasons. Table 3.5 shows frequencies and percentages for each response category.

Table 3.5: YA (Away from Home) Respondents' Reasons for Not Applying for ICA

Reason	YA (Away from Home) (N=177)	
	Percent	n
Didn't know about ICA	66%	116
Don't like going to Social Welfare	6%	11
Too much hassle	6%	10
Did apply but not granted	5%	9
Reason for needing ICA not listed in introduction to booklet	3%	5
Did know about ICA, but didn't know how to apply	2%	3
Don't want to talk about why I could get ICA	2%	3
Did know about ICA but didn't think I could get it	1%	1
Other	5%	8
Ambiguous responses	19%	34
Did not respond	1%	1

Note: Some respondents provided more than one response, thus percentages do not sum to 100%. "Ambiguous responses" refers to responses where it is not clear exactly what the respondent meant eg. boxes ticked provide contradictory statements or are not consistent with responses to related questions. "Other" responses includes "difficulty getting to District Office because of cost of transport" and "not wanting to upset parents by asking them to sign forms". Three respondents who reported that they "didn't know about ICA" did not respond to the question about whether they thought they could get ICA. Nine respondents appear to be receiving ICA. Their responses are not included.

Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they did not apply for ICA because they "didn't know about ICA". Relatively few respondents selected any of the other reasons for not applying for ICA.

Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they did not apply for ICA because they "didn't know about ICA". Relatively few respondents selected any of the other reasons for not applying for ICA.

### Summary

Most YA (Away from Home) respondents reported that they had not applied for or been interviewed for ICA. It should be noted that young people were usually assessed for ICA as part of the process of applying for the unemployment benefit, so unless they were told about ICA (and it appears that many were not) during this process, it is unlikely that they would have realised that they were being assessed for ICA.

Most respondents reported that they did not live with their parent(s) and that they did not receive any help with their living costs from them. Most respondents thought either that they could get ICA or that they might be able to get ICA. Forty-three percent of the respondents thought that they could get ICA and appeared to be potentially eligible for ICA. The most common reason provided by respondents for not applying for ICA was that they did not know about it.

### **Support Persons**

This section presents information about people who accompanied young people to Social Welfare when they applied for their benefit. They are referred to throughout this section as "support persons". The questions asked of respondents attempted to obtain information about the use of Youth Advocates as they are an important feature of the ICA programme. According to DSW Circular Memorandum 1988/164 Youth Allowance and Independent Circumstances Allowance, the purpose of a Youth Advocate was to provide personal support for the young person and verification by way of a statement to confirm that the application was valid in terms of the criteria. The ICA Module Book (produced by the Clerical and Technical Services Training Unit) stated that the purpose of a Youth Advocate was to provide support for the client and provide verification of the applicant's situation.

It was considered unlikely, however, that respondents would be familiar with the term "Youth Advocate", consequently questions were worded in terms of "bringing someone with you to help you apply for the benefit". Respondents were asked whether they took a support person with them to Social Welfare when they applied for their benefit and, if they did, to describe this person and their role, including whether this person helped explain why the young person was applying for the benefit (implies they acted as a Youth Advocate), whether it helped to have someone with them and how it helped.

### Use of Support Person

Table 3.6 shows responses to the question about whether respondents took someone with them to help them apply for the benefit.

Table 3.6: Use of Support Person

Support Person Present	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Yes	47%	248	43%	92
No	52%	278	56%	120
Did not respond	<u>1%</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	215

Just under half of all respondents took a support person with them when they applied for the benefit. This was despite about three-quarters of all respondents reporting that they were not told that they could take someone with them to help them apply for the benefit (see Provision of Information p.14).

#### Description of Support Person

Respondents who had taken someone with them were asked who this person was. Table 3.7 shows the responses to this question. Options provided were the five categories in the table below and a "teacher" option which no one selected. If "someone else" was ticked, respondents were asked to specify who this was.

Table 3.7: Description of Support Person

Description	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Relative/whanau member	58%	144	55%	51
Friend	28%	69	37%	34
Social worker	5%	12	2%	2
Community group person	1%	3	0%	0
Someone else	<u>8%</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>5%</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100%	248	99%*	92

\* rounding error

Note: "Someone else" included a guardian and person with whom the young person was boarding.

Over half of the respondents who took someone with them to DSW said that they took a relative or whanau member. Sometimes the particular relationship was specified even though this was not asked for. About 10% of both ICA and YA (Away from Home) respondents volunteered that they took a parent, a similar proportion mentioned taking a sibling, and 4% mentioned aunts or uncles. YA (Away from Home) respondents were somewhat more likely than ICA respondents to select a friend as a support person.



### Role of Support Person

Respondents who took a support person with them to Social Welfare were asked if that person helped explain to Social Welfare why they were applying for the benefit. Their responses are shown in Table 3.8. This question was designed to find out whether or not the support person acted as a Youth Advocate. It is difficult to know how accurate an indication this question gives, as the person may well have helped explain matters to Social Welfare staff without providing official verification for the purposes of ICA.

About two-thirds of all respondents reported that their support person helped explain why they were applying for the benefit. ICA respondents were more likely than YA (Away from Home) respondents to say that the support person acted in this role.

Table 3.8: Whether Support Person Helped Explain Respondents' Reason for Application

Helped Explain Reason for Application	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Yes	76%	189	64%	59
No	21%	53	34%	31
Other/did not respond	<u>2%</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2%</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	99%*	248	100%	92

\* rounding error

Note: "Other" includes respondents who ticked both "yes" and "no" boxes.

Even though support persons may have helped explain why the young person was applying for the benefit, some of these people may not have been acceptable as Youth Advocates in terms of providing official verification. DSW Circular Memorandum 1988/164 Youth Allowance and Independent Circumstances Allowance, includes examples of people who might act as Youth Advocates and these include teachers, relatives and social workers. It appears that a Youth Advocate was intended to be someone older than 16 or 17. About one-third of the respondents described the person who accompanied them as a "friend" (see Table 3.7), thus, many of them may have been of a similar age to the respondent. However, as more than half of the respondents said that they took a relative or whanau member with them, it appears that the use of Youth Advocates in the ICA programme builds on something that many young people already do, that is, take someone with them to Social Welfare who could act as a Youth Advocate.

Those who took a support person with them were asked whether it helped to have someone with them. Table 3.9 shows their responses.

**Table 3.9: Whether it Helped Respondents to Have a Support Person**

Whether it Helped	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Yes	90%	222	80%	74
No	7%	18	17%	16
Other/did not respond	3%	8	3%	2
Total	100%	248	100%	92

**Note:** "Other" includes respondents who ticked both "yes" and "no" boxes.

Most respondents said that having a support person helped. ICA respondents were somewhat more likely than were YA (Away from Home) respondents to say it helped to have a support person with them.

Those who said it helped to have a support person with them were asked how it helped. Their responses are shown in Table 3.10.

**Table 3.10: How Support Person Helped**

Type of Help	ICA (N=223)		YA (Away from Home) (N=74)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Provided moral support	33%	74	32%	24
Explained things to young person	20%	44	23%	17
Told young person what to expect	11%	25	18%	13
Backed up what young person said	15%	34	7%	5
Helped fill out forms and answer questions	7%	15	11%	8
Other	18%	40	19%	14

**Note:** Some respondents provided more than one response, thus percentages do not sum to 100%. "Other" includes non-specific help. The number of ICA respondents who responded to this question is one more than the number who said it helped to have a support person because this respondent ticked both "yes" and "no" boxes in response to the earlier question (see Table 3.9).

The most common sorts of help that respondents described were categorised as "provided moral support", followed by "explained things to young person". The third most common category for ICA respondents was "backed up what young person said", while this was the least common category for YA (Away from Home) respondents. The following are some examples of the comments made by respondents.

### Provided Moral Support

- \* *Made me feel more relaxed.*
- \* *It gave me confidence.*
- \* *Moral support. Social Welfare can be a pretty scary place.*
- \* *I didn't feel so alone and embarrassed.*
- \* *It made it easier to talk.*

### Explained Things to Young Person

- \* *Helped me to understand what they were saying to me.*
- \* *I can't read all that well and I need someone to explain things to me. Because if there was anything I wasn't sure of then there was someone there that I could ask.*

### Backed Up What Young Person Said

This category included people who spoke for the young person. It was not always clear from respondents' comments whether their support person acted as a Youth Advocate by verifying the young person's circumstances. However, those comments which most strongly indicated that the support person acted in the role of a Youth Advocate were included in this category.

- \* *She talked to them because I don't understand things easily.*
- \* *Just to tell Social Welfare that I was telling the truth.*
- \* *She explained why I needed the benefit.*

### Told Young Person What to Expect

This category included support persons who told young people how to apply for the benefit. Many of them appeared to have applied for a benefit themselves.

- \* *Because I was told what to expect before I got there.*
- \* *They showed me where to go and what to do.*

### Summary

As it was considered unlikely that many young people would be familiar with the term "Youth Advocate", respondents were asked about support persons or people they took with them when they applied for the benefit. Just under half of the respondents said that they took a support person with them. This was despite many reporting that they were not told that they could take someone with them.

More than half of the respondents described their support person as a relative or whanau member. Thus, it appears that the policy of using Youth Advocates builds on something which occurs already.

Most respondents said that their support person helped explain why they were applying for the benefit. It is unclear, however, whether this meant that they acted officially as a Youth Advocate. Most respondents reported that having a support person helped them. The most common types of help support persons provided were moral support and explaining things to the young person.

### Feedback on Application Process

This section reports on respondents' views about the application process, including suggestions for improvements. Their views on the privacy of their interview and how they felt about what happened when they went to Social Welfare are presented. The section also identifies those aspects of the application process which were most commonly commented on by respondents. These included positive comments as well as problems with waiting time, the complexity of the application process, the number and nature of questions asked during the application process and documentation, such as identification, needed to receive the benefit. It should be noted that respondents were not asked to comment specifically on these aspects of the application process, rather this information was volunteered. The section concludes with a summary of the main findings related to feedback on the application process.

#### Privacy of Interview

Respondents were asked if they had an interview in a private place so no one else could hear. Responses to this question are shown in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11: Privacy of the ICA Interview

Interview Held in Private Place	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Yes	68%	362	66%	41
No	25%	133	26%	16
Did not have an interview	5%	25	5%	3
Other/did not respond	<u>2%</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3%</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	62

Note: Only the YA (Away from Home) respondents who answered "yes" or "not sure" when asked whether or not they had applied or been interviewed for ICA were included in this table (as those who responded "no" were not asked to respond to the question on privacy of their interview). "Other" responses includes respondents who ticked both "yes" and "no" boxes.

ICA and YA (Away from Home) respondents responded very similarly to the question concerning privacy. Approximately two-thirds said they had been interviewed in a private place, and one-quarter said they had not.

Some respondents (9) commented on the lack of privacy of their interview.

- \* *I was nervous because where I was interviewed, there were people all around us who could hear everything we were talking about. This made it hard for me to answer some questions.*
- \* *There are no private rooms so everyone finds everything out about you. When they are interviewed they should be in a room where no one else can hear what is being said.*

### Feelings About What Happened at Social Welfare

Respondents were asked how they felt about what happened when they went to Social Welfare. Table 3.12 shows their responses.

Table 3.12: Respondents' Feelings About What Happened at Social Welfare

Feeling	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Good	22%	117	18%	39
In Between	57%	303	55%	119
Bad	18%	97	25%	53
Did not respond	<u>3%</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>2%</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	215

Note: Respondents who explained how they felt or described their experience and did not tick a box had their responses categorised according to whether they could best be described as "good", "in between" or "bad". Respondents whose ticked box response differed from their explained response, in terms of whether it was categorised as "good", "in between" or "bad", had only their ticked box response included in the table.

More than half of the respondents indicated that they felt "in between" about what happened when they went to Social Welfare. Similar proportions of ICA and YA (Away from Home) respondents indicated that they felt "good" or "bad" about what happened. For respondents who ticked either the "good" or "bad" boxes and explained their response, the comments they made tended to reflect the box ticked. One hundred and forty-three respondents who ticked the "in between" box explained their response. Just over three-quarters (76%) made negative comments.

Respondents who expressed positive feelings about the application process used words like "relief" (those who explained this feeling seemed relieved that they were going to receive some assistance), "good", "glad" and "relaxed". More specific comments were usually related to staff (see Feedback on Staff p.34) or to the benefit providing respondents with money to live (see Feedback on Other Issues p.38).

Respondents who expressed negative feelings about the application process used words like "nervous", "confused", "shy", "guilty", "degraded", "angry", and "scared".

- \* *I am one of the many people I know of who have left Social Welfare no happier than when I went in and if anything I came out more angry and frustrated.*
- \* *Even though I had been to Social Welfare before I still felt uneasy about what was happening.*
- \* *I was a bit scared I'd say something wrong.*
- \* *I don't know why but you just feel bad every time you go in there.*

Many respondents who expressed negative feelings gave reasons for why they felt that way. Some said that they did not like the way they were treated by staff or that they did not understand what was happening when they went to Social Welfare. Others said that they were "mucked around" or that they had to wait at Social Welfare for long periods of time. Some thought that they were asked too many or too personal questions. Some respondents said that they did not like what happened at Social Welfare because they had to wait a long time for the benefit to be paid or that the benefit was inadequate or that they preferred to work. Some respondents mentioned more than one of these issues. These issues are dealt with in more detail later in this section and in the sections which follow.

### Positive Comments

About one-fifth of respondents indicated that they felt "good" about what happened at Social Welfare (see Table 3.12). Positive comments about the application process were usually made in response to the question which asked young people what things Social Welfare could change to make it easier for young people applying for the benefit. Fifty-one (7%) respondents indicated that it was relatively easy to apply for the benefit. Their comments tended to be general.

- \* *I think it's fine how it is.*
- \* *It's not that hard to do at the moment, so why should you change it.*
- \* *Everything is pretty straightforward.*

Some (13) respondents commented that it was relatively easy to apply for the benefit because staff had made it easy (see Feedback on Staff p.34).

### Waiting Time/Being "Mucked Around"

The most common aspect of the application process commented on by respondents was the amount of time spent waiting at Social Welfare or the "mucking around", for example, having to make more than one visit to Social Welfare, in order to apply for the benefit. One hundred and two (14%) respondents commented on this aspect of the application process. Some (21) respondents reported how long they spent waiting at Social Welfare. The times given ranged from half an hour to five and a half hours and was usually between two and four hours.

- \* *I found the waiting around unbearable. I waited two hours just to speak to someone.*
- \* *I was told that when I have my birth certificate and bankbook then I could come back. This was after 5½ hours waiting.*
- \* *Social Welfare should have more workers because it can take about 3 or 4 hours or more just waiting for a 5 minute interview.*
- \* *When an appointment is made staff should be on time so we do not have to wait and waste very important job hunting time.*
- \* *I was really mad because when I went to apply I was mucked around. I had given them everything I needed to but they lost most of them from my file. I was then told to go and get all these things again before I could get the benefit.*
- \* *They messed me around a lot because they kept forgetting to give me certain forms to fill in.*

Suggestions for improvements related to waiting time included employing more staff and having things to occupy people while they waited.

### Complexity of the Application Process

Fifty-nine (8%) respondents commented on the complexity of the application process. This category included respondents who said they had difficulty completing the application forms and those who suggested that there should be fewer forms, that forms should be simplified or that help to fill out the forms should be provided. It also included respondents (8) who suggested that Social Welfare and Department of Labour offices should be co-located.

- \* *It was hard for me to do fill out the forms by myself. I had to bring a friend with me to help.*
- \* *They could make it easier by not getting us to fill in so many forms because it is quite confusing especially if you're on your own and you've never done it before.*

- \* *Help with forms as some of us can't read or write.*
- \* *Explain everything on the forms that we have to fill out because some of the questions are confusing.*

#### Number and Nature of Questions Asked

Twenty-nine (4%) respondents commented that they were asked too many questions or that the questions asked were too personal.

- \* *I didn't like answering really personal questions about family and myself. That was upsetting.*
- \* *It's a bit nerve-racking to talk about personal things to someone you don't know.*
- \* *I didn't know what to think as I had to wait for a while which made me scared as well as heaps of people asking questions.*
- \* *I feel like I'm on trial every time I go to them for help.*

#### Documentation Needed to Receive the Benefit

Twenty-four (3%) respondents commented on difficulties associated with obtaining the documentation needed to receive the benefit, such as identification (particularly as more than one form of identification is required) and a bank account number or suggested that fewer forms of identification be required.

- \* *I was asked to provide two separate forms of identification. I did not have anything apart from my birth certificate. I am too young for credit cards. They would not even accept my bank book.*
- \* *I was kicked out of home. My parents had all my money. I was not able to get into my parents' house to get the identification needed to apply.*
- \* *I had to produce my birth certificate and bankbook before I could get the benefit which was hard because I had no money at the time.*
- \* *I had to borrow \$2 from a friend to open a bank account.*

#### Summary

About two-thirds of the respondents who indicated that they were interviewed for ICA reported having a private interview. Over half of the respondents reported mixed feelings about what happened at Social Welfare. Several respondents made positive comments about the application process. However, considerably more respondents made negative comments. The most common negative comment was that long periods of time were spent waiting at Social Welfare or that respondents felt that they had been "mucked around". Other negative comments included that the application process was complex, for example, that there were too many forms



and they were difficult to complete; that respondents were asked too many or too personal questions; and that documentation needed to receive the benefit was often difficult to obtain.

### Feedback on Staff

This section describes young people's understanding of DSW staff and whether this was related to how they felt about the application process. Several questions in the questionnaire booklets, in addition to the specific question about young people's understanding of DSW staff, prompted comments about staff. These included the questions about how respondents felt about the application process, suggestions for improvements to make it easier for young people applying for the benefit and the final question, which asked respondents to write down anything else they wanted to say regarding the benefit. Comments about staff made in response to this range of questions are presented in terms of positive and negative comments. The section concludes with a summary of the main findings with regard to feedback on staff.

#### Young People's Understanding of DSW Staff

Respondents were asked how easy it was to understand the people they spoke with. Their responses are shown in Table 3.13.

Table 3.13: Respondents' Ease of Understanding of DSW Staff

	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Easy	36%	194	35%	75
Some bits easy, some bits hard	55%	294	53%	115
Hard	8%	40	9%	19
Other/did not respond	1%	4	3%	6
Total	100%	532	100%	215

**Note:** Respondents who explained their level of understanding and did not tick a box had their responses coded according to whether they could best be described as "easy", "some bits easy, some bits hard" or "hard". Respondents whose ticked box response differed from their explained response, had only their ticked box response included in the table.

There was little difference between ICA and YA (Away from Home) respondents with regard to how well they understood DSW staff. Over one-third described DSW staff as easy to understand. Over half gave a mixed response ("some bits easy, some bits hard"). Less than 10% described staff as hard to understand. Respondents who ticked "easy" or "hard" and explained their response, nearly always commented in a way that reflected the ticked response. Eighty-four respondents who ticked the "some bits easy, some bits hard" box explained their response. Over three-quarters (79%) of them made negative comments.

Some typical positive comments were:

- \* *They explained things very well.*
- \* *If there was anything that I didn't understand Social Welfare would explain it.*

Some typical negative comments were:

- \* *The interviewer spoke too fast.*
- \* *They were using words I didn't understand very well.*

Seventy-nine (11%) respondents commented that they did not understand what DSW staff said to them in response to other questions.

- \* *I felt uneasy while I was there even though the person who came with me did most of the talking. I was confused about what was going on most of the time. They should have asked me whether I understood or not rather than assuming that I did understand, just because it is a routine thing for them.*
- \* *It's a very terrifying experience because you're all confused when you actually have the interview and you sometimes don't understand what the interviewer is talking about. But you end up making out that you do know because you're ashamed to say "Sorry I didn't understand that, can you explain it please". Because you're thinking the interviewer could be thinking you shouldn't have left school if you don't understand them.*
- \* *Applying for a benefit is confusing. When I went I was told I had to standdown for 6 weeks then come back. All I asked for was a form to fill in to apply. I wasn't given a form, I was just told to come back in 6 weeks which I did. Then I was asked why I hadn't applied earlier.*

Several respondents suggested improvements in this area.

- \* *Come down to a 16-17 year old level. Explain things in an easier way instead of using big words.*
- \* *Explain things in plain English so that you don't end up more confused when you walk out than what you were when you walked in.*
- \* *They could explain the situation a bit better rather than giving them a whole lot of forms.*

### Relationship Between Ease of Understanding of DSW Staff and Respondents' Feelings About What Happened at Social Welfare

Responses were analysed to find out if young people who reported understanding DSW staff were more likely to report positive feelings about the application process. Respondents who reported that people at Social Welfare were easy to understand were considerably more likely to report positive than negative feelings about what happened at Social Welfare (see Appendix VI). Also, more than half of the respondents who said that staff were "hard" to understand, reported negative feelings about the application process. It should be noted, however, that a relatively small number of respondents said that they found DSW staff hard to understand.

It should also be noted that a considerable proportion of respondents reported "mixed" feelings about what happened at Social Welfare, despite finding it easy to understand the people at Social Welfare, and that a relatively small number of respondents said that they found DSW staff hard to understand.

#### Positive Comments

Sixty-four (9%) respondents made positive comments about staff (this includes the 13 respondents who commented that staff made it easy for them to apply for the benefit, see Feedback on Application Process p.29).

- \* *They're great! They are there to help and that's exactly what they did. I hated the thought of being on the dole, but Social Welfare made me realise that it isn't that bad and that it gives you ample opportunity to look for employment.*
- \* *I felt good because when I went there I felt like it was a bad thing to do but the man there made it clear that it wasn't my fault that I couldn't get a job and that they were just helping until I could find a job.*
- \* *They made me feel relaxed and confident so that I was able to answer questions more easily.*
- \* *Most people were nice and explained things step by step.*

A further seven respondents made "mixed" comments about one staff person or commented positively about some staff and negatively about others.

#### Negative Comments

Two hundred and fifty-two (34%) respondents (including the 79 respondents who commented that they did not understand what DSW staff said to them) made negative comments or suggested improvements related to staff. Comments were usually about the personal qualities of staff, including that they lacked empathy with young people.

### Personal Qualities

One hundred and ninety-nine (27%) respondents made negative comments about a range of personal qualities demonstrated by staff. These included being "rude", "unhelpful", "unfriendly", "judgmental" and lacking "understanding" of the situations young people were in. Staff's lack of understanding or empathy is dealt with separately below because a relatively large number of respondents commented on this aspect.

- \* *It was degrading. The people were so unkind and treated you as though you were inferior to them. Some of us have no choice about being on the benefit. I hate being on it. But I have to if I want to survive.*
- \* *Most treat you as if you were a statistic! I didn't go on the benefit to abuse the system, I was made to feel guilty for not being able to find work!*
- \* *Because I had an interviewer who was most rude. I already felt guilty about applying for the benefit and she made many rude and uncalled for remarks.*
- \* *She treated me like dirt and she really made me lose my confidence. All she seemed to be doing was looking around. I felt like I shouldn't have been there. She also told my friend who had come with me to give me confidence to leave us alone.*
- \* *When I was applying for my benefit I felt as though I was being interrogated. I was asked really personal questions about my home circumstances and I felt like they didn't believe me and thought I was lying. Then when I went down to the actual office I was asked questions and the person's attitude was that "we've had your case before and I don't believe a word you're saying." So I really felt like dirt. I think they should believe in the people who apply. It's not easy and they make it worse.*

A number of respondents suggested improvements related to personal qualities of staff.

- \* *More friendlier and helpful. It's not my fault I'm unemployed so shouldn't be made to feel ashamed.*
- \* *I think Social Welfare should care more about helping people get on the dole if they need to, and treat them a bit nicer not like we just want to take your money and go to the pub. When I went they treated me like I was some kind of poor dumb person and did not help me much to fill out forms.*
- \* *Be more polite, treat us like people not kids or people that have done wrong.*

### Empathy

Seventy-five (10%) respondents made negative comments about staff which suggested that staff lacked empathy, particularly for the personal circumstances of young people aged 16-17 years. Many comments referred to staff behaving

towards young people in a particular way because of the age of the young people, including staff not listening to what young people had to say.

- \* *I felt uneasy because to me they seemed so cold and I felt that they didn't understand me or my needs at that time.*
- \* *I have found Social Welfare very reluctant to help me, probably because of my age, unless I really push it or make my situation out to be worse than it is. I would rather be working than on a benefit and wish that Social Welfare would take this into account when I am forced to go to them for help.*
- \* *Being so young I felt uncomfortable. I felt like I was treated like a ball, something to throw around more or less.*

A number of respondents suggested ways in which staff could be more empathic. These included staff listening to what young people had to say and having younger interviewers who would be more likely to understand a young person's situation.

- \* *Not to be too personal and to listen and trust us. It is hard enough telling them some things for them to act as if we were lying.*
- \* *They should let you finish your sentences rather than telling us the facts. A lot of the time 16-17 year olds are just scared kids. Social Welfare should try to be a friend not an enemy.*
- \* *I think that Social Welfare is doing a good job already but I always have an underlying feeling of guilt for going on the benefit. We shouldn't have to feel guilty, the pressure of not having a job is bad enough. A little more understanding all around would be nice.*
- \* *By having younger interviewers who know how we feel because I felt nervous and most uncomfortable being at Social Welfare.*

### Summary

Almost two-thirds of the respondents reported experiencing some difficulty understanding Social Welfare staff. Several respondents suggested that staff needed to explain things in a clear and simple way. Respondents who found staff easy to understand were more likely to report positive feelings about what happened at Social Welfare. Whilst several respondents made positive comments about staff, many more made negative comments. Their comments were usually related to the personal qualities of staff, including that they lacked empathy with young people.

### **Feedback on Other Issues**

This section identifies issues which appear to be of some concern to respondents and which have not been covered in earlier sections of this chapter. These issues tend to have been raised in response to the final question in the questionnaire

booklet which asked respondents to write down anything else they wanted to say about what happened when they went to apply for the benefit, or what it was like being on the benefit. These issues included how young people felt about being on the benefit, the adequacy of the benefit, problems with administration of the benefit and employment related issues.

### Feelings about Being on the Benefit

Respondents were more likely to report negative feelings about being on the benefit than positive feelings. Fifty-eight (8%) respondents made positive comments about being on the benefit. Many respondents who expressed positive feelings about being on the benefit, commented that it was because they had received financial assistance. Several respondents made general comments like it was "OK" and "alright" being on the benefit.

- \* *Being on the benefit has given me a sense of independence, freedom if you like. If I budget right I can get or have most things I need.*
- \* *I think it is really good to know that if you don't work or your parents don't or can't help you out with money at least your cared for being on the benefit.*
- \* *If it wasn't for the benefit I would probably be living on the streets.*

Another 28 (4%) respondents expressed mixed feelings about being on the benefit.

- \* *It's OK being on the benefit for a little while but I'd rather be working.*
- \* *The assistance the benefit provides is appreciated, however, I don't like not having worked for the money.*
- \* *Sometimes being on the benefit is OK but most of the time it's boring.*
- \* *It's nothing to be proud of but it helps me to survive.*

Twice as many respondents (116 or 16%) made negative comments about being on the benefit as made positive comments. Whilst several respondents made general comments, like "I hate being on the benefit" and "I don't like being on the benefit", many respondents made quite specific comments. The most common comment was that it was boring being on the benefit.

- \* *I hate being unemployed. You get into a lot of trouble and it's boring waking up every morning with nothing to do.*
- \* *I think it is rather boring being on the benefit because I'm not the kind of person who likes sitting at home doing nothing. I get restless, but at the moment this is the only way I can get money for myself.*

Other comments included that being on the benefit was "degrading", "depressing", "humiliating" and "embarrassing", that respondents felt "guilty" and that "you are treated like a bludger".

- \* *It's not very good because you lose your self esteem and you get down because you feel useless.*
- \* *Being on the benefit makes me feel ashamed. I don't want my friends to know that I'm on the benefit, especially those that are working.*
- \* *I feel very guilty about receiving money that I have not earned myself but without it I'd be lost.*

#### Adequacy of the Benefit

Respondents, particularly YA (Away from Home) respondents, were considerably more likely to report that the benefit amount was inadequate than adequate. Comments made by forty-three (8%) ICA respondents and eleven (5%) YA (Away from Home) respondents indicated that the amount they received was adequate. This category included respondents whose comments indicated that the amount of the benefit was barely adequate.

- \* *Being on a benefit is alright because I can just afford the things I need.*
- \* *It is good to have some money to pay my board and bills so that I don't have to steal. It also helped me to buy some clothes.*
- \* *I'm very grateful for getting the benefit. It helps me as I'm boarding at \$100 which includes everything. It may not leave me much but it gets me through the week.*
- \* *I'm grateful for the benefit because I don't know where I'd be without it.*
- \* *I appreciate getting the benefit but I still find I struggle.*

Three times as many ICA respondents (127 or 24%) and eight times as many YA (Away from Home) respondents (86 or 40%) indicated that the amount received was inadequate as respondents who indicated that it was adequate. ICA respondents made comments like those below.

- \* *We are not paid enough and it's hard to budget on what we do get because after the bills are paid we sometimes haven't got the fare to get us to some job interviews.*
- \* *Even though I know that the benefit is just enough to live on I find it's hard to buy clothes which make employment interviews a bit embarrassing. If I have to go to the doctor I don't have enough money for the rest of the week.*
- \* *Living costs are really high. The money I get doesn't seem to stretch that far even though I budget it out. My parents can't afford to give me any money. It's so hard.*

YA (Away from Home) respondents made comments like those below.

- \* *I can't afford to live on the benefit. I pay \$80 board a week. When I need to go to the doctor I have to wait until I can afford it. \$10 a week after paying board doesn't go far. The doctor costs \$20 so for 2 weeks I have to save up just to go to the doctor. Social Welfare will not help me, I've already tried. I think situations like that are really unfair. I also owe people for things like that. It's bad.*
- \* *I find it difficult to survive on \$96 a week. Rent and food alone cost me \$90.*
- \* *We should get a little bit more money for costs such as rent, board, power, food and clothes. I am only getting \$80 and I am supposed to be paying \$100 per week.*

Twelve respondents commented specifically on the inadequacy of the amount for accommodation benefit.

- \* *I applied for accommodation benefit and got one lousy dollar.*
- \* *I got \$13 which is pathetic because I pay \$90 for rent, food and bills. I think this should be looked at for young people who have left home.*
- \* *I haven't been able to get the accommodation grant and I feel that I need it.*

At the time of writing this report, a policy review of the accommodation benefit was being carried out. A submission on this review, prepared by the researchers and based on findings from this study, is included in Appendix VII.

#### Problems with Administration of the Benefit

One hundred and one (14%) respondents made comments which indicated that they experienced problems with administration of the benefit. Problems usually concerned payment of the benefit and/or young people having to wait a long time before they received the benefit. These categories of responses overlap to some extent. It was unclear from some comments whether respondents experienced a problem with payment of their benefit or just had to wait what they considered was a long time to receive their benefit. Related to the amount of time before the benefit is paid, is the introduction of the six month standdown for school leavers.

Fifty-six (7%) respondents reported having problems with payment of the benefit. The most common problem, which 18 respondents reported, was that payments either did not go into their bank accounts or amounts paid varied from week to week. Several respondents said they had to visit their Social Welfare office several times to sort this out.



- \* *It took me nearly 2 months to get paid the benefit and I am still trying to get a regular payment. It is hard being on the benefit because I have to keep on going to see them.*
- \* *When I was first receiving the benefit they always mucked it up somehow. This made it really hard to pay rent on time, etc. I had to go and pick up my cheque because they hadn't put it into my bank. This meant having to bus into the city and back which cost me about \$5.*

Thirteen respondents reported that they were paying back money to Social Welfare either because they had been overpaid or they were paying back a Special Needs Grant.

- \* *When I did my course Social Welfare paid me and several others an extra payment. They then asked for it back. They should not have made the mistake of giving so many people an extra payment. After making this mistake, which was entirely their fault, they shouldn't be asking everyone to pay it back so that they can fix their mistake.*
- \* *I should be getting about \$140 per week but they take away \$5 each week because I had to get an emergency payment for food once. Even that \$5 they take out makes a big difference. I only borrowed \$30 and they started taking the money from my benefit the same week.*

Twelve respondents reported that payment of their benefit had ceased or the amount reduced considerably (from the ICA amount to the Youth Allowance amount). In most cases, respondents either did not provide a reason for this or did not know the reason.

- \* *Since I applied I've had to see them four times. I've had my benefit cut off three times and that's within 3 months. I just don't understand why.*
- \* *It was never the same amount, each week it differed, always going down. My benefit would often be cut off altogether, without warning. There didn't seem to be a reason as I had done my bit by reporting in and hunting for a job.*

As mentioned previously, there is some overlap between the category of responses related to waiting a long time to receive the benefit and the category of responses related to problems with payment of the benefit, particularly as some respondents who experienced problems with getting the benefit had to wait some time before receiving their benefit. Forty-five (6%) respondents commented that they had to wait a long time before they received the benefit. More than half (24) of these respondents mentioned the amount of time it took to receive their benefit. This ranged from two to eight weeks and averaged 4.5 weeks.

- \* *I am still in debt from borrowing money for board and food because I had to wait for my money.*

- \* *I think it's a real hassle applying for the dole because you have to wait a few weeks to get it and in those few weeks you've got nowhere to live because you have no money.*
- \* *The form the Department gives you to apply for the benefit clearly states that you get the benefit a week or two after the day you apply. I didn't get mine until five weeks later.*
- \* *Change the two week standdown period because most of us had to pay board during this time. The ones I knew got kicked out because they had to wait for money.*

Nine respondents commented on the introduction of a six month standdown for school leavers.

- \* *Change the new system. I got my benefit in 3 weeks. My mate left school four months ago and has just applied for the benefit. He had been looking for work during these four months and has just been told he has to wait six months before he can get the benefit. It tempts teenagers to steal.*
- \* *Let them apply as soon as they leave school. I couldn't have possibly survived six months without money if I had applied after this rule was brought in.*

### Employment Related Issues

Respondents were asked about their employment history. The employment related issues category includes comments made by respondents which are relevant to employment.

Respondents were asked whether they had had a job since leaving school and, if they had, what the job had been. Almost two-thirds of respondents (60% or 317 of ICA respondents and 61% or 132 of YA (Away from Home) respondents) reported that they had had at least one job since they left school. The most common types of work done by respondents were farm work, factory work, retail selling and labouring.

One hundred and eighty (24%) respondents made comments related to employment. This category included respondents who said that they wanted to work, those who suggested that young people should be provided with help, such as courses and work experience programmes, to find employment and those who considered that assistance should be available to young people wanting to remain at school but unable to do so for economic reasons.

### Prefer Work to the Benefit

- \* *I'd do anything to get a decent job.*

- \* *People have said to me, "Why don't you get a job if you don't like being on the dole?" It's OK for them because they've already got jobs. Believe me if I could get a job I would.*
- \* *It's awful being on a benefit. People who have got jobs think you are a bludger. I'm not a bludger, I prefer to work so that I can hold my head up.*
- \* *Because you lose your pride. Well I did because I was having to take handouts. I am trying hard to find a job but people keep knocking me back.*
- \* *I never thought I would end up stooping so low as to end up on the dole. We need jobs!*

Several respondents commented on employers' attitudes to the unemployed.

- \* *When you go for a job and you say you are on the dole, employers look at you differently to someone who has a job.*
- \* *I would like to work but my problem is that I have never had a job and when you go for an interview and they ask you if you have had a job, I say no. Then straight away you don't get the job. So that is really hard.*

#### Help With Finding Employment

- \* *To get them onto ACCESS courses so that they get more education and experience which will help them to get a job.*
- \* *Help the ones that do want to work. It wasn't my fault that I lost my job.*

#### Assistance to Remain at School

- \* *Tell them what the benefit involves and try and convince them to stay at school and further their education. Believe me it's not easy being on the unemployment benefit.*
- \* *It was awful for me because I had been living away from home for nearly two years. During most of that time I was working and I went back to school to try and get my Sixth Form Certificate but I could not get any financial assistance from the government. My parents couldn't help, the reason I had to leave school was that they couldn't afford to keep me there. I tried to better myself and ended up on the dole. I could have been at school and all I needed was the government to pay my board of \$40. It would have been better than being on the dole and doing nothing wouldn't it?*

### **Summary of Main Themes**

This section summarises the main themes which emerged from responses made by young people to the postal questionnaire. The themes are presented in two parts, firstly, themes which were based on comments volunteered by young people

and, secondly, themes which were based on responses to specific questions in the questionnaire.

### Comments Volunteered by Young People

The most common themes which emerged from comments volunteered by young people are summarised below.

#### Feedback on Staff

Respondents were considerably more likely to make negative than positive comments about staff. One-third (252) of the respondents made negative comments about staff, for example, that they lacked empathy with young people and that young people did not understand what staff said to them. One-tenth (71) of the respondents made positive or mixed comments about staff.

#### Feedback on the Benefit

Nearly one-third (213) of the respondents, particularly those receiving Youth Allowance, commented that the amount of the benefit was inadequate. One-quarter (180) of the respondents indicated that they preferred employment to being on the benefit. Respondents were twice as likely to express negative as positive feelings about being on the benefit. Sixteen percent (116) of the respondents made negative comments about being on the benefit, for example, that it was boring, whilst 8% (58) made positive comments, for example, that it provided them with financial assistance.

#### Provision of Information

Nearly one-fifth (138) of the respondents commented on the lack of information provided to young people.

#### Benefit Administration

Fourteen percent (102) of the respondents commented that they waited too long or were "mucked around" when they applied for the benefit. Fourteen percent (101) of the respondents commented on problems they experienced with administration of the benefit, for example, problems with payment of the benefit and waiting too long to receive the benefit.

### Responses to Specific Questions

Nearly half of the ICA recipients and more than two-thirds of the Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home said that they did not know about ICA. This is consistent with lack of information emerging as a common theme from comments volunteered by young people.

Most Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home reported that they were not assessed for ICA. However, it seems likely that many may have been assessed for ICA but were not aware of it, probably because they were not

informed about ICA during the process of applying for the unemployment benefit. Not knowing about ICA was the most common reason provided by these young people for not applying for ICA.

Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home were much more likely than ICA recipients to report that they were not asked both of the filter questions. As the filter questions were the primary means of identifying potential ICA recipients, it is considered that those who were not asked the filter questions were less likely to have been assessed for ICA.

A substantial proportion (43%) of the Youth Allowance recipients not living at home said that they thought that they could get ICA (the eligibility criteria were included in the questionnaire for respondents to read) and appeared to be potentially eligible for ICA (in that they said that they did not live with their parent(s) and that they did not receive any help with their living costs from them). It appeared, then, that some young people who were potential recipients of ICA may have missed out on it.

The use of support persons, or Youth Advocates, by young people appears to be a practice which should be encouraged. Support persons seemed to be particularly helpful to young people, not only for providing moral support but also for providing practical assistance to the young person during the application process. Just under half of the young people took someone with them when they applied for the unemployment benefit, even though they usually were not been told about Youth Advocates. The person they took often appeared to be a person who could have acted as a Youth Advocate in terms of providing verification of the young person's circumstances, as well as providing support.

## CHAPTER 4

### INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

#### Introduction

This chapter summarises the results of interviews with 45 young people. References are made throughout the chapter to specific cases. The case studies were selected to illustrate the issues that emerged from the interviews. For this reason, they tend to be descriptions of the interviewees who had the most problems. All the case studies are to be found together at the end of the chapter.

The interviewees were ICA recipients (33) and Youth Allowance (YA) recipients living away from home (12). All of the beneficiaries in these two categories living in the districts to be visited were sent a questionnaire booklet, a request for an interview and a return slip on which they could indicate their choice of options: to complete a booklet, be interviewed, or not participate in the study. Nearly all of the 45 young people were interviewed during visits to Christchurch, Auckland, Rotorua and Whakatane. (Three young people who received questionnaires from the nationwide mailout rang in for more information and were interviewed on the telephone.)

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain detailed descriptions of the ICA application process from the young person's perspective; and to determine whether or not some unemployed young people living away from home might be missing out on ICA.

The chapter describes:

- the young people's previous knowledge of ICA, including provision of information by DSW;
- various aspects of the application process, including the presence of support persons, whether filter questions were asked, and how the applicants' circumstances were verified;
- the results of the ICA interviews for ICA recipients and for YA recipients living away from home;
- to what extent the YA recipients may actually qualify for ICA;
- feedback on the application process, including privacy and how well they understood what was happening;
- young people's perceptions of their experience with DSW and their interaction with staff;
- the sorts of problems that the young people encountered in the benefit system;
- the adequacy of the benefit; and
- their desire for work, training and education.

A description of the respondents' gender, ethnicity, family background and education is included in Appendix IV. In general, the respondents' personal

backgrounds were varied, although few had educational qualifications. Fifteen were of Maori background and four were of Pacific Islands background.

### Knowledge of ICA and Provision of Information by DSW

The young people were asked what they had known about ICA before receiving the information that went out with the interview requests. Most of them had known nothing about ICA. A few others had only been aware that there was a higher rate of benefit. About a third of the ICA recipients had known what ICA was (although some did not know very much about it, and one said her social worker was confused too), but none of the YA recipients living away from home had known what it was.

Table 4.1: Previous Knowledge of ICA

Previous Knowledge	ICA	YA
Knew about ICA	12	0
Knew a "higher rate" only	4	4
Not sure	1	0
Knew nothing about ICA	<u>16</u>	<u>8</u>
Total	33	12

Less than half of the ICA recipients (12 out of 33) knew what ICA was. Ten of these learned about it from DSW: seven when they applied for the unemployment benefit, and the other three in a more oblique fashion (one read about it in a DSW pamphlet after having applied for the unemployment benefit, another learned from her social worker, and the third found out when she was informed (by mail) that she would be getting \$76.00 and went back to DSW to explain why she could not live on that amount). The two who did not learn about ICA from DSW, learned about it from the media. The four ICA recipients who were only aware of a higher rate learned about this from DSW (2) or from friends (2). The four YA recipients learned about the higher rate from DSW (2), a landlord and an ACCESS tutor.

When young people were asked whether they would have liked to have been told about ICA, they generally said that they would have liked to have been told. Usually, they said that they wanted to know what the different benefits were and how to apply for them. Eight young people, who did not receive ICA until they learned about it from another source and asked to apply for ICA specifically, were (naturally enough) strongly in favour of being told about ICA. These young people will be discussed in the section on ICA interviews, and are described in detail as Cases 1 to 7 and Case 9 at the end of this chapter. Some of their comments on information provision by DSW are presented below.

- \* *A young Maori woman said that DSW should let everyone know about ICA, and that she herself knew of a few people who should be getting it.*

- \* *A young Pakeha woman said she felt it was "really slack" that no-one had told her about any of the things that DSW might have been able to help her with. "Don't people who work there know their job?" She said the questionnaire booklet we sent out was a good way to get a message across -better than the pamphlets available in the district office.*

Several other respondents also commented on their dissatisfaction with the information provided.

- \* *"Every time I go in there - it's as if they don't care. You have to ask for information - they never volunteer any."*
- \* *"When you sent that book - they should do it like that. They didn't give me anything."*
- \* *"They don't really explain everything - the benefits you can get - so you get the littlest amount out of them ... I reckon they could put pamphlets out ... If they can't be bothered telling, they should at least have leaflets."*

Two young people did not fully understand the requirement to report regularly to the Labour Department. This resulted in their benefit lapsing and their having to reapply for it, which meant that they received no income support in the intervening period. Others were just confused about what benefit they were on and did not know why they were getting the extra money.

- \* *One young man said that he was told that the higher rate of benefit meant he was getting "\$11.00 for shifting and \$14.00 extra for abuse at home."*

Those who specified how they should be informed, most commonly said that young people should be told about ICA (and other benefits) when they apply for the unemployment benefit, but often emphasised the importance of explaining in an "understandable" way, "in words a child could understand." Some also suggested booklets or pamphlets, and a few referred to the information in the booklets sent out with the interview requests for this study as being particularly suitable. Others suggested wider advertising in the media, posters in district offices and around the community, and providing information through the schools.

### The Application Process

Young people sometimes did not have a clear memory of what happened during their application for the unemployment benefit. This is understandable since the experience had been between one and ten months previously and had been a confusing one for some (see Clarity of DSW Communication p.58). However, common to nearly all the accounts was waiting in line at the reception counter, being given "some forms to fill out", and later being called to an interview at an open booth where they were provided with very little information. With some probing it was usually possible to get a good idea of whether or not the young person had been interviewed for the purpose of determining their eligibility for ICA.



The filter questions (do you live at home with your parents, and do you receive financial help from them) were typically asked at the interview and only rarely by the receptionist. Some thought these questions were possibly asked in the application forms themselves (the content of which were seldom recalled with any confidence). (There appeared to be an additional requirement at one district office that all school leavers write a statement explaining why they were leaving school and get it signed by their parents in order to apply for the unemployment benefit. See Case Study 14 for a specific instance.)

There was considerable variation in the number of visits required to complete the application process and the waiting time at each stage. The interviewees also varied in whether or not they took a support person (and if so, whom), whether or not the filter questions were asked, and how their circumstances were verified.

Each of these topics will be discussed in the sub-sections that follow. Feedback on the application process is covered in the section on page 57 and young people's feelings about their interaction with staff, and their experience with DSW in general, are covered in the section on page 59.

#### Number of Visits

While half of the young people interviewed said that they had to visit their district office only once, the remainder said that they had to return, sometimes just for one more visit to bring in some documentation or for a scheduled interview, sometimes more often. Ten interviewees had to return on three or more occasions before the application process was completed.

One ICA recipient reported having to return with identification, again for an interview, and again on separate occasions to get emergency benefits until the regular benefit went through. Another ICA recipient said she was told to go from one office to another office on several occasions because her files were not at the office she had been told to go to. She also had to go in for emergency cheques for three consecutive weeks in a row. Others, both ICA and YA recipients, mentioned getting incorrect amounts paid into their accounts and having to go in to sort these problems out.

Transport was often a problem for those who had to make further visits to the district office. Often the busfare was considered an unaffordable expense, and this added to the frustration of those who tried unsuccessfully to get their problems sorted out over the telephone, or who had to go in to get a cheque because their money had not gone into their accounts. This will be covered in greater detail in the section on problems with benefit administration (p.62).

#### Waiting Time

Most young people interviewed had to wait less than two hours at their district office, but twelve mentioned waits of three hours or more, "ages" or "half the day". Two said that they stayed from 9 or 10 am to 4 pm.

For many, the waiting time was unexpected and distressing. They said that they were bored and anxious, sometimes feeling the atmosphere to be hostile, one having specific worries about all the "Powers" (gang members) standing around. Some said that the long wait created transportation problems because they had arranged to meet someone at a particular time for a ride home.

Young people who had had experience as ACCESS trainees found that the long waits and return visits interfered with their course time.

### Difficulties with the Application Process

Several young people said that they had difficulties with the application process. Sometimes these were due to unfamiliarity with departmental procedures.

- \* *A young woman missed hearing her name called out because she was unfamiliar with the system and had to make another appointment.*
- \* *Another young woman was told to return the following day for an interview which she did, at 9.00 am. However, she did not know what to do when her name was called. When she told staff she was still waiting they gave her another number and she was not seen until 4.00 pm. She felt she was "treated like shit".*
- \* *A young man tried to open an account for his benefit money at a credit union instead of the Post Office bank. He had to go back three or four times because the account was not right. "They [DSW] made it clear, but I mucked it up". It took "two days of going in and out" to clear it up.*

### Support Persons

Nearly half of the young people took friends or relations with them to DSW for moral support and/or to help them with answering questions, filling out forms and explaining things in general.

Occasionally support persons were discouraged from attending or contributing to the interviews.

- \* *One young woman took her mother but she was not invited into the interview.*
- \* *One young man took along his uncle to verify that he was not living with his parents (he signed a form to this effect), but when the uncle tried to help during the interview he was told not to say anything, that the interviewee could do it on his own.*
- \* *One young man (Case 13) took a friend who was rejected as a Youth Advocate because he was too young (under 20). Reapplying on a subsequent visit, he said, "I took [another friend] along - they asked him to leave". He also tried to go along with friends who were applying for the unemployment benefit to support them but, "I've never been allowed to sit with them, they always ask me to leave so they can talk with them alone".*

Of the 20 young people who took a support person, over half took a relative and one-third took a friend. One took her landlord, one took an adult friend of the family, and one took her aunt and seven friends with her. (The rest went alone, except for one respondent who was living in Kingslea where the staff handled the entire application process.) More information on support persons appears below.

- \* *One young woman discussed applying for ICA over the telephone before she came in and was told to bring an older person with her. She took a friend of her mother's who filled out the forms with her.*
- \* *A young woman took her landlord so he could understand what was going on with regard to her benefit without her having to explain it to him and how it affected payment of rent.*
- \* *One took a friend who explained some of the questions.*
- \* *One said that she didn't get anywhere when she went in by herself, but did with her Nana.*
- \* *A young man said his aunty was helpful by just being there, she made applying easier. She helped answer some questions and he would not have gone through with it without her.*
- \* *One took an aunt who organised all the documentation and helped to verify the young person's explanation for living away from home. The interviewee was only granted YA, but later lodged an application for review. The circumstances are detailed in Case 10 at the end of this chapter.)*
- \* *Two took their mothers, who acted as support and helped answer questions.*

### Filter Questions

Most of the young people appear to have been asked the filter questions: Do you live at home with your parents?; Do you receive financial support from your parents? Some respondents did not have a clear memory of being asked, but sometimes it could be inferred from other comments that the person who interviewed them at DSW was at least aware of whether or not the young person was living at home. The information may have been taken from the unemployment benefit forms, files or statements volunteered by the young person.

Table 4.2 shows the young people's reporting of whether or not they were asked the filter questions. Some of those who were not asked the filter questions were consequently not assessed for ICA (see Table notes).

### Verification of Circumstances and the Use of Youth Advocates

How their circumstances were verified was seldom clear from what young people said. Very rarely did they say that they were told about Youth Advocates. Only two respondents were actually told to take a Youth Advocate or "someone older".

In addition, it appeared that they were often unaware of the significance of the various pieces of paper that they had to get signed. (Several district offices used Youth Advocate forms.) Of the 33 ICA recipients and the seven YA recipients who were interviewed for ICA, only 15 gave any indication of how their

Table 4.2: Filter Questions Asked of Young People

Questions Asked	ICA	YA
Asked both questions	19	9
Asked first question only	8 <sup>a</sup>	1
Asked neither filter question	2 <sup>b</sup>	1
Not sure	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u> <sup>c</sup>
Total	33	12

- (a) This includes two ICA recipients who were living at home when they applied for the unemployment benefit (so presumably there would have been no point in their being asked the second question). They were picked up for ICA when they informed the Department of a change of address.
- (b) These respondents were only granted ICA after learning of it independently and asking specifically for ICA when they re-applied for the unemployment benefit.
- (c) This respondent (see Case 9) was living away from home at the time of the application, yet seems not to have been assessed for ICA eligibility, so it is a distinct possibility that he was not asked the filter questions.

circumstances were verified. Most commonly, their circumstances were verified by DSW social workers, parents and advocacy forms which young people were required to get filled out and signed by someone who could act as a Youth Advocate.

