

# kindness

a dynamic, two-way exchange

"I feel like it's one of those things that once you've started to uncover it... it's actually been there in plain sight all along. It's so much a part of the air we breathe." – Interview participant

"People need the most love when they are the least lovable" – Interview participant

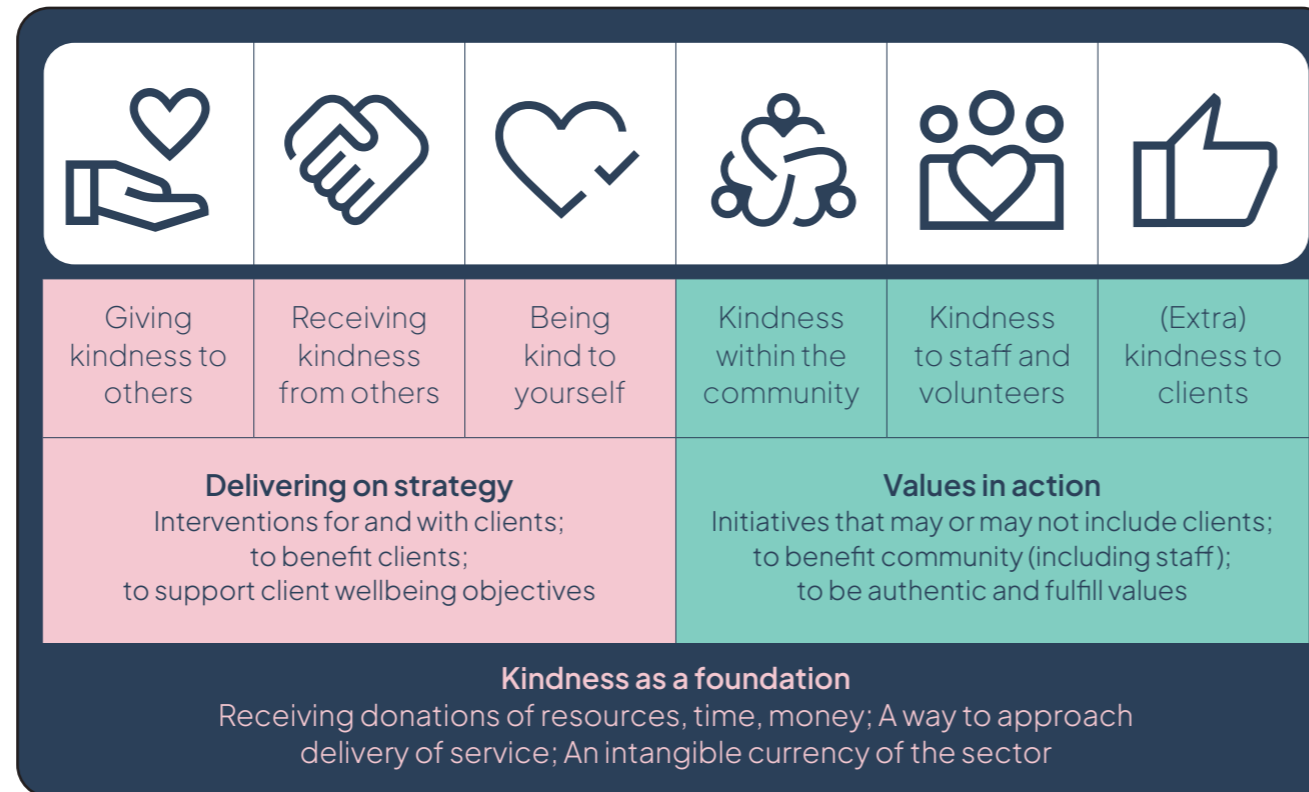
This study began with a question:

**What is the role of kindness from the perspective of community services organisations (CSOs) in Aotearoa New Zealand?**

To answer this question, we engaged 258 individuals who work or volunteer with wide ranging community services sector organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. The research included 50 in-depth interviews, and 208 survey responses.

**We conclude that kindness is both integral to the survival and effectiveness of CSOs, and that CSOs themselves have a critical role in fostering kindness within society.** By reframing kindness as a dynamic, two-way exchange, and being intentional in the design of kindness programmes, CSOs can look to harness the power of kindness and amplify its benefits for their clients, for themselves, and for the wider community.

