

## **The Waste Resource Trust on Waiheke – Exploring the effects of public attitudes on waste minimisation**

A paper by Denise Roche for the WasteMINZ Conference held in Rotorua , 1<sup>st</sup> November – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005

### *Abstract:*

*Community organisations may have a competitive advantage in changing public attitudes towards waste minimisation because they tend to trade on the goodwill inherent in the communities in which they exist and are not necessarily compliance-based.*

*This paper explores the strategies a community organisation might use to secure community engagement and effectively influence public behaviour towards waste minimisation.*

*The Waste Resource Trust on Waiheke Island is a community organisation that was established in 1998 with the aim of reducing the amount of waste sent to Auckland landfills. In their first year the trust conducted a household survey of 260 residents to set a baseline for understanding the local attitudes to waste and which formed the basis of their waste minimisation activities. This survey was repeated recently with a larger sample and the initial results suggests a strategy of community engagement employing local cultural idioms and encouraging community involvement through volunteers, events and activities is highly effective in changing attitudes.*

### **Introduction**

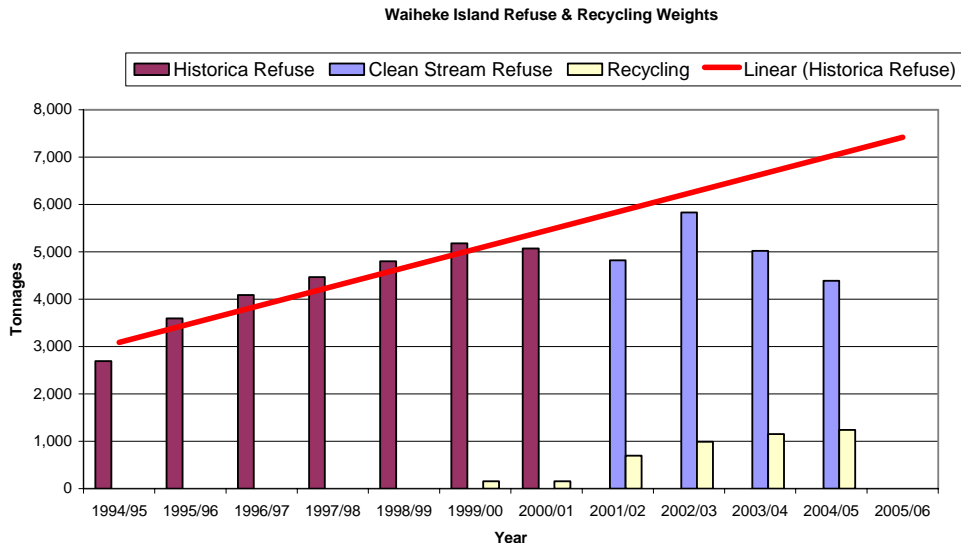
This is a good news story. This paper looks at a small community in Auckland where the locals have bought into the reduce re-use recycle ethos and are making a remarkable difference. They are doing this not because they have to – there are no laws or by-laws that say that anyone **has** to recycle. They are however consistently encouraged to do it and it requires a certain amount of goodwill from the people in the community for that to happen. This paper looks at how we encourage that goodwill on Waiheke.

### **Background**

Waiheke Island is a 35minute ferry ride from downtown Auckland and is part of the Auckland City Council local body area. It has an established population of nearly 8000 people with a total of over 5000 residences. It is a geographically contained community that is a popular visitor destination with around 20% of the homes being holiday homes, and at peak holiday times the daytime population can increase to over 35,000.

All these people create rubbish that has to be removed from the island at considerable cost. Each tonne costs around \$200 in transport costs alone and for the year ending in June 2005 a total of 4,389 tonnes of residual waste was taken off the island.

On a more positive note however, in the four years from 2001 to 2005 the island has increased its recycling from 156 tonnes a year to 1,238, tonnes.



These figures do not reflect waste resources diverted from landfill through re-use including the composting of green waste. If these are included the total diversion rate is closer to 5000 tonnes for the year ending June 2005.

The reversal of the trend (in spite of a population increase) of the predicted annual increases of residual waste by an average of 700 tonnes per annum over the last four years – together with the increase in recycling - is largely attributable to Waiheke residents' active support and participation in the waste reduction programme developed by the Waste Resource Trust over the last four years.

