



MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
*Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora*

**Evaluation of  
Avenues:  
A Pilot of a Modified  
Domestic Purposes  
Benefit-Sole Parent  
Application Process**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **The Avenues pilot**

The Avenues pilot tested an assumption that enhanced case management would reduce the number of people who pursued a DPB-SP application. Sole parents and caregivers who applied for the Domestic Purpose Benefit (DPB-SP) participated in an interview with a client advisor. The Avenues interview was designed to facilitate in-depth exploration of the issues faced by, and possibilities for, potential DPB-SP applicants. Unlike the standard benefit application process, there was flexibility in the interview site and through the allocation of more interviewing time, opportunity to explore a greater range of issues.

### **The evaluation**

A mixed-method approach was used in the evaluation. This incorporated database analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants and Work and Income (a service of the Ministry of Social Development) staff, a telephone survey with participants, and a pilot outcomes/impact analysis.

The evaluation objectives were:

- to assess the extent to which Avenues was implemented as intended, including a description and comparison of the intended and actual operation of Avenues
- to assess the extent to which Avenues achieved its intended objectives
- to assess the outcomes for Avenues DPB-SP applicants, including the income support options taken up and any other outcomes
- to assess the impact of Avenues on DPB-SP applicants, on Work and Income staff and on Work and Income administration of the DPB-SP application processes.

### **The implementation and operation of Avenues**

Avenues bought flexibility to the location of client-client advisor interviews and the additional time allowed for interviews enabled in-depth exploration of issues and options.

However, participation in the pilot was lower than expected, primarily because of an intentional redirecting of people to the standard application process when client advisors were unable to meet the demand for interviews. There were logistical and safety issues attached to a home-based interview option. It proved difficult to identify optimal resource levels and there were ongoing difficulties matching staff supply and client demand in rural areas, where client advisors had to travel large distances between interviews.

### **The outcomes**

Avenues met the objectives to inform participants and assist them to consider the range of possible options available, prior to application for the DPB-SP. Avenues did not alter the portion that proceeded to apply for the DPB-SP.

## **The impact**

The introduction of Avenues did not affect the number of DPB-SP applications received in the pilot sites, or the portion of applications that were ultimately granted or declined. Avenues did not affect the rate at which people moved onto the benefit or the rate at which they subsequently left. Uptake of a core benefit after initial contact with Work and Income was faster for Avenues participants than for non-participants.

## **Conclusions**

While some operational concerns were raised in the evaluation, for the most part, the pilot was implemented and operated as intended. This suggests the pilot's failure to alter participants' behaviour stems from conceptual issues of design and logic, rather than the pilot simply not performing as intended.

Work and Income staff and clients expressed positive views about the pilot, although some criticisms were also made. The pilot's failure to produce the desired changes in DPB-SP application levels and the associated financial savings makes it difficult to justify further investment. The pilot ceased operating, as planned, in January 2002.

# 1 Introductory Overview

## 1.1 Evaluation context and stakeholders

This report was prepared by the Ministry of Social Development's (MSD) Employment Evaluation and Research group (ERE). The evaluation was undertaken at the request of MSD-Operational Policy<sup>1</sup>. It was done in consultation with MSD-Policy, MSD Evaluation, MSD Forecasting and Modelling, and Treasury officials.

## 1.2 Overview of Avenues

### 1.2.1 Intention and objectives of Avenues

The express intention of Avenues was to bring a more individualised approach to the front-end of the process for people who approach Work and Income, a service of MSD, for financial assistance to support themselves and their families<sup>2</sup>. Avenues aimed to do this by improving the provision of information and the consideration of alternative options for DPB-SP applicants within a more flexible interview context. The pilot was developed to test this modification to the process.

The objectives of Avenues were:

- to provide individualised information to potential DPB-SP applicants prior to their application, to ensure that they are aware of the range of possible options available to them, including for the financial support of themselves and their families
- to assist potential DPB-SP applicants to consider the available options in their personal context, in order to make informed choices appropriate to their specific circumstances and needs.

It was expected there would be a change in the extent to which various options for financial support were pursued by participants. Specifically, it was expected there would be an increase in the proportion who took up options other than the DPB-SP, and a commensurate decrease in the uptake of the DPB-SP. It was based on an assumption that the assistance would help potential applicants consider and pursue alternatives for meeting their financial support needs, to a greater extent than happens amongst non participants<sup>3</sup>. Reducing the number of DPB-SP applications and, in turn reducing DPB-SP benefit expenditure, was a key success criterion for the pilot.

### 1.2.2 Rationale for Avenues

The Avenues pilot was developed and implemented by MSD-Operational Policy in response to:

- anecdotal evidence suggesting the current DPB-SP application interview process may not allow sufficient exploration of applicants' situations to determine whether the DPB-SP is the best option for individuals and their families. For example, some DPB-SP applicants would be better off if they remained in, or sought, part-time employment,

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<sup>1</sup> Work and Income-Operational Policy prior to 1 October 2001.

<sup>2</sup> MSD-Operational Policy (February, 2001). Proposal: Domestic Purposes Benefit – Early intervention home visit pilot.

<sup>3</sup> In turn, based on an assumption that this type of assistance is not consistently provided by Work and Income in the standard application process.

supplemented by low-income earner assistance from Work and Income and/or the Inland Revenue Department

- information from a small-scale trial in the Work and Income East Coast region which used a modified application interview focusing on benefit eligibility, and reported that 17 of 38 DPB applications were declined as a result<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.2.3 Description of the Avenues pilot

In the pilot, people who contacted Work and Income to apply for the DPB-SP had an interview with a client advisor. This interview was additional to the standard DPB-SP application process, where potential applicants are referred directly to a case manager. Callers potentially eligible for other forms for DPB (i.e. Emergency Maintenance Allowance, Women Alone, Care of Sick and Infirm) were excluded from the pilot and followed the standard application process.

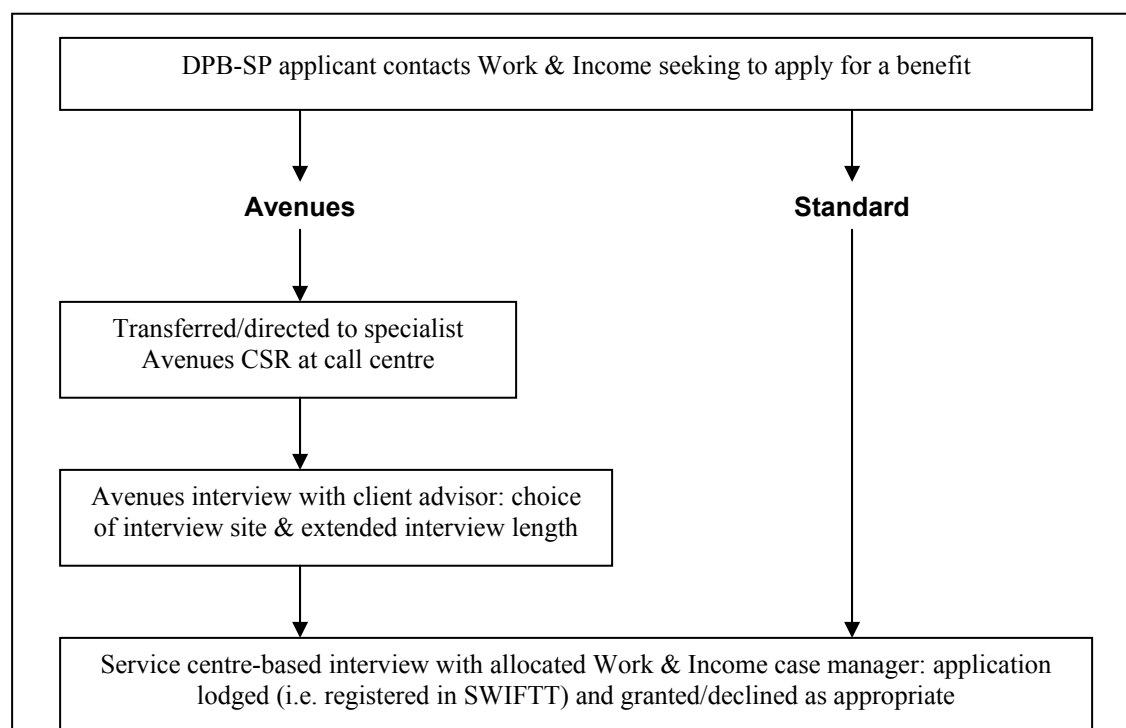
The Avenues interview was designed to facilitate more in-depth exploration of the issues faced by, and possibilities for, potential DPB-SP applicants. In contrast to standard interviews, there was flexibility in the site and more time was allocated. The purpose of the client advisor interviews was to ensure applicants made an informed decision about how to best meet their financial needs, which may include pursuing a benefit application.

Figure 1 summarises the key ways Avenues differs from the standard DPB-SP application process, presented from the perspective of applicants. The diagram represents the interactions people are required to have with Work and Income in order to progress their application. The diagram represents the process for applicants who progress their application through all the required stages, and is underpinned by the assumption that they actively review their decision at each stage.

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<sup>4</sup> The trial did not include comparison of participants and non-participants or any indication of the trends likely to occur without the initiative. The only information about 'normal' benefit take-up levels was the view of the investigator (and report author) that the benefits declined, cancelled or reduced through the initiative would otherwise have been granted or maintained by case managers. In contrast, the Avenues evaluation has considered impact through a comparison with non-pilot sites.

**Figure 1. Avenues and standard DPB-SP application process**



The Avenues pilot ran for six months, from 1 August 2001 to 30 January 2002, in 25 service centres across six Work and Income regions (see Table 1). The selection criteria for these service centres were identified in consultation with the then, Ministry of Social Policy and are listed below in order of priority:

- sites with a large number of DPB-SP applicants
- sites with no other major initiatives or pilots underway
- sites with applicants that have a mix of reasons for applying for a benefit
- sites with a balance of ethnic groups
- a mix of provincial and urban regions.

**Table 1. Avenues pilot regions and service centres**

Region	Service centres
Auckland South	Clendon, Mangere, Manurewa, Papakura
Bay of Plenty	Greerton, Mount Maunganui, Rotorua, Tauranga, Te Puke
East Coast	Flaxmere, Hastings, Napier, Taradale
Central	Dannevirke, Feilding, Horowhenua, Palmerston North, Palmerston North Terrace End
Nelson	Motueka, Nelson, Richmond, Stoke
Wellington	Porirua, Johnsonville, Kapiti



## **2 Evaluation of Avenues**

### **2.1 Scope and limitations**

The evaluation was expected to contribute to the pilot's development, operation, and organisational knowledge of its value. The evaluation's formative function meant close involvement in the design of the pilot by the evaluation team, which enabled early input into intended data collection processes. The application process used in the pilot was exploratory, so a primary function of the evaluation was to describe the implementation and operation. The evaluation also sought to provide information on participant outcomes and the contribution of the pilot to those outcomes.

