

Occupy Our Citizenship

— some thoughts on the regeneration of the community sector

by vivian Hutchinson

vivian Hutchinson is a community activist and social entrepreneur. This paper is based on a short speech given to the Changemakers Auckland Convention at the Bruce Mason Centre, Takapuna, on the 10th February 2012.

1.

I've found myself involved in a great variety of social change initiatives over the last forty years.

These have included land rights campaigns, working with the homeless and on housing issues, establishing work schemes and training programmes for unemployed people, creating agencies for job creation and economic development, establishing the Jobs Research Trust and publishing *The Jobs Letter*, and setting up the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs.

I've also created gatherings such as the *Festivals of Co-operation*, and *Heart Politics* which have brought together people working on social and environmental initiatives. And I have explored innovations and community possibilities within learning communities such as the Foxglove Group, the Rainbow Catalyst, the Stewardship Learning Community, and the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship.

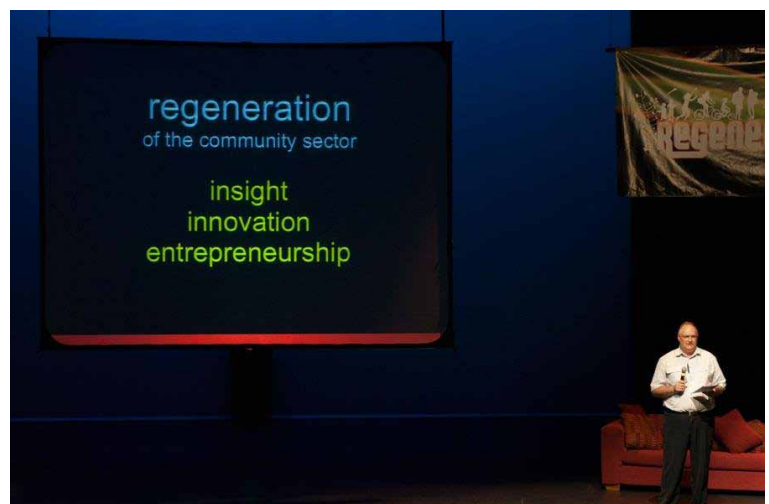
What all these activities have in common is they arise out of an area of society that we call *the community sector*.

This is a sector of our national life that is different from business, or from government, and it is sometimes also called civil society, or the third sector.

It is an area of activity that includes the running of social services — but it is a sector that is much deeper and wider than just these services.

At its heart, this is a sector that is *developmental*.

Perhaps the simplest way of describing the community sector is that it's "... *what people do to make things better.*"



2.

Community is about loving one another well, raising children together, and living the good life.

Everyone involved in the community sector understands that, in order to successfully achieve such a good life, there is a list of basics that our communities just have to get right first. This is a list that includes:

addressing poverty

real job creation

affordable housing

*a health system that promotes well-being and cares
for the sick and disabled*

*an education system that grows
skills and capabilities*

*a clean and green environment that can be sustained
for future generations*

If we don't get these things right ... then a good and satisfying life for all of us just gets more and more out of reach.

3.

The community sector brings people together to address these basic needs. And it does this through a huge diversity of passions and activities and services.

If you started to list all the activities that take place in this sector, you will immediately see that it's all over the show.

It's very messy and complex and chaotic.

And in this sector, no-one is really in charge ... and no-one ever completely agrees on an overall direction.

democracy education and citizen engagement, addressing unemployment and job creation, community economic development, affordable housing strategies, tenants protection, the rights of workers, labour issues, better access to health and education, aged care, hospice, child and youth issues, safe communities, living without violence campaigns, support and inclusion of people living with disabilities, mental health issues, addressing problem gambling and addictions, alternative and traditional medicines, race relations, gender equality, gay and lesbian issues, environmental education, enviroschools, organic farming, permaculture, biodiversity conservation and restoration,

community sector

corporate ethics and social responsibility, socially responsible investment, alternative financial institutions, local bartering, microcredit, natural capitalism, restorative justice, leadership training, community trusteeship and governance, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, training for non-profit organisations, support for volunteers, community advice bureau, fundraising, land stewardship, alternative fuels, energy conservation, recycling and reuse, local food security, farmers markets, global climate change, human rights education, indigenous rights and culture, community media, peace movement and peacemaking, eco-villages

But I do believe there is a deep common purpose here — and there are two key insights that unite and drive our activities:

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

and,

*Whatever the possibilities
might be ... it's going to take
community.*

4.

