

Kindness: a dynamic, two-way exchange that is critical to the community services sector

A qualitative snapshot of kindness through the lens of community service organisations in Aotearoa



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Preface

This report has been prepared for Good Bitches Baking by Penny Fitzpatrick, with support from Matthew Fanselow and Rachel Wallis, from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Ltd).

For 30 years MartinJenkins has been a trusted adviser to clients in the government, private, and non-profit sectors in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally. Our services include organisational performance, employment relations, financial and economic analysis, economic development, research and evaluation, data analytics, engagement, and public policy and regulatory systems.

We are recognised as experts in the business of government. We have worked for a wide range of public-sector organisations from both central and local government, and we also advise business and non-profit clients on engaging with government.

Kei te āwhina mātau ki te whakapai ake i a Aotearoa. We are a values-based organisation, driven by a clear purpose of helping make Aotearoa New Zealand a better place. Our firm is made up of people who are highly motivated to serve the New Zealand public, and to work on projects that make a difference.

Established in 1993, we are a privately owned New Zealand limited liability company, with offices in Wellington and Auckland. Our firm is governed by a Board made up of executive directors Kevin Jenkins, Michael Mills, Nick Davis, Allana Coulon, Richard Tait, and Sarah Baddeley, as well as independent director Sophia Gunn and chair David Prentice.

A heartfelt acknowledgement

This research was supported by a sector advisory group, made up of nine members with a wealth of collective experience across the community services sector. The insights reported here would not have been as rich without their advice, feedback, and support to recruit participants.

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We would also like to thank all the people who generously gave up their time to complete our survey and to take part in interviews. We were humbled by the generosity with which you shared your knowledge, experiences, and views.

A final thanks to the individuals, organisations, and funders that propagate kindness in our society. We see your mahi and thank you for it.





Foreword

We're so delighted to have this report to share with our community - it feels like a resource that will offer all kinds of value, whether as a framework for reviewing strategy, thinking about the people you work with differently, or simply a source of conversation starters about a concept we all take for granted.

We've thought a lot about how we, as an evolving not-for-profit organisation, should grow, about what else we could do to progress our charitable purpose: to make NZ the kindest place on earth through the power of kind acts to give meaning and connection to both the giver and the receiver.

With this purpose in mind and as we progress an overarching strategic refresh, we instigated this

research project (generously supported by the DIA Lottery Community Research Fund). We're never short of ideas here at GBB but we wanted to be sure that any programmes and resources we develop are relevant and useful to our recipient organisations, and also don't duplicate the work they're already doing. We began to wonder what 'kindness' as an active and strategic intervention might look like in different contexts.

With the care and thoughtfulness of the MartinJenkins team, this report has definitely given us a lot of food for thought. It affirms much of what we thought we knew, but it's shown us where some of our thinking needs to take a new direction as well.

We're deeply grateful to our advisory group for their reflections and connections, and to all the participants in the research for their time, insights and generosity.

Now, we offer this report to our community – the NFPs and NGOs, the advocates and services providers, the change-makers and the ones who hold us up, and especially to all the people who are having some kind of a tough time. We see you. This report sees you. Our community sees you.

Katy Rowden

General Manager, Good Bitches Baking



Executive summary

This study began with a question: What is the role of kindness from the perspective of community services organisations (CSOs) in Aotearoa New Zealand?

To answer this question, we engaged 258 individuals who work for, or volunteer with, wide ranging community services sector organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. The research included 50 in-depth interviews, and 208 survey responses.

Through their feedback we conclude that kindness is a dynamic, two-way exchange that is both integral to the survival and effectiveness of CSOs, and that CSOs themselves have a critical role in fostering kindness within society.

Kindness is a many-faceted concept, that permeates all aspects of the community services sector

Interviewees use a range of terms to describe kindness, in theory and in action. Their responses help us to understand kindness in terms of four connected, and independent, categories:

- A set of values
- A way of showing up
- A practice, and

- Intentional acts.

Most interviewees describe kindness as a core foundation of the community services sector, and of their own approach to life.

At an organisational level, CSOs occupy various roles simultaneously as givers, receivers, and facilitators of kindness. They give kindness (for example through charitable acts); they receive kindness (for example through donations); they facilitate the flow of kindness (for example by creating opportunities for others to get involved in kindness exchange); and their very existence is a symbol of kindness in the communities where they operate.

Kindness has two important roles for CSOs

Our research participants provided many examples of kindness programmes delivered by their organisations that fall into two categories according to the purpose that they serve:

- Programmes that contribute to delivery of strategic objectives for clients, and
- Programmes that put values into action.

Even though most interviewees were well versed in the benefits of giving and receiving kindness,

most of the formalised programmes that CSOs described are focused on *putting values into action*, rather than *delivering strategic objectives for clients* – such as, mental wellbeing, resilience, connection. Rather, the opportunities that enable clients to give and receive kindness tend to be by incidental to achievement of objectives, rather than intentional.

The barriers to CSOs delivering more kindness programmes can be overcome through clear logic, dedicated funding, meaningful partnerships, and careful design

Barriers to CSOs running more kindness programmes for clients fall into four groups.

- Systems settings – challenges that are common in the community services sector (like shortage of funding, resources, and competing demands) also hinder kindness programmes.
- Awareness – while kindness is common, many interviewees lack language to describe it as an organised and intentional intervention, which may also inhibit funding for such programmes.



- Suitability – many of the challenges that bring people to CSOs for support can also make it harder for them to engage with kindness programmes.
- Perceptions – a query is raised as to whether society may have view that some people are less deserving of kindness, and whether this perception creates an unconscious barrier to kindness programmes for some CSOs. As one interviewee powerfully stated – *people need the most love when they are the least lovable* – a salient reminder of the importance of work to propagate kindness and to be grateful to those who are delivering kindness to people in tough times.

Understanding the amorphous nature of kindness and being intentional in the design of kindness programmes (including articulating the intended contribution to client outcomes) will help CSOs to avoid mis-steps and may enable more funding of kindness programmes.

There are many ways that organisations can turn the insights from this research into action

The research provides interesting insights. But without action, insights are of little value to the community services sector. Building on the insights provided here, there are a range of actions that CSOs, intermediaries like Good Bitches Baking, and funders can take to address

challenges, and propagate kindness for the benefit of the people they support, and wider benefits for society.

CSOs can...

- Carry on doing what you are doing – your kindness is important mahi that is *seen* by more people than you think.
- Unpack what kindness means in your organisation, and what it looks like in action if it is reframed as a dynamic, two-way exchange.
- Consider how you currently use kindness (to achieve strategic objectives and to put values into action) – and what opportunities may exist to do this more.
- Clearly articulate the role of kindness in achieving your programme objectives.

Intermediaries can...

- Raise awareness of kindness as an intervention.
- Explore further the possible perception that some people are less deserving of kindness, and how this perception may impact the use of kindness programmes.
- Work with CSOs, including Māori-led providers, to co-design kindness programmes that are appropriate to the people the CSO works with.

- Work with funders to help them to understand and measure the contribution of kindness.

Funders can...

- Unpack what it means to be a *kind* funder.
- Review requirements of funded organisations to ensure they create kind environment for funding.
- Support cross-organisation / sector-wide kindness initiatives, and measurement.

"Kindness probably makes the world go round, rather than money. Money makes it get stuck. Kindness helps the flow individually and with networks." – Interview participant



Background and introduction

Background

Good Bitches Baking (GBB) is working to make Aotearoa a kinder place.

GBB and its members believes that:

- Kindness is redemptive to everyone involved
- Everyone deserves to receive kindness, and
- Everyone can benefit from the opportunity to be kind.

They run programmes to help people receive kindness in a time of need, with the main programme delivered through volunteers who bake sweet treats that are given out to people who are having a tough time through community service organisations (CSOs).

In 2022, GBB secured funding to undertake a research project that would broaden understanding of kindness in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Kindness is a broad and amorphous topic. After an initial scoping phase, the research was framed to interrogate three key concepts:

- The circle of kindness (i.e. recognising that individuals are at times givers and receivers, and that there can be wellbeing benefits in both roles)
- Kindness as an intervention (i.e. giving and receiving kindness as part of a wider programme of support to enable individual/whānau/community wellbeing; organised programmes rather than random acts), and
- Aotearoa CSOs as vehicles for kindness (i.e. facilitating kindness programmes alongside other interventions).

Ultimately, the research sought to provide insights in response to three questions:

1. **What is kindness, and what is its role** from the perspective of CSOs in Aotearoa?
2. **What sorts of programmes** do CSOs currently offer that enable their clients to give and/or receive kindness?

3. **What are the barriers and enablers** to CSOs offering kindness programmes to their clients?

While the research has been made possible by GBB, and has been led by their areas of interest, it is intended to have wider relevance across the community services sector, particularly given an apparent gap in the literature about structured interventions that focus on kindness and are delivered by CSOs.

Methods

The research was undertaken in the first half of 2023. It used a multi-method approach, that included:

- Targeted literature scan (to test and qualify our research framework and focus)¹
- Online survey (of current partners of GBB, and other CSOs), and
- One to one interviews with individuals working for CSOs.

¹ This research project followed on from a literature review that was undertaken for Good Bitches Baking by Allen and Clarke in November 2020. That literature review informed the development of our analytical framework and interview schedule. We supplemented Allen and Clarke's literature review with a targeted search of literature pertaining to community service organisations' use of kindness interventions to test and qualify frameworks.



Figure 1: A snapshot of participation and methods



Source: MartinJenkins

* Note: Interviewees' organisations include a mix of faith-based and non-faith based, and some organisations that identify as by, and for ethnic migrants. We achieved limited reach with Māori-led and Pacific-led organisations.

We distributed invitations to participate in the research widely across CSO, using a combination of direct approach, broadcast, and referral.

Figure 1 provides a snapshot of participants. Appendix 1 contains greater detail on participants' profiles.

Caveats and limitations: insights should not be presumed representative of the sector, or of the country

The study is a snapshot based on interviews and survey feedback from a sample of people who work across CSOs. Participants were self-

selecting, and while they are not a homogenous group, they are not wholly representative of Aotearoa New Zealand society in their demographics, or of the wider sector in terms of the profiles of the organisations that they work for.

We received low take up from organisations that identify *exclusively* as Māori-led, or Pacific-led. This could be for several reasons.