Evaluation of the pilot was based on data collected from the trial period. Key aspects of Avenues were implemented and operated as intended. It is reasonable to conclude that the outcomes associated with the pilot are likely to be representative of those that would be achieved by the programme over a longer period of time.

Issues that are outside the scope of the evaluation include:

- the impact of Avenues on other agencies involved, eg Inland Revenue
- the extent to which the issues covered by client advisors in the Avenues interviews differ from their coverage in the standard initial DPB-SP application interviews conducted by case managers.

### **2.2 Evaluation objectives**

The evaluation objectives were:

- to assess the extent to which Avenues was implemented as intended, including a description and comparison of the intended and actual operation of Avenues
- to assess the extent to which Avenues achieved its intended objectives
- to assess the outcomes for Avenues DPB-SP applicants, including the income support options taken up and any other outcomes
- to assess the impact of Avenues on DPB-SP applicants, on Work and Income staff and on Work and Income administration of the DPB-SP application processes.

### **2.3 Evaluation methodology**

A mixed-method approach was used in the evaluation of the pilot, reflecting the evaluation's dual focus on design/implementation and outcomes/programme impact. Each method is described below.

#### **2.3.1 Databases**

An Excel database was developed for the pilot to record information about the Avenues process that could not be captured via the Work and Income benefit administrative database (SWIFTT). This included referral information and interview details such as duration and location. SWIFTT was used to provide information about client demographic characteristics and benefit uptake trends.

### **2.3.2 Interviews**

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews of approximately one hour duration were conducted in three regions: South Auckland, Central and Bay of Plenty. Interviewees included Avenues clients (n=22), and Work and Income client advisors (n=7), case managers (n=5), and call centre customer service representatives (n=4).

### **2.3.3 Telephone survey**

A telephone survey was conducted to explore alternative options pursued by Avenues participants who did not proceed with a core benefit application. The sample was drawn from the Avenues and the SWIFTT databases: clients selected were those who had not applied for a core benefit before 14 November, 2001. When these clients were contacted in the first week of December 2001, 59% of those contacted reported having applied for a core benefit which raised concerns about the rigour of the sampling technique and the possibility of a non-representative sample. Consequently, with one exception (see 3.16.1), findings from the telephone survey have not been included in this report (see section 7.1.2 for details).

### **2.3.4 Impact analysis**

Impact analysis was conducted to assess whether Avenues altered participants' decision to apply for the DPB-SP. A discontinuity with a baseline control was used which involved modelling the monthly number of applications, grants, and declines in the pilot sites. This used information on the number of applications, grants, and declines in non-pilot sites for two years prior to the introduction. Using this model, it was possible to estimate the expected number of applications, grants and declines in the pilot sites, if Avenues had not been implemented, and therefore its impact.

## **2.4 Evaluation resources**

MSD Operational Policy requested ERE to produce this report.. They reviewed and analysed Avenues documentation and, interviewed Avenues project managers. ERE staff analysed quantitative data from the Avenues operational database and from SWIFTT. A budget provided by Operational Policy was used to contract independent external researchers to undertake the in-depth interviews and a telephone survey.

## **3 Implementation and Operation of the Avenues Pilot**

This section describes and compares the intended and actual operation of Avenues.

### **3.1 Participants**

Avenues participants were predominantly female (80%), NZ European (40%) or Maori (38%), and aged between 20 and 40 years old (79%). Of those participants for whom the information was known, the majority sought income support as a result of separating from their partner (25%), transferring from another benefit (9%), ceasing paid employment (12%) or having a child/children come into their care (7%) (see Appendix 7.2 for further details).

### 3.2 Staff

To service the 25 service centres included in the pilot, Avenues commenced operating with the following staff:

- four customer service representatives (CSR's): recruited from existing call centre staff to explain the Avenues pilot to eligible callers and schedule client advisor appointments
- five co-ordinators: recruited from a variety of positions within Work and Income to provide administrative support for the client advisors and undertake data recording requirements
- ten client advisors: recruited from a variety of positions within Work and Income to conduct the client interviews.

Shortly after the pilot commenced, it became apparent that the number of potential participants exceeded client advisor capacity to offer Avenues interviews in a timely manner. Identified consequences of high client advisor workloads included:

- client advisors were sometimes unable to meet with participants in an acceptable timeframe
- client advisors were sometimes unable to meet with case managers in the intended two day timeframe
- client advisors were not always able to carry out follow-up visits to the extent they considered ideal: this was particularly applicable to participants who chose not to pursue Work and Income assistance but whom advisors felt were likely to re-enter the system at a later point
- client advisors did not have the time to actively maintain and develop their knowledge of local services – considered integral to their ability to provide a quality service to clients.

A number of strategies were used to manage these difficulties including:

- excluding some eligible participants from the Avenues pilot and redirecting them to the traditional benefit application system
- the appointment of four additional client advisors: two in Auckland South, one in the Bay of Plenty, and another 'floating' where needed
- client advisors conducting more than their allotted number of interviews per day to catch up, including assisting with other advisors' caseloads
- using Avenues' co-ordinators to conduct client interviews<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Occurring in a few instances, this was a departure from the intended role of co-ordinators and not covered in their initial training.

### **3.3 Resources**

The level of resources available to client advisors was generally considered sufficient to enable them to perform their roles, and plentiful in comparison with those in their former case manager roles. The key exception was the insufficient number of Client Advisors in some regions. Advisors felt there was sufficient flexibility to be able to conduct interviews of suitable length and detail. Material support was also described favourably (eg. cars, cell phones). Cell phones were considered an essential component of the programme, as they formed part of the security procedures developed to protect staff during home visits.

Increasing the level of material support was identified as one way of enhancing the Avenues programme. The provision of lap tops with an electronic connection would have enabled advisors to input data during home visits and email reports directly to case managers, thus improving the timeliness of the administrative component. This was particularly applicable in the case of rural-based advisors.

### **3.4 Security of staff**

Client advisors conducted home visits on their own, which deviated from organisational policy which requires staff to conduct home visits in pairs<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, extensive safety procedures were developed by the project manager and client advisors and incorporated into the process. All client advisors were trained in, and required to observe, these procedures, which included:

- carrying and using cell phones for security as well as convenience
- only visiting homes that were in cell phone range
- ensuring that their co-ordinator knew their destination and expected time of return
- telephoning their co-ordinator when they finished each home-based interview
- telephoning the Avenues project manager when they got home each day
- ensuring any dogs in residence did not present danger
- leaving a property at the first sign of danger.

The perceived safety risks were an issue for many staff: a few of the case managers interviewed for the evaluation revealed they had chosen not to apply for client advisor positions because of safety concerns about home visits. Ultimately, there were only a small number of incidents that presented a potential threat. However, some client advisors felt uncomfortable or unsafe, which was an important issue during the pilot's operation.

### **3.5 Interview scheduling**

Clients' introduction to Avenues was to occur when they initially contacted Work and Income to make enquiries about applying for the DPB-SP. Those clients who resided in the Avenues pilot areas were transferred to the dedicated Avenues CSR's who explained the Avenues process to them - including the requirement to participate in two interviews.

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<sup>6</sup> This was explicit in client advisor job descriptions.

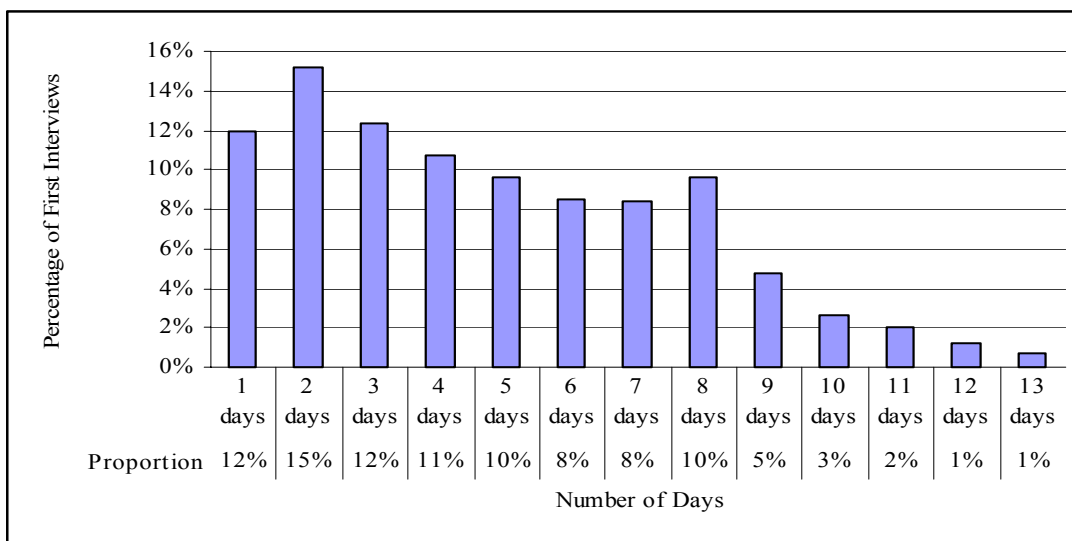
Call centre CSR's recorded basic client details; name and contact details, and scheduled two interviews: the first was with a client advisor in the client's area, typically scheduled to occur within 48 hours, and a second with a case manager, ideally within a few days of the initial interview. It was not intended that the CSR's would answer benefit queries, nor were they trained to do so.

Avenues interviews were scheduled as intended. CSR's allocated interviews to the client advisors usually scheduling four interviews per day per advisor, although sometimes advisors chose to conduct more interviews in order to clear a backlog. Clients were also scheduled for an interview with a case manager so that a benefit application could be registered if required, but this was cancelled if a benefit application did not proceed.

### 3.6 Interview timeliness

The majority of participants (60%) had a client advisor interview within five working days of their initial query to the call centre (see Figure 2). The desired standard was for interviews to occur within 48 hours of initial query: interviews occurred outside this period both because of high client advisor workloads and where clients specifically requested it.