### **About the Waste Resource Trust – a community organisation**

Waiheke has a reputation for being strident and active around environmental issues. It was one of the first nuclear-free communities in New Zealand and has also declared itself GE Free. It is a solid community with a high level of participation in its affairs. In a recent count there are over 200 community groups on the island – all run by volunteers - and it has one of the highest turnout rates for local body elections. Council decisions are the focus of much debate in the local media and the local population can be galvanised into activism around those issues.

The acceptance of the practice of recycling on Waiheke was originated by the

Waiheke County Council which set up extensive recycling and composting programme as a consequence of having to close the local landfill and with the aim of reducing the costs of sending waste to Auckland landfills. Unfortunately these diversion programmes progressively deteriorated following the County's amalgamation with Auckland City Council in 1989.

By 1998 local residents, frustrated by the lack of effective waste diversion programmes formed the **Waiheke Resource Trust** (WRT) to encourage and promote community responsibility for better management and conservation of the Island's resources and with the following objectives:

- 1) *To undertake projects and programmes, which maximise resource recovery and zero-waste practices on Waiheke.*
- 2) *Provide the Waiheke community with information and education to make ethical, effective and powerful decisions in respect of waste management.*
- 3) *Undertake and generate initiatives for the benefit of the people and the environment.*
- 4) *Provide training to assist people on Waiheke to gain meaningful employment and small business opportunities in resource recovery and innovative waste management consultancy.*

The Trust suspected that the island had the potential to radically reduce waste and it is clear from these objectives that the Trust was looking for not only environmental improvements for our community but also *social* improvements.

In addition the Waste Resource Trust sought – and still seeks “*to develop a model for small community waste reduction practices that are consistent with the intentions of New Zealand Waste Strategy and meet or better the target of 10% per annum sought in the Auckland City Council's strategy listed as the Waiheke Waste Management Plan.*”

One of the Waste Resource Trust's first tasks was to do more research into waste on the island so as not to make assumptions about how the community felt about waste issues and to find out what the potential barriers to reducing waste on the island might be. This was also to provide baseline data against which progress could be measured and initiatives evaluated.

Firstly they did a random waste audit of 1000 rubbish bags to measure and document the types of waste going to landfills. They found that about 75% of the waste inside them could be diverted through composting or recycling.

To further understand the solid waste analysis they conducted an island-wide attitude and behaviour survey of 260 households (the population at the time was around 6000) to:

- Gain insight into what people knew about solid waste and waste management including reduction, re-use, recycling and composting.
- Identify what proportion of the community were applying particular waste management methods.
- Develop an understanding of peoples' attitudes to waste and waste management.
- Make recommendations for improving waste management on the Island.

The survey results showed that while only a small proportion (28%) of the population understood the concept of 'waste minimisation' a majority of respondents composted (73%) and re-used packaging (88%) in some way. The survey also found that 72% of the respondents said they recycled some of their waste despite their not having a kerbside collection and this was listed as the prime reason for the other 28% not recycling at all. The survey also concluded that educating the community would be crucial to ensure a better understanding – and improved behaviour – around waste minimization.

The information gathered was used by the Trust to tender for the Auckland City Council's seven-year contract to manage the Waiheke Transfer Station and the rubbish collection and, as well, to set up a system for kerbside recycling for the residents. By doing so they would remove the first barrier to recycling behavior on the island.

The Trusts' tender was successful and, with help from another community organisation from a totally different region, - CBEC in Kaitiaia - Clean Stream Waiheke Ltd was formed.

Clean Stream Waiheke is meeting its parent organization – the Waste Resource Trust's - social objectives. The community-owned company employs 23 staff – making it one of the biggest employers on the island – and consequently contributes over \$500,000 in wages and services fees to the local community. Under the previous contractor there were 6 employees. The organizations are also pursuing innovative ideas for waste solutions – having forged a partnership with the engineering department of Auckland University where students are working on developing glass-crushing equipment and bio-diesel from waste cooking oil collected on the island.

The results from the 1998 attitude survey were also integral to developing an education strategy to promote waste minimization directed at four separate sectors of the island. - These being: businesses, schools, residents and visitors.

Each of these sectors have required often quite different approaches and we have found that to engage these different groups in recycling and waste minimization activities we have had to personally explore their waste issues and find solutions that work for them rather than attempt to apply a one-size-fits all solution to a problem we assume might be occurring. An example of this is that early on we discovered the problem of waste cooking oils for one local bar – we explored further and found that in total over 1000 litres of waste oil was being dumped every week by all the restaurants and takeaway bars on the island. The educator worked with each of the businesses involved to set up a collection system that worked for all of them.

