



***Delivering E-government 2007:
Real People, Real Stories***

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1. Overview

This report presents the results of research that offers insight into the state of progress of e-government in New Zealand – from the perspective of New Zealanders who use government services.

The research involved in-depth interviews with people from many backgrounds, accessing a wide range of government services. These interviews were conducted from late 2006 to early 2007, regarding people's most recent experiences with government. Of these, six interviews were selected and carefully analysed for the purposes of this report.

The six user stories reflect common themes related to e-government:

- Awareness of and access to information
- Role of intermediaries in service delivery
- Empathy and understanding the user's context
- Innovating traditional processes using information and communication technologies
- Delivering value to users

Following an outline of each user story, these themes are drawn together and discussed in detail in the concluding section of this report.

Approach

The research for this report entailed twenty-four in-depth case study interviews of people in Waitakere, South Taranaki and Christchurch, conducted as part of the qualitative research for the Development Goals 2007 report:

http://www.ssc.govt.nz/upload/downloadable_files/Transforming-the-State-Services-SoDG-Report07.pdf

The research sought to understand New Zealanders' perceptions of government and the nature of their experiences of recent interactions with a range of State Services.

Six user stories were selected for inclusion because they best reflected the e-government themes found across all twenty-four interviews. The following selection criteria were used:

- The stories touched on a wide range of services provided across government, including both regulatory and essential services, and complex, high priority or high frequency services
- The people had widely varying backgrounds, and included both adept users and non-users of information and communication technologies

Each story is presented in three parts:

Profile - a brief description of the person's background and what they most needed or expected to receive from the government services they used

Key points – elements of the person's experience that directly or indirectly relate to e-government

Implications – learnings that can be derived from the story

Also included are excerpts from the person's story using their own words, selected to portray their experience in the most meaningful way. The aim has been to underscore the salient features, to bring into relief both the positive experiences and obstacles they faced along the way.

The interpretation has been faithful to the person's account as reflected through the interview transcripts. Only the names and some personal details of the people – such as profession or gender – have been changed for reasons of privacy.

2. The people

The people whose stories are included are:

Bill, who returned home to New Zealand with his British wife after some years abroad with two young children – one born overseas and the other in New Zealand. His story explores the processes his family had to go through for resettlement, such as immigration and citizenship.

Moana, a beneficiary who suffered from bipolar disorder for most of her life and regularly used mental health services. She volunteered at her local mental health support centre and was seeking a part-time job, so that she could lead an independent life. Her story tracks her experiences with these services.

Marianne, a separated mother of three, who ran her own business. Her story explores her experiences as she tried to ensure that her 16-year-old son stayed out of crime and received ongoing mentoring support.

Jude and David, who had a roofing business for some years before making the decision to restructure it into a wood products import business. Although they were experienced small business owners, they were completely new to the requirements of importing. Their story illustrates the challenges they faced in navigating the complex processes.

Leighton, a retired former professor, who conducted research to rebuild his family tree. His story presents his experience with various agencies in doing this work.

Gareth, whose story describes his experience as he gathered a group of residents in his neighbourhood to make a formal objection to the Council against a local building development project. Almost everyone in the group was ignorant of what the process of making a submission involved.

3. Their Stories

Returning New Zealander

Profile

Bill, a New Zealander in his thirties, recalls the experience he went through four years ago when he relocated back to New Zealand with his family from Britain. He is married to Jessica, who is British. They have two very young children, and they wanted to raise their children in New Zealand which they felt would offer a better outdoors lifestyle and a higher standard of living. He works in telecommunications IT and Jessica is an interior designer.

In order to return to New Zealand, they had to update and apply for the necessary documents and permits while in the UK (such as passport renewal and work visa application) and after arriving in New Zealand (such as residency and citizenship applications, and updating drivers' licenses). After the family had settled in New Zealand, Jessica needed to return to Britain within short notice for personal reasons. Her work visa was about to expire, and this meant that she needed to seek its urgent renewal.

What Bill and his family most needed was the fast and efficient processing of their applications and documentation, so that they could settle quickly into their new lives in New Zealand.

