

# Focus on Generosity

- a discussion paper series -

## What value do we place on generosity?

### Discussion Paper 2

This paper examines the benefits that stem from generosity for givers, receivers and the community as a whole.

*This paper is the second of a series to stimulate discussion between the Promoting Generosity initiative Hub Members, Advisors and others in order to guide the work of the Generosity Hub. For information on the series and Promoting Generosity initiative see <http://www.ocvs.govt.nz/work-programme/promoting-generosity.html>*

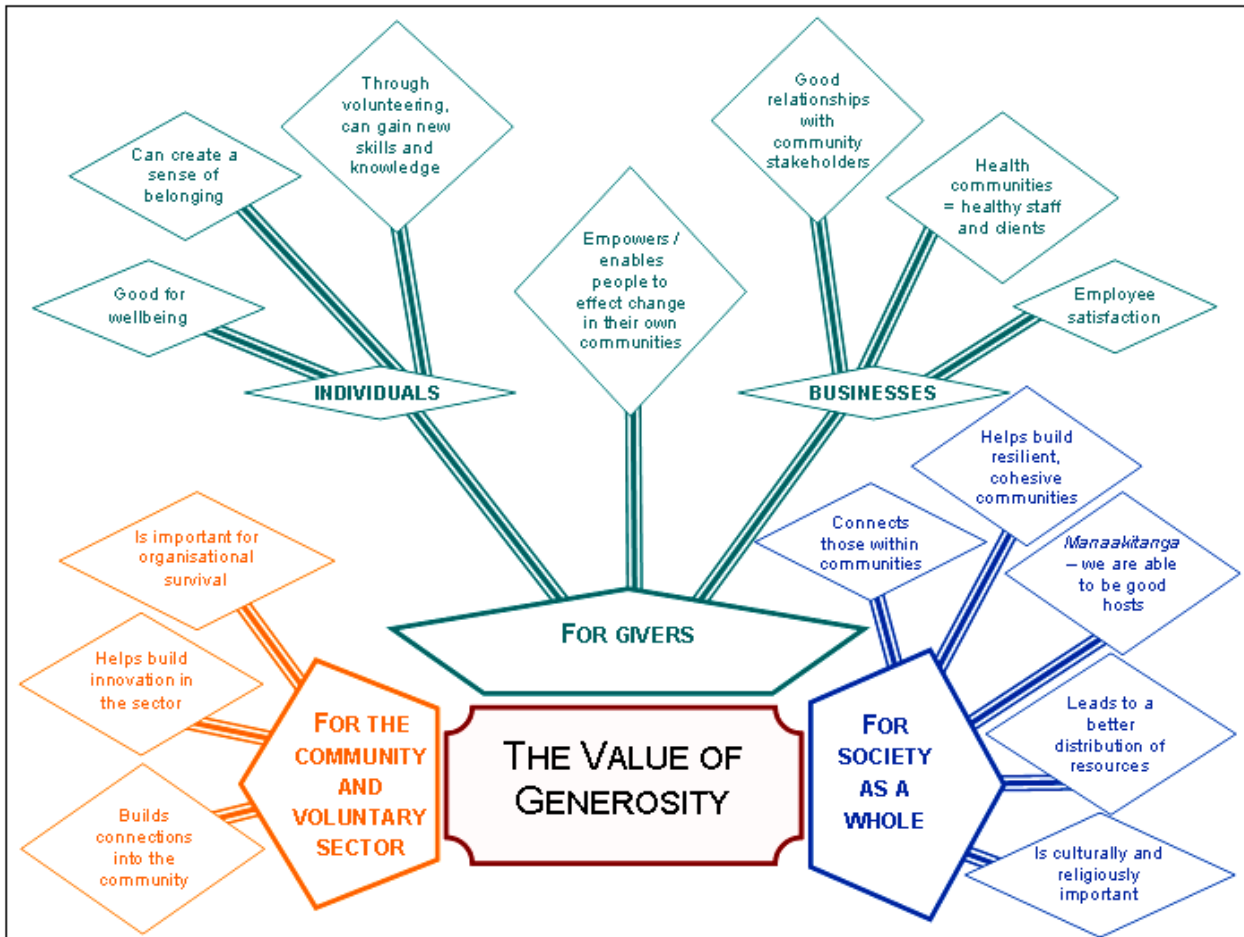


Figure 1: The value of generosity for givers, the community and voluntary sector, and society as a whole

## The value of generosity

Although we cannot say in any measurable way that we have less generosity in New Zealand today than we have had in the past, the *Generosity Hub* has received indications that many people, both in New Zealand and abroad, would like to see more generosity, more giving, and a greater sense of community than exists today. This is even more important as we enter into a period of economic downturn.

