



# the power of good



In times of crisis, Australians rally round and help each other. We saw it in the recent floods, when volunteers pitched in with courage, energy and compassion to assist where possible, no questions asked. Extraordinary? Yes. Surprising? Well, no. Here, **Reader's Digest** presents the results of a new national survey that reveal just how deeply Australians value kindness and how we respect it in others.

Acts of kindness truly are the backbone of everyday life in this country; it's just that we rarely stop to applaud them.

With that in mind, we're also thrilled to launch a new community website where Australians can share and celebrate the small – and not so small – kindnesses in their lives.

We invite you to help us launch The Power of Good campaign. Fill in the postcard on the cover of this issue or go to [powerofgood.com.au](http://powerofgood.com.au) and tell *your* special story.

## Do you know one thing that makes Australians truly happy?

Four out of five Australians realise that making someone else feel better makes us feel good, too.

This is just one heartening result from a national survey conducted by McCrindle Research that reveals how much importance Australians place on being kind, and how the power of good pays unexpected dividends.

“It’s extremely/very important how we treat others”

98%

81%

get a kick out of giving a thank you gift

How do you change a life for the better?  
“Kindness, encouragement and support”

Australians say: “I like to be nice just for the sake of it”

Good deeds outweigh bad by 38:1

80% of us want to be remembered for our service to others

93%

of Australians want to hear more positive news stories

## Kindness works both ways

Kindness is a good luck charm, it seems. Almost nine in every ten Australians admit to going out of their way – either regularly, or every now and then – to help strangers. And being on the receiving end of kindness also puts a smile on our faces, with 88% saying that “being helped by a stranger after dropping items or struggling with shopping” makes them feel extremely or very happy.

When asked what attribute about a person makes the most impact, the response is unanimous. Forget intelligence, looks, a way with words or status. Practically everyone – a massive 98% – says it’s all about how a person treats others; and 88% rank a person’s outlook on life as a defining characteristic. A paltry 13% think wealth is a very important personal attribute.

## Kindness can change lives

As a nation we believe the kindness of strangers does more than just warm the heart – it can dramatically affect lives. Fifty four per cent of Australians believe giving encouragement and support is the “most important” factor in changing lives for the better. Just ask Geraldine Brooks, who was inspired to become an author because of the thoughtfulness of someone she has never met (see page 51). ➔

MCCRINDLE RESEARCH SURVEYED AUSTRALIANS ABOUT HAPPINESS, GIVING AND RECEIVING KINDNESS, AND THE POWER OF GOOD IN THREE SURVEYS DURING 2010

### ACTION

“This makes me feel extremely or very happy and uplifted”

Giving a small gift of appreciation	81%
Eating my favourite food	79%
Finding \$10	73%
Having the day off work	65%
Buying new clothes	53%

60% say

“Without the kindness and support of strangers and acquaintances... I’d be in a worse place today”

# A big deal

Comedian and TV host Charlie

Pickering on a moment he'll never forget

"When I was in Year 12, my mate and I used to catch the train to the city at night and go rollerblading. One night we were dashing to catch the last train home. Just as we were about to go through the turnstile, this old guy in a crumpled suit came up and asked me if I had any change.

For whatever reason, I saw a look in this guy's eyes that flicked a switch in me.

I gave him whatever I had in my pocket. It wasn't much, about \$3. It was no big deal, it wasn't going to buy him a house, but it might buy him a burger. I could tell that not many people had given him money and it was a really big deal for him, it made a difference to him.

So I went home and I never really thought about it again until four years later I was going to my first ever job interview with a law firm. I was going for a clerkship and I was running late. I caught the train into the city and was running from the station to the interview when this guy came out from nowhere and stopped me. I was in a real hurry and didn't have time to stop and talk to anyone, but it was the guy I'd given money to years earlier. He seemed fine. He was wearing a suit that was slightly less crumpled.

'You're the guy who gave me the money,' he said. 'I just want to say thank you. It really helped me out.'

You presume when you give someone money on the street that you're one of a hundred on the day and a thousand in a week and you're never going to be remembered. But it shows that an act of kindness in a world where people are often

Kindness  
doesn't take  
much effort:  
Charlie  
Pickering



too busy to be kind can really be remembered and can have an impact on someone.

I felt a bit of karma going into the job interview. I walked in thinking, *This has to be some sort of sign.*

I'm not a superstitious person at all but I went into the job interview feeling great, that the world was good and that I'd done something good.

And I got the job.

Since then I've always tried to do what was the right thing and I've always tried to help people whenever I can."

As told to Louise Waterson

## PERSONAL ATTRIBUTE

### What we value in other people

How a person treats others	98%
A person's outlook on life	89%
Intelligence	59%
How articulate they are	54%
A person's looks or appearance	28%
Success/status	21%
Wealth	13%

PHOTO: MARINA OLIPHANT

Two in three Australians say their life would be worse off today if it hadn't been for the kindness, support and encouragement shown them by others. And a kind word offered at a low point in our lives has enabled 67% of us to find the confidence to carry on.