Key points

- 1 **Disparate government agencies:** Bill needed to go to individual agencies separately to get different parts of the same application process completed himself; he suggested that it would have been more helpful if he had been able to deal with one body instead of many.

"It would have been nice if it was all one body where you put in an application for this and...it goes through the stages it needs to go through...so the person coming into the country through immigration, you need an IRD number, here's your IRD number. We've already taken the information out of that one packet that you've submitted and then that packet gets moved along the system such as your health, police checks, security....The agencies communicate with each other...so you get basically a welcome pack with all the bits and pieces you need doing and even things like with the driver's licensing agencies, have that tidied."

- 2 **Multiple identity and documentation requirements:** He had to produce many forms of evidence of identity and physical documentation for several purposes to meet different agencies' requirements, and would have preferred to have been able to complete such transactions online.
- 3 **Repetition of the same information:** His family's story needed to be repeated many times to different people. He would have preferred to deal with one person over time for continuity.

"Again it was the case of having to prove who we are, what relationship we're in. The same paperwork really."

- 4 **Understanding the process:** Bill did not understand the full scope of the process he was embarking on. At the outset, he did find helpful information online and felt that he did not need to use intermediaries such as immigration consultants. However, he later realised that there had been matters he was unaware of, which he would like to have found out about in advance. Although he was provided with a comprehensive information pack – drawn from many government agencies about services that could be helpful for a new immigrant - much of the information was of no relevance to him nor targeted to his particular situation.

"I think they could...let you know...where you stand in that process...Give people a spreadsheet at the beginning, this is what's happening at certain times so it gives you an idea of what's going on so you're not in the dark..."

- 5 **Knowledge of application status:** He was not kept informed about the status of his family's residency and citizenship applications, between the times of lodging and approval. He wanted to be able to be advised of the status without having to phone someone.
- 6 **Reasons behind the processes:** Bill did not understand or appreciate reasons behind some policies and requirements he had to comply with.
- 7 **Limited online transactions:** Bill was able to find the forms he needed online, print them off, and send or bring them in. But he would have preferred to be able to complete and lodge them online.

"Immigration...have got a very detailed [online information package] – what section to apply under for your immigration, who should be applying, what forms to fill in and you can even download the forms which is quite handy. It saves you having to go in. It's a shame they don't do an online application, initial application, where you tick all the boxes and fill them all in and that gives you the points system. They say...X amount of points, please put yourself into the pool of interest...you can do it in England, you can do it here."

- 8 **Service capacity:** When Jessica needed immediate answers to questions and urgent processing of her work visa renewal, she and Bill decided to go in person to the agency. They had a specific question and needed a specific answer quickly. But when they went to the agency, they found there was not enough trained staff to deal with all the people that were there at the time.

Implications

- **Transparency of process:** At the outset, Bill knew that his family was going to have to complete and file forms, and that the processes of getting approval for his applications would take time. But after he lodged his applications, he never had sufficient understanding about their status at any given time, or how long each stage of the process would take. His frustration was aggravated by lack of knowledge of the rationale behind some of the procedures. This suggests that complex or lengthy processes could be made more transparent for users such as Bill. This may mean providing information about the full scope of the process at the outset, so that a user appreciates what will be expected and how long it may take. It may also mean that when such a service is designed, it enables a user to be informed – in a manner that suits them – of the status of their application at any given time.
- **One agency rather than many:** Bill had to provide evidence of identity and various legal documents more than once, and had to go to individual agencies separately to get different parts of the same application process completed. He commented that he would have preferred to be able to deal with one body rather than many. The user's needs would be better met if they could provide documentation just once to one place; this may require more back office integration and information sharing by agencies to enable this to occur. In turn, this may require users to have a degree of comfort that their personal information is held securely.
- **Role of intermediaries:** Bill observed that intermediaries can play an important role for users who may face cultural barriers. This suggests when an agency is designing a service, they should consider the possible roles an intermediary may play. For instance, some immigrants and refugees may prefer to work through intermediaries, such as immigration consultants, community advocates or in some cases, the offices of Members of Parliament.

Mental health system beneficiary

Profile

Moana is in her forties, single and has lived with bipolar disorder for 19 years.