The concept of generosity was discussed in depth in [Paper 1: What do we mean by generosity?](#) This paper now looks more deeply into the value of generosity.

To state the obvious, there is value in promoting generosity simply “*because it’s good*” - it is good on many levels, and for everyone involved. Generosity is an avenue through which we express our humanity:

“[p]hilanthropy is a means to reach a desired state of affairs that is closer to one’s view of the ‘ideal’ world.” (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007, 35).

Generosity is also a means of interacting as a social being:

“A smile to a stranger can make a huge difference. You never know what the next person is going through in their life, and your smile or small act of kindness can save a life.” (*Generosity Hub* Advisor, 2008)

Generosity may make people feel good, but does it have other benefits?

Talk of generosity may make people feel good, but it also has more intrinsic benefits for the givers, the community and voluntary sector, and for society as a whole. By growing generosity, it may be possible to head off some of the challenges that spill over from factors such as social isolation, low levels of civic engagement and employee dissatisfaction.

“Fear, mistrust, isolation and conflict grow quickly without the essential enzyme of generosity.” (Wayne Muller in Muller, Nepo & Scribner, 2002, p7).

It is for this reason that the different sectors have come together around the *Promoting Generosity* initiative.

Figure 1 above displays many of the intrinsic benefits that are often associated with generosity or giving – this is by no means a finite list. Figure 1 acts as a map to this paper, beginning with a discussion on the benefits to society as a whole, followed by an outline of the many benefits for the community and voluntary sector, and the givers themselves. Based on the premise that the promotion of generosity is a positive action to take, this paper concludes with a vision for a “generous New Zealand” towards which the *Generosity Hub* works and an invitation for you to discuss, debate and respond to this paper.

# 1 Benefits to society as a whole

## 1.1 Generosity is culturally and religiously important

How is generosity part of our cultures and religions?

Giving is not new to human societies. As New Zealand becomes a more culturally and religiously diverse nation, it is important to bear in mind that the idea of generosity is deeply embedded in many of our cultural and religious traditions. For instance, “within a collectivist cultural tradition such as Māori culture, conceptions of self are intrinsically linked to aspects of nature, *wairua*, *mauri*, *whānau* and *mana*, and all are intertwined. Hence, personal wellbeing depends, both immediately and ultimately, on the wellbeing of the community as a whole” (OCVS, 2007, 1). Some Māori consider that generosity is deeply linked to the concepts of:

- *manaakitanga*, which is about caring for others. It establishes responsibilities as hosts and implies guardianship
- *whanaungatanga*, which creates a sense of belonging through the process of affirming and maintaining family or group relationships
- *aroha*, which encapsulates affection, sympathy, charity, compassion, and love.

Generosity is also a common central tenet of the various religions and cultures of the *pakeha* and other *tau iwi* living in New Zealand – it represents a core value to many people. In 2008, an AC Nielsen/North & South survey ranked “friendliness / kindness / generosity” among the top four “true Kiwi values” (Larsen, 2008), along with a “can-do attitude”, “honesty” and “tolerance / equality / fairness”.

## 1.2 Generosity connects those within communities

One reason for the increased interest in promoting generosity and giving is because greater community involvement can help create cohesive communities that connect with other communities.<sup>1</sup> Building on the work of Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>2</sup> in the 1800s, Putnam (2000, 116) comments that “altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy – our readiness to help others – is by some interpretations a central measure of social capital.”

As outlined in *Paper 1*, generosity is closely linked to reciprocity. Putnam identifies reciprocity as the touchstone of social capital. Our actions create trust and leave open the possibility of future returns from others (Wilkinson & Bittman, 2001). Sometimes the return of the favour is immediate, but in other instances there is more ‘generalised reciprocity’ or broader community connectedness. The latter is a sign of honesty and trust that “lubricate[s] the inevitable frictions of social life” (Putnam, 2000, p135).

