

“Bringing People Together”: Compass Community Trust

Introduction

There have been some exciting developments in Tauranga, a region of about 110,000 people located on the east coast of the north island of New Zealand. The Compass Community Trust has supported the establishment of a dynamic network of community and not-for-profit organizations, helping them link with each other and with the business community, local district councils and funding agencies.

Background

The idea for the Compass Community Trust came from a conversation in 1996 between Peter Wyatt, who at the time was Director of Community and Family Services for the Salvation Army in the Western Bay of Plenty, and Des Ferrow, the head of Tauranga Charitable Trust (a charitable foundation). Both men were concerned about whether trust grants to community organizations were as effective as they could be. They also knew that gaps between social agencies were leaving some community needs unfilled.

They concluded that the solution was to create a new entity that would offer management, planning and support services to community groups to help them access and make the best possible use of funding, and to aid them in bridging gaps. The new entity was named Tauranga Compass Limited, and Peter Wyatt assumed the position of Chief Executive Officer. Core funding

for the new organization was provided by Tauranga Charitable Trust.

Tauranga Compass quickly was hard-pressed by community groups needing assistance – several hundred in the first year of operation. It helped groups identify their needs and locate sources of funding. It also gave guidance to funding agencies that wanted to ensure they were distributing their resources in an effective and controlled manner.

Addressing gaps in services

In September 1997, Compass Community Trust was established, absorbing Tauranga Compass Limited. By the end of August 1998, it had worked with more than 350 groups, including welfare and community organizations; schools and groups in the child, youth and education sectors; sports and leisure groups; and arts groups. It also assisted 70 individuals. Services provided included legal and tax advice; organizational and program reviews; advocacy; advice on human resources and management structures; financial planning and budgeting; information on sources of funding; and information and referrals.

As Compass personnel became more familiar with the services offered by different groups in the community, it became clear that more was needed for the unemployed and persons with mental disabilities. The Tauranga Employment Trust and the Turning Point Trust were created to deal with these gaps in service.

The Tauranga Employment Trust was established to tackle the problem of long-term unemployment in the region. It provides work for unemployed people for up to six months to help them gain valuable skills and then seeks to place them in permanent jobs. To do this effectively, Tauranga Employment Trust developed partnerships with government agencies and community organizations with which the unemployed are placed to learn new skills. In the trust's first year of operation, it provided work opportunities for 160 people who had been continuously unemployed for more than four years. These employees were involved in a variety of projects (including carpentry, light engineering, painting, decorating, horticulture and general labour) carried out in the community by the trust at competitive rates. All except eight people were successfully placed in jobs at the end of their terms with Tauranga Employment Trust.

In the same year, Tauranga Employment Trust assisted another 190 people who had been unemployed for more than 13 weeks but less than four years. These 'community task force workers' were placed with community groups to gain work experience and skills training for three days per week. They received an additional government allowance over and above their standard unemployment benefits.

The Turning Point Trust aims to empower people with long-term mental health needs by working with psychiatric survivors.¹ Its Maori slogan, *Aroha ki te tangata*, means "to embrace, love, encourage and respect each other at all times." The Turning Point Trust also places a strong emphasis on building partnerships among itself, its clients and the community. By establishing a range of user-friendly social, learning and work environments, it encourages survivors of mental illness to regain opportunities to control their lives, enjoy an improved quality of life and learn new skills. The trust works with approximately 120 clients. It provides a drop-in centre; runs personal development, social and recreational courses; and holds life skills and work skills classes. Additional services include help with transportation and inexpensive lunches.

In May 1998, with the support of the Chamber of Commerce of Tauranga Region, Compass Community Trust launched a Corporate Adoption scheme. By 1999, more than 40 companies had 'adopted' community groups, providing them with business and management

advice. The adoption scheme has increased the pool of resources available to assist community organizations and encouraged greater involvement of business people in the community life of the district.

Compass Community Village

Perhaps the biggest change in the social environment of Tauranga resulted from a partnership between the Compass Community Trust and Tauranga District Council. Tauranga's once-popular Historic Village – a restored area of colonial buildings and cobblestone streets – was suffering from declining tourism, marketing and personnel problems, and insufficient funds for maintenance. In August 1998, management of the village was handed over to Compass Community Trust. A not-for-profit company, Compass Community Village Ltd., was established to manage the village.

Many partners helped Compass bring the village back to life. Westpac Trust developed a marketing campaign and provided computers. Community task force workers refurbished the buildings to provide low-rent office space for not-for-profit groups. Buildings were renovated, repainted and even relocated, and gardens weeded and maintained. The Village Hall was completely renovated to provide conference facilities. By the time the village is refurbished entirely, 800,000 cobblestones will have been laid, made on-site by Village workers.