**Figure 2. Length of time between initial contact and first client advisor interview**



n = 3,991 interviews

### 3.7 Interview location

In early policy documentation, the pilot was referred to as a 'home-based interview pilot', reflecting the intended focus. This focus shifted, however, and subsequent briefing papers to the pilot sites stated that applicants were to be given a choice of venue, which may include either a home-based or service centre-based interview. Ultimately, interviews were held in a variety of locations; the majority occurring in either the client's home or a service centre (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Location of client advisor interviews**

Interview location	Frequency	Percentage
Work & Income service centre	2145	51
Client's home	1903	45
Client relative/whanau home	44	1
Phone	84	2
Other <sup>†</sup>	40	< 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4216*</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* Frequency missing = 1

<sup>†</sup> Includes: Public place (n=5), Support person's home (n=5), Marae (n=1), call centre (1), Unspecified 'other' (n=27)

Participants provided varying accounts of the approach taken to the selection of interview location. Clients in some regions indicated they had not been given a choice, with a home visit being presented as the only option available to them. Client advisors in these regions confirmed most interviews were carried out in the clients' homes. Other clients expressed regret that a home-based interview had not been available as part of the pilot. CSR's reported having maintained a 'fairly rigid interpretation of the home-based interview requirement' during the early stages of the pilot, adding that this relaxed over time.

A number of factors may have contributed to the variation described above. In the early design phase, the intention was that all interviews would be home-based. By the time the pilot commenced, emphasis had shifted to a 'whatever-is-convenient-for-the-client' stance. It is possible staff involved in the pilot read or adhered to documentation produced at different stages of the pilot and consequently developed different understandings of the pilot's intention. Staff preference was a known factor: for safety reasons, at least one advisor ceased home visits before the pilot ended.

Clients reported a range of feelings about the merits of the different interview sites. Some of the clients described a preference for home-based interviews, primarily for reasons of convenience and privacy. Some clients had young children and found it difficult to arrange childcare so they could attend an interview, and/or limited (or no) access to affordable transport. One participant stated:

“Love the fact that [the client advisors] came out – [my ex-partner] took the car!”

Home-based interviews also allowed a degree of privacy not ordinarily available to clients. Typically, case manager interviews are conducted in open-plan sections of service centres. This privacy was valued highly by clients who typically disliked the idea of discussing personal and often distressing information in view of other people. One Samoan client described her embarrassment at her present predicament as a single parent and her subsequent relief at not having to 'face the gaze of her community' in a public place. Other comments made by participants similarly reflect this sense of relief:

“Unemployment... benefit [is] bad enough – [I]...hate it. [I]...hate going into the office.” “I thought it was to feel more comfortable, to meet... in your home... could speak freely.”

Other clients expressed a preference for office-based interviews. In some cases, this stemmed from a perception that the pilot was a checking mechanism, or it appeared clients were embarrassed about their home situation. Others preferred the formality attached to the office situation. These clients appreciated the interview occurring in a room that was separate from the rest of the office. One woman’s comment was typical of this:

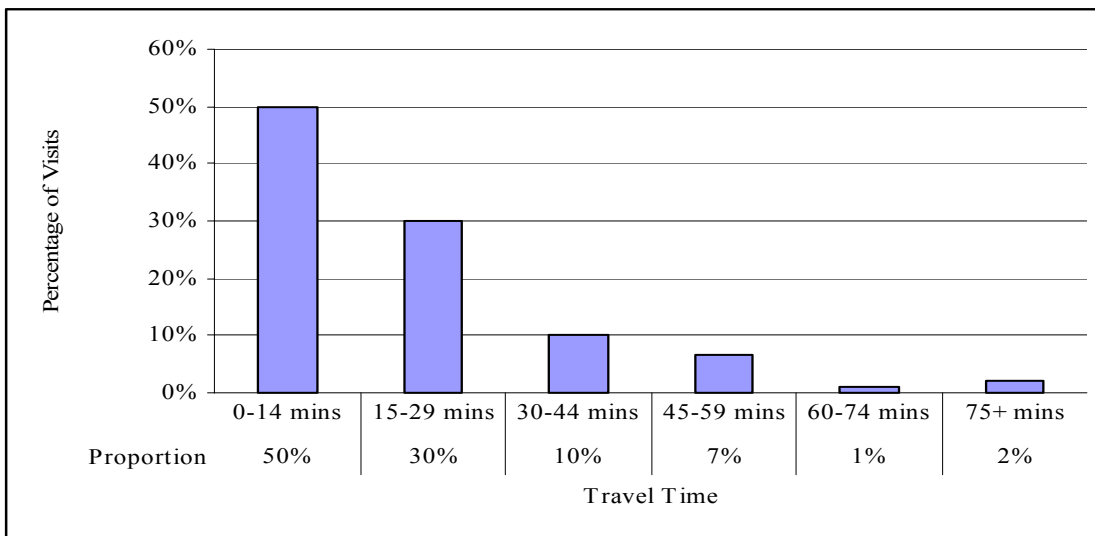
“Walking straight into an open place office made me feel vulnerable...[I] didn’t want to argue in public. [I was] relieved then to go to a private room.

The merits of home- versus office-based interviews were also discussed by client advisors, who reported the same types of benefits to clients as did the clients themselves. They also discussed the merits of the programme for the organisation and for themselves. On the positive side, client advisors suggested that out-of-office interviews allowed them to gather more comprehensive information and gain a better appreciation of clients’ circumstances and individual needs. Disadvantages reported by client advisors related to their personal safety.

### 3.8 Travel time

Allowing flexibility in interview venue meant that travelling time be built into client advisor schedules. The majority (80%) of out-of-office interviews required travel of less than thirty minutes (see Figure 3) But managing travel time of client advisors presented a logistical challenge and, ultimately, had major ramifications on the pilot’s operation. Lack of geographic familiarity meant call centre CSR’s sometimes allowed insufficient travel time when scheduling interviews, particularly in rural areas. In some cases, interviews needed to be postponed because the client advisor was running too late for the interview to proceed.

**Figure 3. Travel time involved in client advisor interviews**



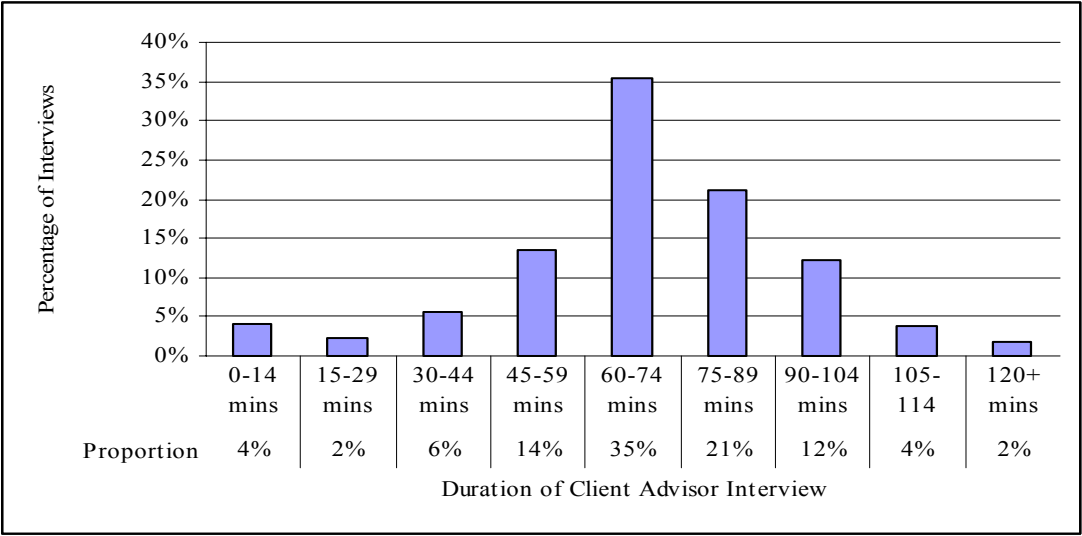
n = 4,216 interviews

**3.9 Interview duration**

Organisational procedures allow one hour for an initial DPB-SP interview. In the Avenues pilot, an additional half hour was allocated per client advisor-client interview, and additional time allocated for follow up interviews and processing.

Over half (56%) of the client advisor interviews lasted between sixty and ninety minutes, with 26% shorter than sixty minutes (see Figure 4). Both client advisors and clients suggested that the length of the interviews was appropriate. Clients reported that the interview time was sufficient for them to tell their stories and ask questions, while client advisors reported having sufficient time to listen to those stories, provide information about available options and ensure that clients were prepared for their interviews with case managers or other agencies and services. This suggests that advisors had the flexibility to match the duration to the needs and situation of individual clients.

**Figure 4. Duration of client advisor interviews**



n = 4,216 interviews

**3.10 Interview content**

Areas covered in the standard DPB-SP application process include the following:

- basic demographic data
- details about children and their place of residence
- housing arrangements
- reasons for applying for DPB-SP
- details about a partnership break-up, if relevant, including the nature of the current relationship, and any financial support and joint commitments
- current and previous employment and training experience
- current financial status.



As intended, a broader range and depth of issues were explored in the Avenues interviews. Information provided by client advisors typically involved the assistance available to participants and the implications of the different options. For those who were working, options for financial assistance included a mix of IRD-based and Work and Income-based assistance (eg Family Support through IRD, and the Childcare Supplement and Accommodation Supplement through Work and Income). For non-working clients, financial options included the DPB-SP and other assistance such as emergency grants to support them through the transition period. Other financial information provided included details about disability and ACC allowances, and budgetary services. Training and work-related information included Work and Income programmes, work test requirements, curriculum vitae-related assistance, and referrals to employment opportunities.

Relationship-related assistance was commonly provided during interviews, reflecting the high rate of relationship breakdowns amongst the group. Advisors reported talking to clients about their relationships, the nature of the break down that had pre-empted their search for assistance, and reconciliation possibilities. Information provided to clients often included Work and Income's definition of a relationship, which was often a surprise to clients, and information about custody options and protection orders. Clients were also given brochures and other information about related services such as Community Law Centres, the Citizens Advice Bureau, relationship services and counselling services.

### **3.11 Involvement of other staff and agencies**

The client advisor job description stated advisors were to work with other Work and Income staff and government and non-government agencies as required.

Ultimately, client advisors reported working with a range of government and community groups, reflecting their holistic focus and their clients' diverse backgrounds, needs and aspirations. Those most commonly cited included Child, Youth and Family Services, Housing New Zealand, and community-based services such as counselling, housing and budgeting assistance<sup>7</sup>.

Client advisors also reported working with staff from their regional offices; call centre staff, service centre staff, service centre managers, Work Brokers, and case managers. Client advisors worked closely with case managers in order to facilitate a flow of information about individual clients. Discussion typically centred on the situation and needs of individual applicants, and all advisors described the value of this interaction. In some locations client advisors gave presentations to other Work and Income staff about working with new DPB-SP clients and their particular needs.

