

# KINDNESS LITERATURE REVIEW

*Allen + Clarke*



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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Good Bitches Baking (GBB) engaged *Allen + Clarke* to undertake a literature review on kindness. *Allen + Clarke* reviewed evidence in relation to the following research questions:

1. What is kindness [as defined in the literature]?
2. How do people experience and give kindness?
3. What is known about the social impact of kindness on wellbeing?
4. What is known about the social return on investment (SROI) of kindness?
5. How can kindness be measured as an indicator of wellbeing and social return on investment?

### Research question 1: Key findings

#### *What is kindness [as defined in the literature]?*

Kindness is defined in several ways but generally involves an altruistic act with a prosocial intention. This means a kind act is one which is motivated by a desire to benefit another in the absence of this act benefiting the actor. Kindness is a behaviour that has been evolutionarily favoured as kindness promotes cooperation to increase chances of survival. Importantly, kindness is not the same as compassion, as the latter involves a degree of suffering. Kindness in Aotearoa New Zealand includes *manaaki* and a kaupapa Māori conception of wellbeing.

### Research question 2: Key findings

#### *How do people experience and give kindness?*

The research highlighted that kindness is manifested in many ways; however, most acts take the form of either giving or helping. Gender and age both play a part in how a giver provides kindness. The types of kindness that are emphasised and most valued vary across cultures.

### Research question 3: Key findings

#### *What is known about the social impact of kindness on wellbeing?*

The literature showed that kindness has many benefits, both physical and emotional. Kindness can lead to reduced depression, anxiety, and blood pressure and increased optimism, life satisfaction and strengthened relationships. However, it is important to recognize that kindness can have unintended negative effects on both giver and recipient.

### Research question 4: Key findings

#### *What is known about the social return on investment (SROI) of kindness?*

There is limited research investigating the SROI of kindness, however, as an evaluative tool on socioeconomic outcomes, it may hold promise. By considering social impacts alongside economic impacts of activities, together with stakeholder perceptions of value, it may be possible to measure the cost-benefit of kindness interventions.

## Research question 5: Key findings

*How can kindness be measured as an indicator of wellbeing and social return on investment?*

Even with the limited literature on the SROI of kindness, there are a number of kindness interventions that demonstrate the positive impacts of kindness, as well as outcomes for wellbeing. While measuring possible cost-benefits of kindness, manaaki and te ao Māori perspectives on wellbeing should also be considered.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This report outlines key findings from the review of evidence looking at kindness.

The purpose of the literature review is to identify evidence that has been published since 2010 and is relevant to answering the research questions.

Key findings from the review of evidence are presented with the goal of:

- defining kindness and how it is experienced, and
- determining the impact of kindness on wellbeing and the social return on investment of kindness.

### 2.1. Background

Good Bitches Baking (GBB) is a network of over 2700 volunteers across Aotearoa, which delivers kindness via baking to those in their communities who are having a tough time. GBB has set a goal to “make Aotearoa the kindest place on Earth”. Part of achieving this goal entails developing a measurement of kindness, which may be used to demonstrate the impact and value of GBB’s work to potential investors.

GBB has commissioned *Allen + Clarke* via the pro bono programme, to undertake an evidence review on kindness. The results will help to inform the questions for a survey of GBB volunteers (and where possible, recipients) to seek their views on what kindness means to them.

The information obtained from the literature review and survey will enable GBB to define and measure kindness. This is the first step towards measuring whether Aotearoa is the ‘kindest place on Earth’ and in requesting the World Health Organisation to adopt a measure of kindness.

### 2.2. Structure of this report

This report is structured around the five research questions:

1. What is kindness [as defined in the literature]?
2. How do people experience and give kindness?
3. What is known about the social impact of kindness on wellbeing?
4. What is known about the social return on investment (SROI) of kindness?
5. How can kindness be measured as an indicator of wellbeing and Social Return on Investment?

Following the executive summary and introduction, the report is divided into five main sections according to each research question.

### 2.3. Methodology

The evidence review has been undertaken in two phases:

- Phase one – project initiation, planning and literature search; and
- Phase two – analysis and review drafting/finalisation.

This report represents work as part of phase two of this process.

The scope of the evidence review is on:

- i. Defining kindness and how it is experienced; and
- ii. Determining the impact of kindness on wellbeing and the social return on investment of kindness.

The evidence review has a focus on:

- evidence published between 1 August 2010 and 17 August 2020;
  - A few sources outside of this date range were included due to their relevance to the research questions
- the specific research questions approved by GBB;
- New Zealand, Australian, and international research that is published in English (particularly from North America, Europe and the UK);
- What kindness means in Aotearoa's cultural context.

This evidence review will focus on high-quality, published, peer-reviewed studies and grey literature.

### **2.3.1. Search strategy and results**

*Allen + Clarke* developed an evidence search strategy that included search terms, sources and exclusion criteria.

As part of the evidence review a systematic search was completed of relevant databases including ERIC, Google Scholar, PubMed Central, the Social Science Research Network and a number of websites likely to house relevant grey literature. From the results of the search, literature was prioritised according to the following:

- Currency (Published between 1 July 2010 and 1 September 2020. Some earlier documents with particular relevance to the research questions were included)
- Relevance to primary research questions
- Material that exhibits methodological rigour
- English language
- Human studies

*Allen + Clarke* notes the difference in meaning between kindness and compassion. The project team excluded literature on compassion, where possible, to avoid confusing the two behaviours, particularly in regard to the definition of kindness.

The literature review excluded any material that did not relate to the research questions, non-English language sources, and some material published before 1 August 2010. Duplicate citations and a small number of false hits or inaccurate returns were removed before all initial returned citations and abstracts were reviewed for relevance to the main research questions.

A total of 98 peer reviewed articles and sources of grey literature were identified during the literature search stage. Following exclusions (e.g. duplicates, wrong intervention, wrong date, etc) a total of 47 sources were included in this literature review.

