

FIGURE.NZ



Figure.NZ is a nonprofit charity that makes an online data platform designed to make data reusable and easy to understand. Founded in 2012 in New Zealand.

figure.nz

Revenue model: platform providing paid services to creators, donations, sponsorships

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Interviewee: Lillian Grace, founder

Profile written by Paul Stacey

In the paper *Harnessing the Economic and Social Power of Data* presented at the New Zealand Data Futures Forum in 2014,¹ Figure.NZ founder Lillian Grace said there are thousands of valuable and relevant data sets freely available to us right now, but most people don't use them. She used to think this meant people didn't care about being informed, but she's come to see that she was wrong. Almost everyone wants to be informed about issues that matter—not only to them, but also to their families, their communities, their businesses, and their country. But there's a big difference between availability and accessibility of information. Data is spread across thousands of sites and is held within databases and spreadsheets that require both time and skill to engage with. To use data when making a decision, you have to know what specific question to ask, identify a source that has collected the data, and manipulate complex tools to extract and visualize the information within the data set. Lillian established Figure.NZ to make data

truly accessible to all, with a specific focus on New Zealand.

Lillian had the idea for Figure.NZ in February 2012 while working for the New Zealand Institute, a think tank concerned with improving economic prosperity, social well-being, environmental quality, and environmental productivity for New Zealand and New Zealanders. While giving talks to community and business groups, Lillian realized “every single issue we addressed would have been easier to deal with if more people understood the basic facts.” But understanding the basic facts sometimes requires data and research that you often have to pay for.

Lillian began to imagine a website that lifted data up to a visual form that could be easily understood and freely accessed. Initially launched as Wiki New Zealand, the original idea was that people could contribute their