- We heard from two interviewees that the sponsor organisation's name was off putting for them. This may be true for others who chose not to participate, and may have even resulted in our emails being filtered at source.
- The topic may not resonate with organisations, due to the way it was phrased in our approach, or perhaps because of a general disconnect between our frame and their own.
- Māori and Pacific organisations and communities are even more likely to experience engagement fatigue, due to the large number of government policies and initiatives that seek to target these groups.

Through this report we touch lightly on te ao māori concepts that relate to kindness. These points are highlighted in pink boxes and are drawn from the researchers' experience and literature, rather than interviews.



A note about terminology

Interviewees do not share a common term for referring to the people that their organisation delivers services to. Sometimes they are called *clients, patients, service-users*, or other terms that describe their relationship to the organisation. At other times they are referred to through terms that relate to the person's identity independent of the organisation – *women, artists, or whānau*, for example.

At points throughout this report we use the term *client*, for lack of a better term. We recognise the inadequacies of this term and mean no offence through its use.



Findings

The following sections present findings in relation to the three research questions:

1. **What is kindness, and what is its role** from the perspective of CSOs in Aotearoa?
2. **What sorts of programmes** do CSOs currently offer that enable their clients to give and/or receive kindness?
3. **What are the barriers and enablers** to CSOs offering kindness programmes to their clients?

Findings are drawn from survey and interviews and have been tested with the advisory group.

This section also includes five Focus Topics – highlighting significant themes and issues that

emerged through the research and benefit from richer description.



1. What is kindness, and what is its role from the perspective of CSOs in Aotearoa?

Kindness is... more than just being nice

Previous research has highlighted that there is no single definition of kindness in literature, but rather kindness is described in terms of concepts like altruism, compassion, and in Aotearoa, manaaki (see Allen and Clarke, 2020).

Participants in the current study, who work in the community services sector, describe kindness as a universal and amorphous concept that is integral to their personal and professional ideologies.

Figure 2: Kindness is... integrated in all aspects of community services sector



Source: MartinJenkins

Manaakitanga is a well-established Te Ao Māori concept, often associated with kindness and hospitality. It incorporates the concepts of Mana and Aki. Mana underpins personal power and prestige that individuals hold, and Aki means to uplift and encourage or support. Taken together manaakitanga is more than just kind words or hospitality, it refers to mana enhancing actions that observe and generate tikanga – thus bringing in the concept of reciprocity.

We see resonance with the multidimensional descriptions of kindness provided by participants in the current research.

The responses they provide help us to understand kindness in terms of four connected and independent categories (Figure 2).

"I feel like it's one of those things that once you've started to uncover it... it's actually been there in plain sight all along. It's so much a part of the air we breathe. And in terms of community action or purpose, all of these groups, they represent a form of kindness within the community." – Interview participant



Kindness: A set of values

A few interviewees work for organisations that name *kindness* amongst their organisational values. We heard phrases like *kindness is catching, kindness and compassion, and words of kindness*.

More commonly, interviewees describe kindness through related values that were or were not formalised, that permeate all aspects of their operations. They talk about concepts like *respect, acceptance, and being non-judgemental; manaakitanga, empathy, compassion, and caring; grace, openness, connection, and love*.

The wide range of words that interviewees use to describe kindness, is indicative of its fluidity as a concept, and the universality with which kindness permeates the sector.

Four values that arose frequently in interviews require further comment:

- **Empathy** lies at the heart of kindness within the community services sector. Interviewees talked frequently about kindness meaning the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. To put oneself in someone else's shoes; To understand the world through their experience and perspective, rather than through our own. Interviewees make a clear distinction between *empathy* and *sympathy*, with the

former being within the scope of kindness in the professional context of the community sector, and the latter being less appropriate.

- **Altruism**, or giving without expectation of receiving anything in return, is mentioned frequently in connection to *kindness*. Participants in this research each occupy multiple roles in the community sector, simultaneously or over time: employee, volunteer, donor, client, community-member, and whānau/relation of a person receiving support. Interviewees acknowledge altruism becomes a nuanced concept, depending on the position they occupy at a given moment. As employees, they operate as agents of an altruistic organisation, but are personally paid to be kind. As volunteers and donors, they receive emotional payback for kindness. As community members, they benefit from social cohesion and connection.

"Sometimes you can be disappointed. Not sure I really believe in altruism. Sometimes we are kind because it feels good to be kind, but I don't mind that." – Interview participant

- **Respect and openness.** Interviewees often use phrases like *treat others as you want to*

be treated, to describe what kindness means to them. We found that on further discussion, this seemingly common and simple phrase, belies a deeper sentiment that relates to treating others with respect and openness. Importantly, this means treating the individual with the respect and openness you would hope to receive, rather than providing support in the manner you would hope to receive it – which may not align with their own wants and needs. For illustration, you may want your children to be looked after so that you can attend to some errands. They may want some errands to be attended to so that they can spend time with their children.

- **Acceptance, without judgement.** Many of the individuals we spoke to describe the importance of accepting another individual as they present in the moment, without passing judgement on the choices, and circumstances, that have led to their current state. This form of kindness should not be mistaken for freedom from accountability. Interviewees indicated they hold the two concepts, accountability, and non-judgement, are held in careful balance within a broader value of kindness.

Kindness: A way to show up

One way that interviewees describe the values of kindness in action, is through the thoughts and



intention they bring to their interactions with others, including their clients.

Interviewees describe showing up to their clients with an intention to understand, to see them as an individual, to listen without judgement. One interviewee described it as asking oneself *am I approaching this in a mana-enhancing way?*

"Kindness is a way of thinking and a way of being. It directs an approach to others, and to self, that is very much led by the heart, and led with purpose... A positive will and a positive intent." – Interview participant

Kindness: A practice

While kindness is not *just* being nice, several interviewees do describe kindness as a day-to-day practice that includes things like politeness, manners, active listening, and patience.

Interviewees practice kindness through the habits and tools they deploy day-to-day in their work (for example, through their choice of timing and location for meetings with clients), and through rituals and activities they undertake with colleagues, clients, and others (for example, karakia, gratitude circles, prayer, and waiata).

These regular and embedded practices generate a culture of kindness, within worker-client relationships, within teams, within organisations, and within communities.

"I'm really cognisant of reading a person's situation so I wouldn't just jump into a solution. It's a question, 'are you safe', offer this first... Before you say something you stop and think 'how could this be taken, what battle could they be facing'." – Interview participant

Kindness: Intentional acts

When asked what kindness means to them, interviewees described a wide range of intentional acts. These include acts that are:

- Spontaneous, or planned
- One—off, ongoing, or repeated
- Gestures large and small
- Gifts to meet need, and gifts that are a treat
- Services, time, money, and supply of goods, and
- Acknowledgements of an individual's intrinsic worth, delivered through words, cards, gestures.

Volunteering was mentioned repeatedly by interviewees in the context of kindness. Overall, the concepts are interrelated, but not synonymous - while volunteering can be a form of kindness, not all kindness is volunteering, and vice versa.

Later in this report we provide more detail about the ways in which CSOs facilitate interventions that enable the giving and receiving of kindness (from page 18).

Our research suggests that it is not always essential to activate all four categories for kindness to be perceived. For example, it is possible to 'show up' in a kind way without undertaking an 'intentional act' to support someone. In this example, the receiver will very often still value the individual's offer and perceive their engagement as a kindness.

This is not to say that well intentioned actions are always perceived as kindness by the receiver. In the next section we explore some of the situations that can lead to kindness not landing well with the receiver.

Aroha, and arohatanga, are also well-established Te Ao Māori values often associated with kindness. They refer to the notion of care, respect, love, compassion, and the action of extending aroha to other living beings (both people and nature).



Focus topic 1

KINDNESS – WHAT'S IN A WORD

Several interviewees expressed discomfort with the term 'kindness', due to meaning imbued by recent or historical events. Two examples that stand out relate to recent use of the term during COVID-19 which were directed towards all citizens, and the historic experiences of people in the disability community.

Several organisations described a sort of renaissance for the term kindness during COVID-19, that began well and took a turn as the country's narrative around our public health response became less unified and more divergent. Connor* described how the association between the term kindness and the lockdowns associated with COVID-19 had ultimately become unhelpful for the organisation where he works.

“During COVID-19, it flared beautifully for a while, and then the honeymoon wore off is what it felt like to us. Because of course, we were already in the business of promoting kindness as one of the ways to help five ways to well-being and other things. So that was a very welcome message... but we found that people soon became quite immune to that word. In fact, people started having quite toxic reactions to it, where we started to get feelings of the pushback in terms of public discourse and social media, kind of a rejection of it. [The stress of lockdowns] was already taking its toll and I think for some people they just started to reject that idea, even if they don't ultimately reject the idea of kindness.

Gerald* has lived experience as a person with disability, and has worked in a range of roles across the disability sector for many years. He described the association that the term kindness has for him with an ideology that is outdated and disempowering in the disability sector.

“The disability community doesn't really react well to the word kindness, which is bizarre, right? I think that particularly disabled people have been seen as an object that you'd be kind to, you know. Where the frame that the disability community is in at the moment is much more of a rights-based framework.

* For privacy, we have not used individuals' real names

Kindness is for everyone; but isn't something that everyone experiences

An important theme to emerge through the research was the observation that many people who are supported by community service organisations are not used to experiencing kindness, and have often experienced the opposite of kindness – through their lives or in recent times.

Sometimes, unkindness is experienced from loved ones, and can be a key reason that individuals are seeking support.

"... the social workers at our agency are doing kind service to the ethnic women who might be in isolation, who may have experienced the opposite of kindness... We do advocacy and we have information to respond to whatever is the opposite of kindness. So, some people may have experienced violence and have been abused and we try to have long term support for the women and the ethnic community members." – Interview participant

Other times, individuals experience unkindness from the community around them, sometimes

directly through sideways glances and social distance, and sometimes indirectly through the social messaging they receive. This unkindness is directed at whole groups, ranging from young people in general to all former prisoners, for example.

A few interviewees referred to cycles of intergenerational and systemic unkindness, such as racism and homophobia.

Another concerning thread to this feedback are the descriptions of individuals experiencing unkindness from other professionals, and from social agencies.

"There continues to be a patriarchal treatment of people who are unfamiliar with the system, and agencies can treat them poorly. The lack of kindness from those agencies comes from a balance of power around information. They are withholding information." – Interview participant

Participants in the current research focused almost exclusively on kindness that is shown to other people, and to organisations. In Te Ao Māori, *care is at the heart of the Māori values system and calls upon humans to be kaitiaki, caretakers of the mauri, the life principle, in each other and in nature* (Spiller, C. et al. *Relational Well-Being and Wealth: Māori Businesses and an Ethic of Care*, 2010).

