

TINA Darkin did not want to highlight the negative in her doctorate thesis, but her recently published work could provide a blueprint for how non-profit community groups can avoid going bust.

While a high rate of failure in that sector in Northland spurred Ms Darkin's PhD topic, she has turned the glass into a half full one by emphasising success factors.

"I wanted to be able to help Northland communities. It is the sector I work in but I couldn't find out much about why some of these organisations failed and some didn't."

"In New Zealand, the turnover for non profit organisations amounts to \$2 billion a year. It's big business but there was a paucity of information about it. I did compare the profit-making corporate model with the non-profit model. There are not so many differences in the models, but certainly there is a different expectation for outcomes."

Ms Darkin - she will puff out the "Dr" when the title's weight can be useful for causes and groups which might benefit from it - said many Northland community trusts and groups failed quite quickly, many lumped on propped up by publicly-generated funds while others went from strength to strength.

"A lot of failures are due to failed relationships within the organisation. Another big factor is loss of their core reason for being there and that is for the client."

"We need effective, sustainable help agencies. Northland's health, social and economic status is in decline and yet many groups whose purpose it is to counteract the impact were failing when we needed them most."

Ms Darkin said there had been no current, complete database of Northland trusts and organisations so her study provided that. It also highlighted the fact that although there were different needs and aims among groups, there were the same key success indicators - good boards and strong relationships, good networks in the community, and funding insecurities that might lead the organisation away from its core work. "Basically, I interviewed a lot of people from successful and failed organisations. I had a huge pot of information I had to boil down and put into a survey. How do you measure success? I found they have been relying on output figures, rather than outcomes."

Ms Darkin said her six-year extramural research had received strong positive feedback as an academic as well as practical study and resource. "My survey items would lend themselves to guidelines for measuring outcomes. It would be a great resource for funders to use when weighing up



INTERESTING TOPIC: Tina Darkin says a lot of failures are due to failed relationships within an organisation.

Measuring up success/failure