Taking the Pulse

A Survey of Social Services in Ashburton

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We would like to thank the following organisations for their participation:

- Ashburton Alcohol and Drug Service
- Ashburton Budget Advice
- Ashburton Council of Social Services
- Ashburton District Council
- Ashburton Senior Citizens
- Birthright Ashburton
- Presbyterian Support
- Society of St Vincent de Paul
- Ashburton Salvation Army Community Food Bank
- Work and Income New Zealand.

Welcome to the third issue of 'Taking the Pulse'

'Taking the Pulse' is the report of a quarterly survey of social services in Ashburton. The survey aims to keep a 'finger on the pulse' of demand for key indicator social services within Ashburton District and of the sector's ability to respond. This is particularly important at the moment as changes in the economic climate are likely to be having an impact in the district.

The survey project was developed by ASHCOSS and Ashburton District Council's community planning unit as a response to local and nationwide concerns regarding how the social service sector is managing in a changing economic climate. It aims to identify the social impacts; specifically changes in service demand and funding; and the capacity of the sector to respond to such changes in our district. It is intended that the survey may provide information to enable or help inform effective responses to possible arising issues.

This report contains the results from the third round of the survey and focuses on changes that have occurred in the sector and community between October 2009 and January 2010.

What We Found

Survey results highlight that while most of the agencies surveyed are still experiencing a high level of service demand, on the whole the level of demand appears to be stabilising. The majority reported that their client base has either stayed the same or decreased in the past three months, yet current clients are requiring assistance in a wider range of areas. This appears to show that either the situation for those who do need assistance is getting worse, or that people are now coming forward to get the assistance they require when they may have delayed doing so in the past. If placed on a continuum, it appears that our social services are still operating somewhere between 'business as usual' and 'increased demand/pressure', yet no longer on the increasing trend which has been seen over the last six months.

Key Findings

Increase in Income Benefits

- For the quarter ending December 2009, the number of people receiving the unemployment benefit has increased more than three-fold compared to the same time in the previous year.
- The number of recipients of the unemployment benefit has also increased in comparison to three months earlier. Since the last 'Taking the Pulse' report, the rate of uptake of the unemployment benefit has risen by an additional 17 recipients, however this increase is at a slower rate than was experienced in the previous quarter (June-September).

Areas of Client Demand

- Overall, clients are requiring increased levels of assistance in a wider range of areas compared to the previous quarter.
- Health, social support, housing and requests for food were the areas reported as having the greatest increases in demand for client assistance across the social service sector for the quarter ending January 2010.

Volunteer and Paid Staff Support

- The majority of organisations surveyed are now reporting that the number of staff, hours worked and workload has remained at the same level compared to October 2009. This is the case for both volunteer and paid staff, however the trend has been more pronounced among volunteer staff, with some still experiencing increasing trends for their paid staff.
- On the whole, this seems to indicate that the current levels of staffing are meeting the level of demand, and provides a further indication that the previous trend of demand increasing, is now beginning to ease.

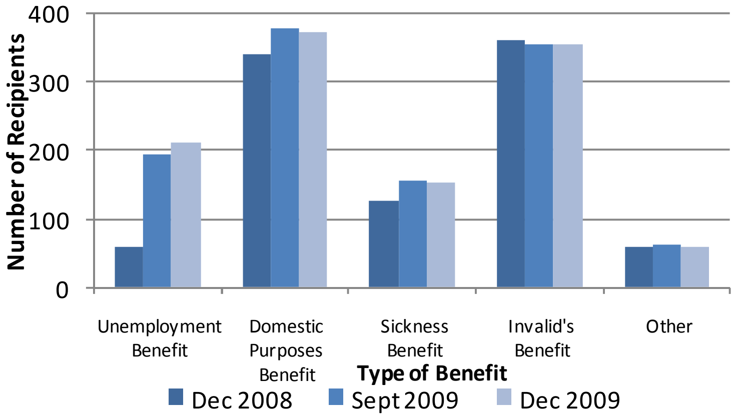
Income Benefits

The overall number of income benefits administered by Work and Income in Ashburton District has increased from 947 in December 2008 to 1152 in December 2009. This is also slightly up from the figure for the quarter ending September 2009, which was recorded at 1146 recipients.

The most significant increase is for the unemployment benefit, with over three times the number recipients compared to December 2008. Unemployment benefits now account for 18% of all main income benefits received in Ashburton District compared to only 6.2% in December 2008. This has also increased since the last "Taking the Pulse" report in October, with an additional 17 individuals of working-age (18 - 64) receiving unemployment benefit. While the number of recipients of the unemployment benefit continues to increase, the rate of uptake appears to now be slowing.

Both the Sickness and Invalid's benefits had a greater number of recipients in December 2009 compared to 12 months earlier, however there has been a slight decreasing trend in the number of recipients of the Domestic Purposes, Sickness, Invalid's and Other benefits since September 2009 .