Another example is the enviro-schools programme. The educators made a huge effort over a period of two years to engage the local primary school in this programme - but it was never successfully taken up. Despite this set-back- and through constant pressure from volunteer activity at the school - the school this year included a reduce-re-use-recycle component to their curriculum and the Clean Stream Waiheke operators hosted visits by 240 school children to the transfer station as part of their studies. In addition that school has been involving the children in waste minimization activities like composting from the start of the year.

### **Changing public attitudes – How we do it on Waiheke**

The underlying reason for targeting the different sectors of our community is that it became apparent early on that for Clean Stream Waiheke to meet its operational objectives of reducing waste we had to effect a change in the attitudes and behaviour the Trust had already explored in the 1998 household survey. Consequently, seven months after the company set up its operation, the Trust embarked on its education/awareness campaign.

The education campaign is a social marketing strategy that has tapped into the community's social capital.

The first step of the trust's social marketing campaign was the 1998 survey that set the baseline for the behaviour we sought to influence and identified the barriers to waste minimisation activities. As discussed earlier the re-introduction of the kerbside recycling pick-up removed a crucial barrier. Changing attitudes is a bit trickier. Essentially what we have been attempting to do is to change the norms of behaviour – or social norms. That means we are trying to create a climate where it is **normal** to reduce waste and where it is **not** normal to throw your recycling in the rubbish or produce lots of waste.

In March 2002 the Trust employed two educators and their first task was to talk to people and find out how we – as an island – could reduce the waste we send to Auckland landfills. In the first three months the educators gave presentations and initiated debate with 30 community groups - ranging from the local Rotary to

a stamp club - and talked to more than 600 people and gathered their ideas, concerns, issues and feedback. One of the key issues that emerged – which was backed up by the 1998 survey results – was that people didn't have a clear idea of what waste minimisation meant and wanted to know more. So we set about publicising our cause.

With no advertising budget and very limited resources we have still been able to create a positive community profile and get the information across to our people about what, how and why to recycle and reduce waste. By creating our own stories and developing relationships with the local media (there are currently three weekly newspapers on the island and one radio station) we are able to push our message and we average at least one story every fortnight – and have done so for the last three and a half years. Over that time coverage has included letters to the editor, a regular column called 'Waste Watchers,' a monthly spot prize advertisement for a Lucky Recycler (with the prize sponsored by a local business) as well as profiles and coverage of events that the Waste Resource Trust either participates in or generates. In addition we have a regular 15 minute 'Talking Rubbish' spot on Saturday mornings on our local radio station and our local cinema regularly shows short films from "Waiheke TV" about our activities.

We know that this strategy is working because last year we repeated the attitude survey and asked the same questions with a larger survey base to reflect the increase in population. The response to the question checking whether people had heard the term 'waste minimisation' before was that 65% of the respondents had heard it before (compared with 28% in 1998) and when asked to identify where they had heard the term they responded by listing the media stories, (30% mentioned stories in the Gulf News, and 12% the Waiheke Marketplace) activities like the Junk to Funk event (13%), the radio spot (12% mentioned this medium – which pleased the radio station no end) and 9% said they had heard the term from school children. It is worth noting that in 1998 of the 28% of the respondents who had heard the term before none had heard it from school children and 4% said from council pamphlets. In the repeat survey no-one mentioned council pamphlets at all.

Aside from community presentations and the media strategy in a small community like Waiheke 'kanohi ki te kanohi' is the best and most effective method for educating people and creating awareness. The survey results referred to above also listed a 14% response from people who has heard the term waste minimisation from friends. On Waiheke people chat to one another and we want waste and waste reduction to be a hot topic for discussion. In the social marketing literature the term is described as 'one-to-one' education – and on Waiheke we have focussed on this method quite deliberately for the last 18 months.

Essentially the Waste Resource Trust has – with Council funding - taken control of what council officers refer to as ‘compliance.’ We prefer to call it our encouragement strategy. We undertook this role because we believed that if the council were to enforce the bylaws around waste that it would discourage our people in their recycling efforts. Community organisations are of the people for the people and cannot risk that special relationship by being seen in any sense as having authority over the people particularly not in our anarchic little corner of the world where authority commands little respect.

Essentially we contact the households (or businesses) where the Clean Stream collection staff have identified a problem where the recycled materials are being contaminated with waste or the rubbish is in a non-compliant bag. (That is, a bag that is not the official red bag that has been pre-paid for through our rates.)