"Teen parents feel judged by agencies, so being kind to others is good for their self-esteem too."

– Interview participant

All these unkind experiences are described as having lasting effects on individuals' self-worth and levels of trust, sometimes contributing to them becoming perpetrators of unkindness themselves.

"A lot of prisoners were cared for and have experienced developmental trauma. They have deep seated shame." – Interview participant

We explore this topic further in section 3 of this report, from page 29, where we discuss 'perceptions' as a potential barrier to community service organisations offering more kindness programmes.



Kindness provides benefits to the community services sector at multiple levels

Beyond values, practice, acts and intent, many interviewees described kindness in terms of its criticality to a well-functioning community services sector, and to a well-functioning society. As such, many found it difficult to distinguish kindness from – *just what we do*.

"Well, it's bread and butter for me, actually. And for the work that we do... It's an aspect of human well-being that well, it's vital and it's the glue of civilised society in some ways." – Interview participant

The benefits of kindness are well traversed in literature, and have been the subject of a multitude of studies, especially in the field of psychology (see Allen and Clarke, 2020).

Many of the participants in the current study were also well versed in the benefits of kindness, for the giver and for the receiver. Their feedback identified benefits at three levels, when viewed in the context of the community services sector:

- Benefits for individuals involved in giving or receiving
- Benefits for CSOs, and
- Benefits for communities and wider society.

Benefits for individuals

Interviewees described the benefits of giving and receiving kindness for people that they work with, and for themselves. Their feedback reinforces the well-being benefits summarised by Allen and Clarke in their 2020 literature review. While Allen and Clarke refer to wellbeing benefits in four domains (social, emotional, physical and relationship benefits), participants of our study mostly referred to social and emotional benefits.

Benefits of receiving kindness

Emotional nourishment and validation

Receiving kindness can provide emotional nourishment and validation to individuals who are having a tough time. It serves as a reminder that they are not alone in their struggles and that others care about their well-being. Receiving kindness can bring comfort, uplift spirits, and provide a much-needed sense of validation for

experiences and emotions. It helps individuals feel seen, heard, and understood, which contributes to well-being and resilience.

"[the benefit is] connection, like somebody thinks you're worth it. It's about belonging, being seen and being heard." – Interview participant

Spiller's work draws on Māori business experience to explore some fundamental Māori concepts of well-being. She asserts that practicing caring values creates relational well-being in the five well-being dimensions associated with mauri ora: spiritual, cultural, social, environmental and economic. *Manaakitanga transforms mana through acts of generosity that enhances all, produces well-being and creates 'a climate whereby the mana of all players is elevated' (Durie, 2001, 83) (Spiller 2010).*



Increased self-worth and confidence

Kindness from others can boost self-worth and confidence for individuals going through hard times. It challenges negative self-perceptions and self-doubt, reaffirming their value as deserving of care and support. Receiving acts of kindness allows individuals to recognise their inherent worth and strengths, promoting a positive self-image. This increased self-worth and confidence can empower them to navigate their challenges with greater resilience and determination.

"Sometimes if the journey is a little bit hard you feel how lucky you are to receive something like that and then it will give you a feeling that you are important." – Interview participant

Restored faith in humanity

Interviewees describe examples of clients experiencing a new or restored faith in humanity because of receiving kindness. In this context, kindness serves as a reminder that there is goodness and compassion in the world, even during difficult times.

"One time a child said to me that the dad had a bad drug problem, and they didn't have any food. I bought groceries and he had a go at me and got quite stroppy, and I said that's okay I was just trying to help out. He did take them, but it left a sour taste. 2 days later he came back with a card which said how sorry he was and that no one had done anything like that for him before." – Interview participant

Benefits of giving kindness

Several interviewees talked about the benefits of giving kindness, being equal to or even greater than receiving kindness for people who are having a hard time. Most interviewees believed in this benefit based on their personal experience and their observations in others. A small number of interviewees referred to research studies to back up their understanding of the benefits of kindness.

Sense of purpose and empowerment

We heard from interviewees that giving kindness to others can provide a sense of purpose and empowerment, especially for individuals who are having a tough time. By offering support, empathy, or assistance, givers regain a sense of

agency and control over their lives. It allows them to channel their energy into positive actions, contributing to the well-being of others and making a meaningful impact despite their own struggles. Giving kindness reinforces the belief that they can make a difference, fostering a sense of purpose and hope.

"It gives the people we work with a real joy and a sense of purpose. I think that it is giving back to the community, and this gives them something to do, it gives them more connections with and across the community." – Interview participant

Benefits of witnessing kindness

One interviewee spoke at length about the benefits of *witnessing* kindness.

... it's so powerful that we get, we get sort of residual kick effects from just watching acts of kindness, even if we're not directly involved. When we see people being kind it makes us feel good as well.



Perspective shift and gratitude

When facing difficulties, extending kindness to others can bring about a perspective shift. It helps individuals gain a broader understanding of their own challenges in relation to others' struggles. This shift in perspective can cultivate gratitude for the aspects of their lives that they may have taken for granted and reminds individuals that they still can make a positive impact.

"People who are disrespectful and unkind generally have no love or respect for themselves, and if you can help them allow themselves to learn to love themselves and see that there is a measurable value in sharing and nurturing that in the community – it's the most important thing really." – Interview participant

Connection and support

Actively giving kindness creates opportunities for connection and support. It allows individuals to engage with others who may be going through similar challenges or have overcome similar hardships. This connection fosters a sense of solidarity, reduces feelings of isolation, and provides a support network. Giving kindness can

lead to the formation of meaningful relationships, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging during difficult times.

Benefits for organisations

Kindness is critical to the survival of community services sector, which is largely made up of organisations that rely on donations, volunteers, and high levels of generosity among their paid staff.

Examples provided by interviewees illustrate the ways in which operating with kindness provides benefit at the organisational level, by:

- supporting more effective service delivery – through building trust and creating meaningful connections with clients
- supporting recruitment and retention of volunteers and staff – through recognising and acknowledging their contributions, and
- supporting social license from the wider community – through being seen to walk the talk.

"Taking time with people you get to the crux of the issue: because people then decide, OK, this person is kind enough, I can trust them, and then

we actually come to the parts that they want to talk about." – Interview participant

Benefits for whānau, communities, and society

Interviewees described the ripple effect of kindness in general terms, and through specific examples they had observed among their clients (Focus topic 2). These include benefits for whānau, for communities, and for wider society.

Benefits for families and whānau were generally described through the improved well-being of the primary client. Even when an organisation works directly with an individual, they often see that individual as part of a larger network of people that are impacted by the individual's well-being, and associated actions. In this way, the benefits of kindness can ripple beyond the individual to the people in their life.

We also heard examples of kindness providing benefits for communities, through clients' paying forward the support that they had themselves received, when they can do so.



Focus topic 2

KINDNESS RIPPLES BEYOND THE RECEIVER

Often, organisations will provide support to an individual, or perhaps a family. Two examples help us to understand the ways in which kindness ripples beyond the immediate client, to have wider benefits.

Juliette* has a management role with an organisation that provides group-based support for parents experiencing antenatal and postnatal distress. She sees the benefits of kindness that clients receive, impacting their whānau as well.

In receiving kindness, our mothers believe in themselves and show up for their kids. They feel empowered, and it has such a ripple effect on their lives. It becomes transformational, and the mothers want to share this with others, and they end up innately giving without realising it – it shows in how they interact with their children, their partners, they are empowered to give more to their communities through their time.

Elena* works for a regional housing trust, that provides access to social and affordable housing. She observes some clients paying forward the kindness they have received, when they are in a position to do so.

What I observe in our tenants is that once they have secured a home that they know is secure – because we offer long-term tenancies – once they have a place where they can be and call home, that safety net helps them to be in a position to give and to do for others. We see small gestures, from getting to know neighbours and helping with childcare, to sharing surplus vegetables from their gardens, and a lot of families we help also refer their family and friends to us for housing support.

* For privacy, we have not used individuals' real names

When kindness doesn't go well, this can signal a disconnect between the giver and the receiver

In their 2020 literature review, Allen and Clarke summarise unintended and negative effects that kindness can have on wellbeing, especially when kindness is not genuine.

Our interviewees provided a range of examples of kindness that had not been well received. In most cases, interviewees could understand with retrospect what had gone wrong, and their descriptions signalled a disconnect between giver and receiver, rather than disingenuousness or malintent.

Later in this report we present some tips for avoiding kindness mis-steps (from page 32).

Boundary violations

Kindness that disregards personal boundaries can result in discomfort or infringement on the privacy and autonomy of the recipient. While the intention may be to provide support, it is essential to respect the boundaries and preferences of individuals. Pushing beyond these boundaries, even with good intentions, can lead to feelings of invasion, mistrust, or a loss of agency. Respecting personal boundaries is crucial for preserving the dignity and autonomy of those being helped.

"We were providing visiting services to one man, and he received a letter about a hospital appointment, and he refused to go. The volunteer got in touch with their coordinator, and the coordinator contacted the older person, who got really angry and felt betrayed – they felt the volunteer had betrayed their trust." – Interview participant

Interviewees also describe boundary violations that occur in the opposite direction as well. For example, when a giver can feel taken advantage of or exploited.

Imposed solutions

Kindness that goes wrong often stems from a presumption of what the recipient needs or desires, without seeking their input or understanding their unique circumstances. Effective kindness requires active listening, respect for autonomy, and a willingness to collaborate rather than dictate.

"...where you come in with an assumption about what a person's needs are and try and force that on them, or if not force it but offer it in a way that's [inappropriate]." – Interview participant

Unwanted dependency

In some cases, excessive or misguided kindness can inadvertently create a sense of dependency on the recipient. Interviewees are careful to not cross the line between assistance and enabling. If kindness is consistently offered without encouraging self-sufficiency or fostering empowerment, it can unintentionally perpetuate a cycle of dependency, hindering personal growth and independence.

"Some of the housing situations where people are in emergency housing and don't have to pay rent and they come out the other end and they can't manage because somebody else has paid



all their bills for them, sometimes we disable and disempower people with all the best intentions in the world.” – Interview participant

Unintended consequences

Even well-intentioned acts of kindness can have unintended consequences due to unforeseen circumstances or lack of awareness. For example, providing immediate relief in a crisis without considering long-term implications may inadvertently undermine the recipient's ability to develop resilience and self-sufficiency. Moreover, unintended consequences can arise from attempting to fix complex problems without fully understanding their root causes or the broader social context.