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<sup>7</sup> Others included church groups, health providers, education and training institutions (for vocational, life skills, literacy and ESOL courses), Inland Revenue Department, Student Services, Plunket and other childcare services (particularly through the District Court), Citizens Advice Bureaux, Community Law Centres and other similar services.

### **3.12 Client distress & the emotional impact of participation**

During the pilot planning phase, it was recognised that participants might be distressed when they entered the Avenues process. Accordingly, the importance of sensitivity and flexibility in responding to participants' needs during interviews was emphasised. The client advisor interviews were often an emotionally demanding experience for clients, reflecting a variety of factors including:

- the general upheaval occurring in their lives and the anxiety many had about their current situation, particularly their financial position
- the need to revisit the events that had prompted the client's initial approach to Work and Income during the interview
- unhappiness with the need to seek government assistance
- the expectation that Work and Income staff would be judgmental and unfriendly, based on the disapproval encountered from others (eg family, community)
- the need to divulge various types of personal information necessary for Work and Income staff to ensure applicants meet the legislative requirements for assistance
- negativity about the interview itself amongst those who interpreted the pilot as a checking mechanism.

Participants responded to their Avenues interview in a variety of ways. For some participants, while the interview process had been difficult, it was also empowering. Positive consequences described by these participants included:

- feeling more optimistic about, and more in control of their future
- dispelling fears about Work and Income: as one client remarked, the interview allowed her to get over her image of Work and Income as a "*big bogeyman*"<sup>8</sup>;
- resolving concerns about seeking financial assistance, with some clients expressing relief that anticipated disapproval from Work and Income staff did not eventuate.

The following client quotes illustrate these outcomes:

"...interview was positive. When you first split up, you're a bit lost, wondering what you're going to do. It was useful from that point of view."

"...made me feel there is a future. It's up to me to choose. [It] made me feel a whole lot better as a person.

[The]...advisor was very good - not at all patronising. No one wants to look at getting a handout. He understood where I was coming from."

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<sup>8</sup> The evaluation did not examine the extent to which these positive initial impressions lasted as clients were absorbed into mainstream Work and Income services. From the limited data available, it appears that the goodwill and enthusiasm some people experience as a result of their positive 'first impression' with Avenues can be undone in a short period of time during subsequent interactions with other Work and Income staff (e.g. call centre CSR's or case managers). To some extent, this is inevitable: mainstream Work and Income services are not set up to provide the intensive and highly personalised assistance associated with programmes like Avenues.

Participants reported some concerns about the interview process. These included feeling judged by the client advisor, believing the advisor did not have the breadth of experience to understand their situation, and feeling that they had been encouraged to pursue options that were contrary to their personal preference.

To be effective, client advisors needed to demonstrate a range of skills and aptitudes commonly associated with social work. These included listening skills, being reassuring, responding empathetically to clients' troubles and recognising when counselling and other social services were needed.

Advisors also described tailoring the information they provided to reflect clients' circumstances, emphasising the need to balance comprehensiveness with client's ability to comprehend and absorb information. In the evaluation, advisors highlighted the risk of overwhelming clients with detail, suggesting it was more constructive to focus on clients' immediate needs and provide information about longer term options to a later point. As one advisor stated,

"When clients are distressed and traumatised..., the choices they are being given don't sink in. I need to be careful not to give too much information at one time. It takes time to understand it".

### ***3.13 Participants' understanding of the pilot***

Clients interpreted the purpose of the Avenues pilot in a number of different ways. Some accepted the official description of the programme's purpose, viewing the interview as an opportunity to work out entitlements, talk through training options, and receive additional information. Others were more sceptical, viewing the programme as a checking mechanism. This was exacerbated by the use of home interviews, perceived by some clients as an opportunity for staff to view their living situations first-hand.

Some of the participants reported expecting that client advisors would make a decision or recommendations on their behalf, thus making the subsequent case manager interview a formality. One of the participants interviewed for the evaluation referred to the client advisor as an assessment officer, expressing confusion about the perceived failure of the client advisor to make entitlement decisions. A number of clients had no previous contact with Work and Income and appeared not to understand how this process differed from others. One client recalled simply being informed that there would be two interviews.

Some change in clients' behaviour was observed over time. In the early stages of Avenues, some of the people residing in pilot areas would abandon their initial enquiries and call from a different area in the hope they could avoid the Avenues interview. Work and Income staff interpreted this as stemming from the perception that Avenues was designed as a checking device. Over time, CSR's noted an increased familiarity with the pilot. There were instances where people from outside pilot areas asked to participate in the Avenues programme, expressing disappointment when they were not able to.

### ***3.14 Interview follow-ups***

Client advisors followed-up with participants when necessary, typically if the client needed more time to decide what option(s) to pursue. Follow-up interviews were scheduled at the discretion of client advisor and reflected their assessment of the client's need and their own time constraints.

Client advisors conducted 116 follow-ups with participants. Some advisors reported that they had insufficient time to carry out the follow-up visits, particularly with people who did not pursue

Work and Income assistance but who advisors felt might re-enter the Avenues process later *when something fell apart for them.*

### **3.15 Subsequent case management**

Avenues participants, who decided to pursue a core benefit application, including the DPB-SP, then had an interview with an allocated Work and Income case manager. In the pilot sites, the role of case manager was to check the completed DPB-SP application form, verify the client's documentation, register the application on SWIFTT, grant the benefit as appropriate and complete a Job Seeker Agreement/Action Plan.

#### *3.15.1 Nature of changes to case management*

The case management process changed in a variety of ways as a result of Avenues. For clients who proceeded with a benefit application, the Avenues interview helped them to prepare for their case manager interview. Case managers suggested that in comparison with non-Avenues clients, Avenues clients arrived at their interviews better prepared, with the appropriate documentation and a clear view of what was required. They also suggested Avenues clients were more relaxed, because they had 'vented' their emotions at the earlier client advisor interview, which made for less stressful and more productive meetings.

Case managers were also generally better prepared for their initial client interviews as a result of the pilot. In most cases, consistent with the pilot's design, client advisors and case managers had met to discuss the applicant, prior to the client-case manager interview. In some cases this was not possible. In this instance, case managers relied on written notes provided by the client advisor. If case managers were able to input client advisor interview data prior to meeting the client, it meant their attention could be focused solely on the client uninterrupted by data entry tasks.

Case managers also described a reduction in the range of issues that needed to be covered during interviews, and a generalised reduction in the scope of case manager role. Response to the narrower scope of these preliminary interviews varied. Some described spending less time with clients; one such case manager suggested a typical initial interview took approximately 30 minutes compared with up to two hours previously. Others took the opportunity to explore the remaining areas in greater detail than had previously been possible. With the introduction of Avenues, these Case managers found they were now able to explore client entitlements more thoroughly and substantially less likely to require successive interviews to complete the application process. One case manager, reported being able to grant the DPB-SP before many of her clients left the initial interview, compared with the week she estimated it had taken previously.

#### *3.15.2 Feelings about case management change*

Case managers expressed different feelings about changes to their role. Some were positive, suggesting that more relaxed clients meant a more productive and nicer working environment. They also said that, by introducing a third party - the client advisors,- there was now enhanced transparency and accountability in the application process.

Other case managers expressed concern about the reduction in the scope of interviews, suggesting it led to de-skilling of case managers. One case manager described the role as

“...more of a processing unit now. Less personal and more process oriented”.

The opportunity to build rapport with clients was also seen to be diminished, because much of the more-personal dialogue now occurred at the client advisor-client level. Some case managers appeared uncomfortable about the need to rely on client advisors reports, expressing a preference for collecting information firsthand.

Others voiced doubts about the efficacy of splitting client advisor and case management tasks, perceiving a risk of duplicating resources and delaying the granting of a benefit. Concerns raised by Avenues participants about the repetition of information between the client advisor interview and the case manager interview lend some support to this argument. In the case of the client quoted below, it appears that the repetition described may have occurred because of a lack of clarity about the purpose of the Avenues interview and the role of the client advisor (reflected in the client's use of the term 'Assessment Officer' for client advisor) and is not inevitably a feature of a intervention like Avenues:

"I repeated the same things to the Case Officer [as the client advisor] because I didn't know what the other interview was for. The case manager sorted out entitlement. I thought the Assessment Officer would do that."

It does, however, highlight the importance of clear articulated parameters around each intervention, and of communicating those to clients. Introducing an additional party to the application process increases the opportunity for miscommunication and, therefore, the need to ensure consistency – as is highlighted in the following quote:

"I was told I could get furniture and case officer said I couldn't. I was getting conflicting information."

### **3.16 Meeting Avenues objectives**

The Avenues pilot aimed to assist potential DPB-SP applicants to consider the range of options, through the provision of individualised information. The extent to which the Avenues pilot met these objectives is discussed below.

#### **3.16.1 Awareness of options**

The majority of participants surveyed by telephone<sup>9</sup> indicated the Avenues interview had provided them with information on income assistance from Work and Income (77%) and that it had given them a better idea of how to think about their options (70%) (see Table 3). During the face-to-face evaluation interviews, participants also reported feeling better informed about non-financial assistance (eg counselling and budgeting services) as well as financial assistance, and emphasised the value of this information as a basis for working towards independence.

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<sup>9</sup> There are substantial limitations to this data and this sample cannot be considered representative of all Avenues participants (see Appendix 7.1.2).

**Table 3. Ways the Avenues interview helped participants**

<b>Ways the interview helped</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percent of respondents</b>
<b>Got information about income assistance from Work and Income</b>	140	77
<b>Got a better idea of my options and how to think about them</b>	131	70
<b>Got information about income assistance from Inland Revenue</b>	113	62
<b>Got a referral to another service or other services</b>	99	54
<b>Got information about job vacancies</b>	35	19

Source: telephone survey of Avenues participants (n=183)

Participants also found other information provided during Avenues interviews helpful including; protection orders and access arrangements, types of training opportunities available, the Work and Income definition of a relationship and assistance to establish the client's relationship status relative to that definition, the types of documentation clients would need to take to a subsequent case manager interview, and their possible eligibility for the types of assistance discussed.

### *3.16.2 Making informed choices*

It was apparent participants held a range of views about the interview's contribution to their decision-making process. Some participants felt the Avenues interview had helped them to make an informed choice by increasing their knowledge of options available to them. The comments below are typical of this view:

"It wouldn't have been as easy to make a decision if I hadn't had the Avenues interview. It made the time to sit down and really discuss the avenues and issues. [I] felt [I] really could ask about things."