In five cases, social workers had known the young people before their unemployment benefit applications and could verify their circumstances. In five other cases, the parents were directly involved in the application process, being physically present or telephoned by DSW. In four cases, written documentation was required:

- \* *A young woman was given a statement form and told that she had to get an "older person, like a referee" to sign it.*
- \* *A young man was given a form for his parents or guardian, who had to be over the age of 22 or 23, to complete so he could get more money.*
- \* *A young woman was shown the criteria and asked to point out the reason why she could not stay at home. She wrote a statement and was told to get someone like her teacher to sign and verify it. (She did so but was not put onto ICA.)*

- \* *An orphan was told to bring a letter from her dead mother's solicitor. (She was also told to bring an older person with her when she came in to apply for the unemployment benefit.)*

Finally, a young man who brought along a friend (whose family he was staying with after leaving home), was told he needed to have someone older come in. (His friend, under 20, was too young.)

Two other young people mentioned being shown the criteria for ICA and being asked to select the one relevant to their situation. Both were granted ICA, but it is not known whether or how their circumstances were verified.

One district office seemed to have a policy of ringing parents to verify the circumstances of their children being assessed for ICA (which sometimes happened without the young person's consent, see Chapter 7 on Interviews with District Office Benefits Staff). In one case, a DSW staff member rang and was the first to inform the parent of the young person's loss of job and flat. This created problems between the young person and the parent.

## ICA Interview and Results

### ICA Recipients

Most of the ICA recipients (24 out of 33) seem to have been put directly onto ICA following their application interviews. Two more, who had been on YA while living at home, were picked up for ICA when they informed their district office of their change of address. Thus, they were identified as potential ICA recipients by DSW and assessed for ICA accordingly.

The remaining seven (Cases 1 to 7, at the end of this chapter) were granted ICA as a result of applying specifically for ICA because they had not been identified by DSW as potential ICA recipients during the unemployment benefit application process. They learned about ICA in various ways (pamphlets, media, friends) and included two young people (see Case Studies 4 and 6) who were told about ICA by the district office when they went in to get help with problems they were having with their Youth Allowance payments.

Detailed descriptions of each of these seven cases are provided at the end of this chapter. In four cases (Cases 1 to 4), it was clear that the young people would not have been granted ICA if they had not used their own initiative. The other three (Cases 5 to 7) certainly initiated their assessment for ICA, but might, in time, have been picked up anyway.

### YA Recipients

Half of the Youth Allowance recipients (six out of twelve) thought they had been interviewed for ICA in the course of their unemployment benefit application, and all but one of these had been rejected. The one who was granted ICA (Case 8) is interesting because she was put onto Youth Allowance four weeks later, after DSW contacted her parents and her mother said she would be happy to have her

back anytime. The young woman commented that when her mother found out she was pregnant she did not want her back at all. She had just been put on the Sickness Benefit when she was interviewed for this study.

Of the six who were not interviewed for ICA in the course of their unemployment benefit application process, two later applied for and were granted ICA (Cases 9 and 10), the latter directly as a result of being informed about ICA in the course of being contacted for this study.

### **Youth Allowance Recipients - Should They Be On ICA?**

One of the reasons Youth Allowance recipients living away from home were interviewed for the study was to find out if any of them seemed to qualify for ICA and thus to obtain some indication of whether or not there were young people who were eligible for ICA but not getting picked up for it. This was particularly important because the system for getting young people onto ICA depends almost entirely on the district office identifying and interviewing appropriate unemployment benefit applicants as they come along - not on young people coming in to apply for ICA as such.

All of the YA recipients living away from home interviewed were told about the filter questions and the eligibility criteria, and asked if they thought they were eligible for ICA. It should be noted that the respondents were not asked specifically about their personal circumstances. Rather, they were shown the eligibility criteria and asked if any of the categories applied to them.

Of the 12 YA recipients living away from home who were interviewed for this study, six (Cases 8-13) thought they were eligible for ICA at the time they applied for the unemployment benefit. There seems no particular reason to disagree with their conclusions, but there is no way of being absolutely certain that they are correct. Three of them were previously or subsequently granted ICA. For the other three, there is only the young person's own informed assessment of their situation, and the fact that none of the details of the circumstances which they revealed to the researchers conflicted with that assessment. The six cases are important because they may represent specific instances of the failure of the system for identifying and assessing young people for ICA.

Of these six who seemed to qualify for ICA, one had actually been granted ICA and was only taken off it after subsequent communication with her mother, who failed to verify her circumstances for DSW (described in detail as Case 8 and briefly discussed in the section above). Two more were eventually granted ICA after reapplying (Cases 9 and 10, also briefly discussed above).

The fourth had just turned 18 so she no longer qualified for ICA, but she believed that at the time of her application for the unemployment benefit she met all the requirements and criteria for ICA. The application process itself seems to have been extremely distressing for her and is detailed in Case 11.

The fifth probably was interviewed for ICA (a confusing and uninformative experience, described in Case 12) and rejected. The young woman was living with her sister and pointed to one of the eligibility criteria that she believed would apply to her own situation.

The sixth had a complicated history (Case 13) which included unpleasant interaction with staff, difficulties with the use of a Youth Advocate and support persons, problems getting accommodation benefit, and hardships experienced while trying to support himself on the Youth Allowance. He seems to have been assessed for, but not granted, ICA when he first applied for the unemployment benefit, and he later tried to reapply for ICA but was rejected. The young man was convinced that he was eligible both times.

Of the six other Youth Allowance recipients, four did not think they should have qualified for ICA and two were not asked.

Of the four Youth Allowance recipients who did not believe they qualified for ICA, three had left home but indicated that their reasons for doing so did not fit the ICA criteria.

- \* *A young Maori woman went to board with her aunt because her father did not like her leaving school in Form 6.*
- \* *A young Pakeha man had shifted from a more densely populated area to a less densely populated area and observed that this could be seen as moving away from areas of training and employment opportunity. His difficulties trying to live independently on the Youth Allowance, and attempts to get more money from DSW are recounted in Case 15.*
- \* *A young Pakeha woman had to return home because she could not afford to flat on the Youth Allowance. The problems she found with her district office's application requirements, the contrasts between her own situation and her friend on ICA, and her special difficulties obtaining employment are described in Case 14.*

The fourth Youth Allowance recipient, who clearly was not eligible for ICA, was a young Pakeha man who was actually living with his father and whose presence in the sample of YA recipients away from home remains a mystery.

The issue of the adequacy of the benefit for 16 and 17 year olds was not part of the ICA Evaluation Project's brief. However, it is an issue that arose repeatedly during interviews and is discussed in the section on adequacy of the allowance and other money problems (p.63). It is mentioned in this section because it was such a serious issue for Youth Allowance recipients. For some it meant they had to move in with their parents again (Cases 13 and 14). For those who persevered in living independently (Cases 9 and 15) it meant privation and instability as they could not meet their payments and were forced to leave one flat after another.

## Feedback on the Application Process

### Choice of Interviewer

None of the respondents were provided with any choice of interviewer. Questions about whether respondents were provided with any choice with regard to the DSW staff who interviewed them were included in the study, because it was thought that young people, who had possibly had traumatic experiences, might have strong feelings about the preferred gender or ethnicity of the person with whom they spoke. Twenty-three young people were asked if they would like such a choice. Most (15) said it did not matter or expressed satisfaction with the interviewer they got. Eight said they would have liked a choice, but some of these were only concerned that the interviewer be understanding and helpful. Only two were specific. (Both wanted women and were, in fact, interviewed by women.)

Five respondents, who said that they would have liked to have had a choice, but who were not specific about their preference, did explain what it was they did not like about their own interviews. Two said that the questions etc. were not explained well enough. A young Samoan man found answering the questions and filling out the forms "really hard" and his uncle translated things for him. One had been upset at the interview by what she felt were prying questions, and another said her interviewer addressed all questions and comments to her father which meant that the young person, who was partially deaf, found it difficult to follow what was being said.

### Privacy and the Location of the Interview

Almost two-thirds (28 out of 45) of the interviews took place in a cubicle or booth. Nine of the ICA recipients and two of the YA recipients said that they were interviewed in a private room. Two of the ICA recipients said that they were interviewed across the reception counter (not in a booth). The interview locations for four respondents were not recorded.

Twelve of those interviewed in a cubicle commented on the lack of privacy:

- \* *"Everyone could hear me and know I was in financial trouble."*
- \* *"Anybody that wanted to listen could listen." The respondent added that people were waiting behind her and her friend, and people kept walking backwards and forwards behind the interviewer.*
- \* *One young woman said that it was not really private, and because she knew she could hear everyone else's conversation, she could not say very much herself.*
- \* *A young man said he would have liked the interview to be confidential, rather than "people hearing you publicly", that he would have preferred anywhere that was more private, even if the booths were just located away from the waiting area.*



Two complained that their interviews were interrupted by other staff members "butting in" or talking to their interviewer.

Six other young people responded with qualified remarks, such as "private enough" or "fairly private":

- \* *One said he was not worried, it was "private enough", but, "All the booths are really good for is so that not everybody hears your problems."*
- \* *"It's private sometimes, though everybody else can hear each other."*
- \* *A young woman said that the booth was "all right - everyone there is in the same situation - there's no listening in."*

The closed rooms were never described as anything but "private", and no respondent expressed any dissatisfaction with them.

A young woman, who at different district offices had been interviewed in a private room and in a cubicle, said:

- \* *"It's nicer being in a closed off room than a cubicle. A room feels more secure. It's like the difference between waiting at the doctor's in the reception and actually going in to see the doctor."*

#### Clarity of DSW Communication

Young people were asked if what happened to them at DSW, and the staff they spoke with, were easy to understand. Eighteen said that staff and events were not easy to understand, eighteen gave mixed responses, and nine said that they were easy to understand.

The nine who said that staff and events were easy to understand remarked that staff were clear, helpful, explained things and helped them with their forms.

Of the eighteen whose comments were mixed:

- \* *Seven said that, although what the staff told them was clear enough, they were not told very much at all, did not always have a clear idea of what was happening.*
- \* *Three said they needed some help from friends and relatives.*
- \* *Four said some parts were clear and some parts were not.*
- \* *Two said the people were clear enough, but the forms were hard to understand and they needed help with them.*
- \* *One young woman said, "There's nothing anybody can say that I wouldn't understand. I understood it, but a lot of people wouldn't have."*

- \* *Another said she thought the process was rather simple, but she could not understand some of the things she was told because "big words" were used.*

The comments of the eighteen who responded negatively generally concerned the following:

- \* *General confusion and lack of understanding of what went on at the district office.*
- \* *The questions that were asked and the forms they had to fill out were "really hard".*
- \* *The language used (in both verbal and written communication) was difficult to understand: "big words", "hard words".*
- \* *Not enough information and explanation was provided.*

Obviously these issues are interrelated and typically a respondent would mention more than one.

- \* *"The questions should be changed. [There were] too big words you couldn't understand ... It should be like a child could do it. There should be someone to sit down and help you with it, to answer questions and write them in."*
- \* *A young Maori woman said her interviewer only asked questions but did not explain them. She had to ask her friend to explain. People were not easy to understand. They used difficult words and she did not know what they meant. The questions were not easy to understand or why they asked them.*
- \* *"He was nice to us, but we couldn't understand most of the things he was telling us. He was talking really fast and we just couldn't ever catch up!"*
- \* *A young Maori/Pakeha woman said she was given no information at all, she was not given time to take in or understand the questions, so she became confused and lost track of what was happening.*
- \* *Two said they needed the friend or relative they brought with them to "translate" for them.*
- \* *A young woman who was partially deaf missed all the questions or comments that the interviewer directed at her father, because she could not read the interviewer's lips.*

#### **Young People's Feelings About Their Interaction with Staff and Experience with DSW**

In describing their feelings about events at district office, well over half (28) of the young people interviewed made only negative comments, over one quarter (13) expressed mixed feelings, and the rest (4) made positive statements.

The four respondents who reported positive feelings about their experiences said:

- \* *Staff treated them well.*
- \* *The people dealt with at DSW were "OK" and there was "no big hassle about anything."*
- \* *The interview went well and she came away feeling OK.*
- \* *"[I was] really happy that I was going to get some money."*

The 13 respondents who reported mixed feelings, and the 28 who were entirely negative made comments which tended to fall into the following three categories:

- 1 How they were treated by DSW staff,
- 2 Their self-image as unemployed beneficiaries and their feeling that others saw them as worthless dole bludgers, and
- 3 The shyness and fear that they brought with them or experienced at DSW.

As the examples in the following sub-sections will illustrate, the comments sometimes overlapped categories.

#### Feedback about Staff

District office staff were the most common focus of comments that young people made about how they felt about what happened at DSW. Staff could be helpful, explaining, polite, good, kind, friendly, hardworking and nice, or unhelpful, confusing, uncommunicative, "rude", uncaring, "cattish", unfriendly, impersonal, "nosey" and lacking in knowledge about benefits. Eleven respondents said positive things about staff (usually in the context of a mixed comment) and 24 said negative things.

- \* *A young Pakeha male said that he would have liked help filling out the forms, because he had difficulty reading.*
- \* *A young Pakeha man (Case 9) commented, "I haven't many complaints, they've got lots of people to get through."*
- \* *Another young Pakeha found reception staff abrupt and unhelpful, and interviewing staff not much better. He was given forms at the counter and told "Fill out this and that and if you have problems come to me." But it was Thursday and there were "heaps of people" to queue up with if he wanted to ask any questions or get help filling out the forms. So he went back and forth between DSW and Labour (where he knew someone who could help him) to get his questions answered. After waiting three hours, he handed over the forms to the interviewer. "She screwed them all up except one. I thought I'd done everything wrong. She said I didn't have to do all that. It was very hard to understand. There was lots on marriage, etc ... It's a bit frustrating waiting three*

*hours for an interview just to see someone. And telling you to fill things out you didn't need to. There was no one to help with the forms. You have to wait half an hour to ask a question at the desk ... There should be someone to sit down and help you with it, to answer questions and write them in."*

- \* A part Maori and part Pakeha woman said that the woman who dealt with her at reception was rude, talked down to her and made her feel small. She spoke loudly to her and seemed annoyed when asked questions.*
- \* A Pakeha male said, "They make it very hard for you ... People should be trained to be nicer to the younger people ... If they were a bit more helpful and friendly you wouldn't feel so hostile to them."*
- \* A Pakeha man said, "I'd like to see people with a more friendly attitude ... I found that quite a lot of people behind the desk are a little cold and withdrawn. They could make it easier for you. Being on the unemployment benefit is not coming up roses. It doesn't make life easier if the person behind the desk is snapping out questions. They might have had a hard day, but I've had a hard day too."*

### The "Dole Bludger" Stereotype

Twelve respondents discussed their concerns at being seen as "dole bludgers".

- \* "The atmosphere felt very unfriendly. I knew that everyone was looking at me like "He's a dole bludger" ... I felt quite petrified at the response from everyone at DSW, I felt like I was seen as a problem child."*
- \* A young Pakeha woman said about the staff that, "they were good and helpful", but "You feel useless because you can't get a job and feel you want to prove that you're only with the benefit temporarily."*
- \* "I did get the feeling I wasn't liked. I was a dole bludger. They were in command of my life. They could give me money or not. I was irrelevant."*
- \* A young Pakeha man said he thought doing community work for the unemployment benefit would be a good idea. He felt good about paying tax on the unemployment benefit because then he was contributing like other wage earners.*

### Shyness and Fear

Eight respondents talked about being shy, scared, nervous and upset.

- \* A young Pakeha woman said she felt she had to justify herself for being there and no one tried to ease the tension. She disliked having her name called out over the speaker and walking up with everybody watching her.*

- \* *A young part Maori and part Pakeha woman, who said she could not understand what was being asked or told to her, explained that she felt shy, and if people keep asking too many questions she becomes really shy.*
- \* *A young Maori woman said she felt nervous and embarrassed.*
- \* *Another Maori woman commented that when you go into DSW "everyone looks sad, down, quiet."*
- \* *A Pakeha woman described her experience at the Department of Labour. She said her Polynesian interviewer turned on the radio and "bopped". She added, "you need things like that to cheer people up" and that it made her feel, "this guy's just like us." She presented the account as an example of how things could be (and should be) at Social Welfare.*

### Problems with Benefit Administration

Young people described their problems with benefit payments: waiting for their benefit to come in and dealing with errors in payments, problems with declaration forms and benefits lapsing. They also found it difficult to cope with changes in benefit payments caused by part-time work (which would only be reflected in the following month's payment), and by repayments, but these are covered in the section on other money problems (p.63).

Sixteen young people mentioned having to come back to the district office repeatedly to pick up cheques and apply for emergency benefits while they were waiting for their unemployment benefit to be paid into their bank accounts, or because the wrong amount was deposited. Three others had their benefits stopped because of problems with declaration forms and employment rules (Case 16).

- \* *"They are always getting computer errors and your money isn't in there. It really gets your blood boiling ... there's always something wrong why your money's not in and they are always trying to catch you out like you're trying to cheat the system even if you haven't done anything."*
- \* *A young Pakeha woman thought DSW was a "hassle", because "if they muck up your money, you have to go back in there."*
- \* *A young Cook Islander said he had to go back to Social Welfare once a week for four weeks to get a cheque before his money started coming into his account. He had no transport, so he had to walk three miles each way. Each time he was told to take a seat, he would wait for about an hour and then he would be interviewed. He would be told to wait again, and then he would get a cheque.*
- \* *A young man thought he forgot the date on his declaration form and that this caused his benefit to cease.*
- \* *Another young man did not realise that the declaration forms needed to be done every month. He missed one when he shifted and he did not get paid.*

### Adequacy of the Allowance and Other Money Problems

Young people who were interviewed were not asked specifically about adequacy of the allowances, however, several young people raised this issue.

Adequacy was a very common problem for Youth Allowance recipients who were still living away from home.

- \* *One Youth Allowance recipient described how he had to move from flat to flat as he ran into debt, unable to pay his bills.*
- \* *"I was in and out of Social Welfare when I needed money. I couldn't keep up with money for food and stuff."*
- \* *"I feel bad because I have to live at home again because I can't afford to flat. And they're not happy that the power bill is only being paid back at \$10 a week."*

Adequacy was a problem identified by 13 ICA recipients as well:

- \* *A part Maori and part Pakeha woman said that flatting was so expensive she had about \$3 left over once she had paid rent, food and bills. She could not go out, could not afford to buy Christmas gifts for her relatives and did not have appropriate clothes for job interviews.*
- \* *A young Maori man said it was "hard to save anything to do anything, like go to tech."*

Five respondents specifically mentioned not having the money for busfare to the NZ Employment Service or to look for work in general, and for decent clothes to wear to job interviews.

- \* *An ICA recipient said, "I have bugger all clothing. I'm living in rags. It's a problem when looking for jobs. It's not the impression I want to make ... No one has bought me clothes in the last two years ... If I went to night school or Polytech, [there would be] no one to back me up."*
- \* *A 17 year old Pakeha male flatting on the Youth Allowance said, "I can't go out, I get depressed, get pretty down. Even \$20 [more], that would be money for buses to look for work. \$85 is totally out the question."*

### Other Money Problems

Young people also had money problems when benefit payments were delayed, decreased or in error.

For example, irregular part-time work, reported on their monthly declaration forms, would result in delayed fluctuations in their benefit payments. The income

received would be reflected in a lower benefit payment in the future, during a week when the young person might not be receiving any part-time work income to offset the reduction. Also, any recoverable loans tended to create money problems further down the line. This was especially true for repayments to DSW that were subtracted from their benefit, but young people often borrowed money privately from friends and relatives that eventually had to be repaid as well.

In addition, there was nearly always some unsupported period to survive, either a standdown or just waiting for the system to click into gear. Often there were unexplainable "stuff-ups", too, "computer errors" or mysterious (at least to the young person) reductions in their benefit payments. Typically the errors would be repaid or the changes explained to the young person, but only after time and money-consuming trips to district office, and at least some anxiety or period of material deprivation.

- \* *A young Pakeha woman was desperate because she only had two changes of clothing while she was waiting for four weeks for her first ICA payment to come in. During the third week she "jumped up and down" in the district office: she said it took three hours to get a cheque for a half week's worth of her benefit. But she had had to borrow the \$8 for her birth certificate in order to apply for the benefit in the first place (Case 18).*
- \* *A young Pakeha woman who was on ICA got a part-time job working outdoors. Her benefit was not adjusted to her part-time income and this resulted in overpayments. She had to quit her job after getting bronchitis, but later on she had to pay back the overpayment. She said this was really hard as she had worked out a budget based on her full benefit.*

#### Desire to Work, Train and Be Educated

Seven interviewees talked about their worries concerning finding employment.

- \* *A part Maori and part Pakeha woman said she didn't want to go into Social Welfare, she wanted a job. When asked how she would like to see the system changed she said, "If there were more jobs ... but that's not their (DSW's) fault."*
- \* *A young Maori man said he felt "funny" about going into DSW because he never thought he would be on the dole. He gets really bored being unemployed, but has found nothing else for himself.*
- \* *The five others said the travel expenses to look for jobs were a hardship while they were on the dole, and/or they were disadvantaged in not being able to dress properly for job interviews.*

Most of the young people had worked in a number of jobs since leaving school, generally in unskilled occupations. They had been shop assistants, factory hands; done housekeeping and farm work; held part-time, full-time, seasonal and holiday jobs. The length of time employed varied from four weeks to a year and a half. Only five ICA recipients and five YA recipients had never worked at all.

For some young people it appears that the Social Welfare system discouraged attempts to gain an education and employment. One young man (Case 16, mentioned earlier) was worse off for having worked a short while because he then had difficulties getting back on the benefit. There were other instances:

- \* *A young Pakeha woman (see Case 17) originally came to Social Welfare to get a loan that would help her get started in a selling job. She was extremely disappointed to learn that she could only get help once she had given up her employment. Her irregular part-time work also caused difficulties because her dole payments fluctuated with each monthly declaration. (She would declare a particular month's income to DSW, and the following month's benefit would be adjusted to it. If she worked relatively many hours, her next benefit payment would be correspondingly low. If she worked fewer hours the next month, her income would be less, and her benefit payment, adjusted to the previous month's income, would also be less.)*
- \* *A young Pakeha woman (Case 18) had to leave school because she could no longer support herself with part-time work and found no help was available to secondary school students.*
- \* *A young Pakeha man (Case 19) (who left home at 15 because of physical and sexual abuse) was put into a foster home where he stayed for six months during which time he got School Certificate. Although he wished to continue his education, he left his foster home because he was unhappy there. He felt he had no alternative but to leave school and go on the unemployment benefit to support himself, and now has not got enough money to dress appropriately for job interviews nor enough financial (and other) support to go to Polytech.*

### Summary

Several issues were identified in the interviews with young people. These covered provision of information, the ICA procedures, money problems and staff/client interaction. The major issues are summarised in this section.

One of the most important findings was that there were some Youth Allowance recipients living away from home who were eligible for ICA, but who were not getting it. Of those interviewed who were not getting ICA, one-quarter were definitely eligible and another quarter were probably eligible.

Another important finding was that some young people who were eligible for ICA were not identified as such through the processes that had been put in place in the district offices to do this. These young people (often after learning about ICA outside of the unemployment benefit application process), initiated their assessment for ICA eligibility themselves. While most of the ICA recipients were identified and assessed for ICA through the unemployment benefit application process or change of address notification, over one-fifth (seven respondents out of 33) brought themselves to the attention of DSW and initiated their own assessment. Two of the YA recipients also did this, and eventually were granted



ICA. (Others also initiated their assessment for ICA, but were not granted it.) Thus a total of nine respondents, or one-quarter of those interviewed who ever received ICA (which also includes three who were interviewed for this study as YA recipients living away from home, but previously or afterwards were granted ICA), initiated their own assessment for ICA.

Not all of the young people reported being asked the filter questions, which appear to be a specific problem area in the ICA procedures. There seems to be room for the filter questions to be omitted in some cases, both when first applying for the unemployment benefit and when changing addresses.

Another major finding was that, although the self-initiation of ICA assessment often depended on the young people learning about ICA and identifying themselves as potential ICA recipients, there was little knowledge about ICA among the young people interviewed. Most knew nothing about ICA and only about a quarter had any knowledge of who would be eligible. Of the YA recipients living away from home, only a third were even aware that there was a higher rate of benefit, and the rest knew nothing at all about it. Less than one-third of the young people interviewed reported getting any information about ICA from DSW.

One implication of these findings is that more information should be made available. There seems to be a certain risk involved in depending entirely on a series of administrative procedures for filtering in the clients of a benefit like ICA. This benefit functions as a safety net for a particularly vulnerable group of clients and, inevitably, some of them get missed out. If information is made available to them and there is some general knowledge of the benefit, then clients can select themselves - but they cannot apply on their own behalf if they do not know that the benefit is there.

Some of the accounts provided by these young people also suggest that the ICA criteria may be too stringent. This is especially so for those YA recipients who, despite the appalling circumstances that result from their living independently on the smaller Youth Allowance, are still determined not to be at home with their parents. (Some of their reasons for leaving home, seen as legitimate reasons by many people who work with young people, are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 which cover interviews with community agencies and with DSW social workers.)

The interviews with young people revealed that nearly half of them took a support person to DSW, but some of these were discouraged from attending or contributing to the interview. Only two young people were informed that they should bring a Youth Advocate (an older person to verify their circumstances to DSW).

Occasionally parents were contacted to verify the young people's circumstances. It appeared that sometimes this was a breach of confidence, when young people's permission to contact their parents was not secured beforehand. It also appeared that sometimes the parents did not cooperate or did not tell the truth. There seems sometimes to be a reluctance on the part of parents to cooperate in this

matter, perhaps because they were unwilling to admit that their children were not welcome to live with them, or were unhappy or unsafe to live with them, or perhaps because they did not want their children to be on the benefit or leave home in the first place. The issue of contacting parents for verification is also taken up in Chapters 5 and 7, which cover interviews with community agencies and with district office benefits staff.

Two-thirds of the young people were interviewed in open booths, and half of these complained about the lack of privacy. Some said that this inhibited them from telling staff about their circumstances.

Most young people said that they had difficulty understanding the application forms, the questions they were asked and what they were told by staff. Most expressed negative feelings about what happened at Social Welfare, particularly with respect to their interaction with staff, but also mentioning waiting for long periods in district office, difficulties with the application process and benefit payments, their personal anxieties and that they disliked being seen as "dole bludgers".

Probably the most important focus of the young people's comments was their desire for kindness and help from DSW staff. Specifically, they asked for a warm and friendly attitude; questions and forms to be put in simple, easy to understand terms; help with answering questions and filling out forms; and explanations of how the system works (like what to do when one's name is called, how long one will have to wait, why one is being asked these questions, etc.).

Inadequacy of the benefit was a problem identified by several young people, particularly YA recipients living away from home. They also described the difficulty with which they would have to wait, unsupported, for their benefits to begin; survive lapses and fluctuations in their benefit, especially when caused by repayments of loans; and cope with the expense of travelling to district office to clear up problems with benefit payments.

Several young people also discussed their worries about finding employment, getting training and completing their education, including the fact that they sometimes did not have the money for busfare and appropriate clothing to go to job interviews. The impression gained by the researchers was that the young people interviewed were trying very hard to cope. Although they were often found to be living under extremely difficult circumstances, they preferred not to be dependent upon the Department for support, but instead had a genuine desire to work and make their own way in the world.

## Case Studies

### CASE 1

*When a young Pakeha man applied for the unemployment benefit at a suburban office, he was given forms to fill out and interviewed. He was asked "Who are you living with?" Nothing was said about a higher rate of benefit or about*

accommodation benefit, although he said, in retrospect, that it was pretty obvious that he needed help. He was told he would get a letter and three weeks later the money (Youth Allowance) appeared in his account. Experiencing financial difficulties soon after, he returned to his district office to ask for help. While waiting, he read a pamphlet which described some of the benefits available. He asked at the counter about ICA, they took his name and address, but gave him a "hard time". They said he did not qualify for ICA and could not get accommodation benefit. They were, as he put it, "no help at all". They said all he could have was the unemployment benefit for young people (Youth Allowance). He spoke to one of his friends who had recently got ICA and the friend told him it was that particular office that was the problem and that he should try again. He shifted flats soon after and tried at another (more urban) district office. They were more helpful and granted him both ICA and accommodation benefit.

He believes his interviewer (at the second district office) did not actually know about ICA. It was he who explained it to her! She then went away for about five minutes and came back with a form. He was told straight after that he would get ICA, and two weeks later it was paid into his account.

## CASE 2

A young Pakeha woman had been on Youth Allowance since the beginning of 1989. Although her mother died later in the year, she remained on Youth Allowance until her brother saw a report on ICA on television. When she realised she might qualify, she rang her district office to ask what she needed to bring with her to apply. She was told to bring personal identification, proof of her mother's death and an older person. A week after her interview (during which, she says, she received no information about the benefit she was applying for) a letter arrived which she did not understand and she rang the district office to have it explained. The letter said she was entitled to ICA and would get an increase in her benefit.

However, she did not get any money that week (the increase only began a fortnight after the letter came). She asked if she could get an emergency benefit but was refused because she was still repaying one that she had been granted near the beginning of the year.

## CASE 3

A young man of Cook Island Maori background was on Youth Allowance when he moved away from home. He went in to his district office where he had another interview. He told the interviewer that he had moved, but does not remember anything else that went on in the interview. His benefit was unchanged. His next contact with DSW was when his benefit ceased because (he believes) he filled in his income declaration form incorrectly, forgetting the date. While he was waiting for his interview he saw some brochures about Youth Advocates and he asked about this during the interview. He was asked whether he lived with his parents and was told that he needed something from the people he was living with and a form completed by his parents or guardian (who had to be over the age of 22 or 23) so he could get more money. His mother would not complete it, so he got his uncle to do so. He said he did not really understand what was going on and said he had to ask staff to

"re-phrase" things. He said he was very nervous and not sure whether he was going to get the unemployment benefit or not. At the time he was interviewed for this study he had been getting ICA for three weeks. He said he would have liked to have known why he was getting \$109 instead of \$82.34.

#### CASE 4

A young Maori woman on Youth Allowance received notification that her benefit payment was being reduced to \$76 while she was paying back debts. She went to her district office where she told an interviewer that she could not survive on \$76.00. She explained her family circumstances. The interviewer explained and showed her the ICA guidelines, and asked her which category she fitted into. The interviewer further advised her to apply for accommodation benefit, fixed up all her forms and wrote her statement for her.

#### CASE 5

A young Maori woman went into her district office alone and asked at reception how to get on the unemployment benefit. She was given forms to fill out and given a 10.15 appointment for another day. She arrived at 9.45, waited until they called out some names, waited another 15 minutes, and then asked when she was going to be seen. She was told her name had been called out, and so she would have to come back as she had missed her appointment. Another interview date was set. In the meanwhile, a story about ICA appeared in the newspaper. So her Nana went with her to the second appointment and they both filled out some forms. Her Nana told the staff person that they had seen the story about ICA in the paper and asked if it applied to her granddaughter. The staff person then explained about ICA, asked the filter questions, asked how long she had been away from home and where and how she was living with no money. Then she was told how much money she would be getting. The young woman believes that everyone should be informed about ICA, and she herself knows of a few people who could be getting it. As far as her own case went, she concluded that when she went in herself she did not get anywhere, but when she went with her Nana, armed with information about ICA, she was granted it.

#### CASE 6

A young Pakeha woman was living at home when she first applied for the unemployment benefit. The first time she went in she was told to wait for her interview but the office closed before she could be seen. She was told to return the next day, but they were too busy then, so she was told to go to another office with a summary of the forms she had filled out on the previous day to take with her. There she was put on Youth Allowance. She later shifted out of her parents home, but was not picked up for ICA. However, when only \$81 (instead of \$86) came into her account, she went to her district office to clear it up. At this point she was told she was eligible for another benefit because she was no longer living at home. She waited two hours for an interview which took place in a private room. She was asked why she was not living at home, and told to get a letter from her landlady saying how much rent she paid. She thinks she might have been told about ICA, and how much

she would be getting, but not about the eligibility criteria. Her mother was waiting for her and the interviewer said she had to come in to say that her daughter was not living at home, and not getting any financial support from her parents. The young woman said her mother did not want to do this, but the interviewer said she had to. The young woman was granted ICA.

#### CASE 7

A young Pakeha woman of farming background was put onto Youth Allowance while she was living at home. She knew of friends who had left home and gone onto a higher rate of benefit (although she had never heard of ICA), so when she moved to the city, she asked for her unemployment benefit to be raised. This took six weeks to come into her account, but she then got a lump sum with back payments. As she put it, "It does seem a contradiction in terms: it's an Independent Circumstances Allowance, and I was dependent on other people for six weeks after applying for it! They ask you if you are acquiring money - but I needed to get some money - but if I said so, I would have lost out." There followed several months of repeated visits to DSW because of missed and incorrect payments, lost files ("First they said they lost my files, then they wouldn't let me see them"), and presumably shifting from ACCESS payments by Labour back to DSW benefits. Later she got a "random interview" (presumably from Quality Control) and the interviewer clarified many of these events for her - showing her the files and discovering three different things that had gone wrong (for example, a \$20 loan was repaid at \$5 per week for six weeks).

#### CASE 8

A young Maori woman learned about ICA from her ACCESS tutor, and believes she was given the unemployment benefit application form and statement to complete while doing her ACCESS course. She completed the form and got her parents to sign the statement about her not living at home and not getting any support from them. She took these to the district office, waited two hours for an interview which took place in a booth and was told to return with her IRD number (and another piece of information or documentation which she can not now recall). The only information she reported being given at the time was the approximate rate of benefit. Within the week she received a letter detailing the amount and starting date of her benefit, and she took the items that had been requested to the district office.

She had been on ICA for four weeks when she was put onto the Youth Allowance rate of benefit. She said that the reason she was put on the reduced rate was that DSW had contacted her parents and her mother had said that she would be happy to have her back anytime. She commented that when her mother found out she was pregnant, she did not want her to live anywhere near her. By the time she was interviewed for this study, the young woman was already on Sickness Benefit.

#### CASE 9

A young Pakeha man applied for the unemployment benefit on his 16th birthday. He had already been living away from his parents for six months. His mother went with him to fill out the forms and it took six weeks for the money to come. This left him entirely without funds for four weeks because the emergency benefit he later applied

for was not paid until three weeks later. In effect, however, the period of time with no income was rather longer since he left his ACCESS course a fortnight before his birthday and he recalls five to six weeks from that point during which he could not pay his board.

He does not remember if he was asked the filter questions, but thinks a letter from his parents was required. [Other young people from this particular district office said that they needed a letter signed by their parents acknowledging that their son or daughter had applied for the dole with their permission.] He was given no information about ICA, but was only told he would get \$82 per week. The first week he was paid \$67, and thereafter \$82.

He moved around a lot because he could not keep up with his rent and other bills. Then his landlord told him to apply for ICA. First he went to reception, "then you sit down for half your life and then they come to you and do it." They said he had to get a letter from his mother or father or both saying that they were not prepared to keep him at home on a long-term basis. "It's fair enough, a bit awkward if you were not getting along with both your parents." About a week or ten days later, he took the letter in and had an interview that went into his life story. "It was good ... the lady was nice, asked if you could write and asked me to write a letter saying why I couldn't stay at home. That was fine. She left me alone to do it which was good." She explained about the higher rate of benefit, and told him that he could have had it earlier. His comment on the process was, "Pretty slack."

#### CASE 10

A young woman, who identified herself as "half-caste Maori/Pakeha", was living with her aunt whom she took with her to DSW to apply for unemployment benefit. They showed the receptionist the Labour Department forms and were told to wait. Half an hour later her name was called and they were interviewed. A female staff member asked for the Labour Department forms which she ticked off. She then asked the young woman some questions about when and why she left school, why she was applying for the benefit, and what she had been doing in between. She asked the filter questions and the aunt helped to verify her niece's explanation for why she was not living at home. Nothing was said about ICA, only that her benefit (\$82.34) would be paid into her account in a few weeks. She only learned about ICA from the information that accompanied the request for an interview for this study. Because she received this information, she put in another unemployment benefit application and a review application with DSW to look at why she did not get interviewed for ICA at the point of her original application. She was confident that she qualified for ICA and was, in fact, later granted ICA.

#### CASE 11

A young Maori/Pakeha woman volunteered herself as an interviewee when she accompanied her friend who was being interviewed for this study. The young woman had recently turned 18 which is why she herself was not in our study population. Because her experience seemed relevant, she was interviewed.

*She said the woman she spoke to at reception was rude, talked down to her and made her feel small. She said the woman spoke loudly to her and seemed annoyed when the young person asked questions. She then had to wait about an hour for an interview.*

*The interviewer was a man who asked her for her leaving certificate, birth certificate, bank account number and IRD number. She was asked if she lived at home (she lives with her step-mother) but not if her parents supported her financially. She said she could not keep up with the rest of the questions. If the interview was for ICA, she was certainly not aware of it.*

*A woman kept coming and going into the booth and "butting in" to the interview. The woman partly explained some things, but the young person was not given any information about ICA. The young woman said she was not given time to take in or understand the questions, so she became confused and lost track of what was happening. She felt rushed and felt that she was not given a "fair go" to have her say, and it made her "feel dumb". She said she was certain that she would have qualified for ICA when she first applied for the benefit.*

#### CASE 12

*A young Maori woman applied for the unemployment benefit while she was living with her sister (also a beneficiary). Their father was employed. She had left school in the 6th Form with School Certificate in four subjects and attended a few ACCESS courses. She took a friend with her when she went to apply for unemployment benefit. She was given some forms at reception and told to return two days later. She came back with her friend who stayed with her during the interview. The interviewer asked questions that her friend had to explain to her. Difficult words were used and she did not know what they meant. She felt nervous and embarrassed. The friend (who had already applied for a benefit herself, and whose grandmother had worked for DSW) also showed her how to write her statement. The interviewer asked her the filter questions to which she answered "no", she filled in a form and wrote her statement, and was told to get someone like her teacher to sign and verify it. She dropped this off at DSW the next day. She did not know that she was being interviewed for any special benefit, was not told which benefit she would go on, only that she would be getting \$77. She has been getting \$83.34 and thought that that was all she could get. During the interview for this study she was shown a list of the ICA criteria and indicated one of them that applied to her own situation.*

#### CASE 13

*A young Pakeha male (whose history involves several applications for various benefits) believed that he should have been given ICA when he applied for the unemployment benefit. "There was a bit of a bust up in the family and I left because of something that happened between me and Dad."*

*He knew about ICA so he went to DSW. "It was the most irritating day. I stayed there from 10 to 4 o'clock." They gave him an unemployment benefit application*

form to fill out, he asked about ICA and they said they would need to have a special person to interview him. She was "the only helpful one." He said the other staff were all rude. He had had four friends go into the same office and get the same rude treatment. "I just dread going in there, even for the simplest thing, even changing my address. It's almost like a nightmare."

The first interview (with the "helpful one") was in a cubicle and private (this appears to have been when he was assessed for ICA). But he was unhappy that at other times he was interviewed, he was just brought to the side of reception. "I had to write a statement about why I wasn't at home." They suggested that he could go onto Youth Allowance. He had brought his friend (he was staying with his friend and his friend's mum) but they would not accept the friend as a Youth Advocate, because he was under 20. He was going to bring in an older person, but he had a motorcycle accident and went onto the Sickness Benefit instead.

After he recuperated at home he went to his first flat. "I was finding it very hard" and he went to apply for accommodation benefit. There was no interview, he filled out forms, he told them how much he paid in rent, they made him sign a statement as to how many were in the flat, etc, but they wanted proof. He brought in his monthly savings account statement, which showed who the rent money was paid to, a current "instant statement", and a photocopy of the automatic payment form that authorised the direct debiting to his landlord. But they also wanted a letter from his landlord, who was on holiday in Australia. "I never got the accommodation benefit for the first flat. Eventually I couldn't keep it up, the bills got too much and we all had to leave." Several of the flatmates were on the dole. He also tried to get money from DSW to pay for the bond for his flat, but was told that he could only get money for this if he was in a married/de facto relationship.

When he shifted into his flat he tried to reapply for ICA. He was allowed to take his friend into the interview. The interviewer briefly ran through the eligibility criteria and told him he did not fit. He thinks he did at the time.

On another occasion, "I took [another friend] along - they asked him to leave." He has tried to go along with friends who were applying for unemployment benefit to support them but, "I've never been allowed to sit with them. They always ask me to leave so they can talk with them alone."

#### CASE 14

A young Pakeha school leaver applied for the unemployment benefit. "They wouldn't let you sign up for the dole until you wrote a statement about why you left school. Your parents had to read it and sign it and write that they agreed to have you be on the dole." A School Leaving Certificate was also required, which she had. They gave her sheets to fill out, and she was told to "fill them out" with no explanation. She was living at home at the time and did not want to show her parents the forms and the statement. She screwed them up and threw them away.

Then she started a course on retailing, reception and elementary hairdressing. She got a Training Benefit for the course from the Labour Department, "no problems", for 12



weeks. "Then DSW will put you on the dole - because you've been on a course, no questions asked." She learned this from others on the course. So, later, she registered with Labour and DSW. At reception she was given forms and told, "fill it out." She "waited ages" for an interviewer who looked at the sheets, took her Birth Certificate to copy and her bank book. She was given \$80. She was flatting at this point, but she was not asked the filter questions. She was also given \$5 accommodation benefit, but only after she asked about it. "They don't really explain everything - the benefits you can get - so you get the littlest amount out of them."

After reading the information sheet with the ICA criteria she said that she would not qualify since she left home because she wanted to be independent. However, flatting is impossible for her on Youth Allowance and she has had to move back with her parents because of the debts she has incurred. "This girl I know, she got a grant from them [DSW] for a bond - she's on ICA and doesn't have to pay back the bond - but I do at \$10 per week. I feel bad because I have to live at home again because I can't afford to flat. And they're not happy that the power bill is only being paid back at \$10 a week."

Her only hope for independence is to find employment. She is trained for hairdressing and would like to get a job in this field, but, because she has tattoos, salon work will not be available to her. "People could understand that they're just from a time in your life when you're younger."

#### CASE 15

A young Pakeha man, after moving to another, less densely populated part of the country, applied for the unemployment benefit and got \$80. He shifted again, reapplied, and got \$85. At this point he "kicked up a stink." He said that in 1988 (about a year before the study interview) he had been getting \$130. (He was afterwards employed for a period in a dairy factory and it was after his employment ceased that he first moved away from his home area.) They explained to him about the lowering of the rate of benefit through the Youth Allowances scheme. He reapplied but was told that was all he would get. "I was in and out of Social Welfare when I needed money. I couldn't keep up with money for food and stuff. I got food vouchers. I went in a few times to see if they made a mistake." But, "they haven't got money to give me."

In the course of these applications the filter questions were asked, he was interviewed and his files examined. He was aware that there was a higher rate of benefit, but he was told that he was not entitled to more than he was getting. "It was disturbing, telling them my situation and she said 'we told you before', speaking in a bad tone. She didn't want to listen to my side of it. As far as Social Welfare was concerned, they weren't willing to give me any more."

When he was being interviewed for this study, the ICA criteria were explained to him. He observed that in shifting from the North Island to Dunedin he could be seen to be moving away from the areas of most work, which might not have helped his case as far as meeting the criteria went.

*Describing his present situation he said, "I can't go out, I get depressed, get pretty down, even \$20, that would be money for buses to look for work."*

*The study interviewer remarked, "The interview was brief. It actually felt pretty hopeless because he was so desperate for the money and had tried so hard for it to no avail. He obviously was unhappy at home, perhaps more bored than anything else, but keen to be independent, anyway. But I could not see my way to asking more pointedly about this or why he went to the South Island. He only spoke vaguely about needing a change."*

#### CASE 16

*A young Maori/Pakeha was still living at home when he applied for the unemployment benefit, and he was put on the Youth Allowance. When he left home he told the Labour Department who told him to advise Social Welfare. At DSW he was given a change of address form to fill out. Although he did not recall being interviewed, he received a letter saying he would be getting \$108 a week. But for the last three weeks prior to his interview for this study, his benefit had not been paid at all.*

*He said that he had been sent to a job by the Labour Department, who told him it would be a full-time, permanent position. But when he got to the job, he was told that it would only be part-time for about two weeks (at the most for a month) and that if he was considered unsuited for the job, he would be told so at the end of the first day and would not be asked to come back. The young man wanted a permanent position and did not like the boss's attitude, so he rang up at the end of the day to say he did not want the job. Social Welfare wanted to know why he left the job, and when he came in to explain about this, he was told to put it in writing. He did so, but the receptionist told him to do it again because it was not clear. He also felt that DSW did not believe his explanation. He wrote out his reasons for leaving again and took it back to the receptionist who seemed to think it was "OK."*

*He said that DSW sent his former employer a letter and explained to the young man that they could not start paying his benefit again until they received a reply. Also, if the employer did not provide a good reason for him leaving, then he would have to wait the six-week standdown before he would be paid the unemployment benefit. He rang up "virtually every day" to find out if the letter had been returned. On one occasion the person he had been dealing with at DSW started yelling at him over the phone and hung up abruptly. On another occasion he was told to ring the employer, which he did, and his ex-boss said that the letter had been sent a few days before. The people he boarded with went into DSW with him to say that they were not getting paid any money. The receptionist (who was "very nice") told them "it was coming from higher up" and there was nothing she could do. He said these people have a young family and need the money.*

*It was not the first time something like this had happened to him. On one job he was put off but did not get paid for four weeks. DSW would not pay out his benefit until his pay was settled. In the meanwhile, however, he received Emergency Unemployment Benefit payments.*

## CASE 17

*A young Pakeha woman originally went into Social Welfare to get help so she could keep her job. She had just become a sales representative for an encyclopedia company and needed money to run her car. She was advised to give up the job and go on the dole.*

*"When they said no, I didn't cry, but I got pretty upset. I had to give up something I really wanted to have a go at, that's what made it really hard." She pushed on with the job for a week, but got into debt, and finally applied for the dole.*

*She was asked if she lived at home: "Can you go back home? Is that a possibility?" and she answered, "No." She was asked why she did not stay at home and she explained that she did not get on with her mum, that they got on better when she was away. She was told that because she was 17, she would get \$89, but because she was working irregularly at the hospital it was at a reduced rate. She was told she would get on the benefit in five or six days, but when she rang a week later, she was told by phone that she would go on in four weeks. When she received it, it was reduced to \$60 because of the work she mentioned on the declaration. So because of her irregular work at the hospital her dole would fluctuate with each four-weekly declaration. (She would declare a particular month's income to DSW, and the following month's benefit would be adjusted to it. If she worked relatively many hours, her next benefit payment would be correspondingly low. If she worked fewer hours the next month, her income would be less, and her benefit payment, adjusted to the previous month's income, would also be less.)*

*She was only able to survive with support from her friends, shifting from place to place, sometimes even sleeping in a car. She felt insecure and hates taking money from others (her friends who had supported her) and hated to be on the dole. "It makes me feel awful, but there's not a lot I can do about it."*

## CASE 18

*A 17 year old Pakeha woman said that she had worked part-time since she was 11 years old. She used to skip school on Mondays to work so that she had the money to go to school and pay board at the same time. (Her parents were separated and her mother was on the domestic purposes benefit.) Eventually she had no option but to leave school because it was too hard working Mondays and after school each day. By the time she applied for the unemployment benefit she had sold her horse, her flute, her furniture and everything else she had that she could sell to survive.*

*When she went into Social Welfare, she says she was "treated like shit" and given little help. She was told to return with two forms of identification. She had to borrow eight dollars to get a Birth Certificate. But in the end she was told she would not have to bother with her School Leaving Certificate because she went to school in a different area. She was also asked if she wanted to apply for the accommodation benefit.*

*When she returned at 9.00 am the next day, she was told to wait, missed her turn because she did not know what she was meant to do when they called her name out, but was eventually seen at 4.00 pm. Her father had come just to support her, but "the interviewer spoke to Dad not to me which peeved me off." Being partially deaf, the young person found it hard to follow the conversation when all the comments were addressed to her father. However, she was told that she would be getting ICA and what the rate of payment was (but not when it would go into her account).*

*She had to wait four weeks for her first ICA payment. She became desperate because she only had two changes of clothing. During the third week she "jumped up and down" in the district office: she said it took three hours to get a cheque for a half week's worth of her benefit.*

#### **CASE 19**

*A young Pakeha man left home at fifteen because his stepfather beat him and sexually abused him. A social worker arranged a foster home for him but he found his foster mother a difficult person to get along with. He left his foster home after six months during which he got School Certificate. He had hoped to get UE as well, and go into medicine or law or become a pilot, but "I had to leave school. I didn't have any choice because I couldn't live at my foster home. I needed to have some money coming in." So he applied for the unemployment benefit. He felt he could only have stayed with his foster mother, "if I'd changed myself to suit her, which I couldn't do. My only regret now is that I'm not at school and not learning. I would go back if the benefit allowed it. It should be changed."*

*Although Social Welfare has spent quite a lot on this seventeen-year-old, he feels himself to be in a dead end. His benefit is \$130 a week, but \$120 goes directly to his landlady in board. He gets \$10 a week in the hand, but has not saved money for clothing and is dressed, literally, in rags. This discourages him from looking for jobs, and although he would like to do a course at the polytech, he is afraid that there is no one to give him the extra support he would need.*

## CHAPTER 5

### COMMUNITY AGENCIES

#### Introduction

There were several reasons why community and youth agencies were included in this research. Firstly, the researchers wanted to tap youth workers' knowledge of young people who were not clients of DSW, but might fit the criteria for ICA (eg. "streetkids"). It was beyond the resources of this project to get access to these young people directly, yet, in order to be able to say whether or not ICA was reaching its intended population, it was important to try to learn something about them.

Secondly, the researchers wanted to learn of young people who were living with their parents or guardians in unsafe or otherwise distressing circumstances - in other words, young people who would be eligible for ICA if they left home. The ethical, political and logistic problems posed by trying to contact these young people directly would have been overwhelming. Nevertheless, the researchers decided that it was important to get some indication of how large a category this might be.