It's something Dave Hughes, comedian and co-host of the *7pm Project*, discovered last year. "My father was diagnosed with an inoperable terminal cancer as well as dementia," explains Hughes. "Mum had to make the heart-wrenching decision to move him into a nursing home. The kindness the staff showed towards Dad in his final months and days was a great comfort to Mum and my sisters, brother and me. Their patience and generosity ➔

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**POSITIVE ACT OF KINDNESS**

“I regularly or occasionally do this”

Help a stranger to gain access or mobility	77%
Help a stranger out in an emergency	74%
Help a stranger with shopping	67%
Comfort a stranger	56%
Help a stranger with money	33%

was magnificent. What a noble and priceless job they did. It made me think about how we really are all one big family.”

## Our community is kinder than we think

While newspaper headlines might suggest that drive-by shootings and daylight robberies are commonplace, our research suggests random acts of kindness and gentle compassion are far more common than acts of evil or violence.

## How do you change a life for the better?

Kindness, encouragement and support	1
Advice and information	2
Training and education	3
Welfare and income support	4
Discipline and punishment	5

In fact, good deeds outweigh evil deeds by an astounding ratio of 38 to 1, according to calculations done by McCrindle Research.

Explains social researcher Mark McCrindle, “We measured all reported forms of assault and theft committed by strangers to fellow Australians and compared that to our research on the number of kind acts. The data is clear: we are far more likely to experience help than hurt from strangers.” Not surprisingly, 93% of Australians would like to hear more positive news stories in the media.

When asked how often they reach out to others, almost nine in every ten admit they have gone out of their ➔

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

# Thoughtfulness changes lives

Writer **Geraldine Brooks** on a great gift

“I never met **Althea Glasby**, but her kindness shaped my childhood. She was a friend of my grandfather’s, who shared his interest in eastern philosophy. At some point, my grandfather must have mentioned that his young granddaughter loved to read. From then on, every birthday and Christmas, a parcel would arrive containing a book that Miss Glasby had obviously chosen with exquisite care. We didn’t have a lot of spare cash when I was growing up, so most of my books came from the library. Miss Glasby’s books, though, were different: expensive editions, beautifully bound, lavishly illustrated.

One of her first gifts was *Orlando the Marmalade Cat* and I have it still, dog-eared now from many loving readings.

She had an instinct for choosing the very book I needed as I grew and changed. Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* led to an intense infatuation with the Bard; *Lord of the Rings*, when I was 12, came just as Tolkien was achieving cool cult status. A few years later, *I Ching* arrived, allowing me to impress my girlfriends with my insights into ancient Chinese wisdom. On every occasion, Miss Glasby would inscribe the books in blue fountain pen and a lovely, fluid hand: ‘To Geraldine, with love from Althea Glasby’.

My grandfather had other grandchildren, and Miss Glasby did not send them books – only me. Whatever the reason, I wish I could thank her in person. I’d give her a nice, hardback first edition of one of the books I have written. My signature wouldn’t be as fine and fluid, but I would say thank you for the gifts that helped to lead me to a life in books.”

I’d say thank you: **Geraldine Brooks**

What motivates us to tap the power of good?  
 “The pleasure I get from putting a smile on another’s face”



# A good deed deserves another

Former Wallaby and author Peter FitzSimons on help in an emergency

**"It was January 1982.** On holiday from Sydney University, I had travelled to India and, on a budget of only 50 rupees a day, decided to blow a whole ten rupees getting dinner from a Varanasi street kitchen.

Big mistake! An hour later, while on the overnight train to Calcutta, there was a rumble in my tummy. I began to feel a little queasy. Like I needed to go to the ...GANGWAY!

OUT OF MY WAY, I SAY!

BIG MAN RUNNING THROUGH! ... toilet! I

shall spare you the

grim details. But I

spent the entire night,

well, never mind. The

following morning,

completely spent, it was

all I could do to lift my

backpack, but I somehow

managed to get out onto a

Calcutta platform with a

roof above that was

curiously spinning around

and around. Or was that me?

It was me.

Going down in a dead faint,

I woke up to seemingly

a hundred kindly and concerned

Indian faces looking down

upon me. Then, two big

Israeli blokes, both

backpackers, pushed

their way through,

took a shoulder each and pretty much dragged me to a taxi, before taking me to a hospital and then a hostel.

They looked after me, even though we had never met before. I never forgot their kindness and am happy to say, that two years later, when I found an Israeli bloke without

money being blocked at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey, I was able to, in some way, repay the debt, by giving the guards money to let him through. It only took ten American dollars!"

Happy to repay the debt: Peter FitzSimons



## We don't expect a reward

way to help a stranger. Some 94% say they help strangers either regularly or occasionally. How? By helping someone up the steps on the bus, or across the road (77%), by helping in an emergency (74%), or with shopping (67%). Even 33% have helped with a direct donation of money.

