

# A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO VALUES

## WHAT ARE VALUES?

Values are the principles or standards that each of us carry through our lives that guide and inform our thoughts, attitudes and actions. They influence, and are influenced by, our experience of the society in which we each live. Our values help determine what is important to us and shape how we interact with each other and all living beings in the world around us.

## WHY ARE VALUES IMPORTANT?

We might not be explicitly aware of them, but values are important influences in many aspects of our lives, such as our choice of friends, what we buy, if and how we vote, our ecological footprints, and our personal wellbeing. They also influence how we act on social and environmental issues, such as poverty, climate change and racism. If we are to overcome the world's most pressing challenges, we need to elevate the human values that underpin our care for each other and the wider world.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INTRINSIC & EXTRINSIC VALUES?

Some values are referred to as extrinsic values. These values rely on external approval or rewards - such as wealth, power or public image. Other values are referred to as intrinsic values. These values are more inherently rewarding - such as community, love for friends and family and creativity. Both groups of values play an important part in who we are - to live well-rounded lives we need to be able to draw on a wide range; but it is also important that these values are kept in balance.

## HOW CAN VALUES LEAD TO A BETTER WORLD?

When we look at some of the key sources of influence in mainstream culture - for example, advertising, the media and government - we can see that they champion and foreground some values more than others. Through an overemphasis on wealth, celebrity and consumerism, our culture has become skewed towards extrinsic values, undermining the intrinsic values which lead to greater care for each other and the wider world. Despite these powerful influences, most people nonetheless prioritise intrinsic values over extrinsic, which we can see as a powerful indicator of the potential to rebalance the values we find all around us. Building our social institutions, business and public services in ways that reflect intrinsic values would deepen our care for one another, strengthen responses to social and environmental issues, and improve personal wellbeing.