

Research project for Wairarapa Green Dollars Exchange



What are people's experiences, what is working well and what can be improved?

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WAIKARAPA G\$



Research was undertaken to collect member experiences to look at how members were experiencing trading within the Wairarapa Green Dollars Exchange System, what trading habits members had, what was working well and how that impacted on members lives and what aspects of the system could be improved to strengthen the system and enhance user experiences.

Committee feedback

Committee Members of the Wairarapa Green Dollars Exchange Committee spent some time talking about what was important to them about the organisation and the vision for the future at the December 2009 Christmas gathering.

The group were given the opportunity to express why they were willing to participate and give time to the organisation in governance roles and how they saw the system when it is working at its best. A discussion was held exploring the hopes and dreams of the committee members for future growth and direction of the organisation.

The feedback from participating committee members was rich and diverse.

People were asked to share a story or memorable moment about their experiences as members. Particularly moving was the heartfelt response from Glenyss about how being part of the system had given her a sense of purpose and feeling of belonging and acceptance as well supplemented the family budget. For Lynne selling her home-made preserves through G\$ markets helped her to grow more confident she could do something to earn an income.

Everyone valued being a member of green dollars and identified many qualities they saw as inherent in the system when it is working at its best:

- Opportunities for participation
- Empowering
- Gives people something to aim for
- Gives people a life
- Encourages motivation
- Practical
- Encourages team work and co-operation
- Creates a group of people moving in the same direction
- Encourages honest and respectful exchange
- Builds relationships less likely to be exploited
- Builds community
- Builds trust
- Needs and desires fulfilled locally
- Creates financial and social balance
- Supports interpersonal relationships
- Team building – committee
- Trading helps build self esteem
- Acceptance – what you have is enough
- People are valued
- Working together
- Individual contributions add richness to team
- Non-competitive

Strong belief in the empowering qualities of the system, the willingness to work with others with a shared vision and valuing the connections and relationships formed were key areas that motivated committee members to volunteer in governance roles.

Responses were:

- Company – social
- Motivating to do something creative and active
- Believing in the system
- Financial boost and alternative
- Acceptance the way you are
- Love markets, love company
- Valued not redundant, can still contribute
- Philosophy – like minds
- Contribute to admin as not able to trade
- Participate
- Pioneering initiative
- Making history
- Work for people and the planet
- It is fair just and constructive – society and the environment are casualties of the current system
- Long term positive
- Essential role refining
- Gives people options – It's a thrill when it works
- Balance the system with philosophical and practical, mixes well strength
- Help – people help themselves
- Opportunities abundance
- Enjoy people markets, potential. Earn a bit – social

The strong belief that local currencies were important for the future of communities formed the basis of the vision for the future. Everyone wanted to see more widespread use of local currency through private trading and increased acceptance by local businesses. More local acceptance and pride in the locally designed WAIS vouchers was also desirable. It was hoped that eventually the WAIS vouchers would be a source of pride in the Wairarapa.

- Local Currency as a normal function in community
- Widespread local use and support of vouchers especially businesses
- WAIS vouchers a source of local pride
- Aim high

The committee sees many benefits to the community through trading in a local currency system. It provides an alternative way of getting needs met , gives choices and builds relationships.

Benefits to the community identified were:

- Reason to use skills/talents
- Validation
- Self esteem

- Supports family
- Quality of life
- Abundance empowering
- Helping people grow connections – links
- System has balance – no interest
- Opportunities to create wealth outside current system
- Educational growth opportunities
- Opens doors for people

Member research

A research survey was created to look at the member experience of trading in the system and identify strengths and areas that could be grown or improved. A selection of members were interviewed and asked a range of questions, including what was working for them with the G\$ system, what the attraction of being a member was and what could be improved.

Survey

G\$ Member Survey

This survey is being undertaken by Wairarapa Green Dollars for the purpose of evaluating how well G\$ is working for members and seeing what can be improved. All identifying details will be used only for the purpose of making sure all members have the opportunity to participate.

Information collected will be collated anonymously and put into a report which will be used to help the G\$ committee grow and strengthen the organisation.

Name.....

How long have you been a member?

Would it be usual for you to trade:

weekly..... monthly..... 3monthly..... less than 3 monthly.....

How satisfied are you with G\$?

1. Not satisfied 2. Mostly satisfied 3. Satisfied 4. Very satisfied

Comments.....

How easy do you find it to use the CES online software?

1 difficult.....

2 sometimes difficult.....

3 mostly easy.....

4 easy.....