In the first instance we send these identified households a letter explaining the problem and the solution. If the address comes up again within a 12-month period we send a second more strongly worded letter. And if a third problem occurs the educators visit the address – and if no-one is home another letter is left for them.

The letters are designed to get a response. We want people to contact us so that we can talk the issues through and identify the problems they have and help find a solution. In 18 months we have sent out a total of just over 2000 letters and our response rate is about one in four. During the same time frame we have visited 60 homes as part of this encouragement strategy and we have had only three addresses who continue to ‘not comply.’

Invariably the responses from householders are a bit grumpy when they receive a letter – but once we are able to talk to them this attitude changes considerably. We have found that people respond favourably once they realise that we are **not** from the council and that our role is to educate – not enforce. The fact that we are a community organisation – with a high community profile, a solid volunteer base and a good reputation and our people are unfailingly positive – gives us a huge advantage in being able to manage one to one education. We are seen as being part of the community – the same as the householder – and contribute to our community’s well being whereas the council, and council officers, are seen in a more negative light.

### **Being part of the community – social capital**

As mentioned earlier our campaigns tap into our community’s social capital. The Waste Resource Trust both draws on it and contributes to it – and this is crucial for the Trust to gain acceptance for our causes. The term ‘social capital’ can be loosely described as the goodwill that exists in communities – although this definition by Australian Eva Cox (1995) is clearer:

“Social capital refers to the processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. These processes are also known as social fabric or glue....We increase social capital by working together voluntarily in egalitarian organizations. Learning some of the rough and tumble of group processes also has the advantages of connecting us with others. We gossip, relate and create the warmth that comes from trusting.”

Social capital - a term coined by American academic Robert Putnam - is being used internationally – and within New Zealand as well – as a tool to examine the health and well being of communities. The literature is conclusive that the development of social capital requires the active and willing *engagement of citizens within a participative community* (Paul Bullen, and Jenny Onyx, 1998) and that areas to explore that indicate social capital include:

- The voluntary and equal participation in networks
- Reciprocity
- Trust
- Social norms
- The Commons.

There is a difference between *indicators* of social capital and *measuring* social capital. (Anne Spellerberg, 2001.) To measure social capital in a community it is necessary to conduct specific research into attitudes, behaviours, organizations and population groups within a community and we have not done this for this paper.

Voluntary participation is a crucial factor in social capital. The Waste Resource Trust was set up by – and still relies on - volunteers to govern the activities of the Trust and guide the operations of the Clean Stream Waiheke company. (The volunteers who are the board of directors for Clean Stream Waiheke are paid directors fees for their role with the company however these are all donated to the Waste Resource Trust to pay the wages of the two part-time educators.) In addition the Trust has a large pool of around 40 other volunteers who contribute to the activities of the Trust and the Trust acts as the organization to facilitate the network of these volunteers.

In recent months 12 of these volunteers coordinated the Junk to Funk experience – a community celebration of waste re-use which culminates in a catwalk show and prize giving event. For the third consecutive year the volunteers in the organizing team offered workshops within the three schools on the island, worked with community groups to ensure their participation, organized sponsorship, as well as co-ordinating hordes of more volunteers to help and

soliciting \$4750 cash provided by local businesses for prize money. The event had an operating budget of \$4000 however a further \$8000 was donated in goods and services.

Junk to Funk is now seen as the largest event on the island. This year just under 1200 people attended on the night, there were 101 entries made by adults and children, we saw the debut of the Waiheke Primary School Junk to Funk Orchestra and over 450 children (from a population of around 1000) were involved in the workshops to create wearable art and what we called FUNK-tional items from the waste stream.

A key factor for keeping the volunteerism going is that we try to ensure that volunteers skills are matched to the tasks they do, that they are thanked and appreciated and most importantly that they have fun. Our volunteers make sure we keep a sense of humour even though we are reasonably serious in wanting to raise awareness. An example of this is that every year they have made sure we have entered the local Santa Parade. We have even won prizes – most notably for our efforts with the truly marvelous pyjama-clad Synchronised Wheelie Bin Marchers.

We don't want to lose our volunteers because potentially they are walking and talking advertisements that promote reduce-re-use-recycle wherever they are on the island so they are part of our one-to-one education strategy. They come from a range of backgrounds, ages and networks and their participation ensures that we remain an égalitarian'-type of organization and gives us our social advantage.