### **2.3.2. Search terms**

Where possible (subject to database functionality), the keywords included in the search strategy are outlined below. Boolean search terms will be used where appropriate.

- Kindness AND measure
- Kindness AND definition
- Kindness AND experience, giving, receiving
- Kindness AND wellbeing, social impact
- Kindness AND social return on investment, indicator
- Kind, kindness, charitable, volunteering, altruism, giving
- Acts of kindness
- Manaaki AND wellbeing
- Manaaki AND kindness

### **2.3.3. Validation**

A validation exercise to check that all the key literature and documents had been captured was undertaken. We reviewed bibliographies from key articles, (typically systematic or narrative reviews), to identify further potentially relevant literature and validate the initial findings. This resulted in the sourcing of an additional 4 articles for inclusion, which were included in the 47 sources reviewed.

### **2.3.4. Interpretation**

Various sources of literature were available relating to definitions, experiences and impacts of kindness. The literature on SROI and kindness was limited, and mostly discussed social return on investment (SROI) as a tool of analysis or discussed kindness interventions within psychology and education. Much of this literature identified the need for further research.

Most literature was overseas based, while a few relevant New Zealand sources were included. While the literature included analysis of cultural differences, much less was available regarding Māori and Pacific populations. Research often covered specific population groups, such as different age groups, children and adolescents and women. This means that it is not always possible to generalise the findings from these studies.

An analysis of sources for research questions two and three is provided in Appendix 2. This can be used to determine the reliability and validity of the findings discussed in the following sections.



### 3. KEY FINDINGS

#### 3.1. Research question one: what is kindness [as defined in the literature]?

The following section describes findings pertaining to research question one.

There is no single definition of kindness as the concept and associated acts are highly subjective and contextual. Research emphasises a range of elements:

- Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) emphasise the altruistic elements of kindness, defining it as behaviour which is costly to the self and benefits others
- Otake et al. (2006) take a more behavioural approach, characterising kindness as a motivation to be kind, to recognise, and enact kindness
- Exline et al. (2012) view kindness as a set of social norms and rules that establish society's expectations of people's behaviour
- Symeonidou et al. (2019) suggest that kindness is "the tendency to be compassionate, caring, and do benevolent deeds without expecting some benefit in return".
- Peterson and Seligman (2004) define kindness based on motivation, stating that kindness is driven by compassion or concern and is expressed through acts of service such as doing favours, good deeds, or caregiving.

*The concept of manaaki (reo for kindness or respect) is integral for understanding kindness in Aotearoa New Zealand. A broader definition of manaaki is the ethic of love, honour and care. Another important concept is manaakitanga which encompasses hospitality, kindness, generosity, and support – including the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others. (Wolfgang, Spiller, Henry and Pouwhare, 2020; p. 22).*

While these definitions take different approaches, they all have an underlying theme of prosocial behaviour, that is "voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another, such as helping, donating, sharing and comforting" (Eisenberg et al., 2016).

#### Motivations/sources of kindness

##### Evolution and altruism

Kindness stems from various sources, including genetics, evolution, and socialisation (Campos & Buchanan, 2014). Natural selection has tended to favour kindness as it promotes cooperation and aids personal survival. Evolutionarily speaking, kindness has manifested as various forms of altruism, a component of kindness, defined in terms of the costs or risk of harm incurred by the giver.

**Kin altruism** suggests that people will be kind to those they are genetically related to (Curry et al., 2018). Kin altruism is not unique to humans, it is demonstrated across species, most obviously in parental care for offspring. This type of kindness is generally manifested in the form of love, care, sympathy, and compassion (Curry et al., 2018).

**Mutualism** is a form of altruism which suggests that people will be kind to members of their communities, and is often manifested as loyalty, solidarity, camaraderie, community spirit, and commitment to a 'greater cause' (Curry et al., 2018). Evolving from the need to coordinate for the

purpose of collective defence or collaborative hunting, mutualism is premised on the idea that people will be kind to those with whom they share interests.

**Reciprocal altruism and competitive altruism** are more strategic forms of kindness. Reciprocal altruism proposes that people will be kind to those they might meet again, with the notion that the receiver might ‘return the favour’ at a later date. This is a form of kindness specific to humans and accounts for “kindness in the form of sympathy (for those in need), trust (initiating cooperation), returning favours, gratitude (for favours yet to be returned), forgiveness and friendship” (Curry et al., 2018). This form of kindness helps to explain why people are kind to strangers. Competitive altruism contends that people will be kind to others when it enhances their status. Natural selection favours kindness that impresses peers and attracts mates (Curry et al., 2018). This form of kindness accounts for generosity, bravery, heroism, chivalry, and acts of public service. Such behaviour can bolster status, regardless of whether the recipient is likely to reciprocate, further helping to explain kindness to strangers.

### **Prosociality and other-focused motivations**

The general consensus in relevant literature is that kindness requires prosocial behaviour, that is, behaviour which is focused on another person and seeks to benefit them. Prosocial behaviour is underpinned by concepts and processes including cooperation, care-giving, altruism, sympathy, and compassion (Gilbert et al., 2019). Campos and Buchanan (2014) propose that “the motivation for kindness is rooted in the universal human need to belong and to maintain ongoing social relations”. They have found that connections to social groups are associated with greater motivation to engage in kind behaviour towards members of that group, while exclusion from a group reduces an individual’s ability to focus on other and behave pro-socially and act kindly (Campos & Buchanan, 2014).

In distinguishing between kindness and compassion, the Dalai Lama defined kindness as being behaviour motivated by the desire to see others flourish and be happy (Gilbert et al., 2019). The motive for someone to be kind is important when defining kindness as “behaviour and motivation cannot be severed” (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019). Kindness which is motivated by self-interest or ulterior motives is not perceived as genuine kindness (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019) and may result in unintended harm, for example, damage to the relationship between giver and recipient. Studies have found when kindness-givers act with ulterior motives, for example, to reap the benefits of acting kindly, they did not gain the same level of benefit as those motivated entirely by prosocial, other-focused intentions (Curry et al., 2018).