"It gave me the information that I needed to get extra money. I didn't know about all the options before. I found it pretty helpful. I don't feel like I knew a lot about all the different benefits before I had the Avenues interview."

Other participants felt they possessed sufficient knowledge of their options prior to the interview. The Avenues interview had contributed little to their ability to make an informed decision and appeared to represent an unnecessary and sometimes unwelcome extension of the benefit application process. The comment below is typical of this view:

"I had already made my decision but had to go through the formality of the Avenues process. I had already been on a benefit before, so I knew my entitlements."

While it was not explored in the interviews, it is also possible that for some of the participants who felt informed prior to the Avenues interview, the information provided may simply have helped them to feel more confident in their belief that the DPB-SP was their best option.

## 4 Avenues Participation and Outcomes

This section examines the outcomes of people who approached Work and Income to apply for the DPB-SP, by mapping the procession of potential clients through the various stages of the application process.

### 4.1 *DPB-SP enquiries and Avenues participation*

The target group for Avenues was all solo parents/caregivers who approached Work and Income to apply for the DPB-SP benefit in the 25 pilot service centres between 1 August 2001 and 30 January 2002.

The total number of people who enquired about a DPB-SP during the pilot period is unknown, as the data collection procedures did not capture this information<sup>10</sup>. A total of 4771 people were ultimately referred to the pilot and a client advisor interview scheduled. These people met the requirements of location, timeframe and status and were consequently eligible to participate in the pilot (see Figure 5).

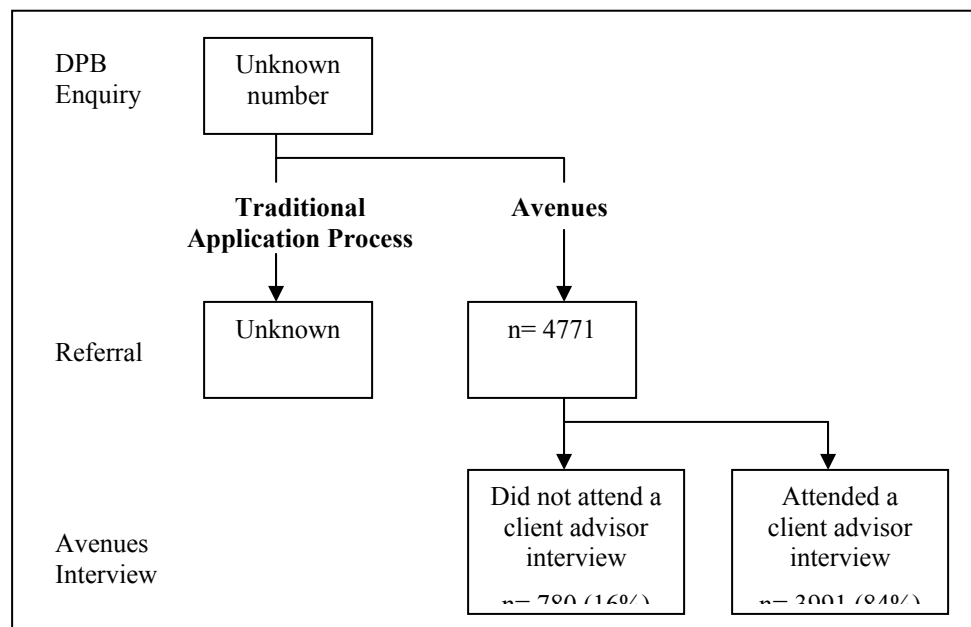
It is known that the number of people referred to Avenues represents only a portion of those people who were eligible to participate. An unknown number of eligible people were intentionally case managed through the standard DPB-SP application process because there were insufficient client advisors to service all eligible callers. It is also possible that a portion of eligible participants were not referred to Avenues because they approached their local service centre rather than going through the call centre where the screening of participants occurred.

Of the 4771 people referred to Avenues, 3991 (84%) attended the scheduled client advisor interview, while the remaining 780 (16%) did not attend (see Figure 5).

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<sup>10</sup> This figure would have been captured through the Avenues database, had all eligible people enquiring about a DPB-SP been referred to the pilot.

**Figure 5. Referral process in Avenues pilot sites**



#### **4.2 Benefit applications and application outcomes**

Applicants for Work and Income assistance<sup>11</sup> are allocated an identification number [SWN number] when their application is lodged in the SWIFTT system. A SWN number means it is possible to track their movement through the benefit system from the lodging of applications to the outcome of those applications, and establishes their previous contact with Work and Income (see Figure 7).

The majority of people referred to Avenues attended their client advisor interview (84%). Almost two thirds (64%) of this group proceeded with a core benefit application; typically a DPB-SP application. The majority of these applications (90%) were subsequently granted (see Figure 6).

Of the smaller group that did not attend their scheduled interview, a far smaller portion proceeded with a core benefit application (33%). It appears this non-attendee group may comprise two distinct groups of people. The first are those who decided not to proceed with a benefit application early on in the process and consequently did not need to attend a client advisor interview. The second group comprises those who knew they wanted to proceed with an application and did not want to participate in an intensive application process. These participants presumably found some way of circumventing the Avenues process.

The low number of other benefit applications by Avenues participants suggests that initial screening processes were effective; that callers were correctly identified as DPB-SP applicants at the initial screening.

An unknown number of people were managed through the traditional DPB-SP application process, even though they were eligible to participate in the Avenues pilot. A total of 2166 people from this group lodged a DPB-SP application following a case manager interview. Of this group, 1893 (87%) applications were granted (see Figure 6).

<sup>11</sup> Assistance may include a core or supplementary benefit or a community services card.

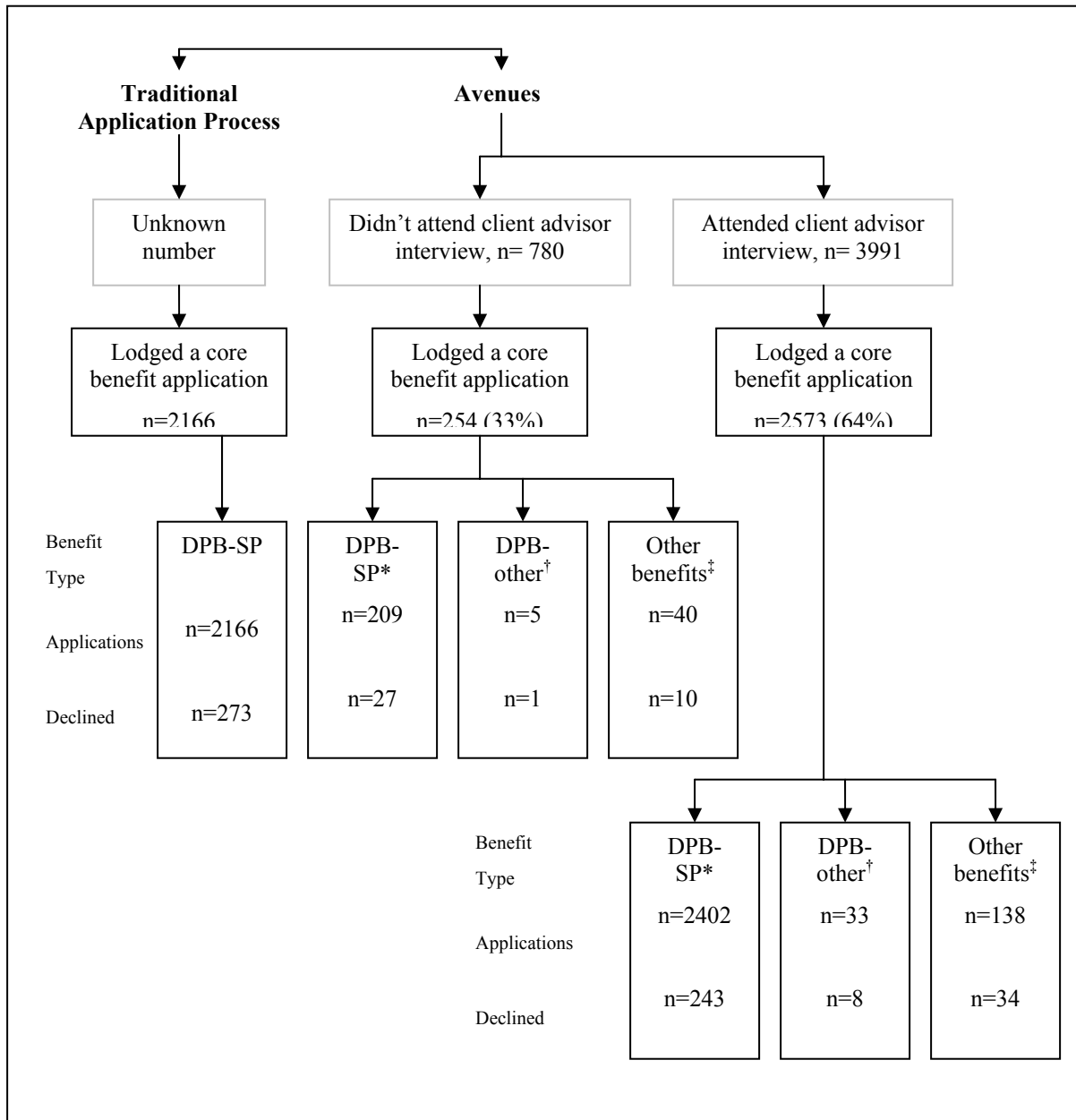


During evaluation interviews, participants commonly asserted they had contacted Work and Income believing that they were eligible for the DPB-SP and that it was the best option for them. The approval rates ranging from 87% to 90% supports that assertion. Avenues' contribution to participants' outcomes is examined in the impacts section (see section 5).

### **4.3 Background of applicants**

The majority of Avenues participants who proceeded with a benefit application were not in receipt of a core benefit when they initially approached Work and Income for assistance (79% of interview attendees and 77% of non attendees, see Figure 7). Similarly, the majority of DPB-SP applicants case managed through the standard process, were not in receipt of a core benefit when they initially approached Work and Income (66%). The remainder of applicants, both participants and non-participants, were receiving various types of core benefits. A small number of Avenues participants appeared to be transferring within the DPB-SP (1%) and should not have been included in the pilot.