The community sector has deep roots in our society and our nation.

When I was starting up the Social Entrepreneur Fellowship project, I met up with the historian Tony Simpson, and asked him to give me a top twenty list of the most effective social entrepreneurs that we have had in New Zealand history.

The list was very interesting ... because I didn't recognise half the names that he gave me.

The people on this list were our elders and heroes in the community and public sectors — active citizens who had worked on the basics, and in doing so had created huge social wealth for our communities ... and yet they are people who are generally not well known.

This led me to asking myself: Why is it that the leaders and heroes of our sector are so much less well known than our politicians, sportspeople, or entertainers?

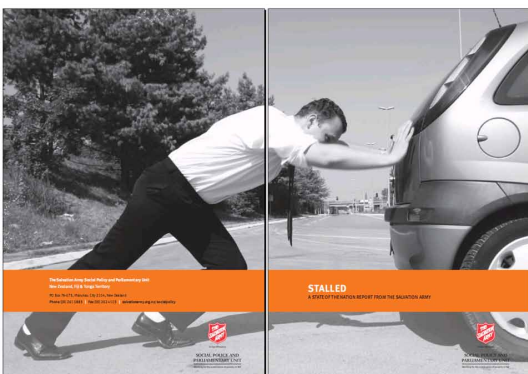


5.

I've said that the community sector is essentially a *developmental* sector. It is what people do to make things better.

But many of us working in this sector have been asking lately: *Are we really developing anything here?*

Sure, there are all sorts of good news and success stories that we are involved with, and justifiably proud of. But are we making real overall progress on our basic social and environmental issues? Is the *sum* of our work really making a difference?



Well, our colleagues at The Salvation Army run an excellent research unit which keeps a good track on the overall progress we are making on our basic issues.

The cover of last year's *State of the Nation* report really sums it up ... it is telling us that when it comes to *development*, things are pretty much stalled.

6.

One of the problems we have is that the community sector has become so colonised by its funders — and by business and government thinking — that we have forgotten our own insights. We have forgotten the wisdom and perspectives that we have built up in this sector over generations.

And there are two ways that you can tell whether a group or a sector has been colonised in its thinking: they start to define themselves by their *problems*, rather than their *possibilities* ... or they describe themselves by what they are NOT, rather than by what they are.

I've never really liked the label of the "third sector", because it's a term that is simply telling us where we are in the food chain of value. And this is a label that tells us that we came second place at losing.

To describe ourselves as the "not-for-profit" sector, is just another nonsense. Why should we call ourselves a "NOT-for-profit" organisation, when our community development activities are about creating much "MORE-than-profit".

And to call ourselves an NGO, or "NON Governmental Organisation", makes as much sense as an artist or gardener describing themselves as "NOT a rugby player".

7.

At the heart of the community sector is the individual awakening of citizenship.

And this is a maturation of personal identity. It is a ripening sense of yourself that is not framed in consumer terms.

This sense of citizenship is not about what you are getting from society ... but about how you can make a contribution to the common good that is *active, engaged and generous*.

When we do this ... we realise that it is the active citizens who are the real *creators* of our communities. Active citizens are the real *stewards* of those things that need to be cared for. And it is active citizens who *produce* the possibilities that our children will inherit.

8.

The trouble with all this is that we are seeing the collapse of real engagement at the level of citizenship in our country.

One of the rawest indicators of this can be seen in just how many of us turned up to vote at the last elections. One million New Zealanders just did not bother.

It was the lowest electoral turnout in 120 years.



It was the lowest electoral turnout since 1877 ... which was before the time when women got the vote.

I'm not sure what it is that I find more disturbing — the fact of this, or the fact that we are not really talking about it.

9.

Leonard Cohen has a song where he sings:

*we asked for signs
and signs were sent
the birth betrayed
the marriage spent
Yes, the widowhood
of every government
has signs for all to see*

This song is speaking to me of active citizenship. It reminds me that when our citizenship is distressed, distracted, and disengaged ... then it doesn't matter who we elect — because all governments end up as widows.