“Last night, we had a group event at the hub, talking about funding and local issues. Someone stood up who had a lot of money and declared that they had bought the school a new car. But now the school has to deal with registration and fuel etc...” – Interview participant

Cultural disconnect

Acts of kindness can go awry when cultural nuances and sensitivities are not adequately considered. What may be well-intentioned in one cultural context may be perceived as intrusive or disrespectful in another. Cultural awareness and sensitivity are essential when offering kindness to individuals from diverse backgrounds, as it ensures that actions align with the values, customs, and preferences of the recipient, preventing unintended harm or offense.

Several interviewees provided detailed examples from their personal experience of a kindness disconnect across cultures (Focus topic 3).

Note: The current study has engaged with people from diverse ethnicities and from diverse communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, to gather a broad cross-section of perspectives and experiences, rather than a deep understanding of kindness through the perspective of any single group. Previous research has evidenced the significance of culture when it comes to variations in the ways that individuals give and receive kindness (See Allen and Clarke, 2020 for a summary of literature).



Focus topic 3

KINDNESS AND CULTURE

Two stories shared by interviewees who did not grow up in New Zealand help us to understand the complex interaction between culture, values, and kindness.

Frieda* grew up in Germany and moved to Northland as a young adult. She describes kindness as differently coded in Germany, and uses time as an example:

I learned with being in Tai Tokerau that you can slow down, and slowing down is a really important thing... It's rude to not bring time and just kind of get on with things. It's rude to not take at least five minutes to do some small talk often. And I learned a lot from that because coming from Germany, we are so task oriented. We don't do small talk. We're like, well, it's actually kind to save somebody's time, you know, be aware of the other person's time by not making this small talk because we all just want to get on with our day.

Frieda described how this lesson in kindness has changed the way she approaches people through her work – and how critical this has been for building trust, and ultimately being more effective.

Frieda is careful to not generalise her experience beyond Northland, or even to assume that all Northlanders are the same in this regard.

Asanka* grew up in South Asia. She is a solo parent of a child with special needs, and unpaid volunteer of a small charity. She explains how her understanding of kindness is rooted in Buddhism, and has evolved over time to also accommodate nuanced differences in the value systems that she grew up with, and of the people that she lives alongside in Aotearoa.

So sometimes a person is trying to be kind, but the other person think it's like 'You're underestimating me.' Say for example like in our culture we always pay more care for elderly people. So sometimes when we see somebody struggling to get something from the supermarket or like, you know, it's in the top shelf or something, there's a tendency of helping. But sometimes [in New Zealand] that person doesn't want help because they feel like you think they are not capable of doing it, so they take it in the wrong way sometimes. A value for us, is elderly people being looked after by the young generation, and that that kind of relationship. But here is more like independence in age is valued.

Rather than one value system giving way to another, Asanka tries to adapt her expressions of kindness to meet the values of the receiver.

* For privacy, we have not used individuals' real names

2. What sorts of programmes do CSOs currently offer that enable their clients to give and/or receive kindness

Kindness interventions are common and diverse

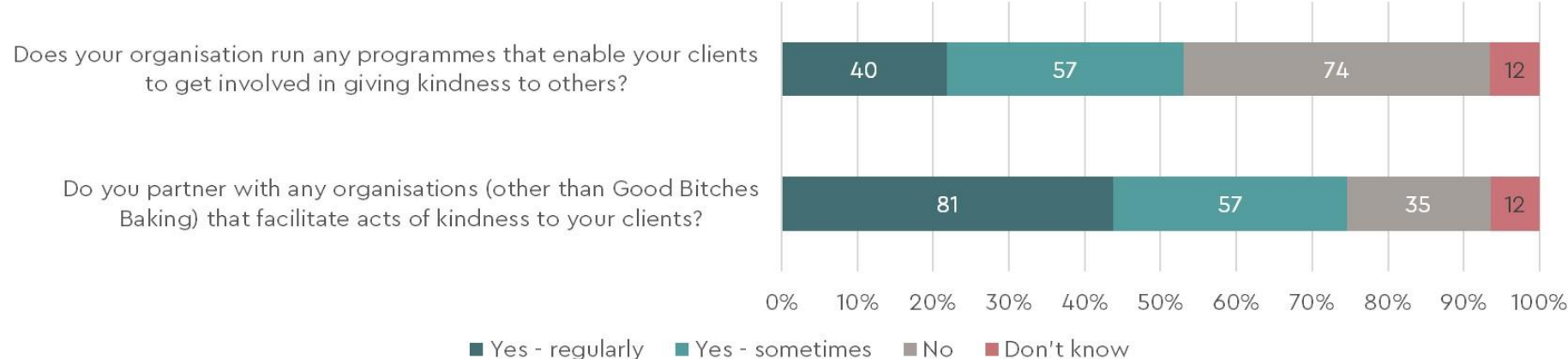
Among survey respondents' organisations, programmes that facilitate kindness to and from clients are relatively common (Figure 3): 75% of respondents report programmes for clients to receive kindness, and 53% report programmes that facilitate clients to give kindness to others.

In general, interviewees were initially much less sure about whether their organisations were involved in offering any programmes that would fit the brief of a kindness intervention. On further discussion, they provided many examples that indicate a rich tapestry of formal and informal activities where kindness is either a focus or a mechanism for achieving other objectives.

Activities can be organised into two larger categories, depending on their primary purpose:

- to support delivery of organisational strategy through benefiting clients and contributing to wellbeing objectives, and
- to enliven organisational values.

Figure 3: Kindness programmes run by survey respondents' organisations



Source: Kindness Research Survey 2023. N=181-183

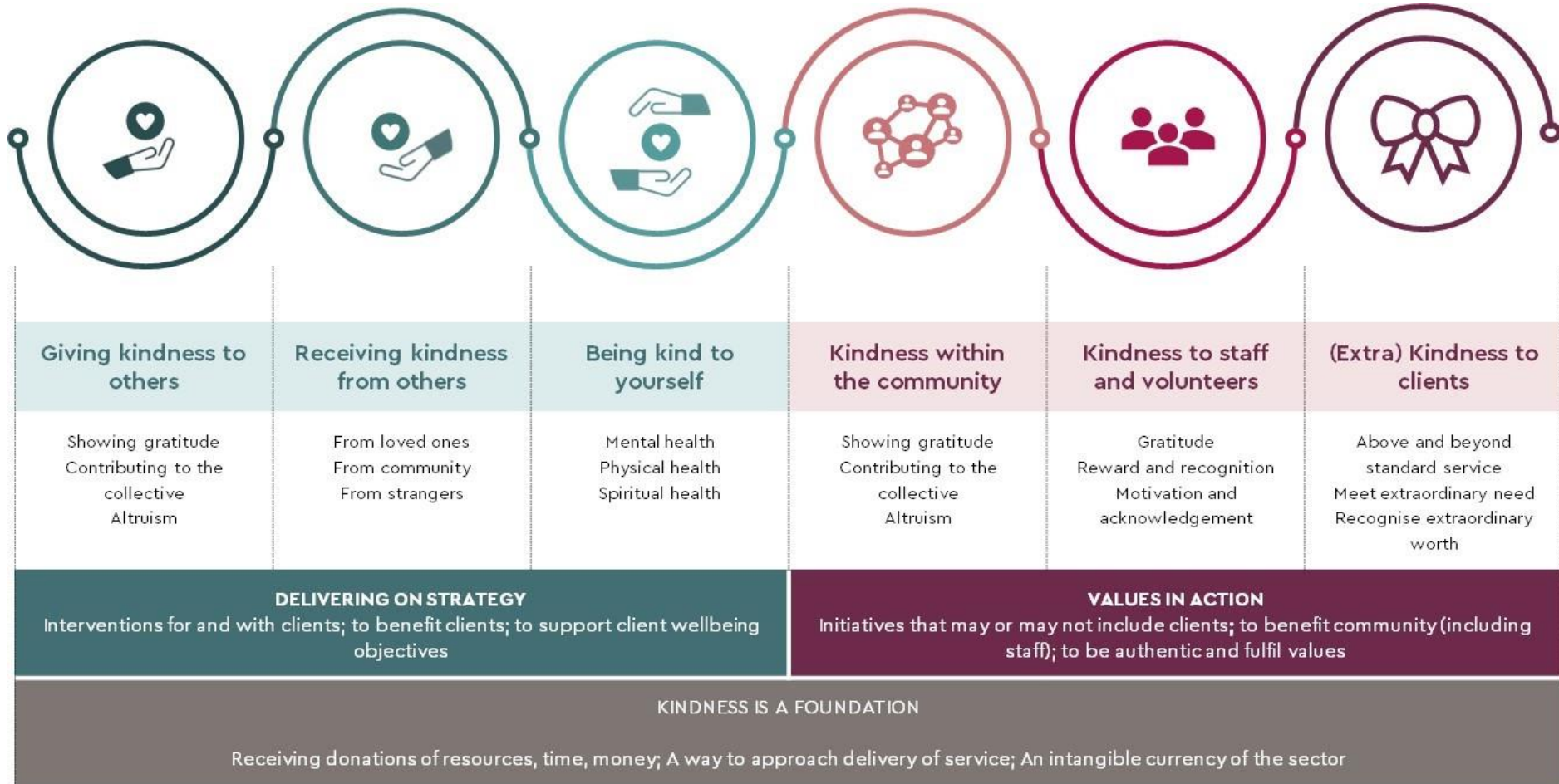


Figure 5 breaks these categories down even further, and the later pages unpack many of the examples that we heard.

We observed through the interviews a lack of structure to many of the examples, leaving a sense that while kindness is prevalent, it is not always clear how it connects to service

outcomes, and as such may be undervalued as an intervention in and of itself.

Figure 4: Kindness as an intervention



Source: MartinJenkins



Kindness programmes to support delivery of strategy

Few interviewees articulated a clear logic that underpinned the connection between kindness programmes they offer to clients, and the higher order outcomes that they seek for clients, such as mental and physical wellbeing.

Nonetheless, they provided a wide range of examples that appear to have a general wellbeing objective, or are a mechanism for engaging clients to build participation in other programmes.