Thirdly, it was hoped that the community agencies would be a point of contact for interviewing more young people, especially those who did not choose to respond to the mailed requests for interviews. And fourthly, it was expected that members of these agencies would have had direct experience with ICA by having acted as Youth Advocates.

The contact with community agencies was productive in all four areas. Furthermore, quite aside from their Youth Advocate experiences, the agency workers provided insight into the problems young people have in gaining access to the welfare system in general. Their dealings with young people had a much wider context than ICA and their responses reflected this broader perspective. In one way or another, all of the community agencies interviewed expressed their concern that young people needed more than help with meeting their immediate financial needs. They emphasised the importance of preventative work, and of providing resources for young people in a way that preserved their self-respect and allowed them to make choices about their future.

This chapter will report on community agencies' knowledge of ICA, their perceptions of young people's knowledge of ICA and the agencies' ideas on useful ways to inform both themselves and young people about provisions such as ICA. This chapter will also cover community agencies' knowledge of young people who may possibly be eligible for ICA, but who are not receiving it; their knowledge of young people at home in undesirable circumstances; their comments on the ICA assessment process specifically; community agencies' particular concerns with the difficulties young people have in accessing the welfare system; and their experiences as Youth Advocates.

### The Community Agencies and their Clients

The term "community agencies" includes government agencies, other than DSW, for example, Police and Probation Service, as well as non-government agencies which were working with young people in the community at the time the study was carried out.

Representatives from a total of 66 different organisations dealing with young people were interviewed in Auckland, Christchurch, Rotorua and Whakatane. These comprised:

- 10 Maori groups (including one group devoted to sexual abuse victims, and one MACCESS training centre)
- 7 Pacific Islands groups (including two groups devoted to substance abusers and one ACCESS training centre)
- 12 Youth or family oriented social work agencies
- 11 residences (including three devoted to substance abusers)
- 10 other ACCESS training centres
- 6 agencies dealing with offenders (Probation and Police)
- 4 unemployed workers groups
- 4 agencies dealing with sexual abuse victims
- 2 school counsellors
- 66 organisations represented in total

Sometimes an interview involved more than one representative of the agency. Nevertheless, the responses from all the representatives together at the interview are treated as one "respondent". When the text refers to an agency or a community agency, this means all the representatives that were interviewed together from that community organisation, and their responses are treated as a unified response. A list of the community agencies, and the number of their representatives interviewed, is given in Appendix V.

Community agencies were asked how many 16 and 17 year olds they had worked with since January 1989. Seven of the larger organizations responded with numbers in the hundreds. Nine respondents dealt with less than 10 (because they worked with a wider age group). Twenty-five did not provide a specific number, describing the volume of their 16 and 17 year old clients as "countless", "heaps", "a handful" or "fluctuating". From figures provided by 41 community agencies who were interviewed for the study, it appears that overall they were in contact with over 3000 16 and 17 year olds.

The community agencies were asked to describe their work and their clients. Their work with young people involved advocacy and advice on welfare problems, counselling, training and providing or arranging for food and shelter on an emergency or regular basis. They described their clients in broad, indicative terms. The young people they worked with included males and females, and a wide range of ethnicity. Most descriptions of the young people's family

backgrounds referred to parents who were beneficiaries and had no spare money for supporting teenagers; and to one-parent, broken or reconstituted families. But some agencies described their young people as coming from a mix of backgrounds, or from "intact", "average", working class or middle class families.

The current situation of the young people was varied: some were streetkids, some were living at home or with relatives, some in residential programmes, some "shifting around" and some flatting; some were escaping from violence and substance abuse in their families while some were "kicked out" of their homes (often by a parent's new partner); some were school leavers, some had been expelled, some were still attending school and others were in ACCESS or MACCESS programmes.

### Information Sharing

#### Community Agencies' Knowledge of ICA

Over half of the community agencies (38 out of 66) had no knowledge of ICA, 12 were fully informed and 16 had some knowledge of ICA. Four of those agencies who knew nothing of ICA said they had good liaison with DSW and were confident that they could leave their clients' benefits entirely in the hands of DSW staff. The rest of the agencies (62 out of 66) expressed a desire to be informed about benefit programmes.

- \* *"I think lately with this new restructuring it's been hard for the people on the street (community workers) because Social Welfare themselves aren't sure of what the hell is going on. I mean if the Department's in a turmoil, how on earth do they expect people who are working in voluntary service agencies to have a clue as to what is going on, because it keeps changing anyway. A new paper comes out and it's a new structure so it's really difficult for people at grass roots level to keep up with the changes."*

When asked what would be the best way to inform community agencies about ICA, the most common suggestion (22 responses) was that circular memoranda or other information be mailed directly and regularly to the agency. In addition, seven asked for booklets with detailed information about all the benefits available.

The second most common suggestion (14 responses) was that speakers or fieldworkers from DSW should visit the community agencies for face to face communication, information sharing and answering queries. In addition, eight suggested regular meetings, information days or courses with DSW and community agency staff; four wanted to have contact people they could liaise with at DSW; and four suggested that DSW staff could attend meetings of various coordinating groups, councils and liaison committees so that several community agencies could be informed at the same time. Four suggested disseminating information through the media.

### Young People's Knowledge of ICA and their Need to Know

Over half the community agencies (37 out of 66) offered an opinion on the level of awareness of ICA among young people. Twenty-three thought they knew nothing about ICA, seven thought they had some knowledge of ICA, seven thought they only knew a little bit about it.

- \* *"DSW does not release information. People have to find it, but you need to know to be able to ask for it."*
- \* *"Young persons wouldn't dream there would be something like this."*
- \* *"Stuff all! Never heard of it and wouldn't know enough to ask."*
- \* *ICA is DSW's "closely guarded secret."*

The point was made that if young people were not informed and their eligibility for such a benefit was missed, the young person, through their ignorance of what could have been made available to them, would not be in a position to bring the matter to the attention of DSW staff. This issue was argued explicitly by six of the interviewees, but was implicit in the statements and concerns of many others.

- \* *"They aren't told. There isn't any publicity. People don't know about benefits to know what to ask for. They don't have the names of benefits and unless you do you get told, there is nothing."*
- \* *"Nobody gives information - Pakehas close it off to control people."*

### Best Ways of Informing Young People

When asked the best ways to inform young people, the most common suggestion (18 responses) was to use the staff of the community agencies. It was considered that if DSW kept the community agencies well informed, they, in turn, would make sure that the young people knew about the available benefits.

- \* *"It's up to us to teach them there are other opportunities, and this is one of them that I didn't know about - and I worked for the Department for [several] years!" (The interviewee worked with sexual abuse victims.)*
- \* *"I think it would be better if we as [ACCESS] training providers could be seen as colleagues in their [DSW's] dealings with young people."*

Fifteen respondents suggested informing young people through the schools, with posters, visits by DSW staff, and pamphlets sent to careers advisory officers and guidance counsellors. Eight suggested informing them through ACCESS courses.

Fourteen thought that DSW should make use of the media, variously suggesting radio, television and newspaper advertising. Others suggested posters, pamphlets



and videos both in district office waiting areas and in places young people are likely to be found: night clubs, sporting venues and video parlours, and at youth seminars. Nine argued for networking and passing on information by word-of-mouth, and six emphasised the importance of working through Maori Wardens and other Maori groups to reach Maori youth.

Frequently the point was made that whatever the methods, they had to be used in ways appropriate to young people. Posters had to be bright and attractive, use of the media had to be creative, and most of all, the language had to be plain, simple and meaningful to young people.

- \* *"It has to be honest, not departmental talk."*
- \* *"Use straight up language."*
- \* *"Use young people who've been there to advertise."*
- \* *"Words like 'allowance' and 'criteria' mean nothing to these young people." Language has to be aimed at what they are familiar with and understand.*

### Young People in Need of ICA

#### The Extent of the Problem

When asked whether they knew of young people who were in need of ICA and not receiving it, some responded with specific instances while others spoke more generally of "many" or "lots" or "some" young people in this situation. Less than half of the agencies said they knew of any, but those that did (29) described the circumstances of the young people in terms which made it clear that these respondents understood both the filter questions and the eligibility criteria for ICA. On the surface there would seem to be no reason to doubt their assessment of the young people as being at least potential ICA recipients.

However, it was not always easy for community agencies to distinguish, for the purposes of the study, between young people living away from home and those who were at home in distressing circumstances, because the young people were frequently moving between home and other living situations. Someone who worked with rural youth commented:

- \* *"It's hard to say because the kids here are very transient, they're... constantly coming and going. They've got reasonably strong family bases here which they use in terms of extended family and friends and all sorts and they just really move from one house to another. But it's really hard to say because they go from one category to the other."*

Fifteen respondents said there were "many", "lots", "some", "quite a few" or "heaps" of young people in need of ICA but not receiving it. Another (a Maatua Whangai worker) said there were over 100. [These responses are consistent with the findings of an Internal Affairs study (Coup 1984) discussed in Literature Review Appendix I.] Thirteen respondents knew between one and 12 specific

individuals (an average of four cases each) whom they considered needed ICA but did not receive it.

### The Situations of Young People Away from Home in Need of ICA

The young people were generally described as having been kicked out of home or leaving families in which they experienced such things as violence, sexual abuse, alcoholic parents, conflict with a parent's new partner, and the stresses of overcrowding and unemployment. Some young people had been away from home for years, sometimes still transient or living on the streets. Sometimes their parents were overseas.

- \* *"Social Welfare these days ... they're interested in the family taking responsibility. The reality is that you haven't got nice families."*
- \* *"These kids don't have homes like we know them..."*
- \* *"There are heaps out there. Only a tiny proportion come in. We could find more, but what can we do with them? People are scared because DSW can take kids, so they fear the Maatua Whangai."*
- \* *"Violence and sexual abuse are common as anything - lots of it."*

When describing specific cases, the community agencies again referred to violent, alcoholic parents and guardians, family breakdown, abuse by a parent's new partner, sexual abuse and overcrowding. The young people ran away or were "kicked out" (some for sniffing) and were living with relatives (often grandparents who could not afford to keep them), flatting precariously (missing rent and other payments), living in caravan parks, "crashing" with mates or repeatedly picked up for overdosing.

- \* *"Nearly all the streetkids under our care left home early because their parents were never there, because they were always in the pub, or out drinking and would come home and beat them around. So they turn anti-everything and go around sniffing and committing crimes. Only a couple of them are on the streets of their own choice."*
- \* *"Three kids ran away from home, but wanted to go to school. But they were too scared to go home. They were 15 and 16 years old."*

Two interviewees did not say how many young people living away from home were in need of ICA, but said that whenever they saw a young person in such circumstances they immediately arranged for appropriate income support. Another said that the focus of their agency was to return young people back to their whanau, to work with their whanau (as opposed to arranging for them to receive welfare benefits).

### Those in Need Who Did Not Meet the Eligibility Criteria

Eight community agencies described young people in need, but who were clearly not eligible, or not yet eligible, for ICA. In most instances this was because they were under 16 years of age.

- \* *"Fifteen year olds are a real problem. I know of two fifteen year old females who are working as prostitutes in the street because they were chucked out of home and had no way to support themselves." (Unemployed workers' organisation.)*
- \* *A sexual abuse counsellor said she saw 13 year olds who lived in the streets because of no home or family that's safe enough to live with. She said they had absolutely no help and then got into drugs, alcohol, glue and anything that made life bearable.*

The issue of under-16 year olds came up in response to other questions as well, even though interviewees were not asked specifically about this group. Twenty-one community agencies volunteered their concerns that these younger people were not being looked after.

Two agencies mentioned young people who were still in secondary school and were trying to support themselves independently. For example, sometimes parents moved to another town while their young people stayed behind to complete their schooling.

Many respondents, particularly those from Maori community groups, mentioned that the young people they worked with came from very poor families and overcrowded homes. They pointed out that when these young people left home for these reasons, they did not meet the eligibility criteria for ICA.

- \* *"Unemployment and redundancy have had a huge effect on people in this area. They just don't have the resources to support young people."*
- \* *"Poverty is rife."*

A rural youth worker believed that there would be many more young people in need of income support in the future. This respondent was aware that many young people who had voluntarily left home to move to the city were now returning and believed that some of these might not be accepted back into their parents' homes.

Some Pacific Islands groups said that there were young people living in circumstances of hardship who were not eligible for ICA or other assistance, since due to cultural differences, their particular circumstances did not meet the criteria. This will be taken up in the section on Concerns About ICA's Target Population (p.90).

### Why Those in Need Are Not Getting ICA

Interviewees pointed to several reasons why those eligible might still not be getting ICA. A common problem was that young people did not know that such an allowance existed. One respondent knew of several young people who had gone on the unemployment benefit while still living at home, but when they left (for such reasons as violence, sexual abuse, overcrowding and poor relations with parents) they were not picked up for the higher rate and as they themselves were not aware of it, they never took it up with Social Welfare.

Some community agencies thought that some young people slipped through the net during the changeover from Labour to Social Welfare of responsibility for paying ACCESS trainees.

Three respondents suggested that young people would not want to tell DSW staff about their experiences of abuse. One of them commented:

- \* *"Sometimes the kids feel guilty at not living at home, they feel loyalty to their parents. So they don't want to talk about it (to DSW) and just accept it as their own fault and so forget it."*

The head of a large urban youth agency, that sees 800 young people per year, found several patterns:

- \* *"Quite a lot of the ones we'd see of a ... vagrant nature, or a streetkid type nature ... they do not wish to get in touch with DSW for a number of reasons, one of the major ones being that they've fouled their copybook by not reporting, by changing addresses, sometimes by cheating. And others have had experiences of DSW in the past ... They might have been in care, you know, along the line and feel they don't want to get into that network. Or others just don't want to go through any control system where they've got to be responsible to an agency like DSW. And a few others are getting money through thieving and prostitution or drug selling and they're not worried, or they're living off a sort of nomad existence with their mates, and they're all supporting each other in whatever sort of way ... Well, I would find they are a small percentage of the youths that we would see ... About ten percent of all the youngsters we'd see would be in that sort of category."*

According to some agencies, the young people sometimes could not meet the verification requirements of a particular district office (especially when parents were required to cooperate).

- \* *(From a detached youth worker) "Mum doesn't know about the interference. [The young person] could be forced to go back. The parents won't admit to it."*
- \* *(Explaining why a young man, forced to leave home, is trying to survive the six-month standdown for Youth Allowance in a flat with another beneficiary) "Well, they said to him, 'Can you get a letter off your father saying you're not living at home?' and he said, 'I'll try', and he went to his Dad, and his Dad said, 'No'."*

## Young People At Home in Undesirable Circumstances

### The Extent of the Problem

The community agencies were asked if they knew of young people living at home in undesirable or distressing circumstances. Their answers to this question were similar to those concerning young people in need of ICA (above), in that some responded with specific instances and others spoke in more general terms.

Eleven respondents specified between one and 22 individual cases of young people at home in undesirable circumstances: a total of 42 cases. They included males and females, Maori, Pakeha and Pacific Islands people. Generally, however, there were more references to Maori and Pacific Islands youth, and to women.

Fourteen agencies said that there would be "lots", "heaps", "quite a few", but they would not be able to put a number on it. These respondents included representatives of ACCESS training centres and a residential substance abuse rehabilitation programme, youth workers, sexual abuse counsellors and people working with young offenders. The head of a very large youth and family social work agency calculated that 60% of the young people his agency saw fell into this category: close to 500 youths per year in a bad or dangerous home situation. A Maori youth worker believed there would be over 100 in his area, and the head of an ACCESS training centre considered that 5% of her trainees would be living in such conditions.

Two agencies said that whenever they found such a case they immediately took steps to find a safe environment for the young person, and for that reason they did not know of any current situations of young people living in undesirable circumstances at home. Another respondent who was in charge of a residence said she only saw the young people after they had left home. However, she had received calls from shopkeepers asking if she had any vacancies for young people (working for them as assistants) who talked to their bosses about what was happening at home and who needed to get away. The representative of an urban social work agency believed that by their late teens people in such situations tend to leave home anyway. A Maori community agency social worker thought that a lot of young people who might seem to be living at home were only using their parents' address and were actually living with friends or on the street or "crashing" from place to place.

### The Undesirable Circumstances

The home situations described by community agencies typically included sexual abuse, violence and alcoholic parents; unemployment, overcrowding and poverty; stressful relationships, often within reconstituted families; neglect; a lack of guidance, values, discipline and support; family breakdown; parents who have been in prison; and suicide attempts by the young people themselves.

- \* *"You name it, it's there."*
- \* *"No one cares, but you are desperate."*

- \* *"There is no relief."*
- \* *"Lots do leave and sleep around town because it is safer than at home."*
- \* *"The extended family these days is not what it used to be. It's composed of all sorts of people and ages because people cannot get housing or afford to rent it. Housing is built to the Pakeha nuclear family."*

The Maori youth worker quoted directly above argued that the "extended family" concept had been glorified and misrepresented as traditional Maori social structure; that furthermore, the sort of situation which is currently described as "extended family" is not part of Maori culture or tradition, but a response to current financial, social and family breakdown problems: it is not a choice for Maori families, but an economic necessity.

- \* *"There is so much unemployment, so many people on benefits, families are such a mess, people feel frustrated and angry because they haven't got enough to survive, to make ends meet. Often there are lots of kids and other people who are living in one place. There is a lot of alcohol and drugs and glue. There is a lot of violence and sexual violence and no way out of it. There is so much poverty, no budgeting knowledge, repossession threats and action, unpaid fines, court appearances, jail terms. Can't afford kids' school fees, school camps, etc. There are a lot of attempted suicides, and lots end up in psychiatric care."*

#### Why Young People Stay at Home in Undesirable Circumstances

When asked why the young people stayed at home under these circumstances, the general consensus was that they did not see any alternatives for themselves, particularly in that they believed they could not afford to leave. More specifically, respondents commented that

- \* *no matter how bad it was, it was the only home they knew;*
- \* *they had no place to go;*
- \* *"It's lack of rental accommodation ... we don't have half-way houses ... we don't have other support agencies ... We're in a rural depressed area";*
- \* *they needed the emotional support of family;*
- \* *they were not informed about alternatives (e.g., income support that might be available if they left).*

Additional problems included that

- \* *"A lot of young people stay at home because they feel obligated";*
- \* *they did not want to expose family problems;*

- \* *sometimes they did go away, found they could not manage on their own, and had to go back to their families.*

It was clear from several Pacific Islands organisations that, for Pacific Islands young people, there were also strong cultural reasons as to why they might continue to live at home in undesirable circumstances. In broad terms, it was stressed that Pacific Islands young people are not usually encouraged to move out of home or to become "independent" - as it is generally not part of Pacific Islands cultures to be oriented towards becoming "independent individuals", but rather, Pacific ways of living are centred around the extended family and community. Everyone has particular roles to take up within the family and young people have a very special role to play in this way of life.

Thus, it was stressed that when there are traumatic situations in the home, such as violence or sexual abuse, young people do not often perceive that they have any options but to stay at home. Reasons to stay may include their obligations to help out at home (for example, to help look after younger siblings or household work), fear of uncovering family problems and causing family embarrassment, fear of being shamed or being ostracised from the family, fears that they may not have the ability to cope on their own. However, it was pointed out that in many of these traumatic situations, although young people may not move out on their own (go flatting, for example), they may often go to live with other relatives (sadly though, as some community workers noted, young people may sometimes find themselves in homes with similar problems to those which they have left).

Some community workers agreed that there was a special conflict experienced by Maori youth between wanting to stay home (and contribute what they could) on Youth Allowance and leaving home when they knew that they would need every penny of the ICA payment to support themselves. An ACCESS trainer felt this was particularly difficult for young people in training programmes, because not all of their training costs were covered by the training benefit, and they had even less to contribute (or were a burden on their families) as a result.

Several agencies made the point that there would be many young people living at home in undesirable circumstances who were under the age of 16. A school counsellor said that she mainly saw the younger ones because the 16 year olds were more likely to confide in a friend. A sexual abuse counsellor argued that it was 12 to 14 year olds who needed to be made aware of alternatives to living with abusive parents. She added, "start it in Kohanga! They are our future."

A few individual cases of young people living at home in undesirable circumstances were described in detail.

- \* *One young person was forced to stay at home to comply with the conditions for his probation, despite the fact that there was a history of domestic violence and he did not get on with his parents. At the time of the interview the young man was in jail after committing an offense as a result of a fight with his parents.*

- \* *A youth agency worker mentioned one 16 year old girl who was expected to stay at home to look after the children and work on the farm. The mother was an alcoholic and the girl wanted to get out and get a job. She was only living at home because of pressure from her mother.*
- \* *A youth worker discussed the case of a young Maori girl who was sent to her because she was "naughty". It turned out that she was being sexually abused by her father and her father's friends. The youth worker believed some political concerns were behind the fact that the father was never prosecuted. The girl would always be sent home again where she was repeatedly abused. She eventually began shoplifting, was sent to Kingslea ("She was punished!"), became a user, and is now in a centre for addicts and has a child. "DSW owes her. They were part of that decision-making team that went in and made her stay in that situation and punished her. So they owe her, for me, more than a benefit. They owe her part of her life. It's like ACC. They owe her a type of ACC for the decisions they have made." [Pertinent to the needs of young people abused at home was the concern of an agency which specialises in counselling victims of sexual abuse. They commented that under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, abused young people's rights might be abridged because, when it came to the family making decisions on the young person's care, adult loyalties in the family would tend to be with the abuser and not with the young person.]*

#### Concerns About the Accessibility of ICA

Community agencies expressed a wide range of concerns about the accessibility of ICA. They expressed these concerns very strongly and made it clear that they felt very seriously about these issues. Furthermore, these comments were unsolicited. It is considered that those agencies that actually mentioned these issues are only a fraction of those interviewed that would have agreed that these were areas of concern to them, had they been asked specifically about each one. In other words, if a list of these problems had been used as prompts, the agencies would have undoubtedly expressed concern with more issues than they volunteered without prompts. Their concerns included misgivings over the target population (the specific category of young people that the benefit was meant for) and the eligibility criteria and how they were applied, as well as difficulties with the application process and DSW staff.

However, one community agency said that ICA was reasonably easy to access, that it was good to put the onus of support on parents, and also approved of the use of positive terms like Youth Allowance and training benefit instead of unemployment benefit. Two agencies said they liked the way that rewards were now shifted towards training.

Another organisation said about ICA,

- \* *"It's the absolute lifeline now for 16 and 17 year olds ... we've got to have that."*



### Concerns About ICA's Target Population

The main line of criticism concerning ICA focused on the need to widen the target population and broaden the eligibility criteria. About half the community agencies interviewed thought that the allowance should be made available to a wider range of young people, particularly with respect to age and home circumstances.

Twenty-one community agencies expressed a concern that those under the age of 16 who had left home were not being supported.

- \* *An urban nightshelter and rehabilitation programme had cared for approximately 40 young people under the age of 16 between January and October 1989. They were typically glue sniffers and poly-drug abusers (using more than one substance), and most had been emotionally, physically and sexually abused. The organisation found it very difficult and complicated to get Orphan's Benefit for any of them. Its representative said there was lots of paperwork and he had to get the parents to sign certain documents as well.*
- \* *A large church-based social work agency said they were finding it increasingly difficult to find appropriate foster parents for the under 16 year olds because the Unsupported Child Allowance was so low. The agency itself covers the cost of things like bus passes, medical bills and holidays.*
- \* *Probation officers pointed out that because under-16 year olds are not covered by this benefit, there are no resources available to 15 year olds who are assigned by the courts to community care. Ordinarily the sponsor/employer would use the young person's unemployment benefit to cover costs, so a 15 year old would not be accepted.*

There was also concern that young people who had left home and wanted to stay on in school were not being supported.

- \* *The representative of a Maori social work agency pointed out that when young people are forced to leave home (often just through conflict with parents who are stressed because of redundancy and poverty), they have to drop out of school as well because there is no support for them to stay on.*

Also, there were major concerns expressed about young people who were living at "home" or with relations, in "undesirable circumstances"; this was often specifically mentioned in relation to Maori and Pacific Islands young people. It was noted that the ICA criteria were aimed at young people who were unable to receive financial support from their parents and who were living away from home. Questions were therefore raised as to the needs of those young people who were unable to receive financial (or other support) from their parents and yet who were living at "home" or with relations.

For example, cases were described where young people were living at home and taking care of the household/younger siblings, since parents were never home, or were always drunk or at the pub. Community workers were often quick to point out that these were situations which the Department should be made aware of, since in many cases the Department's expectation that parents should be more responsible for their young people was unrealistic - in reality, it was often the young people who had to take care of the parents' responsibilities.

Furthermore, it became apparent that there were many assumptions and definitions in social welfare policies that the Department needed to examine in relation to their appropriateness for Pacific Islands cultures, for instance, such concepts as "parents", "home", "family" or "extended family" and "independence". Emphasis was given to some of the unique needs and experiences of Pacific Islands youth which are often different from other groups of young people.

For example, it is not unusual for Pacific Islands young people to live with their relatives rather than their "parents". There are often a lot of different pressures and expectations for young people living with relatives which are particular to those situations, and which are not always the same as those experienced when living with parents. Therefore, the point was made, that differences such as these are not often understood or accounted for in various social welfare provisions or services, and that the Department has a very long way to go in developing policy or delivering services which cater for cultural differences.

In summary, it was emphasised that the Department needed to examine its overall approach to providing services and assistance to young people and families. Thus, in the particular area of ICA, there needed to be consideration given to providing assistance to young people who are living in distressing circumstances at "home" and yet who are unable to get financial support from their parents.

#### The Eligibility Criteria and How They Are Applied

Many community agencies believed that the criteria of eligibility should include the mental health of the young people, estrangement from their parents, when the expectations of parents are unreasonable, and when parents are too poor to support them.

- \* *"We should get away from the idea of blame and punishment. There should only be the single criterion of need."*
- \* *"The mental health of the young person should be a criterion of eligibility, where a young person's emotional and mental development is put at risk by continued dependence on the family unit." So instead of having to prove that there are "irreconcilable differences", one would only have to point to "developmental pressures." "[DSW] may not realise that the only irreconcilable difference is that parents don't recognise that there are irreconcilable differences."*

- \* *A school guidance counsellor believed that criteria for estrangement should be included, where it was just too hard for the young person to live at home because of philosophical differences, e.g. fundamentalist parents; where the young person was unloved; where the parents are authoritarian.*

Concern was also expressed by several community agencies that the ICA criteria were not being applied with enough flexibility, and that the discretions that were built into the allowance led (in some district offices) to less flexibility. Some said that ultimately the granting of the allowance depended on the whims of staff who might be using the criteria in a rigid manner. Specific instances were given of how the eligibility criteria were applied and this is detailed in the section on Youth Advocates and other support for young people (p.101). One general example is provided here.

- \* *The representative of an unemployed workers' organisation said that many young people who were raised by their grandparents were returned to their parents when the grandparents died. Often this caused "untold problems", but if the young person left, they might not be considered to be eligible for ICA.*

There was also concern that young people who moved from urban to rural areas, or from the North Island to the South Island, were seen to be moving away from job opportunities, and so were considered by DSW staff as not complying with their obligations to look for work.

- \* *"The unemployment of young people is long term, structural and will go on for at least 20 years ... Instead of being obsessed with the work ethic, we should accept that young people will be unemployed for some time to come. Why shouldn't they relieve the pressures of the city and explore alternative lifestyles and creative work? ... Why not take a more creative approach if young people can improve their mental health. Let them supplement the unemployment benefit with fishing, etc, or clubbing together. Let people go to Kawakawa or Waiheke."*

While this issue is not specific to ICA, it illustrates the sorts of dissatisfactions expressed by some community agencies with the way rules were sometimes interpreted.

In addition, the differences in practice and policy between district offices were found to be confusing and frustrating to deal with by several community agencies.

- \* *An unemployed workers' organisation found that bonds (needed for rental accommodation) were a special problem since different district offices responded differently, from outright refusal from one to various levels of Special Needs Grant, etc from others.*
- \* *An ACCESS training centre found that a particular district office did not give accommodation benefit to single people. These respondents also said that consistency was lacking across the board.*

#### Difficulties with the Application Process

Community agencies described many problems that young people they worked with experienced in the course of applying for the unemployment benefit, and eventually being assessed for ICA.

It was observed that young people were generally unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the welfare system. They often had real problems producing the required identification and some had no permanent address, and this made the welfare system difficult for them to access.

- \* *"The process doesn't give them back their mana and that's what this is about!"*

It was observed that young people found the language used on the unemployment benefit forms difficult to understand and the forms hard to fill out. It was also observed that young people found some of the questions to be too personal and did not wish to discuss sensitive matters with benefits staff.

- \* *"Sometimes [the young people] blow it, they'd be so rude ... some of them have no social skills and they'd resent being asked to fill in forms because some of them can't read or write ... or they resent being asked ... personal questions by this foreign agency."*

It was observed that the long waits were stressful and some young people found it humiliating to have their names called out.

- \* *"Having to line up is humiliating! It should be done like in banks so you're not the focus of everyone's attention. A light could show up when the next person can go up. No names should be called or bells rung. Everyone hates the bells."*

These were the sorts of problems and situations where Youth Advocates and other support people could be of important help to young people. Some of the assistance that they provided is discussed in the section on Youth Advocates and other support for young people (p.101)

#### Interaction with Staff

Community agencies expressed many concerns arising from the interaction which they and the young people they worked with experienced with DSW staff.

While several community agencies described individual members of district office staff as helpful and considerate, others found them to be rude and insensitive to the youthfulness of their clients, to the hardship of their situations, to their lack of literacy and other skills, and to how hard it was for them to challenge, complain or assert themselves.

- \* *"If a person requests another staff member to deal with them they should be allowed that and it shouldn't be a hassle and you shouldn't get a hard time from all the rest of the staff because of it."*
- \* *"Staff are inhumane and take away what pride you've got left."*

A few were concerned that some staff were polite and accommodating to agency representatives, but did not act in the same way towards young people who went in alone.

- \* *"It's sickening that I can go in and go to the top, directly, and get action immediately, but most people get shit and the runaround ... You shouldn't have to use a position of power to be treated humanely."*
- \* *"So often you have to go to the top to get anything at all, even when it's your entitlement."*

Several respondents called for DSW to recruit more Maori and Pacific Islands staff, for more experienced and older staff, and for "grass roots" training (to emphasise greater cultural sensitivity and understanding of young peoples' experiences, and improve interviewing ability).

- \* *"All staff should be trained at grass roots level not Departmental training - it is out of touch totally. Training needs to be from grass roots people like us. It has to be us to 'know it'. Staff have to learn about life and remember what they learn. They need to speak to us humanely. They have to know that people they deal with are hungry!! Often their benefit has hitches and they know they've got other bellies to feed and bills to pay. Money has run out by the time they come into DSW. They have so much stress already."*

### Benefit Problems

Several community agencies expressed concern about the problems young people experienced after they completed the application process, such as trying to support themselves whilst waiting for the benefit money to actually be paid into their accounts, and dealing with incorrect payments or lapses in their benefits.

The point was made that young people were often already in debt when they applied for the benefit and they found it very difficult to survive the period waiting for the benefit payments to begin.

- \* *"You get told one day, but you can go in five days in a row and your money won't be in your account."*

Likewise, any irregularities in their payments, a wrong amount or a non-payment, could create hardships for young people living barely within their benefit.

- \* *"People need to know exactly when their money will be in the bank. Often they are told a certain date but it doesn't go in. Often DSW muck up your benefit. They never have to compensate you for travel costs, stress of it, they never apologise. Lots of people from ... rural areas have to come in ... to sort out problems DSW make. They can't afford this and often hitch-hike. It's not safe and when they get to the office they often have to wait hours at a time and then go to the bank, then back to DSW etc then come the next day and so on."*  
(paraphrased by interviewer)

- \* *"Staff have to know that people they deal with are hungry. Often their benefit has hitches and they know they've got other bellies to feed and bills to pay. Money has run out by the time they come into DSW. They have so much stress already ... often people come in from K\_\_\_\_\_ and get no action all day. There are no buses from there now."*

Some mentioned the difficulties which can arise when a client transfers from one district office to another.

- \* *"There needs to be a system where if someone transfers from another town that they have their benefit automatically transferred. At present it is reliant on a teller and sighting your file before you can get anything. Often you have to wait weeks and you have no money to live on. Staff are limited (by management) because they have toll limits and aren't allowed to do overtime because of costs. Yet the DSW is flash, carpet up walls, flash chairs, two lights on one booth etc. It's not fair and there is so much affluence there." (paraphrased by interviewer).*

Some youth workers pointed out that young people may not always be assertive enough or knowledgeable enough to ask for the emergency help they require. Also, such grants sometimes caused as much trouble as they saved if they were later recovered.

- \* *"Recoverable grants are totally unrealistic when you have nothing and no money anyway. How can you get and keep a roof over your head, let alone feed yourself...?"*

### Adequacy

Some community agencies had reservations about the adequacy of the Youth Allowance rate of benefit. They were concerned about several categories of young people who did not get ICA and were paid at the lower rate. The biggest worry was that young people living away from home were not able to cover their basic living costs, and could not maintain stable, viable living arrangements.

- \* *Two agencies that provided hostel and emergency accommodation for young people pointed out that the \$82 Youth Allowance barely covered what they had to charge the young people, and these rates were already heavily subsidised (the agencies being run as charitable concerns).*
- \* *"They live in caravan parks which are a rip-off at \$76 - and they miss out on pets."*
- \* *"They need to live in groups because it's cheaper, but then the groups get bigger and they get kicked out anyway."*
- \* *"They haven't got the economic wherewithal to get themselves clothes for job interviews."*

There were also concerns about young people who were living at home whose families could not or would not support them.

- \* *"These people cannot afford food - they have to come to us for vouchers or loans to tide them over ... Families cannot afford to keep young people."*
- \* *One agency representative expressed concern about young people coming to the attention of the agency who were living in single parent, single income situations, or were the children of a previous marriage living in a reconstituted family: the respondent considered that many of these young people were worse off than those in care.*

Some community agencies pointed out that in such situations the new six month standdown was an added stress both for the young people themselves and the families experiencing financial hardship. There were calls for the Department to provide support both for the young people and their families.

The Auckland Unemployed Workers' Union articulated a decisive stance on the Youth Allowance Scheme which was echoed by several other community agencies.

- \* *"We oppose the Youth Support Scheme on the basis that we believe young people should not be treated differently in a situation of unemployment compared to older people. The whole issue of parental income testing is opposed on the basis that:*
  - 1 *We don't believe that young people should be forced to be dependent on their parents. If they are old enough to get a job or go to polytech, they should be old enough to be independent of their parents. They should not be forced to rely on their parents.*
  - 2 *We feel that there will be young people that will be trapped in unhealthy home situations, situations where they are being physically, sexually abused, or emotionally abused, and that they'll feel that they can't leave because they can't afford to leave.*
  - 3 *Parental income testing doesn't take into account what outgoings, what financial commitments people might have. Someone on Youth Allowance may be disadvantaged because their parents may be expected by DSW to support them, but the reality is that they can't because of their financial commitments."*
- "Our position has been that unemployed people should not be treated differently according to their age. Income testing should be abolished and 17 year olds should get the same income as 20 year olds."*
- \* *Several community agencies pointed out that living costs were the same, regardless of age, if there was no parental support.*

- \* *A school counsellor suggested trying to recover money from parents who were not supporting their children, instead of punishing the young people themselves.*

There was strong feeling that in the case of young people, especially those without support (or with minimal support) from their families, the least resources were being given to those least able to cope.

There were specific concerns from ACCESS training providers that the training benefit (which was at the Youth Allowance rate) and the associated allowance for travel (which deducted the first five dollars from the actual transport costs) did not cover the actual costs of attending training courses. The young people had to come up with the extra five dollars and whatever they might need in the way of shoes and clothes. Training providers said that this was often a real hardship for young trainees and their families, and sometimes caused young people to opt out of training altogether.

- \* *"It's not an incentive issue but a cost issue: they are really on UB minus \$5 so they are out of pocket when they start."*
- \* *"The 17 and older young people that I would work with would not touch ACCESS ... they've done ACCESS and they think it's a big have. If you're on the dole at least you can count on it, but if you miss a day of ACCESS, the money is deducted ... safer on the dole."*

Several community agencies talked about the importance of being able to get Special Needs Grants for young people experiencing acute financial hardship.

- \* *"We go for SNG's. Early last year they started cutting those out - we didn't have access to them. They referred to Government cutbacks ... Last year you could go in with a young person in real need and you could count on an SNG [because they were already vetted by a youth worker] but now you have to go in and really battle ... You get the runaround, and the young person usually says, 'oh, stuff it!' And, I mean, they've got ways of getting money -there's prostitution, there's thieving, there's selling pills, going to doctors and getting pills and selling them off. There's beating people up and taking the money that they've got. If they have no access to money, they won't starve, but they'll get themselves in the cart doing it." (a detached youth worker)*

### Young People's Other Needs

Community agencies frequently pointed out that young people had many needs and not all of them could be met by a Social Welfare benefit. One Maori group agreed that the Department was functioning like "an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff" providing nothing but first aid to the victims; they wanted to see more attempts to keep young people from "falling off the cliff" in the first place, and for the ones that do, to make sure they get "taken to hospital" and helped to a full recovery. There was widespread concern over the need for preventative work with young people and their families, and for resources and processes to be put



in place that would give young people back their mana and give them options for their future, and would address the wider context of unemployed youth. These concerns were raised by all of the community agencies interviewed, and were expressed most powerfully by the Maori and Pacific Islands groups.

The community agencies' biggest specific concern was that young people needed training programmes and employment to maintain their self-respect. They said that there were not enough training opportunities for all the unemployed young people who wanted them, and not enough jobs for them to move on to.

- \* *"They [training courses] are not that easy to get [into], though, ... there are schemes around, but there are more unemployed than there are places on the schemes."*
- \* *"Sometimes you need to be unemployed for ten weeks to get on a course or get jobs."*
- \* *"And then they've got these ACCESS programmes which, really, there's no work at the end for the young people and so they just end up back in square one ... You're on a benefit and then there's the ACCESS programme so you feel like there's some hope, but after the 12 week or the 32 week programme, they're back on the streets again ... more skilled in whatever they went to train up in, but they're just on a benefit again."*
- \* *The parent in a DSW family home said, "There should be more incentives, more of a pat on the back for completing ACCESS courses."*
- \* *A detached youth worker suggested that beneficiaries should be encouraged into cottage industries: Housing Corporation could put some rent money into a beneficiaries' lawn mowing company and DSW could train up beneficiaries to help DPB recipients with their babies.*

Many of those who worked with youth said that young people got bored and lost confidence on the dole, and it was important to "wean" them off the benefit.

- \* *"I try to wean them off the Department. I'd rather support them two or three weeks if they can get a job in that time rather than them get used to money for nothing." (a DSW family home parent)*
- \* *"Give them even 12 hours per week involvement - this gives a working record [and] self-satisfaction, developing themselves and their outlook on life, and giving back their mana and self-reliance." (Maatua Whangai)*
- \* *"The system stinks with Social Welfare. It sets people up to be lazy. It doesn't encourage people to go out and do something positive." (A church-based welfare agency)*

- \* *"Money is not the only answer. People need employment, they need emotional and practical support, they need to retrain their thinking and behaviour and how they see themselves."*

Some community agencies were concerned that many young people did not have the skills and support systems for independent living.

- \* *A detached youth worker argued that the unemployment benefit should be tied to "semi-supervised living" - the Department should help young people to find a flat and then help them to budget.*
- \* *The head of a large urban youth agency argued that DSW should have street-level social workers to facilitate the young people into the benefit system and help them with budgeting. "I'm actually not happy that youngsters just get thrown money because the sort of child we're talking about has no concept of budgeting for themselves ... Especially if they're used to stealing it, they have no sense of value - they've found it easy to come by."*
- \* *"They need help and advice on how to stretch their money, what food is cheaper, etc. They need help to learn how to cook, to live - nobody shows them."*
- \* *"DSW needs to be there as a helping agency. [But] DSW seems to be the type that, instead of teaching you how to fish, they just hand you a fish now and then."*
- \* *Two community agencies felt it would be valuable if young people who come to Social Welfare were offered a social worker to speak with as a matter of course.*

The point was made by some agencies that in certain cases the family breakdown situation itself should be addressed and parenting skills should be taught. For some, the answer lay in preventative work, in channelling support to young families. Certainly many community agencies, especially Maori and Pacific Islands community organisations, believed that it was important to help the young person in the wider context of family and whanau.

### Use of Community Resources

Several community agencies suggested ways in which DSW could improve its services to clients by making better use of resources out in the community. They put forward a wide range of ideas.

Several groups suggested that DSW could perform some of its functions, especially interviews with young clients concerning sensitive matters, away from the district office. Possible venues put forward included local marae, school guidance counsellors' offices and ACCESS training providers' premises.

- \* *A sexual abuse counsellor pointed out that it was just about impossible for lots of young people to go to DSW for fear of what they would be asked to explain in a public place.*

Several community agencies believed that DSW should be treating them as colleagues in providing benefits to clients.

- \* *"I think it would be better if we, as training providers, could be seen as colleagues in their dealings with young people. With adult trainees - they have more resources, but with young people we have more of a guardian role."*
- \* *A few agencies said they would like to be able to get copies of DSW application forms so they could help their clients practice filling them out.*
- \* *"We help DSW out [for example, we] keep people calm and prevent fights [in the reception area] but they won't give anything."*
- \* *Some agencies said they would like to contribute their perspective and expertise helping DSW develop more appropriate pamphlets and other informational resources, as well as designing more understandable and "user friendly" application forms.*
- \* *An ACCESS training provider pointed out that if the Department sent the monthly declaration forms to her organisation instead of to the young people themselves, there would be fewer lapses through the young people neglecting to complete them properly or through the forms not reaching these mobile clients in the first place.*
- \* *A detached youth worker was dissatisfied that distressed young people with limited literacy and social skills were expected to come to district office to apply for benefits and explain their circumstances. She suggested that DSW should only have the role of writing out cheques for these clients and 16 and 17 year olds should be able to come with a youth worker who knew them and who would be accountable for any help that the young person received.*
- \* *Several of those who worked closely with young people believed they should play a more responsible role in the process of assessing them for benefits. They pointed out that they learned a great deal about these young people's circumstances in the course of training or counselling them and it was unnecessarily distressing for them to have to repeat sensitive matters to DSW staff in the reception area when they applied for a benefit. A MACCESS training provider said that they would also be the best judges (because of their close knowledge of these young people's circumstances) of whether or not they were eligible for ICA.*
- \* *A Maatua Whangai worker put the use of community resources squarely in the context of Puao-te-ata-Tu and said, "I'd like to see them [DSW] respond with cash and people." He pointed out that if honoraria were paid to "fancy lecturers" as a matter of course, there should also be a fund provided for the use of kaumatua.*

Several community agencies said that it was important to have community people at district offices to help clients and put them at their ease, and others said that more Maori and Pacific Islands people should be recruited to district office staff.

The point was made repeatedly that it is important to have close liaison between DSW and community agencies for information sharing, for tapping community resources and, ultimately, for a better service to those in need.

- \* *"The last six months, what tends to happen for us is, you get to know somebody [a member of district office staff] and they're gone - they've shifted - lack of continuity ... You need [to know] about [these] changes ... an organisation like us [a large urban youth agency] we're dealing with Mrs [Brown] and she's no longer there, another person has never heard of us, there's no notification, now deal with Mrs Smith ... It's really valuable to have a contact person."*

### Youth Advocates and Other Support for Young People

The community agency interview guides included a set of questions for those people who had acted as Youth Advocates for potential ICA recipients. Youth Advocates were understood by the researchers to be those people who had physically accompanied a potential ICA recipient through the benefit application process, and either provided verification or spoke on the young person's behalf.

Although the structure of the Youth Advocate section of the interview guide was such that it focused on people who had acted as Youth Advocates for potential ICA recipients, the information it elicited from the community agencies was, in the main, not specific to ICA. People from the community agencies assisted young people to apply for the unemployment benefit rather than specifically for ICA. Hence they responded to the advocacy questions from a more general perspective. It is the researchers' contention that such responses were useful, as they were a reflection of what happened when community workers acted as advocates for young unemployed people, some of whom would have been potential ICA recipients.

### How Community Workers Helped

Community workers stressed the importance of Youth Advocates accompanying young people through the application process. In this way they could provide support for young people who did not understand what was going on, who were too shy or scared to ask questions, who felt embarrassed or resentful about talking, and who could not bring themselves to talk about their personal circumstances. Community workers said that often these young people were unable to read or write, but that they were reluctant to admit this because they did not want to appear stupid. They also pointed out that it was useful to have someone present who would be listened to by staff, who knew what was supposed to happen and what the young person's benefit entitlements might be, and who could sort out any problems as they arose.

A number of community agencies had provided practical assistance apart from accompanying a young person through the benefit application process. Some had filled in forms or applied for a benefit on behalf of a young person. This meant some young people did not have to go a district office. In one instance, a DSW staff person had interviewed a young person at the premises of a counsellor. Another agency had taught groups of young people how to apply for a benefit.

Two spoke of having set up young people's initial contact with DSW, one other of having allowed "street kids" to use their organisation's address, and another spoke of helping young people to find identification. Some also referred to arranging for young people to apply for a benefit with particular DSW staff members whom the agency knew to be especially helpful, even if this meant that it took longer.

Some agencies wanted Youth Advocates to be used so that young people would not have to repeat distressing circumstances to unknown staff members, but it seems that this did not always happen.

The following sections describe the different types of assistance provided by twenty-eight community agencies whose workers had acted as Youth Advocates or had assisted young unemployed people with the benefit application process.

#### Accompanying a Potential ICA Recipient Through the Application Process

Two workers from each of two community agencies gave accounts of assisting potential ICA recipients through their benefit application process. All four spoke of having acted as Youth Advocates or having had a great deal of experience taking young people to DSW for unemployment or training benefits. Two instances are described below.

- \* *A young woman who had been sexually abused confided this to the agency workers. They took her to DSW where she was required to repeat her story to departmental staff. The young woman was not prepared to talk to anyone else so they "gave it a miss" and arranged for her to receive the training benefit instead. They also referred to another young woman for whom they did not bother with ICA and likewise arranged for her to receive the training benefit.*
- \* *One agency worker spoke of acting as a Youth Advocate for one young woman and said "it was lucky I was with [her]". He went to provide support, not to back up her statements. When asked about the information provided and how the young person was treated by staff, he said the staff did not tell the young person much, although the staff knew what they were doing and were quick. He thought the young woman's treatment was "pretty good". He further commented that young people were too scared to ask questions as they were afraid of being thought stupid.*

Two ACCESS trainers reported that their organisation tried to fill in as much of the detail on the forms as possible and usually the young people had no problems receiving the benefit. One of the other workers said, "The reason we go with them is kids will get lost in the system", and added that they made sure the young people brought along all the information they needed for their application.

#### Providing Verification Only

Interviewees from four community agencies described having provided verification of a young person's circumstances. One interviewee said she had written a covering letter for about a dozen trainees who met the initial criteria for ICA (not living at home or being financially supported by parents). The others said they had signed or filled in forms that DSW had given to the young people.

#### Other Ways of Helping Young People with the Application Process

Interviewees from twenty-two community agencies described a variety of ways in which they assisted potential ICA recipients. While these did not fall within the realm of acting as a Youth Advocate, they appeared to affect the benefit application process.

#### Setting up Initial Contact with DSW and Use of Particular Staff

One interviewee said that he took young people to DSW if they had financial difficulties, often in response to people phoning about the young person's debts. He would explain the problem to staff, then leave and follow-up the young person to find out how much they were receiving. Interviewees from another agency also described taking young people, whom they had met in Court, to DSW, explaining their cases to reception staff and leaving them there.

Two workers said that it was worth a longer waiting period to queue up to see staff with whom they already had a working relationship. One said that they now sent the young people to DSW by themselves because accompanying them was so time consuming.

#### Processing Applications on Behalf of Young People

Three interviewees had applied for ICA on behalf of the young people, which meant that the young people did not have to go to the district office. One interviewee said they used to tell the young people to go to the Department on their own, then they had someone go along with the young person, and now they "do it for them ... otherwise there'd be too many hiccups."

#### Alternative Venue

One interviewee said she once had a social worker come to her place of work, where the young person's circumstances were explained, and the social worker

then proceeded to organise the appropriate benefit. She frequently spoke with DSW benefits staff over the phone about a young person's benefit application. She said that she often suggested to young people that they take a friend when they go to DSW as it can be "un-nerving".

*Assistance with Application Process, Address and Identification*

One agency said it taught groups of young people how the application process worked and provided them with the benefit application forms. Another said they never took the young people to DSW but sent them with the required information and let the "street kids" use the name of the agency as their address. They said that using the agency's name helped the young people during the process of applying for a benefit.

And another worker spoke of having found identification for the young people. When identification was unobtainable, they would vouch for the young people and the Department would accept their word. The interviewee said that this was not always the case and that it used to be a "hassle" until the Department got to know them.

*Assisting Young People with Benefit Problems*

An ACCESS training provider said that if decisions about granting or declining benefits were delayed, or if they considered the benefit had been incorrectly declined, one of their trainers would go to the district office on behalf of the young person in order to rectify the problem. It appeared that even though this was a time consuming process, they felt that it was necessary to ensure that young people obtained the benefits they needed.

*DSW Staff Response to Youth Advocate*

One worker spoke of having taken young people to DSW to apply for Special Needs Grants, advances for rental bonds for flats or in response to problems with a young person's benefit. She said she went with the young people to ensure they received "better" treatment, which usually happened when someone was there who knew what the young person was entitled to and who understood what DSW staff were telling the young person. She said that often the young people were not told about their entitlements or did not understand what they were told. Her presence meant that staff knew "someone was listening."

Workers from another agency spoke about situations where they were told by DSW staff that they "couldn't deal with an advocate" or that a Youth Advocate was not needed which they interpreted as meaning that they should not be present during the interview between the young person and staff member. Their standard response to this was that a young person "could have a Youth Advocate and by all means they could direct their questions to the young person but that the young person was entitled to support from another person." They commented that often they were able to raise things which had not been covered by the staff person and that this was often appreciated by the staff person.

### Usefulness of Youth Advocates to Young Clients

The Youth Advocates were important to the young people in many ways. They provided them with skills and with resources, and they sometimes made it unnecessary for the young person to go to DSW or to discuss their personal problems with staff. One of the most valuable functions of the Youth Advocate was to provide moral support.

One interviewee said the young people would not have gone through the application process or asked anything if she had not been there. Another interviewee referred to acting as an advocate for those who "can hardly talk about their problems." And another talked about the process being "quite hard" and said "these kids are not achievers from school. They can't read or write. They need someone to come with them. They don't want to be made to feel stupid. They get embarrassed."