### **Situational triggers**

Situational triggers are circumstances which prompt people to behave kindly, to carry out an act of kindness. These may be triggered by an individual’s need, for example, seeing a homeless person and offering them food or money, or by a life event (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019). For the latter, the act of kindness is often proactive, for example congratulating someone on a recent achievement. Situational triggers do not always occur in isolation; often the situation prompts an emotional response which in turn causes the individual to act kindly (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019).

### **Compassion**

Throughout much of the literature, compassion and kindness are used interchangeably. This scope of this literature review has excluded compassion, but it is important to briefly discuss the difference between kindness and compassion, and to understand why it is important to distinguish between the two. Gilbert et al. define compassion as “sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it” (Gilbert et al., 2019). The Dalai

Lama has suggested that kindness and compassion can be distinguished based on the motive for each. Compassion is motivated by a desire to relieve suffering while kindness, as discussed above, is motivated by a desire to see others flourish and be happy (Gilbert et al., 2019).

Compassion often involves kindness but as is clear from the discussion above of situational triggers and motives, kindness does not necessarily involve compassion. This distinction is important because it clarifies that givers of kindness do not need to perceive suffering by the recipient for them to act kindly.

### **Cultural variations**

While kindness is considered a “universal language”, the type of kind behaviour that is valued differs between cultures, with some societies placing greater value on certain acts of kindness than others; for example people from Latin American countries are more likely to enact kindness by offering strangers everyday type of assistance, than people from any other country (Campos & Buchanan, 2014). A 2016 study comparing kindness and prosocial behaviour between American, Romanian, and Japanese participants found that the “path through which kindness promotes wellbeing might differ between cultures” (Gherghel et al., 2019).

There is no singular reason that certain types of kindness are valued more than others. A study of South Korean and American students, and the difference in the benefits of kindness between cultures, indicated that whether a culture is individualistic or collectivist is likely to have some effect (Shin et al., 2019). Cultural variation in the performance and understanding of kindness further emphasises the subjective nature of kindness.

## **3.2. Research question two: how do people give and experience kindness?**

The following section describes findings pertaining to research question two.

### **Acts of kindness**

In discussing how people give and experience kindness, it is important to keep in mind the highly subjective nature of kindness; an act which may be perceived as kind by one individual may be perceived as normal, expected behaviour by another. This means that there is no one act which is universally perceived as being kind although certain acts are far more likely than others to get majority consensus that they are kind, e.g. giving blood, volunteering, or letting someone cut in line.

“Kindness involves actions and reactions to others” (Canter et al., 2017) and as discussed in the previous section, kind actions must be motivated by kind intentions to be genuinely kind (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019). Kindness involves actions not only towards those known to the giver, but also to strangers (Symeonidou et al., 2019).

In a study of kindness in schools, Binfet and Whitehead (2019) developed a coding manual based on “themes of kindness”. This approach categories acts of kindness into:

- helping (physical, emotional, instructional, or helping with chores)
- giving (objects or money, or time)
- being friendly
- being respectful
- taking initiative

- encouraging, complimenting, or advocating
- self-directed kindness
- protecting the environment
- unspecified/generic kindness and
- other/miscellaneous.

The study indicated that kind acts could enhance adolescents' wellbeing if they had a high level of engagement in implementing acts of kindness.

In a study of adolescents and their conceptualisations of kindness and its links with wellbeing, Cotney and Banerjee (2019) also developed a coding framework of "kind act themes":

- emotional support
- proactive support
- social inclusion
- positive sociality
- complimenting
- helping
- expressing forgiveness
- honesty
- generosity", and
- formal kindness.

The more specific themes are clearly a product of the adolescent audience, however, the overall themes provide a useful starting point for understanding the various ways people give kindness.

### **Demographic differences**

A key finding in literature on giving and receiving kindness is that experiences of kindness are not equal across age groups (Canter et al., 2017). "Kindness is developmental in nature" (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019) and understandings and therefore behaviour and actions rooted in kindness are different across age groups. The difference in kindness across age groups is "consistent with the idea that there may be a trend for character development over the lifespan" (Linley et al., 2007 cited in (Canter et al., 2017)).

The age of a 'giver' has an impact on their capacity and ability to be kind in recognised ways; Binfet and Gaertner found that acts young children considered to be kind, such as "following directions" and "wearing a smile" were given less emphasis and therefore were less noticed by adults as they were not considered significant enough to be acts of "kindness" (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019). Adolescents most commonly gave kindness by helping, either physically, such as holding a door open; emotionally, by giving advice or standing up for someone; or by teaching someone (Binfet & Whitehead, 2019). Adolescents also commonly demonstrated kindness by giving to others and being respectful.

Canter et al. (2017) found that kindness tended to be higher in participants over 40 years of age than younger age groups, and that kindness scores increased with age. This correlation of increased age and kindness is consistent with the idea of character development over the lifespan (Canter et al., 2017).

Significant gender differences exist in the way kindness is given and experienced. Canter et al. (2017) proposed that there are three aspects of kindness:

- benign tolerance, “a live and let live, permissive humanity revealed in an everyday courteousness, acceptance and love of one’s fellows”,
- empathetic responsivity, “a reactive consideration of the specific feelings of other particular individuals”, and
- principled proaction “behaving honourably towards others” often in an altruistic manner.

Women scored significantly higher than men in benign tolerance and principled proaction and slightly higher than men in empathetic responsivity.

In a study of sixth to eighth graders (11-14 year olds) Binfet and Whitehead (2019) found that girls were more likely to compliment others, and girls and other-gendered individuals were more likely to report emotional helping, supporting someone who is sad, providing advice, defending someone, or helping where there is an emotional need.

These findings are consistent with the nurture hypothesis; the idea that particular aspects of behaviour are a product of socialisation and the environment in which a child is raised. The nurture hypothesis suggests that girls and women are more likely to be emotional, compassionate, and kind because society has influenced them to be so (rather than because of a genetic predisposition to kindness, emotionality, and compassion) (Eagly & Wood, 2013).