Almost 60 community and not-for-profit organizations now inhabit the Community Village. Close proximity has helped to strengthen the bonds between them, and has made life easier for clients who need to visit several agencies. The provision of parking and common services such as photocopying, word processing, purchasing and postal services is a boon to smaller organizations. According to Peter Wyatt: "The village provides a heart for the community." In addition to housing community groups, it features craft shops, its own radio station, a church, a café, Village Hall and the Tauranga House Restaurant and reception facilities.

The village's halls, meeting rooms and shops now host a wide range of gatherings, exhibitions, displays and special events that range from children's hobby workshops to the introduction of new product lines by some of the region's largest companies. Tourist traffic is on

the upswing as a result of these activities and events such as the inaugural 'Hall of Trees' exhibition, which was attended by more than 3,000 people. For this event, community organizations decorated large Christmas trees, and visitors were encouraged to make a donation to the tree representing the charity of their choice. The centrepiece was a six-metre tree decorated by florists for the village.

The 'Friends of the Community Village' program encourages local businesses and other organizations to support refurbishment projects in the village. The contributions of the 'Friends' are recognized in a plaque in the village, and the organizations receive individual plaques to be displayed at their offices. Organizational friends that donate more than \$5,000 are designated as 'gold' Friends, organizations that donate between \$1,000 and \$4,999 receive the 'silver' designation, and those that donate between \$250 and \$999 are 'bronze.' To date, some 70 organizations have been designated as 'Friends of the Community Village,' including thirteen 'gold' Friends.

Partnerships continue to expand

The number of agencies served by Compass Community Trust continues to increase. In 1998-99, it assisted more than 400 groups, including several companies, and close to 50 individuals.

More than 30 partnerships are key to the success and impact of Compass Community Trust. A monthly speaker's series on issues of interest to community groups is provided through a partnership with the Tauranga Council of Social Services. Speakers have included Government Ministers, Members of Parliament, senior government officials and university professors. Recently, the partnership has expanded, with Compass providing the Council with meeting premises and newsletter production. Compass also assists the Co-ordinators of Volunteers in Tauranga, an umbrella organization of volunteer community groups in the Western Bay of Plenty, by providing meeting premises and producing and mailing the organization's newsletter. Perhaps as a result of Compass' involvement with both groups, a 'trial marriage' of the two organizations recently has taken place.

The Tauranga Arts Festival Trust was set up to oversee a major arts festival that took place in October

1999. Substantial funding from a variety of partners, including the Tauranga Energy Consumer Trust, the Bay of Plenty Community Trust and the major projects investment fund of the Tauranga District Council enabled the festival to attract major acts, artists and exhibitions. Peter Wyatt points out: "We see this year's festival as the beginning of Tauranga's millennium celebration – full of energy and community spirit."

Compass has worked with the University of Waikato Foundation to provide assistance and advice on funding strategies for the new University of Tauranga (a college of the University of Waikato). The trust also has brokered 'community opportunities' for the staff and trainees of Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, putting them in touch with organizations that can use their skills and assistance. Compass Community Trust acts as a hub for networking among many regional and national organizations.

The trust has undertaken several projects in partnership with the Tauranga District Council. Under contract, Compass Community Trust provided significant input on the community sector aspects of the Council's 20-year strategic plan. On a *pro bono* basis, the trust carried out an extensive survey of users of the city's various libraries to aid their redevelopment and future planning. "This work was undertaken as a service to the community," notes Peter Wyatt.

Partnerships with funding organizations, the business community and the Tauranga District Council have been formalized through representation on the board of trustees. The trust is administered by three trustees – one nominated by the funding organizations, one by the business community and one by the Mayor of Tauranga. The core funding organizations include the Bay of Plenty Community Trust, Bethlehem Charitable Trust, Hillsdene Charitable Trust, Placemakers, Carters and Tauranga Charitable Trust.

The dynamism and impact of Compass Community Trust has not gone unnoticed. In November 1997, the Governor General of New Zealand presented Compass Community Trust with the Poutama Award for Community Service. In 1998, Compass received the New Zealand Community Trust Award, presented by the New Zealand Trustees Association for "outstanding performance, endeavour, and achievement by a Community

Trust.” As we went to press, New Zealand’s Governor General, Sir Michael Hardie Boys, GNZM, GCMG – visiting Tauranga for the official opening of the Compass Community Village and to open the inaugural Arts Festival – announced that the New Zealand Trustee Association had awarded their Premier ‘Trustee of the Year’ award for 1999 to Compass, and presented the award to them. In the end, however, as Peter Wyatt notes: “Where a spirit of cooperation and partnership is fostered within the community, it is the community that will ultimately benefit.”

Ann Simpson

Ann Simpson works on the community stories series for the Caledon Institute.

Additional information about the Compass Community Trust is available from the Trust at P.O. Box 841, Tauranga, New Zealand; Tel: 64-7-571-3700; Fax 64-7-571-3701; e-mail: compass@xtra.co.nz.

Endnote

1. The term ‘psychiatric survivors’ refers to people who typically are labelled ‘mentally ill.’ It recognizes the strengths of people who have survived mental disorders and psychiatric treatment and service.

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