Government is a *partnership* between the leaders of our nation and its citizens. And government will always remain broken if its citizens are asleep.

10.

If we are going to turn up for this partnership, then we need to do whatever we can to *regenerate* our community sector.

There's not one way to do this, and because it is the community sector, we can expect its regeneration to be messy and complex and chaotic.

But there are three things that, for my part, I am focusing on:

*a) we need to reclaim the insights we have as communities ...
especially by telling and valuing our own stories on how
to make a difference on our basic issues.*

*b) we need to get much more serious about understanding
the process of social innovation.*

*and, c) we need to get a lot more serious about fostering
the skills of entrepreneurship within the community sector.*

11.

For the last five years, I have been working with a group of people who have been doing just that.

The New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship is a group of active citizens who have created projects and initiatives in all sorts of areas — from affordable housing, to prison reform, to job creation, working with young people, working with disabled people and their families, addressing family violence or problem gambling, or creating eco-neighbourhoods.



Like the community sector itself, this is a group that is all over the show.

But coming together as a fellowship, and as a learning community, we were forced to get out of our own silos of activity, and learn from the common ways we approach our challenges.

We did this while holding regular retreats every six months at the Anglican Retreat Centre at Long Bay, on Auckland's North Shore. And more recently we have been hosting Masterclasses for a younger group of social entrepreneurs and changemakers.

12.

I have written up the personal stories of these fellowship members and their projects, and some of the things that we have been learning on our retreats. These have been published in a book called *How Communities Heal*.

I haven't done this because the members of this fellowship are particularly special — the fact is there are hundreds of people just like them in communities all over New Zealand.

I have done this because these are stories — like those of our earlier elders and heroes this sector — that are not so commonly told in our mainstream media. As a result, there is not a commonly-held awareness in our communities of what it takes to create social innovations, or of how to foster the entrepreneurship that makes change happen.

To some extent, *How Communities Heal* is an expression of “solutions-based” journalism — the telling of the stories of what's working and the role models for change that are being created.

This is a form of journalism that is pushing back against a cynical media landscape that prefers to concentrate on simply spreading the news of problems and critiquing their causes.

13.

I called the project *How Communities Heal* because this refers to an important switch in thinking that is at the heart of social entrepreneurship.

Too many of our social services are just managing or organising problems, rather than solving or healing them.

Social innovation and social entrepreneurship really starts to emerge when we make that switch in thinking ... and take up that deeper challenge of social change.

This is something that is not yet well understood by those who fund social service activities in our communities. I think it would be fair enough to say that there is a lot more funding available for managing problems, than there is for healing them.

But social entrepreneurs are not called to their work simply to commodify problems ... and then earn a living out of them.

They want to permanently alter the perceptions, behaviours and structures that are creating the problems in the first place. They want real impact and real change ... and there is no doubting that this will be disruptive to the status quo.

14.

Regeneration is an organic and living process.

And because it involves everything that is dying as well as emerging ... it is also messy and complex work.

Yet the process of *regeneration* has something profound to teach us about solving our toughest social and environmental problems.

The British economist E.F. Schumacher often spoke about two main types of problems. The first type are 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 writing clever software, or 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 are the problems which are so woven into our living systems that they do not respond consistently to recipe solutions.

Instead, they require an active citizenship that can 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 it is re-learned with each new generation.

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

15.

I love what's been happening with the Occupy movement at Wall Street and around the world.

To me, it feels like a breath of fresh air to the many developmental issues that have remained stalled or stuck in our communities — like the issue of poverty, and how we address the fairness gap between rich and poor.

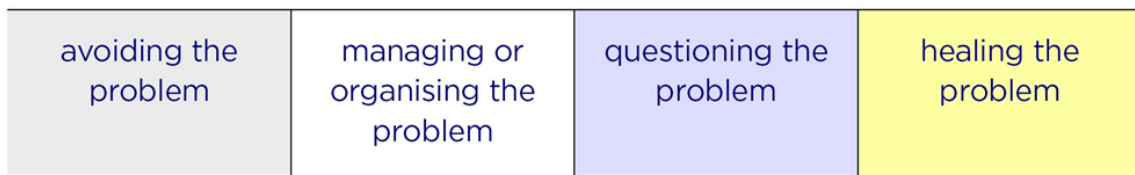
In many ways, I think that the Occupy movement is a much deeper thing than what we are seeing with the tents and the marches on the TV evening news.