- \* *Another interviewee said that his presence at interviews between staff and young people had helped the young person because they would have been too shy or unsure of the system to make a successful application. He felt that advocates were important because they provided support and generally DSW listened to the advocate. He commented that people listened because he was a person of "authority" or "leadership" in the community and that they may not have listened to the young person otherwise.*

### **Summary**

Community and youth agencies tended not to be informed about ICA, and tended to believe that young people were not well informed either. They wanted DSW to provide this information to their organisations and to young people, as well as to provide information about DSW benefits and services generally.

The agencies and youth workers interviewed believed that there were many young people eligible for ICA who were not getting it. They suggested that this was mainly because young people were ignorant of the help available to them, and even when they did apply for help they often had problems with the application process. They also believed that there were many young people remaining at home in distressing circumstances, largely because they were unaware of the alternatives available to them.

Respondents also believed that there were many young people who were in genuine need of help like ICA, but were not eligible for it because the target population for ICA excluded both those under the age of 16 and secondary school students, and the eligibility criteria did not include family poverty, overcrowding or lack of material support. Maori and Pacific Islands groups argued that ICA and the way it was applied did not cater for certain cultural considerations, for example, the particular family situations or living arrangements of Maori and Pacific Islands young people, and the consequent pressures experienced by them.



Concerns about the accessibility of ICA also included concerns about the flexibility with which the eligibility criteria were applied, difficulties with the application process and interaction with staff.

There were also concerns about the adequacy of the benefits available to young people, and the problems they had with waiting for the benefit to go into their accounts and with lapses and fluctuations in their benefit payments. Agencies also discussed young people's other needs for counselling, training and employment, as well as the needs of their families. Furthermore, calls were made for the Department to consider the overall circumstances of young people and families who are "at risk", and to provide services and assistance which are more holistic and preventative in nature.

Community agencies wanted closer liaison with the Department. They also wanted the Department to make greater use of community resources to provide venues for such activities as sensitive interviewing and to use community people and agency staff as colleagues in helping clients into and through the Social Welfare system.

Very few youth or community workers appeared to have acted as Youth Advocates (in that they physically accompanied a potential ICA recipient through the benefit application process). However, a number of youth and community workers had assisted young people applying for the unemployment benefit in a variety of other ways, including providing written verification of the young person's circumstances, making initial contact with DSW on behalf of the young person, assisting young people obtain identification, teaching young people about the application process and assisting young people when they had problems with their benefit. Youth Advocates seem to be particularly useful in that they provide young people with much needed moral support and practical assistance as well as being able to verify a young person's circumstances. Some community workers believed that some young people would not have gone through the application process or talked to DSW staff about their personal circumstances if they had not been present. It appears, then, that Youth Advocates were very important in ensuring that young people in need of ICA received it.



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Minister of Social Welfare  
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

## Independent Circumstances Allowance Evaluation Report

The Evaluation Unit of the Department of Social Welfare has recently published the report "The Evaluation of the Independent Circumstances Allowance". A copy of the report and the executive summary are enclosed.

The Independent Circumstances Allowance (ICA) was part of the Youth Allowances scheme introduced in 1989. ICA was the one provision under the scheme which recognised that some young people could not live with their parents nor reasonably expect financial support from them. ICA was replaced by the Independent Youth Benefit on 1 December 1990.

The evaluation project was carried out for the Income Support Unit who received a draft report of the findings in August 1990. These findings were used by Head Office staff responsible for developing the administration procedures for the Independent Youth Benefit.

The report has been sent to the Director-General and will be distributed to other senior Head Office staff, the Directors of the six District Offices visited during the study, and the Ministries of Youth Affairs and Education. Copies of the report will be available to Social Welfare staff and other interested persons on request. A summary of the main findings of the report has been sent to study participants.

David A. Preston  
for Director-General

## **Independent Circumstances Allowance Evaluation Project**

### **Executive Summary**

**Introduction.** The Independent Circumstances Allowance (ICA), which was in existence from 1 January 1989 to 1 December 1990, was the single provision under the Youth Allowances Scheme which recognised that some young people cannot live with their parents nor reasonably expect financial support from them. The objectives of the ICA Evaluation Project were to learn whether or not ICA reached its target population of unemployed 16-17 year olds and was delivered as intended, and what factors in the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) administration or programme policy of ICA might have prevented young people in genuine need from applying for or receiving the allowance.

The project involved a nationwide postal questionnaire completed by 532 ICA recipients and 215 Youth Allowance recipients living away from home; and six district office visits in which 45 young people, 66 community agencies, 17 district office social workers and 44 district office benefits staff were interviewed.

**Aspects of ICA Relevant to its Evaluation.** Two aspects of the allowance were particularly relevant to the evaluation. One was that it relied on a filtering system to identify potential recipients instead of depending on clients to apply for the benefit directly. The system was based on two questions to be asked of all 16 and 17 year old unemployment benefit applicants: 1) Do you live at home with your parents? and 2) Do you receive financial support from your parents? If they replied that they were not living with their parents nor supported by them, then they were interviewed to assess their eligibility for ICA. It was not expected that young people would have prior knowledge of the availability of ICA and apply for it. Generally, unemployed people would apply for the unemployment benefit and it was left to benefits staff to identify the 16 and 17 year olds, ask them the filter questions and assess for ICA the ones who answered "No" to both.

The second aspect of ICA that was particularly relevant to the evaluation was that although the framework for granting ICA gave it the appearance of a non-discretionary benefit, the eligibility criteria contained some elements of discretion. This must be taken into account when interpreting differences found between district offices in granting the allowance. Differences may be due to variations in administrative procedures, and they may be due to the discretion exercised by the interviewing officer. In dealing with areas of discretion, staff decisions may be influenced by the tension between, on the one hand, meeting clients' needs and, on the other, ensuring that only those who are eligible for benefits actually receive them.

**Whether ICA Reached its Intended Population.** Some young people did appear to get missed out of the filtering process that was meant to capture those who were eligible for ICA. Approximately half of the Youth Allowance recipients in the study may have been eligible for ICA, although they were not receiving it. They were less likely than ICA recipients to have been asked the filter questions and two-thirds of them did not believe they had ever had their eligibility for ICA assessed.

Half of the community agencies, and some DSW social workers and benefits staff, said that they were aware of young people in the community who were in need of, and might be eligible for, ICA but were not getting it. They identified those who lacked knowledge about ICA, those who were reluctant to provide information about their personal circumstances, and those who could not provide the necessary documentation or verification as being likely to miss out on ICA.

It appeared that of the young people interviewed for the study who had ever been granted ICA, one-quarter had not had their eligibility picked up in the course of their unemployment benefit

application. These young people were only assessed for the allowance after they themselves brought their potential eligibility for ICA to the attention of DSW benefits staff after they learning about ICA, usually in some entirely accidental fashion. If more information about ICA had been available in the community, it seems likely that more young people who were potentially eligible for it would have brought themselves to the attention of DSW and applied specifically for ICA.

**Young People in Need of Income Support But Ineligible for ICA.** There was widespread concern that there were young people who did not qualify for ICA because they did not meet the criteria, but who were in need of income support. There was general agreement that there were young people living at home in distressing and undesirable circumstances who could qualify for ICA if they left home. Agencies that worked with such young people put their numbers (in their own catchment areas) in the hundreds. The workers believed that one of the main reasons that such situations persisted was that the young people were not informed of their alternatives, and were afraid that they could not support themselves if they left home.

Other areas of concern included young people under the age of 16 who were living away from home; unemployed young people whose family life was affected by poverty and whose parents could not afford to keep them at school nor support them properly at home; and young people living away from home who wanted to continue with their secondary schooling. Several community agencies argued that the mental health of the young person should have been included as one of the criteria of eligibility.

It also became clear that there were young people who were in need of support, but who were not eligible for ICA, because the criteria did not cater for certain cultural considerations. Several Maori groups made the point that Maori youth were often torn between wanting to stay at home, help out their families and contribute what they could from their Youth Allowance payments, and needing to escape overcrowding and other problems at home even though this meant that they would not be able to contribute at all. They said that the young people whom ICA was aimed at were only one part of a family cycle marked by poverty, stress and limited opportunities, and that it was necessary to take a much broader, pro-active and whanau-oriented approach to helping people.

For Pacific Islands groups, similar issues were raised in relation to the overall extended family situation, as well as concerns that the ICA provisions did not take into account the unique needs of Pacific Islands young people: for instance, that in general they were not encouraged to leave home, that they had important roles and responsibilities in the context of their wider family groups, and that the very concepts of "independence", "home" and "parents" needed to be examined with specific reference to the Pacific Islands cultural context (for example, young people staying with relations, and the special pressures on them in that situation, were mentioned).

**The Need for Better Provision of Information.** Young people were generally not informed about ICA. It appeared that only half of the young people receiving ICA who were surveyed or interviewed for this project were aware that this benefit existed.

Nearly all of the community agencies and social workers interviewed wanted to be informed about ICA. In most of the district offices studied, it appeared that very little benefit information was actually shared with people in the community, although some offices did, or were planning to, provide information to community groups, and some staff members carried out an unofficial liaison role with them as well. Maori and Pacific Islands groups in particular stressed that the information they were getting was of poor quality and narrow in scope.

**Inappropriate Aspects of the Application Process.** There was a common feeling that some aspects of the ICA application process were insensitive or inappropriate to the young people involved, in terms of difficulties understanding the language used by staff, filling out forms, and

obtaining identification; lack of privacy during sensitive interviewing; being asked too many questions and the questions asked being too personal; and problems with staff attitudes, awareness and sensitivity. Lengthy waiting periods in the district office were also a concern. A specific problem in one district office was the practice of ringing parents to verify the young person's circumstances. This practice had repercussions for confidentiality and veracity.

The above problems were exacerbated by the fact that the young people were often fearful, self-conscious and unfamiliar with the welfare system. There were concerns expressed by young people, community agencies and DSW social workers that these problems with the application process made the allowance difficult to access.

**Greater Use of Youth Advocates and Support People.** It was generally agreed by all respondents who were familiar with the experiences of young people at DSW (including district office benefits staff), that it was valuable for young people to have a support person with them. It seemed that the use of Youth Advocates accompanying the young people through the application process in a support capacity would have helped ICA reach its target population and would have helped ensure that it was delivered appropriately.

It appeared from comments made by some district office benefits staff that sensitive information about the young person's circumstances was much more likely to be provided if a support person or Youth Advocate was present. Also, some youth workers believed that some young people would answer the filter questions wrongly to avoid talking to DSW staff about their family problems. In other words, they would say they were living at home or supported by their parents (just so they would not have to explain why they were not) and thus, perhaps unknowingly, eliminate themselves from consideration for ICA. However, it appeared that the district offices studied used Youth Advocates purely for the purpose of verifying the young person's circumstances and usually through the use of Youth Advocate forms that the young person took away to have signed by a Youth Advocate.

**Other Issues.** Young people were often already in debt before they got to DSW, and their budgeting was so tight that any period without income support, or with reduced income support, could result in severe hardship. Also, inadequacy of the benefit itself was an issue. Some young people found themselves with not enough money for appropriate clothing and busfares for job interviews. Inadequacy of the benefit appeared to contribute to the relatively high mobility of young people (particularly for respondents on the Youth Allowance) because they could not afford to pay the rent and other costs associated with living away from home. Some of the young people who were interviewed mentioned living in cars, shifting from flat to flat or returning to stressful and unsatisfactory home situations when they could not meet their rent payments and electricity bills.

Responses from the young people clearly indicated that they would rather work than be on a benefit, but that they had few options in this direction. Neither did it appear that there were enough training opportunities.

Concerns were raised about the Department's strictly compartmentalised approach to delivering services, and the difficulties it caused clients when trying to find out what services were available and what assistance they may have been entitled to. There were strong calls from some community agencies, particularly from Maori and Pacific Islands groups, for the Department to break down the many artificial barriers placed between various "sections" and staff, to create a more holistic, needs based and responsive system. In addition, community agencies wanted DSW to make better use of a wide range of community resources and made the point that appropriate liaison staff needed to be in place for this to happen.

**Recommendations.** The report includes recommendations concerning the application process, the use of Youth Advocates, provision of information, staff training, other income support issues, liaison with community agencies and use of community resources.

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## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DSW SOCIAL WORKERS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reports on the information gathered from interviews with 17 Department of Social Welfare social workers from the six district offices visited. These social workers were interviewed to obtain information on 16-17 year olds needing ICA. Those who had acted as Youth Advocates were also asked about their experience of the ICA assessment process.

Where the number of social workers reported making responses to a question does not add up to seventeen, the difference is the number of social workers for whom no response was recorded.

#### **Background Information**

Interviewees were asked how long they had worked with the Department, their grade, social work team, ethnicity, and age. Their gender was also recorded. Their responses showed a broad range of experience and background (see Appendix IV). The interviewees were also asked how many 16-17 year olds they had worked with from the introduction of ICA to October or November 1989, when the interviews were carried out, and for a description of these young people.

Altogether, the social workers interviewed had worked with approximately three hundred 16-17 year olds between January and October or November 1989. One social worker interviewed had not worked with any 16-17 year olds as his caseload was mainly aged 15 or less.

Based on the descriptions provided by the social workers, the three hundred 16-17 year olds can be generally described as follows. There were more young men than women. There were similar proportions of Maori and Pakeha and a few Pacific Islands young people. There was a mixture of unemployed, those still at school and short-term workers. Slightly more than one-half had parents who were unemployed.

A background of family violence and/or sexual abuse, disrupted or dysfunctional family life or lack of family support was commonly mentioned. Alcohol, offending behaviour, inadequate income and a background of "state care" were also referred to. Most were at home with parents, "with Mum" or living with family members. The others were flatting, or with friends, or friends' parents, in institutions, with foster parents or had nowhere to live. Reference was also made to the transient nature of some of the young people's living arrangements and overcrowding of family homes.

## Knowledge of ICA

The interviewees were asked about their knowledge of ICA and for their perceptions of young people's knowledge of ICA.

### Social Worker's Prior Knowledge of ICA

Thirteen of the seventeen social workers interviewed said that they knew about ICA before being contacted by the project team, though three mentioned they knew only "a little", "not much", or "vaguely" about ICA. The other four said that they knew nothing about it. There was no single main way in which these social workers had found out about ICA. Seven reported that they learnt through regular DSW training or information channels. Three learnt from sources outside the Department, two through being involved in the ICA process by acting as a Youth Advocate, and one social worker found out via casual conversation with a benefits staff person.

### Feedback on Adequacy of ICA Information

Only three of the thirteen social workers who knew about ICA thought that the information they had received about it was adequate. However, one of these social workers commented that you have to "look for it to get it", while another said that it was adequate in that she knew it existed if she needed it.

Two of the social workers who said they had limited knowledge of ICA put the onus for their lack of knowledge on themselves. One was not sure whether she had made full use of the information available and the other commented that social workers did not "go out of their way" to be informed about benefits unless they needed to know in order to help a particular client.

When suggesting improvements to help young people in need of ICA to access it, over two-thirds (12) of the social workers stressed the need for young people and/or people who work with young people, to know about ICA. One said:

*"[My] main comment is to let young people know ICA exists and [we need] more clear information on ICA and how it can help these children and their families."*

All three social workers who appeared to have accompanied a young person through the ICA assessment process referred to a lack of information about ICA. In one case, ICA had been in existence for only two days and the information about, and assessment process, for ICA were "not in place". She had to photocopy information from a benefits training manual as there was nothing else available.

Comments from some of the other social workers referred to improving information sharing between benefits and social work staff, as well as between



staff and clients; that there was "misinformation" about paying "kids" to stay at school; and that the rules had changed and that information had become outdated very quickly. There was also reference to a "DSW attitude" of "it's available but don't advertise it."

### Best Ways to Inform Social Workers

Two-thirds (11) of the social workers interviewed thought that the best way for them to be informed about ICA was via the "spoken word". These eleven social workers suggested being informed in ways such as the following: briefing by the benefits divisional officer, staff training courses, personal presentations, videos, briefing of Assistant Directors who in turn brief staff, and talking about it. Reference was made to getting "swamped" with paper with no time to read and that a personal presentation was better absorbed. Only four of the seventeen social workers interviewed thought that the best way for them to be informed about ICA was via circular memoranda or pamphlets.

### Social Workers' Perceptions of Young People's Knowledge of ICA

Nearly all the social workers thought that young people knew "very little" or nothing about ICA. One commented that ICA was "a bit of a hidden benefit". Two social workers referred to the general lack of information that all clients received and commented that there was not enough "marketing" of DSW services. Only one social worker thought that quite a few young people knew about ICA (she had had one inquiry about ICA).

### Suggested Methods for Informing Young People About ICA

Most (11) of the social workers suggested several different ways of letting young people know about ICA. The three most common suggestions were letting young people know through the schools (9 mentions); sending information to people who work with young people, for example guidance counsellors, and ACCESS, youth and community workers (7 mentions); and providing information in the Department's reception area, such as "bright" posters, a video, pamphlets and an information board (5 mentions).

## **ICA Application Process**

### Young People Who Had Been Assessed for ICA

Seven of the social workers interviewed said that they knew of young people who had been assessed for ICA. Between them, they knew of twelve such young people. This group were described as follows (though full information was not provided on all of the twelve young people): seven were young women and five young men; eight were Maori and one Pakeha. While some seemed to be in stable living situations, others were not. Four were staying with relatives, one was temporarily with a friend's family, one was sharing a home with other young people who were cousins and one rented a bedsitter. One was staying in a car

with two cousins, and two were described as "fairly destitute" with nowhere to stay. The parents of four of the young people were unemployed, while one young person's parents were both working. Descriptions of their circumstances included violence, sexual abuse, death of a parent, rejection by guardians due to offending and court appearances, getting "kicked out" by parent and step-parent, being unable to live with either of separated parents, and having a history of foster homes and institutions.

According to the social workers, these young people found out about ICA in a variety of ways. Four of the twelve young people who had been assessed for ICA had found out about it when they applied for the unemployment benefit, three had found out from their social workers, and one young person saw an item about ICA on television and contacted his social worker about it.

The results of their assessments were generally positive. Nine were granted ICA, two were not granted ICA and for one the result was unknown. One of those not granted ICA was 15 years of age, whose carer was subsequently paid the Orphan's Benefit. Nearly all (11) of the ICA assessments were categorised under the "no parental support" and/or "family breakdown" criteria.

#### Social Workers' Involvement

The seven social workers who knew young people who had been assessed for ICA had all acted as Youth Advocates by providing verification for eleven of these twelve young people. Only three of these social workers appeared to have been present during the young person's ICA assessment interview.

It appeared that the social workers verified the young person's circumstances by supplying file information, speaking to benefits staff over the phone or in person, or providing written information about why the young person could not live at home or about their family circumstances. One was asked for both verbal and written advocacy.

Whether verification was verbal or written, or both, appeared to depend on the discretion of the benefits staff. One social worker commented that she verified the young person's circumstances verbally because she had "dealt with the case and known the young person for a year." Another said that benefits staff would not accept her verification despite her knowing the young person since he was three years of age.

Some of the social workers commented on how they thought their involvement in the ICA assessment process helped. One commented on the role social workers played in verifying a young person's situation. He said that, although it was the benefits staff who had "picked up on" the young person's potential eligibility for ICA, the granting of ICA had depended on the information the social worker had provided to the ICA interviewer, which stressed that the young person was unable to live at home. He said that the benefits staff were very

interested in the social workers' opinions. He referred to one case where a social worker was able to get a decision about the granting of ICA reversed and was concerned that if social workers did not use this "power" correctly then it was an abuse of the system.

This contrasted with feedback from another social worker. Whilst he had not been personally involved in the ICA assessment process, he reported that social workers in his office had had some difficulty acting as Youth Advocates. He said feedback from other social workers was that Youth Advocate reports were not "worth their weight." He felt that the role of social work and benefits staff in the administration of ICA needed to be made a lot clearer.

Two social workers considered that their involvement during the ICA assessment process helped through the provision of support. One suggested that social workers could be called on to assist with interviews with young people. Another felt this was important for young women in particular. One social worker, who said he took the young person down to benefits staff to make sure they got an interview, thought his involvement enabled the young person to "get into the system, like a key can get the door open."

Another social worker said that she did not believe the young people she knew who had been assessed for ICA would have coped without the assistance of a Youth Advocate. She commented that the process was always really clear when there was a social worker present, though she had seen other adults who were acting as Youth Advocates being "patronised" by benefits staff.

#### Feedback on and Improvements to the ICA Assessment Process

The three social workers who appeared to have accompanied a young person through the ICA assessment process were asked about their experience and if they thought the process was appropriate for 16-17 year olds, sensitive to the culture and gender of the young person, confidential, flexible enough to cope with young people in differing circumstances and not unnecessarily upsetting. The four social workers who provided verification, but who did not appear to have gone through the assessment process with a young person, were asked for general feedback.

The following section reports on the issues raised by these seven social workers, and relevant comments made by the other social workers, about the ICA assessment process. The social workers commented on the attitudes and skills of benefits staff; the limited skills of young people; young people's immediate need for money; and the sensitivity and flexibility of the ICA process.

#### Benefits Staff

Four social workers spoke about the importance of having "appropriate" interviewing staff who were skilled in working with young people, were able to communicate with them, and who had good interviewing skills, made appropriate use of Youth Advocates and provided information to clients.

One social worker, who described the process that a young person had to go through to receive ICA as "appropriate and adequate", also noted that it can depend on the interviewer's attitude to the young person: "There is a danger young people would get treated off-hand ... they are so often nervous and unsure and staff misinterpret the young people's behaviour."

Another social worker commented on the "poor technique" of benefits staff and their tendency to ask "closed-ended" questions when interviewing clients. He felt that in cases where a young person did not talk about their circumstances, staff should "check out" the family situation with another family member. He thought family members acting as Youth Advocates would be "really useful". This social worker acknowledged the high workload of benefits staff and the lack of appreciation they received for their work.

One respondent said that when applying for a benefit, young people were at the "mercy" of the benefits staff. This social worker went on to say that if the staff were "good" and took the time to draw the young person's story out, then "it's OK" but benefits staff had the reputation of being "tight" and keeping information. Another social worker said that there was still an attitude in the benefits area that "money is coming out of staff's pockets to pay benefits." He felt that benefits staff made it as difficult as possible for people to receive a benefit and that they "tell people as little as possible." He commented that clients who were assertive and asked for information were regarded as "pushy" and "obnoxious" by benefits staff.

Another social worker spoke strongly about the need to train benefits staff beyond the technical application of ICA and the unemployment benefit. She said that training needed to address the attitudes of benefits staff to people from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and their understanding of people who were experiencing hardship.

#### *Appropriateness for 16-17 Year Olds*

Five social workers raised concerns in relation to the appropriateness of the ICA assessment process for young people: that the process did not take into account their often limited literacy skills, substance abuse and difficulties acquiring identification.

One felt that the process was not sensitive to age or level of maturity and pointed out that the young people they work with have language difficulties and are not "intellectually quick". Another social worker said a lot of young people were from "special classes" that is, they had reading and learning problems. She said that they were "sometimes bombed out on glue, dope etc ... they need the process to be far more clear cut and easy to access." The third social worker talked about a lot of young people becoming frustrated because the "whole process is too fast" and the "kids aren't going to say they can't hear or that they can't read." The fourth social worker said he had to read things to the young person he had accompanied "whose literacy was limited" and that "it's very difficult to go through the process of signing your name when you can't spell it." The fifth social worker

referred generally to making the process easier for young people to receive ICA, including reducing the number of forms young people have to fill in.

One of these social workers talked about the need to improve the "mechanics" of the process. She said that a major problem she had encountered was young people not having access to the required forms of identification, such as birth and school leaving certificates. She emphasised that young people needed to be given a simple and practical checklist of what they needed to do in order to apply for the benefit. She spoke of having a lot of problems and "battling [her] own Department", and said that the system made it very hard to meet the needs of these people. She said that although she herself, as a social worker, was in a relatively powerful position in the Department, she found helping the young person very difficult so it must be much worse for the young person.

#### Immediate Need for Money

A problem one social worker spoke strongly about was the need for young people to receive money immediately in order to be able to buy necessities such as food and to open a bank account. She said young people were in the circular situation of needing a bank account for the benefit to be paid into but were unable to open one as they did not have any money. She also spoke of a young person for whom she had been told that it would be three weeks before he would get any money. During this three week period, the young person became "pretty desperate" and resorted to shoplifting for food. He was caught. He was then given a \$100 emergency benefit. The social worker stressed that he shoplifted because he had no money and no means other than shoplifting to get any food. She stated that young people who were granted ICA should receive it on the day they applied and considered that the waiting time for the first benefit payment was "phenomenal - these people are often hungry" and immediate payment was needed so clients did not resort to offending to get food.

At a district office where young people who applied for the benefit were given an interview appointment for a later date, a social worker said that some young people had sought assistance from him because they did not have the money to survive between their application and their interview. He said "Nobody asks them if they can manage until then", and that most young people were not assertive enough to ask to speak to someone about this.

#### Cultural Sensitivity

One social worker stated that the process was not culturally sensitive and felt that matching of a staff interviewer with a potential ICA recipient in terms of ethnicity should be "automatic". She pointed out that such a practice was inherent in Puaotē-Ata-Tu. Another thought that the young people should always be given the option of seeing a Maori person without assuming that they will want to see one.

### Sensitivity to Gender, Confidentiality and Privacy

One social worker said that the assessment process was not sensitive to gender, nor confidential, and that the interviews were not private. She said that this was particularly a problem where young women were concerned. She noted that there had been a sign saying that private rooms were available, but applicants had to ask to be interviewed in one of these. She also felt that matching of a staff interviewer with a potential ICA recipient in terms of gender should be "automatic", and that it should be guaranteed that interviews would be conducted in private.

### Flexibility

One social worker spoke of a young person who was living with relatives who were on a benefit and could not afford to support her. She needed to receive the unemployment benefit as soon as she was eligible. The social worker was applying for ICA for the young person four weeks prior to her 16th birthday so that she would hopefully receive the money as soon as she turned 16. The young person had no school leaving certificate; she had been a street kid since age 13 and had no access to the documentation required for a benefit application. The social worker commented that this would be a good test of whether delivery of the allowance is flexible.

### **Need for ICA**

In order to obtain information about the need for ICA, the seventeen social workers who were interviewed were asked whether they knew:

- (i) young people eligible for ICA but not receiving it, that is, 16-17 year olds not receiving ICA who were not living with their parents and were not receiving any financial support from them, for one or more reasons as outlined in the eligibility criteria for ICA; and
- (ii) young people at home in distressful circumstances, that is, 16-17 year olds who were living at home in circumstances like those outlined in the eligibility criteria for ICA.

When responding to these questions, some of the social workers also spoke of other young people they saw as needing ICA, for example those who were younger than 16 years or who were undertaking secondary or tertiary education. Information on these young people is also presented in this section, as are some general comments about the need for and costs of independent living.

### Young People Eligible for ICA But Not Receiving It

Five social workers said they knew of young people (twenty-eight in particular, but also "quite a few" others) whom they considered were eligible for ICA but not receiving it. There appeared to be a number of reasons why these young

people were missing out on receiving ICA. Some, who were living on the streets and were solvent abusers, were not meeting the Department's reporting requirements. Others did not receive ICA because they did not know about it or did not know how to access the welfare system. Others were taken care of by extended family members, who may have been considered as "parents" by benefits staff which meant the young people were not considered eligible for ICA. And another appeared to have not been picked up by benefits staff. The following are descriptions provided by these social workers of the young people and their circumstances.

*Street Kids, Solvent Abusers*

- \* One social worker knew of six 16-17 year olds who were not living at home and not receiving ICA. All were Maori or Pacific Islands young men from a lower socio-economic background. Three had fathers who were unemployed, two had fathers who were employed and one's mother was a single parent. All of these young people were living on the streets and were solvent abusers. The social worker thought that these young people probably did not get ICA because they did not report to the Labour Department and were subsequently "stood down, [their] problem is just themselves." He felt that there was nothing social workers could do for them as they were too old to be covered by the Department's policy on "status". He also stated that most of the young people on the streets were 13-15 year olds who were "transitory".

*Lack of Information*

- \* A social worker knew of more than twenty young people whom she considered eligible for ICA but who were not receiving it. She described them as Maori, more young men than women, and said that most were from single parent families. These young people were living in institutions or on the streets with friends. They were living away from home due to family problems such as family breakdown and abuse. She thought that they did not receive ICA because they did not know about it.
- \* A social worker spoke about an unspecified number of young people she knew who needed ICA but did not receive it. She said that many came from a background of unemployment. She said young people went into Social Welfare for information and then did not go back. This was due to there being a lack of information, their not being able to understand the information they did get, and the reception they received at Social Welfare. She also referred to those who did not know how to go about finding out information and said that some of these young people did not get "picked up" until they started offending.

### Extended Family, Low Income Families

- \* A social worker knew of "quite a few" Pacific Islands young people who were living away from home because they were "not supported" at home. She said they did not receive ICA because they got "picked up" by the wider family.
- \* Another example given was of a young Maori man whose benefit status was unknown, who had been a State Ward since he was 7 years old. He was living with extended family members who also "took in" other young people. This household was overcrowded and according to the social worker, survived on the young people's benefits and other assistance from Social Welfare. Even though this young person may have been receiving ICA, his situation highlights the problems of overcrowding and poverty which might be experienced by households comprising extended family members.

### Eligibility Missed by Staff

- \* A social worker knew of one young person who was living with a relative. Although he was receiving a benefit, she thought it was not ICA. He was Maori and his parents were sickness beneficiaries who carried out seasonal work. This young person had been estranged from his family for a long time and was a State Ward. His step-father was described as a "violent, alcoholic man" who did not like his step-children. The social worker thought that the young person did not get ICA because she had been "slack" and had assumed he would have been picked up by the benefits staff, but it appeared he had "slipped through the net."

### Young People at Home in Distressful Circumstances

Five social workers said they knew of thirty-seven young people plus an unspecified number of young women "abuse survivors", all of whom were living at home in circumstances like those outlined in the eligibility criteria for ICA. The circumstances included financial stress and friction within the family, and physical and sexual abuse. It was reported that these young people continued to live at home because they saw no other choices due to factors such as a lack of money, a lack of information about other options, and a lack of rental accommodation. These situations were described as follows:

### Friction Within the Family

- \* One social worker said she knew of five young people who were living at home in distressful circumstances. She described them as Maori, and including both young women and men. The parents of all but one were unemployed. Friction within the family was cited as the reason that living at home was distressful. The social worker said the young people continued to live at home because "it's their family" and they "cling on to it because it's all they've got." She also referred to the living costs of young people as "being phenomenal" and that this meant they could not afford to undertake training.



- \* Two social workers knew of 24 young Pakeha men that they described as "teenage shit-kickers", and who had problems related to violence, alcohol and drugs. Their parents were employed. When asked why these young people continued to live at home, one social worker said that the parents and young people were in a cycle of violence, anger and hatred which went "around and around ... a bit like a game." The other referred to situations where the young people were "alright" but the parents were "total wasters". He said that these young people continued to live at home because they had no other choice. He thought that a lot of young people were not mature enough to leave home, and that even if they did receive ICA, \$109.79 was not a lot of money to live on.

*Abuse, Lack of Information and Accommodation*

- \* A social worker knew of about eight young people at home in distressful circumstances. She described them as young men, about half of whom were Maori and half Pacific Islands. Generally both parents were working. She said that living at home was distressful mainly because of physical abuse and stress. The young people continued to live at home because they had nowhere else to go and because of financial difficulties.
- \* A social worker knew of young women who were living at home in distressful circumstances. She did not specify how many were in this situation but described them as being "abuse survivors", who crossed all ethnic and socio-economic boundaries. The social worker said that they continued to live at home because there were "no choices" and that these young women did not have access to information. She spoke of young women being more vulnerable and having less access to information than young men, and that the ACCESS courses in the area, which was rural, were geared more towards jobs which were traditionally male. She also referred to it being hard for 16-17 year olds to justify emotional and distressing circumstances to a bureaucracy. A further factor contributing to the young women continuing to live at home was the severe accommodation shortage in the area. There were young women who did not qualify for emergency accommodation assistance but who needed somewhere to live. The social worker also commented that if things were really "horrendous" at home, people living in this area went to relatives.

*Other Young People Needing ICA Who Were Not Eligible*

Fourteen social workers spoke of other young people who were not eligible for ICA but whom they saw as needing it or some other form of income support. These included young people who continued to live at home due to a lack of rental accommodation, those who lived in overcrowded families, and those whose families were unable to financially support them. It also included those younger than 16 years, and those who wanted to continue with their schooling.

### Lack of Accommodation and Overcrowding

- \* Two social workers, referring to rural communities, spoke of there being a need for ICA but said young people were unable to receive it because there was no rental accommodation. One of these social workers said the young people were staying at home and their homes were overcrowded. The other said that some used home as a base but were not actually in residence. She also referred to young people who stayed at home as caregivers in the larger families. Another social worker commented that there were "more and more" people moving back into the rural areas.

### Under 16 Year Olds

- \* A social worker said the vast majority of her caseload needed ICA but they were not eligible as they were 14-15 year olds. She described this group as being 75% young women and two-thirds European. Two-thirds had parents who were beneficiaries. These young people came from family breakdown situations such as abusive fathers or brothers and alcoholic parents. Some of these young people continued to live at home whilst others had left. Those who were not living at home stayed with friends, friends' parents or had nowhere to live. Those who continued to live at home did so because they recognised the importance of having a place to sleep and had a "better the devil you know" attitude.
- \* A social worker knew of some young people living away from home, and others living at home in distressful circumstances, who he felt needed ICA. As they were 15 year olds and thereby not eligible for ICA, no further information was provided about them.

In total, six social workers specifically referred to the need to lower the age limit for ICA or provide income support to 15 year olds.

### Lack of Money

- \* Three social workers spoke of situations where the parent(s) were beneficiaries or the families were "just surviving". One described the situation as "financial distress" and said this situation would be considerably improved if they were receiving more to "help out". Some young people lived in homes where there were a lot of dependent children in the family and more money was needed. Another social worker referred to young people who were "unsupported" at home.

### School

- \* A social worker talked about families who found it a financial struggle to send young people to school and about "numerous" young people who had to move away from home to attend school or Polytechnics because they lived in isolated areas. He felt that the financial situation would worsen for families due to the school funding changes.

- \* Another social worker said that ICA was a "big disappointment" compared to what it was proposed to be. He thought that it was "ridiculous" that young people who lived away from home and who wanted to go to school were unable to receive ICA. He said there was not many of them but felt it was important to support these young people.
- \* A social worker spoke of a situation where ICA could have provided an income for two sisters to support them in a "safe" home, when they were not attending boarding school. The elder of these two young women, although old enough to live independently, wanted to "belong to family" and remain at school until she found a job.

### Need for and Costs of Independent Living

Three social workers commented approvingly that ICA recognised that some young people were unable to live with their families and that it cost more to live independently. One made the following comments about a young person he had helped apply for a benefit on her sixteenth birthday:

- \* *The young person was "rapt". Although she had been anxious about applying for the benefit, she was not anxious about applying for ICA as it meant more money. There was no "hassle" [the social worker had accompanied her]. "She had changed overnight once she had her autonomy, a different girl altogether ... By giving some of these young people the resource to live independently, it is a positive way out for everyone." The young person was only in the care of the Department because there was nowhere for her to live. She had the skills to live in an independent situation and now she was on ICA she was "doing brilliantly".*

One said that while overall ICA was "very good" and that it recognised some "important needs", she would have liked it to be able to be applied more broadly.

Two social workers thought that the amount of ICA should be increased. One of these felt the different rates for different ages was unfair and the other commented that setting up a flat involved the same costs for a 16 or 17 year old as for a 25 year old. Two social workers also referred to the higher costs involved in undertaking training, for example for fees and books.

### Summary

It would appear that information about ICA had not been widely nor fully distributed amongst the social workers interviewed, nor were their young clients aware of ICA. Most of the social workers stressed the need for young people and those who work with them to know about ICA.

Some of the social workers raised a number of concerns about the ICA assessment process. These included the need to have "appropriate" interviewing staff who were skilled in working with young people; the importance of benefits staff checking whether young people were able to survive until their first benefit

payment; and young people being able to be interviewed by people from the same culture and gender, and in interview rooms. Several social workers spoke about reading problems and difficulties young people had understanding the process and what they needed to do to apply for the benefit. Producing the identification required for a benefit application was described as a problem for some young people.

Most of the social workers (13) talked about young people whom they considered were eligible for ICA but were not receiving it, or who were not eligible for ICA but whom they saw as needing it or some other form of income support. The main areas of concern were the lack of income support for 15 year olds, and families being unable to financially support their young people. Concerns were also expressed about young people being unable to receive ICA due to the lack of rental accommodation in the rural areas, lack of income support for young people wanting to remain at school and about the overcrowding of some family homes. It also appeared that some young people who were living with extended family due to reasons such as those listed in the eligibility criteria for ICA, may have not been considered eligible for ICA as members of the extended family were regarded as "parents".

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DISTRICT OFFICE BENEFITS STAFF**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents information from interviews in six districts with 26 ICA interviewing officers, five reception staff, and 13 senior benefits staff. Reception staff and ICA interviewing officers were interviewed in order to obtain information about how ICA was administered by district offices. The purpose of the interviews with senior staff was to obtain relevant background information and an overview of the way ICA was administered in each office.

Not all staff involved in administering ICA in the six districts were interviewed. However, the information obtained from the 44 staff interviewed does provide some insight into the administration of ICA in district offices.

Interviewees were asked how long they had worked with the Department, their grade, ethnicity and age. Their gender was also recorded. Staff who were interviewed had a range of experience and background (see Appendix IV).

As some questions were not asked of all staff (because they were not applicable), response totals do not always come to 26 (for interviewing officers) and 5 (for reception staff).

#### **Knowledge of ICA**

##### **Reception Staff**

Reception staff were asked if they were familiar with ICA and with the eligibility criteria for ICA. Three reception staff said that they were "reasonably" familiar with ICA and the criteria while one was "somewhat" familiar with both, and another was "somewhat" familiar with ICA but "not very" familiar with the eligibility criteria.

Reception staff said that their training and experience on the job was adequate for the limited role that they had with young people being assessed for ICA. Training for three staff involved reading circulars, pamphlets or booklets, or attending a meeting. The other two staff said that they had attended short training sessions.

##### **Interviewing Officers**

The number of ICA interviews carried out by individual staff members ranged from zero (this person had been recently recruited to the unemployment benefit area) to "about 50". In most offices there appeared to be a mixture of experienced and inexperienced interviewing officers due to staff turnover.

Overall, while training on ICA appeared to have been fairly low-key, it was considered adequate by most interviewing officers. The main exception to this was one district office where all three staff interviewed were concerned about their lack of training.

The content and amount of training varied between districts. In one office, the Training Officer had made up an ICA package and the Senior Executive Officer (SEO) said that there were follow-up training sessions to accompany any changes, such as the introduction of the six month standdown for school leavers. For staff from this office who became interviewing officers after the initial training session, relevant training was provided through module books. All staff at this office said that training was adequate and one person commented "we were well-trained on procedure." The SEO commented that "ICA isn't so complicated that it needs a lot of training." A similar comment was made by senior staff in two other districts.

In another office, staff considered that their training, organised by the training unit, was thorough. They commented on role-plays as a very useful, and also enjoyable, aspect of the training session.

In one office, staff shortages meant untrained 102s were interviewing for ICA, and the three 103 staff interviewed commented that they themselves lacked the training and the skills to do the job properly. Two said they received no training other than reading handouts and interview sheets. Comments made by staff included that some staff needed "intensive training" and that "a lot of interviewing officers here still haven't grasped it (ICA)." In another office, interviewing staff felt that training was adequate but two people said that they would like to have known more about Youth Advocates, particularly about the sorts of people who could act as Youth Advocates.

Most (19) interviewing staff said that they had dealt with upset young people and identified several reasons for young people becoming upset. These reasons included DSW staff talking to their parents, "the rigmarole they have to go through" to get the benefit, their home situations and the problems that caused them to leave home, the rate of payment (particularly if they were not eligible for ICA), and not being able to obtain a Youth Advocate.

About half (10) of the interviewing staff who had experience dealing with upset young people indicated that they felt able to deal with them. Nine interviewing staff indicated that they would like more training to help them deal with young people who got upset. Senior staff in one office also considered that interviewing staff needed more training to deal with upset clients.

#### **Provision of Information About ICA**

Staff in three offices said that they displayed ICA posters, staff in two offices said that they had not had them at any stage and staff in another office improvised

with a home-made poster because of the delays in obtaining pamphlets and posters.

Generally, there seemed to be problems with pamphlets, in that they had either arrived late (after ICA came in), or had run out and were hard to get replaced. In one office there was confusion as to which pamphlets were current and which were out-of-date. In another office, senior staff complained that ICA pamphlets were very difficult to obtain and that they were still waiting for an order to arrive.

Senior staff in one office said that they did not advertise ICA in the office because it was too costly. However, they said that they were liaising with community groups working with beneficiaries to find ways of informing people about their entitlements. There were plans to allow a community group to provide assistance to people in the unemployment benefit area. Also, a publicity committee had been set up to investigate ways of providing information to the community about benefits, in general.

When asked if information about ICA was given to community groups, schools or other organisations, it appeared that only one office had been involved in publicising ICA in the local area, and this was done through schools and the local Maori Trust Board.

Two staff interviewed in different districts volunteered that the initial media advertising for ICA was misleading because it created the impression that 16 and 17 year olds would be eligible for ICA while still at school. One of them said the misunderstanding about the eligibility of young people at school still existed at the time they were interviewed, which was more than 12 months after the introduction of ICA.

District office staff generally considered that there was little awareness of ICA in the wider community, particularly amongst young people. When asked what they thought were the best ways of advertising ICA in their office, reception staff emphasised the need to advertise ICA outside the district office. Suggestions included advertising ICA at school before young people leave and a nationwide poster campaign.

Interviewing staff were not asked specifically to comment on advertising, but about half of them volunteered comments, either in response to being asked about young people's lack of understanding of ICA, or in response to being asked about problems with and suggested improvements to ICA. These comments included making people more aware of ICA, improving public relations and specific ways to inform young people about ICA and other benefits they might be entitled to.

- \* *"Nothing was advertised, so nobody knows anything about it."*
- \* *"Advertising is a must: we need a public noticeboard, pamphlets in the foyer ... we need a DSW officer to go round schools, inform teachers and educate people on ICA."*

- \* *A staff member said that when DSW staff went to schools telling them about benefits, they were met with hostility at one school where they were accused of promoting the unemployment benefit, but commented that being on a benefit was a reality for young people these days.*
- \* *One interviewing officer felt that because there was no advertising, young people had to take in so many facts when they went to DSW that they felt "swamped" and "overwhelmed by it all." He suggested that more advertising would make young people more familiar with ICA "before they hit our office." He also observed that DSW does not advertise benefits in general.*
- \* *One interviewing officer, who recommended that ICA be advertised using pamphlets in New Zealand Employment Service offices and in community places, said she had been in a situation where a community person had asked for material on ICA to take away, and she had nothing to give him. She commented that people in the community working with young people would like to know about ICA so they can send them to DSW if they are entitled to a benefit.*
- \* *Another interviewing officer, who had experience of Youth Advocates being present during interviews with young people, suggested that young people needed to be informed about ICA and Youth Advocates prior to applying for the unemployment benefit because by the time young people were told about Youth Advocates it was too late, as they had already had to go into Social Welfare and explain their situation on their own.*

### Processing Potential ICA Recipients

When ICA was introduced, it was intended that young people would be identified as potential ICA recipients when they applied for the unemployment benefit (see Administration of ICA p.3). Whilst this appeared to happen in most cases, the process potential ICA recipients went through differed in some ways to that intended. In addition, some young people who were living at home and receiving Youth Allowance were identified as potential recipients of ICA when they left home and notified the Department of their change of address. These young people were sent a letter which asked them the filter questions and invited them to be interviewed to determine their eligibility for ICA.

### Reception Process: Identification of Potential ICA Recipients

It appeared that in the districts visited, potential ICA recipients were identified by interviewing staff at their interview for the unemployment benefit, rather than when they first applied for the unemployment benefit at reception. Whilst most offices seemed to ask the filter questions prior to the interview, young people's responses to these did not appear to be used in the way intended, that is, to refer young people to a specialist interviewer who would have informed them about ICA. In one office where the filter questions were not asked prior to the interview, senior staff said that because they did not have unemployment benefit



application forms with the filter questions included, a separate sheet of paper with the filter questions on it was stapled to the application form if the receptionist asked the young person for their age and the young person said they were 16 or 17. The senior staff pointed out that ICA was "a sort of low-key thing" and "the receptionist doesn't always remember to ask the filter questions, or it's a busy day so they get missed." They said that those young people who were not asked the filter questions during the reception process were picked up when they had their interview for the unemployment benefit.

It appeared that there was little or no mention of ICA to young people during the reception process. In one office, a receptionist explained, "At this stage we don't tell them about ICA, just write it on the slip because we haven't got time to go into it. Our main aim is to keep the queues down as short as possible."

According to reception staff, arrangements were usually made for young people to be interviewed for ICA on the day they applied for the unemployment benefit. In some cases, however, appointments were made for a later date, such as when the office was very busy or, in the case of two districts, when a Youth Advocate was required. In only one district were interviews regularly scheduled for one to three days later.

#### Matching of Young People with Interviewers

Interviewing officers were asked if they tried to match the young person in terms of gender and ethnicity to the interviewer before the interview took place, or asked for the young person's preferences for the person they wanted to interview them. Whilst matching of young people with interviewers was not mentioned in the circular memorandum outlining ICA, it was considered that this might be used as one way of meeting two of the objectives of the ICA programme, namely, that it was delivered in a way which was sensitive to the gender and the culture of the young person.

It appeared that there was no matching for ethnicity and gender carried out in any of the offices visited as part of the study. The process of placing clients with interviewers appeared to be arbitrary in the sense that whoever was available for interviewing took the next client on the list or depended on what letter of the alphabet their name started with.

In one district, while there appeared to be no matching generally, senior staff commented that they were occasionally asked by social workers to interview an abused young person for ICA, and that they sometimes saw young people who had been "kicked out" of their homes. In these situations, they said that the supervisor of the reception team tried to select more mature, married staff for the interview.

In another district, the SEO said it would not be possible to match young people with staff when they see between 1,400-2,000 young people applying for a benefit each week. However, a few interviewing officers in different districts said that if

a young person said that they preferred to speak to an interviewer of a particular ethnicity or gender, they would endeavour to meet the young person's request. For example, in one office, an interviewing officer said that if clients wanted someone they had talked with previously, they attempted to meet the request. In all offices, staff generally felt that matching had never emerged as a problem or issue.

#### Location of Interview and Privacy for Clients

Interviewing staff said that interviews took place mostly in interviewing bays in the reception area. Generally, they considered that although they were not particularly private, they were adequate for "straightforward" applications, where nothing personal or sensitive was discussed. However, as young people were not identified as potential recipients of ICA until their interview for the unemployment benefit, it was unlikely that they would have known before the interview whether or not personal or sensitive information was to be presented.

When interviewing staff were asked if they thought anyone could overhear the interviews, most (19) reported that they could be overheard. Three staff in different districts commented on the lack of privacy in interviewing bays. For example, one interviewing officer thought that clients were more likely to withhold information when they were interviewed in the bays.

There appeared to be several reasons why private rooms were not used for interviews with young people. Senior staff in five offices said that there was a room which could be used if privacy was needed, but in practice these were not always available when needed, or not used because the young person did not specifically ask for a private room. One interviewing officer said that while there were private rooms available they do not use them "because they are not set up for clients" (used for storing files) or they were "too far away". In another district an interviewing officer said that since a confrontation between gang members occurred in the reception area she always interviewed in the bays rather than in a private room for safety reasons.

When asked about whether they had dealt with upset young people, two interviewing officers, who said that they had dealt with them, thought that more private rooms were needed because of this. One said, "they are young adults, and we should treat them as such. A lot don't really communicate well in bays."

#### Confidentiality

Staff were asked if they ever told clients that the interview was confidential. This question drew a range of responses. In many cases, interviewing staff said they did not discuss confidentiality with young people because they assumed young people knew everything was confidential. This was also mentioned by senior staff in two districts. In one of these districts, one senior staff person said, "staff are aware that everything is confidential."

In two districts, senior staff said that young people were told that what they said was confidential. In the office where parents were contacted for verification of the young person's circumstances, staff members said that they did not usually discuss confidentiality with young people. However, one person in this office said that they told concerned clients that "not all of the conversation will be relayed over the phone (to the parents)." Other interviewing officers in this office also commented that they sometimes told clients that the interview was confidential, for example, "if someone is reluctant to talk."

Overall, confidentiality did not appear to be perceived as a problem or issue by those staff interviewed.

### Provision of Information to Young People

There appeared to be differences between offices with regard to the information that was provided to young people about ICA during interviews. It appeared that in all offices young people were told about the rate of the benefit, in three offices they were told about Youth Advocates and the eligibility criteria and in two offices young people were told what ICA was and about places they could go if they needed counselling or some other assistance.

In the offices where interviewing staff said that the eligibility criteria were mentioned to young people, it appeared that information about the criteria was limited to the one criterion which was most relevant to the young person's situation, rather than providing information on them all. In the offices where interviewing staff said that young people were told about Youth Advocates, this appeared to be only when the young person asked about them or they were needed for verification. In one office, a senior staff member said that "Youth Advocates wouldn't be mentioned unless there was a perceived problem", such as a lack of information; it was "not mentioned as a matter of routine, because you could be creating a big deal out of nothing, which is wasting time and manpower and money."

### Verification Procedures

There appeared to be major differences in practice between district offices with regard to whether verification was obtained and how it was obtained. There seemed to be three main methods of verifying a young person's circumstances. These were: contacting the parents of the young person, using Youth Advocates and using DSW social work records. Whilst one office appeared to contact the parents as the only means of verification, the remaining offices used both Youth Advocates and DSW social work records. Senior staff in two offices also said that verification was only obtained when there was some reason to doubt the information provided by the young person. The three main methods used for verification are described in more detail below.

### Contacting Parents

One district office had a policy of contacting the parents of all young people who were identified as potential recipients of ICA. The parents, or the person with whom the young person had been living, were contacted to find out whether it was necessary for the young person to leave home. If the parents said that there was no reason for the young person not to be living at home, ICA was not granted. Senior staff in this office commented that it was a reasonably common occurrence for young people to say that they could not live at home and that their parents would not support them, while the parents said that this was not the case. Staff comments about contacting parents for verification are presented in 10.7 General Feedback.