She had to move several times between residences over the previous two years. She initially sought a house from Housing New Zealand Corporation, but since none were available quickly enough to meet her needs, she found a private flat in the local paper. Due to her illness, she needed to live in a quiet, relaxed environment. To prepare her new flat, she obtained a loan to cover the bond and furniture from Work and Income.

To cope with her illness on a day-to-day basis, and in times of emergency, Moana also used various government and community services, and especially appreciated the human support network – such as the caseworkers and nurses – that these services formed around her.

Moana wanted to take independent control of her illness, get a part-time job and lead a normal life. She expected to be able to participate in her own treatment and recovery, with a preference for any such treatment to not require her to take prescription drugs.

Key points

- 1 **System of appointments:** Moana's experience with Work and Income was enhanced by their introduction of an appointments system – which was more efficient and effective than the previous system that entailed her waiting hours to meet with someone. This made a significant difference in her perception of the quality of service.

“The whole system at [Work and Income] has changed as far as staff goes...You just sat there and waited and, yes you could have been there for three or four hours. . .Whoever changed the system there well bless their little cotton softs because, I remember the days when you used to go into [Work and Income] and had to spend all day waiting. With this new system of the appointments you just go and see the person and it’s all over and done with.”

- 2 **Repetition of the same information:** Moana saw a different psychiatrist each time she visited the hospital, requiring her to retell her history each time. She expressed much frustration with this, and indicated that it would have been preferable if each doctor had instead been able to consult a file that could inform them of her background.
- 3 **Helpful intermediary:** Moana most valued the help of her iwi support person because she helped her navigate her way through various government services in a personal, empathetic way.
- 4 **Coordinated government services:** Moana's experience with various government agencies that delivered health services, including emergency services, suggests that they coordinated well together.
- 5 **Interface between user and government:** Moana made use of and volunteered at a local mental health support centre, which provided a range of services including government services.
- 6 **Empathetic treatment:** The pleasant interaction with the officer at Housing New Zealand Corporation impressed Moana more deeply than whether or not her request was fulfilled. In spite of the fact that no state house was provided to her, she was reassured that the officer had put in his best effort to assist her, and was satisfied with the outcome. This reflected transparent processes that were attuned to her expectations.

“[I] saw this chappy and just told him what my situation was. He was lovely, the chappy. He was very helpful and he was very understanding of the situation. I’m sure if there was a house available he would have put me in it but it was out of his hands...He took it all into account.”

Implications

- **Government engagement:** Moana derived significant value from her involvement in the local mental health support centre. This benefit was sufficiently great to motivate her to contribute her efforts as a volunteer to support others like herself. This suggests that such community organisations/intermediaries may offer much potential to agencies – both as a delivery vehicle for government services, and as a source of information to better understand users’ needs.
- **Cultural change:** Work and Income’s introduction of the appointment system appeared to Moana to be just one part of an overall cultural change that she perceived in her dealings with the agency. The nature of the change was one of enhanced understanding of her needs, respectful treatment, and better anticipation of her requirements. This suggests that a user-centric approach to service design and delivery may be manifested in many different aspects of a user’s experience.
- **Availability of previously-provided information:** Moana was frustrated that she needed to retell her story every time she saw a new psychiatrist at the same hospital. She believed that her doctors either could not access or did not refer to a record of her history, and this had a negative effect on her perception of the service she received. This suggests that a user’s experience may be enhanced if a service provider makes use of previously-provided information when relevant; which may require, for instance, a commitment by the doctors to use online information systems.
- **Trust:** Moana was satisfied with the service provided by Housing New Zealand Corporation even though they were unable to provide her with a house. Her experience suggests that the quality of an interaction as well as a user’s expectations matter as much as, if not more than, simply achieving a particular desired outcome. Where a process is transparent, a user is more likely to have confidence in and continue to trust the reliability of the service, even if their request cannot be satisfied under the particular circumstances.

First-time importers

Profile

Jude and David, father and son, run a small importing business from home. The family business was originally a roofing company, but they wanted to reshape it into a wood products import business so that they would be less reliant on labour and incur lower compliance costs. They operated from a converted home office, with a double garage acting as a warehouse. They decided to import wood products from China. Jude had close contacts in China who were helping investigate export issues on his behalf, while they dealt with the import issues from New Zealand.