Supporting clients to receive kindness from others

- Promoting give a little and crowdfunding initiatives
- Distributing donations of food and other essentials
- Distributing donations of treats, including Christmas gifts and pamper packs
- Opportunities to receive services without charge, such as yoga and dance classes, and
- Opportunities to receive knowledge, advice, and mentoring.

Supporting clients to give kindness to others

- Volunteering opportunities (within the organisation, within the community)

- Opportunities for clients to contribute to functioning of a group they belong to (for example, washing dishes, weeding a communal garden)
- Providing service in the community (for example serving food at community lunches, delivering meals), and
- Fundraising for an unrelated cause.

"The kids all have to do something in their community in every one of our programmes. It's something that they have to learn because in some cases they don't have role models that have empathy for others, so to experience it is really important. We use a number of different strategies, but one is role playing in groups (what is fair play, how to express compassion etc) and then it starts to naturally happen." – Interview participant

Supporting clients to be kind to themselves

Several interviewees talked about the importance of supporting the people they work with to develop a practice of being kind to themselves. Self-care is essential for maintaining overall well-being. It supports physical health,

enhances mental and emotional well-being, promotes resilience, increases productivity, strengthens relationships, fosters self-compassion, and prevents burnout.

Interviewees are working with people who are experiencing a hard time for a variety of reasons – for some, kindness will be a rare experience in their lives and learning to be kind to themselves is a first step towards accepting kindness and giving kindness to others. For others, their experiences of giving and receiving kindness are in abundance. In this case, self-care acts more as a preventative for burnout.

"We arrange pamper days for the people we work with. Carers are very busy – they are already doing a lot of kindness for others. They don't have time for self-care." – Interview participant

Kindness programmes that put values into action

Interviewees spoke much more readily about kindness interventions that were focused on staff, or that enabled their staff to give kindness beyond their paid role. These examples generally tended to reflect a core purpose of 'walking the



talk' through embodiment of their organisational values, rather than a functional purpose.

Kindness within the community

The individuals that we interviewed spoke passionately about their connection to the community where they are located, and the importance of being seen by that community to be authentic and acting with integrity.

Acts of kindness within the community facilitate social licence and give substance to interviewees beliefs about the role of kindness in a well-functioning society. Examples included:

- Fundraisers for other organisations' causes
- Mobilising an organisations' volunteer-base for one-off community initiatives and crisis response
- Regular acts of gift giving beyond the organisation's clients

"Twice a year we do "Koha Aroha", where we gather together the names that are offered to us from our nursing staff of people that are in need and we put together food parcels and give those to people in the community, at Easter and Christmas." – Interview participant

Kindness to staff and volunteers

It was widely acknowledged among interviewees that the sector is underpaid, and staff frequently go above and beyond what they are paid to do (in terms of hours, and resources).

Initiatives that show kindness to staff and volunteers are an important part of the recruitment and retention approaches for CSOs. We heard examples ranging from gifts of time to gifts of goods; from verbal gratitude to public recognition; and from kindness to individual staff members, to kindness within a group.

These demonstrations of kindness are important for the survival of individual CSOs, and for the sector at large. However, for a well-functioning sector in the long-term they must come as part of a package that includes adequate pay and reimbursement of expenses.

"I donated three of my sick days to one of my staff anonymously." – Interview participant

(Extra) Kindness to clients

Interviewees frequently go above and beyond to support their clients. In many ways they consider this to be part of the job. On occasion,

organisations facilitate extra kindness for clients through more formal programmes.

"Once a month we have a group that meets to identify and organise different opportunities for the giving of kindness, both to our staff and to our patients and their families." – Interview participant

Spiller (2010) asserts that businesses that fail to understand that 'mana is enhanced when collective well-being is the outcome' (Durie, 2001, 83) may very well fail in their quest for ongoing community support.

This observation has echoes of the social license that is achieved by CSOs when they put their values into action through kindness in the community.



3. What are the barriers and enablers to CSOs offering kindness programmes to their clients?

A range of barriers prevent CSOs from running more kindness programmes

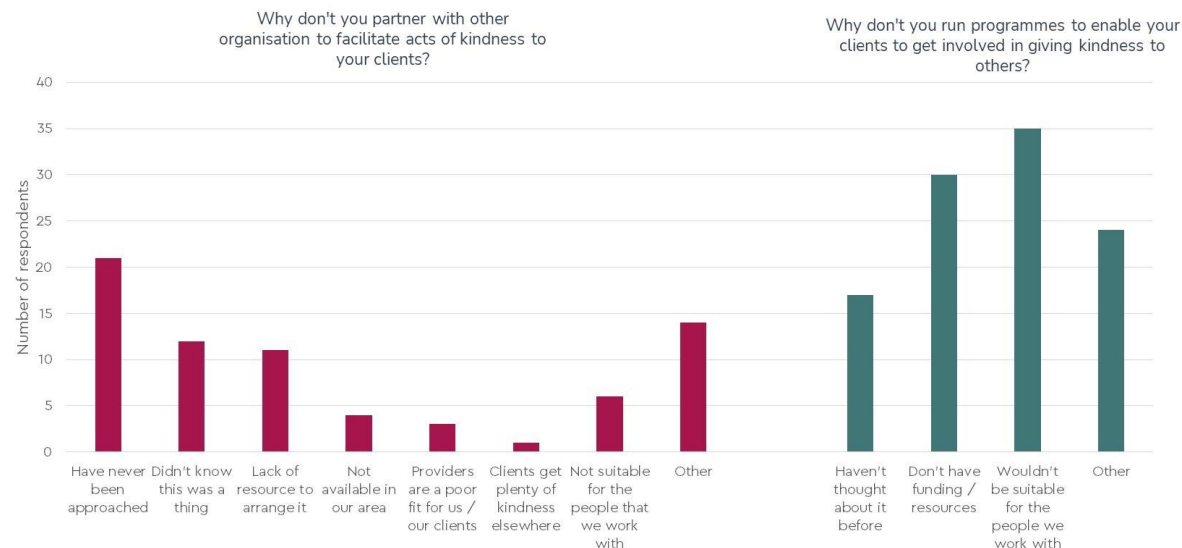
Figure 5 shows the range of issues that survey respondents indicated create barriers to them running more kindness programmes for clients. We discuss these in four groups: systems settings; awareness; suitability; and perceptions.

System settings

Many of the challenges identified by survey respondents that prevent them from running more kindness programmes are commonplace in the community services sector: limited funding, limited resources, and competing demands.

Interviewees commented frequently on the multiple ways that system settings can make it difficult for them to offer programmes that are focused on kindness, or even to deliver their core work activities in a kind way (Focus topic 4 expands on this theme). There are many reasons that system settings don't prioritise kindness, including downward pressures on funding, increasing demand for services, and a lack of adequate measurement to quantify the value of kindness as a direct or indirect intervention.

Figure 5: Barriers to running kindness programmes



Source: Kindness Research Survey 2023. Why don't you partner with other organisations... N=49; ...run programmes to enable... N=84

These concerns, described as an *unkind system* by our interviewees, show likeness with issues raised in other research, such as the COVID-19 Hauora Wellbeing Survey of the tangata whenua, community sector conducted by Hui E! and Volunteering NZ in 2021 which speaks to

systemic power imbalances and funding. That study also signals some positive changes in systems settings that may present reason for optimism, such as conditions created by the pandemic for a more collaborative and less competitive approach to funding.



Focus topic 4

THE SYSTEM IS NOT ALWAYS A KIND PLACE
FOR CSOS

A theme emerged through the research, that suggests a lack of kindness in the wider social service system towards community service organisations. Most of these comments relate to the relationship between funders and provider. Most interviewees did not offer views on the drivers for these settings, beyond the socio-economic situation creating increased demand for services, in a context of reducing funding.

Chronic underfunding and overdemand.



We'd like to do a lot more if we had the finances to help people. When we need to refer onwards... all of the agencies are stretched and there's not enough around. People are really burnt out and staff are not being looked after in our sector. We're lucky here and are a really caring team, we are trying to improve our working conditions given the current climate. Its very hard to be kind when you're at your wits end, burnt out and exhausted.

A funding environment that encourages competition between organisations, rather than co-operation.



Those services that don't have benchmark data are missing out on funding because they can compete with hospital data. Hospitals have coding units with staff – how much of hospital budgets go to coding? Why not pro rata that out to community funding?

Metrics and measurement tools that promote quantity rather than quality.

Perceived lack of trust from funders.



We're really lucky in that we've managed to be quite well-resourced and that takes a lot of work. Trying to tap into those things is hard work. I spend a lot of time writing proposals and applying for funding. It would be nice is those funders could have a higher trust relationship; where our funders could show some kindness. If someone's got a proven track record and they've got an idea, why can't we have that high trust relationship? [funders] are getting us to pitch against each other ultimately. [It is] colonisation process at its finest. It's not putting people and the community first – it's just putting barriers there. If someone is not adept at writing those, they don't even apply.

Lack of trust from donors and communities.



In our organisation we have always had "giveaways", and this is generally because people always donate things to us and we want to make sure they get to those who need it. We have a "koha bin" where people can leave things, and they simply can leave it and go. But we have others who donate to us and they want to get photos, or to know who got their gift. And I say "no". There is a real learning curve in taking your hands off what you give, and not chasing up where it has gone or to who.

Awareness

The language of kindness programmes was not commonplace for most of the people we interviewed. For example, when asked what kindness programmes they offer, most people struggled (at least at first) to name any specific programmes that in their view fit this frame.

This may also be a reason that it could be difficult to attract funding for kindness programmes – if organisations lack the language to articulate the connections between kindness programmes and client outcomes.

In addition, the relatively high numbers of respondents who report that they haven't been approached to partner for kindness, or didn't know this was a thing, suggests there may be opportunity for intermediary organisations like Good Bitches Baking to expand their outreach and further raise awareness of prospects for partnership and the potential value these sorts of programmes might provide to clients, and organisations.

Suitability

Interviewees have mixed views about the level of kindness they observe in the communities where they work – from abundant, to short supply.

At one end of the spectrum, interviewees describe their clients as having great capacity for

kindness, even while they experience difficult situations themselves. Often, for these people it is self-care that is the kindness they are missing, and which becomes the focus for the organisations that support them.