### **Receiving kindness**

While the benefits of being kind for the giver are well documented, the effect of kindness on recipients is often ignored, with the assumption that recipients are inevitably benefitted by acts of kindness. In reality, the effects of receiving kindness are inconsistent and often detrimental (Pressman et al., 2015). Research has discovered that being the recipient of kindness can negatively affect an individual’s sense of self-esteem and autonomy, leading to negative self-attribution and increased feelings of sadness and anxiety (Pressman et al., 2015). Recipients may feel incompetent and indebted to the giver (Ko et al., 2019). A study by Pressman et al. (2015) suggests that the detrimental effects of an act of kindness are ameliorated in pay-it-forward style kindness activities as the threat to self-esteem is reduced because the recipient becomes a giver, and their autonomy is not damaged.

### **3.3. Research question three: what is known about the social impact of kindness on wellbeing?**

The following section describes findings pertaining to research question three.

#### **Wellbeing benefits**

“Kindness is associated with a number of positive consequences for individuals such as increased happiness or subjective wellbeing” (Campos & Buchanan, 2014). As previously noted, there are a multitude of benefits to being kind. These range from physical, to emotional and mental, to relationship benefits.

Studies have found that kind behaviour and actions lead to reduced depression, anxiety, and blood pressure, and increased optimism, life satisfaction, and longevity of life (Pressman et al., 2015). Intentional kindness interventions have resulted in decreased social anxiety and therefore

decreased social avoidance (Trew & Alden, 2015). Buchanan and Bardi (2010) found that performing acts of kindness or novelty resulted in an increase in life satisfaction, after participants completed randomly assigned acts of kindness, acts of novelty or no acts, every day over a 10 day period.

Being kind promotes the release of oxytocin into the bloodstream. Oxytocin is a hormone produced by the brain when people connect with one another. It is sometimes called the “love hormone” as greater levels of oxytocin are produced during and after sex and other prosocial activities (Hamilton, 2010). Increased levels of oxytocin result in decreased stress and anxiety and increased levels of trust and the positive emotions resulting from oxytocin release encourage further prosocial behaviour, helping to create a reinforcing cycle of kindness (Hamilton, 2010).

Kerr et al. (2015) found that kind acts can “build trust and acceptance between people, encourage social bonds, provide givers and receivers with the benefits of positive social interaction, and enable helpers to use and develop personal skills”. Kind acts result in stronger relationships and improved quality of relationships. This is reinforced by a study which found that kindness can assist in building trust between people (Jasielska, 2018).

Being kind can increase self-confidence and feelings of competence (Kerr et al., 2015), in turn increasing interpersonal skills and peer acceptance (Layous et al., 2012), and in some cases, improving job performance (Ko et al., 2019).

Both giving and receiving kindness has also been linked to increased happiness (Curry et al., 2018) and can create a ‘pay-it-forward’ model of kindness where recipients of kind acts ‘pass it on’ and become givers of kindness (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019).

Pay It Forward (PIF) kindness interventions were found to be popular and widely endorsed, based on the idea that good deeds received can be reciprocated by doing a good deed for someone else (rather than for the person who completed the original good deed) (Pressman et al., 2015). They found that even from a one-time and brief PIF intervention, both the givers and receivers can experience wellbeing benefits such as increased positive effects and joviality.

This challenges previous studies which have found the benefits of kindness interventions need to be autonomously motivated for benefits to be experienced, as the PIF intervention was forced. Demographic differences found that women experienced benefits more keenly. Those who had a negative experience of the PIF may have done so because they were more introverted and less comfortable with the PIF intervention.

Otake et al. (2006) explore the relationship between kindness and subjective happiness, focusing on Japanese women. Participants were encouraged to count the number of times that they were kind in a week. The study found that counting kindness interventions significantly increases subjective happiness and gratitude. Kind people experience more happiness and have happier memories, and happy people are kind initially, but can become happier, kinder and more grateful by counting their kindness. These factors contribute to wellbeing (Otake et al., 2006).

## Causation

Kindness involves prosocial activity which is likely to contribute to increased wellbeing by satisfying the need to feel competent, the need for autonomy, and the need to be connected – all three fundamental human needs as posited by self-determination theory (Ko et al., 2019).

*“Successfully completing kind acts can increase people’s confidence that they have the resources and capability to make an impact on others’ lives – that is, that they are competent. Choosing the type of act to perform – as well as when, where, how, and for whom to perform that act – may bolster*

*feelings of autonomy. Lastly, prosocial behaviour often creates positive social interactions with the target, which can be used as evidence that one is a connected and valuable member of one's community" (Ko et al., 2019)*

Autonomy of the giver and the act of kindness being entirely voluntary is important for achieving positive outcomes for both giver and receiver (Pressman et al., 2015). This may be because when the act is voluntary, the quality of it is improved in turn improving the quality of the relationship between giver and receiver (Pressman et al., 2015). It may also be because acts of kindness which are not voluntary or which are rooted in self-interest are perceived as ingenuine (Cotney & Banerjee, 2019), potentially threatening the relationship between the two parties, and endangering any benefits obtained from kind behaviour. This may have a paradoxical effect and result in fractured relationships and detrimental effects to the wellbeing of all parties involved (Curry et al., 2018).

Jasielska (2018) posits that experiencing positive emotions builds social resources, increasing positive attitudes towards others. This means that kindness is both a cause and a result of increased wellbeing because it is motivated by the positive emotions experienced when helping others.

### **Cultural variation**

As discussed previously, different cultures place different emphases on various acts or types of kindness, and this cultural disparity also exists in the effects of kindness. In a study comparing kind acts by individuals from Japan, Romania, and the United States, Gherghel et al. (2019) found that the positive effect on wellbeing in individuals from the United States was due to the satisfaction of the need for connection. Meanwhile, the positive effect on wellbeing for individuals from Japan was due to increased feelings of autonomy. This is significant because it means the mechanisms by which individuals glean benefit from being kind is not universal; that culture affects the way people experience kindness and the way people benefit from kind acts.