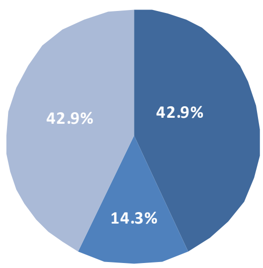
Fig. 1: Number of Ashburton District Residents Receiving Income Benefits – Comparison for the Quarters ending December 2009, 2008 and



Source: Ministry of Social Development – Territorial Authority Benefit Factsheets; www.msd.govt.nz

Client Base Changes

Fig. 2: Changes in social service agencies' number of clients

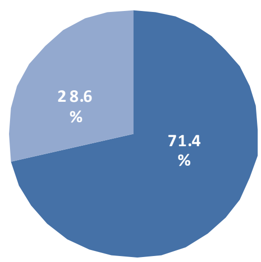


43% of social service agencies surveyed reported an increase in the number of clients on their books since October 2009. This has decreased from 86% of organisations reporting an increase in the last three-month report period. 43% of the agencies surveyed noted no change to the number of clients, and one organisation reported that there had been a decrease in their number of clients. This is the first time that a decrease has been reported since this survey started in July 2009, and in conjunction with the decreasing percentage of organisations who are gaining clients, this could indicate that the demand placed on social service agencies by the number of clients requiring services is beginning to subside.

The majority of agencies surveyed (60%) reported that they are not actively seeking clients at present.

Fewer agencies reported noticeable demographic changes to their client base compared to the reporting periods ending July and October 2009. Of the 29% of organisations who reported changes in their client base, socio-demographic factors such as fewer families and an increasing trend of employed people seeking assistance were noted.

Fig. 3: Social service agencies who have noted a change in their client's demographics



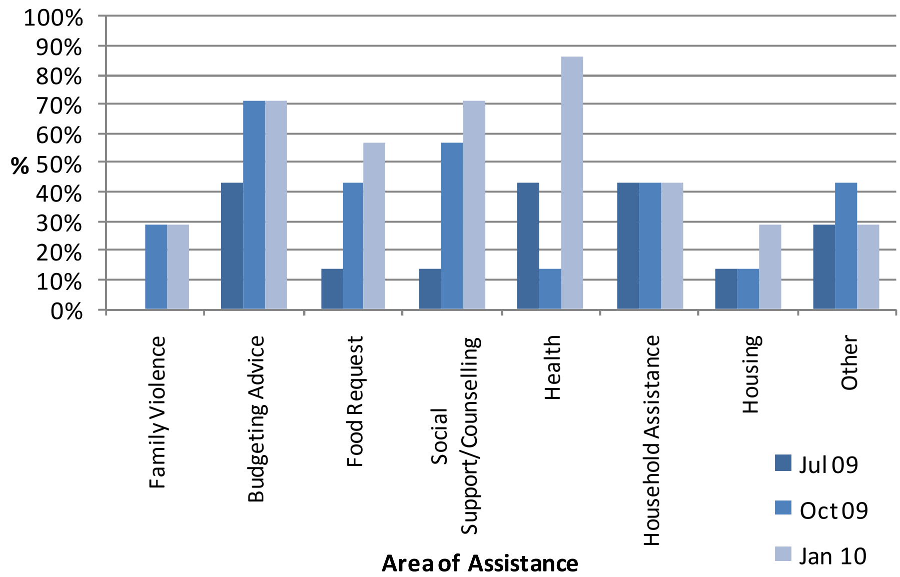
Survey Methodology

A short questionnaire has been designed which focuses on service demand, funding, and staff and volunteer support of social service organisations. The survey is to be repeated at three-monthly intervals to track any changes and emerging trends.

The survey is completed by a cross-section of local social service agencies identified as being likely to provide a leading indication of changes occurring in the sector. This has provided a small group of ten participants with a mix of central government and non-government organisations. The participant base has been kept small to enable a quick turn-around of survey administration and results, meaning trends reported are as up to date as possible.

Client Demand for Service

Fig. 4: Proportion of Agencies Reporting Requests for Assistance by Category, October 2009 - January 2010



Two of the seven survey respondents (29%) reported that their average client's needs have increased in the three month period October 2009–January 2010. This is down from 57% reporting an increase for the period ending October last year. All of the organisations noticing increasing requirements of clients in the previous three months state that this increase is expected for this time of the year, with the financial impact of the Christmas period beginning to hit and costs associated with the start of the school year. No organisation reported that their average clients' need had decreased since October 2009. This suggests that while demand for service may be continuing to rise in some areas, on the whole the pressure appears to be easing.

Areas of Requested Assistance

Overall, clients appear to be requiring assistance in a wider range of areas. Every agency surveyed has reported an increase in demand in at least one area of assistance, with greater proportions experiencing further demand increases in the areas of food requests, social support/ counselling, health and housing.