5 very easy

Do you use WAIS? Yes No

Do you attend markets?..... How many on average per year?

Do you have any comments or suggestions for markets?

Open questions:

- Why did you join, what attracted you?

- What has your experience been like with using green dollars?
- Are there any ways you think G\$ could work better for you G\$, any things you would like to see developed?
- What would you like to see in a members' hand book?

Information collected:

Information was collected from 13 members out of 70 current members or 18.5 % of members. Members interviewed ranged from new traders who had only been in the system for a number of weeks to long-time traders of nearly 2 decades.

Trading

No traders reported trading weekly, one traded on a fortnightly basis, two traded monthly, two traded three monthly, five traded less than three monthly and two were not actively trading. Other comments were that markets and seasonal factors also affected trading.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the G\$ system among members varied, only one respondent reported being not satisfied, five were mostly satisfied, three were satisfied and three were very satisfied. Ne new member had not yet traded so did not respond.

Factors affecting people's satisfaction levels included:

- People's website contact details not being current
- Wider skills base needed – difficult to get specific tasks done
- Unsure what to trade - too much effort
- Good support from co-ordinator
- Need new directory
- Hard to spend
- Inconsistency with offers
- Good concept
- Location a problem
- Good opportunity for people to use skills

Key issues were finding the right traders, working out what to offer and outdated details in the CES system.

Using the CES Software

Responses to the ease of using the CES online software varied. Two respondents had difficulties using the software, three found it sometimes difficult, four found it mostly easy, three found it easy. No respondent reported finding it very easy to use. Main issues were with passwords with two respondents reporting it difficult to access, one respondent was not online and did not use the software.

Use of WAIS vouchers

Less than half the respondents surveyed used the WAIS vouchers with five people saying they used the vouchers and eight people saying they did not. While one respondent said they found the WAIS vouchers very convenient, another replied they had found limited opportunities.

Market attendance

Many members made the effort to get to the markets with 10 respondents reporting fairly regular attendance. Two that did not attend markets and a new member who hopes to attend markets. Five respondents reported attending most markets, two others attended ones when they were local to where they lived and others attended some markets.

Comments included that more prominent locations be sought and that the markets were good value. Another respondent thought that more variety would improve the markets.

Attractions of the system

“Why did you join, what attracted you?”

Responses to this question were varied:

- Long term interest in alternative economies. The system is co-operative and values based. The present system is abusive. Good way to harness people’s time and energy.
- Good value for money, better than bartering, another option for trading goods, creates activity in community, money stays local.
- Recommended by word of mouth
- Attracted by market opportunities, decided to join.
- Novelty way of making money, using skills to trade, meeting new people
- Chance to earn extra money. Heard about it through promotional activities
- Can use my skills to swap for things I need. Great having a network to connect to.
- Complementary currency philosophy appealing. Good response to localising currency.
- Like the system, like trading without cash.
- Good system, works well. Easy to trade.
- Good alternative when lack of conventional currency, like the philosophy of people helping others.
- Desire to seek alternative to exploitative mainstream system, support local producers.

Experiences using G\$

Respondents reported overwhelmingly positive experiences using G\$, with only one respondent saying their experience had not been very rewarding. People liked the networking, ease of use and practicality, value for money and good support from co-ordinator when signing up. The services were useful and there was enthusiasm for growing the system to include a wider range. It gave people another option to generate income and get needs met.

Improvements

Suggested improvements included:

- Ability to trade out of the area.
- Wider range of services
- Having hard copy of skills list
- Revamp image – not a “fringe” activity
- Better support if not online
- More businesses on board
- Healthcare services
- Exploring ideas of partnership with local government
- Closed loops ability to engage businesses and look at wages etc.
- More basic food available
- Teaching people about an interest-free balanced system and the need to go “through zero”
- More social opportunities.

Summary

The responses from general members and committee members to the system have been overwhelmingly positive. People value the empowering aspects of the system and the opportunities it offers to use what you have to trade for what you need and also value the philosophical and social aspects of the system. Most find it easy to use, and feel they get good value from trading.

Many choose to be involved with the system as they are aware of the alternatives it offers to the mainstream system and its values. While the WAIS vouchers are generally seen as a positive option, people would like more local ownership and opportunities to use them.

Better information on getting around the CES system could enhance some users’ experience with this and encouraging members to keep their details and offers current would avert the majority of dissatisfaction.

The key suggestions are to widen the range of basic goods and services available through the system and get more businesses participating. Wider networks and more social opportunities may also strengthen the system.