Through the setting up of the family business and the later transition from roofing to importing, they had to gather a wide range of information to meet various needs. They gained business-specific knowledge through courses, informal business networks and mentors, and websites (such as Inland Revenue and business.govt.nz). When they decided to import wood products from China, they also needed specific information about importing regulations and procedures.

As businessmen, Jude and David expected and wanted efficiency and timeliness in the State Services they used. They found the processes complex, and decided to use intermediaries - such as private customs brokers and a logistics company who provided “everything in a package” - to help them interface with the border government agencies. However, even the intermediaries were not able to fully anticipate the nature of the obstacles that Jude and David would face as first-time importers, in spite of their efforts to seek the information.

The wood products, upon arriving in New Zealand, had to be quarantined and fumigated, and a levy was charged, before they could be released to Jude and David.

Key points

- 1 **Lack of information about requirements:** Despite their early efforts to learn all they could about importing, Jude and David did not have sufficient understanding about the processes and rules that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry would impose on them when they began to import natural wood products. This meant they faced unexpected delays, paid duties, and suffered damage to their products when they had to be fumigated.

"We learnt a lot about what we imported after we imported it. . .Nobody knocked us over the back of the head with a blunt stick and told us not to import natural wood products. We brought in stuff that they were going to check and going to fumigate, but nobody said that."

- 2 **Intermediary helpful but not sufficient:** They relied on the services of a private customs broker to help them navigate their way through the complex set of government rules and requirements. Although they found the broker to be extremely helpful, there were many matters that were not covered – and they did not learn about them until after the goods had been imported.

- 3 **Repetition of the same information:** Jude and David needed to liaise with Inland Revenue from time to time, and they had to retell their story every time they spoke to a new person.

- 4 **Searchable information:** Although New Zealand Customs Service staff were helpful, Jude and David found the Customs codes they issued to be complex and difficult to navigate. The PDF file in which the codes were presented was huge, not web-friendly and not searchable.

"The Customs Codes themselves are actually horrible to go through...It's not specific enough... they could have a better search machine in there...It's all just pages and pages. It's a PDF file so it's not web friendly, user friendly..."

- 5 **Difficult to find advice:** Jude and David sought advice from many sources, to provide the sort of information and tacit knowledge that was not available. Despite the fact that they used many and

various types of sources (mentors, courses, etc.), this required significant effort, and the advice received was often not helpful.

- 6 **“Hard” regulatory attitudes vs “soft” customer orientation:** Jude and David felt that even though regulatory agencies have every reason to be stringent, a more user-friendly approach in certain circumstances could make Government appear less “faceless”.

“To be treated like a human being. For them to recognise you as a person and to be polite, to know their stuff, know what questions to ask so that you know what the questions are for them to help you in the process...I mean you have to be responsible for yourself but at the beginning you know nothing.”

- 7 **Lack of documentation for quarantined goods:** Jude and David claimed that the wood products had been damaged while they were quarantined, but there was no documentation on the state of the goods before they were quarantined. Without further evidence, the lack of documentation meant that it would be difficult to either substantiate or challenge such a claim.

Implications

- **Information for first-time importers:** Jude and David were experienced businessmen, but they had limited knowledge about importing. They found government services such as business.govt.nz to be very helpful, but too general to help them with their specific importing requirements. This suggests that they may have benefited from a package of information targeted for first-time importers that could have been provided to them by the parties they had contact with when they were seeking information. Their access to information associated with government regulations could also have been enhanced through the use of the Internet and other ICT. The agencies could have simplified the complexities of the regulatory information by providing a search engine capability.
- **Role of intermediaries:** Intermediaries such as the private customs brokers and logistics company were very helpful for Jude and David, but their assistance was not sufficient to cover all of their needs for information and support. They did not realise this until after a number of problems were experienced. This suggests that their problems may have been mitigated if there had been a source of information available about the roles that intermediaries may play in the process.
- **Suitable mix of channels that takes into account preferences in different situations:** Jude and David were Internet-savvy and tended to obtain information online unless ongoing liaison with an agency was specifically required. In such cases, they preferred a sustained face-to-face relationship with the same person at the agency. This suggests that to best meet a user’s needs – even if that person usually prefers to use the Internet – it may be necessary to provide for a mix of channels to allow them to use different channels at different times and for different purposes.