### Youth Advocates

Whilst Youth Advocates were present during some interviews with young people (see Use of Youth Advocates p.129), Youth Advocates usually provided verification through young people being given a form which they were told had to be completed by a Youth Advocate. According to staff in one office, if young people claimed to have been "kicked out of home", they were always asked for a Youth Advocate. Those who claimed they left home voluntarily because "they did not like it at home", seemed to be given less consideration as potential ICA recipients, in that their circumstances were not verified and they were not granted ICA.

### DSW Social Work Records

In two districts, staff said that most of the recipients of ICA registered with their offices were State Wards or were known to DSW social workers, so DSW records and social workers were used most often to provide verification.

### Results of ICA Interviews

Senior staff and interviewing officers were asked about young people who were identified as potential ICA recipients but who were declined ICA. Relatively little information was obtained on this as this information was not recorded. According to staff who were interviewed, most young people who were identified as potential ICA recipients were granted ICA.

Staff were also asked when and how young people were informed of the results of their interview. In all offices, staff said that applicants were usually informed at the end of the interview. In one office, senior staff said that a grant letter usually reached the young person within a week, and that "ICA is done speedily and separately to usual unemployment benefit applications."

In offices where young people were asked to obtain a statement from a Youth Advocate, which sometimes involved a second interview, the decision could be delayed for some time. A senior staff member said that no decision was made

until the statement from the Youth Advocate was returned, but clients were put on Youth Allowance in the meantime. When the decision was made, young people were notified by letter of the result of their interview. According to senior staff in the office where parents were contacted to verify the young person's circumstances, sometimes there were delays associated with contacting parents which meant that the young person might not be notified of the result of their interview for some time (the average time was seven days).

### **Youth Advocates**

When ICA was introduced, it was intended that Youth Advocates would be present during the interview with the young person in order to provide support for the young person and to provide verification of the young person's circumstances.

#### Use of Youth Advocates

Interviewing staff were asked what proportion of young people took Youth Advocates with them when they were interviewed. Eleven staff responded "none", nine said "very few", and three said "less than half". For the remaining three staff, one said "all" (meaning 3 cases), one said "most" (meaning 3 cases out of 4) and the other said "about half" (meaning 3 or 4 cases). Thus, in those offices visited, Youth Advocates tended not to be present when young people were interviewed.

It appeared that staff generally viewed Youth Advocates only as a means of providing verification of the young person's circumstances, rather than as a means of providing verification and support for the young person. In three district offices, comments by senior staff and interviewing officers indicated that even though Youth Advocates were generally not present during the interviews with young people, young people were asked to obtain a statement from a person who could verify their circumstances. In the other district offices, Youth Advocates were generally not used in any way and were considered a "non-event" or a "non-issue".

In some offices, the use of Youth Advocates for verification seemed to be associated only with young people who had been abused. Senior staff in one office said that they could think of only two occasions when Youth Advocates were used, and that they had never had a sexual abuse case. A senior staff member in another office said that Youth Advocates were not used "because we don't see a lot of abuse cases." When an interviewing officer was asked whether he mentioned Youth Advocates to young people during the interview, he replied "no, not under normal circumstances ... (only) if there was a reason why we couldn't make a decision at the time ... I don't know if I've ever seen a Youth Advocate being used actually. I know there's a lot in the manuals about it and in the policy, but in fact I don't think it has been necessary here." He thought that this was because the interviews in his office were "quite straightforward."

Whilst staff in some offices considered that there was little need for Youth Advocates because there were few abuse cases, comments from staff in other offices suggested that where Youth Advocates were not used, information about abuse was less likely to be provided by young people (see Feedback on the Usefulness of Youth Advocates below).

### Feedback on the Usefulness of Youth Advocates

Interviewing staff who had experience of Youth Advocates being present during ICA interviews (15) were asked about the effect Youth Advocates had on the interviews. Even though their experience of Youth Advocates being present during interviews was usually limited, nearly three-quarters (11) of them had positive comments to make about the effect of Advocates on interviews.

Interviewing officers who made positive comments said things like: having an Advocate present helped put the young person at ease, they helped with explaining things to the young person so that they understood what was happening and they made things easier for staff as well as young people. Three interviewing officers thought that Youth Advocates were helpful because it was often difficult to get information from young people. One of them considered that she would not have "got a word out of a couple of her ICA young people" if it had not been for their Youth Advocate. She thought that young people should always have a Youth Advocate with them during their interview.

An interviewing officer commented that in one interview, the Youth Advocate "gave the girl a lot more confidence, she let the Youth Advocate speak for her and I don't think she would have known enough or would have been articulate enough to put her case across (abuse was the reason for her leaving home) ... Having someone speak for her and just having that support helped a lot."

In the district where parents were used to verify the young person's circumstances, the one interviewing officer with experience of Youth Advocates, was fully in support of their use, and was concerned that a lot of young people were not aware that they could have a Youth Advocate.

It appeared that information about young people's circumstances, particularly if it was sensitive, was much more likely to be provided if a support person or Youth Advocate was present during the interview with the young person. This was supported by comments made by staff in offices where Youth Advocates were not used and in offices where they were used. In those offices where Youth Advocates were generally not used, senior staff said that they did not deal with a lot of abuse cases. In offices where Youth Advocates were used, some interviewing officers said that they had interviewed young people who were victims of abuse and that they felt that information about the young person's circumstances was provided only because of the presence of a support person. One interviewing officer commented, "the fact that kids don't tell the department enough might be why there aren't so many on ICA."

### Young People In Need of ICA Who Did Not Receive It

Interviewing staff were asked if any young people who really needed ICA, did not receive it because they did not meet the eligibility criteria. Numbers were fairly evenly divided with 14 staff saying "no", and 12 saying "yes", or "possibly". Those who felt that there were no young people missing out on ICA, commented that the criteria were fairly wide and inclusive.

The young people identified by staff as missing out on ICA appeared to fall into three main groups. These were:

- those who lacked knowledge about ICA
- those who did not meet the eligibility criteria
- those who were reluctant to provide information about their circumstances or could not provide the necessary documentation, including verification

#### Young People Who Lacked Knowledge About ICA

Four staff seemed to be mainly concerned about lack of knowledge of ICA, including Youth Advocates, amongst street kids and young unemployed people who were living at home in undesirable circumstances, for example, where the parents made unreasonable financial and other demands on young people.

- \* *One interviewing officer was concerned that these young people were not told (officially) about ICA and felt that they had the right to know about statutory benefits.*
- \* *A senior staff member in another office, suggested that every 16-17 year old should be given information about entitlements, so that if their situation changed, they would know that they might be eligible for some financial assistance. He felt that, even though this would create more applications, this was not a problem as they had found ICA easy to administer in their office.*
- \* *Another staff member considered that young people should be advised "earlier" about ICA procedures, including the system of obtaining statements from Youth Advocates.*
- \* *One staff member commented that it was usually the "middle class type of kids" rather than the "down and out types" who received ICA, because they were more likely to know about ICA.*

#### Young People Who Did Not Meet the Eligibility Criteria

Staff identified several groups of young people who did not meet the eligibility criteria. These included those who had lived away from home for over six months but who had been working for less than six months, those who had worked and lived away from home for six months but moved back home prior to applying for the unemployment benefit, those living with grandparents who were experiencing

financial hardship, those whose parents claimed that they could live at home or that they were supporting them whilst the young person claimed that this was not the case, and those who would be categorised under "family breakdown" if they were not under 16 years.

In relation to young people who were living with grandparents who were experiencing financial hardship because they were superannuitants, it appeared that they were not eligible for ICA because their grandparents were regarded as "parents". Staff said that because the grandparents had never been dependent on the welfare system they would not apply for the Orphan's Benefit.

In the office where parents were contacted to verify the young person's circumstances, there appeared to be some problems associated with determining the young person's eligibility for ICA because of conflicting information provided by the young person and his/her parents. One staff member said that there were occasions when parents had said that they were providing financial support to the young person but, according to the young person, they were not. One staff member also said that there were occasions when the young person said that they had been told to leave home, but the parents denied this when they were contacted. It appeared that when conflicting information was provided, the information provided by the parents was used to decide whether ICA was granted or declined.

Senior staff in one district thought that the six month requirement for the "independent work history" criterion was somewhat unrealistic, that young people who had worked two or three months had done well to obtain employment in the first place and should be able to remain independent from home.

The "other reasons" criterion was intended to be used, at the discretion of district offices, for young people who could not live at home but who did not meet the other eligibility criteria. This criterion appeared not to have been used by those offices visited and it was not clear whether it was used by other offices, as this criterion was not included on statistical returns. One staff member commented that there should be an "open-basket" category, where staff could "just write the reasons in."

#### Young People Who Were Reluctant to Provide Information or Could Not Provide the Necessary Documentation or Verification

As mentioned previously, some staff commented that some young people were reluctant to provide information about their personal circumstances, particularly if they did not have a Youth Advocate (see Feedback on the Usefulness of Youth Advocates p.130). Young people who were reluctant to provide information about their personal circumstances may also have included those young people who said that they left home because "they did not like it at home" (see Verification Procedures p.127). As previously mentioned, young people who provided this as a reason for not living at home appeared unlikely to be granted ICA, particularly as verification was not obtained.



Young people who could not provide the necessary documentation included those who could not provide a permanent address, those who could not provide sufficient identification and those who could not get a Youth Advocate to verify their circumstances. A few staff considered that all 16-17 year olds living away from home should be granted ICA because of the difficulties young people experienced obtaining the necessary documentation, including statements from Youth Advocates.

### General Feedback

Interviewing staff were asked to comment on problems with and suggested improvements to ICA. The main themes which emerged from these comments have been incorporated into relevant sections earlier in this chapter. This section presents some general opinions about ICA from both interviewing officers and senior staff. Overall, staff expressed a variety of opinions and no particular theme was predominant.

Some staff had expected more applications for ICA. They made comments like,

- \* *"ICA had been a lot less major event than we were led to believe. We were expecting young people to come along in their thousands."*
- \* *"We don't get a lot of ICA applications here. I expected more. It's been a bit of a fizzer really - just a way of the government saving some money."*

As previously mentioned, a few staff felt that all 16-17 year olds living away from home should be granted ICA (see Young People Who Were Reluctant to Provide Information or Could Not Provide the Necessary Documentation or Verification p.133). Reasons for this suggestion included the amount of work involved in administering ICA (for a small difference in the amount of the benefit) as well as the difficulties young people experienced obtaining the necessary documentation, including statements from Youth Advocates. They made comments like,

- \* *"It's a cumbersome system for only \$20 difference in benefit especially when you consider the time that goes into interviews. We'd be better off giving the extra cash to all who live away from home."*
- \* *"All 16-17 year old applicants should be granted the higher rate. The majority are granted ICA anyway ... the whole process is a waste of time ..."*

In response to the introduction of the six month standdown for school leavers, a few staff expressed fears that young people would leave home in order to qualify for ICA (and thus by-pass the standdown period). One staff member made the following comment,

- \* *"... but there will always be the fear that some people will leave home for the sake of trying to get ICA ..."*

In the office where parents were contacted for verification, ICA appeared to be perceived as a way of making parents take responsibility for their young people. Staff made comments like,

- \* *"We have calls from parents saying they are grateful to us for declining ICA for their son or daughter."*
- \* *"What I like about ICA is that it gives parents more onus to have the young person under their control."*

However, some staff in the same office felt that parents were sometimes reluctant to admit they were not supporting the young person or had asked them to leave home. One staff member made the following comment,

- \* *"I've had one case where the parents wanted the young person to get ICA so they could charge them \$100 per week board."*

A few staff in several districts felt that the amount of ICA was insufficient for young people to live on independently. A small number of staff disagreed with the differential payment rates of Youth Allowance according to age, which meant that 16-17 year olds received less than 18-19 year olds, even though they faced the same expenses. Staff made comments like the following,

- \* *"It should be \$108 basic with ICA on top of that."*
- \* *"It's an unrealistic amount if you don't get ICA. There's a vicious circle. You can't live on that."*

Whilst staff were not asked specifically about district office practices in the areas of improving staff morale and relations between staff and clients, it appeared that activities in these areas were being carried out or were being planned in at least one of the offices visited.

### Summary

#### Knowledge of and Provision of Information About ICA

Whilst reception staff did not appear to know about ICA in detail, they indicated that their training and knowledge of ICA was sufficient for the limited role they had with young people. Interviewing officers generally considered that the training they had received on ICA was adequate, particularly if they participated in a training session rather than being given written material to read. However, several interviewing officers indicated that they would like more training to help them deal with young people who got upset.

Staff generally considered that people in the community, particularly young people, did not know about ICA. This finding was not surprising as there appeared to be little advertising of ICA by district offices. Difficulties associated with obtaining current pamphlets and the cost of advertising seemed to contribute to this. It

appeared that staff generally thought that advertising was needed, not only of ICA but of benefits in general. Staff suggested several ways of advertising ICA which emphasised advertising outside district offices. Some offices had, or were planning, to liaise with community groups with regard to providing information about benefits.

### Application Process

It appeared that the process young people went through in order to be able to receive ICA was not the same process as that described in DSW Circular Memorandum 1988/164 Youth Allowance and Independent Circumstances Allowance. In most offices, the identification of potential recipients, the provision of information about ICA and the assessment of the young person's eligibility for ICA occurred during the interview which all unemployment benefit applicants have.

Staff were asked whether matching between young people and interviewing staff occurred because it was considered that this might be one way of enhancing the sensitivity of the ICA process to the gender and culture of the young person. Matching did not appear to happen, although staff said that if young people did request an interviewer of a particular ethnicity or gender, they would attempt to meet this request. However, it appeared that very few young people made such a request.

Interviews with young people appeared to usually take place in interviewing bays. Staff generally considered that these were adequate for interviews where sensitive information was not discussed. As young people were not identified as potential recipients of ICA until their unemployment benefit interview, staff were unlikely to know whether or not sensitive information was going to be presented during the interview. There was some concern that young people might be reluctant to provide sensitive information when they were interviewed in bays and might have missed out on ICA as a result.

Private rooms for interviews appeared to be available in most offices. However, these tended not to be used for several reasons, including that they were used for other purposes. In most offices, young people did not appear to be informed that the interview was confidential because it was assumed that young people knew this.

There appeared to be differences between offices with regard to the information that was provided to young people about ICA. As mentioned earlier, it was intended that young people would be provided with information about ICA prior to being assessed for it. However, this did not appear to happen. During their interview, young people were generally only informed about the rate of the benefit; Youth Advocates, only if staff needed them to verify the young person's circumstances; and the eligibility criterion which was considered appropriate to the young person's circumstances.

There also appeared to be differences between offices with regard to whether verification of the young person's circumstances was obtained and, if it was, how it was obtained. There seemed to be three main ways of verifying a young person's circumstances. These were: contacting the parents of the young person, using Youth Advocates and using DSW social work records. In some offices, it appeared that the young person's circumstances were not verified unless there was some reason to doubt the information provided by the young person. In the office where parents were contacted for verification, ICA was perceived by some staff as a way of making parents take responsibility for their young people whilst some others felt that because parents were reluctant to admit that they were not supporting the young person or had asked them to leave home, young people in need of ICA did not receive it (because the granting or declining of ICA was based on the information provided by the parents).

### Youth Advocates

As mentioned earlier, it was intended that young people who were identified as potential ICA recipients would be informed about Youth Advocates prior to being assessed for ICA. This was so that they could arrange for a Youth Advocate to be present when they were assessed for ICA. The finding that Youth Advocates tended not to be present when young people were assessed for ICA was not surprising because, as mentioned earlier, young people were generally not informed about Youth Advocates prior to being assessed for ICA. It appeared that young people were more likely to be given a form and told that it had to be completed by a Youth Advocate.

It was also intended that Youth Advocates would provide verification of the young person's circumstances and provide support to the young person. It appeared, however, that if Youth Advocates were used, they were used only to provide verification. It is considered that this also explains why young people were more likely to be given a form that had to be completed by a Youth Advocate, rather than being encouraged to have a Youth Advocate present during the interview. In addition, the use of Youth Advocates for verification seemed to be associated only with young people who had been abused. This was perhaps because the eligibility criteria stated that a Youth Advocate was necessary for young people who were categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion (this included young people who had been abused at home).

Most interviewing staff who had experience of Youth Advocates being present during interviews with young people considered that they were useful, particularly as they provided information about the young person's circumstances when the young person was reluctant to do this. It appeared that sensitive information was much more likely to be provided if a support person or Youth Advocate was present. This perhaps explains why staff in several offices commented that they did not deal with a lot of abuse cases.

### Young People In Need of ICA Who Did Not Receive It

Almost half of the interviewing officers thought that there were young people in need of ICA but who did not receive it. The young people they referred to appeared to fall into three main groups. These were: those who lacked knowledge about ICA, those who did not meet the eligibility criteria and those who were reluctant to provide information about their personal circumstances or could not provide the necessary documentation or verification.

### General Feedback

Some staff had expected more applications for ICA. A few staff felt that all 16-17 year olds living away from home should be granted ICA. The inadequacy of ICA was commented on by some staff. It appeared that at least one district office was either planning or carrying out activities to improve staff morale and relations between staff and clients.

## CHAPTER 8

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter summarises and discusses the findings of the ICA Evaluation Project.

The underlying assumptions of the Youth Allowances Scheme, introduced by the Government in January 1989, were that there was a transitional period for young people, between dependence and independence, and that during this period their parents should have some financial responsibility for them. ICA was the single provision under this Scheme which recognised that some young people cannot live with their parents nor reasonably expect financial support from them. Two aspects of its administration were particularly relevant to this evaluation. The first was the fact that it depended on a filtering system to identify potential recipients rather than on having people apply directly for ICA. The second was that the eligibility criteria contained some areas of discretion.

The objectives of the evaluation of ICA were to learn whether or not it reached its intended target population and was delivered as intended, and what factors in the DSW administration or programme policy of ICA, may have prevented young people in genuine need from applying for or receiving the allowance.

Information was collected by means of a nationwide postal questionnaire completed by 747 ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients living away from home. In addition, the evaluators visited six district offices in the course of which they interviewed 45 young people, 66 community agencies, 17 district office social workers and 44 district office benefits staff.

*background* This chapter combines and summarises findings from all the respondent groups. The different perspectives of these groups were reflected in their responses. For example, the benefits staff had to concern themselves with compliance issues whereas social workers and community agencies were more concerned with meeting needs, and community agencies were operating from a broader experience of social welfare than were the young people. Nevertheless, many common themes emerged from the different respondent groups. Although some groups were small, the high level of agreement between them offers a basis for firm conclusions. The researchers believe that the issues reported here reflect the general concerns of these groups. The instances where the groups differed from each other in their responses are noted in the discussion of findings below.

Not all the issues that were addressed by respondents were "ICA issues" as such. Neither young people, nor those who worked with them, nor DSW staff themselves, restricted their comments to the specifics of this particular allowance. The respondents were concerned with the problems of young people who were inadequately supported, and did not always see that limiting the scope of their attention to a particular age group or set of circumstances, or to a specific benefits policy, was useful for solving those problems. For many respondents, and this was stated explicitly by some community agencies (especially Maori and Pacific Islands groups), it made no sense to look at young people in isolation;

they were just one part of a wider problem and needed to be understood and helped within that wider context.

As the findings from all of the respondent groups indicated that there was substantial variation in practice from one district office to another, many of the comments made were specific to the policies and practices of particular district offices.

### **Problems with the Application Process and Dealing with DSW**

There was a common view that some aspects of the ICA application process were insensitive or inappropriate to the young people involved. Young people and those who work with them described in detail the sorts of situations they would find themselves in and their reactions to these. These are summarised below.

#### **Unfamiliarity with the System, Anxiety and Lack of Privacy**

Most young people went to the district office feeling fearful and self-conscious, and were usually unfamiliar with the system they were about to enter. They did not know that they might have to wait there for hours, they did not know what documentation to take. Some were not even aware that they were being summoned to the counter when their name was called out. Their interviews were usually held in open booths that gave them little privacy. Their benefit was not always explained to them in a way they could understand. Many young people described the experience as humiliating. Young people and youth workers alike were concerned that there should be acknowledgement of these feelings and that steps should be taken to address the problem.

#### **Difficulties With Understanding the Language Used and With Filling Out Forms**

Sometimes the language used by staff and in DSW forms (even the new ones) was considered (by the young people themselves as well as those who work with them) too difficult to understand. Both sets of respondents also said that there were too many forms and they covered areas (like mortgages and assets) that confused the young people. Some community agencies said they had trouble getting copies of the forms to help people practice on.

#### **Difficulties Obtaining Documentation and Dealing with Bureaucratic Processes**

Young people reported that documentation was often difficult to obtain. Community agencies and social workers also identified this as a problem for young people. Some needed to borrow money to get a birth certificate, and others could not produce their school certificates and other papers because they had left home abruptly and their parents would not cooperate. They simply did not have things like driver's licences and credit cards, so providing two forms of identification was often not possible for them. They sometimes did not have any money with which to open a bank account for crediting their benefit payments.

Young people found it difficult to cope with such processing complications as lost files, having to transfer offices and having to travel back and forth between the

Employment Service and Social Welfare. Return visits to Social Welfare were sometimes a financial hardship.

#### Problems with DSW Contacting, or Requiring Signatures from Parents

There was at least one district office that required young people to get their parents to sign a statement when they applied for the unemployment benefit, and had a policy of ringing parents to verify the circumstances of their young people being assessed for ICA (which sometimes happened without the young person's consent). These practices were viewed by young people and youth workers as breaches of client confidentiality. Furthermore, the parents' response was sometimes of doubtful honesty (particularly when parents did not want to admit that there were problems at home, or did not want to cooperate for other reasons). Sometimes there were other repercussions for the young person, as in one case where a DSW staff member rang and was the first to inform the parent of the young person's loss of job and flat, which created problems between the young person and the parent. Whilst some staff in this office perceived this practice as a way of making parents take responsibility for their young people, others felt that it meant that some young people in need of ICA did not receive it, i.e. when their parents contradicted their description of their circumstances.

#### Diseconomies of the System

Some district office benefits staff considered that the process was a cumbersome and wasteful one when one considered the relatively small amount of money saved by not granting ICA to Youth Allowance recipients living away from home and the relatively large amount of staff time taken up in administering ICA.

There appeared to be a further dis-economy derived from leaving young people in need, whether due to lack of information, narrow interpretation of criteria or administration systems which prevented young people in genuine need from receiving ICA. Some young people said that ICA was the only thing that kept them from stealing. As several youth workers pointed out, if it is too difficult for young people to get the money they need legally, then they will turn to crime in order to feed themselves: that way they will come to the attention of the Police, and the outcome will be more expensive in the long run. Several community agencies and DSW social workers, describing young people whom they personally worked with, said that offending was a common result of their being inadequately supported. Australian research supports this (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission 1989:44-59).

#### Staff-client Interaction

The most common concern of both young people and community workers, and to some extent social workers, was the issue of staff-client interaction. Their concern covered both communication (that staff used difficult language, talked too fast and were hard to understand) and personal qualities (that staff were sometimes lacking in courtesy, empathy, understanding, life experience, and willingness to help and explain). Some young people thought the staff regarded them as dole bludgers,



as trying to cheat the system and stupid. However, there were also young people who described the staff they dealt with as being kind and helpful.

Some community agencies argued that high priority should be given to the recruitment of more Maori and Pacific Islands staff, and staff who were "culturally aware", with the ability to contribute to the delivery of services in a more flexible and culturally appropriate manner. Young people's concerns tended to focus more on the need for staff with particular personal qualities such as kindness and helpfulness. Many youth workers and young people commented that staff needed to be more sensitive and to have a better understanding of what these young people's lives were like.

The point was made by several community agencies and social workers that staff needed to be given the resources and training to deal with their clients' needs, the stress of their workload and the exigencies of client behaviour. Whilst district office benefits staff were not asked specifically about this, it appeared that at least one office was planning or carrying out activities to improve staff morale and relations between staff and clients.

### **Problems with the Use of Youth Advocates and Support People**

The Youth Advocate was required, for certain ICA criteria, to verify the young person's circumstances. The Youth Advocate could also provide support for the young person by accompanying them to district office, attending the ICA interview and speaking on their behalf.

#### **Insufficient Use of Youth Advocates and Support People**

It appeared that the district offices studied used Youth Advocates purely for the purpose of verifying the young person's circumstances particularly with regard to cases of abuse. Often this was done through the use of Youth Advocate forms that the young person would take away to have signed by a Youth Advocate and then returned to the district office. (There was also, in one district office, the practice discussed above of ringing the parents for verification, rather than encouraging young people to take a Youth Advocate with them.) In general, district offices did not inform young people about Youth Advocates nor encourage them to take one as a support person (that is, a mature person who could speak on their behalf, as opposed to a friend their own age whom they might take along anyway). This perhaps explains why few community workers appeared to have acted as Youth Advocates and been present during the young person's ICA interview.

The limited use of Youth Advocates meant that their potential contribution was not realised. It was generally agreed by all respondents who were familiar with the experiences of young people at DSW (including district office benefits staff) that it was valuable for young people to have a support person with them, even if this person did not take on the specific Youth Advocate role of verifying the young person's circumstances. Nearly half of the young people took someone with them to district office, and almost all of them found it helpful (especially for moral support, having someone to explain things to them and telling them what

to expect, backing up what they said and helping them to fill out forms and answer questions). Some community agencies said that they approved of the written Youth Advocate form as a way of young people avoiding having to discuss sensitive and personal matters with DSW staff, but at the same time felt that young people needed a support person with them at DSW.

### The Importance of Youth Advocates' and Support People's Presence at Interviews

Some youth workers believed that some young people would answer the filter questions wrongly to avoid talking to DSW staff about their family problems. In other words, they would say they were living at home or supported by their parents (just so they would not have to explain why they were not) and thus, perhaps unknowingly, eliminate themselves from consideration for ICA. It appeared from comments made by some district office benefits staff that sensitive information about the young person's circumstances was much more likely to be provided if a support person or Youth Advocate was present. This perhaps explains the fact that staff in several offices commented that they did not deal with a lot of abuse cases. It may be unrealistic to expect young people to reveal these sorts of problems without the support of a Youth Advocate.

Some district office benefits staff commented that they found young people to be subdued and reluctant to provide information about their personal circumstances. Several community agencies commented that young people who experienced distressing circumstances at home tended to be unassertive. Generally, community agencies and social workers strongly urged that the presence of Youth Advocates, especially members of community agencies and family members, be encouraged by the Department.

### Support People Provided Help Filling Out Forms

Several young people commented that they had difficulty completing the unemployment benefit application forms and needed help with them. Some community agencies and social workers agreed that young people frequently lacked the skills for this task. If staff do not have the resources to spend time helping them with the forms, it could be useful for the young person to take with them someone who can.

### Importance of Using Community Resources

One of the clearest messages received from the community agencies and social workers was that the young people in the greatest need were often the ones least able to access the system. These were the young people who had no stable living arrangement and so had no permanent address; who left home under such conditions that they could not get access to their identification papers; who had not the money to pay for a birth certificate or with which to open a bank account; who could not get their parents to cooperate in verifying their circumstances for DSW; who were so shamed and frightened that they dared not go in to discuss their situations with DSW staff; and who simply did not have the literacy and communication skills to access the system effectively. These young people

required the help of their community agencies and social workers to penetrate the welfare system in order to get the support they needed.

In general, community agencies wanted to see better use made of community resources: (1) as Youth Advocates and buffers between young people and DSW staff; (2) for consultation on the development of forms, pamphlets and other informational resources, and on how to improve services; (3) for training DSW staff; (4) as colleagues in dealing with and making decisions about young people; and (5) for providing alternative venues for interviewing (e.g., ACCESS centres and marae). The point was made repeatedly that appropriate liaison, contact and outreach staff need to be in place for any of these things to happen - particularly since it was often the face-to-face oral communication of information out in the community situation, which is the most effective (as was specifically identified by Pacific Islands groups).

### **Problems with Provision of Information**

The provision of information about ICA by the Department was studied as an aspect of ICA administration that might have prevented young people from applying for the allowance, and also to find out whether ICA was delivered as intended. The dependence on the filter system to identify potential recipients meant that the districts did not have to inform the general population of young people about the availability of ICA. This became a problem when the filter system failed (discussed below). Sixteen to seventeen year olds who applied for the unemployment benefit, and who were living away from home and unsupported by their parents, should have been informed about ICA.

### **Poor Communication Between District Office and Young People**

It appeared that only half of the young people receiving ICA who were surveyed or interviewed were even aware of this benefit, and by no means did all of them learn about it from DSW. Only a third of them seemed to have been informed about ICA when they were interviewed to assess their eligibility for it. It appeared that the amount of information provided to young people varied between the district offices studied, even though the circular memorandum outlining the allowance stated that potential recipients should be informed about ICA and that they should be informed before the assessment interview.

The failure of DSW to inform potential recipients about ICA is only one part of a general problem of poor communication. It is clear from their responses that most young people found their experiences at district office to be daunting and confusing, and the language used by staff difficult to understand. It is likely that these factors made it difficult for them to absorb any information they were given.

### **Providing Information to the Community**

There are the further issues of informing young people before they become clients, and the degree to which the community at large is aware of what benefits are available. Community agencies, social workers and district office benefits staff were united in their belief that young people were generally not informed about

ICA. Nearly all of the community agencies and social workers emphasised the importance of the Department providing information to those who work with young people. In most of the district offices studied, it appeared that very little benefit information was disseminated to people in the community, although some offices did or were planning to provide information to community groups, and some staff members carried out an unofficial liaison role with them as well. The point was made repeatedly by informants with experience across districts that information sharing varied considerably from one district office to another.

Maori and Pacific Island groups in particular stressed that the information they were getting was of poor quality and narrow in scope, which suggests that this is an area of service delivery that is still culturally insensitive and inappropriate to the community's needs. For Pacific Islands people, the lack of knowledge of, and related limited access to, ICA and other assistance and services provided by the Department was a serious issue which was constantly raised. Because English is a second language for many Pacific Island people, who find the "system" to be complicated, monocultural and unwelcoming, they are faced with multiple barriers when trying to get information and services.

### How to Inform Young People

Every group of respondents emphasised that getting benefit information to young people meant using the channels and methods that were most readily accessible to them. Young people said that they wanted to be informed, when they applied to DSW, of the benefits available and how to obtain them. They also wanted pamphlets and other forms of advertisement, and information to be disseminated through their schools. Those who worked with young people believed that they would be one of the best sources of information for them, but that young people should also be informed through their schools, by advertising in the media, at district office, and by word of mouth through ethnic and other networks. Some community agencies said they would like to get regular mailings of official benefit information, while others stressed the value of face to face communication and effective personal liaison. All agreed on the importance of using simple, understandable language and attractive presentation when communicating with young people.

### **Young People Who Miss Out On ICA**

The main reason that it was so important that information about ICA be disseminated was that young people did appear to get missed out of the filtering process that was meant to capture those who were eligible for ICA. This was clear from interviews with young people and district office benefits staff, and inferred from young people's responses to the postal questionnaire. One-quarter (nine out of 35) of the young people interviewed who had ever been granted ICA had not had their eligibility picked up in the course of their unemployment benefit application. They were only assessed for the allowance after they themselves brought their potential eligibility for ICA to the attention of DSW benefits staff.

It seems very likely that there were, among our respondents, young people on the Youth Allowance who were living away from home who should have been picked

up for ICA. Of the Youth Allowance recipients who were interviewed, at least one-quarter, but probably as many as half (six out of 12) could have been eligible for ICA when they applied for the unemployment benefit.

Of the young people who responded to the postal questionnaire, Youth Allowance recipients were less likely than ICA recipients to have been asked the filter questions. And although it is very possible that some of them could have been assessed for ICA and were not aware of it, two-thirds of the Youth Allowance recipient believed that they had never had their eligibility for ICA assessed. This is despite the fact that three-quarters of the Youth Allowance recipients appeared to be potential ICA recipients in that they reported that they were not living with their parents and were unsupported by them, so that their responses to the filter questions should have identified them as potential recipients. Ninety-two (43%) of the Youth Allowance recipients surveyed both appeared to be potential ICA recipients (living away from home, unsupported) and believed that they met the eligibility criteria for ICA.

While it may be inevitable that some young people would get missed out given the dependence on a filtering process for identifying potential recipients, the findings indicate that about half of the Youth Allowance recipients were in fact eligible for ICA.

Young people who were living independently while on the Youth Allowance were usually in very difficult financial circumstances and in unstable and unsatisfactory living arrangements. If information about ICA was available in the community, it seems likely that young people who were potentially eligible for the higher rate of benefit would be able to bring themselves to the attention of the Department of Social Welfare and apply specifically for ICA. This is what happened to the nine young people referred to above, after they learned about ICA, usually in some entirely accidental fashion. At least one young person applied for ICA as a result of being informed about it when invited to participate in this study. Some district office benefits staff identified young people who lacked information about ICA as one group of young people who might be missing out on ICA.

Some district office benefits staff also referred to young people who were reluctant to provide information about their personal circumstances or who could not provide the necessary documentation or verification as young people who may have missed out on ICA.

Half of the community agencies, and some DSW social workers and benefits staff, said that they were aware of young people in the community who were in need of, and who might be eligible for, ICA but who were not getting it. The specific reasons for this situation occurring, and the extent of the problem, will be taken up later in this chapter.

### Young People in Need Who Did Not Fit the Criteria

There was widespread concern that there were young people who did not qualify for ICA because they did not meet the criteria, but who were in need of a higher level of income support.

### Young People at Home in Distressing Circumstances

There was general agreement that there were young people living at home in distressing and undesirable circumstances who could qualify for ICA if they left home. About half of the community agencies worked with young people in this category. Agencies that specialised in this area put the number of these young people in the hundreds. Their calculations were limited to their own catchment areas. A national figure would be much greater.

Those who worked with these young people believed that one of the main reasons that they continued to live in conditions of violence and abuse was that they were not informed of the alternatives, and were afraid that they could not support themselves if they left. It was noted by one respondent that young women were particularly vulnerable. Certainly women are more likely than men to be victims of abuse and, according to the 1986 Census, young women are somewhat less likely to be in paid employment than young men.

### The Under-16 Age Group, Low-Income Families and Others

Many of those working with young people expressed concern about the unsatisfactory conditions of young people under the age of 16 who were living away from home. Some of the agencies which were involved with finding accommodation for these young people criticised the Unsupported Child Allowance (or Orphans' Benefit) as difficult to obtain and inadequate to its purpose, and the allowances for foster parents as likewise insufficient. Young people who would be categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion if they were not under 16 years were also mentioned by some staff as young people in need who did not meet the ICA criteria.

There was also concern for unemployed young people whose family life was affected by poverty: whose homes were overcrowded, whose parents could not afford to keep them at school nor support them properly at home. The point was made by community agencies and social workers that as long as these young people were too young for the unemployment benefit or the adult rate, or while they were on standdown, their parents could not afford to keep them.

The lack of income support for young people living away from home who wanted to continue with their secondary schooling was also mentioned. It was pointed out by one community agency and several social workers that while there was a need for ICA in rural areas, there was a lack of rental accommodation which meant young people were less able to live independently in order to receive ICA.

Some district office benefits staff also referred to young people who had lived away from home for over six months but who had been working for less than six months, those who had worked and lived away from home for six months but moved back prior to applying for the unemployment benefit, those living with grandparents who were experiencing financial hardship and those whose parents claimed that they could live at home or they were supporting them whilst the young person claimed this was not the case (in the office where parents were used

for verification) as young people in need who did not receive ICA because they did not meet the eligibility criteria.

### Cultural Considerations

It became clear that there were young people who were in need of support, but who were not eligible for ICA, because the criteria did not cater for certain cultural considerations. Several Maori groups made the point that Maori youth were often torn between wanting to stay at home to contribute what they could from their Youth Allowance payments and needing to escape overcrowding and other problems at home even though this meant that they would not be able to contribute at all. Ultimately, they argued, it was necessary to take a much broader, pro-active and whanau-oriented approach to helping people than merely dispensing piecemeal benefits. They said that the young people that ICA was aimed at were only one part of a family cycle marked by poverty, stress and limited opportunities.

For Pacific Islands groups, similar issues regarding family poverty were raised in relation to the overall extended family situation. Furthermore, there were concerns on the part of Pacific Islands groups that the ICA provisions did not take into account the unique needs of Pacific Islands young people: for instance, that in general they were not encouraged to leave home, that they had important roles and responsibilities in the context of their wider family groups, and that the very concepts of "independence", "home" and "parents" needed to be examined with specific reference to the Pacific Islands cultural context (for example, young people staying with relations, and the special pressures on them in that situation, were mentioned).

### Additional Criteria Suggested by Community Agencies

There was concern for young people who had left home because they were unhappy or needed their independence, but who could not argue the criterion of "family breakdown". It has been argued (by Jane and James Ritchie for New Zealand, and by Frank Maas for Australia) that the very fact of their being unemployed makes the presence of these young people a seriously stressful element in the home, and many families do not have the skills and resources to cope with this additional stress. For these sorts of reasons, several community agencies argued that the mental health of the young person should be included as one of the criteria of eligibility.

### **Adequacy and Other Problems for Young People on the Benefit**

#### Money Problems Arising From Changes in Benefit Payments

According to both young people and community agencies, one of the most serious problems facing young people was the fact that they were so poor that before they ever got to DSW they were often already in debt. Young people's budgeting was so tight that any period without income support, or with reduced income support, often resulted in severe hardship. This was the observation of many community agencies, attested to by the personal experience of many young people,

and supported by Australian studies (Hartley 1989; HREOC 1989; Maas 1987, 1988; Maas and Hartley 1987, 1988).

Many young people and youth workers, and some social workers, were concerned about the period of time between applying for a benefit and money arriving in a young person's account. They were also concerned about the times when a payment failed to go into a young person's bank account or was the wrong amount, which not only produced a delay but sometimes required the young person to go into the district office to clear it up at their own expense (which was sometimes substantial, especially in rural areas).

According to young people and community agencies, hardship was also experienced when a benefit was terminated and there was an unsupported period before the benefit could be started up again. This happened when young people gained and lost employment, and was exacerbated by employers who did not cooperate in informing DSW about the young person's status. Payments also ceased when declaration forms were not sent in or were improperly filled out.

Several young people and community agencies said that payments were often reduced due to repayments of loans, bonds and overpayments. This also happened because of part-time and fluctuating employment, which discouraged some young people from obtaining such jobs, according to the young people and those who worked with them. These reductions were difficult for young people to cope with since they were usually barely able to budget on their usual payments. Over the last ten years there has been a significant shift of young people from full-time to part-time work. This has involved all ethnic groups, both young women and men, but it was most significant for Maori and Pacific Islands young people.

Payment hitches sometimes occurred when people transferred between offices. They also happened when people tried to get onto the Education Department's version of ICA, which seemed to be more rigid in its criteria.

### Adequacy

While the evaluation of ICA did not specifically set out to address this, inadequacy of the benefit was an issue of major concern raised by both young people and community agencies. Those who were trying to survive on the Youth Allowance while living away from home and without the support of their parents were by far the worst off. In response to the postal questionnaire they were twice as likely as ICA recipients to mention financial difficulties and in the interviews they detailed the serious hardships they encountered.

The point was made by young people, community agencies and DSW staff, that 16 and 17 year olds living away from home and unsupported by their parents generally have the same living costs as 18 and 19 year olds and, for that matter, as most 20 year olds on the dole. They found themselves with not enough money for appropriate clothing and busfares for job interviews. ACCESS trainers interviewed argued that the training benefit did not cover young people's costs on



an ACCESS course in terms of clothing, shoes or even travel, and because of this some families could not afford to keep their young people on training courses.

### Homelessness and Income Support

Inadequacy of the benefit appeared to contribute to the relatively high mobility of young people (particularly for respondents on the Youth Allowance) because they could not afford to pay the rent and other costs associated with living away from home. A youth worker said that young people had to live in groups in order to afford to live in rented accommodation but risked eviction if the groups became too large. Some community agencies said the Youth Allowance barely covered their hostel charges and these were already heavily subsidised. Some of the young people who were interviewed mentioned living in cars, shifting from flat to flat or returning to stressful and unsatisfactory home situations when they could not meet their rent payments and electricity bills. An Australian researcher, Christabel Young (1987), identified a clear pattern of young people leaving home, returning and leaving again and found that the pattern was created by the problems they faced in supporting themselves and getting reasonable accommodation.

### Supplementary Support

Several community agencies said that, while it had been their practice to obtain special needs grants for young people requiring emergency support, these grants have become much more difficult to obtain ("Now you have to go in and really battle").

The accommodation benefit is another form of supplementary support, and over half the ICA recipients surveyed said that they were receiving this. However, only one-third of the Youth Allowance recipients living away from home were on the accommodation benefit and most reported receiving less than \$10.00 per week.

### **Wider Problems**

Several other issues came out of the research that were not specific to ICA. Among them were the general problems of any unemployed young people: boredom, poor self-image and trying to make ends meet.

### Work and Training

Responses from the young people clearly indicated that they would rather work than be on a benefit, but they had few options in this direction. Neither did it appear that there were enough training opportunities. As the youth workers put it, the emphasis on training was a good one, but it needed more resourcing. They said that young people should have more incentives to train: that is, more rewards for successful training, and more jobs to make the whole exercise worthwhile.

The researchers formed the clear impression that despite the difficult situations these young people were in, they were trying very hard to cope. Although they

were often in dire straits, they were not looking for handouts. They had a genuine desire to work and to better themselves.

### Young People's Other Needs

Many youth workers, both inside and outside the Department, were concerned that young people were becoming dependent on DSW payments and that this sapped their ability to look after themselves. There was also a feeling that DSW could address the needs of young people more effectively by meeting their needs for counselling and providing them with information about community groups that they could go to for help. There was a general concern that while these young people may have been able to fulfil their most pressing material needs with their benefits, some were lacking in the lifeskills required for independent living.

### "Gatekeeping"

Throughout this exercise respondents indicated that they thought income support policies were sometimes being administered in ways which frustrated the purposes of the policies. There was deep concern about the way in which assistance and services were being delivered. A major concern related to the way in which the Department "guarded" information about the services and assistance it provided. This was perceived by some young people and community agencies as a way of gatekeeping or limiting the amount of money the government would have to spend, by ensuring that few people actually knew about certain provisions. Some community agencies and a few young people believed there were counter staff in some offices who were unaware of the existence of some provisions, or had a very limited knowledge of how they could be utilised. Some community agencies believed that this was a deliberate attempt by some DSW managers to limit the use of certain provisions.

The point was made repeatedly that effective provision of services required the Department to actively publicise the assistance that was available, and it was important to do this in ways which would reach all client groups.

### A Holistic Approach

Concerns were raised about the Department's strictly compartmentalised approach to delivering services, and the difficulties it caused clients when trying to find out what services were available and what assistance they may have been entitled to. Many people described the frustration they experienced in having to go from section to section, from person to person, and in some cases, from office to office - often over a period of months - in order to piece together the many fragments of information about the full assistance they were entitled to. For many clients, the hassles and pressures were overwhelming, so the decision to "go without" was often made (which could lead to greater problems in the long term).

There were strong calls by some community agencies for the Department to break down the many artificial barriers placed between various "sections" and staff, so that the system was more responsive to the needs of clients. In other words, a more holistic, needs-based emphasis was considered necessary to help provide

clients with an overview of the various services they were entitled to in relation to their particular situations. It was argued that the system's failure to do this produced greater problems, requiring more costly solutions, further down the track.

### **Summary of Maori Issues**

For Maori, the main problem with this study was the narrowness of its conceptual framework. To address the needs of 16 and 17 year olds who were living under stressful circumstances without dealing with the circumstances themselves (that is, the home environment and all the difficulties faced by those who were contained within it) was for many Maori "band aid treatment" of the first order. The call was repeated for an integrated benefit system that acknowledged and responded to the social structures of whanau, hapu and iwi.

Given, however, that ICA was available, the view expressed by Maori was that it was inadequate and it was difficult to access. Information, adequacy and access issues were all addressed by the Maori groups interviewed. Time and again the inability of the Department to deliver and/or deal with these issues in a meaningful and appropriate manner was stressed. Favourable comments about the ICA programme were often due to the establishment of effective liaison between community groups and district office staff.

Improving working relationships with DSW people was acknowledged as a desirable and, in some instances, a critical objective of the Maori groups. They perceived this objective as being of minor importance (and in some instances of no importance) to DSW. Maori groups did not believe that there were any incentives for DSW staff to create and nurture such relationships with the community. Where the working relationship was positive, the Maori groups spoken to were appreciative of this.

Although various limitations of the ICA programme were identified, there was appreciation that at least an attempt was being made to address the needs of unemployed youth.

### **Summary of Issues of Importance for Pacific Islands People**

Throughout the study, it was clear that there were many issues that were of particular importance for Pacific Islands people, not only in relation to ICA, but in relation to many of the Department's policies, provisions and services. As was emphasised many times by Pacific Islands people, ICA was only one small part of the social welfare system and so, when evaluating the ICA provision for young people, issues in the wider context of the extended family and community should also have been taken into account.

Firstly, it was apparent to the Pacific Islands community that there were proportionately very few Pacific Islands young people receiving ICA, in comparison to other groups of young people. Although this could be partly explained by the general lack of knowledge amongst Pacific Islands people about

this allowance, it is also partly because of the greater likelihood of Pacific Islands young people continuing to live with their families. It became clear that Pacific Islands family life involves experiences and demands which were generally not understood or catered for in various departmental provisions or services. Pacific Islands young people are not usually encouraged to move out of "home" or to become "independent". It is generally not part of Pacific Islands cultures to be oriented towards becoming "independent individuals", but rather, Pacific ways of living are centred around the extended family and community. Everyone has particular roles to take up within the family, and young people in particular have a very special role to play in this way of life. Thus, it is quite common for Pacific Islands young people to live at "home" into their twenties, which is quite different from other groups of young people who may move away from "home" in their middle to late teens.

Furthermore, Pacific Islands young people often live with relations rather than with parents. Often, there are many different pressures and expectations for young people living with relations, which are particular to those living situations, and cannot be likened to living at "home" with parents. In some cases, young people may be living in extreme hardship or in distressful circumstances, yet the eligibility criteria for various social welfare services and provisions, such as ICA, are often narrowly defined and do not cater for the needs of young people in living arrangements which are not of the mainstream culture.

Pacific Islands groups emphasised the need to understand the overall family situations of which Pacific Islands young people are part. Pacific Islands families are often trying to cope with many different pressures, as well as having to adapt to life in New Zealand (often as speakers of English as a second language). For some families, such pressures can include redundancies or unemployment, low incomes, substandard accommodation, high living costs, overcrowding, poor health, problems in dealing with various bureaucratic "systems" and substantial culturally-defined obligations (for example, contributing to the work of the church, and to the extended family and community both in New Zealand and in the islands, is often an essential part of family life). For those families who are struggling to survive, family income is often stretched, not only to support children and young people, but also to support other family members - such as grandparents who have recently migrated - who are without independent sources of income. It became clear that, although the Department is beginning to recognise the value of the extended family and is wanting to give it more responsibility, the reality is that the extended family is often severely short of income, lacking in support, and under threat of collapse.

Therefore, it became apparent that a great deal of further work was needed in looking at the Pacific Islands issues raised, and in examining those assumptions and definitions underlying social welfare policies, which are inherent in such concepts as "home", "parents", "family" and "independence", and which are often interpreted from a mono-cultural viewpoint. Also, the need for the Department to take a comprehensive approach to providing services and income support to young people and their families was stressed, with a particular emphasis on the development and delivery of policies which are more flexible and culturally appropriate.

### Conclusions

The researchers concluded that:

- 1 ICA probably reached most of its intended target population. However, it has found that approximately half of the Youth Allowance recipients in the study may have been eligible for ICA. Based on this, the researchers would estimate that at the time of the study about 250 young people who were living away from home and who applied for the unemployment benefit, and were only granted the Youth Allowance, may have been eligible for ICA. It was not possible from the study data to estimate the number of unemployed young people living away from home who were not receiving an unemployment benefit and were eligible for ICA. Neither was it possible to estimate the number of young people who were living at home in undesirable circumstances like those detailed in the eligibility criteria. This group was not part of the target population, but if they left home they would have been potentially eligible for ICA.
- 2 It appeared that ICA was not always delivered as intended. There were problems which limited its accessibility to young people in genuine need. The problems included shortcomings in the following areas which are important to proper delivery of ICA: sensitivity to culture and gender, appropriateness to the age and skills of the client population, confidentiality, flexibility to deal with young people in various circumstances, and avoiding unnecessary trauma to distressed young people. It appeared that sometimes young people found the application process so upsetting that they preferred to forego the allowance than to discuss their family circumstances with staff. It also appeared that various situations arose that caused benefits to lapse for extended periods, during which time young people were unsupported and experienced considerable financial hardship.
- 3 There were some factors in the DSW administration of ICA that appeared to prevent some young people in genuine need from applying for or receiving the allowance. These factors included lack of appropriate information in the community at large about the existence of ICA; difficulties that young people had in complying with the rules for providing DSW with identification papers and other documents; ineffective communication between young clients and DSW staff; and less than optimum use of Youth Advocates and support people.
- 4 The narrowness of the target population and the way the criteria for ICA were interpreted also appeared to have prevented young people in genuine need from applying for or receiving the allowance. Such young people included under 16 year olds, secondary school students living away from home, young people whose families were too poor to keep them at school or support them adequately at home, young people whose home life was stressful to them but who could not argue family breakdown, and Maori and Pacific Islands youth whose specific needs may not have been addressed by the ICA provisions at all.

## CHAPTER 9

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the recommendations which have been developed from the findings of this project. The ten recommendations considered most important by the authors of this report have been "boxed".

It is recommended that further investigation be carried out by the National Director Income Support with a view to providing adequate income support:

1. To 15 year olds who are unable to live with their parents, are unable to receive financial assistance from them, and do not have a care-giver.
2. To low-income families so that young people are not forced to leave home because their families cannot afford to support them.

In the area of benefit application procedures, it is recommended that the National Director Income Support request district offices to:

3. Inform young people, when they first ring or call at a district office, of what documents and information they need to have with them when they apply for a benefit.
4. Investigate ways of providing assistance to young people with opening bank accounts and/or obtaining identification and offer this assistance when young people first ring or call at a district office. Suggested ways might be through identifying staff who could act as contact people in DSW, the banks and other institutions.

5. Provide assistance to young people with filling out benefit application forms by:

- (i) Staff offering help to young people with filling out forms and/or
- (ii) District offices encouraging and resourcing community groups to attend the DSW reception area so that they can help young people with filling out forms, where this is not already occurring.

6. Use interview rooms, wherever possible, when interviewing young people.
7. Explore, encourage and resource the use of community agencies and their staff to find alternative interviewing venues which may be less distressing than district offices to young clients.

