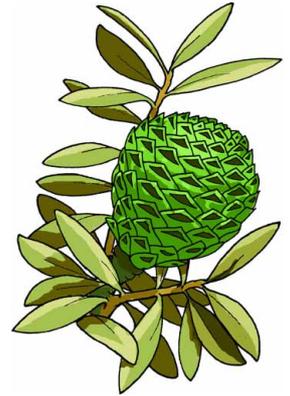


# IT'S GOING TO TAKE COMMUNITY



*“There’s a cloud the full length of these isles  
just playing chase with the sun.  
And it’s black and it’s white and it’s wild  
... all the colours are one!”  
— Dave Dobbyn, “Welcome Home”*

**Community-building is the soul work** of a social entrepreneur. It is their main strategy for sustaining social innovation.

Social entrepreneurs act in a way which produces what Geoff Mulgan calls “a connected difference”. They create and leave behind compelling new social relationships between previously separate individuals and groups, and they do this in a way that grows a more robust social fabric. In other words, they build *community*.

Social entrepreneurs may be taking advantage of business and market-based strategies to address social and environmental issues ... but these strategies do not happen in a vacuum. They happen in communities. And in this context, social entrepreneurs are not so much looking for markets — they are looking for communities.

Communities are the *kohanga*, or the nursery of markets. The entrepreneurial act for a social innovator is to lead and awaken communities to a different sense of aspiration and possibility. The markets then follow.

While social entrepreneurs can be found in all sectors of society, most of the individuals and organisations profiled in *HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL* would describe themselves as working within the *community sector*. This is an area of activity that is distinct from mainstream business and government, and includes everything from social services, health, education and environmental groups, indigenous and tribal affiliations, human rights and advocacy groups.

This sector brings together everything we do as citizens to make things better. It is the sector where citizens address all the basic issues of social, economic and environmental

well-being that under-pin our ability to raise children, and look after one another and the earth.

This sector is unusual, because its contribution to our overall well-being is often just assumed. Active citizens and community organisations are often treated like some natural resource that exists out in a back paddock somewhere ... and the more powerful business and government interests can just go and raid it every now and then.

That back paddock is so colonized by other interests that it is common not to even refer to it by its own name. In a peculiar reversal, we refer to this sector by what it's *not*: the *not*-for-profit sector, or the sector of *non*-government organisations. Or it is sometimes referred to as the *third* sector — which is an immediate reminder to everyone of its status in the overall food chain.

Social entrepreneurs are important builders of a *community* sector. And their first job is to dare to speak its name. Our challenge is to be much more clear and businesslike about what the community sector stands for, what it is serving, and how its health is critical to the sustainability of any social and environmental solutions.

I was challenged to think more deeply about this when I heard a speech given in 2007 by Tim Smit, the social entrepreneur and creative force behind the Eden Project in Cornwall, England. Smit was speaking to the UK Social Enterprise Conference when he challenged the participants to think well beyond their existing contracts for social services and the other mental “silos” we have find ourselves trapped in.

Water. Power. Rail. Housing. Health. Education ... even Financial Services. Smit reminded us that there was a time — in living memory — when Western societies used to consider all these things to be essential community and social enterprises. We tried to run and govern them in such a way that they included the voice for a common good, and a sense of sustainability for future generations.

Over the last generation however, a pragmatic voice for the deeper purpose and well-being of community economic development has been drowned out by an ideological rush to privatise these concerns. Privatisation has indeed brought some efficiencies, but there have also been some important losses. Critics argue that governments throughout the world have privatised the benefits of doing business in these community economic areas ... while the deeper and longer-term costs are still being borne by our neighbourhoods and our environment.

It is easy to get discouraged and silenced by the weight of this recent history. Yet one of the primary tasks of a social innovator is to constructively restore and regenerate the voice of *community* and *sustainability* in each of these critical social and environmental areas.

There is a hopefulness here ... if only because *community* and *sustainability* are not just concepts to be managed, they are *living* systems. And living systems are self-organising — they learn, adapt and change.