**Figure 6. Benefit application and application outcome**

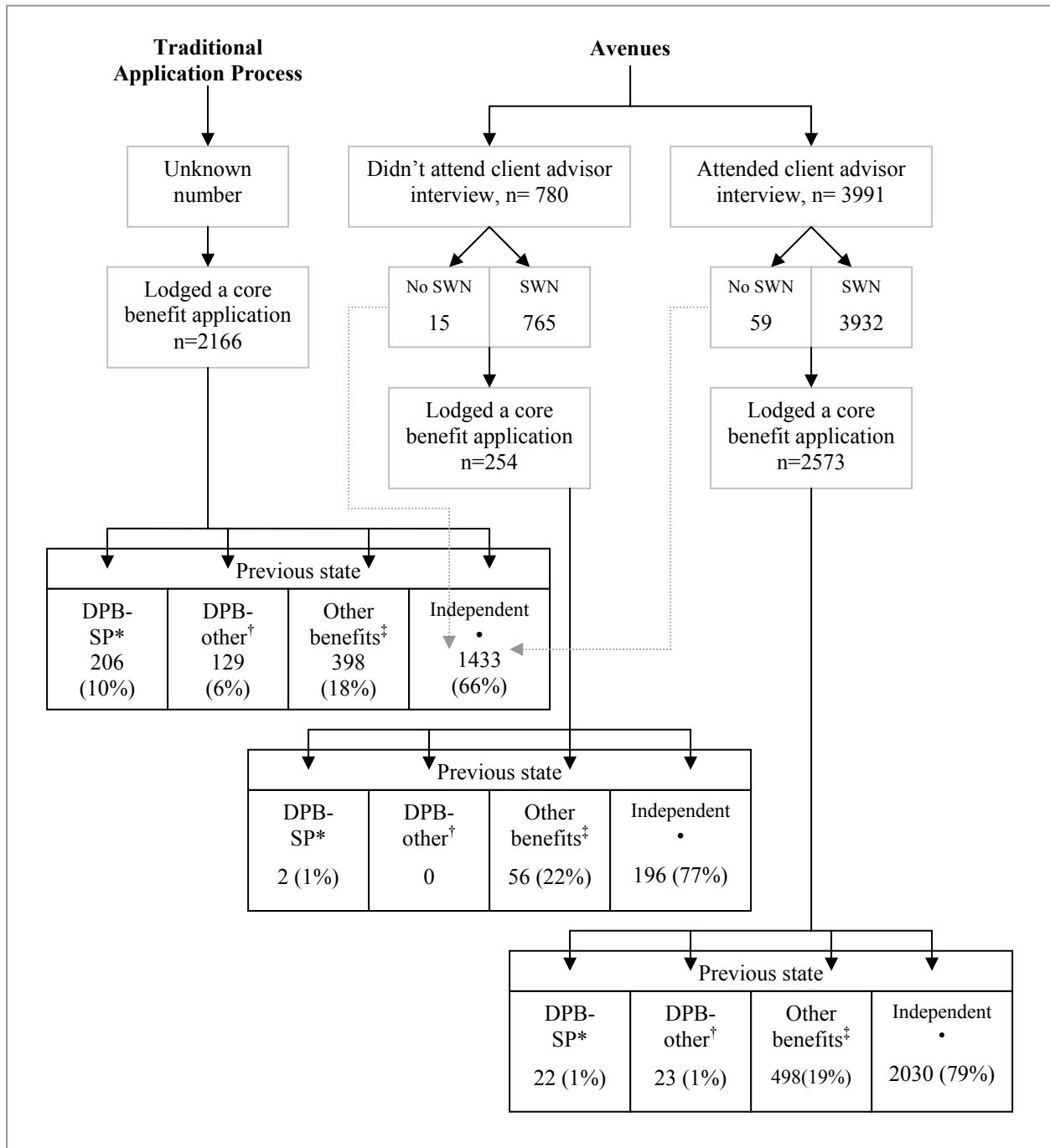


\* denotes DPB sole parent category

† denotes DPB CSI, Women alone & EMA categories

‡ denotes core benefit assistance excluding DPB

**Figure 7. Applicant background**



\* denotes DPB sole parent category

† denotes DPB CSI, Women alone & EMA categories

‡ denotes core benefit assistance excluding DPB

• denotes not receiving any core benefit (although could be receiving lower level Work and Income assistance)

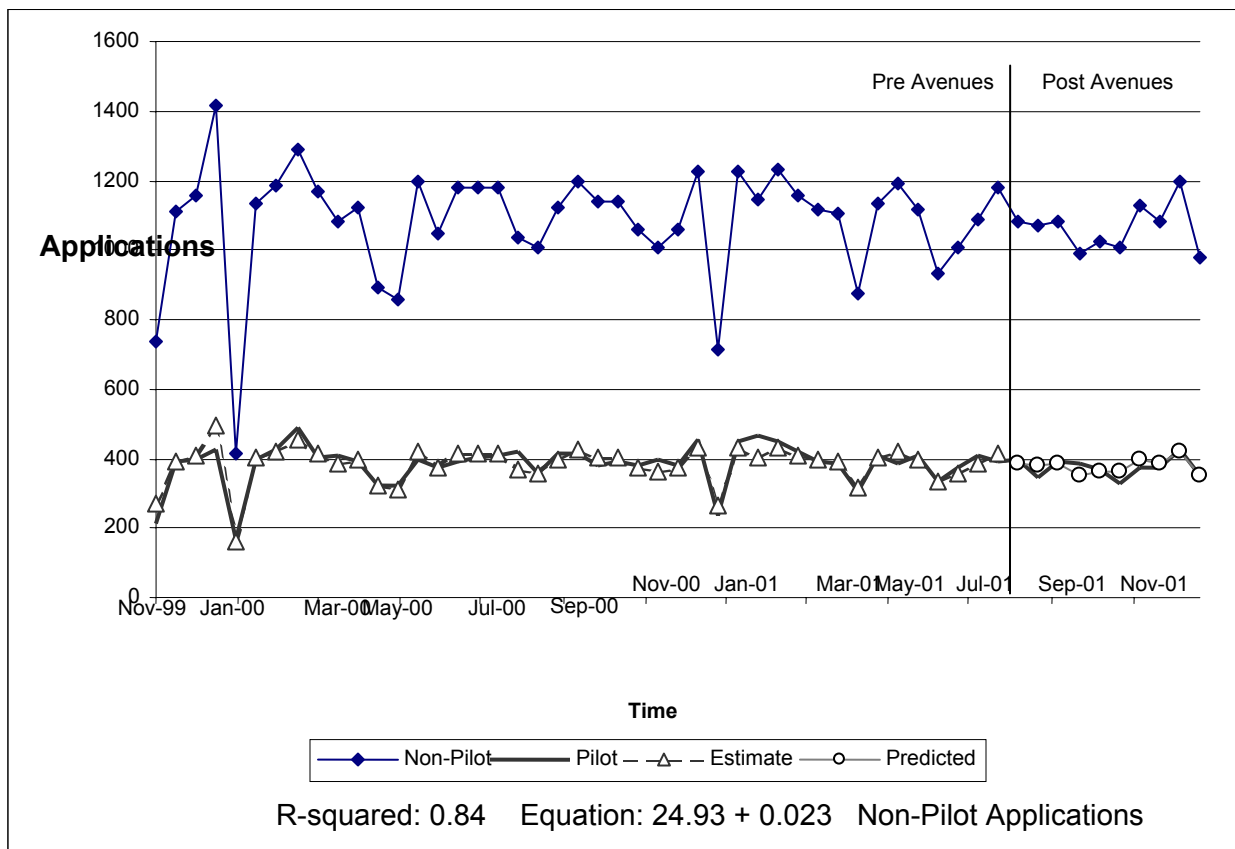
## 5 Impact of Avenues

The impact analysis involved an examination of DPB-SP application and approval levels, and of income support use.

### 5.1 DPB-SP applications

**Figure 8** shows the total number of DPB-SP applications received in pilot and non-pilot sites. The results of this analysis suggest that the introduction of Avenues had no significant effect on the number of DPB-SP applications received. This is demonstrated by the close correspondence between the actual number of DPB-SP applications received at pilot sites and the predicted number, based on their historical relationship. If Avenues had an impact on applications, there should have been a decrease in the number of applications from August 2001.

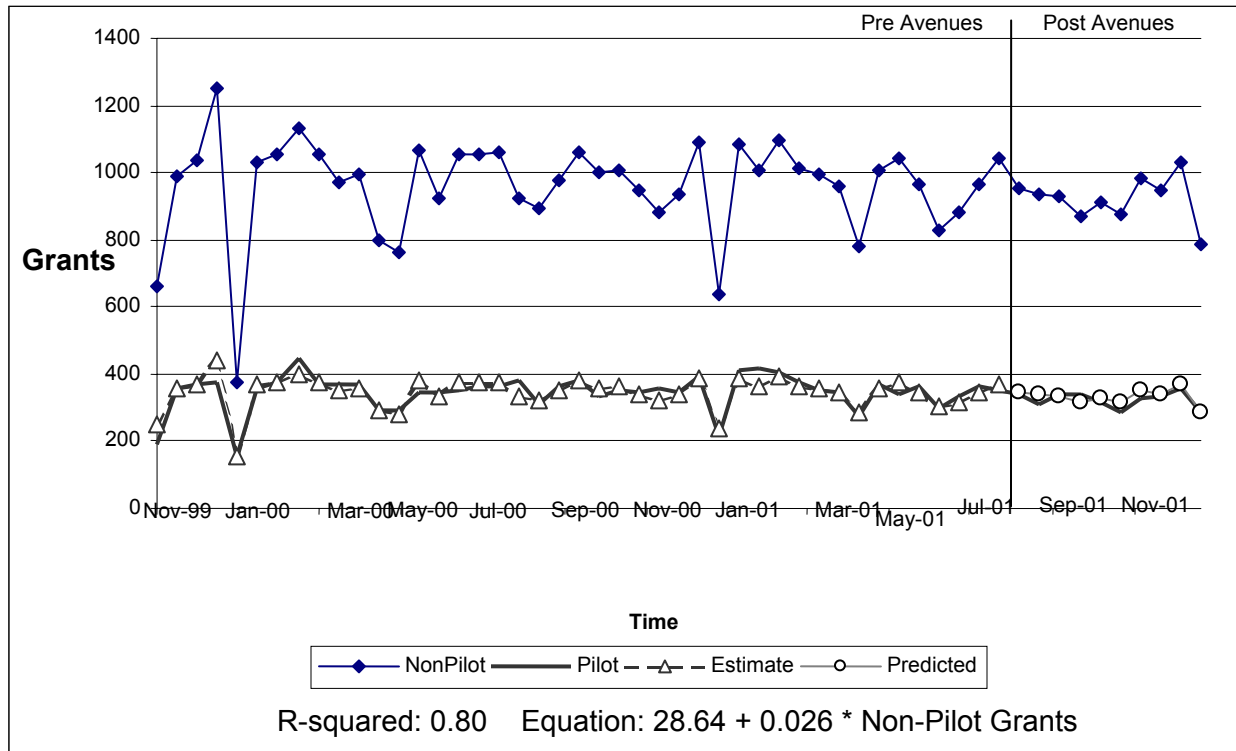
**Figure 8. Actual, estimated and predicted number of DPB-SP applications in pilot sites**