It is a call to pay more serious attention to the basic issues that we need to address.

It is a call to end the widowhood of our governments.

And we can respond to this call by more deeply “occupying” our citizenship ... and our communities.

How Communities Heal



16.

In the continuum chart that I have included in *How Communities Heal*, there is a critical area of activity between the stages of “managing the problem” and “healing the problem”.

We don't just jump from managing to healing ... but we have to go through an important doorway of “questioning the problem”.

For myself, at this time, I have been sitting with some strategic questions about community development:

What sort of community sector are we handing on to the next generation?

How do we establish a fresh vision for development on our most basic social and environmental issues?

How do we awaken a more active and generous citizenship to engage on these most basic issues?

How do we reinvent the community groups we will need in the next generation?

17.

The regeneration of the community sector starts by changing the type of conversations we are having with one another.

We really need to start valuing the reflective time that is needed for us to reassess just what's going on right now ... and talk in ways that go to the heart of our challenges.

And we need to turn up to these conversations *as active citizens* ourselves ... and put to one side the hats and labels of our job descriptions or positions in community or public or private agencies.

18.

And while we are at it, we should try to get a lot smarter about the way we connect with one another as active citizens. Our challenge here is to get out of our own silos of activities, and reach across our own communities.

Try making appointments with — and learning from — other active citizens who are also working for the common good, yet are working in completely different fields from you.

19.

Expect development, and expect real change.

Yes, the community sector will still manage *problems* ... but we are definitely also here to reach for *possibilities*.

And we need to grow and foster the changemakers who will do this reaching — especially those community organisers and social entrepreneurs who have got the guts to try something new.

20.

We are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities to make a difference. And it's a job that's best done together.

If we are still trying to figure out whether we have a role to play in any of this ... then I might suggest that it happens to be pretty simple:

If we are alive, and if we are on the planet right now ... then it's our turn.



vivian Hutchinson
Takapuna
February 2012

Notes and Links

- This paper is based on a short *Pecha Kucha* presentation given by vivian Hutchinson to the Changemakers Auckland Convention, held at the Bruce Mason Centre, Takapuna, Auckland, New Zealand, on 10th February 2012. The convention is part of a series of gatherings being organised by the ReGeneration Trust.



- the Changemakers website can be found at www.changemakers.org.nz and it includes a series of 90-second films on changemakers from throughout New Zealand.
- *special thanks* to Billy Matheson, Lani Evans and the trustees and volunteers of the ReGeneration Trust. For more information see www.regeneration.org.nz
- this paper can be also downloaded in PDF format from tinyurl.com/viviancitizenship12
- vivian Hutchinson QSM is a community activist and social entrepreneur, and a citizen of Taranaki. He has been the co-founder and organiser of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship, and a trustee of the Social Innovation Investment Group. He is the author of the book *How Communities Heal – stories of social innovation and social change* (2012).

Hutchinson has been one of the pioneers in community-based action for jobs in New Zealand, especially in establishing programmes for the support and education of unemployed people. He was a founder of the Taranaki Work Trust, the Skills of Enterprise Business Courses, the Jobs Research Trust, *The Jobs Letter*, and the New Zealand Mayors Taskforce for Jobs. As an adviser, Hutchinson has helped with the establishment of enterprise and economic development units at a local authority level, and the creation of government employment agencies and programmes. He is also a co-founder of the Heart Politics Gatherings, the Stewardship Learning Community, Taranaki ChangeMakers and Community Taranaki. For more information see www.vivianhutchinson.org.nz .

- *photo of vivian Hutchinson* at the Changemakers Convention by *Guy Ryan of Inspiring Stories Trust*. For more information www.inspiringstories.org.nz
- *the answer is community ...* this phrase is inspired by Margaret Wheatley and her work with the Berkana Institute www.berkana.org
- *social entrepreneurs in NZ history ...* see “*New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Historical Checklist*” by Tony Simpson (2005) at tinyurl.com/nzsefsimpson
- *The Salvation Army State of the Nation reports ...* see tinyurl.com/nzsason. The 2012 *State of the Nation Report* entitled “*The Growing Divide*” was released a few days after the Changemakers Auckland Convention ...