“...where mutuality reaches beyond exchange to create more enduring bonds of interdependence, care and commitment, a transition occurs. No longer is reciprocity experienced as an exchange. There is a shift to solidarity and from there to genuine human mutuality.” (Peet, 2001, p9)

Baudot (2001) describes how in a market society attitudes, norms and values begin to be attached to economic transactions and efficiency, invading all aspects of public

<sup>1</sup> Giving can foster both ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville was a French political thinker and historian best known for *Democracy in America* (appearing in two volumes: 1835 and 1840) and *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856).

and private life. Individuals tend to have fewer non-commercial personal and social relationships, and do not respond to generosity, love or conviviality. Sylvia et al (2008, p1) believe that:

“Where generosity isn’t there, there appears to be less creative problem solving, less ability to care for those who need assistance, more negativity, greater reliance on Government and other organisational /authoritative decision making and direction, and poor community self esteem.”

Muller, Nepo & Scribner (2002) contrast market economies with gift economies, where community gain is put before individual gain. The following Māori proverb serves to emphasise the importance of all working together.

*“Kaua e rangiruatia te hā o te hoe; e kore tō tātou waka e ū ki uta”*

“Do not lift the paddle out of unison or our canoe will never reach the shore”

Nevertheless, generosity is also beneficial to market societies as it dispels isolation, which can lead to sick communities. For instance, the giving of time can help break down the cultural barriers or generational barriers that leave people disconnected from wider communities – it opens doors into new networks. On the whole, evidence shows that where generosity and social capital levels are high, “children grow up healthier, safer and better educated, people live longer, happier lives, and democracy and the economy work better” (Putnam, 2006, p138).

Building generosity is often a cyclical process. Existing social networks provide channels to recruit each other for good deeds and foster norms of reciprocity. People who receive help are then more likely to help others - this is vividly shown in the 2000 film directed by Mimi Leder, *Pay it Forward*, where the main character conjures the notion of paying a favour not back, but forward - repaying good deeds with new good deeds done to three new people.

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Although Putnam (2000) claims that different forms of giving complement each other rather than substitute each other, different forms of giving are more prevalent in different societies. According to Wuthnow (in Jones, 2006):

- volunteering is seen more in a society that is decentralised and has loosely connected communities maintained by active members
- philanthropic giving is seen more in a society centrally coordinated by professionals and caretakers who are entrusted with the care of public concerns.

Evidence from New Zealand research also suggests that different forms of giving may be more prevalent in different sectors within the same society (Jones & King, 2008). This may reflect the fact that not all sectors organise and network in the same way.

### 1.3 Generosity helps build resilient and cohesive communities

Closely related to the idea of connected communities is the notion that building civil society involves encouraging civic participation in our communities. This means encouraging volunteering, making philanthropic gifts, or engaging in politics, local or national. This view is supported in the literature.

Do all sectors in society experience generosity in the same way?

“...volunteering is part of the syndrome of good citizenship and political involvement, not an alternative to it...Volunteering is a sign of positive engagement with politics...Conversely, political cynics, even young cynics, are less likely than other people to volunteer.” (Putnam, 2000, p132).

Internationally, there is renewed interest in civic engagement and social inclusion. Patel (2008) believes that this “is due in part to the changes brought about by the globalisation process and concomitant social and economic disparities within and between countries.” She points out that the costs of social exclusion are high and cannot be ignored as they impact negatively on productivity and economic growth, as well as social cohesion of communities. Patel argues there is a “link between social exclusion, disempowerment, a loss of confidence and trust in national governments, and violence, [and the link] is increasingly being made as reflected by ongoing political violence, youth violence and ethnic and religious strife around the globe.” According to Patel, civic engagement is one vehicle to promote active citizenship and social inclusion. Civic engagement or participation includes everything from participation in elections, to participation in local neighbourhood-level decision-making structures, volunteering and service programmes.

What is the relationship between generosity and democracy?

**People who give to their communities are taking ownership of societal issues and are more likely to contribute, and want to contribute, to finding solutions.**

Democracy can be linked to the idea of *polis* where politics and civic participation are virtually one and the same. The concept of ‘substantive democracy’ thus means ‘rule of the people’ (Wilkinson & Bittman, 2001). This compares to ‘procedural democracy’ with its focus on processes and institutions, which can create a separation between the people and the decisions being made. Volunteering (direct involvement) and giving in other forms (supporting public caretakers) present opportunities for ensuring we have an inclusive and substantive form of democracy.

Who owns society’s problems in a generous society?

People who give to their communities are taking ownership of societal issues and are more likely to contribute, and want to contribute, to finding solutions. This is important as the needs of society cannot solely be met by government alone – government is not our sole ‘public caretaker’ - we all are in our various civic roles. Thus, “generosity is about ownership and community building” (Sylvia et al, 2008). Giving builds engagement, which builds sustainable, resilient communities that can respond and adapt to changing demands, tough times, and emergencies.

