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**The unheard voices of women from  
the Christchurch earthquakes and beyond**

Written by Liz Gordon with input from NCWNZ Women's Voices Research  
Committee members  
Rosemary Du Plessis  
Helen Gibson  
Judith Sutherland

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**National Council of Women of New Zealand  
Christchurch Branch**

## Acknowledgements

The Women's Unheard Voices project is the second stage of a larger project devoted to recording women's unique experiences of the Christchurch earthquakes in 2010-2011. Our thanks go to everyone who assisted and participated - especially the women who told their stories and the considerable work that was undertaken by volunteer interviewers.

We want to first acknowledge the Christchurch Branch of the National Council of Women, the Otautahi Māori Women's Welfare League and the Christchurch Branch of PACIFICA. These organisations all participated in planning the research and collecting stories. The NCW Christchurch was the co-ordinating organisation for the project, and we are grateful to its members for their support and to the National Office of NCWNZ for their administrative assistance.

We wish to thank the Lotteries Community Sector Grants Board. Without your financial support we would not have been able to record the compelling stories in this report. We have been true to your goals – we have both enhanced the research capacity of our organisation and provided an enduring and inspiring account of women's responses to the challenges posed by Christchurch earthquakes.

An experienced social researcher, Brigid Buckenham, made a major contribution to the project, identifying potential participants, liaising with community organisations, and conducting a significant number of interviews. Elizabeth Ashby, our University of Canterbury Summer Scholarship student, processed interview records, assisted with administration and conducted interviews. Rosemary Baird edited audio recordings and converted audio files for uploading on the UC CEISMIC website. We want to thank them for the energy, expertise and commitment they brought to the project. We are also grateful to the University of Canterbury for partly funding Elizabeth Ashby's scholarship, and providing office space and computers. The UC CEISMIC team have ensured that most of the interview records are publicly available through the QuakeStudies digital archive.

We wish to once again thank all the women who agreed to tell their stories. You inspired us, made us happy, sad and made us cry. The resilience shown by the women of Christchurch in the face of thousands of earthquakes is remarkable.

We would like to acknowledge our families, friends and supporters, without whom this research would not have proceeded so smoothly. Special thanks to Bruce Sutherland, who waited patiently as our Research Committee meetings stretched into the evenings, and who was endlessly supportive.

Judith Sutherland, Rosemary Du Plessis, Helen Gibson, Liz Gordon

Women's Voices Research Committee

1 February 2014

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## Preface

After the devastating 6.3 magnitude quake in Christchurch on 22 February 2011, the media gave much attention to heroic stories of rescue, the comments of decision-makers, or people who were quake 'victims'. The Women's Voices project was initiated in 2011 by the Christchurch Branch of the National Council of Women of New Zealand to ensure that women's everyday stories of endurance, day-to-day support for families, friends and neighbours, and informal and formal community activities were also documented. This report presents the stories of women interviewed in 2013 during the second stage of this project. A further report will combine these findings with material from interviews conducted in late 2011 and 2012.

Interviewers used a life story approach to find out about women's earthquake experiences. Open-ended questions about their lives before the quakes; their quake experiences; the impacts of the quakes; their situation at the time of the interview; and their aspirations for their families/ whānau, neighbourhoods and Christchurch as a city were used to elicit the stories analysed in this report.<sup>1</sup>

The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee reviewed and approved the information sheets, interview guidelines and consent processes. Participants first consented to have their stories recorded and only consented to the use of their stories once they had received the written summaries of their interviews. They had the opportunity to use their own names, or pseudonyms. Some of them chose to use both their given names and family names. This report, based on interview summaries reviewed, revised and approved by participants, uses only their first names (including pseudonyms).

Many of the women whose experiences are included in this report chose to have their full stories included in the NCWNZ Women's Voices Archive located in the UC CEISMIC QuakeStudies digital archive. Some of them also agreed to the recordings of their interviews being publicly accessible. Search the website for the names of the women in this report and read a fuller account of their earthquake experiences.<sup>2</sup> Information associated with each story indicates how this information can be used. Many women consented to the use of their stories in reports, books, articles, exhibitions and museum installations.