Kindness programmes come in many forms



Te ao Māori values of manaakitanga and arohatanga are often associated with kindness. They speak to generous interactions that enhance the mana of all involved.

"In receiving kindness, our mothers believe in themselves and show up for their kids. They feel empowered, and it has such a ripple effect on their lives. It becomes transformational, and the mothers want to share this with others, and they end up innately giving without realising it – it shows in how they interact with their children, their partners, they are empowered to give more to their communities through their time." – Interview participant

## Four types of barriers prevent CSOs from running more kindness programmes

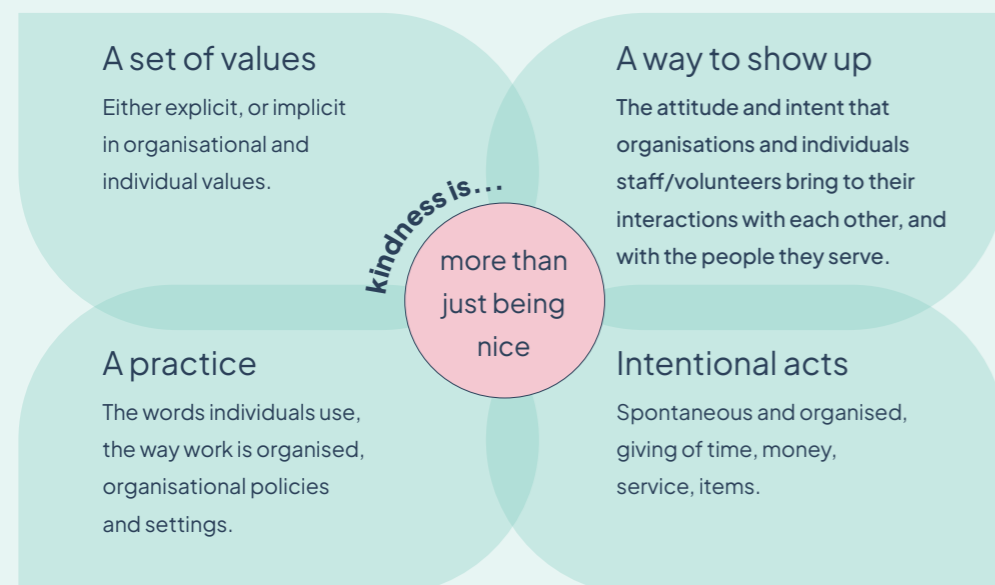
**System settings** – challenges that are common in the community services sector also hinder kindness programmes (like shortage of funding, resources, and competing demands).

**Awareness** – while kindness is common, many interviewees lack language to describe it as an organised and intentional intervention, which may also inhibit funding for such programmes.

**Suitability** – many of the challenges that bring people to CSOs for support can also make it harder for them to engage with kindness programmes.

**Perceptions** – a query is raised as to whether society may have a view that some people are less deserving of kindness, and whether this perception creates an unconscious barrier to kindness programmes for some CSOs. As one interviewee powerfully stated – *people need the most love when they are the least lovable* – a salient reminder of the importance of work to propagate kindness and to be grateful to those who are delivering kindness to people in tough times.

**Clear logic, dedicated funding, meaningful partnerships, and careful design could enable CSOs to run more kindness programmes for the benefit of their clients, themselves, and wider society.**



## Kindness permeates all aspects of the community services sector

- CSOs give kindness, for example through charitable acts
- CSOs receive kindness, for example through donations
- CSOs facilitate the flow of kindness, for example by creating opportunities for others to get involved in kindness exchange
- The existence of CSOs is a symbol of kindness in the communities where they operate.

"[The benefit is] connection, like somebody thinks you're worth it. It's about belonging, being seen and being heard." – Interview participant

## Kindness programmes serve two purposes for CSOs:

- Programmes contribute to delivery of strategic objectives for clients
- Programmes put values into action

Most of the formalised programmes that CSOs described are focused on putting values into action, rather than delivering strategic objectives for clients – such as, mental wellbeing, resilience, connection. While most survey respondents report running programmes that enable clients to get involved in giving (53%) and receiving (75%) kindness, we find these opportunities tend to be incidental to achievement of objectives, rather than intentional.