8. Encourage young people to take an adult support person with them when applying for a benefit.

9. Encourage the presence of Youth Advocates and support persons during the application process by informing community agencies of the role they can play.

10. Accept assessments made by staff of community agencies concerning a young person's eligibility for a benefit, where the agency has had contact with a young person who would find an interview with DSW staff to assess benefit eligibility a distressing experience. An example might be a young woman who has been sexually abused by one of her parents.

11. Provide the young person with a choice, where verification of their circumstances is needed, as to whether this is obtained from either their parent(s) or another person, and that staff abide by the decision made by the young person about this.

12. Avoid the need for young people to make return visits, by carrying out as many activities as possible (e.g., providing information, accepting changes of address, dealing with payment problems, etc.) over the telephone.
13. Provide money to cover travel costs to young people who are required to make return visits to district office.
14. Not require ACCESS trainees to go to district office during training time.
15. Investigate the option of sending benefits staff to ACCESS training centres to deal with benefit applications from ACCESS trainees, where they do not already do so.
16. Investigate ways of accepting benefit applications from ACCESS training providers on behalf of ACCESS trainees, where ACCESS training providers would like this to happen.

In the area of benefit application procedures, it is further recommended that the National Director Income Support request the Director Operations to:

17. Design a form which is simple and only includes information and questions relevant to young people, for them to use when applying for a benefit.

18. Revise current policy on the types and amount of identification required of young people applying for benefits, in recognition of their special circumstances, and set up a working party to develop alternative suggestions, which would still meet the Department's needs regarding control of benefit abuse.

In the area of provision of information, it is recommended that:

19. In order to prepare young people and their families for the changes in Youth Allowances to be introduced on 1 December 1990, the Department provide clear information, which can also be used on an ongoing basis, about income support that will be available to young people.
20. The Department of Social Welfare liaise with the New Zealand Employment Service and the Ministry of Education with a view to co-ordinating the information provided on options for assistance to young people.
21. The National Director Income Support set up a working group involving both the "users" (e.g. young people, adult family members, community agencies, Maori and Pacific Islands organisations) and "deliverers" (e.g. district office staff: reception staff, benefit interviewing officers, community liaison and social work staff) to determine what information should be provided about income support for young people and how this information should be presented to them and their families.

In the area of provision of information, it is further recommended that the National Director Income Support request district offices to:

22. Inform young people through schools, community agencies and other places where they congregate, about income support available to them.

23. Provide information in their reception areas about income support available to young people. Ways in which information might be presented include information desks and boards, videos, posters, pamphlets.

24. Review their procedures for informing social work staff about benefits applicable to their clients and, where necessary, put in place practices which will improve the flow of information between benefits and social work staff.

25. Develop liaison with community agencies for the purpose of:

- (i) sharing information about DSW benefits and services,
  - (ii) sharing information about community agency services and resources,
- in order to facilitate the improvement of DSW services to its clients.

26. Provide young clients with information about the assistance that is available to them from the various helping agencies in the community.

27. Keep community agencies, youth workers and school guidance counsellors informed about what documents and information young people need to have with them to apply for a benefit.



In the area of provision of income support, it is recommended that the National Director Income Support:

- |  |
|--|
| <p>28. Investigate ways of ensuring that eligibility for income support for young people is assessed in a manner which results in equity for young people from all cultural backgrounds. For example, ensure that eligibility criteria for income support for young people unable to live at home with parents, take account of cultural differences in concepts such as "independence", "home" and "parents".</p> |
|--|
29. Request district offices to inquire whether young people need financial assistance to tide them over periods when they are waiting for benefits to be paid into their accounts, when their benefits have lapsed, and when the benefit amount is being reduced due to part-time work in the previous month or repayments, and to provide this assistance.
  30. Request district offices to assist young people who are receiving income support and who need extra financial support, for example, for doctor's fees.
  31. Investigate the adequacy of income support for unemployed young people.
  32. Investigate ways of simplifying the system of declaration forms so that mobile young people and young people with limited literacy skills are not disadvantaged.
  33. Review the system of abatements so that young people in irregular part-time work are not disadvantaged.
  34. Review the system of recoverable grants so that young people do not experience excessive hardship.
  35. Reiterate to district offices the policy that standdowns do not apply with regard to temporary jobs.
  36. Direct district offices to revise the assessment of a particular job from permanent to temporary if the young person's experience with the job is more consistent with it being categorised as temporary, so that the standdown is not applied in such cases.

In the area of training, it is recommended that the National Director Income Support request the Director Training and Development to:

37. Prepare training material to draw to the attention of district office staff working with young clients:
  - (i) The common lack of literacy, other skills and self-confidence among young clients, together with the consequent need to consistently offer them help and information, especially with regard to benefit application procedures and requirements.

(ii) The distressful circumstances young clients may be in, and the consequent need for staff to be sensitive to this, eg. physical and/or sexual abuse situations at home, and to the reluctance of some young clients to discuss their personal circumstances.

38. Provide all Department of Social Welfare staff who have contact with clients, with training that provides staff with an overview of the assistance that is available both within the Department and their community.

In the area of recruitment, it is recommended that:

39. The Department employ, to work with young clients, people who are aware of the possible situations young people may be in and who are able to display empathy and patience in their dealings with young clients.
40. District offices recruit more Maori and Pacific Islands benefits staff, who identify with the values of their respective cultures.

It is recommended that the National Director Income Support encourage district offices to:

41. Inform each other of practices which they have implemented which are designed to improve staff morale and DSW services to its clients.

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## APPENDIX I

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter briefly reviews the literature relevant to the situation of the young unemployed and explains some of the conditions that may lead to their leaving home. It covers qualitative and quantitative research on homeless and unemployed youth in New Zealand and in Australia (where there is a greater depth of research), as well as the local and international literature on child abuse and family violence.

#### Unemployment and Homelessness of New Zealand Youth

##### Unemployment and Economic Independence

Several statistical compilations have detailed recent social and economic changes which have affected young people in New Zealand (Department of Internal Affairs 1983, Catherwood 1985, Holden 1984). The most recent figures available (September 1989) put the unemployment rate for 15-19 year olds at 16%, more than double the overall rate for unemployment of 7% (Earle 1990:16).

According to the Social Monitoring Group (Davey and Mills 1989:36-55), the decline in the proportion of 15 to 19 year olds in paid employment is largely attributable to fewer full-time employment opportunities, since their rate of part-time employment has increased. So while unemployment for young people has risen, part-time work has also risen; thus full-time employment has declined even more than the unemployment figures alone would indicate, and so too have young people's opportunities for economic independence declined.

From 1976 to 1986, Maori and Pacific Islands youth continued to have lower rates of full-time and part-time employment than Pakeha. For Maori youth, this may reflect their academic qualifications. Although the qualifications held by this age group of Maori were better in 1986 than in 1976, they still left school with lower qualifications than did non-Maori.

Young people's unemployment levels are reflected in the following figures which were developed to describe "economic independence" of young people. According to the Social Monitoring Group (Davey and Mills 1989:34), 15% of 15 to 19 year olds were economically independent in 1986, that is, living away from their parents with an income greater than or equal to the minimum single person unemployment benefit. This represented a decrease in economic independence for all ethnic groups (Maori, Pakeha and Pacific Islands), over the previous decade. Fifty-five percent were dependent, that is, living at home on an income below the benefit. This was up from 40% a decade previously. Unfortunately their figures for the balance (30%), those "neither fully dependent nor fully independent", combine those who are at home on a higher income with those away from home on a lower income, confounding two conceptually distinct categories.

At the time of the 1986 Census Maori and Pacific Islands young people (15-19 year olds) living away from their parents were more likely than Pakeha young people to be living in extended family situations, though over the previous ten years the percentage living in extended families had increased for all ethnic groups. Young people living independently (this included those living in extended families) tended to be living in low-income households.

Incomes of 15 to 19 year olds dropped markedly relative to incomes overall between 1981 and 1986. They fell even more steeply for Pakeha than for other ethnic groups, although Maori continued to have the lowest incomes of the three ethnic groups in this age range, and the highest proportion living independently (Norris and Day 1990:53). To a large extent, this drop in income can be explained by young people's increased reliance on the unemployment benefit. This will be covered in the next section.

### Homeless Youth in New Zealand

In 1982, a DSW survey found just under 1300 young people (known to the Department) who were homeless, or living in unsatisfactory accommodation, or in inappropriate placements. The survey also found that just over half of them were unemployed, 70% were 16 and under, and 60% were of Maori or Pacific Islands background. Fewer than 200 were in the homeless category. Two thirds of these were unemployed, 63% were 16 and under, and 94% were of Maori or Pacific Islands background. Because these numbers only included young people known to the Department, the Working Group of the Consultative Committee on Youth Affairs (Working Group) concluded that they "under represented the numerical significance of youth homelessness, but gave a useful guide to some of its features" (1983:25).

The Working Group also found that 15 year olds' ineligibility for benefits was a "distinct problem for those community groups which feel obliged to provide care for those of that age group who are on the streets". However, they saw this as a dilemma, believing that it was undesirable to provide blanket income maintenance which might encourage 15 year olds to leave home for "unsupervised and undesirable living situations" (p.9).

At the same time the Working Group was looking into the situation of homeless youth, Cabinet directed the formation of the Working Party on Unsupervised Young People (Working Party). The Working Party focused their investigation on "street kids", who "frequent public places at times that would suggest that regular parental supervision is not being exercised" (1983:1).

The Working Party was unable to obtain a clear indication of numbers, but suggested that over 1,000 unsupervised young people roamed the Auckland streets in the day and 100 to 200 were sleeping out at night. The numbers suggested for Wellington were "hundreds" by day and perhaps 50 sleeping out at night. No estimates were obtained for other centres, but the Working Party believed that numbers overall were increasing (p.5).

The Working Party said that Maori and Pacific Islands youth were disproportionately represented, and found evidence that the age of "homeless, at risk youth" was falling, that homeless 14 year olds were common and the numbers of homeless younger children were increasing (p.4).

A report on an Auckland youth house studied the nature and extent of the population of homeless and "at risk" youth (Coup 1984). While the report concluded that there was a "very real, large, problem of homeless young people", it was unable to obtain a clear numerical picture. The study's findings agreed with the earlier Working Group and Working Party reports in terms of the high degree of unemployment and high proportion of Maori youth in this group, but was not conclusive concerning the situation with regard to Pacific Islands youth.

Given the very limited indication of the numbers of homeless youth in New Zealand that emerges from the three surveys done in the early 1980s, there is little to be inferred concerning the present situation, except that the numbers have probably increased with rising unemployment and decreasing incomes. Youth workers canvassed in 1981 (Coup 1984) expected that the problem would grow, partly due to difficult economic circumstances and unemployment, but also as a reflection of the young age structure of New Zealand's Maori and Pacific Islands populations (p.30). Better and fuller data is available describing the situation for Australian youth, and which seems to have followed a similar trend to New Zealand's

### The Australian Situation and Some New Zealand Comparisons

#### Unemployed Youth

Researchers have documented the increasing homelessness and unemployment of Australian young people - a pattern that became evident in the 1970's (Burke et al. 1984; Maas 1986, 1987; Maas and Hartley 1987, 1988; Young 1987; Fopp 1982; Hartley 1989; Macrae 1986; Wilson and Arnold 1986).

By 1983, one quarter of 15 to 19 year olds in Australia were unemployed and the average period of unemployment (6 months) had quadrupled over the previous decade (Burke et al. 1984:113-4). Some analysts argued that the longer the period of unemployment, the less likely it seemed that individuals would find employment later on (Macrae 1986:12-13).

An equivalent analysis is not available for New Zealand youth, but it has been noted that (as of March 1988) "22% of the registered young unemployed had been out of work for more than three months, and 6% had been out of work for more than six months" (Davey and Mills 1989:54).

As in the New Zealand situation mentioned above, structural changes in the Australian job market have resulted in fewer full-time jobs being available for teenagers, especially young women. The substantial increase in part-time work has served mainly to help full-time students, but not the job-seeking unemployed of concern here. In general, both unemployment and early school leaving (also

increasing) were found to be concentrated in families of low socioeconomic status (Burke op. cit:114-5).

### Reasons for Young People Leaving Home

According to 1981 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, 12% of unemployed 15 to 19 year olds were defined as "not a member of a family". This frequently cited statistic was a focus of concern for Australian researchers (Fopp 1982, Maas and Hartley 1987, Wilson and Arnold 1986), but it is a conservative figure because it is based on a much more exclusive definition than the ICA category of "living away from home". A person would fit the definition of the Australian category only if they were "living alone... or not related to any other member of the household in which they were living" (Fopp 1982:309-10). The Australian figures, then, would exclude young people living with aunts and uncles. Even if they only had a sibling or cousin as one of their flatmates, they would have been counted as living as a member of a family.

A recent analysis of the 1985 Australian Longitudinal Survey (ALS) data, which narrowed the age grouping to 15 to 17 year olds, showed that 6.3% of all males and 10.4% of all females lived away from their parents, but they were more likely to live away if they were unemployed (Maas 1988). Analysing the 1985 and 1986 ALS data, 16 and 17 year olds were more than twice as likely to move away from home between the two survey periods if they were unemployed. In New Zealand, the Working Party on Unsupervised Young People suggested that one of the factors causing young people to become "street kids" was "the effect on some young people when work is not available to them after leaving school" (1983:6).

Several inferences have been taken from this association between adolescent unemployment and leaving home. The most common conclusion drawn is that unemployed teenagers may raise the level of conflict in the home. According to the Ritchies' work on New Zealand teenagers (describing the difficulties parents experience during the adolescence of their offspring), "Whether you [the parent] are employed or at home, a young person hanging around the house [creates a situation where] the possibilities for conflict are horrendous" (1984:42).

Australian survey data indicates that young people were more likely to leave home because of conflict in the early 1980's than in the early 1970's (Maas 1988). Family conflict was the most common reason given by youth when applying for emergency accommodation (Maas 1986). Similar observations have been made concerning New Zealand youth (Working Group of the Consultative Committee on Youth Affairs 1983:26).

One problem may be that young people today are developing their independence in vastly different circumstances than their parents did. The teenagers of the 1950's and 1960's were much more assured of work and of being able to support themselves at a reasonable standard of living when they left home. Such expectations of their own teenagers are much less likely to be met. Australian youth workers have been reported describing such family tensions in detail (Burke et al. 1984:124).

More tangibly, the stress caused by parental unemployment, poverty and the purely financial difficulties of supporting an extra unemployed young adult can lead to conflict, too. A study of Canadian runaways supports this. Half the young people interviewed reported running from a financially troubled home, and they were much more likely to report physical abuse if their families were experiencing financial difficulties (Janus et al. 1987:40-41).

According to the Australian literature, sometimes teenagers decide to leave home because they feel they are not contributing their share (Maas 1986). Certainly, unemployed youth are more likely to come from low income families, and this will tend to exacerbate these feelings (Maas 1987). The issue of family poverty will be taken up more fully in 4.4.1 Family Conflict and Poverty.

To summarise, family conflict should not be seen as an independent factor affecting some unemployed youth so that they cannot live at home, but can arise directly from the fact of their unemployment.

#### Mobility, Income and Indebtedness

The problems young people face in supporting themselves and getting reasonable accommodation creates a pattern of leaving home, returning and leaving again, especially when family conflict was the original motivation for leaving (Young 1987:49). Interviews with 14 to 25 year olds indicated that about 38% of those living with parents wanted to leave their homes, either to achieve independence in general or specifically because of conflict with their parents (Burke et al. 1984:121). But youth can be hard-pressed in many ways - often handicapped in the job market, poor and dependent on unreliable rental accommodation. Although the media tend to focus on young people in immediate crisis situations, there are many more who subsist in impermanent, insecure and substandard housing, or who experience episodic homelessness associated with an uneven pattern of employment (Ibid:116-119).

While some of these young people may have the option of returning home, some of them do not. Some of them do not even expect financial support from their parents. A study (Hartley 1989) of incomes and expenditure patterns of Australian 16 to 19 year olds, based on interviews and diaries kept over a two-week period, included 22 interviewees who were unemployed and living away from home. While the present research project is not specifically concerned with the adequacy of the Independent Circumstances Allowance, a number of the findings of this income and expenditure research are relevant to the present study. More than half the unemployed young people living away from home were not supported by their parents. Fourteen out of the 22 said that even if they had no money coming in for a month they would definitely not go to their parents even for a loan. In fact, their third highest category of expenditure (16.2% of their fortnight's income) was to repay loans - nearly always informal loans from friends and relatives.



### The Incidence of Homelessness

The most recent investigation into homeless Australian youth was undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and chaired by the Federal Human Rights Commissioner, Brian Burdekin (1989). The report delved into the incidence and experience of homelessness, the costs to society, and the factors contributing to it. It supported many findings of the earlier literature and has implications for the New Zealand situation.

The Burdekin Report concluded that, "there were no reliable measures, in fact there are very few measures at all of the incidence of child and youth homelessness" (p.65). However, in a study commissioned by HREOC for this report, Dr Rodney Fopp developed some approximate figures based on 1988 Australian Bureau of Statistics data on labour force status (pp 349-368).

Fopp took the stance that young unemployed who were "not members of a family" would find it very hard to obtain and keep adequate housing, and even if they were not literally "homeless", they could reasonably be described as being "at serious risk" of homelessness (p.68). This is supported by earlier research (Burke et al. 1984:116-119), where the argument was put forward that, while concern is generally focused on young people facing the immediate crisis of homelessness, this phenomenon is actually indicative of a more general problem. Youth are also found in temporary, unstable, insecure, substandard and unsupportive accommodation situations; they may be episodically homeless, which is typically associated with uneven employment; and others are more or less permanently in crisis, chronically unable to obtain accommodation or establish support networks.

According to 1988 Australian Bureau of Statistics data on labour force status, forty-seven out of every 1000 unemployed 16 and 17 year olds were "not members of a family". This equalled 3534 young people, but did not include those on low incomes, on part-time incomes, not in the labour force, or whose family status was unknown. Fopp argued that altogether, these groups would make up the total of 16 and 17 year olds who were homeless or at serious risk of becoming so.

Fopp estimated that there were (very conservatively) 8521 youths between 12 and 15 years old who were actually homeless (pp 65-68). The inquiry also received substantial evidence that the age of those presenting to different youth services in different centres (for emergency accommodation, etc) decreased dramatically over the previous two to three years, and that there were children as young as ten years old living on the streets of Sydney. A study by Dr Ian O'Connor, commissioned by HREOC, and involving interviews with 100 homeless children and young people, found that over half had their first experience of homelessness at the age of 14 years or younger.

### The Experience of Homelessness

In the course of interviews with young people and youth workers, the Burdekin Report found that there were few accommodation options open to homeless young people, and that a particular problem for them was that their initial period of homelessness found them entirely without funds, especially because of the

lengthy waiting period for government income support. It was found that they often resorted to offending to support themselves, including robbery, theft, drug dealing and prostitution. Their lives were marked by transient living circumstances, and they were often the victims of violence and exploitation by adults. They had substantial health problems arising from inadequate nutrition, lack of regular sleep, substance abuse and unwanted pregnancy, and which included emotional and psychological disorders (pp 44-54). Some homeless youth were under school leaving age, but few remained in school. Those that did so "were held there by their own determination ... and active assistance by the school and teachers" (p.56). Those who were able to obtain employment found that junior rates of pay could not keep them independent, and because they were living in "squats" or on the street, they were not able to go to work properly dressed and washed, and thus could not keep their jobs (p.57).

Ultimately, it was found that homeless youth did not often make a successful transition to independence, but merely moved on to adult homelessness, and that according to some youth workers, "the girls ... advance to motherhood and the boys ... advance to gaol" (p.59).

Similar patterns were found in the earlier New Zealand studies. Coup (1984) found emotional and health problems, unemployment, illiteracy, offending and substance abuse, as did the Working Party on Unsupervised Young People (1983). The Working Group of the Consultative Committee on Youth Affairs emphasised the connection between homelessness and unemployment, and argued that the lack of stable accommodation was undermining the effectiveness of the job creation and training programmes of the time. They echoed the concerns of the Burdekin Report with respect to the difficulties experienced by young people who try to keep a job while they are sleeping rough every night (1983:17).

### Youth Homeless Allowance

Much of the Australian research into the situation of the young and homeless was in anticipation of, or in response to, the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance (YHA), administered by the Department of Social Security, in July 1986. The overwhelming thrust of the findings of this research was that many young people were experiencing extreme poverty and deprivation. An analysis of case studies, examining the experiences of homeless youth in their attempts to obtain the Allowance, revealed some of its shortcomings (Maas and Hartley 1987, HREOC 1989:149-159).

Among these shortcomings were issues of publicity and information and the process of application. Both of these areas are addressed directly in this research project. There were also several issues arising from the extremely stringent criteria used for the YHA and a six-week waiting period which placed some young people in situations of destitution. Many of the recommendations from the research have been incorporated by the Department of Social Welfare in the administration of the Independent Circumstances Allowance.

When YHA was introduced in 1986, young people could not apply for the allowance until they had passed six continuous weeks away from home with no

financial support from their parents or guardian or a government body. They also had to fit one of the following three criteria:

1. not having a parental home (parents dead, incarcerated, etc);
2. not being allowed by their parents to live at home under any (reasonable) circumstances;
3. such exceptional circumstances as domestic violence or sexual abuse.

Applications under the second criterion had to be accompanied by statements signed by both parents attesting that they would not permit the young person to live at home. Applications under the third criterion had to be verified by "appropriate professionals", preferably ones who had worked with the young person while still in the home environment (pp 149-151).

There were many submissions heard by the inquiry to the effect that the criteria were too stringent, often disqualifying young people who had little option but to leave their homes (for example, where the young person and the parent's new partner were fundamentally incompatible) (p.152). Another example of a situation where a young person would be unable to stay at home, but would possibly not fit such criteria, comes from a New Zealand discussion paper on gay and lesbian youth services. "Disclosure of a person's sexual orientation can unfortunately mean family conflict and it is still not uncommon for the person to be asked to leave the family home" (Taylor 1989). If the young person was not forced to leave (for example, they could stay, but would have to disguise or deny their sexual orientation), the situation might not be seen as fitting the criteria.

The inquiry also reported on the hardships faced by young people during the six week standdown period and the inadequacy of the Allowance itself. At the rate it was being paid in 1988, the most a young person could be getting in total income support was \$76 a week, or 62% of the 1986 poverty line for single people (pp 153-155). Evidence was found that, "homeless children and young people who cannot return to their families, find employment or get income support, are sometimes forced in a matter of days (not weeks) into criminal activity or prostitution to survive" (p.162).

Criticisms of the implementation of the allowance included the lack of available information, the attitudes of staff who administered the allowance, and complex application procedures, especially those which concerned identification of clients and verification of their circumstances (pp 152-159).

Submissions criticised the fact that the only information available was in the form of pamphlets and leaflets, only appeared in English, used difficult and inappropriate language, and was only placed in government buildings; and that counter staff did not advise young people that YHA existed and did not volunteer information in general. The inquiry was also told that young people were discouraged by staff attitudes towards them, that staff sometimes handled young people with insensitivity, and that the semi-public disclosure of their personal

circumstances in the course of applying for the allowance was especially distressing (pp 156-158).

The requirement of three identification documents, including a birth certificate which was at least 12 months old, was described as unrealistic. Perhaps the most serious concerns were with the requirement that in most cases both parents be contacted to verify the young person's circumstances, and that this sometimes happened (contrary to departmental instructions) in abuse cases; and with the fact that such detailed cases had to be built to prove "exceptional circumstances", that an applicant required the active involvement and advocacy of a youth worker (pp 158-159).

In 1988, certain changes were introduced to address some of these issues. Specifically, income support was put in place to tide young people over the standdown period; assessors were directed to expedite applications in several ways; goals were set to have at least one appropriate, specialist staff member in each office to deal with YHA applicants; young people could be directed to departmental social workers for assessment (instead of asking the young person to bring forward a professional who had known them at home); and guidelines were provided to promote sensitive contact with parents, including not contacting a parent unless they had demonstrated some parental concern within the previous two years (p.159).

### Factors Contributing to Youth Homelessness

#### Family Conflict and Poverty

The Working Party on Unsupervised Young People considered that a factor implicated in the increasing numbers of street kids in New Zealand might be "economic recession, giving rise to housing difficulties ... unemployment and inadequate income", which exacerbated "the problems faced by low income families, solo parents and, especially, large families" (1983:5). This was supported by an analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data which found a strong correlation between family income and youth unemployment (Bradbury et al. 1986). Young people living in single parent families had nearly double the unemployment of those living in two parent families, but this association was explained by income. Young people whose families had the same income level had similar rates of unemployment, regardless of whether they lived with both parents or with their mothers only. (Youth with their fathers only had higher incomes and higher unemployment than those with their mothers only, but the sample size was very small.)

It was found that lower social class, too, (measured by parental occupation, employment status, educational attainment, family income and housing type) was associated with youth unemployment. In other words, young people from lower social class families were more likely than young people from higher social class families to be unemployed (Ibid.).

The Burdekin report's findings are compatible with the studies described above in that they pointed to increased overall unemployment, the decreased real value

of income support, and increasing housing costs, as adding to family stress and ultimately contributing to homelessness amongst young people (p.92).

The report also focused on youth unemployment itself as a major factor in family conflict and young people leaving home, drawing on the survey analyses discussed above in 4.3.2 Leaving Home. The report supports the conclusions that just having the young people around the house and unemployed is a stress factor, but points out that for low income families there are serious economic implications as well (p.148).

This issue is taken up more generally by Burke and others (1984:121-4), who argue that not only youth unemployment, but also their intermittent employment and low incomes, seriously limit their ability to make a contribution towards the living costs of their families (or, for that matter, their ability to afford to live independently).

The Inquiry's findings indicated that low income families depend on young people's income support, that it is an irreplaceable resource to them and they cannot manage without it, nor can they manage on a lower rate of income support. Thus, for some families, an unemployed youth who is too young for a benefit, or too young for a full benefit, or waiting out an extended standdown period, is simply too expensive to keep at home.

### Family Violence

New Zealand sources provide evidence that many homeless young people and those "at risk" have left homes marked by physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect (Coup 1984, Department of Internal Affairs 1983, Gray 1988, Taylor 1989, von Dadelszen 1987, Working Party on Unsupervised Young People 1983). However, there is very little in the way of research that gives any indication of the incidence or prevalence of any of these forms of family violence.

There are problems with collecting this sort of information. To begin with, what happens between members of a family is not generally accessible to the outside observer. Furthermore, the different forms of conceptualisation, and the wide range of definitions of violence used, makes different studies difficult to compare.

The various methods of data collection each have their own limitations, as well. Retrospective data will have recall problems, and require a very high standard of interviewing skills. On the other hand, official statistics reflect a labelling process which channels individual cases through the bureaucracy and may be affected by any number of variables (for example, some groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities and those of lower socio-economic status, may be more vulnerable to official intervention). The other problem with official statistics is that the publicly identified abusers and victims are widely accepted as representing a small fraction of the actual instances of abuse (Pagelow 1984:11-32; Alter-Reid et al 1986:250-264; Haines 1989:5-25). These sorts of differences make it very difficult to assess the levels of incidence that emerge from various studies.

Nevertheless, there seems to be some consensus that the issue of family violence in general is a serious one and directly relevant to the problem of homeless youth.

The Burdekin report states that "abuse of children is widespread [and the] substantial link between child abuse and ultimate homelessness is ... beyond question" (p.91). The two sections that follow present some of the findings of research into physical and sexual abuse that provide some indication of the dimensions of these problems.

### Physical Abuse

In a random sample American household survey (Strauss et al. 1980) of 1146 parents with at least one child between 3 and 17 years living at home, 73% admitted to at least one violent occurrence in the course of raising a particular randomly selected referent child; 3.6% admitted to acts of "severe violence" (from kicking to use of a weapon). The authors argue that these may be underestimations because they are based on retrospective self-reports of socially unacceptable behaviour, only the violent behaviour of one parent in two-parent families was tapped, and the very vulnerable under 3 year olds were excluded.

The authors also refer to a study of 250 American university students where eight percent stated that they had been physically injured by their parents during their last year at home.

There are also statistics available from New Zealand studies of family violence, the most important of which is the work of the Ritchies' (1981). In a study of 110 Form II students in Hamilton (12 and 13 year olds), nearly half were being "smacked" by their parents, and for most this occurred at least once a month. One-quarter of the sample were hit hard enough to hurt, and to want to hit back, although they dared not (pp.28-30).

While the statistics provide a specific background for understanding the breadth of physical violence, the cultural context is equally important. The Ritchies' argue that there is an ideology of violence in New Zealand culture, and that most cases of child abuse come out of "the normal context of rather ordinary or common parental practices exacerbated by stressful situations" (p.62).

Unemployment and other factors which might be involved in what the Ritchies' describe as "stressful situations" were explored in a study of abused children and their families in the UK between 1977 and 1982 (Creighton 1985). It was found that in 1977 the unemployment rate among male caregivers was 35%, that it rose to 58% over the last three years covered by the study, and that in general, the caregivers were characterised by early parenthood, marital instability, large families, criminality and mobility.

The Ritchies' assessed the cross-cultural evidence as demonstrating that, in countries where corporal punishment is not an important disciplinary technique, child abuse is rare (p.63).

"Punishment validates power; only those in power are in a position to punish and get away with it ... Parents have power over children and so they may hit them" (pp 11-12).

Indirect evidence for this comes from a New Zealand Department of Social Welfare study of the correlates of severe child abuse (Fergusson 1973:41-2). The category of "non-abuse", as defined by the author, includes "child possibly ill treated, but case possibly accounted for by punishment". In other words, "ill-treatment" might not be "abuse" if it was meant as "punishment".

### Child Sexual Abuse

According to an Australian study (Goldman and Goldman 1986), which surveyed 991 first year tertiary and apprenticeship students from a wide range of socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds, 19.5% of the women and 6.7% of the men reported sexual experiences with parents, grandparents or siblings. The authors found that the greater the age discrepancy and the more dependent the relationship, the greater the trauma - especially for girls and especially within the father-daughter and grandfather-granddaughter relationships. Twenty-one young women (3.5%) and one young man reported sexual victimisation by fathers, stepfathers and grandfathers. Similar figures have been found in American surveys of the same form (Finkelhor 1979), that is, self-completed questionnaires of tertiary students.

In a New Zealand study of sexual abuse (Mullen et al. 1988), five percent of the 314 women interviewed said that they had been sexually abused as a child by a relative. Unfortunately, these findings are not very useful for obtaining prevalence rates because of the way the research was structured. Women were asked if they had ever experienced sexual abuse as a child (or as an adult), and if they answered no, there was no further questioning on sexual abuse. If they said yes, they were questioned further concerning details (pp 841-842). This would have missed a lot of women who might have answered yes to a differently phrased filter question.

Writers in the field of sexual abuse have emphasised the importance of sensitive probing to elicit recall of past sexual trauma (Pagelow 1984, Alter-Reid et al. 1986, Haines 1989). Russell's study (1983) of American women is highly regarded for its well developed and conscientious methodology (Pagelow 1984:43, Haines 1989:26) and has been described as the "most important adult retrospective incidence study to date" (Alter-Reid et al. 1986:255). Russell used a random household sample; intensively trained female interviewers, chosen for their sensitivity and wherever possible, matched to interviewees for race and ethnicity; and a well-designed, standardised interview schedule aimed at encouraging good rapport, and asking different questions in a wide variety of ways to tap "memories stored under many different categories" (Russell 1983:135-137). Russell found that 16% of the 930 women reported at least one experience of sexual abuse by relatives before the age of 18 years (p.137). (The figure rose to 38% if the perpetrator of the abuse was not restricted to relatives.)

The Burdekin Report accepted Australian estimates that one-quarter of all females, and one-sixth to one-ninth of all males, were subjected to sexual abuse before adulthood (p.90), but somewhat less than half of these would have been abused by family members, going by the proportions found in Russell's research.

Miriam Saphira's seminal work on New Zealand child sexual abuse (1981), which was a self-selected (magazine readers were invited to respond) and self-administered survey of 315 women, unfortunately does not give any indication of incidence or prevalence of sexual abuse. However, she was able to conclude that for most of those who were abused by a relative and indicated the duration of that abuse, the abuse would have carried on through to their teenage years.

### Summary

The literature review summarises research relevant to unemployed and homeless youth in New Zealand and overseas, and discusses some of the factors contributing to this problem.

The unemployment rate for young people in New Zealand is higher than for any other age group, and is especially high for Maori and Pacific Islands youth. There is a strong correlation between unemployment and leaving home both for New Zealand and overseas youth. It is argued that this reflects a pattern of conflict tending to develop between parents and their unemployed teenagers.

Homeless youth in New Zealand were surveyed in the early 1980s, and although the researchers believed that they were substantially under-counted, they noted the presence of many homeless youth who were 15 years old and younger, as well as the preponderance of Maori and Pacific Islands youth. Overseas researchers also found it difficult to measure the incidence of homelessness. An important Australian study took the number of unemployed youth living away from home as a most conservative measure of young people who were homeless or at serious risk of homelessness.

It has been observed in New Zealand and overseas that while unemployed youth often leave home, their low income makes it very difficult for them to survive independently. Sometimes a pattern develops of returning and leaving home repeatedly, but some young people do not have this option and are entirely unsupported by their parents once they have left home. For those who are homeless it is almost impossible to keep any employment that may be obtained because their circumstances do not allow them to go to work properly washed and clothed. The homeless are often forced to resort to offending to support themselves, and also experience violence, exploitation by adults, and a range of health problems.

The Australian Youth Homeless Allowance (YHA), in many ways similar to ICA, is meant to support young people who cannot live at home. Since its inception in 1986 it has been criticised for overly exclusive criteria of eligibility, an overlong six-week standdown, the lack of available information concerning the allowance, resistant attitudes on the part of staff administering the allowance, and complex application procedures including stringent requirements for identification and verification. Some of these issues were addressed in changes to this allowance introduced in 1988.

Family poverty and family violence were examined as factors contributing to young people leaving home. Poverty makes relationships in the family stressful and leads



to conflict which is sometimes resolved by the young person leaving home. In addition, it is expensive to support a young person, and if that person is not in paid employment, nor receiving adequate income support, and thus not contributing in any substantial way to family finances, a low income family may not be able to afford their presence in the home.

There is clear evidence that family violence is a common factor in young people leaving home, in New Zealand and overseas, but it is very difficult to get incidence rates. One problem is that hitting young people is part of the culture and so it is hard to say where "punishment" ends and abuse begins. It is possible that one-quarter of high school students in New Zealand are hit hard enough to hurt by their parents. The best figures for child sexual abuse indicate that one-sixth of the young women in the ICA age group have been sexually abused by relatives at some time in their lives, and that for most of them the abuse would have continued into their teenage years. The rates for young men would be lower, perhaps one-third of the female rate.

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## APPENDIX II

### Statistics Relevant to ICA

This appendix provides statistics on unemployed 16-17 year olds on ICA, on Youth Allowances and living away from home and on Youth Allowances living at home. It also provides figures on the eligibility criteria which ICA recipients were categorised under.

#### Client Status

Table 1 shows the numbers and percentages of young people in each status category. Most unemployed 16-17 year olds came under the living at home status category, followed by the ICA status category. Youth Allowance recipients living away from home were the smallest group of unemployed 16-17 year olds and comprised 8% of all unemployed 16-17 year olds receiving a benefit. The proportion of young people on ICA increased by 12% over the period, whilst the proportion of young people living at home decreased by the same percentage. The proportion of Youth Allowance recipients living away from home remained constant over the period.

Table 2 shows the percentage change in numbers of young people for each status category. For all three status categories, the numbers of young people increased significantly between 31 March 1989 and 31 December 1989 but decreased between 31 December 1989 and 31 March 1990. The reason for the decrease is not clear. Since the introduction of ICA, the numbers of young people receiving ICA increased considerably and at a much greater rate than the overall numbers of young people receiving the unemployment benefit. The numbers of ICA recipients nearly quadrupled over the period, whilst the overall numbers of young people receiving the unemployment benefit doubled.

Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of Unemployed 16-17 Year Olds by Client Status

Client Status	31 Mar 89		30 Jun 89		15 Sep 89		31 Dec 89		31 Mar 90	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
ICA	587	18%	1176	21%	1420	22%	2007	26%	1908	30%
No ICA - Living Away from Home	247	8%	423	8%	513	8%	596	8%	536	8%
No ICA - Living at Home	<u>2343</u>	<u>74%</u>	<u>3970</u>	<u>71%</u>	<u>4469</u>	<u>70%</u>	<u>5106</u>	<u>66%</u>	<u>3976</u>	<u>62%</u>
Total	3177	100%	5569	100%	6402	100%	7709	100%	6420	100%



Table 2: Percentage Change in Numbers of Unemployed 16-17 Year Olds by Client Status

Client Status	31 Mar 1989  N	30 Jun 1989  N	Mar/Jun  Percent Change	15 Sep 1989  N	Jun/Sep  Percent Change	31 Dec 1989  N	Sep/Dec  Percent Change	31 Mar 1990  N	Dec/Mar  Percent Change	Mar/Mar  Percent Change
ICA	587	1176	+100%	1420	+21%	2007	+41%	1908	-5%	+225%
No ICA - Living Away from Home	247	423	+71%	513	+21%	596	+16%	536	-10%	+117%
No ICA - Living at Home	<u>2343</u>	<u>3970</u>	+69%	<u>4469</u>	+13%	<u>5106</u>	+14%	<u>3976</u>	-22%	+70%
Total	3177	5569	+75%	6402	+15%	7709	+20%	6420	-17%	+102%

Table 3 shows the numbers and percentages of young people in each status category by gender. The proportion on ICA for both males and females increased over time, although females were slightly more likely than males to be receiving ICA. Females were also slightly more likely than males to be living away from home and not receiving ICA, whilst males were more likely than females to be living at home.

#### Eligibility Criteria

Table 4 shows the numbers and percentages of ICA recipients categorised under each of the ICA eligibility criteria. The eligibility criterion under which ICA recipients were most commonly categorised was "family breakdown". The next most common criteria under which ICA recipients were categorised were "no in loco parentis support" and "work experience" (working and living away from home continuously for a six month period or more). The proportion of ICA recipients categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion increased over the period, whilst the proportion of ICA recipients categorised under each of the other criteria decreased. At 31 March, quarter, two-fifths of ICA recipients were categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion.

Table 5 shows the numbers and percentages of males and females categorised under each of the eligibility criteria. Both males and females were most commonly categorised under the "family breakdown" criterion, followed by the "no in loco parentis support" and "work experience" criteria. Females were slightly more likely than males to be categorised under the "family breakdown" and "better training/employment" (moved in order to increase their training or employment opportunities) criteria, whilst males were slightly more likely to be categorised under the "work experience" criterion.

Table 3: Numbers and Percentages of Unemployed 16-17 Year Olds by Client Status and Gender

Gender	31 Mar 89		30 Jun 89		15 Sep 89		31 Dec 89		31 Mar 90	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<u>Male</u>										
ICA	288	18%	564	19%	680	20%	989	24%	933	27%
No ICA - Living Away from Home	96	6%	184	6%	244	7%	292	7%	265	8%
No ICA - Living at Home	<u>1235</u>	<u>76%</u>	<u>2169</u>	<u>74%</u>	<u>2489</u>	<u>73%</u>	<u>2886</u>	<u>69%</u>	<u>2293</u>	<u>66%</u>
Total	1619	100%	2917	99%*	3413	100%	4167	100%	3491	101%*
<u>Female</u>										
ICA	299	19%	612	23%	740	25%	1018	29%	975	33%
No ICA - Living Away from Home	151	10%	239	9%	269	9%	304	9%	271	9%
No ICA - Living at Home	<u>1108</u>	<u>71%</u>	<u>1801</u>	<u>68%</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>66%</u>	<u>2220</u>	<u>63%</u>	<u>1683</u>	<u>57%</u>
Total	1558	100%	2652	100%	2989	100%	3542	101%*	2929	99%*

\* rounding error

Table 4: Numbers and Percentages of ICA Recipients for Each Eligibility Criterion

Eligibility Criteria	31 Mar 89		30 Jun 89		15 Sep 89		31 Dec 89		31 Mar 90	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
No <u>in loco parentis</u> support	141	24%	230	20%	312	22%	446	22%	383	20%
Family breakdown	153	26%	383	33%	454	32%	733	37%	764	40%
Special circumstances	87	15%	174	15%	222	16%	285	14%	246	13%
Better training/ employment	76	13%	148	13%	151	11%	207	10%	191	10%
Work experience	<u>130</u>	<u>22%</u>	<u>241</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>281</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>336</u>	<u>17%</u>	<u>324</u>	<u>17%</u>
Total	587	100%	1176	101%*	1420	101%*	2007	100%	1908	100%

\* rounding error

Table 5: Numbers and Percentages of ICA Recipients for Each Eligibility Criterion by Gender

Gender	31 Mar 89		30 Jun 89		15 Sep 89		31 Dec 89		31 Mar 90	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<u>Male</u>										
No in loco parentis support	69	24%	111	20%	158	23%	233	24%	201	22%
Family breakdown	73	25%	183	32%	199	29%	344	35%	353	38%
Special circumstances	43	15%	81	14%	101	15%	139	14%	121	13%
Better training/employment	31	11%	60	11%	72	11%	91	9%	78	8%
Work experience	<u>72</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>129</u>	<u>23%</u>	<u>150</u>	<u>22%</u>	<u>182</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>180</u>	<u>19%</u>
Total	288	100%	564	100%	680	100%	989	100%	933	100%
<u>Female</u>										
No in loco parentis support	72	24%	119	19%	154	21%	213	21%	182	19%
Family breakdown	80	27%	200	33%	255	34%	389	38%	411	42%
Special circumstances	44	15%	93	15%	121	16%	146	14%	125	13%
Better training/employment	45	15%	88	14%	79	11%	116	11%	113	12%
Work experience	<u>58</u>	<u>19%</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>131</u>	<u>18%</u>	<u>154</u>	<u>15%</u>	<u>144</u>	<u>15%</u>
Total	299	100%	612	99%*	740	100%	1018	99%*	975	101%*

\* rounding error

## APPENDIX III

### Research Instruments

This appendix contains the following:

1. A copy of the questionnaire booklet sent to ICA recipients. 191
2. A copy of the questionnaire booklet sent to Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home. 199
3. A copy of the detailed interview guide for the interviews with ICA recipients. 209
4. A copy of the "long" checklist for the interviews with ICA recipients. 217
5. A copy of the "short" checklist for the interviews with ICA recipients. 223
6. A copy of the detailed interview guide for the interviews with Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home. The "long" and "short" checklists followed a similar format to the checklists for the interviews with ICA recipients and are not included in this appendix. 225
7. A copy of one of the letters and the return form sent to young people (both ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home) requesting an interview. These were sent to young people only in the districts being visited. The letter sent to young people in each district varied slightly because it identified the district being visited, the date of the visit and was signed by the members of the interviewing team who were visiting the district. 235
8. A copy of the reminder letter sent to young people in the districts being visited who had not responded to the letter requesting an interview. The letter was sent out after about two weeks. 239
9. A copy of the reminder letter sent to all young people who were sent a questionnaire booklet only. These were sent to all young people since the questionnaires were anonymous and the research team did not know who had returned questionnaires. This letter was also sent out after about two weeks. 241

- |     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 10. | A copy of the detailed interview guide for the interviews with community agencies. The "long" and "short" checklists followed a similar format to the checklists for the interviews with ICA recipients and are not included in this appendix. | 243 |
| 11. | A copy of the interview guide for the interviews with DSW social workers.  | 255 |
| 12. | A copy of the interview guide for the interviews with district office reception staff.   | 275 |
| 13. | A copy of the interview guide for the interviews with district office interviewing staff.  | 293 |

Some of the interview guides mention using one or more of the following during the interview:

- Cards A - F
- "Information About Your Organisation" sheet
- ICA information sheets for adults and young people

Cards A - F were handed to interviewees for them to read and select a response from. Card A described who could apply for ICA and was used in interviews with young people. Card B listed the eligibility criteria for ICA and was used with district office staff. Cards C - F were copies of the scales or groups listed in the relevant question in the interview guides. The "Information About Your Organisation" sheet was intended for use where there were people from more than one organisation present at the interview. Instead of asking each organisation questions (a) - (d) in Section I of the community agency interview guide, interviewees were handed a sheet listing these questions and providing spaces for their responses. These were to be collected at the end of the interview. The ICA information sheets were a single sheet supplying information about who could apply for ICA, the eligibility criteria, Youth Advocates, benefit rates etc. One was written for adults and the other in a style more suited to 16-17 year olds.

Kia ora! Hello!

We want to find out what it's like  
for 16-17 year olds who apply for  
the unemployment benefit.

Will you help us?  
by answering some questions.

What you tell us will be used to  
make it easier for 16-17 year olds  
who apply for the unemployment benefit.

Thank you for your help!

Marlene Levine

Evaluation Unit  
Department of Social Welfare

Head Office

Wellington



We sent this questionnaire to you because our records tell us you are getting about \$109 each week.

We call this an Independent Circumstances Allowance (or ICA for short)!

WHAT IS ICA?

ICA is a higher rate of unemployment benefit for 16-17 year olds:

- who are unable to live with their parents, and
- whose parents are unable to help them with their living costs (eg. rent, food, bills).

Some of the reasons 16-17 year olds have got ICA are:

- they have moved from their home to a place where there are more jobs or training opportunities;
- they have become unemployed after they have been working and living away from home for 6 months;
- their parents have gone away or are in hospital or prison, or are unable to help with living costs;
- violence or sexual abuse or other problems mean that they cannot live at home and their parents are unable to help them with money to live somewhere else;
- some other reason.

All 16-17 year olds on unemployment benefit get at least \$82.34 each week (this is called a Youth Allowance). If you get ICA then you get \$109.79 each week. You might also get some more money for accommodation as well (this is called an Accommodation Benefit).

We would like to ask you some questions about what happened when you applied for your benefit!

Who will see what you say?

Only our research team will read what you write down here.

When you send this back we will not know who it has come from. It does not have your name on it or any identification number.

Your answers will not change your benefit!

Please answer the questions either by ticking the boxes or writing your answer down.



When you went to Social Welfare to  
apply for your benefit:

1. Did they ask you if you lived with your  
parents?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

2. Did they ask if your parents helped you with  
your living costs (eg. rent, food, bills)?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

3. Did they tell you about ICA (like what I told  
you on page 2)?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

4. Did they say you might be able to get \$109.79?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

-5-

5. Did they tell you that you could bring someone  
with you to help you apply for your benefit?

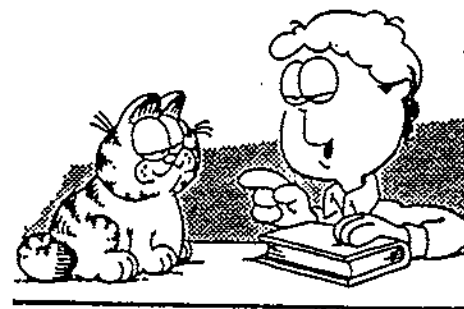
Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

6. Did they give you names of people or places who  
could help you if you needed to talk things  
over, or if you were worried or upset?

Yes ☐

No ☐

I can't  
remember ☐



7. What other information did they give you?

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8. Did you have an interview in a private place so  
no one else could hear?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I didn't have  
an interview ☐

193

Library (WSS)  
Department of Social Welfare  
Private Bag 21  
Postal Centre  
Wellington

Easy ☐      Some bits easy  
Some bits hard ☐      Hard ☐

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.15



A friend

A teacher ☐

A social worker ☐

A person from a community group ☐

Someone else ☐

(who? \_\_\_\_\_)

Yes ☐ No ☐

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.15



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Good ☐ In Between ☐ Bad ☐

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16. What do you think Social Welfare could change to make it easier for 16-17 year olds applying for the benefit?

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17. How did you find out how much money you would get?

I was told when I applied for my benefit ☐

I was sent a letter ☐

At the bank when I went to get my money ☐

Some other way ☐ → Please tell me how




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18. Are you still getting a benefit?

Yes ☐ No ☐

19. How much money are (or were) you getting?

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

20. Are (or were) you getting an Accommodation Benefit?

Yes ☐ → How much? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

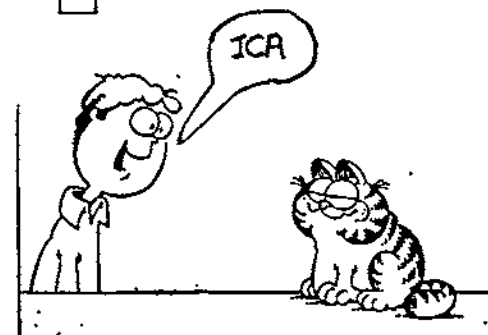
No ☐

Don't Know ☐

21. Did you know about ICA before I told you about it in this questionnaire booklet?

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.23

Go to No.22



22. How did you find out about ICA?

Social Welfare staff told me ☐  
when I applied for a benefit

From Social Welfare posters ☐  
pamphlets

From friends ☐

Other (eg. school, community ☐  
group) Please tell us how.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

23. What do you think would be the best ways for  
Social Welfare to let 16-17 year olds know  
about ICA?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

And last of all, we'd like to ask  
you some questions about yourself.

24. Are you female or male?

Female ☐ Male ☐

25. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years

26. To which group or groups do you feel you  
belong?

New Zealand Maori.....☐

New Zealand European/  
Pakeha.....☐

Other European.....☐

Samoan.....☐

Cook Island Maori.....☐

Niuean.....☐

Tokelauan.....☐

Tongan.....☐

Chinese.....☐

Indian.....☐

Other Ethnic Group...☐

(Please write it on the line below)

\_\_\_\_\_

27. What form were you in when you left school?  
(Form 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7)

\_\_\_\_\_

28. Have you had a job since you left school?

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.31



29. What did you do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

30. How long was it for? \_\_\_\_\_

31. Did you get the unemployment benefit last year?  
(1988)

Yes ☐ No ☐

32. Who do you live with?

I live at home with my parents ☐

I live by myself ☐

I share a place with flatmates ☐

I board ☐

I stay with relatives or members  
of my family or whanau ☐

I stay in a hostel ☐

Other ☐

(please write it down on the line below)

\_\_\_\_\_

33. Where do you live? (eg. Hastings, Dunedin)

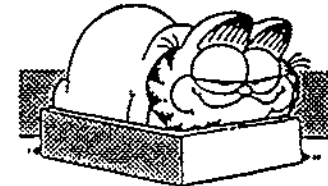
If you don't want to tell me where you live  
would you tell me if you live in a -

City ☐

Large town ☐

Small town ☐

In the country ☐



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Your answers will help us to try and make sure that all 16-17 year olds who need to get a benefit can do so easily.