Civic participation can increase when, for instance, businesses provide opportunities for their employees to engage more. The generosity of, and collaboration between, individuals and organisations can maximise potential benefits to society. It has been suggested that:

“We need to give till it hurts, like we do as parents, for the greater good. This is particularly true for people who are stronger and to whom much has been given. It is reasonable to expect that they will also give a great deal.” (*Generosity Hub Advisor*, 2008)

**Individual engagement can increase when, for instance, businesses provide opportunities for their employees to engage more.**

## 1.4 Generosity can lead to a better distribution of resources

Giving can be viewed as a redistribution of resources. This aligns closely with Māori, Pacific and other world views, whereby concepts of giving are underpinned by the idea of redistribution of collectively-held resources to areas of community need, ie sharing (Robinson, 2004).

Some people consider that there is currently an imbalance of wealth (in all its forms) within sectors, across sectors and amongst individuals. From a different perspective, it may be that there is untapped wealth or capital which could be better directed.

Money is not the only form of wealth or capital that we have.

What kinds of wealth or capital can we share?

“...there are so many kinds of ‘capital’ besides money, and some are more available and even more valuable. For example, whenever we gather to make something happen, we need someone who has wisdom capital, and another who has compassion capital; some bring ‘knowledge-of-the-community’ capital, some have time capital, and finally, some contribute financial capital. But it’s only when you combine all that capital that you create true wealth. Then all of a sudden there’s no giver and no receiver, it’s just everybody bringing what they have to the table, and somehow taking away exactly what they need.” (Muller in Muller, Nepo & Scribner, 2002, p14)

Lee (2007) also found that community organisations look to tap into a number of business non-monetary resources, including networks, technology and expertise. For societal needs to be met, resources (in whichever form) need to be better distributed, and this can occur through generosity of spirit and effective giving.

What is the relationship between generosity and *manaakitanga*?

## 1.5 Generosity makes us better hosts – *Manaakitanga*

Generosity helps New Zealand to present a warm and welcoming face to the rest of the world. If New Zealanders are generous as hosts, New Zealand can live up to its reputation of a friendly and safe destination, and its responsibilities of *manaakitanga* and being a good world citizen. According to the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015, *manaakitanga* “implies a reciprocal responsibility upon a host, and an invitation to a visitor to experience the very best we have to offer”. A desired outcome of this strategy is that the tourism sector and communities work together for mutual benefit, for example, by communities preserving and promoting their local culture and character and incorporating this into all aspects of the visitor experience.

## 2. Benefits to the community and voluntary sector

### 2.1 Generosity is important for organisational survival

What happens to our society if non-profit organisations cannot survive?

In 2004, philanthropic donations and volunteering represented 43% of total non-profit income.<sup>3</sup> Generosity is, therefore, important for the survival of non-profit organisations, especially during an economic downturn when non-profit resources are further depleted and demand on many non-profit services goes up.

Grant Thornton New Zealand undertakes small surveys of the challenges for non-profit organisations each year. In 2007/08 it identified among the fifteen most significant concerns: financing activities in organisations, fundraising, attracting new Trustees/Board members; managing volunteers. These concerns suggest that the resource-base of many organisations is inadequately meeting their needs.

### 2.2 Generosity helps build innovation in the sector

The community and voluntary sector is often lauded for being innovative. According to Salamon (in Dollery & Wallis, 2003, p59):

“the ‘transactions costs’ involved in mobilising governmental response to shortages of collective goods tend to be much higher than the costs of mobilising voluntary action. For government to act, substantial segments of the public must be aroused, public officials must be informed, laws must be written, majorities assembled, and programs must be put into operation. By contrast, to generate a voluntary sector response, a handful of individuals acting on their own or with outside contributed support can suffice.”

Can increased generosity build social innovation?

Although non-profit organisations have the potential to be innovative, evidence of innovation is inconsistent (Salamon in Dollery & Wallis, 2003). Some New Zealanders attribute this to the restraints placed on non-profit organisations receiving funding – this opinion is shared by people in other jurisdictions who believe tightly defined contracts squeeze out innovation (SESR, 2007). It is undeniable that innovative initiatives may be seen as high-risk by some funders (eg government or corporate funders) who are more likely to contract for services, or give grants to programmes they know will achieve positive, measurable outcomes.