Parent of youth at risk

Profile

Marianne is a self-employed New Zealander in her forties. She is legally separated from her husband but has “never bothered with a divorce,” and is currently living in a de facto relationship. She has three children living at home: June and Laura, who are 11 and 14 respectively, and her eldest, Jimi, who has recently turned 16.

Since he turned 11, Jimi had repeated encounters with the law for theft and burglary. In Marianne’s attempt to take control of the situation, she sought help from various governmental and not-for-profit providers of social, legal and educational services.

She was especially concerned because Jimi was soon to turn 17, and the law would no longer regard him as a minor. Furthermore, the State Services he had used, such as psychologists through Child, Youth and Family, would no longer be free and could pose a significant financial burden on her family.

As a working mother with three children and her own business, she had many parental needs which were not sufficiently acknowledged or met as she navigated the system to get assistance for her son.

Key points

1 **Lack of advice about progress:** Marianne sought to engage more closely with Jimi’s school, and to partner with his teachers, the dean and principal to provide better support and assistance for Jimi. However, she was frustrated that the school did not keep her updated on his progress, despite repeated appeals by her for this to happen.

2 **Understanding of justice system:** A parent support organisation helped Marianne to cope more effectively with Jimi, but also assisted her to understand and work better with the justice system.

“[The parent support group] helped Jimi because he’s got a clearer boundary. It has helped me ...because prior to that I would have been absolutely horrified going through the justice system.”

3 **Notice and scheduling issues:** The court system and youth justice coordinator did not work with Marianne in a way that sufficiently took account of her particular situation. There were frequent problems in the scheduling and proceedings of family group conferences, and court meetings arranged that did not give her sufficient notice to arrange her schedule to attend.

“I was annoyed about the fact that in the written decisions of the court it showed that Mum was too busy to come, and that was not essentially true. Mum was not given enough time to arrange my schedule so I could come. And that’s a matter of record, that I couldn’t really be bothered.”

4 **Good advice about due process:** The Police and the Child, Youth and Family social workers kept her well informed about due processes and legal rights when Jimi was confined at the station and at the Child, Youth and Family home. However, Marianne also wished for more advice on her options for the future.

“I feel that all the advice...the system, [Child, Youth and Family] and the justice system have kept me well informed as to what is going to happen or what could happen. . .but they haven’t sort of told me what they could do in the future.”

5 **Limited information about programmes for ongoing support:** Marianne wished that she had more information about government and community-based mentoring and support programmes for Jimi.

Implications

- **Marianne’s needs as Jimi’s mother and custodian:** Marianne’s focus was to get support for Jimi from various government agencies. She found this to be challenging, and occasionally

overwhelming. The support she received from the parent support group enabled her to cope with not only her emotional turmoil, but also gave her more confidence to deal with the justice system. Her experience suggests that the challenge of designing services to be user-centric may be complicated by the interchangeable roles that people take on. Jimi, the end user, received government services through his mother, who acted as his intermediary. However, Marianne also had her own needs that required specific support, and thus may be considered to be a “service user” as well.

- **Proactive assistance:** Marianne wished that there had been more proactive assistance from agencies she dealt with getting Jimi onto a sustained mentoring programme. This suggests that someone in Marianne’s situation – who may approach youth-related services to support her son – may benefit from also being offered a range of complementary services (such as mentoring), whether delivered in-person or online.
- **Cultural change and ICT:** Marianne’s stress was exacerbated by the fact that her workday was often intruded upon over what she felt were trivial matters that the schools could have handled themselves. She also felt that she could have been kept better informed of family group conferences so that she could have planned her schedule in advance. While certain collaborative tools could have been of assistance – for instance, a mobile digital schedule that Marianne could have shared with authorised contacts – the introduction of technology alone would not have been likely to generate the desired improvements. Rather, such improvements would have probably required the parties involved to first agree on the way in which they would work together for appropriate tools to serve as effective enablers.