Reciprocity is another factor to consider when exploring social capital. In essence there are two types of reciprocity: The short –term 'what do I get out of it' type characterized by self-interest and the longer term altruistic benefits of what is contributed to society as a whole. Recycling behaviour can be seen as a classic example of reciprocity within this context. The Waste Resource Trust has spent an enormous amount of energy in our campaigns to get people to recycle because they are caring for the planet – yet we suspect that people are doing so more and more to reduce the costs involved in buying extra red rubbish bags. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It works. The cost of the bags is the self interest and the community interest that drives recycling is that by doing so we can also take pleasure in the fact that we can feel good about ourselves because locally we are supporting a community-owned business and creating jobs and we are also caring for the planet.

#### Social norms/Norms of behaviour

As discussed earlier our social marketing campaigns have endeavoured to change the social norms or norms of behaviour around recycling and waste reduction practices on the island.

Social norms or norms of behaviour describes what people do, what their attitudes and rules and habits are and how this impacts on how they behave. Shared norms are the result of a high level of trust and behaviour within groups.

The level of community activism on Waiheke suggests that participating in the life of the community is an accepted part of life here. It's a shared norm. Our community can be shocked by misfortune or injustice or decisions that are seen as petty and mindless and our people are frequently moved to take action.

It's normal here to 'get stuck in' – as one old battler was heard to remark recently. And, as witnessed by the level of giving involved in the Junk to Funk events, to some extent, it's also normal to give.

It is also normal to identify as different. This goes beyond mere parochialism to a positive identity that cares for people and the planet. Our community is proud of the Waste Resource Trust as it contributes to our image of ourselves and reinforces this point of difference

The attitude survey results from last year suggest that recycling behaviour has also become a norm. In 1998 72% of those surveyed said they recycled. The response was 93% in the more recent one. We can also track recycling behaviour from the volumes processed by Clean Stream Waiheke and the steady annual increases.

### Trust

As a community organization we have a high level of trust from our community. The fact that the Waste Resource Trust is a not-for-profit means that we work hard to be accountable to the community and this is reflected in our media stories, our presentations to other community groups and in our relationships with the schools and businesses and people in the community. Our organizations are community-owned, collective and community-based, which show a clear benefit for our entire island population and all profits go back to the community.

We are also extremely careful to maintain our organizations independence and we try to ensure that the work that we do is not seen as enforcing or confused with activities that the Council would undertake. As a wider part of the population come to understand that the more we are trusted.

### The Commons

In the literature around social capital the commons is described as the combined effect of trust, networks, norms and reciprocity that creates a strong sense of community with shared ownership over resources. For the Waste Resource Trust the best outcome we could achieve would be for our entire community to see our waste as a resource and for us all to take responsibility for it.

An example of the commons from the Waste Resource Trust would be Junk to Funk – where the project has become bigger than any one individual or even the parent organization. The commons is best depicted as the strong sense of togetherness, acceptance, celebration and pride that was so apparent at the event this year. It has now become ‘owned’ by the community – and we seem unable to drop it from our list of annual activities. It is a community resource – as is the community organization that facilitated it.

We are working hard at having our community take pride in the fact that our waste and recycling is dealt with by a community-owned company. –That essentially its operation and success depends on all of us and it belongs to all of us. We do not refer to Clean Stream Waiheke Ltd as a not-for-profit organization because, firstly, it does make a profit (the profits –from the sales of recycling commodities - stay in the company to fund further employment and waste diversion work) and, secondly, we consider Clean Stream Waiheke’s social role in providing work, income, and training and up-skilling for staff makes it a ‘more-than-profit’ organization.

## **Conclusion**

For Waiheke, the Waste Resource Trust and our community-owned company Clean Stream Waiheke Ltd does have an advantage when it comes to changing attitudes and behaviour. For all the reasons listed above we can gain acceptance where organizations that are seen as ‘authorities’ may not. It is a shame then that the role of community organizations like the Waste Resource Trust in creating positive changes has traditionally been significantly undervalued – and under-funded – by councils and national governments yet we contribute so much more than just a service.

We have more to do. We can – and will – divert much more waste from the waste stream and we are looking at ways of doing so. And we are extremely fortunate because our organizations are driven by passionate people who are full of innovative ideas that can help us solve our waste problems.

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### Key Informants

Gordon Hodson – Waste Resource Trust trustee and director, Clean Stream Waiheke Ltd  
John Stansfield – Waste Resource Trust trustee and director, Clean Stream Waiheke Ltd

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Useful websites for social marketing:

[www.social-marketing.com](http://www.social-marketing.com)

[www.social-marketing.org](http://www.social-marketing.org)