Biologists tell us that *life* exists to create the conditions for *life* — evolution is its own virtuous circle. The same is true for community economic development — it exists to create the conditions that make *community* and *sustainability* more possible. The virtuous circle here is



that when our communities and our natural environment are strong and thriving ... then the more capable and sustainable our markets and economies also become.

*Small workshop groups at the Changemakers 2011 NZSEF Masterclass*

Creating this virtuous circle is the reason for both the community sector and for social entrepreneurship. It just keeps turning. And at the axle of this turning are two simple insights:

Whatever the problem may be ... *the answer is community.*

And, whatever the possibilities may be ... *it's going to take community.*

- In 1999, I was asked to speak in Christchurch at a meeting of district councils and local authorities on governance issues. It was at this meeting that I asked the mayors present to come together and form a Mayors Taskforce for Jobs. I was proposing that our country needed to set a national goal: *that all young people in our communities will have the opportunity of paid work, or to be in training or education.*

To everyone's surprise, seven Mayors immediately stood up and said: "Yes, we are going to do it!" Several months later, the first meeting of this taskforce attracted over half the mayors in New Zealand and, before long, over 95% of the mayors in New Zealand were participating members. Nothing like this had ever happened before in the history of our local government ... so many mayors coming together on a social and economic issue.

I think it is significant that the call to form the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs did not come from policy advisers, or from the existing local government organisations or institutions. It came from an individual who was working in their communities.

Five years later, I was helping to organise the annual general meeting of the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, which is held at the same time as the annual Local Government conference. I found myself standing in the foyer of the Aotea Centre in Auckland during one of the coffee breaks of the conference, and there was a man walking around who was a senior partner at a prominent legal firm which had one of the city councils as a client. The law firm was sponsoring the coffee break.

This man was talking with a group of mayors ... and he stood engrossed as they told him stories about starting up cadetships and apprenticeship schemes in their councils to employ young people, creating schemes to track young people once they leave school, holding graduation ceremonies for apprentices in order to boost the profile of the trades at a time of skill shortages ... and meeting with government departments and government ministers in order

to create plans that would ensure that every young person in New Zealand is either in work or education.

And then these mayors pointed over in my direction. The lawyer walked over and asked me: “How is it that you asked the mayors to do this? By whose authority do you do this work?”

I replied: “My citizenship.”

- The work we do for social change is primarily an expression of our *citizenship*. It is an expression of that part of us that speaks to and looks after the common good. Awakening this sense of citizenship — activating this work for the common good — is at the heart of the job description of a social entrepreneur.

Our communities have become so colonized by consumer society that we have reduced our shared sense of citizenship until it is understood mainly in consumer terms. Citizenship has become replaced by seeing ourselves as *customers* in a political process. It has become redefined as some sort of shopping experience that we get to practice once every three years at a polling booth.

This is a reduction of our humanity, and it is a *cultural* loss ... because this reduction strips away our ability to speak authentically to each other about the craft of working together for a common good.

We need to push out the current boundaries of our understanding of citizenship. When we do this, we will also push out the boundaries and restraints that exist within the community sector. This is because an awakened citizen gets to remember their own responsibility and their creativity.

We remember that it is as citizens we are the real *creators* of the communities we wish to live in. As citizens, we are the *stewards* of the things that need to be cared for. It is as citizens that we are also the *producers* of the possibilities that our children will inherit.

- Social entrepreneurs understand we are not going to completely address our most critical social and environmental challenges until we can awaken this active and engaged sense of citizenship. Bill Drayton of the Ashoka social entrepreneur network points out that organising for this active and engaged citizenship is a significant structural difference between a social and a business entrepreneur. He writes:

*“The most important contribution any of us can make now is not to solve any particular problem ... What we must do now is increase the proportion of humans who know that they can cause change. And who, like smart white blood cells coursing through society, will stop with pleasure whenever they see that something is stuck or that an opportunity is ripe to be seized. Multiplying society’s capacity to adapt and change intelligently and constructively and building the necessary underlying collaborative architecture, is the world’s most critical opportunity now. Pattern-changing social entrepreneurs are the most critical single factor in catalysing and engineering this transformation.”*

This deeper sense of citizenship is indeed awakening ... it is just that a great deal of this emergence is happening under the radar of popular culture. In a mainstream media landscape so addicted to oppositional, cynical or sensational journalism, the slower and more complex stories of social change — the stories of *how communities heal* — are not so readily seen or heard.