Genealogist

Profile

Leighton is an 80-year-old retired former professor. He has had a lifelong career as a lecturer with a passion for research, which is a significant driving force for his genealogical project.

The death of a cousin – who was the only member of his family who had attempted to record the family history – gave him the impetus to embark on the project. He was motivated to complete the family tree before he passes on. His son supported the idea and pointed him to a genealogy shareware programme to facilitate his data collection.

Key points

- 1 **Access to information:** Leighton said that resources for genealogical research are ample but most people do not know they exist or how to access them.
- 2 **Intermediaries as guides:** Leighton found the help he received from librarians, curators and museum volunteers immensely helpful for navigating through the huge amount of information.
- 3 **Cost is a barrier to some information access:** Leighton remarked that acquiring a copy of an old birth, death or marriage certificate costs \$30 to \$35, which he said is prohibitive for most people. He suggested that it would be more appropriate for such information to be made available online, preferably without a fee.

“They used to produce a document...about births deaths and marriages... [which cost] about \$5 or something like that. They put it up to \$30 or \$35 which is prohibitive for most people...I think that stuff should be online...once it’s online it doesn’t cost you anything.”

- 4 **Much information is online:** Leighton praised the amount of government information he was able to find online, and said that the ability to search on a wide range of subjects was very helpful.

“[Obtaining wills from Archives New Zealand] is very simple and works well...the wills are listed so you can know whose will.”

“I was very interested to know when my grandfather left a particular member of the family with a thousand pounds in 1915. What was it worth? ...well that’s \$12,500 and the Reserve Bank calculate that. You know the Reserve Bank have got a calculator.”

Implications

- **Access to information:** Leighton could not appreciate the rationale behind the cost attached to obtaining birth, death and marriage certificates, and suggested that access to certain types of public information could be made less costly and more equitable for general users if they were made online. This suggestion points to the changing expectations of users given the ease of access afforded by the now ubiquitous Internet. It also underscores the importance of transparency in developing or implementing government policy.
- **Information literacy and awareness:** Leighton commented that even though there are ample resources for genealogical research, most people do not know that they exist or how to access them. This suggests that efforts to raise awareness and encourage information or media literacy may provide benefit to potential researchers. They can then navigate the information available in both the print and electronic realms to create their own family stories.
- **Use of intermediaries:** Leighton used a wide range of information resources from both central and local government agencies, and private and voluntary organisations. This suggests that there could be opportunities for cooperation between central and local government agencies to assist researchers to discover and search primary and secondary genealogy resources.

Participant in local democratic process

Profile

Gareth, a New Zealander in his early fifties, lives with his wife in their own home. He coordinated a local group opposed to a medium density housing development project in their local area. This group made a formal objection to the local council.

The proposed development was to be located one property away from his, separated by part of a small vineyard. However, he was not consulted as part of the resource consent process because his property was not directly adjacent, even though he would have had a direct line of sight to the development. He considered the development to be out of character for the local area and that it did not meet Council guidelines.

The group was formed as people in the neighbourhood who had concerns about the project responded to a flyer Gareth distributed. He noticed that most people felt daunted by the idea of making a submission, even though he had learnt through experience that the actual process is usually not as complicated as it may first appear.

Key points

- 1 **Better information about process:** Gareth said that many people may be overwhelmed by the complexity of preparing and lodging resource consent submissions, and usually had little understanding of the resource consent process. He said that it would have been helpful if the Council had provided a simple 10-page handbook on how to prepare submissions.

“A nice simple little 10 paged handbook on how to do different resource consent submissions... could come in very handy. Processes...are very involved and technical and to most people they would shy away from it...it’s too complicated...If everybody knew the process...you would actually empower your community a lot.”

- 2 **Council assistance:** When the local group coordinated their efforts, they were able to use some Council facilities, such as the community hall. But the Council provided little further assistance.

“They were very nice and that type of thing but basically you have to know what you’re asking for. You could understand that point of view as well... they’ve got to conserve [sic] the interests of the Council, they’ve got to conserve the interest of the developer and they’ve got to conserve the interest of the community. Somewhere in between they’ve got to be fair to all. It’s a tough position to be in...The Council’s job is to be of service...but they’re not there to help or hinder.”