The *Generosity Hub* hypothesises<sup>4</sup> that high levels of private donations and volunteering are likely to lead to a more innovative non-profit sector as these contributions are less likely to be tagged to certain evidence-based deliverables, and there is more chance of finding donors who are ideological entrepreneurs willing to invest in venture philanthropy.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there is potential for the kind of innovation that comes when sectors (eg private and non-profit) share resources. Both sectors offer different strengths and capabilities, and if they work together well, there is a greater possibility of developing new holistic solutions.

<sup>3</sup> Calculated from data contained in the *Non-profit Institutions Satellite Account: 2004* (SNZ, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> There is currently little research in this area to prove or disprove this hypothesis. Further research in this area would be valuable.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that resources from other sources should dry up (ie it is not an either/or) as this can allow for the continuation of proven services and action.

### **2.3 Generosity helps build connections and credibility**

Through the giving process, donors and volunteers can be exposed more broadly to an organisation's cause and activities. Each individual or business is a point of connection to a new network through which an organisation can build understanding of its cause and brand recognition. An organisation's best promoters can be its volunteers and donors as well as the businesses it goes into partnership with. The support given by these individuals and businesses can also build an organisation's credibility.

### 3. Benefits to individuals and businesses

There are not only general public and organisational benefits to increased levels of generosity. Donors and volunteers also derive their own benefits. At the individual level, community involvement can be inspirational, giving people a sense of belonging, assisting them to obtain new skills and knowledge, as well as helping them lead a full life. Where businesses are involved, community involvement can lead to increased employee satisfaction, improved community relationships, and stronger communities that are able to participate more effectively in the economy. More information is provided below.

#### 3.1 Generosity empowers people and enables them to effect change in their own communities

How do we each be the change we want to see?

Mahatma Ghandi's saying "be the change you want to see" continues to be repeated throughout the world. Giving enables individuals and businesses to engage in issues and causes of importance to them and those around them, as well as to provide services to others. It empowers them to help create the kind of society they want to see.

"...people may move from occasional volunteer action to more sustained engagement in activities related to development and change, and the other way round. These progressions may facilitate a deeper understanding of the issues producing the socio-economic conditions that volunteers and social activists aid to address, and can strengthen social inclusion by virtue of fostering people's participation in activities seeking to change these conditions." (CIVICUS, IAVE & UNV, 2008, p10)

#### INDIVIDUALS

*"O le ala i le pule o le tautua."*

"The road to leadership is through service." (Samoan proverb)

#### 3.2 Generosity can create a sense of belonging

Depending on how one gives, generosity can create a sense of belonging through the action of 'giving back' or the social interaction it creates. Robinson (2004) talks about how those with 'weak' ties are more likely to reach out to share their resources with others. This is reflected through the statement of a recent migrant to New Zealand:

"I feel closer to New Zealand society through volunteering." (Tan in MSD, 2008, p16)

However, Robinson (2004) argues that sharing takes place amongst those with whom we are more familiar or already have cultural connections with. This is reflected by the statement of a research participant in OCVS (2007, p23) about *mahi aroha* (unpaid activity by Māori performed out of sympathy and love):

"That's how we keep our whānau strong, know they're always there."

#### 3.3 Generosity can develop new skills and knowledge

Not only do people get to utilise the skills and knowledge they already have through giving to others (particularly, giving time), they can also develop new skills and

knowledge through the acts of giving, which they carry across into other aspects of their life. People can often try new things or enter different disciplines through volunteering. Working with different people in different environments broadens their horizons.

Individuals who want to think more about their giving can also join groups such as Giving Circles<sup>6</sup> through which they can learn about local causes, or they can undertake their own investigations of causes in their region or sphere of interest.

The potential to develop new knowledge and skills has been noted by companies that engage in employee volunteering. By working in a different role as a volunteer, employees can develop existing and additional transferable skills. Employee evaluations suggest that enhanced communication, coaching, listening and teamwork skills particularly benefit employees.

### 3.4 Generosity is good for individual wellbeing

Anecdotal evidence suggests that being generous allows people to live a full life. Giving and receiving helps individuals to connect with others in meaningful and satisfying ways, and provides people with a sense of worth and vocation.

“Generosity frees us from the tyranny of the self.” (*Generosity Hub Advisor*, 2008)

Some research has suggested that people that give are happier and healthier - they feel good about themselves. For instance, some studies suggest “that building a community’s social capital can be a more effective approach to child welfare than child protection systems, preventative systems or parenting skills and responsibility approaches.” (Hoffmann-Ekstein, 2007, p9)

## BUSINESSES

### 3.5 Generosity helps businesses build good relationships with community stakeholders

Generosity, as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become part of a business’ ethical responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> A recent IBM Global survey of 250 business leaders worldwide found that companies no longer view CSR as a discretionary cost (IBM Corporation, 2008).