"... these caregivers go through so much and yet they are some of the strongest people I know... on these regional Facebook pages you see the camaraderie that they provide each other and the support, and the offering to provide respite, and [material items] ... so yes, a high level of kindness as shown to [the person they care for]. But there's also a community of kindness with each other as well. I would imagine that a lot of these people are absolutely involved in wider activities where they show kindness because it's just the type of people that they are." - Interview participant

In addition, many interviewees talked about the ways in which their clients show gratitude for the kindness that they receive from the organisation, and from individual staff members. Current and former clients write notes of thanks,

spontaneously donate goods and funding, and oftentimes return as volunteers.

At the other end of the spectrum, interviewees describe their clients as having very limited capacity for kindness, either because of the distress of their immediate situation, or through a lack of having experienced kindness themselves through their lives.

In very few cases, interviewees describe their clients as being intentionally manipulative or exploiting of the kindness that is shown to them by CSOs.

Many of the challenges that lead to individuals receiving support from CSOs, can also create barriers to them participating in giving and receiving kindness as well, and can make organisations hesitate at the thought of offering kindness programmes. The specific nature of the challenges varies, of course, but interviews reveal some common themes that act as barriers to kindness during tough times.

Emotional vulnerability

Many interviewees talked about the heightened emotional vulnerability that their clients experience during tough times, that can make it difficult to give or receive kindness. They might feel overwhelmed, guarded, or even undeserving of kindness due to feelings of shame or self-doubt.



Emotional vulnerability can be a barrier to offering kindness as individuals may find it challenging to extend support while dealing with their own struggles. Similarly, receiving kindness can be challenging as it requires openness and vulnerability, which can be daunting when one is already feeling emotionally fragile.

"There are so many people who are convinced that they are failures, and everything they do in life will fail. And so the idea of trying, or someone being kind to them, or giving them another chance, feels like a threat. And I think society needs a greater awareness of this, because these people are the most vulnerable and at risk." – Interview participant

Self-reliance and independence

Some individuals who are having a tough time may have a strong sense of self-reliance and independence, making it challenging to ask for, or accept help. They might perceive seeking assistance as a sign of weakness or dependence, hindering their ability to receive kindness.

Several interviewees talked about instances where 'kindness' carries a historic meaning that is

patronising and disempowering for their clients. This was particularly true for the disability sector.

Fear of burdening others

When people are having a tough time, they may fear burdening others with their problems or feel guilty about accepting kindness. They may worry about imposing on others or believe that their struggles are insignificant compared to what others are going through. Interviewees described how this fear of burdening others can deter people from seeking or accepting support, and from giving and receiving kindness.

Social isolation and stigma

Several interviewees described how people that they work with can feel socially isolated and misunderstood or stigmatised by people that they know, and society in general. They observed that individuals going through challenging times may withdraw from social interactions, feeling disconnected from others and hesitant to reach out for support. The sense of isolation can make it difficult to give or receive kindness.

Hopelessness and lack of self-worth

When individuals are consumed by hopelessness or a lack of self-worth, they may have difficulty recognising acts of kindness or interpreting them as genuine. They may be sceptical of others' intentions, assuming that kindness is merely a

superficial gesture or that people have ulterior motives. This scepticism can prevent them from fully appreciating and benefiting from the kindness offered.

Lack of self-worth can also prevent individuals from feeling they are deserving of kindness that is offered, and/or that they don't have anything of value to offer to anyone else.

"Sometimes when we show kindness to people, they aren't ready to receive it, because they don't think they are worth it. This comes back to historical trauma, or their beliefs of themselves." – Interview participant

Obstructive policies and system requirements

Two interviewees spoke about organisational policies and requirements that created a barrier for clients giving and receiving kindness. In one case, the barrier was intentional – to protect clients from overcommitting themselves during an emotionally vulnerable time. In the other case, the barrier was incidental, and resulted from administrative requirements.



"Sometimes the barrier is the red tape and policies of the system." – Interview participant

Limited resources (perceived and actual)

During tough times, individuals may face limited resources, both tangible and intangible. Financial constraints, lack of access to support systems, or limited time and energy can create barriers to both giving and receiving kindness. Feedback suggests that lack of resources is often a greater barrier in perception than.

"Some of our young people may think they have nothing to give. They might not understand that kindness doesn't have to be financial, it can be shown in actions." – Interview participant

Perceptions

Several interviewees shared their experiences of working with individuals facing immense challenges in their lives. Some interact with people who have endured lifelong difficulties; others work with individuals who may even exhibit unkind behaviour towards others.

Their comments, which are expanded further in Focus Topic 5, ask some challenging questions about whether as a society we have a perception that some people are less deserving of kindness – either as a direct result of their individual behaviour, or because of being associated with a social group.

Taken together with the comments in section 1 of this report, regarding *unkindness* that clients have experienced from professionals and agencies, we query whether a perception that some people are less deserving of kindness may create an unconscious barrier to the use of kindness programmes for some organisations, or in the worst situations lead to some organisations even treating individuals *unkindly*. This question requires further investigation to be proven true or false, however it is worth consideration by CSOs on an individual bases when thinking about the programmes they do or do not run, and reasons for this.

The interviewees stressed the significance of extending kindness to every individual they encounter, irrespective of their past and current actions.

"A lot of prisoners were cared for and have experienced developmental trauma. They have deep seated shame." – Interview participant



Focus topic 5

PEOPLE NEED THE MOST LOVE WHEN THEY ARE
THE LEAST LOVABLE

Many interviewees described working with people who are going through some of the worst experiences of their lives. Others are working with people whose lives have been difficult throughout, and who are themselves perpetrators of unkindness to others. They described the challenges, and the importance of offering kindness to all of the people they encounter – regardless of their history and presenting behaviours.

Emma* has worked in Mental Health for over 20 years. Through her work she has met people from all walks of life. She raises a challenging question about the boundaries of our kindness as a society.

What we need to learn is not just what kindness can do, we know how potent kindness is. It can help people to heal and change their lives. What I am interested in is where does the limitation of kindness stop. Who are we not being kind to and why? Who do we vilify in society – prisoners, gang members – and say “they don’t deserve kindness”. This is our greatest challenge to confront – the idea that kindness is somehow conditional, and how can we break this belief.

Taika* works for a regional centre and delivers non-violence group programmes for men. He describes kindness in terms of non-judgement, and how a non-judgmental approach opens the way for effective intervention.

We often talk about – there aren’t necessarily bad people, there are people who do bad things – and reassure the men that they are not the enemy, their behaviour is. Not passing judgement, feeling safe. These men have spent most of their lives being judged. They need to feel ok in sharing their story.

Louise* explains how she looks beyond the antisocial behaviour of some of her financial mentoring clients, to connect with them in kindness.

One thing I always noticed is that behaviour is a form of communication: you ask yourself, what is their behaviour trying to communicate? We forget when people get older that it’s the same – we can be judgmental but sometimes we need instead of responding and making it about you, to try to understand, remember we are all people at heart, look past the behaviour and see what’s driving it.

* For privacy, we have not used individuals’ real names

Kindness programmes are enabled by clear logic, dedicated funding, meaningful partnerships, and careful design

The level of interest in this study, and the enthusiastic way that so many individuals engaged in discussion about kindness within the community services sector, suggests there may be an opportunity to increase the prevalence of kindness programmes as organised interventions.

Four enablers may help to foster greater prevalence of kindness programmes.

Clear logic

Firstly, clear logic is vital in designing and implementing effective kindness programmes. It involves a clear line of sight to the outcomes that organisations are seeking for individuals (such as self-esteem, and confidence), communities (such as safety and connection), and society (such as social cohesion and wellbeing).

With a logical framework in place, kindness programmes are more likely to be seen as *core work* for community service organisations to achieve their goals, rather than *additional*.

Dedicated funding

Secondly, dedicated funding plays a crucial role in sustaining kindness programmes over time. Allocating sufficient financial resources ensures

that the initiatives can be properly executed and maintained, preventing disruptions that may hinder their impact. Adequate funding also allows for the development of comprehensive support systems, necessary training, and scaling programmes to reach a broader audience.

Meaningful partnerships

Thirdly, forging strong partnerships between community service organisations that work directly with communities and individuals, and charitable organisations that facilitate kindness interventions will help to ensure the programmes that are developed avoid the kindness mis-steps discussed elsewhere in this report, and are safe for the receivers and the givers (physically, mentally, and culturally safe).

Some interviewees referred to similar partnerships with organisations that provide goods or support to their clients, for example providing access to menstruation products.

Collaborating with government agencies, non-profit organisations, community groups, and private businesses can create a network of support and expertise. These partnerships enable the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best

In a recent article about kindness and manaakitanga,* Provost asserts that targeted positive messages (manaakitanga) have potential to demonstrate to children and young people that they are valued as taonga (treasures with inherent value), and to support them to feel manaakitanga for others. In this context, she calls for community kindness to go beyond random acts, and instead become *premeditated, consistent and targeted to those who are most likely to have weak sense of belonging — including children and young people*.

*inspiringcommunities.org.nz

practices, enabling kindness programmes to leverage diverse perspectives and strengths.

Careful design

Learning from the examples captured in the previous section, below we summarise some tips for avoiding kindness mis-steps.

Most of these tips assume a direct relationship between the giver and receiver. In situations where kindness is delivered through an intermediary, such as the GBB model, it will be the relationship with the partner organisation that is critical to codesigning appropriate and effective kindness interventions.