- 3 **Notification of development proposals:** Gareth felt that the notification process regarding the proposed development was inadequate. He learned of the proposal only indirectly; many others who were potentially affected only learned about it when he distributed fliers around the neighbourhood.

- 4 **Community participation may improve outcome:** Gareth said that most of the people who participated suggested positive mitigation measures that could be incorporated into the project design, rather than rejection of the project. He felt that if a community feels empowered and gets involved, this is likely to result in a better community.

“Another plus side is that if you do get community involved, empowered, you might actually end up with a better community. Sometimes, the Council takes it upon themselves to know what’s right for a community but in reality... community know itself to try for itself.”

Implications

- **Making submissions:** Gareth commented that his group would have benefited from better engagement in the resource consent and planning process, which could have been facilitated by the Council providing a guide to preparing submissions. Such a guide could be made available

online, and could even allow for submissions to be lodged online. Online tools could potentially contribute to other aspects of community engagement in the planning process – such as awareness-raising, community interaction or policy deliberation and formulation.

- **Being informed about progress:** Most people in the group were inexperienced and lacked understanding about what to expect from the resource consent. Many were frustrated by long periods of uncertainty while they awaited an outcome on the progress of the application. This suggests that their frustration would have been lessened if they had been provided with advice in advance about how the process worked, and where they had opportunity to provide input.

4. Common themes

The six users whose stories were presented in this report each had different personal objectives, made use of different government services and had quite different experiences. While these stories were not intended to represent the experience of all users, they do illustrate the sheer diversity of people's experiences with government. Their stories also reflect the challenges regularly met by agencies developing user-centred policies and services, as they seek to optimise the experiences for such widely varying individual needs and expectations.

Despite the differences between each of the users' stories, there were some common themes and learnings that can be drawn from them. They illustrate not only the state of progress of e-government in New Zealand, but also the nature of improvements that could be made in future.

These themes are discussed below.

Awareness of and access to information

Each of the users needed different types of information and sought it from multiple sources. In most cases they were able to find what they needed, but the processes to obtain that information were sometimes difficult and time consuming. There was evidence that much information was available online. However, sometimes the users were unable to find what they needed at a place and time that suited them, and through the channel they preferred to use.

In many cases, these people expressed the wish that their needs for information could have been better anticipated. For those unfamiliar with a particular process, they would have liked to have received advice about what steps they could expect to take, the sorts of requirements they would need to meet, and how long each step would take. A common sentiment expressed was that someone in that position often does not have enough knowledge to even know what questions to ask.

Role of intermediaries in service delivery

The users in these stories received a range of government services, and each person described more than one way that they received them. Sometimes they experienced the services directly, such as through face-to-face contact with a government staff member, or by accessing information they wanted directly online. In other instances, they experienced the services indirectly through the assistance of an intermediary, such as a customs broker, local museum volunteer, or iwi support person.

Agencies' increasing recognition of the roles intermediaries can play in service delivery was reflected in these user stories. This included agencies using intermediaries to help with service delivery, or to gain a better appreciation of users' needs; sometimes agencies referred people to intermediaries to help them navigate difficult government processes.

Nevertheless, the stories also suggested that there is scope for more effective use to be made of intermediaries in government service delivery. This could include providing resources to intermediaries to enable them to enhance or extend their services, or providing information to people about opportunities to use intermediaries.

One of the stories also illustrated the different roles intermediaries may play: Marianne's role when seeking assistance from government agencies for her son may be seen as an intermediary; but when she needed support to cope with her own issues, she became a direct recipient of government services.

Empathy and understanding the user's context

The users' stories illustrated the importance of user-centred service design and delivery. From the users' comments, it was evident that this made a positive contribution to their experiences. They included systems for which it was obvious that technology was integral, such as the appointment system introduced by Work and Income (as experienced by Moana), and the business.govt.nz information portal (as experienced by Jude and David). But they also included examples where the roles played by technology were invisible, such as the good advice about due process provided to Marianne by the

Police and by the Department of Child, Youth and Family; and the transparent processes and empathetic treatment of Moana when she sought a house from Housing New Zealand Corporation. Such successful experiences reflect agencies putting significant effort into considering service delivery from the user's perspective.