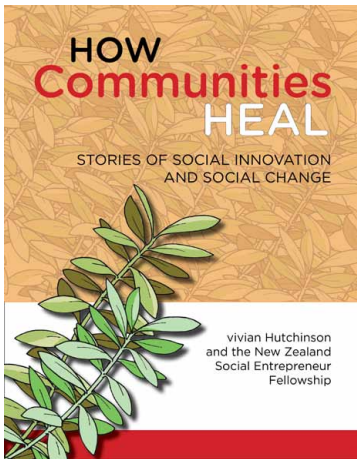
“ We have two clear choices here: one is to continue the path we have been on more or less continuously for the past three decades, concentrating wealth and influence, and driving the marginalised further into the shadows, with yet more restrictive welfare entitlements and a yet more punitive criminal justice system. The other is to act more inclusively and to work consciously and deliberately at ways of ensuring that the most marginalised New Zealanders, and in particular, many poor families and unemployed young people, feel as though they are valued and valuable members of our society.” – *from the Foreword, by Major Campbell Roberts, director of the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit.*

- *New Zealand 2011 election results ...* at a turnout of 73%, this was the lowest election participation rate since 1877. See “1 million didn’t bother to vote” by Simon Collins *New Zealand Herald* 28 November 2011, available at tinyurl.com/nzhcollins111128
- *the widowhood of every government ...* Leonard Cohen lyric is from his song *Anthem* from the 1992 album *The Future*. (Thanks to John Seed for pointing to this song). See a recent performance by Cohen in London at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e39UmEnqY8
- *New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship ...* was founded in 2006 with funding from the Tindall Foundation and support from several other philanthropic trusts and community leaders. This learning community is now self-organised by the social entrepreneurs themselves, and is run as a social enterprise. The current trustees are Ngahau Davis (chairperson), Malcolm Cameron and Vivian Hutchinson. For more information see www.nzsef.org.nz
- *How Communities Heal project ...* stories of social innovation and social change featuring members of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. For more information, or if you want to get onto the distribution list for this project, sign-up at www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal
- *solutions-based journalism ...* journalist David Bornstein, and others, are currently fostering this movement 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 and <http://dowser.org>
- *British Economist E.F. Schumacher (1911-1977)* was the author of “*Small is Beautiful – a study of economics as if people mattered*” (1973) see tinyurl.com/smallas. 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
- *Occupy Wall Street ...* see “*Ten Ways the Occupy Movement Changes Everything*” article by Yes! Editor Sarah van Gelder at tinyurl.com/occupyyes
- *other speeches and papers by Vivian Hutchinson* relating to his work with social entrepreneurship and social innovation, are available on the internet at www.vivianhutchinson.org.nz
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Changemakers interview with
 Vivian Hutchinson
<http://vimeo.com/36263068>





“This book shows how the NZSEF fellowship members can, have, and are making a difference ... and yes, so can we!”

— Rodger Smith, Auckland community worker

“It is amazing to follow the stories and be moved and touched by the courage and ingenuity of these inspired social entrepreneurs ... They are part of a social movement which is harnessing the creativity and entrepreneurship of individual citizens to make the world a better place to live.” — KK Tse, Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum

“This book gives us hope that our own work will make a difference. It shows the importance of questions and conversations in shaping new possibilities ... and it illustrates the need for co-operation, collaboration and peer support in achieving fundamental social change.”

— Elaine Gill, Taranaki social entrepreneur and Chair of TSB Bank Board

HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL tells the stories of a unique group of New Zealand social entrepreneurs who are bringing insight, entrepreneurship and practical hope to our social and environmental challenges.

The book profiles the personal stories of these innovators, and looks at the projects and programmes they are creating. Each profile includes photographs of the entrepreneurs and their projects, as well as scenes from their participation in the retreats of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship.

HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL also has a series of articles from Vivian Hutchinson on entrepreneurship and innovation, and the tools and ideas that are helping make these projects happen.

Individual chapters from HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL are available freely online at www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal

A hard-covered limited edition can also be purchased (retail \$45) at our bookstore online at tinyurl.com/hchbooksales

eBook, Kindle and PDF for iPad editions are also available at tinyurl.com/hchebooks

