



NEXT Champions

Giving encourages giving. On top of the generosity of our founders we are also privileged to have many other generous New Zealanders giving NEXT their time, expertise and experience to help achieve our goals in education, the environment, and strategic philanthropy. We call these people our Champions – they are a critical part of how NEXT works to provide more than just financial support to for-purpose organisations.

We are extremely grateful for the Champions contributions, and we know the organisations they each support feel the same way. In this series we profile some of our Champions and discover what makes them tick . . .



INTRODUCING GEOFF RICKETTS CNZM

Geoff and Fran Ricketts had a long standing, long lunch date with NEXT founders Neal and Annette Plowman. It became the start of a long friendship too – and the catalyst for Geoff and Fran to set up the Ipiriri Nature Conservancy Trust to preserve one of New Zealand's most iconic surf beaches, Elliot Bay in Northland.

“If you can put your hand up for a cause you believe in, and put your hands in your pocket at the same time to support it – others in the community will follow.”

1. What is your relationship with NEXT and how did that come about?

My wife Fran and I have known Annette and Neal Plowman for many years and, when NEXT was established in 2014 with a wonderful donation of \$100 million, I was approached by them to be a member of the NEXT Advisory Panel. I was thrilled to accept and have learnt a great deal.

2. What are the ways that you engage with the Foundation and with the wider NEXT community?

I always had an interest in education and I chair both the University of Auckland Foundation and the New Zealand Catholic Education Office Limited, which oversees the 241 Catholic schools in New Zealand.

I was particularly interested in the outcomes of school leavers, especially disadvantaged young students who become confident young adults, shedding that disadvantage.

3. Why do you engage with NEXT?

It is always of great interest and a privilege to have some involvement and awareness of large initiatives supported by NEXT in education and the environment. It is also informative to meet and hear expert educators and conservationists committed to building a better New Zealand.

4. What has changed for you as a result of your relationship with the Foundation?

Being involved with NEXT on the Advisory Panel, I became more aware of the need for the protection and conservation of the environment in New Zealand. In particular, I admired the ambitious vision of NEXT to remove pests from large areas of the mainland and keep them out. I also came to see the need for protection of New Zealand's biodiversity.

This greater knowledge of the fragility of our environment was a catalyst for Fran and I to set up the Ipipiri Nature Conservancy Trust to purchase a property at the iconic Elliot Bay beach which was classified by the Northern Regional Council as an "Outstanding National Landscape". It would have been an absolute tragedy if the property was not preserved. NEXT became a founding donor to the Trust and in terms of raising the total \$8 million to secure the property, having NEXT in that capacity gave the project the "good housekeeping seal of approval". In no small way, this led to an ability, notwithstanding Covid 19, to raise the full amount of the purchase price, and some further funds to establish a Great Walk in Northland.

5. Has NEXT influenced your behaviour in regards to generosity and making a difference in the world?

There is no doubt that knowing Neal and Annette and seeing the establishment of NEXT with their generous donation, sowed the seeds for Fran and I to establish the Ipipiri Trust. The overall Elliot Bay property consists of approximately 700 hectares, which is 500 hectares of native forest, 200 hectares of farmland, and the iconic Northland surf beach, Elliot Bay. The beach is also home to endangered bird species, in particular kiwi and the New Zealand dotterel. The property will now be a taonga, a treasure for all the people of Aotearoa New Zealand to enjoy.

The Ipipiri Trust's vision is to preserve and respect the Maori heritage and culture of the area, protect and enhance the biodiversity, maintain access to the beach and to develop walking tracks to connect the Bay of Islands track with the Whangamumu track, with the Elliot property providing the link to connect those tracks to the Department of Conservation Russell Forest. This will enable a Great Walk with the added bonus of creating jobs too.

7. What's one learning in strategic philanthropy for you?

If you can put your hand up for a cause you believe in, and put your hands in your pocket at the same time to support it – others in the community will follow. That has been the case for me with the University of Auckland Foundation and the Ipipiri Nature Conservancy Trust.

8. What is the future you dream of for NZ for generations to come?

My dream in education is to ensure great high quality education in New Zealand's schools and universities, taught by excellent, inspiring teachers to ensure confidence and skill development as children and teenagers complete their education.

In respect of the environment, my dream is to ensure the unique biodiversity of New Zealand is protected for the benefit of all New Zealanders.

In conclusion . . .

All New Zealanders should thank Annette and Neal Plowman for their generosity and strategic thinking in establishing NEXT. With their generous donation, NEXT can support transformational change in both education and the environment for the benefit of all New Zealanders – and I encourage other philanthropists to partner with NEXT.