Tips for avoiding kindness mis-steps

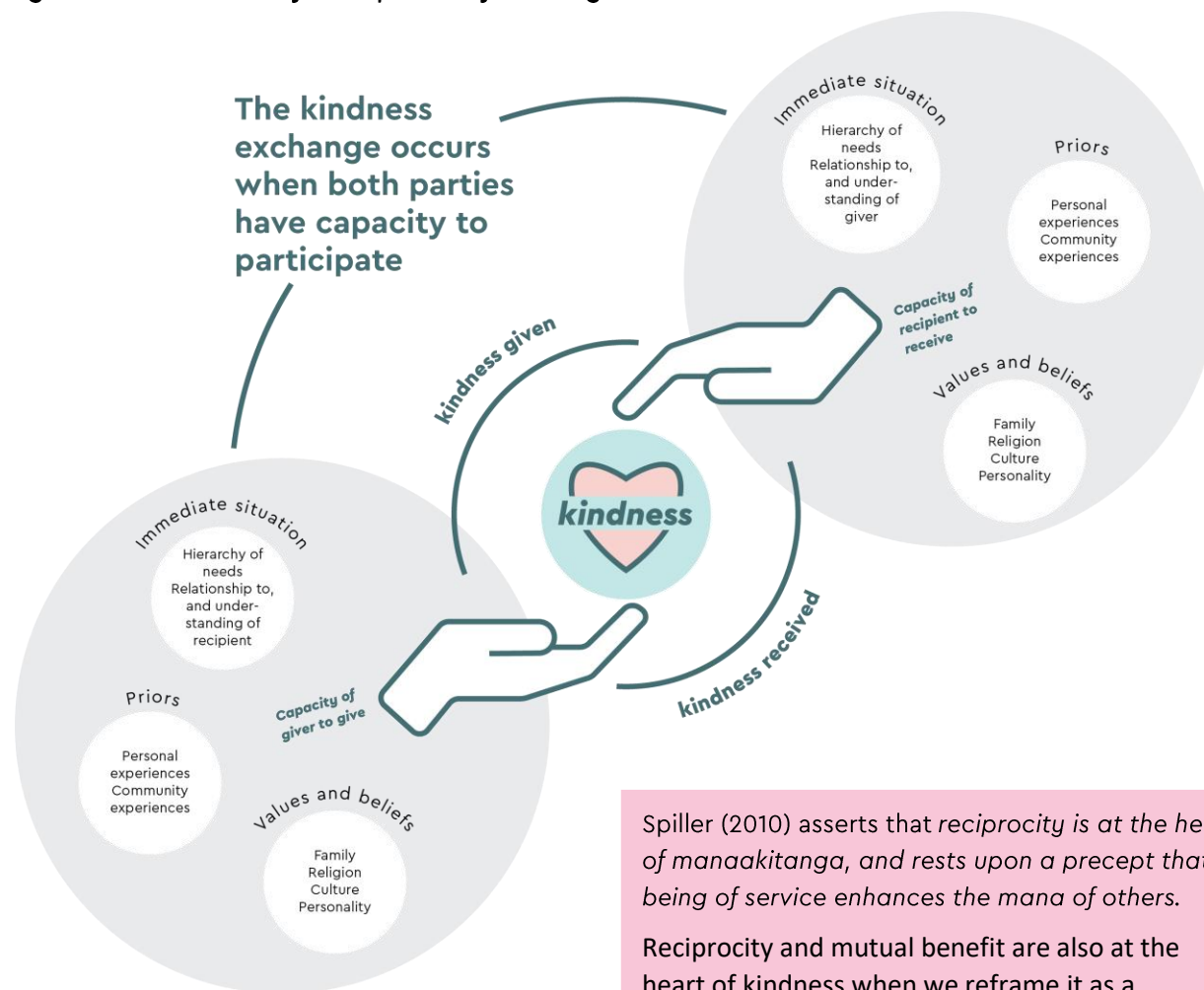
Reframe kindness as a dynamic, two-way exchange: earlier in this report we presented examples of kindness that had not been well received. In all those examples the intentions appear good, while the delivery missed the mark. Feedback from interviewees helps us to reframe kindness as a dynamic, two-way exchange between two parties – rather than the traditional idea of an inflexible, one-way exchange from giver to receiver (Figure 6). With this framing, we see kindness as a relationship in which both parties bring a preloaded set of values and beliefs, prior experiences, and an immediate situation, that all inform their capacity to give or receive.

Both parties have power to participate in the exchange... or not. And both parties can overlook the mis-steps of the other.

At an individual level, we all bring our preloaded beliefs, experience, and immediate context to our interactions with others in all aspects of our lives. By reframing kindness as a dynamic, two-way exchange, and bringing self-awareness to our kindness interactions, individuals will be more likely to avoid some of the common mis-steps that occur.

Practice active listening: Interviewees spoke at length about the importance of listening and

Figure 6: Kindness is a dynamic, two-way exchange



Source: MartinJenkins

Spiller (2010) asserts that *reciprocity is at the heart of manaakitanga, and rests upon a precept that being of service enhances the mana of others.*

Reciprocity and mutual benefit are also at the heart of kindness when we reframe it as a dynamic, two-way exchange.



taking time to understand the needs, preferences, and perspectives of the recipient. Avoid making assumptions or imposing your own solutions without their input. Actively listen to their concerns, desires, and goals, and tailor your acts of kindness accordingly. Listening is itself an act of kindness that makes an individual feel 'seen' and 'heard'.

Respect boundaries: Recognise and respect personal boundaries. Be mindful of what is comfortable and appropriate for the recipient. Interviewees explained how boundaries will be informed by culture, context, and situational factors.

On a related note, organisations can create clear guidance for their staff and volunteers, to help them to protect their own boundaries as well.

Seek cultural awareness: When offering kindness to individuals, educate yourself about their culture, customs, and sensitivities. Be aware of potential cultural differences and adjust your

actions accordingly to avoid causing unintended offense or misunderstanding.

Empower, don't enable: Instead of fostering dependency, aim to empower the recipient.

Consider long-term Impact: Evaluate how your kindness may contribute to sustainable solutions or positive change.

Collaborate and seek consent: Involve the recipient in the decision-making process and collaborate with them to identify the best course of action. Seek their consent and involve them in the planning and implementation of any assistance or support you provide. This ensures that the kindness offered aligns with their needs and desires.

Be realistic about your capacity and skills: Understand the risks and requirements involved, and only offer support that you are qualified and have capacity to deliver.

Reflect and learn: Reflect on past experiences and learn from any mistakes or unintended consequences. Continuously educate yourself about different perspectives, social issues, and effective ways to help others. Seek feedback from the recipients of your kindness to understand their experiences and improve your approach.

Regularly self-reflect: Engage in regular self-reflection to assess your motivations, biases, and intentions when offering kindness. Check your ego and ensure that your acts of kindness are genuinely driven by compassion and a desire to make a positive impact, rather than seeking validation or control.



Conclusion and call to action

Kindness is integral to the community services sector

Kindness plays a crucial role in the survival and effectiveness of CSOs

This study began with a question: what is the role of kindness from the perspective of community services organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Through the research, we conclude that kindness is both integral to the survival and effectiveness of CSOs, and that CSOs themselves have a critical role in fostering kindness within society.

Understanding the amorphous nature of kindness, and the complexities that can arise when acts of kindness interact with belief systems, experiences, and individuals' contexts will help CSOs to avoid mis-steps, and may encourage greater use of kindness as wellbeing intervention that is funded.

Sector stakeholders can turn these research insights into actions

The research provides interesting insights. But without action, insights are of little value to the community services sector.

The insights from the research highlight opportunities for community service organisations, intermediaries like Good Bitches Baking, and funders to address challenges, and propagate kindness for the benefit of the people they support, and wider society.

CSOs can...

- Carry on doing what you are doing – your kindness is important mahi that is seen by more people than you think.
- This report offers language to help you to unpack what kindness means in your organisation, and what it looks like in action if it is reframed as a dynamic, two-way exchange (Figure 6, page 32). Refer to Figure 2 (page 9) and discuss how you show

kindness as individuals, teams, a service. This will help your staff to know that their kindness is seen as well.

- Consider your own services through the lens of kindness (Figure 4) – are you making the most of kindness as an intervention for delivering on strategy, as well as for putting your values into action?
- Clearly articulate the role of kindness in achieving your programme objectives. This will help funders to appreciate why kindness matters, and the investment that is required to deliver kindness programmes (and to deliver other programmes in a kind way).

Intermediaries can...

- Raise awareness of kindness as an intervention. This will help to overcome the barrier that was signalled by several survey participants (Figure 5, page 25).
- Further explore the possibility that there is a perception some people are less deserving of kindness, and challenge this perception wherever it creates an unconscious barrier to



kindness programmes (Focus topic 5: People need the most love when they are the least lovable, page 30)

- Work with CSOs, including Māori-led providers, to codesign kindness programmes that are specific and appropriate to the people the CSO works with. This involves reframing kindness as a dynamic, two-way exchange (refer to the Tips for avoiding kindness mis-steps, page 32, and Figure 6).

- Work with funders to help them to understand and measure the contribution of kindness to programme objectives, and wider social outcomes.

Funders can...

- Consider what it means to be a *kind* funder, and how you demonstrate kindness as individuals, teams, a service (Figure 2, page 9).

- Review your requirements of funded organisations, and how explore how these requirements may be perceived as kind/unkind by those organisations, and may enable or prevent organisations to deliver their funded services in a kind way (Focus topic 4: The system is not always a kind place for CSOs, page 26).
- Support cross-organisation / sector-wide initiatives to propagate kindness, and to measure its contribution to social outcomes.



Appendix 1: Method details

Interviewee profiles

50 in-depth interviews were completed by three experienced researchers in May and June 2023. We used a semi-structured interview schedule, and an interviewee-led approach. This means that not all topics were discussed with all interviewees. Rather, interviewees were able to direct the interview towards aspects of greater interest / importance to them.

Breakdown by Region

Row Labels	Count of Provider Name
Northland	3
Auckland	8
Waikato	2
Bay of Plenty	3
Gisborne	1
Hawkes Bay	1
Taranaki	1
Manawatu-Whanganui	4
Wellington (note: some are national offices)	9
Nelson	3
Canterbury	8
Otago	4

Southland	3
Grand Total	50

Breakdown by Service category

Row Labels	Count of Provider Name
Addiction	4
Basic Needs	6
Budgeting / Financial Capability	1
Disaster Recovery	2
Education and Training	4
Employment	3
Family / Whānau Services	12
Health	5
Hospice	1
Information	1