Across the literature, studies consistently found that people were kind to those known to them. This may be due to the simple fact that when prompted to be kind, it is easiest to be kind to those in one's sphere. Alternatively, it may be due to mutualism – the idea that people are predisposed to be kind to those in their community because of the associated evolutionary benefits.

### **Negative effects on wellbeing**

The detrimental results of ingenuine kindness have been discussed above, particularly the potential for such acts to damage relationships. The unintended consequences of kindness, even genuine kindness, are discussed in the 'receiving kindness' section above, specifically the unintended damage to the recipient's self-esteem and confidence.

Kindness can also have a negative effect on the giver's wellbeing. Kerr et al. (2015) found that because kindness requires focus on others' wellbeing and not one's own in order to gain benefit from being kind, being kind may serve as a burden rather than a benefit. This is likely to be especially true where being kind is suggested as a therapeutic intervention to assist in improving one's wellbeing.

## **3.4. Research question four: What is known about the social return on investment (SROI) of kindness [as defined in the literature]?**

### **What is Social Return on Investment (SROI)?**

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a cost-benefit analysis that was designed as an adjustment to the financial analysis tool of Return on Investment (ROI) analysis. SROI provides a way to consider public good and social outcomes, as well as, or instead of, maximising profit (Hamelmann et al., 2017; Yates & Marra, 2017).

Andreyeva and Hamilton (2012) and Yates and Marra (2017) explain that SROI is an evaluation tool that seeks to understand and measure the value of social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes created by an activity or an organisation, and the costs of creating them. SROI can capture socioeconomic value by considering both economic value and the value of more intangible things that are difficult to measure and place value on. By considering social and environmental impact alongside economic costs and benefits, SROI can work to reduce human and environmental harm (Hamelmann et al., 2017).

Andreyeva & Hamilton (2012) explains further: “this value is arrived at by engaging a range of stakeholders who are involved in the activity, in order to identify the most important changes that occur as a result of the activity and, using financial proxies, assigning a value to these changes. The value is compared to the cost required to generate the benefits to produce an SROI ratio.” (Yates & Marra, 2017, p. 2).

The research found that while the SROI has positive impact by stimulating funding for organisations that are seeking to achieve public good, there are challenges associated with attempting to place a monetary value on outcomes and resources that cannot be appropriately monetised (Yates & Marra, 2017).

Spiller, Pio, Erakovic and Henare (2011a) suggest that a more holistic perspective on the interconnectedness between social, environmental and economic outcomes could be considered. This would be more aligned with a te ao Māori perspective, rather than a typical Triple Bottom Line approach, such as what the SROI relies on (Spiller et al. 2011; Yates & Marra, 2017). The Triple Bottom Line refers to the addition of social and environmental considerations, alongside cost, which is the typical Bottom Line (Yates & Marra, 2017). However, SROI and a te ao Māori perspective may be aligned, as wellbeing is often a much more integral part of Māori enterprises (Spiller et al., 2011).

### **What is known about the social return on investment (SROI) of kindness?**

The literature search returned limited results on the SROI of kindness. In the 17 sources that our searches identified, they mostly discussed the SROI as a tool of analysis or discussed kindness interventions within psychology and education.

The broadness of a concept such as “kindness”, and the challenges of defining it, as well as its causes and outcomes, mean that SROI does not immediately lend itself to analysing the value of kindness. However, if the concepts used by SROI are interpreted broadly, such as social, environmental, and economic costs and benefits, as well as varying stakeholders’ views on an activity, possible social returns on kindness can be deduced. These are explored in question five below.

The SROI requires an understanding of the activity or organisation, and then a way to prescribe value to these, as defined by stakeholders. SROI could go some way towards measuring kindness as it provides a tool to measure the cost-benefit of something intangible, towards an outcome of public good. The time of volunteers can have a value assigned to it, such as in the Pyjama Foundation example described below. (Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2010).

### **Case studies of SROI analysis**

The following are examples of organisations which have used SROI analysis.



*Brothers Act of Random Kindness (BARK) is a social enterprise based in Townsville, Australia that addresses unemployment and high incarceration rates among the Indigenous male population. BARK used SROI to explore their impacts. A SROI analysis on their activities, measuring the social and economic benefits, found that for an investment of \$480k between February 2011 and February 2012, there was a value produced of \$4.5 million, giving BARK a SROI ratio of 9:1 (Andreyeva & Hamilton, 2012).*

*The Pyjama Foundation operates across Australia and works with volunteers to improve the literacy and educational outcomes of children living in care. A SROI analysis found that for every \$1 of cash or time invested in the Foundation's learning program, \$4.86 was created in value. This means the SROI ratio for the investment in The Pyjama Foundation is 4.86:1. In this ratio, volunteers' time accounts for 64% of the valuation of all inputs (cash and time) (Social Ventures Australia Consulting, 2010).*

### **3.5. Research question five: How can kindness be measured as an indicator of wellbeing and social return on investment (SROI)?**

#### **What are some measurements of kindness and wellbeing that could be applicable with a SROI on kindness?**

While the literature search did not find specific research on the SROI of kindness, there are a number of examples in the literature of the impacts of kindness interventions on wellbeing including in the education and health sectors. An analysis of the definitions of 'wellbeing' is provided in Appendix 3. Using SROI, these interventions could be deemed as an investment in kindness and show how kindness can contribute to a social good. The literature indicates the benefits and importance of kindness and suggests social returns from kindness interventions could be measured.

#### **Measuring manaaki**

Spiller et al. (2011b) suggest that care is at the heart of Māori values system, calling for people to care for or be *kaitiaki* of other living beings and of their *mauri* or life force. Therefore, they suggest that a business model of prioritising and valuing relationships, stakeholders and wellbeing aligns with the Māori values system. This highlights the value of the relationships between the people in their organisations, and the intrinsic worth of their stakeholders. (Spiller et al (2011b). This approach is consistent with the stakeholder consideration that SROI also uses.