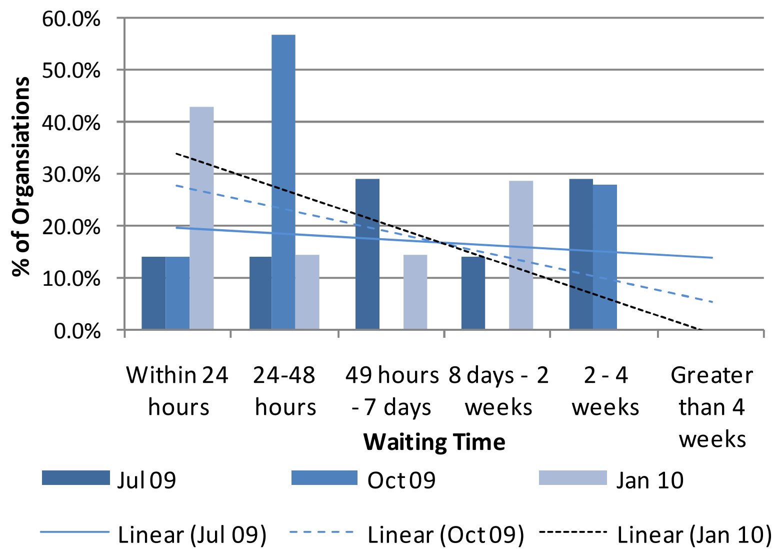
Of particular note is the demand in the health area (such as appointment costs, mental health and emotional support) which has risen significantly in the past three months. 86% of organisations surveyed are now reporting increased demand in this area, compared to 14% in October. This shows that people are approaching a wider range of social service organisations for assistance of this these types.

The 'Other' category was the only area which was less frequently reported than in October. The two organisations who did report other areas of support required by their clients noted that this was due to costs associated with the start of the school year.

> ***"Overall, clients appear to be requiring assistance in a wider range of areas"***

Client Wait Times

Fig. 5: Average Client Waiting Time July 2009, October 2009 and January 2010



The average length of time a client must wait from the time they are first referred or request assistance, to the time they are first seen is shown in Fig.5. The trend shows that as at January 2010, clients are being seen sooner than they were in October and July of last year, with the majority of organisations able to see a client within 24 hours (43%).

Images kindly supplied by Ashburton Online

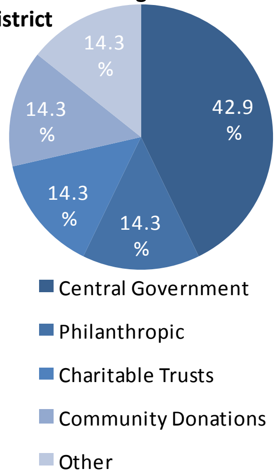
Funding

In January financial support from grants, gaming trusts, investments, subscriptions corporate and community donations were reported as sources of funding by a greater proportion of survey respondents. The most significant increase was the category of community donations with 57% of organisations receiving financial support from this source, up from 29% in October.

Compared to October 2009, a decrease in funding received from philanthropic and charitable trust sources was reported.

Central government remains the major funder for most respondents, with 43% of organisations surveyed receiving the bulk of their funding from this source.

Fig. 6: Major Source of Funding for Social Service Agencies in Ashburton District



Staff

Paid Staff

The average number of hours worked per paid staff member per organisation as at January 2010 was 18.1 hours per week, slightly higher than for the last survey period (17.5).

The proportion of organisations who are reporting an increase in the number of paid staff and the number of hours worked has decreased for the quarter ending January 2010 compared to the previous quarter. Coupled with the majority of respondents commenting that the number of paid staff, paid hours worked and range of duties expected of paid staff have remained the same as at the time of the last report, it appears that the level of resources required to meet the level of demand is beginning to balance.

Volunteers

Of the organisations who have volunteers, the average number of hours worked per volunteer reported in January 2010 was 1.4 hours per week, slightly less than reported in the last quarter, (1.5).

Fig. 7: Paid Staff Changes, January 2010 compared to October

Paid Staff Changes, October 2009 - January 2010			
	Increase	Decrease	Status Quo
Number of Paid Staff	17%	0%	83%
Number of Hours Worked	43%	0%	57%
Range of Duties Expected	50%	0%	50%

Fig. 8: Volunteer Staff Changes, January 2010 compared to October 2009

Volunteer Staff Changes, October 2009 - January 2010			
	Increase	Decrease	Status Quo
Number of Volunteer Staff	0%	14%	86%
Number of Hours Worked	0%	14%	86%
Range of Duties Expected	0%	0%	100%

For the quarter ending January, survey results show that changes in the number of volunteers, hours worked and range of duties expected are no longer following the increasing trend previously reported.

With 86% of organisation reporting that both the number and hours of volunteers has remained unchanged; and 100% reporting no change in duties, this suggests that current needs are being met by the present level of volunteer staff.

Summary – January 2010

Income Benefits	✘
Client Base Changes	=
Demand for Service	✘
Client Wait Times	✓
Funding	=
Paid Staff	✓
Volunteers	✓

Key:

Situation improved	✓
Situation worse	✘
No change or unclear	=

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