

# THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY RECYCLING

Community enterprise is a tool that enables communities to turn global challenges into local opportunities. Recycling promotes the sustainable use of our natural resources. Our community focused business model uses recycling and reuse as a vehicle to deliver on broader social, economic and environmental outcomes such as the promotion of community development, reducing the need for new landfills, preventing pollution, saving energy, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Telling the story of these wider benefits can be important for community recyclers in getting important stakeholders on board. This resource sheet aims to give you some key points about the benefits that community recycling brings to your community.

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Recycling generates significant economic benefits for communities.

### EMPLOYMENT

Resource recovery is a high labour activity and can provide work for a significant number of people, including some of the most vulnerable members of society. The sector requires the employment of low, medium, and highly-skilled workers in a variety of jobs—from materials handling and processing to high-quality product manufacturing. This inclusivity and diversity helps build safe, inclusive and healthy communities. It also future proofs the local economy by building skills and growing the capacity of communities to solve their own problems.

### EFFICIENCY AND INNOVATION

The drive for efficient handling and use of recycled materials spurs innovation, a key to long-term economic growth.

Investments in recycling equipment and the companies themselves also filter through the economy and contribute to economic growth.

## THE LEAKY BUCKET PROBLEM

The problem is not that too little money flows into a neighbourhood. It is that too often it is spent on services with no local presence and so immediately leaves the area.

Community recyclers generate revenue through sales, services, contracts and projects and put approximately 80c of every dollar earned straight back into local hands, helping to create a thriving local economy.

If you imagine that your local economy is like a leaky bucket: money enters when it is spent, is exchanged through sales and wages, and leaks out any time the spending occurs at a business that is not owned locally. We tend to focus on pouring more money into our local economies to keep them going but that only works if you have an endless source of income.

Councils and communities can maximise the impact of their existing recycling budgets by choosing contractors with a high direct and indirect local spend. By increasing local spend you can plug the leaks, spend the same amount of money and generate more income for your local area.

## SOCIAL BENEFITS

Community recyclers provide work and training opportunities, keep money going around in local economies and make second hand goods available to people. These activities enhance the environment by conserving materials and energy and recovering hazardous products. This helps to engage people in new activities and introduce innovation and new ways of thinking.

Waste is a social problem and technical solutions can only take us part of the way to eliminating waste. Community organisations are resourceful and they have the potential to solve many waste related problems. Successful waste reduction goes hand in hand with community empowerment and capacity building. Many community recyclers see material going to landfill as wasted opportunities, wasted resources and wasted jobs.

## ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

There will always be many environmental benefits of resource recovery, regardless of the times we live in. Especially in a world like today, where natural resources (eg. fuels, metals, etc) and energy are being used up at an alarming rate, rapid deforestation is wiping out the earth's forests and tons of waste is produced every second. The importance of reducing, reusing and recycling cannot be over-emphasized.

Some of the immediate benefits of recycling are:

- Reduction of the amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators;
- Conservation of natural resources such as timber, water, and minerals;
- Prevention of pollution by reducing the need to collect new raw materials;
- Saving on energy and fuel use by reducing the need to process virgin materials;
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change



## CASE STUDY: XTREME ZERO WASTE RAGLAN

Xtreme Zero Waste is a community enterprise, using business as a tool to meet the needs of our community. Xtreme Zero Waste is contracted by Waikato District Council to operate weekly kerbside collections and the Raglan Recycle Centre. Achieving approximately 75% diversion from landfill, XZW are turning Raglan's waste into resources and moving forward to zero waste.

The story of Raglan's journey towards zero waste illustrates the multiple benefits of the community recycling model.

Historically Raglan's waste went into a landfill that had been established beside the Te Hutewai Stream valley. Both solid waste and sewage waste was landfilled until a municipal sewage system was established in 1976. In 1997 the local Lions club started monthly kerbside paper and cardboard collection.

In 1998, the local landfill closed and a refuse transfer station established. The community got involved with landscaping of the old tip site, and trees were planted. The community began researching alternatives to landfill.

Local Educational Trust, Whakamaua-te-Aio, began diverting greenwaste from the transfer station to make compost. They took over paper and cardboard recycling collection from the Lions. The trust began additional research and developed a

business plan for a zero waste to landfill goal.

After only three years they were already reaching a diversion from landfill of 74%. They started business collections and rural drop off locations for recyclable materials using retro-fitted 20 foot shipping containers.

In 2002 Whakamaua-te-Aio, established themselves as a group with a zero waste vision and Xtreme Waste was created. Later that year, Xtreme Waste were successful in securing a three year contract with Waikato District Council to establish and manage a recycle centre, the existing transfer station and a new kerbside recycle collection.

With financial support from the Waikato District Council, a wood yard is built in 2005 that resells second-hand building materials. Previously, on average 300 cubic meters of building materials were being sent to landfill each year. Not only does the development of the wood yard benefit the environmental impact, it also provides a great local service for the community in the DIY space, generates income and provides additional employment.

In 2007, the Whaingaroa Community and Xtreme Waste received both local and national recognition with the coveted Ministry for the Environment's Green Ribbon Award for Community Action for the Environment. It was followed up with the Waikato Sustainable Business Network Awards with a winning entry in the category for Social Responsibility.



The following year Xtreme Waste successfully negotiated a seven year contract with the Waikato District Council. This contract enabled them to purchase much needed machinery including the local mini skip business, and provided the opportunity for to obtain the street bins & litter contracts.

By 2009/2010 their turnover reached six figures and within 10 years they've gone from collecting cardboard in their cars, to running a million dollar operation employing 28 people in their community. Diversion from landfill has hit 76%. They have also helped launch the Para Kore (Zero Waste) programme, which has the objective of minimising waste on marae.

Rebranding in 2013 to Xtreme Zero Waste they are one of hundreds of social enterprises around New Zealand that began with nothing more than a vision for a better community. Not only did they exceed what they set out to achieve, but more importantly became catalyst for the

development of other organisations around the country by sharing information and mentoring.

In terms of wider benefits to the community and environment, Xtreme Zero Waste are heavily involved in a number of local projects. The old landfill leachate still passes through a set of ponds maintained by Xtreme Zero Waste and this water flows through a wetland developed by Whaingaroa Harbour Care. Once the old landfill leachate reaches the harbour, the toxicity is depleted to the point where it is unable to be measured by Waikato Regional Council.

Xtreme Zero Waste has planted over 6,000 trees and set up a programme to reduce possums rats, stoats, ferrets and cats in the bush surrounding their site. The forest they created has become an important bird habitat. Xtreme Zero Waste continue to work with the local and regional council to control pests and noxious plants throughout the adjoining forest areas.

## MULTIPLE BENEFITS: A SNAPSHOT OF XTREME ZERO WASTE

### SOCIAL

- Access to resources
- 26 part-time employees (17 FTE)
- Hundreds trained
- More services for the community
- Awareness of waste issues

### CULTURAL

- Local management of projects
- Rangatiratanga
- Participation in environmental restoration
- Kaitiakitanga
- Permaculture
- Creating a local culture

### ECONOMIC

- 70% of income circulating in Raglan
- \$1.2 million per annum in revenue
- \$3.6 million of economic activity
- \$11,000 per week on local wages
- Redistribution of wealth

For more information see [www.xtremezerowaste.org.nz](http://www.xtremezerowaste.org.nz)