Nevertheless, the awakening is happening — whether we are reading about it in our daily newspapers, or not.

In 2007, Paul Hawken published a book called *Blessed Unrest*, which is subtitled “*How the Largest Movement in the World Has Come Into Being ... and Why No-One Saw It Coming*”. Hawken was writing about the tens of millions of ordinary and not-so-ordinary people who are creating or getting involved with projects and organisations that are working to make things better. These people are in groups which are addressing environmental issues, or confronting power in the face of social injustice, or involved in community and economic development initiatives, or leading a revival in indigenous cultures.

These groups are dispersed, and are hugely diverse. They are splintered and wonderfully disorganized. There’s no identifiable leader, and there’s no consensus on an ideology. It’s a movement that doesn’t even really know it is a movement.

Yet Hawken argues that when you put all this activity together, all these active citizens and their organisations actually represent the biggest social movement in human history. He researched previous social movements to see if there was anything equal in scale and scope, but he couldn’t find anything.

Like Drayton, Paul Hawken describes the emergence of all these individuals and groups as being like the white blood cells in the collective body of humanity. They represent humanity’s “immune response to political corruption, economic disease and environmental degradation”.

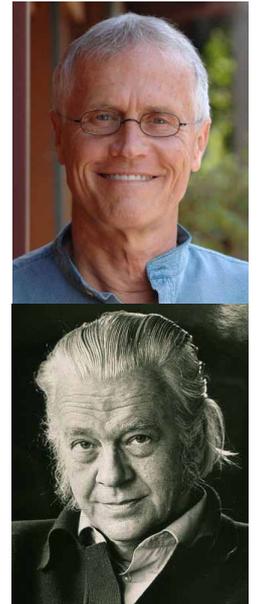
It is important to recognise that, over the last 20 years, this “immune response” throughout the world has led to the emergence of far more social entrepreneurs than terrorists.

It’s just that we are not as readily telling, and hearing, their stories.

- In 2011, the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship started running masterclasses in collaboration with a network of young changemakers who call themselves *ReGeneration*. They are a network of mostly under 30-year olds that has grown out of the movement that created Enviro-Schools around New Zealand, and they are very motivated by issues such as climate change, community development, and social enterprise.

Members of this network have been running a large annual “Summer Jam” for young changemakers, and have also been capturing inspiring stories on film about citizen action and engagement on important issues, and convening community conversations about the possibilities for the future.

I like the name *ReGeneration*. All the previous labels of generation groups — the “X” generation, the “Y” generation, or even the Baby Boomers — were consumer labels designed by marketing people whose purpose was to try to sell us something. But *ReGeneration* is something else. It is not about consumption, but about creativity and contribution. It is about grabbing good ideas that will make a difference and giving them a go.



Paul Hawken  
and E.F. Schumacher



The 2010  
ReGeneration  
Summer Jam held  
at the Living Springs  
conference centre  
near Lyttelton

The young changemakers of *ReGeneration* know the challenges ahead, and they know it's not going to be dull for them. And I have some sadness in acknowledging that my own generation has left them a lot of work to do in terms of renewal, repair and restoration. They will be discovering many of our unpaid bills.

When I was in my early 20s and just starting to get engaged in projects for community economic development, I was particularly inspired by the British economist E.F. Schumacher. He wrote the book *Small is Beautiful* and was one of the thought leaders behind a movement for an economics "... as if people mattered".

In his final book, called *A Guide to the Perplexed*, Schumacher talked about two types of problems. The first were the sort of problems where you could establish a formula or a recipe, and when you solved them, they were basically fixed for quite a long time. Solving these problems is like building an infrastructure, like a bridge, that could last for several generations.

But a great many of our most complex problems are not solved like this. These problems are so woven into our living systems that they do not respond consistently to recipe solutions. They require us personally to grow in wisdom and maturity so we can judge how to address them in the moment. Our capacity to do this is also a *living* thing — and is re-learned with each new generation.

This is the deeper work of *regeneration*, and it happens one citizen at a time.