Wolfgramm et al. (2020) advocate for the consideration of Māori concepts of both wellbeing and value to be considered alongside traditional aggregate measures of wellbeing. They ask:

*“Do these macroeconomic measures reflect how Māori assess the overall effect (positive and negative aspects) of economic growth on the wellbeing of people (social, community, culture and society), planet (ecologies and environment) and enterprise?” (p. 20)*

Wolfgramm et al. (2020) also highlight the complexities in measuring wellbeing, noting that wellbeing is subjective, so cannot be objectively integrated into economic measurements (such as SROI). They suggest that for wellbeing measures to be culturally responsive and valid they need to involve Māori in their development. (Wolfgramm et al. 2020, p. 18).

Research has found a statistically significant linkage between the profits of an organisation and their commitment to ethical and social responsibility (including values such as manaaki or kindness/respect) (Spiller et al., 2011a), which further supports the value of kindness.

### **Measuring the social impact of kindness interventions in educational spaces**

Flook et al. (2015) explored the benefits of kindness via a specific pre-school curriculum called The Kindness Curriculum. This intervention consisted of two 20-30 minute training sessions over a 12-week period on mindfulness-based prosocial skills. This combined both mindfulness practice and kindness practices, such as empathy, gratitude and sharing.

Flook et al. (2015) found that this curriculum supported preschool children to improve their social competency, learning, health and social-emotional development. The control group showed more selfish behaviour over time, however. The positive impact of kindness specifically, and as separate from the mindfulness component of this curriculum, are difficult to deduce. However, (Flook et al., 2015) reference a possible valuation of the positive impacts of investing in early childhood:

*“Economists have demonstrated that investments in early childhood education pay for themselves, yielding a return of 7% or more. This indicates the potential for investments in kindness to increase health and reduce risk behaviours over the life span, thus reducing societal costs” (p. 44).*

Binfet (2015) advocates for “intentional acts of kindness” to be integrated into learning. This includes competencies such as self-awareness, relationship skills and prosocial behaviour, or enacting kindness to improve social and emotional wellbeing. Acts of kindness are also considered a positive psychology intervention, and these have been found to improve wellbeing for participants.

A useful source in the literature about the complexity of measuring SROI of kindness is an evaluation of the ‘Kind Campus’ model. While this study does not provide a SROI of kindness necessarily, it is an example of a measurement model of kindness in a (school) community being developed. Kaplan et al., (2016) evaluate the impact of the school-based kindness program ‘Kind Campus’. Kind Campus is a widely adopted kindness education program across more than 200,000 students in over 300 schools in the United States. Kaplan et al. (2016) found that social-emotional skills (such as kindness) can lead to improved academic achievement, as well as improved wellbeing.

Kaplan et al. (2016) also reflect similar literature as referenced above, describing the link between kindness interventions via positive psychology interventions, as well as the positive impact of mindfulness and compassion training on young people.

Further, Kaplan et al. (2016) also note that school environment has an impact of student wellbeing and success. They explain that “positive school climate is associated with positive emotional and mental health outcomes, increased self-esteem and self-concept, increased motivation to learn, decreased bullying and violence, decreased student absenteeism, and also mitigates the impact of socioeconomic risk on academic performance” (p. 160).

In attempting to evaluate school-based kindness programs, via a mixed method community-based participatory research, the researchers used concept mapping. This allowed them to bring together perspectives from shared stakeholders, and to consider the complex facets of how a school community experiences kindness. However, they highlight that impacting a school environment via kindness interventions is highly complex. They propose that by centring kindness within schools via kindness education programmes, having a common language for

kindness, and having a framework of measurement may encourage a more positive school environment for both students and educators. (Kaplan et al., 2016; p. 167).

### **Measuring the social impact of kindness interventions in health spaces**

Cleary & Horsfall (2016) advocate for the importance of kindness to be used in mental health nursing but make the case for kindness to be appreciated and used broadly. They note that kindness can be dismissed as unprofessional and is not valued as highly as qualities such as heroism. However, they note that a nurse can be both kind and strong, and that for their patients, feeling cared for through caring actions can improve their experience of their treatment. Pressman et al. (2015) reference a study which found that volunteers providing kindness in hospital-based and home-based visitor programs, provided benefits such as increased cognitive functioning, happiness and lower medication use. These studies suggest that encouraging kindness in the health sector can have beneficial impacts, especially for those who are significantly unwell.

The benefits of kindness in mental health support have also been demonstrated by Kerr et al.'s (2015) findings. Gratitude and kindness interventions for those on the waitlist to see a psychologist contributed to patients' enhanced satisfaction with daily life, optimism, reduced anxiety, and sense of connectedness with others.

### **3.6. Limitations and gaps**

A number of limitations and gaps in the literature pertaining to kindness have been mentioned in this report. It is worth noting, however, that while significant limitations and gaps remain in the evidence base, this does not diminish or define the value proposition of the literature. It merely signals the early stage of the research landscape as well as the complex nature of measuring kindness.

### **3.7. Areas for further research**

Some research questions which were not included as part of this review, but would benefit from further investigation are the following:

- How can kindness to strangers be encouraged?
- Are certain types of kindness more likely to achieve the desired outcomes?
- How can we integrate a kaupapa Māori model of kindness, wellbeing and social impact to this discussion?
- What can we learn about individual vs community-social kindness?