Mental health	5
Older People	3
Youth Services	3
Grand Total	50

Breakdown by organisation identity

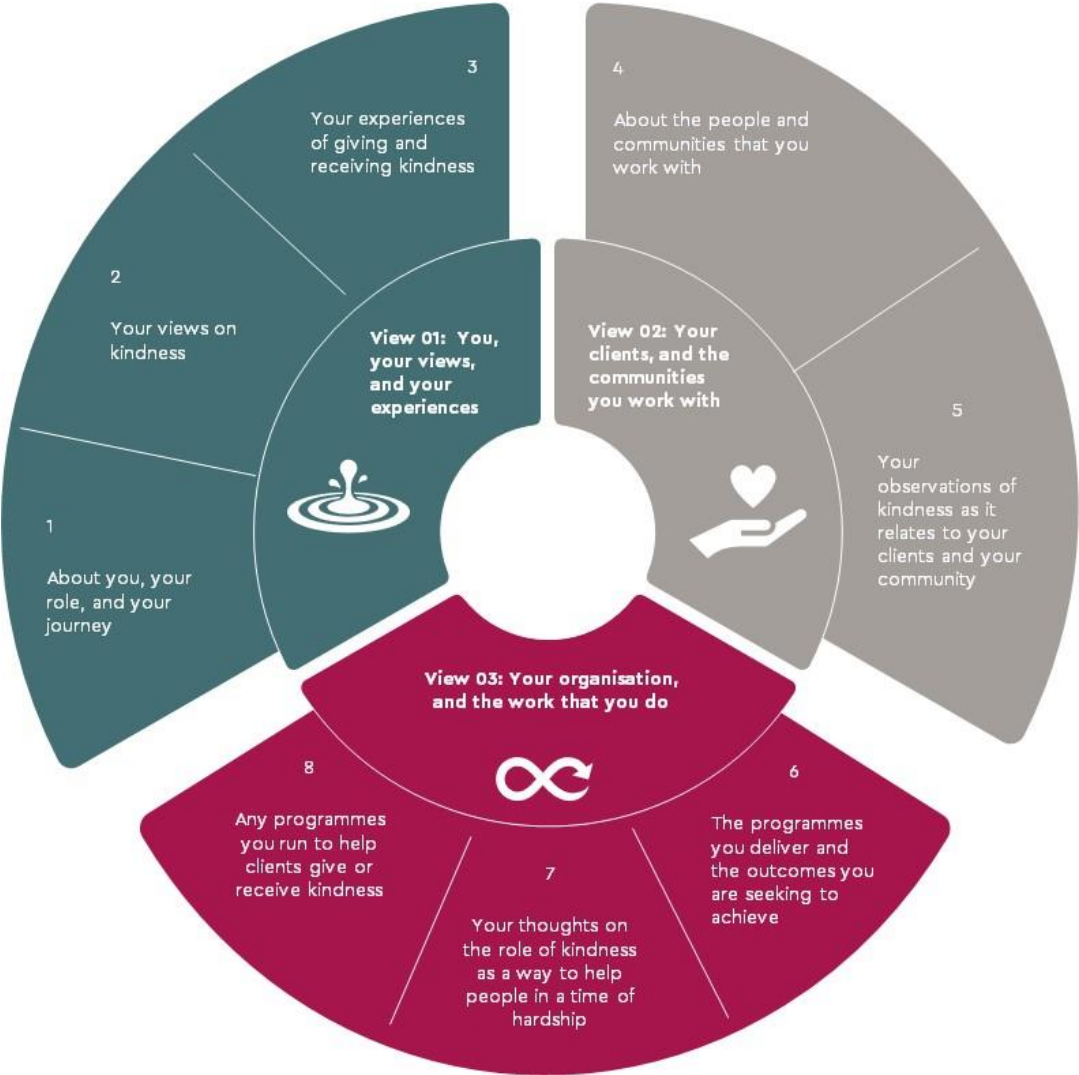
Row Labels	Count of Provider Name
Māori organisation / mostly Māori staff/clients	2
Pacific organisation / mostly pacific staff/clients	0
Other ethnic organisation / ethnic focus	3
Significant Rainbow community focus	2
Grand Total	7/50

Breakdown by target audience

Row Labels	Count of Provider Name
Ethnic women*ethnic communities	2
Individuals with disabilities and their families*employers	3
Low income*in need	1
No specific audience - available to all (note, includes services targeted to people with specific conditions / circumstance)	24
Older People	4
Parents and Caregivers*Family/whānau group	8
Volunteers	1
Women	2
Youth / Youth at risk of disengagement	5
Grand Total	50



Interview framework



Survey questions

Helping Community Organisations to Close the Circle of Kindness

About you

1) Please tell us:

We won't publish your name / organisation name in any public reports

Your organisation's name::

Your name and role::

Your email address::

Your phone number::

2) Do you want to be kept up to date with findings from the research?*

Yes please

No thanks

3) Which town / region are you located in?*

Blenheim-Marlborough

Central Auckland

Christchurch

Dunedin

Gisborne

Gore-Balclutha

Hamilton

Invercargill

Kaitaia

Kāpiti

Napier-Hastings

Nelson-Tasman

New Plymouth

North Auckland

Oamaru



- Palmerston North
- Queenstown & Central Otago
- Rotorua
- South Auckland
- Taupō
- Tauranga
- Thames
- Timaru
- Wairarapa
- Warkworth
- Wellington
- West Auckland
- Whakatāne
- Whanganui
- Other - Write In (Required):

_____*

4) Please tell us a little bit about the people that you serve, and what your organisation does:

*

5) Does your organisation partner with Good Bitches Baking?*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

About kindness in Aotearoa



At Good Bitches Trust, we are working to make Aotearoa a kinder place. To date, most of our kindness has been delivered through baking.

6) What does 'kindness' mean to your organisation?

7) What does 'kindness' mean to the people that you work with?

8) When you imagine a kind community, how does it function?



Kindness and Community Organisations

Page exit logic: Skip / Disqualify LogicIF: #5 Question "Does your organisation partner with Good Bitches Baking?" is one of the following answers ("No", "I don't know") **THEN:** Jump to [page 6 - Going forward](#)

At Good Bitches Baking, most of our work to date has looked like this:



We organise volunteers (givers) to do baking (act of kindness) that is given to people having a tough time (receivers) through community organisations they already know and trust.

We think that, in some cases, people who are having a tough time might also benefit from getting involved in doing acts of kindness for others - we call this closing the circle of kindness.

These next questions explore how community organisations do or don't support this work already, and how appropriate it is for the people that you work with



HELPING YOUR CLIENTS TO RECEIVE KINDNESS

Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.

9) Do you partner with any organisations (other than Good Bitches Baking) that facilitate acts of kindness to your clients?*

- Yes - regularly
- Yes - sometimes
- No
- Don't know

Logic: Hidden unless: #9 Question "Do you partner with any organisations (other than Good Bitches Baking) that facilitate acts of kindness to your clients?" is one of the following answers ("Yes - regularly", "Yes - sometimes")

10) Can you tell us about these acts of kindness? (e.g. who you partner with, what form of kindness is provided)

Logic: Hidden unless: #9 Question "Do you partner with any organisations (other than Good Bitches Baking) that facilitate acts of kindness to your clients?" is one of the following answers ("No", "Don't know")

11) Why don't you do this? (check all that apply)

- Have never been approached
- Didn't know this was a thing
- Lack of resource to arrange it
- Not available in our area
- Providers are a poor fit for us/our clients - e.g. cultural disconnect
- Clients get plenty of kindness elsewhere
- Not suitable for the people that we work with
- Other - Write In (Required):

_____*

12) Beyond Baking: What other acts of kindness would your clients value?



Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.

13) Do other organisations like yours arrange acts of kindness for the people that they work with?

- Yes - it is common
- Sometimes - but it isn't common
- No - it is very rare
- Don't know

Logic: Hidden unless: #13 Question "Do other organisations like yours arrange acts of kindness for the people that they work with? " is one of the following answers ("Yes - it is common", "Sometimes - but it isn't common")

14) Tell us about what other organisations do to facilitate kindness for the people they work with (which organisations, what programmes, who do they partner with)

Logic: Hidden unless: #13 Question "Do other organisations like yours arrange acts of kindness for the people that they work with? " is one of the following answers ("Sometimes - but it isn't common", "No - it is very rare")

15) In your view, why isn't it more common for organisations to arrange acts of kindness for the people they work with?

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR CLIENTS TO GIVE KINDNESS

Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.

16) Does your organisation run any programmes that enable your clients to get involved in giving kindness to others? *

- Yes - regularly
- Yes - sometimes
- No
- Don't know



Logic: Hidden unless: #16 Question "Does your organisation run any programmes that enable your clients to get involved in giving kindness to others? " is one of the following answers ("Yes - regularly", "Yes - sometimes")

17) Can you tell us more about these programmes? (e.g. do you deliver them alone? are they compulsory? what form do they take?)

Logic: Hidden unless: #16 Question "Does your organisation run any programmes that enable your clients to get involved in giving kindness to others? " is one of the following answers ("No", "Don't know")

18) Why do you not run programmes like this? (check all that apply)

- Haven't thought about it before
- Don't have funding / resources
- Wouldn't be suitable for the people we work with
- Other - Write In (Required):

*

19) What would help your clients to get involved with doing acts of kindness for others? Is this something you and your clients would value?

Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.

20) Do other organisations like yours arrange for their clients to get involved in doing acts of kindness for others?

- Yes - it is common
- Sometimes - but it isn't common
- No - it is very rare
- Don't know



Logic: Hidden unless: #20 Question "Do other organisations like yours arrange for their clients to get involved in doing acts of kindness for others? " is one of the following answers ("Yes - it is common", "Sometimes - but it isn't common")

21) Tell us what other organisations do to help their clients to get involved in acts of kindness? (which organisations, what programmes, who do they partner with?)

Logic: Hidden unless: #20 Question "Do other organisations like yours arrange for their clients to get involved in doing acts of kindness for others? " is one of the following answers ("Sometimes - but it isn't common", "No - it is very rare")

22) In your view, why isn't it more common for organisations to help to get their clients involved in acts of kindness?



About your relationship with Good Bitches Baking

23) Are you the person who manages the relationship with GBB?*

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

24) How often do you receive baking?*

- More than once a week
- Weekly
- Every two weeks
- Every three weeks
- Monthly
- Occasionally

25) How many people use your services in a month?*

- <10
- 11-20
- 21-50
- 50-100
- >100

26) Tell us a little about the people who eat the baking

27) How do they respond to receiving a moment of kindness in the form of a baked treat?

28) Please tell us about any comments from people who have eaten GBB baking that we can share - we'll keep any comments *strictly* anonymous.



29) Do you have anything you'd like to say to our Good Bitches?

Reliability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Matching values	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural competence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Logistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

30) How does the baking you receive from GBB support the work that you do?

32) Is there anything that would improve your experience of working with GBB?

31) How satisfied are you with your relationship with GBB?*

	Very	It's ok	Not at all
Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

33) How likely would you be to refer another organisation to GBB?*

- Very
- Maybe
- Not at all



Going forward

34) Are there other organisations in your area that work with people who would benefit from GBB's kind of kindness? If yes, please give details.

35) Would you like to join our Kindness Times mailing list?

*

- I already get it
- No thanks
- Yes please

Thank You!

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us. Don't forget to share this survey with other people working for community organisations like yours, or that serve your community.



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