When you have finished, please put this booklet in the big envelope with our address on it and put it in the post. It doesn't need a stamp.

Marlene Levine  
Marlene Levine

P.S. If you have any questions about this booklet or you would like to talk about what happened to you when you applied for your benefit, please ring us in Wellington during the day. We will pay for the toll call. Phone tolls (010) and tell the operator you want to make a "collect call" to Wellington 846 209. Ask to speak to me or Robyn Bailey or Karen Paterson.

If you have any questions or problems about your benefit, please go to your Social Welfare Office.

Kia ora! Hello!

We want to find out what it's like  
for 16-17 year olds who apply for  
the unemployment benefit.

Will you help us?  
by answering some questions.

What you tell us will be used to  
make it easier for 16-17 year olds  
who apply for the unemployment benefit.

Thank you for your help!

Evaluation Unit  
Department of Social Welfare

*Polyn Bailey*  
Head Office Wellington



We sent this questionnaire to you because our records tell us you are getting about \$82 each week and you are not living with your parents.

Do you know about the Independent Circumstances Allowance? (or ICA for short)

WHAT IS ICA?

ICA is a higher rate of unemployment benefit for 16-17 year olds:

- who are unable to live with their parents, and
- whose parents are unable to help them with their living costs (eg. rent, food, bills).

Some of the reasons 16-17 year olds have got ICA are:

- they have moved from their home to a place where there are more jobs or training opportunities;
- they have become unemployed after they have been working and living away from home for 6 months;
- their parents have gone away or are in hospital or prison, or are unable to help with living costs;
- violence or sexual abuse or other problems mean that they cannot live at home and their parents are unable to help them with money to live somewhere else;
- some other reason.

All 16-17 year olds on unemployment benefit get at least \$82.34 each week (this is called a Youth Allowance). If you get ICA then you get \$109.79 each week. You might also get some more money for accommodation as well (this is called an Accommodation Benefit).

We would like to ask you some questions about what happened when you applied for your benefit!

Who will see what you say?

Only our research team will read what you write down here.

When you send this back we will not know who it has come from. It does not have your name on it or any identification number.

Your answers will not change your benefit!

Please answer the questions either by ticking the boxes or writing your answer down.



When you went to Social Welfare to  
apply for your benefit:

1. Did they ask if you lived with your  
parents/guardian?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

2. Did they ask if your parents/guardian helped  
you with your living costs (e.g. rent, food,  
bills, clothes)?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

3. Did they tell you about ICA (like what I told  
you on page 2)?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

4. Did they say you might be able to get \$109.79?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

5. Did they tell you that you could bring someone  
with you to help you apply for your benefit?

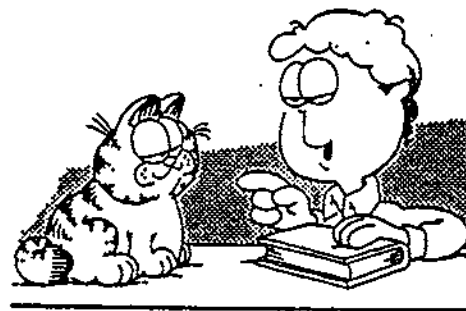
Yes ☐ No ☐ I can't remember ☐

6. Did they give you names of people or places who  
could help you if you needed to talk things  
over, or if you were worried or upset?

Yes ☐

No ☐

I can't  
remember ☐



7. What other information did they give you?

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8. Did you ever apply for ICA or get interviewed by a Social Welfare staff member to see if you could get ICA?

Yes ☐ Not Sure ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.11



9. What happened? (e.g. did you get ICA and if you didn't, why was this)

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10. Did you have an interview in a private place so no one else could hear?

Yes ☐ No ☐ I didn't have an interview ☐

11. How easy was it to understand the people you spoke with? (Tick one box and/or explain)

Easy ☐ Some bits easy ☐ Some bits hard ☐ Hard ☐

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12. Did you bring someone with you to help you apply for your benefit?

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.17



13. Who was this person?

A friend ☐

A relative or someone from your whanau (eg. aunty grandmother) ☐

A teacher ☐

A social worker ☐

A person from a community group ☐

Someone else ☐

(who? \_\_\_\_\_)

14. Did this person help explain to Social Welfare why you were applying for your benefit?

Yes ☐ No ☐

15. Did it help to have someone with you?

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.17



16. How did it help?

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17. How do you feel about what happened when you went to Social Welfare? (Tick one box and/or explain)

Good ☐ In Between ☐ Bad ☐

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18. What do you think Social Welfare could change to make it easier for 16-17 year olds applying for the benefit?

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19. How did you find out how much money you would get on your benefit?

I was told when I applied ☐  
for my benefit

I was sent a letter ☐

At the bank when I went to ☐  
get my money

Some other way ☐ → Please tell  
me how  
↓

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. Are you still getting a benefit?

Yes ☐ No ☐

21. How much money are (or were) you getting?

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

22. Are (or were) you getting an Accommodation Benefit?

Yes ☐ → How much? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

No ☐

Don't ☐  
Know

23. Did you know about ICA before I told you about it in this questionnaire booklet?

Yes ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.25  
↓

24. How did you find out about ICA?

Social Welfare staff told me ☐  
when I applied for a benefit

From Social Welfare posters, ☐  
pamphlets

From friends ☐

Other (eg. school, community ☐  
group) Please tell us how?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

25. What do you think would be the best ways for Social Welfare to let 16-17 year olds know about ICA?

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26. Do you think that you could get ICA?  
*Please read about ICA on page 2 then tick one box.*

Yes ☐ Not Sure ☐ No ☐ → Go to No.28

↓ ↓

27. Why haven't you applied for ICA? *(Tick one or more boxes)*

I did go and apply for ICA but Social Welfare didn't think I should get it ☐

I didn't know about ICA ☐

I did know about ICA but I didn't know how to apply ☐

I did know about ICA but I didn't think I could get it ☐

My reason for needing ICA isn't one of the reasons listed on page 2 ☐

I don't want to talk about the reasons why I could get ICA ☐

I don't like going to Social Welfare ☐

Too much hassle ☐

Other *(Please write down why on the lines below)* ☐

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And last of all, we'd like to ask you  
some questions about yourself.

28. Are you female or male?

Female ☐

Male ☐

29. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years

30. To which group or groups do you feel you belong?

New Zealand Maori.....☐

New Zealand European/  
Pakeha.....☐

Other European.....☐

Samoa.....☐

Cook Island Maori.....☐

Niuean.....☐

Tokelauan.....☐

Tongan.....☐

Chinese.....☐

Indian.....☐

Other Ethnic Group.....☐

(Please write it on the line below)

\_\_\_\_\_

31. What form were you in when you left school?  
(Form 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7)

\_\_\_\_\_

32. Have you had a job since you left school?

Yes ☐

No ☐

→ Go to No.35



33. What did you do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

34. How long was it for? \_\_\_\_\_

35. Did you get the unemployment benefit last year?  
(1988)

Yes ☐

No ☐

36. Who do you live with?

I live at home with my parents/  
guardian ☐

I live by myself ☐

I share a place with flatmates ☐

I board ☐

I stay with relatives or members  
of my family or whanau ☐

I stay in a hostel ☐

Other ☐

*(please write it down on the line below)*

---

37. Do your parents help you with your living costs  
(e.g. give you money for rent, food, bills,  
clothes)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

38. Where do you live? (e.g. Hastings, Dunedin)

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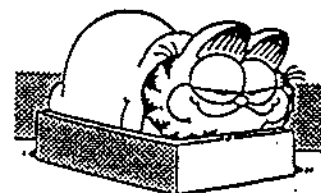
If you don't want to tell me where you live  
would you tell me if you live in a -

City ☐

Large town ☐

Small town ☐

In the country ☐





This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Your answers will help us to try and make sure that all 16-17 year olds who need to get a benefit can do so easily.

When you have finished, please put this booklet in the big envelope with our address on it and put it in the post. It doesn't need a stamp.

Polyn Bailey

Robyn Bailey

P.S. If you have any questions about this booklet or you would like to talk about what happened to you when you applied for your benefit, please ring us in Wellington during the day. We will pay for the toll call. Phone tolls (010) and tell the operator you want to make a "collect call" to Wellington 846 209. Ask to speak to me or Marlene Levine or Karen Paterson.

If you have any questions or problems about your benefit, or you think you could be getting ICA, please go to your Social Welfare Office.

INTERVIEW GUIDEICA RECIPIENTSNotes to Interviewer

1. The interview guide has been set out as follows:

AIMS: the main areas of investigation for your interview.

BACKGROUND: the reasons why we are asking these questions. (You may want to discuss AIMS and BACKGROUND with your interviewee.)

QUESTIONS: a list of the specific points you need to cover in the course of the interview. The actual wording and order is at your discretion.

2. The checklists are abbreviated versions of your interview guide. The short checklist sets out the points to be covered on a single page. The long checklist sets out the points to be covered with space provided for notes.
3. Make sure that the code number from the coding information sheet is on the write-up cover sheet.
4. You will already have been in phone contact with the young person you are about to interview and will have established:

- (i) who you are;
- (ii) whether you are of the gender and ethnicity that the young person requested;
- (iii) whether we have their permission to use their words when writing the report; and
- (iv) whether they had a Youth Advocate and if we have their permission to speak with their Youth Advocate and, if so, a way of contacting the Youth Advocate.

The young person will have either indicated (iii) and (iv) on the response to the letter they sent back or else you will have asked them on the phone. Do not raise these points with the young person if they have said no to our using their words or speaking with their Youth Advocate (it's harder to say no to an adult face-to-face than from a distance). If they have said it is okay to use their words, you may want to check back what you write down with the young person.

*Point to check*

- (v) that if they are using public transport to get to the interview, they need to bring their tickets to the interview and we'll refund them.

Points (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v) will be recorded on the young person's coding information sheet.

- 5. Make sure you have copies of:
  - (i) information sheets for young people,
  - (ii) Card A,
  - (iii) Card F,
  - (iv) the long checklist,
  - (v) the short checklist,
  - (vi) pamphlets on UB, which include information on ICA.

### Introduction

The pilot study suggested that a lot of talking by the interviewer at the start may not be appropriate. It does seem important to cover why we are doing the study and the sorts of questions we want to ask them. You will also need to make sure that the confidentiality aspect is clarified with the interviewee.

Remembering that the young person has received a letter from us about the study and why we want to talk with them, and you have been in phone contact, you may want to start off by:

- (a) checking that they know your name and who you are interviewing for - Evaluation Unit, Head Office, Department of Social Welfare. You may want to talk about what the Evaluation Unit does or what you do when you're not interviewing for the Evaluation Unit.
- (b) referring to the letter we sent them and seeing if they would like you to go over some of the points in the letter such as:
  - 1. That we are doing a study to see if the new unemployment benefit for 16-17 year olds living away from their parents is working out alright.
  - 2. That this benefit is called the Independent Circumstances Allowance (called ICA for short). Some 16-17 year olds who don't live with their parents get ICA, which is \$109.79 each week, instead of \$82.34 each week which is what other 16-17 year olds on the unemployment benefit get.
  - 3. That we wanted to speak with them because the Department's records tell us that they are on ICA.
  - 4. That we would like to ask them about what happened when they went and applied for their benefit and what they know about ICA.
  - 5. That no one outside of the research team will know what they say and that we will not use names in our report. That their Social Welfare office will not learn about what they say and that talking to us will not affect their benefit in any way.

Make sure the young person is quite comfortable with all these points and that you have answered any questions they had before going on with the interview.

## I KNOWLEDGE OF ICA

AIM: We want to find out what young people know about ICA.

BACKGROUND: We would like to find the best way of getting the information to the young people who should be getting this benefit.  
[We are interested in how many young people who are eligible get ICA. This will be affected to some extent by whether young people know about ICA. We want to find out how young people learn about ICA so we can recommend ways of getting information to those who need ICA.]

## QUESTIONS:

- (a) Did you know about ICA before we told you about it?
- (b) What did you know about ICA?
- (c) How did you find this out?
- (d) When did you find this out?
- (e) Would you have liked to have been told about ICA when you applied for your benefit?
- (f) What do you think would be the best ways for 16 and 17 year olds to find out about ICA?

## II APPLICATION PROCESS

AIM: We want to know exactly what happens when a young person applies for the unemployment benefit and what it is like for them.

BACKGROUND: We need to know what young people have to do to get ICA to find out if the programme is working properly and make sure young people aren't being put off.

To determine whether 16 and 17 year olds are possibly in need of ICA, those applying for unemployment benefit are supposed to be asked whether:

- . they live with their parents, and whether
- . their parents helped them with their living costs.

The young person may have answered these questions when they were filling out an application form for the unemployment benefit. We want to know whether this is happening and whether someone at Social Welfare told them about ICA.

We want to know about the process the young person must go through in order to get ICA and whether the process:

- . is conducted in privacy;
- . is culturally sensitive;
- . guarantees confidentiality to the young person;
- . does not traumatise the young person;
- . is flexible enough to cope with differing circumstances;
- . takes into account that it is 16-17 year olds who are applying for ICA; and
- . is sensitive to gender.

QUESTIONS:

1. What happened when you first came into Social Welfare? (Please get full details of events and surrounding circumstances.)
  - (a) number of visits and time between visits?
  - (b) at reception?
  - (c) at the interview?
  - (d) were they asked the filter questions (verbally or on the UB form)?
    - (i) Do you live with your parents?
    - (ii) Do they help you with living costs?
  - (e) were they asked whether they would prefer a certain type of interviewer (eg. male or female, particular ethnic group)?
    - (i) how did they feel about this?
    - (ii) if not asked, would they have liked to have been asked?
2. Circumstances
  - (a) where was the interview held?
  - (b) was the interview a private one?
  - (c) who was at the interview?
  - (d) when were they interviewed (eg. how many days after they first went to Social Welfare to apply for the benefit)?
  - (e) is there anything else they want to say about the interview?
3. What were they told about the benefit? And who told them?
  - (a) that Independent Circumstances Allowance exists?
  - (b) about the criteria for ICA [Card A]
  - (c) how much money they would get on ICA compared to Youth Allowance or unemployment benefit for 16 and 17 year olds who aren't eligible for ICA?
  - (d) how to get ICA?
  - (e) how a Youth Advocate could be brought to help when being assessed for ICA?
  - (f) about counselling services (people or places they could go to for help or to talk about things)

- (g) whether or not they would be getting ICA?
- 4. Thoughts and feelings about the experience.
  - (a) Was it easy for them to understand the people at Social Welfare? (If not, what and why?)
  - (b) What did they think/feel about the interview? Why?
  - (c) Anything else they can tell us?
  - (d) How can Social Welfare make applying for the benefit better?

[cover Part III only if young person had a Youth Advocate, otherwise go to Part IV below]

### III YOUTH ADVOCATES

AIMS: To find out how people come to be Youth Advocates and how they help.

BACKGROUND: To understand the role of the Youth Advocate.

#### QUESTIONS:

- (a) What is their Youth Advocate's relationship to them?
- (b) How did they choose their Youth Advocate?
- (c) Did it help having a Youth Advocate? How?

### IV PERSONAL BACKGROUND

AIMS: We want to know more about you.

BACKGROUND: We want to know what you have in common with other young people who have been through the same experience and might feel the same or differently about it. Maybe it's more upsetting or confusing for some young people than it is for others. Certain people might have been put off more than others - we want to look for patterns.

#### QUESTIONS:

- 1. School history
  - (a) When did they leave school?
  - (b) What form were they in?
  - (c) What school qualifications did they get?
  - (d) Have they done any other courses?
- 2. Work history
  - (a) What jobs have they had?
  - (b) How long did they work there?

3. Benefit history
  - (a) How much are they getting at the moment?
  - (b) How long have they been getting this amount?
  - (c) If not getting ICA, why not?
  - (d) Were they getting the unemployment benefit last year?
4. Living arrangements
5. Employment situations of parents [Ask about this only if you feel confident that it will not upset interviewee]
6. Ethnic background [Card F]

#### Closing Interview

- (a) If we have permission for a Youth Advocate interview, check the contact information.
- (b) Is there anything else they would like to say or ask about?
- (c) Offer to show your notes or if interviewee does not want to see your notes confirm that it is alright to quote them if they have said we can do this.
- (d) Offer to send them a summary of what we learn in this study which will probably be available in April next year.
- (e) Offer pamphlets on UB which include information on ICA, particularly if other young people are present at the interview.
- (f) Check if they need to be reimbursed for travel. [Collect their tickets]
- (g) Thanks.

[Interviewer: Please record your own thoughts and feelings about how the interview went]



CODE

--	--	--	--	--	--

WRITE-UP COVER SHEETICA RECIPIENTS

1. District Office: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Others Present at Interview (identify interviewing team members by name, identify others by their role in the interview or their relationship to other participants - not by name):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Interview Venue (eg. private home, community centre):  
\_\_\_\_\_

Attach this to your write-up of the interview
---

LONG CHECKLISTICA RECIPIENTSIntroduction

who you are  
why talking to them  
    (refer to our letter)  
confidentiality  
won't affect benefit  
questions

## I KNOWLEDGE OF ICA

- (a) Did you know?
- (b) What did you know?
- (c) How learned?
- (d) When learned?
- (e) Would you have liked  
    to have been told?
- (f) Best ways to inform  
    you?

## II APPLICATION PROCESS

1. What happened
  - (a) no. of visits, time between each?
  - (b) at reception?
  - (c) at interview?
  - (d) filter questions asked or on form?
    - (i) live with parents?
    - (ii) \$ from parents?
  - (e) matching?
    - (i) how felt about this?
    - (ii) if no, would they have liked to have been asked?
2. Circumstances
  - (a) where was interview?
  - (b) privacy?
  - (c) others present?
  - (d) when interviewed?
  - (e) anything else?

## 3. Information provided

- (a) by whom?
- (b) what?
  - (i) existence of ICA?
  - (ii) criteria [Card A]?
  - (iii) how much \$?
  - (iv) how to get ICA?
  - (v) Youth Advocate?
  - (vi) counselling?
  - (vii) get ICA or not?  
[If not, why?]

## 4. Thoughts and feelings

- (a) were people easy to understand?
  - (i) what not understood?
  - (ii) why?
- (b) thoughts/feelings on process?
- (c) anything else?
- (d) improvements?

[If no youth advocate, go to  
Part IV below]

### III YOUTH ADVOCATES

- (a) who?
- (b) how chosen?
- (c) how helpful?

### IV PERSONAL BACKGROUND

- 1. School history
  - (a) when left?
  - (b) what form?
  - (c) qualifications?
  - (d) other courses?
- 2. Work history
  - (a) what jobs?
  - (b) for how long?
- 3. Benefit history
  - (a) how much \$ now?
  - (b) how long this amount?
  - (c) if no ICA, why not?
  - (d) UB last year?
- 4. Living arrangements?
- 5. Parents' employment?
- 6. Ethnic background  
[Card F]

Closing

- (a) check contact info.  
for YA interview
- (b) questions/comments
- (c) offer to show notes/  
check use of quotes
- (d) offer to send summary
- (e) offer pamphlets on UB
- (f) reimburse for travel
- (g) thanks

[Interviewer: Please provide  
feedback on interview]

SHORT CHECKLISTICA RECIPIENTS

## Introduction

who you are  
 why talking to them  
 confidentiality  
 won't affect benefit  
 questions

## I Knowledge of ICA

- (a) what
- (b) how learned
- (c) when learned
- (d) liked to be told
- (e) best ways to inform

## II Application process

1. what happened
  - (a) no. of visits,  
time between each
  - (b) reception
  - (c) interview
  - (d) filter questions  
(asked, on form)
    - (i) live with  
parents
    - (ii) \$ from parents
  - (e) matching
    - (i) how felt
    - (ii) liked to be  
asked
2. circumstances
  - (a) where interviewed
  - (b) privacy
  - (c) who present
  - (d) when interviewed
  - (e) anything else
3. info provided
  - (a) by whom
  - (b) what
    - (i) existence of ICA
    - (ii) criteria
    - (iii) how much \$
    - (iv) how to get ICA
    - (v) Youth Advocate
    - (vi) counselling
    - (vii) get ICA or not  
(if not, why)
4. feedback on process
  - (a) understanding
  - (b) thoughts/feelings
  - (c) anything else
  - (d) improvements

## III Youth Advocate

- (a) who
- (b) how chosen
- (c) how helpful

## IV Personal background

- (a) school history
  - (i) when left
  - (ii) what form
  - (iii) qualifications
  - (iv) other courses
- (b) work history
  - (i) what jobs
  - (ii) how long for
- (c) benefit history
  - (i) how much now
  - (ii) how long for
  - (iii) if no ICA, why
  - (iv) UB last year
- (d) living arrangements
- (e) parents' employment
- (f) ethnic background

## Closing

check contact info for YA  
 questions/comments  
 show notes/check quotes  
 offer summary  
 offer pamphlets on UB  
 reimburse travel  
 thank you

INTERVIEW GUIDEYOUTH ALLOWANCE RECIPIENTS NOT LIVING AT HOMENotes to Interviewer

1. The interview guide has been set out as follows:

AIM: the main areas of investigation for your interview.

BACKGROUND: the reasons why we are asking these questions. (You may want to discuss AIMS and BACKGROUND with your interviewee.)

QUESTIONS: a list of the specific points you need to cover in the course of the interview. The actual wording and order is at your discretion.

2. The checklists are abbreviated versions of your interview guide. The short checklist sets out the points to be covered on a single page. The long checklist sets out the points to be covered with space provided for notes.
3. Make sure that the code number from the coding information sheet is on your interview notes.
4. You will already have been in phone contact with the young person you are about to interview and will have established:

- (i) who you are;
- (ii) whether you are of the gender and ethnicity that the young person requested;
- (iii) whether we have their permission to use their words when writing the report;

The young person will either have indicated (iii) on the response to the letter they sent back or else you will have asked them on the phone. Do not raise this with the young person if they have said no to us using their words (it's harder to say no to an adult face-to-face than from a distance). If they have said it is okay to use their words you may want to check back what you write down with the young person.

- (iv) that if they are using public transport to get to the interview, they need to bring their tickets to the interview and we'll refund them.

Points (ii), (iii) and (iv) will be recorded on the young person's coding information sheet.



5. Make sure you have copies of:
- (i) information sheets for young people,
  - (ii) Card A,
  - (iii) Card F,
  - (iv) the long checklist,
  - (v) the short checklist,
  - (vi) pamphlets on UB, which include information on ICA.

### Introduction

The pilot study suggested that a lot of talking by the interviewer at the start may not be appropriate. It does seem important to cover why we are doing the study and the sorts of questions we want to ask them. You will also need to make sure that the confidentiality aspect is clarified with the interviewee.

Remembering that the young person has received a letter from us about the study and why we want to talk with them, and you have been in phone contact, you may want to start off by:

- (a) checking that they know your name and who you are interviewing for - Evaluation Unit, Head Office, Department of Social Welfare. You may want to talk about what the Evaluation Unit does or what you do when you're not interviewing for the Evaluation Unit.
- (b) referring to the letter we sent them and seeing if they would like you to go over some of the points in the letter such as:
  - 1. That we are doing a study to see if the new unemployment benefit for young people living away from their parents is working out alright.
  - 2. That this benefit is called the Independent Circumstances Allowance (called ICA for short). Some 16-17 year olds who don't live with their parents get ICA, which is \$109.79 each week, instead of \$82.34 each week which is what other 16-17 year olds on the unemployment benefit get.
  - 3. That we wanted to speak with them because the Department's records tell us that they are getting the unemployment benefit and are not living with their parents, but that they do not get ICA.
  - 4. That we would like to ask them about what happened when they applied for their benefit and what they know about ICA.
  - 5. That no one outside of the research team will know what they say and that we will not use names in our report. That their Social Welfare office will not learn about what they say and that talking to us will not affect their benefit in any way.
  - 6. That if, after talking to us, they decide they want to apply for ICA, they will need to go to their local Social Welfare office.

Make sure the young person is quite comfortable with all these points and that you have answered any questions they had before going on with the interview.

## I KNOWLEDGE OF ICA

**AIMS:** We want to know whether this group of young people knew about ICA before we told them about it.

We want to know how young people find out about ICA.

**BACKGROUND:** We are interested in how many young people who are eligible get ICA. This will be affected to some extent by whether young people know about ICA. We want to find out how young people learn about ICA so we can recommend ways of getting information to those who need ICA.

### QUESTIONS:

- (a) "Did you know about ICA before we told you about it?"
- (b) "What did you know about ICA?"
- (c) "How did you find this out?"
- (d) "When did you find this out?"
- (e) "Would you have liked to have been told about ICA when you applied for your benefit?"
- (f) "What do you think would be the best ways for 16 and 17 year olds to find out about ICA?"

## II APPLICATION PROCESS

**AIMS:** We want to know what happened when the young person went to Social Welfare to apply for the unemployment benefit; whether they were told about ICA by Social Welfare; whether they were assessed for ICA and what happened if they were.

**BACKGROUND:** To determine whether 16 and 17 year olds are in need of ICA, all UB applicants are supposed to be asked whether:

- . they live with their parents, and whether
- . their parents help them with their living costs.

The young person may have answered these questions when they were filling out an application form for the unemployment benefit. We want to know whether this is happening and whether someone at Social Welfare told them about ICA because they do not live with their parents and they therefore appear to be potential ICA recipients.

We want to know about the process the young person must go through in order to get ICA and whether the process:

- .is conducted in privacy;
- .is culturally sensitive;
- .guarantees confidentiality to the young person;
- .does not further traumatise the young person;
- .is flexible enough to cope with differing circumstances;
- .takes into account that it is 16-17 year olds who are applying for ICA; and
- .is sensitive to gender.

**QUESTIONS:**

**1. What happened**

- (a) "What happened when you went to Social Welfare to apply for your benefit?" [Get full details of events and surrounding circumstances.]
- (b) "How many times did you have to go to Social Welfare and how long was it between visits?"
- (c) "Did they ask you if you lived with your parents?" [Explain what we mean by "parents".]
- (d) "Did they ask you if your parents helped you with your living costs (eg. rent, food, bills, clothes)?"

[The two trigger questions may have been asked verbally or asked on a form the young person had to fill out.]

**2. Information on ICA**

- (a) "Did someone in Social Welfare tell you about ICA?"
- (b) "What were you told about ICA?"
  - (i) that Independent Circumstances Allowance exists?
  - (ii) reasons young people can get ICA? [Card A]
  - (iii) how much they can get on ICA?
  - (iv) what a Youth Advocate is?
  - (v) about counselling services? (people or places they could go to for help or to talk about things)
- (c) "Who told you?"
- (d) "When did they tell you?"

3. ICA interview [try and find out if they were assessed for ICA, that is, they were interviewed and had to provide some verification of their personal circumstances]
  - (a) "Did you ever apply or get interviewed for ICA?"
  - (b) "What happened?"
  - (c) "When was your interview eg. how many days after you went to Social Welfare to apply for the benefit?"
  - (d) "Were you asked whether you would prefer a certain type of interviewer eg. male or female, particular ethnic group?"
    - (i) [if asked] "How did you feel about this?"
    - (ii) [if not asked] "Would you liked to have been asked?"
  - (e) "Where were you interviewed?"
  - (f) "Were you interviewed in private so no one else could hear?"
  - (g) "Who was at your interview?"
  - (h) "What were you asked?"
  - (i) "What were you told?"
    - (i) that they would get ICA or not?
    - (ii) (if yes) why weren't they eligible for ICA?
4. Youth Advocates
  - (a) "Did you have a Youth Advocate?" [Explain what a Youth Advocate is.]
  - (b) "Who was your Youth Advocate (eg. friend, aunty)?"
  - (c) "Why did you choose this person to be your Youth Advocate?"
  - (d) "Did it help having a Youth Advocate?" "How?"
5. Thoughts and feelings about application process
  - (a) "Was it easy to understand the people in Social Welfare?" (If not, what and why?)
  - (b) "What did you think/feel about the interview?" "Why did you think/feel like this?"
  - (c) "Is there anything else you would like to tell us?"

- (d) "How can Social Welfare make applying for the benefit better?"

### III NEED FOR ICA

AIMS: (i) After showing and explaining CARD A to the young person, we would like to ask the young person if they think they could get ICA.

We do not want the interviewer to ask the young person why they could get ICA, that is, what their reasons for living away from home are.

- (ii) If the young person does think they could get ICA, we would like to know if there is anything stopping them applying (eg. you may already know that the young person didn't know about ICA which is why they hadn't applied).

Important - if the young person thinks they could get ICA, stress that they need to go to their local Social Welfare to apply. We are not assessment staff and cannot guarantee that their application will be successful. Encourage the young person to use a Youth Advocate who can verify their circumstances and support them through the application process.

- (iii) If the young person had applied or been assessed for ICA and been declined, we would like to know what reasons, if any, Social Welfare gave the young person for them not getting ICA.

BACKGROUND: We want to know why young people who think they could get ICA are not receiving it. We want to know if it is a particular group of people who are not receiving ICA.

We want to make recommendations on whatever is preventing young people in need of ICA from getting it ... ie. distribution of information, application process, criteria of eligibility being interpreted too narrowly or missing a significant group of young people.

We want to get an idea of the proportion of applications which are declined and why. We want to know if it is a particular group of applicants who are declined ICA.

### QUESTIONS:

- (a) "Do you think you could get ICA?"

- (b) [If applied or interviewed for ICA] "Why did Social Welfare say you couldn't get ICA? [You may already know this from Part II, 3(i), (ii).]"
- (c) [If interviewee thinks they could get ICA] "Why haven't you gone to Social Welfare to try for ICA?"

#### IV PERSONAL BACKGROUND

**AIMS:** We would like to know about the young people we are talking to, ie. their school, work and benefit history, their current living arrangements, ethnicity and age.

**BACKGROUND:** We want to be able to build a profile of the young people who are not getting ICA.

#### QUESTIONS:

##### 1. School history

- (a) "When did you leave school?"
- (b) "What form were you in?"
- (c) "What school qualifications did you get?"
- (d) "Have you done any other courses?"

##### 2. Work history

- (a) "What jobs have you had?"
- (b) "How long did you work there?"

##### 3. Benefit history

- (a) "How much are you getting at the moment?"
- (b) "How long have they been getting this amount?"
- (c) "Were you getting the unemployment benefit last year?"

##### 4. Living arrangements

##### 5. Employment situation of parents [Ask about this only if you feel confident that it will not upset interviewee]

##### 6. Ethnic background [Card F]

Closing Interview

- (a) "Is there anything else you would like to say?"
- (b) "Would you like to look over my notes and make sure I've got straight what you wanted to say?" [If interviewee does not want to see your notes confirm that it is alright to quote them if they have said we can do this.]
- (c) "Would you like us to send you a summary of what we learn in this study which will probably be available in April next year?"
- (d) "Would you like a pamphlet which includes information about ICA?"
- (e) Check if they need to be reimbursed for travel. [collect their tickets]
- (f) If they want to try for ICA, they need to go to their local Social Welfare Office.
- (g) Thank you.

[Interviewer: Please record your own thoughts and feelings about how the interview went]



26 September 1989

Dear

We work for Social Welfare. We are doing a study to find out what it's like for 16-17 year olds who apply for the unemployment benefit.

We are sending out the purple questionnaire booklet that's in this envelope to all 16-17 year olds in New Zealand who are on the unemployment benefit and living away from home.

We would like to talk with you.

We will be visiting Christchurch between 16 October and 3 November. We would like to talk with you about what happened when you went to Social Welfare to apply for your benefit. We would be asking the same sorts of questions that are in the booklet.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO ONE OF US please fill out BOX 1 on the page at the end of this letter and send it back in the small envelope we sent you.

IF YOU WOULD like to help us but would RATHER WRITE THINGS DOWN, then answer the questions in the booklet and send it back to us in the big envelope we sent you. Fill out BOX 2 on the page at the end of this letter and send it back in the small envelope so we know not to ring you up to see if you want to talk to us.

IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO HELP WITH OUR STUDY fill out BOX 3 on the page at the end of this letter and send it back in the small envelope so we know not to write to you again or ring you up.

Hoping to hear from you!

*Marlene*

Marlene  
Levine

*Karen*

Karen  
Paterson

*Robyn*

Robyn  
Bailey

(Please turn over)



P.S. ANSWERING OUR QUESTIONS WILL NOT CHANGE YOUR BENEFIT.

Only our research team will see what you tell us. When we write our report we will write how many people said what, not who said it.

If you write things down in the booklet and send it back to us, we will not know who it has come from. It does not have your name or any identification number on it.

That's why we have sent you two envelopes - so if you send us the page at the end of this letter with your name on it, it is separate from your booklet.

\* \* \*

Because the purple booklet does not have your name on it we will not know who has sent theirs back. So we will be posting everybody a "reminder" letter unless you fill out the page at the end of this letter and send it back to us.

\* \* \*

If you have any questions, please ring us in Wellington during the day. We will pay for the toll call. All you do is phone tolls (010) and tell the operator that you want to make a "collect call" to Wellington 846-209. Then ask for one of us: Marlene Levine, Karen Paterson, Robyn Bailey.

Evaluation Unit  
Department of Social Welfare  
Head Office  
P.O. Box 27-015  
Wellington



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

BOX 1

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO ONE OF US, FILL THIS IN AND  
SEND IT BACK TO US

1. Could you give us a phone number where we can reach you?

TELEPHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

When is a good time to ring? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Would you like to meet and talk to one of us or would you rather talk to one of us over the telephone?

Meet and talk ☐

Talk over phone ☐

3. If you took someone with you when you applied for your benefit, who helped explain to Social Welfare why you needed a benefit, we call this person your Youth Advocate.

If you had a Youth Advocate, would you let us ask her or him what it was like going to Social Welfare?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

4. Would you let us use your words (but not your name) when we write our report?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

5. If there is any type of person you would rather talk to (like a woman or a man, or a Maori person or a Pakeha person, or any other preference) please tell us.

\_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to have someone else there when you talk to us (like one of your friends or your aunty or whoever), that's fine. ✓

(Please turn over for Boxes 2 and 3)

## BOX 2

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP US but would rather write things down:

1. Answer the questions in the booklet and send it back to us in the big envelope we sent you.

2. Tick this box —→ ☐ and send this page back in the small envelope. We will not send you a reminder letter or ring you up.

3. If you would like us to send you a summary of our report when we finish the study in March next year, please tick this box→ ☐

## BOX 3

IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO HELP WITH OUR STUDY then tick this box→ ☐  
and we will not send you a reminder letter or ring you up. Send this page back in the small envelope.

PLEASE PUT THIS PAGE IN THE SMALL ENVELOPE ADDRESSED TO US  
& POST IT.

IT DOESN'T NEED A STAMP!

Thank you.



# REMINDER LETTER



© 1980 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

Remember last week we sent you:

- a PURPLE questionnaire booklet, and
- an invitation!!! to talk to one of us

about what happened when you went to Social Welfare to apply for your benefit.



We haven't heard back from you yet so we're sending you this notice in case you forgot to send them back to us.

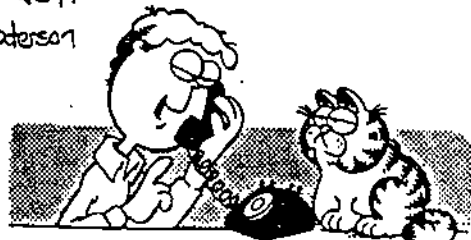
IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP with our study, either fill in BOX 1 on the page we sent you last week or the purple booklet and send it back.

If you lost everything we sent you and would like to help us with our study, or if you are confused by all this, ring us in Wellington during the day. We will pay for the toll call. All you do is phone tolls (010) and tell the operator you want to make a "collect call" to Wellington 846-209.

Then ask for one of us: Marlene Levine, Karen Pederson or Robyn Bailey.

Thanks!

Robyn Bailey



Evaluation Unit - Department of Social Welfare - P.O. Box 27-015 - Wellington



# REMINDER LETTER



Remember last week we sent you -

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a **PURPLE** questionnaire booklet

about what happened when you went to Social Welfare to apply for your benefit.

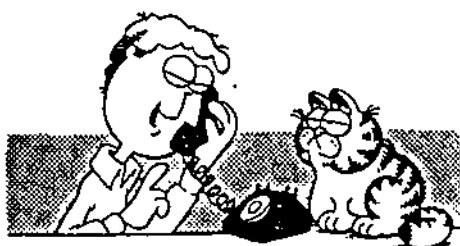


We're sending everybody this notice in case you forgot to send the booklet back to us. Thanks a lot if you have!

If you lost your booklet and you want to help us ... or ...

if you would like to talk to us about what happened when you went to Social Welfare to apply for your benefit, give us a ring in Wellington during the day from Monday 20 November onwards.

We will pay for the toll call. All you do is phone tolls (010) and tell the operator you want to make a "collect call" to Wellington 846-209. Then ask for one of us: Karen Paterson, Marlene Levine or Robyn Bailey.



Thanks!

*Robyn Bailey*

Evaluation Unit - Department of Social Welfare - P.O. Box 27-015 - Wellington

INTERVIEW GUIDEYOUTH AGENCIESNotes to Interviewer

- 1 A copy of the interview guide for interviews with youth agencies is attached. Please note that this can be used for either individual agencies, that is, one agency or group interviews with more than one agency.
- 2 The introduction may vary depending on whether it is an interview with one agency or a group interview with several agencies. Please note differences in boxes.
- 3 Each part in the interview guide is divided into three sections:
  - (a) Aim
  - (b) Background
  - (c) Questions

The aim identifies the area on which information needs to be obtained and could be stated prior to asking any questions.

The background states why we need this information. This may need to be discussed with interviewees, particularly if they want to know why we want this information.

The questions provide a guide to the sorts of information that we need to fulfill the aim. These questions are by no means exhaustive and are meant to act as a guide only.

Please note that differences between interviews with one agency and group interviews with several agencies are enclosed in single line boxes in the guide.

Also, relevant issues highlighted by the pilot study are outlined in double lined boxes in the guide.

- 4 Make sure you have copies of:
  - (a) "Information About Your Organisation" sheet (needed for interviews with more than one agency only).
  - (b) ICA information sheet for adults.
  - (c) Long checklist (lists headings and key words on several pages which you can use to write on during the interview).

- (d) Short checklist (lists headings and key words on single page for reference during the interview).
- (e) Pamphlets on UB which include information on ICA.



Introduction

The pilot study suggested that a lot of talking by the interviewer at the start may not be appropriate. It does seem important to cover why we are doing the study and the sorts of questions we want to ask them. You will also need to cover the confidentiality aspect, including permission to use quotes. You might like to refer to earlier contact(s) you've had with them and ask if they have any questions about points raised.

Points that could be covered in the introduction include:

1. Checking that they know your name and who you are interviewing for - Evaluation Unit, Head Office, Department of Social Welfare. You may want to talk about what the Evaluation Unit does or what you do when you're not interviewing for the Evaluation Unit.
2. That we are doing a study to find out if young people who need the Independent Circumstances Allowance are getting it and if there are ways the Department can improve procedures to help young people get ICA.
3. That we would like to talk with them because they might be able to tell us whether young people who need ICA are getting it and if they are not, why they are not.

4. For Interviews with Several Agencies Only

[Express the following as suggestions.]

- (a) That it might be a good idea to go around the room and get each of them to introduce themselves and identify the organisation they work with.
- (b) That it might be a good idea if one person from each organisation gave us an idea of the type of work their organisation does with young people.
- (c) That you have a sheet of paper which asks some questions about their organisation so we can get an idea of the numbers and type of 16 and 17 year olds youth agencies like theirs work with and that you would be very grateful if a representative from each organisation could fill it out. [Distribute "Information About Your Organisation" sheets.]

5. (a) That you'd like to know if each of them has seen a copy of the information sheet on ICA. [It should have been attached to the letter sent to them. Distribute copies if needed.]
- (b) Ask if anyone has any questions about the information sheet or ICA.

6. That you have some general points you would like to cover but you'd like to keep the interview as informal as possible.

7. Confidentiality

- (a) That anything they say will be confidential to the research team.
- (b) That we may be using quotes in the study report to highlight trends which emerge from the study, however, no names or anything that is likely to identify anyone will be used unless we have their permission.

For Interviews With One Agency Only

That when we report on what we learned from agencies that work with young people, may we identify the statements they make as being made by a member of their organisation provided the name of the member is not used? [Find out "yes" or "no".]

May we identify their organisation as one of the agencies we spoke with? [Find out "yes" or "no".]

That you'll confirm these with them at the end of the interview. [Make sure interviewee(s) are clear about what we mean by these.]

For Interviews with Several Agencies Only

That there are two questions about this on the "Information About Your Organisation" sheet which you would appreciate them answering.

For Interviews with One Agency Only**I INFORMATION ABOUT ORGANISATION**

Aim: "We would like to find out some background information about your organisation and your involvement with 16 and 17 year olds."

Background: This is so we can get an idea of the numbers and type of 16-17 year olds youth agencies like yours work with.

QUESTIONS:

- (a) "What type of work or activities do you do with young people?"
- (b) "Could you tell me how many 16 and 17 year olds you've worked with since January?"
- (c) "Would you describe for me the 16 and 17 year olds you work with (eg. gender, ethnicity, sorts of employment situations their parents are in, work history, personal background eg. family violence, living arrangements)?"
- (d) "Is your organisation funded in any way by the Department of Social Welfare?" [You may need to explain that we want this information as part of background information so we know the type of organisations we spoke with.]

## II KNOWLEDGE OF ICA

1. Aim: "We would like to find out what youth agencies know about ICA."

Background: This is so we can get an idea of who actually knows about ICA.

QUESTIONS:

- (a) "What did you know about ICA prior to me contacting you?"
- (b) "How did you find this out?"
- (c) "How could the Department tell organisations like yours about ICA?"

2. Aim: "We would like to find out what youth agencies think young people know about ICA and what would be the best ways to let 16-17 year olds know about ICA."

Background: This is so we can recommend in our report ways for young people to find out about ICA.

QUESTIONS:

- (a) "What do you think young people know about ICA?" [If not volunteered, find out why they think this.]
- (b) "What do you think would be the best ways to let 16-17 year olds know about ICA?"

### III KNOWLEDGE OF ICA APPLICANTS

Aim: "We would like to find out the characteristics of 16 and 17 year olds applying for ICA."

Background: This is so we can get an idea of whether there are particular groups of young people applying for ICA. Also, we want to get an idea of how young people feel about the application process, the proportion of applications which are declined and the reasons they are declined.

#### QUESTIONS:

- (a) "Do you know of any young people who have applied for ICA?" [If response is "no", go to Part V, p.11]
- (b) "How many do you know of?"
- (c) "How were you involved with these young people (eg. did they help the young person by acting as a youth advocate)?" [You may need to explain that a youth advocate is someone who can act as a support for the young person and verify their personal circumstances, usually during the ICA interview.]
- (d) "Could you give me a general idea of the type of young people who apply for ICA?" [for example, their sex, ethnicity, the sorts of employment situations their parents are in, living arrangements (eg. flat with others, stay with friends)].

The pilot study indicated that these characteristic questions can get repetitive and that the characteristics can be similar to those of the young people the agency works with described at the beginning of the interview. If this seems to be the case, you may prefer to ask them how these young people differ from those they described earlier. On the other hand, some agencies were quite willing to describe young people in detail, particularly if there was only a small number of them.

- (e) "Would you tell me the reasons [that is, the eligibility criteria] for which the application was made?" [refer interviewee to ICA information sheet]
- (f) [If interviewee selected "other" reasons] "Could you tell me what "other" reasons were used and how often they have been used?"
- (g) "How did the young person feel about the application process?"
- (h) "What was the result of their application?"
- (i) [If application declined.] "Why was the application declined?"

- (j) "Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about these people or their circumstances?"

[Ask the following questions only if interviewing one person or if interviewing more than one person, ask at the end of the interview if they would like to answer a few more questions about their involvement with the young person]

[For interviewee(s) who have helped young person/people apply for ICA but did not act as a youth advocate. For the purposes of the study, a youth advocate is someone who was with the young person during the ICA interview.]

(k) "What was it like for you helping the young person/people?"

(l) "How do you think your involvement helped the young person/people concerned?"

[Go to Part V, p.11]

[For interviewees who have acted as youth advocates.]

#### IV YOUTH ADVOCATES

Aim: "We would like to find out what happened and how you felt about acting as a youth advocate and whether you can suggest any improvements to the ICA process."

Background: This is so we can get an idea of how the application process affects young people who apply for ICA and how it affects their advocates if they have one. We want to be able to recommend ways that the Department can improve procedures for young people who are eligible for ICA.

#### QUESTIONS:

- (a) "How many times have you acted as a youth advocate?"
- (b) [If not already known, ask] "How did you come to act as a youth advocate?"
- (c) [this question may already have been answered if interviewee acted as a youth advocate for y.p. he/she knew who applied for ICA (see Part IIIe) in which case you may prefer to acknowledge their earlier response and say that you would like to find out specifically about the reasons young people apply where youth advocates are used.]  
 "Could you tell me for which reasons the young person/people applied for ICA?" [Refer interviewee to the information sheet on ICA. We only need to know eligibility categories, not specific reasons eg.

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family breakdown is sufficient. However, if they mention "other" reasons, try and find out what these were and how often they were used.]

[Get interviewee to describe their experience acting as a youth advocate]

- (d) "What happened?"
- (e) "What information were you given?"
- (f) "How did you back up the young person's statements?"
- (g) "What did you think of the process you went through?"
- (h) "How did you feel about the way you were treated?"
- (i) "How do you think the young person was treated?"
- (j) "How do you think your involvement helped the young person?"

[Get interviewee to talk about what they think of the process a young person has to go through to get ICA]

- (k) "How culturally sensitive?"
- (l) "How sensitive to gender?"
- (m) "How appropriate for 16-17 year olds?"
- (n) "How confidential?"
- (o) "How upsetting?" (If yes, find out if this could have been avoided)
- (p) "How flexible in coping with young people in differing circumstances?"

[You might prefer to deal with questions (k)-(p) together rather than separately eg. by listing all of them and then asking interviewee to comment]

[Get interviewee to talk about improvements to the ICA process]

- (q) "How could the ICA process be improved?"
- (r) "What do you think of the eligibility criteria for ICA?" [refer interviewee to ICA information sheet]
- (s) "Can you think of any other problems or improvements with regard to ICA?"
- (t) "Was there anything that you particularly liked about the application process for ICA?"

# V KNOWLEDGE OF 16-17 YEAR OLDS WHO NEED ICA BUT DON'T RECEIVE IT

Aim: "We would like to get an idea of the type of 16-17 year old who may be missing out on getting ICA and why."

Background: This is so we can find out their characteristics and make recommendations in our report about helping these people get ICA.

## QUESTIONS:

- (a) "You might like to refer to your ICA information sheet. Do you know of any 16 and 17 year olds in these situations not getting ICA?" [If response is "no", go to Part VI below.]
- (b) "How many do you know of?"
- (c) "Could you give me a general idea of the type of 16-17 year olds in these situations?" [for example, their sex, ethnicity, the sorts of employment situations their parents are in, living arrangements (eg. flat with others, stay with friends).] You may prefer to ask the interviewee how these young people differ from those they described earlier.
- (d) "Why don't they get ICA?"
- (e) "Why do they live away from home?"
- (f) "Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about these people or their circumstances?"

# VI KNOWLEDGE OF 16-17 YEAR OLDS AT HOME IN DISTRESSED CIRCUMSTANCES

Aim: "We would like to find out the characteristics of 16-17 year olds at home in distressing circumstances."

Background: This is so we can get an idea of why young people continue to live at home under such circumstances.

## QUESTIONS:

- (a) "You might like to refer to your ICA information sheet again. Do you know of 16 and 17 year olds living at home in these situations?" [If response is "no" go to Part VII, p.12.]
- (b) "How many do you know of?"
- (c) "Could you give me a general idea of the type of 16-17 year olds in these situations?" [for example, their sex, ethnicity, the sorts of employment situations their parents are in.] You may prefer to ask the interviewee how these young people differ from those they described earlier.



- (d) "Why do they continue to live at home?"
- (e) "Could you give me an indication of their situation at home?"  
[Prompt: "Why is their situation at home distressing?"]
- (f) "Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about these people or their circumstances?"

#### VII IMPROVEMENTS TO ICA

Aim: "We would like suggestions on how ICA could be improved."

Background: This is so we can make recommendations in our report about helping young people in need of ICA to get it.

#### QUESTIONS:

- (a) "Can you suggest any ways of improving things to help young people in need of ICA to get it?"
- (b) "In what other ways should ICA be changed?"
- (c) "Are there any other comments you would like to make about ICA?"

## CLOSING THE DISCUSSION

- (a) "Does anyone have any other questions or comments at this stage?"
- (b) "Would anyone like to see my notes?"
- (c) "We will be preparing a summary of the results of the study which will probably be available in April next year. Would you like a copy?"  
[Take details of who and where they would like it sent.]
- (d) "Would you like the most recent Social Welfare pamphlet on the unemployment benefit which includes information on ICA?"

For Interviews with One Agency Only

- (e) "I'd like to confirm with you whether:
  - (i) We may identify your organisation as one of the agencies we spoke with.
  - (ii) We may identify the statements you made as being made by a member of your organisation provided the member's name is not used."

For Interviews with Several Agencies Only

- (f) "Could I collect those "Information About Your Organisation" sheets from you now?"
- (g) "Are there any other questions or comments about anything?" [If they would like more information or something where we'll need to get back to them, take details so this can be followed up.]
- (h) "Thank you very much for your assistance."

[If you interviewed more than one person and they helped or acted as a youth advocate for a young person/people, find out if you can interview them separately. If so, ask questions Part III(k)-(l) and Part IV, pp 9-10.]

[Interviewer: Please record your own thoughts and feelings about how the interview went]

CODE

☐☐☐☐☐☐INTERVIEW GUIDEDSW Social Work Staff

1. District Office: \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Others present at interview: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Interviewer please note:

1. Make sure you have copies of:
  - (a) ICA information sheet for adults.
  - (b) Card F.
2. Youth Allowance and ICA refer to the different rates unemployed 16-17 year olds can get. All unemployed 16-17 year olds apply for a benefit on the standard unemployment benefit (UB) form.

16-17 year olds are processed for ICA as an extension of the UB application process. It was found during the pilot that most staff are familiar with UB rather than Youth Allowances. You may want to use both terms or use them to check out what the interviewee is saying so you both know what the other is talking about.
3. Extra lines have been included for yes/no response questions to enable you to record any comments the interviewee may make in addition to responding yes or no.