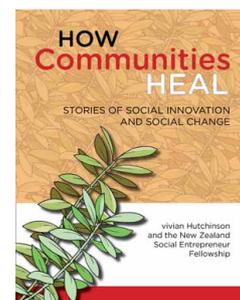
It happens as we reach *through* the stuckness of our problems ... and harness the insight, innovation and entrepreneurship we need to address our social and environmental challenges.

It happens as we reach *for* the healthy and healing communities that we can imagine for our families, and for generations to come.

And it happens to be pretty simple. If we are alive and on the planet right now, then it's our turn.

# Notes and Links

- This article by vivian Hutchinson is part of the [HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project](#) — stories of social innovation and social change featuring members of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. It is available online at [tinyurl.com/hchcommunity](http://tinyurl.com/hchcommunity)
- *Dave Dobbyn* ... lyric is from the song “Welcome Home” from his 2005 album “Available Light”. This song has become something of an unofficial national anthem for New Zealanders. The words speak not just about the colours of our national sporting teams, but also of the spirit of enterprise and mischief that is at the heart of the Kiwi psyche. A video of this song is at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQIVmvXAGLI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQIVmvXAGLI).
- *life creates the conditions for life* ... these are the words of biologist Janine Benyus, as quoted by Paul Hawken in his Portland Commencement Address (below).
- *the answer is community* ... this phrase is inspired by Margaret Wheatley and her work with the Berkana Institute [www.berkana.org](http://www.berkana.org)
- *Tim Smit and social enterprises* ... from his speech to the Social Enterprise Coalition Voice 07 conference see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTEoOV-Acl4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTEoOV-Acl4). Smit’s story of the creation of the Eden Project in Cornwall is a must-read for all social entrepreneurs, see [www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0552149209](http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0552149209)
- *Bill Drayton* ... see “Everyone a Changemaker” (2006) by Bill Drayton at [tinyurl.com/draytonchangemaker](http://tinyurl.com/draytonchangemaker); and “Tipping the World — The power of collaborative entrepreneurship” by Bill Drayton in *What Matters* — McKinsey & Company website 8 April 2010 [tinyurl.com/drayton2010](http://tinyurl.com/drayton2010)
- *Paul Hawken* ... see “Blessed Unrest — How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming” by Paul Hawken (pub Viking 2007) at [tinyurl.com/blessedhawken](http://tinyurl.com/blessedhawken). See also Commencement Address to the Class of 2009, University of Portland 3rd May 2009, available at [tinyurl.com/phawken09](http://tinyurl.com/phawken09)
- *we are not telling these stories* ... Journalist David Bornstein, and others, are currently creating more of a movement for “solutions-based” journalism amidst the mainstream media. Solutions journalism aims “... to highlight the possible solutions to the planet’s most pressing problems, rather than simply to spread news of those problems or critiques of their causes”. See [tinyurl.com/3ty475m](http://tinyurl.com/3ty475m) and <http://dowser.org>
- *The ReGeneration network* ... see [www.regeneration.org.nz](http://www.regeneration.org.nz)
- *E.F. Schumacher* (1911-1977) British economist and author of “*Small is Beautiful — a study of economics as if people mattered*” (1973) see [tinyurl.com/smallas](http://tinyurl.com/smallas)
- *Schumacher on problems* ... In *A Guide to the Perplexed*, Schumacher wrote about the concept of “convergent” and “divergent” problems, and the importance of understanding the differences between the two. Convergent problems lead to a solution that can be finalised and written down as a form of instruction. Divergent problems are concerned with living systems and cannot be solved in the sense of establishing a “correct formula”. They require some capacity for transcendence. See [tinyurl.com/schuperplexed](http://tinyurl.com/schuperplexed).
- “*It’s Going to Take Community — some thoughts on economics as if people and the earth mattered*” paper by vivian Hutchinson based on his workshop at the New Zealand Community Economic Development Conference, held in Waitakere City, Auckland, New Zealand, in April 2011 at [tinyurl.com/viviancommunity11](http://tinyurl.com/viviancommunity11)
- More articles in this series, and further information on the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project can be found at [www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal](http://www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal)





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