Other examples from some users' stories suggested that their experiences could have been improved in some cases if service providers had demonstrated better appreciation of the users' circumstances or context. They included users needing to repeat personal information for each new person or government system they dealt with, the cost to a user to obtain public information, and inflexibility in scheduling meetings to accommodate a user's other commitments.

Using ICT to innovate traditional processes

Technology was integral to most of the services experienced by the users. In some of the stories, the users expressed appreciation of how technology made their experience better, such as Bill being able to find the forms he needed online, or Jude and David being able to access customs codes in a PDF file. But the stories also illustrate that innovative application of technology could enhance traditional processes to better serve users' needs. For example, Bill said he would have preferred to be able to complete and lodge the forms online, rather than print them off and send or take them in; Jude and David said they would have preferred to have customs codes in a more web-friendly, searchable format.

Many opportunities for innovation of back-office processes can be gleaned through the user stories. For instance, Bill's experience would have been enhanced if he had been able to deal with each of the agencies' separate requirements from one place at one time. Innovative use of technology might also allow a user such as Bill to use online media to prove relationships, complete the renewal of a passport within 24 hours, or have documents witnessed and authenticated online instead of in person by a notary public.

Delivering value to users

For government services to be considered truly user-centric, users must feel that value has been delivered.

For example, businessmen Jude and David particularly valued quick efficient service. For most of their transactions with government, they preferred to complete them rapidly online. Nevertheless, for other services they preferred the opportunity to develop an ongoing face-to-face relationship with one person over time. Thus, for some services Jude and David valued efficiency most highly, and for others they valued personal relationships more highly than efficiency.

In contrast, Moana valued the introduction of Work and Income's appointment system, which significantly cut down the stress and time required for her to make use of their services. Yet, Moana's comments suggest that what she valued most from these changes was not the increased efficiency, but rather her perception of the agency as more friendly and reliable to engage with.

Moana's interaction with Housing New Zealand Corporation provides yet another perspective on what may constitute value for a user. Her interaction with the agency did not result in the particular outcome she sought but she nevertheless derived value from the experience. She was pleased with the customer service she received in spite of not being able to get a State house from Housing New Zealand. Her desire to be treated with respect and warmth mattered as much as, and perhaps more than, her desire to find a new house.

Each of the users whose stories are presented in this report would be likely to provide a different answer if asked what value they had expected to receive from the government services they experienced. The notion of value incorporates the tangible and intangible costs and benefits associated with a service: what is valued will vary from person to person; and for one person may vary from service to service.

The experience of these users points to the need to continually question if government is providing relevant services that create value, and delivering it in a manner that users appreciate and respond to.

This may, for instance, involve work on building the appropriate measurement tools for evaluating the extent to which services are meeting the expectations of users.

5. Conclusion

These stories have illustrated different aspects of the state of progress of e-government in New Zealand, from the perspectives of people who have recently used government services. Much information could be found online. Agencies sometimes used intermediaries to help with service delivery or to gain a better appreciation of users' needs – and they sometimes incorporated technology as part of this process. Agencies are increasingly recognising the importance of user-centred service delivery and they are beginning to design their services accordingly. Although using technology to support front-end services may not have always been evident to the user, the stories suggest that technology has become integral to their delivery.

It is also evident that agencies are increasingly designing and delivering services that manifest the characteristics of successful e-government as defined by the E-government Strategy (“Convenience and Satisfaction”, “Integration and Efficiency”, and “Trust and Participation” – the characteristics of successful e-government, from *Enabling Transformation – A Strategy for E-government 2006* <http://www.e.govt.nz/about-egovt/strategy/strategy-nov-06.pdf>). For example, these stories illustrate that users derive value not only from the efforts that agencies are making to improve efficiency. They also value trusted connections with service providers, where they expect ongoing support or consistent information to be provided.

However, the stories also suggest that there remains considerable scope to enhance users' experiences with government services. Operations within some government agencies have become more efficient. It appears though that in certain areas, information-sharing or business integration among different agencies to enhance service delivery could be improved. The stories also illustrate that there is much potential for the innovative use of technology to provide user-centred information and services to better meet user needs in the future.