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## DSW SOCIAL WORK STAFF

Introduction

[Cover the following points at the beginning of the interview]

1. Greeting. (Hi/Kia Ora/Talofa Lava)
2. Your name. Thanks for talking with me.
3. Refer to letter they should have received about the study and what you do. Ask if they would like any further explanation and if they have any questions.
4. Explain that you would like to work through the questions set out in the guide and record their responses. Tell them how long the interview will take (probably 30-45 minutes).
5. That this interview is confidential. (Names will not be recorded and comments will only be known to the research team.)
6. That we may be using quotes in the study report, and would like their permission to do this.  

Yes ☐

No ☐
7. Do they have any questions about anything.

## BACKGROUND

"I'd firstly like to ask some questions about yourself."

1. "How many years have you worked as a social worker for the Department?"

\_\_\_\_\_ years

2. (a) "What is your current position?" [that is, are they a basic grade social worker or a senior social worker]

\_\_\_\_\_  
(b) "Are you in a particular team?" *[If response is "yes", ask which one, for example, generic, court.]*  
\_\_\_\_\_

## INFORMATION ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE

"I'd like to ask some questions about the 16-17 year olds you work with."

- 3 "How many 16-17 year olds have you worked with since January?" *[If they do not say whether this is an approximate or exact figure, ask.]*
- \_\_\_\_\_

[Probe for:

- (a) male or female,
- (b) ethnicity,
- (c) sorts of employment situations of their parents,
- (d) work history,
- (e) personal background eg. family violence,
- (f) living arrangements.]

## KNOWLEDGE OF ICA

"I'd now like to ask you some questions about ICA."

5. "Do you know about ICA?" [this is apart from our letter about the study which they may have got]

Yes ☐

No ☐ —> [Go to Q8]

- 
- 
6. "How did you find out about ICA?"
- 
- 
- 

7. "What do you think about the information you received on ICA?" [Prompt for why they think this, was it adequate to meet their needs.]
- 
- 
- 

8. "What would be the best way to inform you about ICA?"
- 
- 
- 

9. "What do you think young people know about ICA?"
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-6-

10. "What do you think would be the best ways for young people to find out about ICA?"

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KNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE APPLIED FOR ICA

11. "Do you know of anyone who has applied for ICA?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐

No ☐ —> [Go to Q27]

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12. "How many do you know about?" [If they do not say whether this is an approximate or exact figure, ask.]

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-7-

13. "Could you give me a general description of these people?"  
[Prompt for the following information.]

- (a) Sex? \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) Ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) Sorts of employment situations of parents?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (d) Living arrangements (eg. flat with others, stay with friends)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (e) How did they find out about ICA? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (f) What was the result of their applications?  
[If unsuccessful, ask: "Do you know why their application was declined?"]  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (g) Can you tell me how they felt about the process of applying for ICA?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (h) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about these people or their circumstances?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

-8-

14. "What was your involvement with these people as regards ICA?"

*[For example, did they act as a youth advocate (may need to explain that a youth advocate is someone who can act as a support for a young person and can also verify a young person's personal circumstances) or other ways they were involved.]*

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[ASK Q.15, 16, 17 AND 18 ONLY IF INTERVIEWEE HAS HELPED A YOUNG PERSON TO APPLY FOR ICA BUT NOT ACTED AS A YOUTH ADVOCATE. IF INTERVIEWEE HAS ACTED AS A YOUTH ADVOCATE GO TO PAGE 10]

15. "Would you tell me the reason(s) for which the application(s) was/were made?" *[Provide interviewee with information sheet. Insert number of young people falling into each category in boxes provided.]*

No parental support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special/unusual circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving from home for training/job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent work history	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

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[Ask Q.16 only if interviewee selected "other", otherwise go to Q.17]

-9-

16. "Could you tell me what "other" reasons were used?" [Find out how often "other" reasons were used if not apparent from response]

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17. "What was it like for you helping the young person/people?"  
or "How did you find helping the young person?"

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18. "How do you think your involvement helped them?"

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GO TO PAGE 14

## FOR YOUTH ADVOCATES

18. "I'd like to talk to you about your experience acting as a youth advocate. *[If not already mentioned, ask how many times they have acted as a youth advocate.]*
- 

19. "Did you come to act as a Youth Advocate because you are a social worker?" *[If not]* "How did you come to act as a Youth Advocate?"
- 
- 
- 

- 20(a) "Would you tell me the reason(s) for which the application(s) was/were made?" *[Provide interviewee with information sheet. Insert number of young people falling into each category in boxes provided.]*

No parental support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special/unusual circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving from home for training/job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent work history	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

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-11-

[Ask only if interviewee selected "other", otherwise go to Q.21]

- 20(b) "Could you tell me what "other" reasons were used?" [Find out how often "other" reasons were used if not apparent from response]

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21. "What can you tell me about your experience acting as a youth advocate?" [Probe for:
- (a) what happened,
  - (b) information they were given,
  - (c) how they backed up y.p.'s statements,
  - (d) what they thought about the process they went through,
  - (e) how they were treated,
  - (f) how they think young person was treated,
  - (g) how they think their involvement helped young person]

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-12-

22. "What do you think about the process a young person has to go through to receive ICA?" [Prompt: "We're concerned about whether the interview was
- (a) culturally sensitive,
  - (b) sensitive to gender,
  - (c) appropriate for 16-17 year olds,
  - (d) confidential,
  - (e) not unnecessarily upsetting, and
  - (f) flexible enough to cope with young people in differing circumstances".]

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-13-

23. "How could this process be improved?"

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24. "What do you think of the eligibility criteria for ICA?"  
[refer interviewee to information sheet]

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25. "Can you think of any [other] problems or improvements?"

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26. "Was there anything that you particularly liked about ICA?"

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## KNOWLEDGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO NEED ICA BUT DON'T RECEIVE IT

27. "We are particularly interested in finding out about young people who need ICA but who don't receive it. These are 16-17 year olds who do not live with their parents and do not receive any financial support from their parents."  
*[Refer interviewee to information sheet on ICA, in particular reasons for young people getting ICA.]*

"Do you know of anyone who is in any of these situations but who doesn't receive ICA?" *[Tick box]*

Yes ☐

No ☐ → *[Go to Q30]*

- 
28. "How many do you know of?" *[If they do not say whether this is an approximate or exact figure, ask.]*

- 
29. *[If they knew young people who applied for ICA, you may prefer to ask how these people differed from those they knew who applied for ICA.]*

"Could you give me a general idea of the type of young people in these situations?" *[Prompt for the following information.]*

(a) Sex? \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Sorts of employment situations of parents?

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(d) Living arrangements (eg. flat with others, stay with friends)?

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(e) Why do they live away from home? \_\_\_\_\_

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(f) Why don't they get ICA?

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(g) If there anything else that you would like to tell me about these people or their circumstances?

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#### KNOWLEDGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT HOME IN DISTRESSED CIRCUMSTANCES

30. "We are also interested in young people living at home in distressful circumstances."

"Do you know of any young people living at home in circumstances like those which are listed on your information sheet as possible reasons for young people getting ICA?"

[Tick box]

Yes ☐

No ☐ → [Go to Q33]

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31. "How many do you know of?" [If they do not say whether this is an approximate or exact figure, ask.]

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32. [If they knew young people who applied for ICA or young people who should get ICA but don't, you may prefer to ask how these people differed from the young people they talked about earlier.]

"Could you give me a general idea of the type of young people in these situations?" [Prompt for the following information.]

(a) Sex? \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Sorts of employment situations of parents?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(d) Could you give me an indication of their personal circumstances? [Refer interviewee to information sheet. Find out which eligibility categories young people would fall into if they weren't living at home.]

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(e) Why do they continue to live at home?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(f) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about these people or their circumstances?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## IMPROVEMENTS TO ICA

33. "Can you suggest any ways of improving things to help young people in need of ICA to get it?"

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34. "Are there any other ways would you like to see ICA changed?"

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35. "Are there any other comments you would like to make about ICA?"

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

"Finally, I would like to ask you some questions about yourself."

36. "Do you mind telling me how old you are?"

\_\_\_\_\_ years

37. "Do you mind telling me which ethnic group or groups you feel you belong to?" *[Show Card F - Tick appropriate box or boxes]*

New Zealand Maori	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Zealand European/Pakeha	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other European	<input type="checkbox"/>
Samoan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cook Island Maori	<input type="checkbox"/>
Niuean	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tokelauan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tongan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

*[Record group(s)]*

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38. [Record sex of interviewee by ticking box]

Male ☐

Female ☐

39. "Do you have any other questions or comments about anything?"

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"Thank you for your help."

[To Interviewer: Please record your own thoughts and feelings about how the interview went]

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Code: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐INTERVIEW GUIDED.S.W Reception Staff

1. District Office: \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Others present at interview: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Interviewer please note:

1. Make sure you have the following cards:
  - (a) Card B
  - (b) Card D
  - (c) Card E
  - (d) Card F
2. This guide refers to "Youth Allowance" rather than "unemployment benefit for 16-17 year olds". Youth Allowance and ICA refer to the different rates unemployed 16-17 year olds can get. All unemployed 16-17 year olds apply for a benefit on the standard unemployment benefit (UB) form.
 

16-17 year olds are processed for ICA as an extension of the UB application process. It was found during the pilot that most staff are familiar with UB rather than Youth Allowances. You may want to use both terms or use them to check out what the interviewee is saying so you both know what the other is talking about. In general, be aware of the different terms current at different offices.
3. Extra lines have been included for yes/no response questions to enable you to record any comments the interviewee may make in addition to responding yes or no.

## DSW RECEPTION STAFF

Introduction

*[Cover the following points at the beginning of the interview]*

1. Greeting. (Hi/Kia ora/Talofa Lava)
2. Your name. Thanks for talking with me.
3. Refer to letter they should have received about the study and what you do. Ask if they would like any further explanation and if they have any questions.
4. Can I check that you actually deal with unemployed 16 to 17 year olds?
5. Explain that you would like to work through the questions set out in the guide and record their responses. Tell them how long the interview will take (probably 45 minutes to an hour).
6. That this interview is confidential. (Names will not be recorded and comments will only be known to the research team.)
7. That we may be using quotes in the study report, to highlight trends that may occur, and would like their permission to do this.

Yes ☐

No ☐

8. Do they have any questions about anything.

-3-

## BACKGROUND

"First, I'd like to ask you some questions about your work."

1. "How many years have you worked in the Department of Social Welfare?"

\_\_\_\_\_ years

2. "How many years have you worked as a receptionist?"

\_\_\_\_\_ years

3. "What is your current grading?"  
[Circle]

101      102      103      104      105      106      107      Grade

4. What terms do you use to refer to the different benefits and allowances available to young unemployed people?

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## KNOWLEDGE OF ICA

"Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your involvement with ICA."

5. "How familiar are you with the Independent Circumstances Allowance?" [Show Card D - Tick box]

Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ [Go to Q.6]
Reasonably	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Somewhat	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Not very	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ [Read boxed information below to interviewee, then go to Q.7]
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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ICA is currently an allowance for unemployed 16-17 year olds who are unable to live with their parents and whose parents are unable to help them with their living costs. Instead of getting a Youth Allowance of \$82.34, ICA recipients receive \$109.79 a week.

Young people are assessed for ICA as part of the unemployment benefit application process. They can take someone along as a 'Youth Advocate' who can act as a support and also verify the young person's personal circumstances. [Go to Q.7]

6. "How familiar are you with the reasons for which a young person may receive ICA?"  
[Show Card D - Tick box]

Very ☐

Reasonably ☐

Somewhat ☐

Not very ☐

Not at all ☐

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7. "Do you ever carry out ICA interviews?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐ -----> When does this happen?

No ☐



-6-

## TRAINING AND INFORMATION

"I'd now like to ask you some questions about what training and information you may have had on ICA."

8. "What have you had?" [Prompt for circulars, meetings, courses, videos]

Yes, had training/info ☐  
[describe]

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Had none ☐ →  
Has this been a problem?  
Yes ☐ No ☐ → q12

What would you want?

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↓  
q12

9. "What did you find useful?"

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10. [Probe for adequacy] "Has it been enough?"

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11. "Can you suggest any improvements?"

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## ADVERTISING

"We've talked about training, I'd now like to get some idea of how your office advertises ICA."

12. "Does your office display:

(a) any posters on ICA	Yes	No	Don't Know
[Tick box]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(b) any pamphlets on ICA?"	Yes	No	Don't Know
[Tick box]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. "Does your office provide any information on ICA to community groups?" [Tick box]

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	----->[Prompt: "What information is provided?"]
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	

14. "Can you think of any other ways your office advertises ICA?"

15. "What do you think are the best ways to advertise ICA in your office?"

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## RECEPTION PROCESS

"I'd now like to ask you about what happens when a young person asks about or applies for a Youth Allowance (or UB for 16-17 year olds)."

16. "Could you describe what you do when someone asks about or applies for a Youth Allowance, starting from the first contact with the young person?"

[Probe for:

- (a) what they say to young person,
- (b) what they get young person to do
- (c) filter questions (asked or on UB form): do they ask:-
  - (i) if the young person is living with parents/guardian?
  - (ii) if the parents/guardian are supporting the young person financially?
- (d) do they mention
  - (i) ICA
  - (ii) eligibility criteria
  - (iii) role of Youth Advocate
  - (iv) people who could help/counsel the young person (potential Youth Advocates, support agencies)

Spontaneous response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Probed response: \_\_\_\_\_

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-10-

17. "How often do young people applying for Youth Allowance bring someone with them?"  
[show Card E - Tick box]

Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Mostly	<input type="checkbox"/>	
About half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ [Go to Q.19]

- 
- 
18. "Would you happen to know who these people might be?" (eg. family, friends, teachers)
- 
- 

19. "Do young people applying for Youth Allowance ever get upset or angry?" [Record other emotional reactions as well]

Yes ☐

No ☐ → [Go to Q.23]

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20. "In what situations do they get upset or angry?"

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21. "Do you feel you have been given the resources, for example, training, support, to cope with such situations?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐ —> [Go to Q.23]

No ☐

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22. "Do you feel you need additional resources?"

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23. "Has anyone ever asked or rung you about ICA?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐ —> [Find out if these are young people or others acting on young people's behalf]

No ☐ —> [Go to Q.34]

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24. "How often?"

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-12-

"I'd now like to ask you the same questions I asked you about Youth Allowance applicants for people who have enquired about ICA."

25. "What happens when you receive an enquiry about ICA?"

[Probe for:

- (a) what they say to young person,
- (b) what they get young person to do,
- (c) do they mention:
  - (i) eligibility criteria,
  - (ii) role of Youth Advocate,
  - (iii) benefit rate,
  - (iv) people who could help young person,
- (d) is the young person interviewed?
  - (i) when? (by appointment?)

Spontaneous response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Probed response: \_\_\_\_\_

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-13-

26. "How often do young people who enquire about ICA bring someone with them?"

[show Card E - Tick box]

Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Mostly	<input type="checkbox"/>	
About half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ [Go to Q.28]

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27. "Would you happen to know who these people might be?" (eg. family, friends, teachers)
- 
- 

28. "Do young people enquiring about ICA ever get upset or angry?" [Record other emotional reactions as well]

Yes ☐

No ☐ → [Go to Q.30]

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29. "In what situations do they get upset or angry?"

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IF THESE (Q30 & 31) HAVE BEEN ASKED PREVIOUSLY  
DON'T ASK AGAIN

30. "Do you feel you have been given the resources, for example, training, support, to cope with such situations?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐ —> [Go to Q.32]

No ☐

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31. "What additional resources do you feel you need?"

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"I'd now like to ask you some questions about your thoughts on ICA."

32. "In general, do you think that unemployed young people know about the Independent Circumstances Allowance?"  
[Tick box]

Yes

☐

----->[Probe for how many know and how much they know eg. do they know they can get a higher rate of Youth Allowance if they are not living at home?]

No

☐

Don't know

☐


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33. "Do you have any suggestions for improving how enquiries about ICA are dealt with by your office?"

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34. "Are there any particular problems that you come across concerning ICA?"

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35. "Do you have any suggestions for improving ICA in general?"

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

"Finally I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself."

36. "Would you mind telling me how old you are?"

\_\_\_\_\_ years

37. "Do you mind telling me which ethnic group or groups you feel you belong to?"

[Show Card F - Tick appropriate box or boxes]

New Zealand Maori ☐

New Zealand European/Pakeha ☐

Other European ☐

Samoan ☐

Cook Island Maori ☐

Niuean ☐

Tokelauan ☐

Tongan ☐

Chinese ☐

Indian ☐

Other

[Record response] \_\_\_\_\_

38. [Record sex of interviewee here]

Male ☐ Female ☐

39. "Do you have any other questions or comments about anything?"

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"Thank you for your help."

[To Interviewer: Please record your own thoughts and feelings about how the interview went]

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Code: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐INTERVIEW GUIDED.S.W ICA Interviewing Staff

1. District Office: \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Others present at interview: \_\_\_\_\_
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Interviewer please note:

1. Make sure you have the following cards:

- (a) Card B
- (b) Card C
- (c) Card F

2. Youth Allowance and ICA refer to the different rates unemployed 16-17 year olds can get. All unemployed 16-17 year olds apply for a benefit on the standard unemployment benefit (UB) form.

16-17 year olds are processed for ICA as an extension of the UB application process. It was found during the pilot that most staff are familiar with UB rather than Youth Allowances. You may want to use both terms or use them to check out what the interviewee is saying so you both know what the other is talking about.

3. Extra lines have been included for yes/no response questions to enable you to record any comments the interviewee may make in addition to responding yes or no.



## DSW INTERVIEWING STAFF

Introduction

[Cover the following points at the beginning of the interview]

1. Greeting. (Hi/Kia Ora/Talofa Lava)
2. Your name. Thanks for talking with me.
3. Refer to letter they should have received about the study and what you do. Ask if they would like any further explanation and if they have any questions.
4. Explain that you would like to work through the questions set out in the guide and record their responses. Tell them how long the interview will take (probably 45 minutes to an hour).
5. That this interview is confidential. (Names will not be recorded and comments will only be known to the research team.)
6. That we may be using quotes in the study report, and would like their permission to do this.  

Yes ☐

No ☐
7. Do they have any questions about anything.

-3-

## BACKGROUND

"First, I'd like to ask you some questions about your work and your involvement in ICA."

1. "How many years have you worked for DSW?"

\_\_\_\_\_ years

2. "What is your position in this office?" *[Probe for title/what they do, not just grading.]*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. "What is your current grading?"  
*[Circle]*

101    102    103    104    105    106    107    Grade

4. "How many ICA interviews have you done?"

\_\_\_\_\_

## ICA PROCESS &amp; INTERVIEW

"Now I'd like to ask you some questions about how ICA actually operates."

5. "Can you describe how you come to see young people who might be eligible for ICA?" *[Probe for use of appointment system if not volunteered and when interview takes place, for example, the day the young person first comes in or phones or some days later.]*

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6. "What happens when you interview a young person who might be eligible for ICA?" [Probe for:
- (a) what they ask young person;
  - (b) do they say what ICA is;
  - (c) do they talk about each eligibility criterion;
  - (d) do they talk about what a Youth Advocate is (may need to explain what a Youth Advocate is), find out when young people are told about Youth Advocates even if it is not at the interview;
  - (e) do they tell them the ICA benefit rate;
  - (f) do they talk about possible people to see if the young person feels they need to talk to someone]

Spontaneous response: \_\_\_\_\_

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Probed response: \_\_\_\_\_

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*[The following questions (Q7-35) relate to specific aspects of the ICA interview. You will need to be aware that some of the questions may have been answered in questions 5 and 6.]*

Understanding

7. "Do you think ICA applicants have a good understanding of ICA?" [Tick box]

Yes ☐ —> [Go to Q.9]

No ☐

8. "What sorts of things do you have to explain to them?"

Written Guide

9. "Do you use a written guide when interviewing applicants?" [Tick box]

Yes ☐ —> [Try to obtain a copy of guide.  
If you can't get a copy, probe  
for content]

No ☐

Length

10. "On average, how long, does an assessment interview take?"

\_\_\_\_\_ hour/s      \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

-7-

Location

11. "Could you describe the place the interviews are held?"

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Privacy

12. "Do you think anyone could overhear the interview?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐

No ☐

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13. "Are any other staff present during the interview?"  
[Tick box]

Yes

☐

Sometimes

☐

No

☐

*[Probe for who and their purpose]*

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Matching

14. "Do you ever try to match the applicant to the interviewer in any way before the interview is carried out or ask for the young person's preferences about the person they want to interview them?" *[If yes, probe for gender, ethnicity and any other matching factors]*

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Confidentiality

15. "Do you ever tell the applicant that the interview is confidential?" *[Probe for what they say]*

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Reactions

16. "Do young people ever get upset or angry during the interview?" *[Tick box - record other emotional reactions as well]*

Yes ☐

No ☐ —> [Go to Q.20]

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17. "In what situations do they get upset or angry?"

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18. "Do you feel you have been given the resources, e.g., training, support, to cope with such situations?" *[Tick box]*

Yes ☐ —> [Go to Q.20]

No ☐

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19. "What else do you feel you need?"

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"I'd now like to ask you some questions about the eligibility criteria for ICA and the use of Youth Advocates.

Eligibility Criteria

20(a) "These are the criteria of eligibility for ICA [show Card B]. Which of these have applied to the young people you have dealt with?" [Tick box or boxes]

- |                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| "No parental support"           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| "Family breakdown"              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| "Special/Unusual circumstances" | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| "Moving from home"              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| "Independent work history"      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| "Other"                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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-10-

[Ask only if interviewee selected "other", otherwise go to Q.21]

- 20(b) "You said that you have dealt with young people who have given "other" reasons when being assessed for ICA. What were these "other" reasons?" [Find out how often "other" reasons were used if not apparent from response]

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21. "Do you think that some young people who really need ICA might miss out because they don't fit the criteria?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐

No ☐ → [Go to Q.23]

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22. "In what way?"

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23. "How do you define the term parent when dealing with ICA cases?"

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Youth Advocates

24. "What proportion of applicants have brought a Youth Advocate to their interview?" [Show Card C - Tick box]

All	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Most	<input type="checkbox"/>	
More than half	<input type="checkbox"/>	
About half	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Less than half	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Very few	<input type="checkbox"/>	
None	<input type="checkbox"/>	→ [Go to Q.31(b)]
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	↗

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25. "How often were Youth Advocates used for each criterion?"  
[Show Card B - for example, actual numbers, proportions, ranking in order of use]

No parental support	_____
Family breakdown	_____
Special/Unusual circumstances	_____
Moving from home	_____
Independent work history	_____
Other reasons	_____

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26. "What people most commonly appear in the role of Youth Advocates?" (e.g, family, friends, teachers)

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27. "Do you think Youth Advocates have a good understanding of ICA?" [Tick box]

Yes ☐ → [Go to Q.29]

No ☐

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28. "What sorts of things do you have to explain to them?"

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29. "What effect do you think Youth Advocates have on the interview?"

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30. "How does a Youth Advocate verify to you, the personal circumstances of a young person?"

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[Ask either (a) or (b)]

31. (a) [For those who have dealt with Youth Advocates]

"Do you check the legitimacy of the applications for ICA in any other way?"  
[Tick box]

Yes ☐ —> "In what other ways?"

No ☐ —> [Go to Q.32]

- (b) [For those who have not dealt with Youth Advocates]  
"How do you check the legitimacy of applications for ICA?"

-14-

Results of ICA Applications

"I'd like now to ask you some questions about the results of ICA applications."

32. "Do you tell the young person whether or not they will get ICA?"
- (a) "When are they informed?"
  - (b) "How are they informed (eg. verbally or by letter or both)?"
  - (c) "Why are they not told at the interview?"

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[You will have to word Q33 in a way that makes sense in the context of the ICA process in this District Office. We are only interested in situations where a particular client has been earmarked for ICA and the final assessment interview reverses this.]

33. "When interviewing a young person for ICA, have you ever decided that they are not eligible for ICA?"

Yes ☐

No ☐ —> [Go to Q.36]

- 
34. "What were their reasons for being interviewed for ICA?"

- 
35. "What were the characteristics of these young people?"  
[Probe how many, sex, ethnicity, circumstances]

-15-

## TRAINING AND INFORMATION

"I'd like to ask you some questions about what training and information you may have had on ICA".

36. "What training and information have you had?" *[Prompt for circulars, meetings, courses, videos.]*

Yes, had training/info ☐  
*[Describe]*

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Had none ☐

Has this been a problem?

Yes ☐ No ☐ → q40



What would you want?

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↓  
q40

37. "What did you find useful?"

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38. *[Probe for adequacy ("Has it been enough?")]*

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39. "Can you suggest any improvements?"

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IMPROVEMENTS TO ICA

"I'd now like to ask you about your thoughts on ICA."

40. "Are there any particular problems that you come across concerning ICA?" *[If yes]* "What are they?"

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41. "Do you have any suggestions for improving the process young people have to go through to receive ICA?"

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42. "Do you have any other suggestions for improving ICA?"

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43. "Is there anything you particularly like about ICA?"

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44. "Is there anything else concerning ICA that you would like to comment on?"

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

"Finally I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself."

45. "Would you mind telling me how old you are?"

\_\_\_\_\_

46. "Do you mind telling me which ethnic group or groups you feel you belong to?"

[Show Card F - Tick appropriate box or boxes]

New Zealand Maori ☐

New Zealand European/Pakeha ☐

Other European ☐

Samoan ☐

Cook Island Maori ☐

Niuean ☐

Tokelauan ☐

Tongan ☐

Chinese ☐

Indian ☐

Other

[Record response] \_\_\_\_\_



47. [Record sex of interviewee here]

Male ☐

Female

☐

48. "Do you have any other questions or comments about anything?"

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"Thank you for your help."

[To Interviewer: Please record your own thoughts and feelings about how the interview went]

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## APPENDIX IV

### Respondent Characteristics

This appendix describes the demographic characteristics of the young people and district office staff who participated in the study. Youth workers and representatives from community agencies were not asked for this information so they are not included. It was possible to compare the age and gender of young people who responded to the postal questionnaire with the age and gender of the study population (that is, all ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who were not living at home) to determine whether respondents were representative of the study population in terms of age and gender. The results of these comparisons are also presented.

#### Respondents to the Postal Questionnaire

Table 6 shows the gender of the respondents.

Table 6: Gender of Questionnaire Respondents

Gender	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Female	60%	321	62%	134
Male	39%	207	37%	80
Did not state	<u>1%</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	215

Although females and males were about equally represented in the populations of both ICA and Youth Allowance recipients who did not live at home, for both groups, about three-fifths of respondents to the questionnaire were female.

Table 7 shows the age of the respondents.

Table 7: Age of Questionnaire Respondents

Age (years)	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
16	34%	183	38%	81
17	59%	312	56%	120
18	5%	27	4%	9
Did not respond/other	<u>2%</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>2%</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	215

Note: "Other" included two ICA respondents who were aged 15 years and one Youth Allowance respondent who did not live at home who was aged 19 years.

More 17 year olds than 16 year olds responded to the questionnaire booklet and made up the populations of both ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who did not live at home. The questionnaire respondents were representative of the study population in terms of age.

Table 8 shows the ethnicity of the respondents. NZ European/Pakeha followed by NZ Maori were the most common ethnic groups which respondents identified themselves by. It should be noted that 74% of all NZ European/Pakeha respondents were on ICA, whilst 66% of all Maori respondents were on ICA.

**Table 8: Ethnicity of Questionnaire Respondents**

Ethnic Group	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
NZ European/Pakeha	48%	258	43%	92
NZ Maori	33%	175	41%	89
NZ Maori/NZ European	6%	34	6%	12
Pacific Islands <sup>1</sup>	4%	19	4%	8
Other combinations <sup>2</sup>	4%	20	4%	9
Other <sup>3</sup>	4%	22	2%	4
Did not respond	<u>1%</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	100%	532	100%	215

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Islands respondents included 12 Cook Island Maori, 10 Samoan, 2 Tongan, 2 Niuean and 1 Tokelauan.

<sup>2</sup> "Other combinations" included combinations of NZ Maori and NZ European/Pakeha with Pacific Islands ethnic groups.

<sup>3</sup> "Other" included "other European", "New Zealander", "Indian" and "South African".

Table 9 shows the highest form questionnaire respondents reached at school. Over two-thirds of the respondents left school prior to the 6th form.

Respondents were asked where they lived. They were given the choice of writing down the actual place where they lived or ticking one of four boxes labelled "city", "large town", "small town", or "in the country". Many respondents wrote down the actual place where they lived. Table 10 shows their responses.

Respondents were asked about their living situation. The most common living situations of respondents were boarding (31%), followed by flatting with others (23%) and staying with relatives or whanau (21%). There was little difference between ICA respondents and Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home with regard to their living situations.

Table 9: Highest Form Questionnaire Respondents Reached at School

Form	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
3	5%	24	4%	8
4	26%	137	24%	52
5	40%	213	43%	92
6	24%	128	25%	53
7	3%	14	2%	4
Did not respond/other	<u>3%</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>3%</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	101%*	532	101%*	215

\* rounding error

Note: "Other" included respondents who were still at school and two respondents who left school in Form Two.

Table 10: Location of Questionnaire Respondents

Location	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
City	46%	243	39%	83
Large town	19%	101	18%	39
Small town	25%	131	27%	59
In the country	9%	46	13%	29
Did not respond/other	<u>2%</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>2%</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	101%*	532	99%*	215

\* rounding error

Note: "Other" included respondents who ticked more than one box.

### Young People Interviewed

Table 11 shows the gender of the young people interviewed. Over half of the young people interviewed were female.

Table 12 shows the ethnicity of the young people interviewed. About half of the young people interviewed identified themselves as NZ European/Pakeha and one-fifth identified themselves as NZ Maori.

Table 13 shows the highest form young people who were interviewed had reached at school.

Table 11: Gender of Young People Interviewed

Gender	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
Female	56%	18	58%	7
Male	44%	15	42%	5
Total	100%	33	100%	12

Table 12: Ethnicity of Young People Interviewed

Ethnic Group	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
NZ European/Pakeha	61%	20	50%	6
NZ Maori	18%	6	25%	3
NZ Maori/NZ European	12%	4	17%	2
Pacific Island	9%	3	8%	1
Total	100%	33	100%	12

Table 13: Highest Form Young People Interviewed Reached at School

Form	ICA		YA (Away from Home)	
	Percent	n	Percent	n
3	6%	2	0%	0
4	21%	7	25%	3
5	39%	13	50%	6
6	27%	9	25%	3
7	6%	2	0%	0
Total	99%*	33	100%	12

\* rounding error

Over two-thirds of the young people interviewed had left school prior to the 6th form. Most (67% of ICA respondents and 75% of Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home) had no school qualifications. About half of the young people interviewed had undertaken ACCESS or Polytech courses.

The most common living situations of the young people interviewed were flatting, followed by boarding and then staying with relatives or whanau. The young

people interviewed appeared to come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds (as determined by parents' employment).

#### District Office Reception Staff

Reception staff were interviewed in Christchurch (2), Whakatane, Otahuhu and Grey Lynn offices. All five reception staff interviewed were women. They were generally in the older age groups and were graded 102. Three staff described themselves as New Zealander or Pakeha, one as Maori and another as Other European.

#### District Office Interviewing Officers

Interviewing officers were interviewed in Christchurch (7), Rotorua (6), Central Auckland (6), Grey Lynn (3), Otahuhu (2) and Whakatane (2) offices. With the exception of one who was graded 104, the interviewing officers were all graded 103. Most (19) interviewing officers were women. Their age ranged from 20 to 43 years with an average of about 30 years. Twelve staff described themselves as NZ European/Pakeha, two described themselves as NZ Maori, two described themselves as NZ European/NZ Maori, five described themselves as Pacific Island (for example, Samoan, Tokelauan, Niuean) and five as belonging to other ethnic groups (for example, Other European, New Zealander and Indian).

#### District Office Social Workers

Social workers who were interviewed included four senior social workers and thirteen social workers. Length of time worked as a social worker with the Department ranged from 2 months to 17 years. Three had been with the Department as a social worker for less than a year, four for between 1 and 3 years, four for 3 to 5 years, five for more than 5 years, and for one the length of time with the Department was unknown. The social workers interviewed worked on the following teams: generic (13) [this included rural (3), inner city (2) and community (4) teams], care & protection (3), court (1) and a social worker for the Samoan community.

Six of the social workers identified themselves as NZ European/Pakeha, four as NZ Maori, one as Maori/Pakeha, four as Samoan, one as Chinese and one as Other European. Eight of the social workers interviewed were women and nine were men. Their ages ranged from 25 to 52 years, with five in their twenties, ten in their thirties, one in the forties and one in the fifties.

## APPENDIX V

### Community Agencies Interviewed

This appendix provides a list of community agencies which participated in the ICA study and were willing to be identified as participating in the study. The number of representatives who were interviewed from each agency is specified in brackets beside the name of the agency.

#### Christchurch

City Mission [3]  
Presbyterian Support Services [1]  
Child Helpline [1]  
Christchurch Unemployed Rights Collective [3]  
START (Sexual Abuse Treatment and Rehabilitation Programme) [3]  
Odyssey House [2]  
Sarah Crane (counsellor in private practice)  
Polynesian Performing Arts Trust [1]  
Waipuna Night Shelter [1]  
Youth Resource Centre [1]  
A DSW family home [1]

Eight community agencies who were interviewed have not been identified.

#### Auckland

Pacific Island Presbyterian Church ACCESS Papakura [2]  
Probation Service Mangere [1]  
Poutama Trust [2]  
Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre [1]  
Probation Service Central Auckland [14]  
Youthlink Trust [1]  
TAWA (ACCESS training centre) [1]  
Auckland Unemployed Workers Union [1]  
Arohanui Inc. [4]  
Auckland Youth Resource Centre [4]  
Te Kakano o te Whanau ki Tamaki Makarau [2]  
Te Roopu Whanui Atawhai [1]

Eight community groups, including four Pacific Islands groups, who were interviewed have not been identified. One community group wished only to be identified as a church-based group.

#### Rotorua

Waiariki Community College [5]  
Maatua Whangai [1]  
Women's Refuge [5]  
Family Support Services [4]  
Western Heights High School counsellors [2]

Youth Resource Centre and Emergency House [9]  
Te Whanau Taura Here [3]  
Te Hou Ora [1]  
Te Waiariki Rurea Trust [1]  
Te Whanau Youth Movement [1]  
Lifelink and Youthline [1]  
YMCA ACCESS [1]  
YWCA Hostel [1]  
Youth Aid Section Rotorua Police [1]

Whakatane

District Probation Office [2]  
Community Constable and Youth Aid Officer Whakatane Police  
Women's Collective [1]  
Kahunui Trust [1]  
Iwi Transition Authority and Ngati Awa Trust Board [2]  
Whakatane Unemployed Workers Union [2]

One person who was interviewed worked with a number of community groups but did not want to be identified as being a representative of any one group. Four community groups who were interviewed have not been identified.



## APPENDIX VI

### Relationship Between Provision of Information and Young People's Understanding of DSW Staff and Feelings About What Happened at Social Welfare

**Table 14: Comparison Between Amount of Information Provided and Feelings  
About What Happened at Social Welfare**

		Number of Pieces <sup>1</sup> of Information							
		More than Three		Two		One		None	
Feelings		Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent	n
<b>ICA Recipients</b>									
Positive		28%	18	26%	27	15%	12	16%	18
Mixed		59%	38	57%	59	57%	46	52%	58
Negative		<u>13%</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>17%</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>35</u>
Total		100%	64	100%	103	100%	80	100%	111
<b>YA (Away from Home) Recipients</b>									
Positive		57%	4	25%	4	20%	7	14%	15
Mixed		43%	3	63%	10	51%	18	54%	59
Negative		<u>0%</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>29%</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>32%</u>	<u>35</u>
Total		100%	7	100%	16	100%	35	100%	109

<sup>1</sup> "Piece" refers to each of the following: (1) being told about ICA; (2) being told they could get \$109.79; (3) being told they could bring someone with them and; (4) being told about helping agencies available.

**Note:** Respondents who said they did not have an interview, or did not respond to one of the questions, or ticked more than one box in response to the privacy of interview question were not included in this table. Respondents whose ticked box response to how they felt about what happened at Social Welfare differed from their explained response, in terms of whether it was "positive", "negative" or "mixed", had only their ticked box response included in the table.

**Table 15: Comparison Between Understanding DSW Staff and Feelings About What Happened at Social Welfare**

Feelings	Understanding					
	Easy		Some bits easy/ Some bits hard		Hard	
	Percent	n	Percent	n	Percent	n
<b>ICA Recipients</b>						
Positive	37%	68	16%	46	5%	2
Mixed	49%	90	64%	181	42%	17
Negative	<u>14%</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>53%</u>	<u>21</u>
Total	99%*	184	100%	284	100%	40
<b>YA (Away from Home) Recipients</b>						
Positive	29%	22	23%	26	5%	1
Mixed	57%	43	50%	55	37%	7
Negative	<u>13%</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>27%</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>58%</u>	<u>11</u>
Total	100%	75	100%	111	100%	19

\* rounding error

**Note:** Respondents who did not respond to one or both questions were not included in this table. Respondents whose ticked box response to how they felt about what happened at Social Welfare or their understanding of the people they spoke with at Social Welfare differed from their explained response, had only their ticked box response included.

## APPENDIX VII

### Submission on Accommodation Benefit Policy Review

TO: Robyn Nicholas  
Income Support

FROM: Karen Paterson, Robyn Bailey and Marlene Levine  
ICA Evaluation Project  
Evaluation Unit

#### SUBMISSION ON ACCOMMODATION BENEFIT POLICY REVIEW

##### Introduction

The purpose of this submission is to provide information obtained from the Independent Circumstances Allowance (ICA) Evaluation study which is considered relevant to the policy review of accommodation benefit. Information from the study is most relevant to section seven of the discussion paper which is concerned with youth rates and proposes that only those people in receipt of ICA will be eligible for accommodation benefit. The study also identified policy issues relevant to the accommodation benefit which are not included in the discussion paper.

It should be noted that the study was not designed to specifically address issues related to the accommodation benefit. However, the young people and community agencies who participated in the study identified inadequacy of the benefit and lack of information about benefits provided by Social Welfare as issues of major concern. These would seem to be particularly relevant to this review.

##### Youth Allowance Recipients Who Do Not Live At Home and Who Do Not Receive ICA

An assumption underlying the proposal in section seven of the discussion paper appears to be that young unemployed people who do not live at home receive ICA. However, there are, in fact, many young people (about 8% of all 16-17 year old unemployed people) who do not live at home and who do not receive ICA (Appendix 1 compares the numbers of these young people with ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who live at home over a twelve month period). Clearly, if young people who do not live at home and who do not receive ICA were denied access to accommodation benefit, they would be even more severely disadvantaged financially than they are at present (this is discussed further below). Thus, it is considered that the proposal that only those people in receipt of ICA will be eligible for accommodation benefit should be extended to make both ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home eligible for an accommodation benefit.

A review of the literature relevant to the evaluation of ICA highlighted that unemployed young people can increase stress and conflict within the family. As a consequence, they are more likely to move away from home than young people who are employed (see Appendix 2). Thus, whilst these young people may not

be granted ICA, it is considered that they are in need of some additional assistance, like the accommodation benefit.

#### Entry Threshold for Accommodation Benefit

It is considered that the current policy of setting the entry threshold for accommodation benefit for people receiving youth rates at the same level as single people receiving invalid's benefit severely disadvantages those on youth rates, particularly Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home and who do not receive ICA. The effect of this policy is that the entry threshold for ICA recipients is 30% of their actual rate of benefit and, for Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home, it is 40% of their actual rate of benefit.

As part of the evaluation of ICA, a postal questionnaire was sent to the population of ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home. A total of 747 young people responded to the questionnaire (532 ICA respondents and 215 Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home). They were asked whether they received an accommodation benefit and, if they did, how much they received. Just over half (52% or 277) of the ICA respondents reported that they were receiving accommodation benefit compared to about one-third (33% or 70) of Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home.

Less than half (43% or 119) of ICA respondents who reported receiving an accommodation benefit said they received less than \$10.00 per week. Considerably more than half (62% or 43) of Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home reported receiving less than \$10.00 accommodation benefit per week.

The amount of accommodation benefit received by ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home is generally low (see Appendix 3). The average amount of accommodation benefit received by all ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home, including those who do not receive an accommodation benefit, was \$5.64 and \$3.74 respectively at the end of December 1989. The average amount of accommodation benefit received by ICA recipients and Youth Allowance recipients who were actually receiving an accommodation benefit was less than \$10.70 and \$8.40 respectively at the end of March this year.

Thus, it appears that the high entry threshold for accommodation benefit means that many young people are not receiving an accommodation benefit and those that are, are receiving a relatively low amount. It is considered, then, that the proposal to set the entry threshold at 25% of ICA is strongly supported for ICA recipients. It is also considered that the entry threshold for Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home should be set at 25% of the Youth Allowance rate.

### Adequacy of Benefit

The evaluation of ICA did not specifically address adequacy of benefit issues. Despite this, however, inadequacy of the benefit was an issue of major concern raised by young people and community agencies working with young people. It is considered that these concerns have implications for the accommodation benefit.

With regard to the postal questionnaire sent to young people, of those who mentioned adequacy of the benefit, three times as many ICA respondents (that is, 127 respondents or 24% of the total number of ICA respondents) and eight times as many Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home (that is, 86 respondents or 46% of the total) indicated that the amount they received was inadequate compared to respondents who indicated that the amount was adequate. Some examples of comments made by respondents who thought that the amount was inadequate are presented below (they are not direct quotes because an undertaking was given to respondents that only the research team would read their responses. However, their responses have been changed only slightly so that they retain the flavour of the original response). Comments made by ICA respondents are distinguished from those made by Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home because of the different amounts they receive.

Examples of comments made by ICA respondents:

*It has been very difficult to live on the unemployment benefit even though I am sharing a place with a friend and we are sharing expenses. Even though I get \$110 I find it hard to live on. I can't buy a lot of clothes and other personal things. By the time I've paid the rent, food and other living expenses I am lucky to have a couple of dollars for myself.*

*Even though the benefit is just enough to live on I can't buy clothes which would be suitable for job interviews. I find this embarrassing. If I have to go to the doctor I don't have enough money for the rest of the week.*

*Living costs are very high. I find that the money I get doesn't seem to cover everything even though I budget. My parents can't afford to give me any money. It's so hard.*

Examples of comments made by Youth Allowance respondents who did not live at home:

*We should get a little bit more money for costs such as rent, board, power, food and clothes. I am only getting \$80.00 but I am supposed to be paying \$100 per week.*

*I can't afford to live on the benefit. I pay \$80 board a week. When I need to go to the doctor I have to wait until I can afford it. \$10*

*a week after paying board doesn't go far. The doctor costs \$20 so for 2 weeks I have to save up just to go to the doctor. Social Welfare will not help me, I've already tried. I think that situations like this are really unfair. I also owe people for things like that. It's bad.*

*I find it difficult to survive on \$96 a week. Rent and food alone cost me \$90.*

Twelve respondents commented specifically on the inadequacy of the amount of the accommodation benefit they received. Some of them reported receiving an accommodation benefit of \$1.00 per week.

Some of the community agencies who were interviewed as part of the evaluation of ICA study provided accommodation for young people. One agency said that they charged \$74.00 per week and commented that this did not cover all their costs and that it left young people who were only getting \$82 with very little. Another agency said that they charged \$61 for a single room and \$59 for a shared room per week but that this did not include meals. Another agency said that they knew of young people who lived in caravan parks and were charged \$76 per week.

Inadequacy of the benefit appears to contribute to the relatively high mobility of young people because they cannot afford to pay the rent and other costs associated with living away from home. Some of the young people who were interviewed mentioned living in cars, shifting from flat to flat or returning to unsatisfactory home situations when they could not meet their rent payments and electricity bills. A youth worker said that young people had to live in groups in order to afford to live in rented accommodation but risked eviction if the groups became too large.

These findings would seem to provide further support for the argument that Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home should be entitled to an accommodation benefit and that the entry threshold for accommodation benefit should be set at 25% of the actual benefit young people receive.

#### Provision of Information

It was apparent from the evaluation of ICA study that relatively large numbers of young people either did not know whether or not they were receiving an accommodation benefit or did not know the amount they were receiving. Thirteen percent (97) of young people who responded to the postal questionnaire did not know whether they were getting an accommodation benefit. Twelve percent (41) of those who reported receiving an accommodation benefit did not know or could not remember the amount they were receiving. It should also be noted that a further seven percent (25) of those who reported receiving an accommodation benefit said that they received more than the maximum \$41.00 to which they are currently entitled. This suggests that they either misunderstood the question or misunderstood the information they were given by Social Welfare staff.

When asked for suggestions for improvements, nine percent (68) of respondents to the postal questionnaire identified the provision of more information with regard to benefit entitlements. Some respondents specifically mentioned accommodation benefit:

*I do not think that 16 and 17 year olds are given enough information about what they are entitled to. I didn't find out that I could get the accommodation benefit until I'd been getting the unemployment benefit for about four months.*

*They should have told me about ICA and also accommodation benefit in detail. Most people don't know that such benefits are available. I didn't find out about them from Social Welfare, my flatmate told me.*

During interviews with young people, several volunteered that they were not informed about the availability of accommodation benefit.

Community agencies were asked about the information they and the young people they worked with were given. Many of the 66 agencies interviewed expressed concern about the amount and the quality of the information that is provided to people about benefits in general:

*DSW does not release information. People have to find it, but you need to know to be able to ask for it.*

*They aren't told. There isn't any publicity. People don't know about benefits to know what to ask for. They don't have the names of benefits and unless you do you get told there is nothing.*

Thus, information from the evaluation of ICA strongly suggests that consideration needs to be given to the provision of information about benefits in general, and that this would also apply to the accommodation benefit.

#### District Office Administration of Accommodation Benefit

The ICA evaluation identified some issues relevant to the administration of accommodation benefit by district offices, including differences in practice between district offices.

One young person who was interviewed as part of the study said he was declined accommodation benefit at one district office but when he moved he was granted it at another office. Whilst the young person may have been declined accommodation benefit for legitimate reasons, he said that his flatmate was of the opinion that it was because of the way the accommodation benefit was administered in that particular office.

It appears from comments made by two community agencies that at least one district office has a policy of not granting accommodation benefit to single people.

Another young person appeared to have difficulty providing the proof needed to receive the accommodation benefit. He was able to provide a monthly bank account statement (which showed who the rent money was paid to), a current "instant statement" (which showed the date of his last rent payment) and a copy of the automatic transfer payment form that authorised the direct debiting of the rent amount to his landlord. He was told, however, that he would need to produce a letter from his landlord. As his landlord was overseas on holiday at the time he could not provide such a letter. He said he eventually had to move out because he and his flatmates could not afford to stay there.

Thus, it would seem that some aspects of the administration of accommodation benefit by district offices which appear to unnecessarily disadvantage young people need to be examined.

#### Assumption About Parents Helping to Support Young People Living at Home

The assumption that parents will be helping to support their young people living at home stated in paragraph 7.4 of the discussion paper will not always apply. One of the community agencies interviewed as part of the ICA evaluation described a situation in which a young woman who was living at home was required to pay her parent 90% of her benefit as board. This sort of situation leaves a young person with very little money for such things as bus fares to DSW and Labour Department offices and job interviews, clothing (some young people mentioned needing "decent" clothes for job interviews) and doctors' fees.

Currently, young people in this situation are eligible to apply for accommodation benefit. However, it is proposed in the discussion paper that they no longer be eligible to apply for accommodation benefit. It is considered that young people in this situation should be provided with some form of assistance. Thus, they should either continue to be eligible to apply for accommodation benefit or have access to some other form of assistance.

#### Different Situations for Pakeha, Maori and Pacific Islands Young People

Several Pacific Islands community agencies who participated in the ICA study were concerned that the ICA provisions did not take into account the unique needs of Pacific Islands young people and that, furthermore, the concepts of "independence", "home" and "parents" needed to be examined with specific reference to the Pacific Islands cultural context. It may be that some Pacific Islands young people do not receive ICA because the eligibility criteria do not take these issues into account.

Thus, the proposal to use ICA to determine which young people will be able to receive accommodation benefit may disadvantage some cultural groups. It is felt that the following questions need consideration:



1. Have the concepts of "independence", "home" and "parents" been examined in relation to Maori and the Pacific Islands cultures?
2. What will be the impact of this proposal on Maori and Pacific Islands young people and their families?

### Conclusion

It is considered that information from the ICA evaluation study strongly supports consideration of the following in relation to the accommodation benefit policy review:

1. That the proposal should be extended to include not only ICA recipients but also Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home.
2. That the entry threshold for Youth Allowance recipients who do not live at home should be set at 25% of their actual rate of benefit.
3. That the provision of information about the accommodation benefit needs to be improved.
4. That some aspects of the administration of accommodation benefit by district offices need to be examined.
5. That the assumption that parents will be helping to support their young people living at home will not always apply and that some form of assistance needs to be available for young people when parental support is not provided.
6. That the implications of the proposal for different cultural groups need to be examined.

## Appendix 1

Numbers and Proportions of 16-17 Year Olds on Unemployment Benefit for 12 Month Period to 31 March 1990

ICA Recipients			Youth Allowance Recipients Not Living at Home		Youth Allowance Recipients Living at Home	
31 Mar 89	587	(18%)	247	(8%)	2343	(74%)
30 Jun 89	1176	(21%)	423	(8%)	3970	(71%)
20 Oct 89	1663	(22%)	614	(8%)	5208	(70%)
31 Dec 89	2007	(26%)	596	(8%)	5106	(66%)
31 Mar 90	1908	(30%)	536	(8%)	3976	(62%)

Source: Statistics Unit, DSW.

For Appendix 2 to this submission see the following Sections from the Literature Review (Appendix I of this report): Reasons for Young People Leaving Home and Mobility, Income and Indebtedness.

## Appendix 3

Average Amount of Accommodation Benefit for All<sup>1</sup> ICA Recipients and Youth Allowance Recipients Not Living at Home

As at	ICA Recipients (\$)	Youth Allowance Recipients Not Living at Home (\$)
31 Mar 89	4.26	3.43
30 Jun 89	5.11	3.69
15 Sep 89	5.32	3.97
31 Dec 89	5.64	3.74

<sup>1</sup> Includes those who were not receiving an accommodation benefit

Source: Statistics Unit, DSW

Average Amount of Accommodation Benefit for ICA Recipients and Youth Allowance Recipients Not Living at Home in Receipt of an Accommodation Benefit

As at	ICA Recipients (\$)	Youth Allowance Recipients Not Living at Home (\$)
31 Dec 89	10.4	8.4
31 Mar 90	10.7	8.4

Source: Statistics Unit, DSW