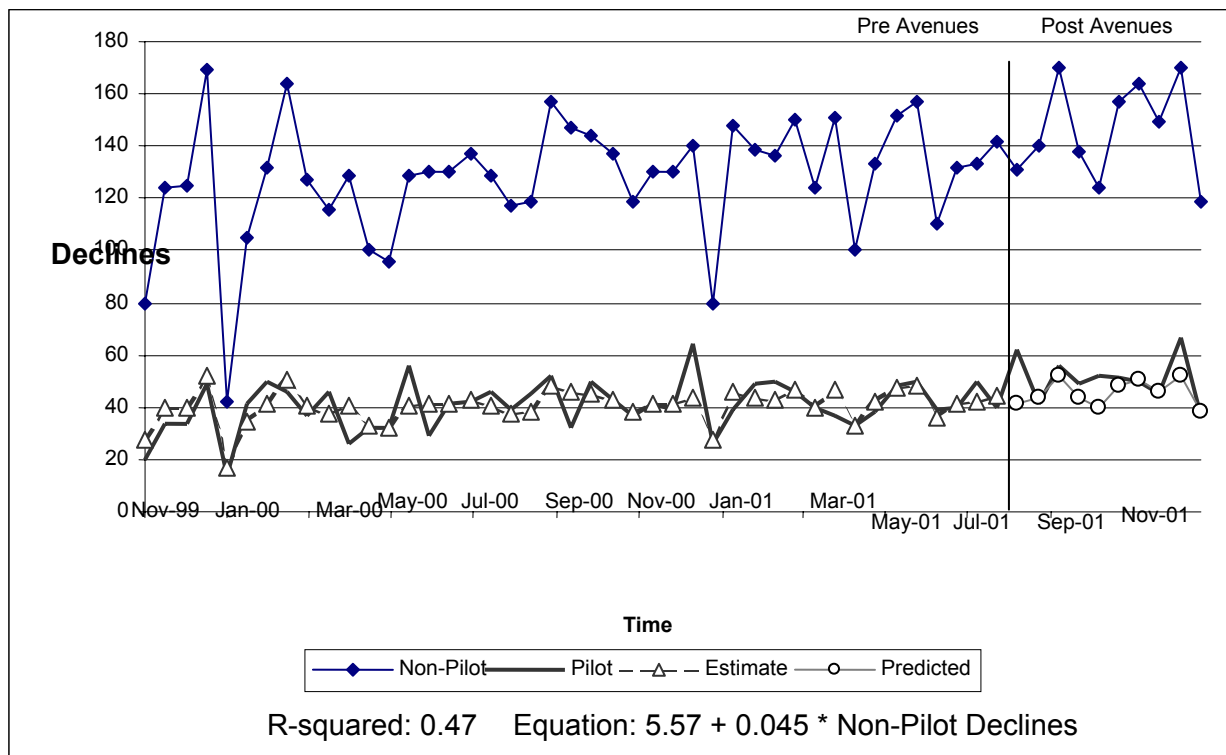
## 5.2 Impact on the level of DPB-SP applications granted and declined

Like the number of DPB-SP applications registered, the numbers of applications granted (see Figure 9) and declined (Figure 10) have not altered substantially from what would have been expected in the absence of the pilot

**Figure 9: Actual, estimated and predicted DPB-SP applications granted in pilot sites**



**Figure 10. Actual, estimated and predicted DPB-SP applications declined in pilot sites**

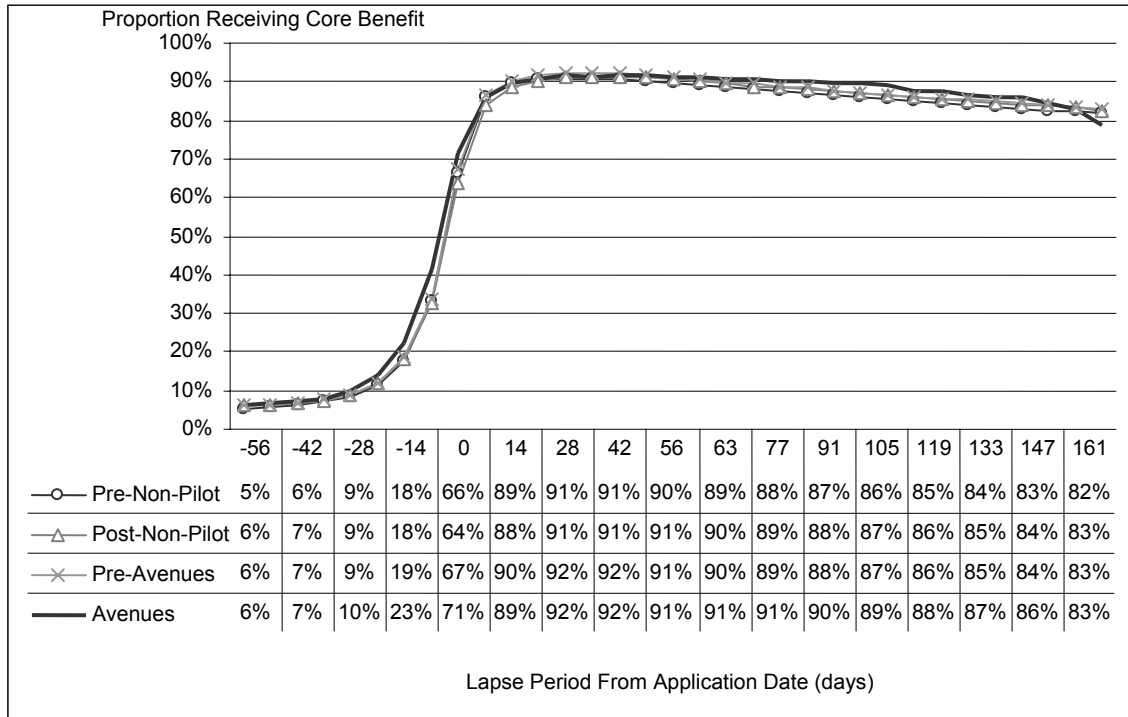


### 5.3 Cohort analysis of DPB-SP applicants: Patterns of core benefit use

A cohort analysis was used to see whether Avenues altered the patterns of income support use by DPB-SP applicants. This analysis examined the patterns of benefit use amongst DPB-SP applicants in the Avenues pilot sites compared with non-pilot sites, as well as applicants in both sites prior to the introduction of Avenues. The assumptions of this analysis are broadly similar to those made for the time series analysis in the previous section. That is, apart from the introduction of Avenues, there was no other systematic change in the benefit experience of DPB-SP applicants pre- and post- August 2001, or between the pilot and non-pilot sites.

**Figure 11** tracks the benefit status of four groups of DPB-SP applicants in the 8 weeks before, and the 160 days after, their application for the DPB-SP. In addition to the pilot sites, the three comparison groups include non-pilot sites, split between pre and post August 2001 and pilot sites prior to August 2001. There is little in the data to differentiate the pattern of benefit usage between DPB-SP applicants in the pilot sites to the three comparison groups.

**Figure 11: Proportion of DPB-SP applications receiving a core benefit in pilot and non pilot sites**





## 6 Conclusions

The evaluation found that potential DPB-SP applicants' choices about income support were not altered as a result of MSD facilitating informed decision making prior to benefit application.

While some operational concerns were raised in the evaluation, for the most part, the pilot was implemented and operated as intended. This suggests the pilot's failure to alter participants' behaviour stems from conceptual issues rather than the pilot simply not performing as intended.

It may be that people are unwilling to change course once they have made the decision to approach Work and Income for a DPB-SP and that any intervention at this stage is unlikely to have much effect. Another possibility is that people have already determined DPB-SP is the most appropriate assistance prior to contact. This is supported by other MSD research<sup>12</sup> which found that sole parents tend to become DPB recipients as a last resort and that alternatives have often already been explored and/or exhausted before an approach was made.

Work and Income staff and many of the participating clients expressed positive views about the Avenues pilot, although there were some criticisms. The pilot's failure to produce the desired changes in DPB-SP application levels and the associated financial savings, however, makes it difficult to justify further investment. The pilot ceased operating as planned in January 2002.

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<sup>12</sup> MSD. (2002). *Evaluating the February 1999 Domestic Purposes Benefit and Widows Benefit Reforms: Appendix 4 Part G* and MSD. (2002). *Evaluating the February 1999 Domestic Purposes Benefit and Widows Benefit Reforms: Summary of key findings*. \* Findings from this research were not available at the time the Avenues pilot commenced.

## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Evaluation methods

#### 7.1.1 Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in three regions where Avenues was piloted: South Auckland, Central and the Bay of Plenty. These sites were selected by Work and Income to include variation in:

- proportions of the different options taken up by Avenues clients (high/low proportion of clients going on to receive a main Work and Income benefit)
- urban/provincial/rural locations and the associated labour market characteristics
- ethnicity of Avenues clients.

An interview guide was used for the semi-structured interviews, which usually took approximately one hour. Interviewees included Avenues clients (n=22) and Work and Income client advisors (n=7), case managers (n=5), and call centre customer service representatives (n=4). Table 4 shows the distribution of staff and clients interviewed by region.

**Table 4. Staff and client interviews by region**

Region	Interviews	Number
Bay of Plenty	case managers	1
	client advisors	3
	clients	10
South Auckland	case managers	3
	client advisors	2
	clients	5
Central	case managers	1
	client advisors	2
	clients	7
National	call centre CSR's	4
<i>Total</i>		38

Staff interviews were conducted in Work and Income offices in the three regions between 3 and 14 December 2001. Client interviews were conducted during the same period and were mostly home-based. It was intended to interview up to 10 clients per region: the lower final interview numbers reflect the difficulties the researchers faced in contacting clients, rather than client reluctance to participate in the research. Most clients contacted agreed to participate in the research, although some were not available or not at home at the scheduled interview times.

Staff interviews focused on their experiences of the Avenues service and client interviews focused on their experiences of the interview process and their subsequent interaction with Work and Income and/or other agencies.

Interviews were conducted by three senior researchers at CRESA, who each have more than 15 years research and/or community development experience, particularly related to working with women and with Maori.