Business is seen as behaving ethically and managing beyond their bottom line when it is concerned for its workers, their families, communities and society at large (IPP,2006). Thus, generosity for business is not just about how the business interacts with the community around it – there is also generosity in the workplace, which is about how staff are treated and how they treat each other.

Is generosity the ‘X-factor’ that we all look for?

How does generosity lead to strong relationships?

<sup>6</sup> A giving circle is a group of donors who place their charitable dollars into a pooled fund, and decide as a group which charities to support, often following an investigation of local organisations and causes. Although giving circles are prevalent in other countries this model has not yet taken off in New Zealand.

<sup>7</sup> Some New Zealanders such as Roger Kerr argue that the only business of business is to increase profits, and that business social investment (or generosity) is only a discretionary activity. The growth of corporate social responsibility in New Zealand and beyond would suggest otherwise (IPP, 2006)

New Zealand customers are now expecting and demanding businesses to incorporate social outcomes into their planning (IPP, 2007). A business with a reputation for being generous (both through what it gives and how it gives) will have good relationships with its community stakeholders. This may in turn improve company loyalty and branding, with positive spin-offs for profitability.

### **3.6 Generosity can create employee satisfaction**

As outlined in 3.3, employees engaged in activity such as employee volunteering often find it rewarding.

“Generosity has its own rewards - we see this at Habitat for Humanity where the people and the workplaces involved in building houses are positively affected in all sorts of ways, such as team building, reduced absenteeism, people feeling good about having helped.” (*Generosity Hub Advisor*, 2008)

Moreover, employees may also experience a sense of pride in working for employers who practice CSR. Satisfied employees, mean a reduction in employee turnover and litigation (which is good for business profitability).

### **3.7 Healthy communities = healthy staff and clients**

“Business investment in programmes that address poverty comes out of the understanding that poverty at both the local and national levels is not only a problem with serious implications for society, it also affects business profitability and the long term sustainability of business.” (IPP, 2006, p9)

In other words, social, not just the economic, wellbeing of society is vital for business success. Weak, unhealthy and uneducated communities do not make for strong markets and employees. Therefore, there is commercial benefit in businesses helping to build stronger communities.

“Well-known companies have already proven that they can differentiate their brands and reputations, as well as their products and services, if they take responsibility for the well-being of the societies and environments in which they operate.” (IBM Corporation, 2008, p1)

Porter & Kramer (2002) highlight that philanthropic investments made by companies in a geographical cluster can have a powerful effect on the competitiveness and performance of the whole cluster (eg investments to improve a local university can improve the quality of a pool of employee candidates).

What is the relationship between social wellbeing and business?

## The vision

This paper has outlined the value of generosity for givers, the community and voluntary sector, and for society as a whole.

Based on the premise that the promotion of generosity is a positive action to take, a group of over sixty people from the non-profit, business, government and academic sectors attended a forum in November 2007 and formulated a vision for a “generous New Zealand” to which the *Generosity Hub* works. Overall, there was a sense that “success” should not be fundamentally defined by the amount donated or the number of hours volunteered, but instead by the attitudes and beliefs of New Zealanders.

In summary, the vision was to create a society where:

1. Giving is the norm - "It's what we do"
2. Everybody is recognising and celebrating generosity in all its forms
3. Giving behaviours are understood, taught and promoted
4. Volunteering and giving are supported by government, business and the community
5. Inclusive and engaged communities are built and sustained
6. We are all working together.

Is this a vision  
that you share?

This discussion paper series is about exploring how we might bring about this vision. Still to come in this series are:

- *Paper 3: What do we know about generosity in New Zealand?* This paper will bring together the research and knowledge surrounding generosity and the practice of promoting generosity in New Zealand today, whilst identifying the gaps.
- *Paper 4: What can we do to promote generosity?* This paper will respond to the questions: what can we do? How do we leverage off the strengths of each sector? What is possible now? What in the future?

If you would like to give feedback, or if you have any research, information or experience you think would be useful for the paper series we would appreciate hearing from you.  
You can contact us at [promotinggenerosity@msd.govt.nz](mailto:promotinggenerosity@msd.govt.nz)

“The commitment to truly care for the wellbeing of your neighbours; to contribute to the greater good, is a challenge that all of us can practice”

Hon. Tariana Turia, Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector, 2009

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- Plus discussions with Promoting Generosity Hub advisors and communities-of-interest*