Three-quarters of Australians would do something nice for a stranger "just for the sake of it", while six in ten report they have already done something nice for a stranger just for the sake ➤

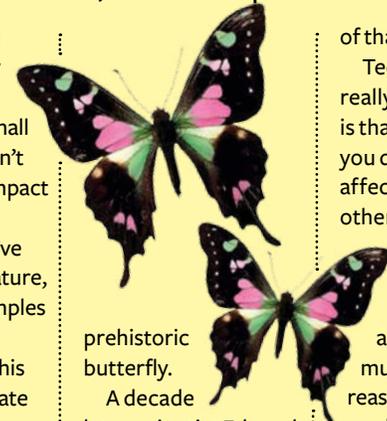
## Flutter those wings...

It doesn't take much effort, but the consequences can be extraordinary

**How easy** it could be to take the view that one person performing one small act of kindness won't have much of an impact in this vast world.

But the stories we've included in this feature, and the many examples we've heard about while working on this project, demonstrate quite the opposite.

In fact, it's a perfect display of "the butterfly effect". The idea first appeared in *A Sound of Thunder*, a 1952 short story by Ray Bradbury, where a time traveller causes a disastrous, far-reaching effect when he accidentally kills a



prehistoric butterfly.

A decade later, scientist Edward Lorenz coined the term "butterfly effect" to describe a concept central to chaos theory, namely that tiny differences in the initial state of a dynamic system may produce large variations in the long-term behaviour

of that system.

Technical? Not really. All it means is that any one thing you do today will affect how you and others around you

act tomorrow.

Now let's just think about it and immediately multiply the

reasoning; if everyone reading this paragraph commits to carrying out one extra act of kindness, that's over a million more positive moments in the community right now. And from each of those... who knows?

That's the power of good.

Sue Carney,  
Editor in Chief



## Share your story powerofgood.com.au

**The Power of Good** is all about celebrating the small kindnesses that can slip by hardly noticed but truly deserve their moment in the spotlight. Kind acts help us all. The giver feels good; the receiver feels great; and together, lives become brighter. You can share your story by filling in the card on the cover of this issue. Remember, it doesn't have to be a grand gesture or a life-changing effort – simply a genuine act that made a difference to your life or to others.

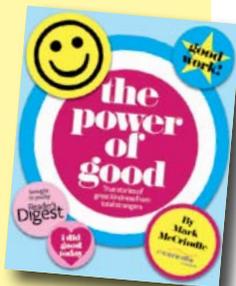
Or go online to [powerofgood.com.au](http://powerofgood.com.au)

There you'll find inspiring stories, more research into what Australians think about kindness and links and resources if you wish to get more involved.

**You could win the trip of a lifetime** if you submit your story via [powerofgood.com.au](http://powerofgood.com.au). The act of kindness judged by Reader's Digest editors as most inspiring will win its entrant a \$12,000 cruise holiday for two to New Zealand's wildlife island paradises in the Subantarctic, courtesy of Heritage Expeditions.

Closes April 30, 2011. See the website for details.

**OUT NOW!** For 70 inspiring stories from well-known Australians and more resources, check out *The Power of Good*, by Mark McCrindle (Hybrid Publishers). Available online for \$24.95 at [myshoptoday.com.au](http://myshoptoday.com.au) or good bookshops.



of being nice. Furthermore, almost everyone (97.7%) likes the idea of being nice “just for the sake of it”.

For some people, like Charlie Pickering, it doesn't take much effort, either. He explains: “I'm a cyclist, and whenever I'm in the city and see someone's locked up their bike but forgotten to turn off the light on their bike, I always turn the light off.

“I'll even walk across the road to do it because I know how bad it is to go to ride home and find out that the light's not working. That's really frustrating.” The fact that the bike's owner doesn't even know about the act of kindness doesn't matter. “I like the idea that you can do a net good,” says Charlie. “You can in really small ways make the world better.”

And what prompts all this good-doing? Nearly 74% of respondents said it's simply, “the pleasure I get from putting a smile on another's face” or “my conscience” (69%). Religious or spiritual motivations were ticked by only one in five.

And barely one in ten felt motivated to be nice in order to make a good impression on others.

Kindness really is, it seems, its own reward.

Josephine Brouard ■

## Generosity of spirit

Rev Graham Long,

the Wayside Chapel, Kings Cross

**“There are no rules for grieving.**

When our son died in 2009, I knew that life had changed forever, but I could not articulate the change. I was not the only one stuck for words: everyone around me didn't know what to say either. I was swimming in a sea of kindness, but no-one could do the one thing that I wanted: bring my boy back.

Some generous and beautiful people offered me various options for a holiday. I needed the routine of work to keep me afloat, and also I didn't want to stray too far from my three grandchildren who had lost their father.

After some months, people stopped saying awkward things and our family settled back into a semblance of routine. I was

grateful for the dwindling of difficult moments when people communicated care not through language, but in spite of it, and yet I was astonished to find the world moving along without my boy.

At the Wayside Chapel one day, a homeless man walked into my path in a way that, for a moment, perplexed me. I thought he wanted to talk, but it swiftly became

obvious that no conversation was on offer. I knew the man well enough by sight, but we'd never talked at great depth. Suddenly he stepped right into my face and threw his arms around me. He kissed me on the side of my face and whispered, “This is from your son,” and then he walked away.

I've never forgotten that moment. It was a small, generous act that dramatically lifted my spirits, and for that I will always be grateful.”

PHOTO: NEWSPIX



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