### *7.1.2 Telephone survey*

The National Research Bureau (NRB) carried out a telephone survey, based on a sample of 320 clients identified by Work and Income. NRB achieved a 57 percent response rate, with 183 clients interviewed. Up to 5 calls were made to clients on the database, with calls spread over different days and times in order to maximise the chance of contact. New contact details were also sought, when possible, for those clients who had relocated. Female interviewers were used to give reassurance to the respondents.

It was intended the telephone survey sample would comprise Avenues clients who chose not to proceed with a core benefit application following their client advisor interview. This would enable exploration of the alternative options pursued.

The sample was drawn via the Avenues and SWIFTT databases on 14 November 2001, from the group of participants who had completed an Avenues interview between 1 August and 14 October 2001. The delay of one month between end of interviews and selection date was intended to overcome potential problems with recording delays on the SWIFTT system. Clients selected were those who did not show as having applied for a core benefit at 14 November.

When these clients were contacted for the telephone interview in the first week of December 2001, 59% of those contacted reported having applied for a core benefit. Consequently, the telephone survey cannot be considered to represent the experiences of participants who pursued non-core benefit options post Avenues.

For this reason, findings from the telephone survey have not been included in this report. The single exception is section 3.16,, reporting on the Avenues objectives. Findings on client awareness have been included, but because this sample cannot be considered representative of the broader Avenues participant group, this information needs to be treated with caution.

### *7.1.3 Impact analysis*

The evaluation sought to address whether Avenues produced any changes to the number of DPB-SP applications within pilot sites. Since Avenues focused on discussing options available to prospective DPB-SP applicants, including alternatives to the DPB-SP, one possible impact of the process would be to alter the probability that Avenues participants would go onto to apply for the DPB-SP.

#### ***Approach: discontinuity design with a baseline control***

The analysis sought to determine whether the introduction of Avenues lead to any change in DPB-SP benefit applications in the pilot sites overall, not just those who participated in Avenues. The challenge posed was to isolate the possible effect of Avenues from the natural variability that exists in the benefit application process. The approach taken in this study was to use the geographical and spatial specificity of pilot sites to construct a counter-factual estimation of the DPB-SP application process in the absence of pilots (illustrated in

Figure 12).

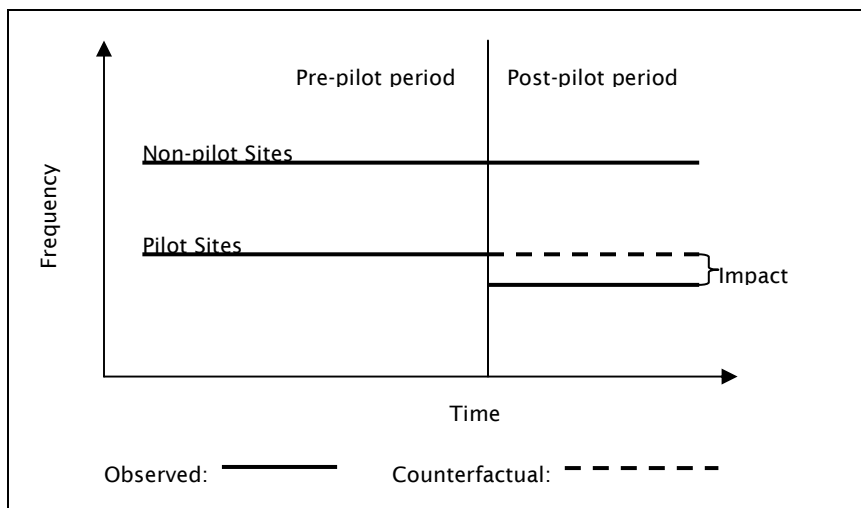
**Figure 12. Counter-factual design to estimate the impact of Avenues on the DPB-SP application process**

		Time	
		Pre Pilot Period	Pilot-period
Space	Non-Pilot Sites	Control	Counter-factual / Intervention
	Pilot Sites	Control	Control

The analysis used the information in the three control cells to construct an estimate of the counter-factual of the pilot sites during the pilot period. This counter-factual was then compared with the actual values observed during the pilot period. Any differences between the actual and counter-factual values are then interpreted as the impact of Avenues on DPB-SP applications relative to the programme’s absence. The baseline control (non-pilot sites) accounted for common variability that occurs in the DPB-SP application process; for example, any seasonal or national policy changes.

Figure 14 illustrates how the counter-factual was estimated. The first step involved modelling the relationship between pilot sites and non-pilot sites (base control) in the pre-pilot period. The model was then applied to the pilot period, using non-pilot site information to estimate expected values for pilot sites at the corresponding periods of time. In the example, the intervention resulted in a decrease in the frequency of applications and the impact is the difference between these values and those estimated by the model.

**Figure 13. Example of a discontinuity design with a baseline control**



In this study the design described was applied to the number of DPB-SP applications, grants and declines occurring in four-week intervals between August 1999 and January 2002. A simple linear regression model was used to represent the relationship between each of these measures in the two years prior to the introduction of Avenues (August 1999 – August 2001). The correlation between pilot and non-pilot sites in each of these measures was high and stable over the study period. In other words, there was no evidence to show that the relationship between pilot and non-pilot sites had changed in the two years leading up to Avenues. For this reason it was not considered necessary to employ more sophisticated time series approaches to estimate the counter-factual.

The success of this design relies on a number of assumptions. The first is that there is a stable and reasonably strong correlation between the values in the pilot and non-pilot sites. The most important criterion for the base control (the non-pilot) sites is that they are able to provide a reasonable estimate of the counter-factual for the pilot sites. If there is high internal variability between the two groups and little common variability, then any estimates of the counter-factual will have large errors. This reduced precision would mean that the effect of Avenues would have to be large before it could be observed above the internal variability of the pilot sites.

**Table 5. Regression models and R<sup>2</sup> for DPB-SP applications, grants and declines**

Variable	Correlation	R <sup>2</sup>	Model
Applications	0.23	0.84	Pilot Site Applications = 24.81 + 0.022 * Non Pilot Site Applications
Grants	0.23	0.80	Pilot Site Grants = 28.18 + 0.025 * Non Pilot Site Grants
Declines	0.09	0.45	Pilot Site Declines = 6.04 + 0.045 * Non Pilot Site Declines

1: Spearman rank correlation between model residuals and the period of the study.

To test the strength of the correlation between the pilot and non pilot sites the R<sup>2</sup> values were computed for each of the models (see Table 5). The R<sup>2</sup> values for both applications and grants are relatively high and therefore provide reasonable precision in the subsequent analysis. Application declines on the other hand had a low R<sup>2</sup>, which is in part a reflection of the lower number of declines that occur and the greater internal variability of this measure. This means the analysis will be more limited in its ability to identify whether Avenues altered the frequency of DPB-SP benefit declines.

Stability assumption refers to the stability of the linear association between pilot and non-pilot sites over the pre-pilot period. If there was change occurring in the underlying correlation between pilot and non-pilot sites not accounted for in the model, then the estimated counter-factual will be biased. This presents the risk that the impact of the Avenues is either over-stated or under-stated according to whether the unobserved trend is positively or negatively associated with the programme impact.

To examine the stability of the model over time, Table 5 compares the Spearman rank correlation of the residual values and the two-year period of the data. If the model is stable there should be a low correlation between the residuals and time. In other words, there would be no systematic increase or decrease in the error term over the duration of the pre-pilot period. In all three cases the Spearman rank correlations show a weak positive correlation between the residual and the study period. The correlation values for the applications and grants can be

explained by two large outlying values with opposing signs which when removed, the correlation comes close to zero.

The second assumption of the analysis is that the only difference between the pilot sites pre and post Avenues was the introduction of Avenues and no other concurrent changes were made to the DPB-SP application process. Although the pilot sites were not randomly selected, they were well spread geographically. For this reason it was unlikely that any systematic change occurred in all these sites apart from the introduction of Avenues. The third and related assumption is that the established relationship between the number of DPB-SP applications, grants and declines in the pilot and non-pilot sites did not fundamentally alter between July and September 2001. The only reason for any observed change in the correlation between the pilot and non-pilot sites post August 2001 is due to the introduction of the Avenues pilot. If this were violated then the estimate of the counter-factual would be biased. Again there was little circumstantial evidence that such a shift would have occurred during the pilot period.

Both these assumptions appear to be robust given the absence of any policy changes affecting DPB-SP applications or processing over the July to September period 2001. Likewise, apart from the introduction of Avenues there is no evidence that there were any other consistent changes in the way that DPB-SP applicants were processed that were unique to the pilot sites. A further point to note is that this analysis does not require that the pilot and non-pilot sites be similar in their demographic make-up.

## 7.2 Participant characteristics

**Table 6. Ethnicity**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Avenues Participants</b>	<b>Eligible non-participants</b>	<b>*i.e. met eligibility criteria but were not referred to Avenues</b>
<b>NZ Maori</b>	37%	44%	43%
<b>NZ European</b>	41%	34%	38%
<b>Pacific*</b>	11%	11%	14%
<b>Other</b>	11%	10%	5%
<b>N</b>	3932	765	2167

\* Includes Samoan, Cook Island Maori, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tongan

**Table 7. Gender**

Gender	Avenues Participants		Eligible non-participants
	Attended scheduled client advisor interview	Did not attend scheduled client advisor interview	*i.e. met eligibility criteria but were not referred to Avenues
<b>Female</b>	81%	78%	86%
<b>Male</b>	20%	22%	14%
<b>N</b>	3932	765	2167

**Table 8. Age**

Age range	Avenues participants		Eligible non-participants
	Attended scheduled client advisor interview	Did not attend scheduled client advisor interview	*i.e. met eligibility criteria but were not referred to Avenues
<b>15 to 17 yrs</b>	0%	1%	1%
<b>18 to 19 yrs</b>	7%	5%	8%
<b>20 to 24 yrs</b>	18%	20%	18%
<b>25 to 29 yrs</b>	21%	25%	18%
<b>30 to 39 yrs</b>	39%	38%	38%
<b>40 to 49 yrs</b>	13%	10%	15%
<b>50+ yrs</b>	2%	2%	2%
<b>N*</b>	3693	722	2167

\* Age unknown for 282

**Table 9. Event that led to DPB-SP application**

Event reason	Avenues Participants		Eligible non-participants *i.e. met eligibility criteria but were not referred to Avenues
	Attended scheduled client advisor interview	Did not attend scheduled client advisor interview	
Separated from partner	28%	11%	33%
Transfer from another benefit	10%	5%	25%
Ceased work	12%	8%	19%
Child came into care	8%	5%	12%
Returned to NZ	2%	0%	3%
Other	4%	3%	4%
Reason unknown	37%	68%	4%
<b>N</b>	3932	765	2167