



## **The government's move towards purchasing outcomes: what are we losing?**

**- Sarah McKay**

Recent research by the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services outlines the added value that is provided by community based services. It highlights how community based organisations are becoming increasingly marginalized as the government moves towards funding social services through larger organisations and private providers. This is reflected in the governments emphasis on purchasing outcomes and value for money, with less concern about who is delivering those outcomes such as private providers.

This research explores an important question; 'what are we losing when community based organisations have to retrench or are shut down because of a lack of funding?' The report illustrates the added value that community based organisations are able to provide. The research found that these organisations did not only seek to deliver the outcome that they were funded for but were more likely to provide a wider range of support for individuals and whānau and families. One theme associated with this is that these services are more likely to be accessible as they are based in the local community, know its history, are likely to have local people working in them and are more reflective of the community and people that they serve.

Other themes included community based organisations have important community knowledge, enhance community cohesion as they are places in which people can connect, have strong existing networks and collaborations and can provide a space for the community to set its own agenda for community led development. The ability of these organisations to work flexibly with clients was also identified as they are more likely to be directed by clients' needs than by what is stipulated by the funders and/or the need to make a profit. In a webinar about the research one of the authors of the report Trevor McGlinchey said that community based organisations "took the time that was needed to build the relationship and support the change."

This research challenges us to think more holistically about the real value that services provide rather than just focusing on discrete outcomes. It makes a compelling point that positive outcomes are less likely to occur if the community around people is not supportive and by providing this added value wellbeing is more likely to be sustained in the longer term.

<http://nzccss.org.nz/library/research-analysis/Outcomes%20Plus%2025%20May.pdf>