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## APPENDIX 2: SOURCE ANALYSIS FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS TWO AND THREE

Source	Type of study	Method	Number of participants	Type of analysis
Canter, D., Youngs, D., & Yaneva, M. (2017). Towards a measure of kindness: An exploration of a neglected interpersonal trait. <i>Personality and Individual Differences, 106</i> , 15–20. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.019">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.10.019</a>	Self-report questionnaire		<i>n</i> =165 (42% male, 58% female, between ages of 18 and 70, median age = 32 years)	Multivariate analysis
Cotney, J. L., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Adolescents' Conceptualizations of Kindness and its Links with Well-being: A Focus Group Study. <i>Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 36</i> (2), 599–617. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517738584">https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517738584</a>	Focus groups	Six mixed-gender semi-structured discussion focus groups: facilitators asked core questions and added prompts where necessary but participants encouraged to lead. 45-60 minutes in length	<i>n</i> =32 students from UK secondary schools in Year 7 (11-12 years old; 8 males, 10 females) and Year 10 (14-15 years; 4 males and 10 females) Mostly Caucasian students.	Inductive thematic analysis
Symeonidou, D., Moraitou, D., Pezirkianidis, C., & Stalikas, A. (2019). PROMOTING SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING THROUGH A KINDNESS INTERVENTION. <i>Hellenic Journal of Psychology, 16</i> , 1–21.	Grey literature Online forum;	Participants randomly assigned to either the control group (counted kind acts each day) or the control group (writing daily routines)	<i>n</i> =54 (34 women; 20 men) aged 18-55 years	Mixed measures ANOVA Bonferroni pairwise comparisons
Binfet, J.-T., & Whitehead, J. (2019). The effect of engagement in a kindness intervention on adolescents' well-being: A randomized controlled trial. <i>International Journal of Emotional Education, 11</i> , 33–49.	Intervention	Randomly assigned to control group ( <i>n</i> =190) and intervention ( <i>n</i> =193). Intervention group planned three kinds acts to be done	<i>n</i> =383 sixth to eighth graders	ANCOVAs



		in the week ahead, noting who each act was for, and when it was to be completed. Control group planned three locations to visit each week and asked to note when during the week they would do so. Completed pre-test and post-test surveys		
Pressman, S. D., Kraft, T. L., & Cross, M. P. (2015). It's good to do good and receive good: The impact of a 'pay it forward' style kindness intervention on giver and receiver well-being. <i>The Journal of Positive Psychology, 10</i> (4), 293–302. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.965269">https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.965269</a>	Intervention	Participants randomly assigned into 10 giver pay-it-forward groups that roamed university campus and broader Lawrence, Kansas community for approx. 90 minutes Receiver group included any individual (e.g. community member, faculty, staff, student) who happened to be close in proximity to one of the PIF groups; included 1014 individuals who were recipients of the PIF activity and 251 individuals utilised as control subjects (e.g.	83 givers (59% female; 87.5% Caucasian, aged 19-56 years with a mean age of 22.6) 1014 receivers 251 individuals utilised as control subjects	PANAS assessment Coding of Duchenne smile and non-Duchenne smile ANOVA Pearson correlation coefficient tests ANCOVAs and partial correlations used when covariates were necessary

		individuals who were not part of the activity because of distance or because they were encountered after the activity was complete)		
Ko, K., Margolis, S., Revord, J., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2019). Comparing the effects of performing and recalling acts of kindness. <i>The Journal of Positive Psychology</i> , 1–9. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1663252">https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1663252</a>	Longitudinal study (3 days)	Participants randomly assigned to one of four conditions: perform only, recall only, perform and recall, or control. Completed same psychological measures each day plus the activity associated with each condition (e.g. recall an act of kindness, perform an act of kindness, etc.)	n=532 undergraduate students; 39% Asian, 26% Latino, 9% White, 3% African American and 13% other/mixed ethnicities. 69.5% female. Average age 19.12 years	Statistical analysis
Campos, B., & Buchanan, K. E. (2014). <i>Kindness Revisited</i> . <a href="https://www.academia.edu/13476033/Kindness_Revisited">https://www.academia.edu/13476033/Kindness_Revisited</a>	Literature review			
Trew, J. L., & Alden, L. E. (2015). Kindness reduces avoidance goals in socially anxious individuals. <i>Motivation and Emotion</i> , 39(6), 892–907. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-015-9499-5">https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-015-9499-5</a>	Self-report Social Interaction Anxiety Scale- Straightforward	Participants randomly assigned to one of three task conditions (acts of kindness, exposure only, life details). Not blind	n=146 (73.97% female; mean age was 20.47 years). 55 participants were of European descent, 67 were of Asian descent, 24 of 'other' descent	ANCOVA
Buchanan, K. E., & Bardi, A. (2010). Acts of Kindness and Acts of Novelty Affect Life Satisfaction. <i>The Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 150(3), 235–237. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/00224540903365554">https://doi.org/10.1080/00224540903365554</a>	Intervention	Participants were randomly assigned to perform either kind acts, new acts, or no acts	n=86 (38 females and 48 males, median age 26)	ANOVA

Hamilton, D. (2010, August). Why Kindness is Good for You. <i>Prediction Magazine</i> .	Magazine article			
Kerr, S. L., O'Donovan, A., & Pepping, C. A. (2015). Can Gratitude and Kindness Interventions Enhance Well-Being in a Clinical Sample? <i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i> , 16(1), 17–36. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9492-1">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9492-1</a>	Intervention	Participants were asked to list either things they were grateful for (gratitude intervention), or to list the kind acts they had committed (kindness intervention), and to rate the intensity of gratitude or kindness felt on a scale of 1 (somewhat grateful) to 7 (extremely grateful) each day of the 14-day intervention.	n=48 (36 females, 12 males, ages 19 to 67, median age 43 years)	ANOVA
Jasielska, D. (2018). The moderating role of kindness on the relation between trust and happiness. <i>Current Psychology (New Brunswick, N.J.)</i> , Journal Article, 1–9. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9886-7">https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9886-7</a>	Intervention	No random assignment to groups; all participants experienced the same intervention	n=91 (71 women) aged 19-26 (M = 20.38)	Moderation analysis was conducted using the PORCESS macro model for SPSS
Layous, K., Nelson, S. K., Oberle, E., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2012). Kindness Counts: Prompting Prosocial Behavior in Preadolescents Boosts Peer Acceptance and Well-Being. <i>PLOS ONE</i> , 7(12), e51380. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0051380">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0051380</a>	Longitudinal experiment	No random assignment to groups; all participants experienced the same intervention	19 classrooms in Vancouver, n=415 9-11 year olds with median age 10.6	Multi-level modeling
Curry, O. S., Rowland, L. A., Van Lissa, C. J., Zlotowitz, S., McAlaney, J., & Whitehouse, H. (2018). Happy to help? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of	Systematic review and meta-analysis			

<p>performing acts of kindness on the well-being of the actor. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i>, 76, 320–329. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.02.014">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.02.014</a></p>				
<p>Otake, K., Shimai, S., Tanaka-Matsumi, J., Otsui, K., &amp; Fredrickson, B. L. (2006). Happy People Become Happier through Kindness: A Counting Kindnesses Intervention. <i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i>, 7(3), 361–375. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-005-3650-z">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-005-3650-z</a></p>	<p>Study 1: Self-report questionnaire S2: Intervention</p>	<p>S2: not randomly assigned, participants were asked to keep track of every act of kindness they performed and to report the daily number of these acts. Japanese Subjective Happiness Scale administered before and after</p>	<p>Study 1: <math>n=175</math> (20 males, 155 females) Japanese undergraduate students, median age 19.1 years S2: <math>n=71</math> female undergraduates (median age 18.70 years) in intervention group and <math>n=48</math> female undergraduates (median age 18.79 years)</p>	<p>S1: Content coding S2: Two-way analysis of variance <i>Post-hoc</i> pairwise comparisons</p>
<p>Gherghel, C., Nastas, D., Hashimoto, T., &amp; Takai, J. (2019). The relationship between frequency of performing acts of kindness and subjective well-being: A mediation model in three cultures. <i>Current Psychology</i>. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00391-x">https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00391-x</a></p>	<p>S1: self-report questionnaire S2: self-report questionnaire</p>		<p>S1: <math>n=145</math> Americans (87 males, 58 females, median age 36.33), <math>n=167</math> Japanese (88 males, 78 females, 1 unknown, median age 40.12) and <math>n=127</math> Romanian (18 males, 107 females, 2 unknown, median age 29.42) participants. S2: <math>n=151</math> American (93 males, 57 females, 1 unknown, median age 35.26), <math>n=153</math> Japanese (68 males, 84</p>	<p>S1: Exploratory factor analysis (weighted least squares) S2: Analyses were performed using R statistical software version 3.6.0 and multi-group analysis</p>

			females, 1 unknown, median age 40.39), <i>n</i> =129 Romanian(27 males, 102 females, median age 33.35)	
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### APPENDIX 3: DEFINITIONS OF WELLBEING

Citation	Definition of wellbeing
Binfet, J.-T., & Whitehead, J. (2019). The effect of engagement in a kindness intervention on adolescents' well-being: A randomized controlled trial. <i>International Journal of Emotional Education</i> , 11, 33–49.	Social and emotional wellbeing, happiness and gratitude, subjective wellbeing
Cleary, M., & Horsfall, J. (2016). Kindness and Its Relevance to Everyday Life: Some Considerations for Mental Health Nurses. <i>Issues in Mental Health Nursing</i> , 37(3), 206–208. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2016.1140546">https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2016.1140546</a>	Subjective wellbeing
Kaplan, D. M., deBlois, M., Dominguez, V., & Walsh, M. E. (2016). Studying the teaching of kindness: A conceptual model for evaluating kindness education programs in schools. <i>Evaluation and Program Planning</i> , 58, 160–170. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.06.001">https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.06.001</a>	Less depression and anxiety (page 170), emotional wellbeing
Kerr, S. L., O'Donovan, A., & Pepping, C. A. (2015). Can Gratitude and Kindness Interventions Enhance Well-Being in a Clinical Sample? <i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i> , 16(1), 17–36. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9492-1">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9492-1</a>	Hedonic wellbeing, eudaimonic wellbeing, relational wellbeing (increased optimism, greater satisfaction with life, connectedness with others)
Pressman, S. D., Kraft, T. L., & Cross, M. P. (2015). It's good to do good and receive good: The impact of a 'pay it forward' style kindness intervention on giver and receiver well-being. <i>The Journal of Positive Psychology</i> , 10(4), 293–302. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.965269">https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.965269</a>	Subjective wellbeing, greater positive and lower negative affect
Spiller, C., Pio, E., Erakovic, P., & Henare, M. (2011a). Wise Up: Creating Organisational Wisdom Through an Ethic of <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> . <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 104, 223-235.	Subjective wellbeing

<p>Spiller, C., Erakovic, L., Henare, M., &amp; Pio, E. (2011b). Relational Well-being and Wealth: Māori Businesses and an Ethic of Care. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>, 98, 153-169.</p>	<p>Relational wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing, cultural wellbeing, social wellbeing, environmental wellbeing, economic wellbeing</p>
<p>Wolfgramm, R., Spiller, C., Henry, E., &amp; Pouwhare, R. (2020). A culturally derived framework of values-driven transformation in Māori economies of wellbeing (Ngā hono ōhanga oranga). <i>AlterNative</i>, 16(1), 18-28.</p>	<p>Economies of wellbeing: these are brought together in the framework <i>Ngā hono ōhanga oranga</i> which incorporates five interrelated concepts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Ngā hono</i>: the linking principle that makes explicit relational dimensions of wellbeing</li> <li>2. <i>Ōhanga</i>: an eco-system of identities that underpin <i>ohaoha</i> – economic activity</li> <li>3. <i>Oranga</i>: economic activity focused on reinstating and enhancing <i>mauri ora</i> (health and wellness of one’s life) across a range of contexts</li> <li>4. <i>Ora</i>: Māori values-driven transformation from the centre of the model</li> <li>5. <i>Whakapapa</i>: Māori relational pragmatics</li> </ol>