This report considers key themes in these earthquake stories. It also shows how specific women spoke about their experiences and made sense of what happened to them and others. The research is an attempt to make their voices accessible, for them to be heard, and for action to be taken on the issues relating to response, recovery and rebuilding that they identify.

Rosemary Du Plessis, Research Coordinator

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the interview schedule used in the Women's Unheard Voices project.

<sup>2</sup> <https://quakestudies.canterbury.ac.nz/store/collection/228>

## Background

The Christchurch earthquakes can be viewed from many disciplines: geology, geography, history, disaster management, psychology, sociology etc. For the past two years, the National Council of Women in Christchurch has been researching the earthquakes from the perspective of women who lived through them and continue to experience their effects.

Why women? In the period immediately after the disastrous earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011 it appeared that the primary voices being heard on radio and television and represented in print media were male. The focus was on response and recovery, on political leaders and decision-makers, recovery services, security, and the fencing off and demolition of dangerous buildings. There were few opportunities to hear female voices in the public sphere, and photo line-ups of key people responsible for earthquake recovery were often exclusively male.

Behind the scenes, women were very busy keeping families together, coping with the challenges of accessing food and cooking it, getting children to school (often over poor roads and in remote places), providing support for neighbours, sustaining communities and helping others. The Christchurch Branch of the National Council of Women were acutely aware that earthquake response and recovery depended on these actions, and decided to undertake its own research into the effects of the quakes on local women. This decision reflected the approach taken by Enarson (1998: 167) who concluded that there are “his and hers” disasters. She argues that “studying whether and how women in different life circumstances respond to hazards and participate in relief and reconstruction is an important line of enquiry”.

The Women’s Voices project was launched in September 2011 and the first stage was carried out by teams of trained volunteer interviewers between November 2011 and November 2012, when a first report was produced for the project’s major funder, The Christchurch City Council. Interviews continued beyond that date and by early 2013, over 100 interviews had been completed. If the women who told their stories consented, written summaries of their stories and audio recordings of their interviews were included in the University of Canterbury’s QuakeStudies digital archive. Photos of some of the narrators and edited videos of some interviews have been added to the archive.<sup>3</sup>

The women interviewed during the first stage of this research were identified through the social networks of NCWNZ and other women’s organisations in Christchurch. Attempts were made to contact women involved in Civil Defence, earthquake recovery work in a voluntary or professional capacity, community activists and advocates, as well as women from different parts of the city, in different life circumstances and of different ages. There was a particular interest in including women with children younger and older children, and women involved in a range of occupations as well as small businesses that were struggling to keep going after the February 2011 quake. Most (but not all) of these women were Pākeha, and they were often professional women or those who with post school vocational training. The participants included local and national political leaders, community activists, a

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://quakestudies.canterbury.ac.nz/store/collection/228>

few celebrities, emergency workers, sole parents and women in nuclear families, teachers, nurses, GPs, funeral directors, factory workers, youth workers and those employed by a range of social service agencies. These were amazing women with incredible stories, but they were largely women with some financial security, home owners rather than those in rental accommodation, and seldom women on state benefits or in social housing.

While we had recorded the stories of women who flew or drove huge amounts of food into Wainoni Park, we had not heard the stories of those who received that food and needed more. While many of our interviewees were made homeless, most had somewhere they could go, and money to get them there. We wanted to record the stories of women who had least resources and experienced the most severe damage to houses, services roads and community facilities.

The eastern side of Christchurch bore the brunt of the worst earthquakes (in terms of damage) and is one of the poorest urban areas in New Zealand (although socioeconomic status varies widely across the area). The research team decided that we needed to record more stories from women who lived in this part of Christchurch and had few material resources when the earthquakes hit. We wanted to document the stories we had not heard, and which seldom received attention. The second stage of the project has focused on these “unheard voices”.

In mid-2013 we received a grant from the Lotteries Community Sector Grants Fund to carry out more interviews and analyse the stories of women with least financial resources in the parts of the city in which most damage occurred, especially to services like water, sewerage and roading. We were funded to do more interviews with women on low incomes, women on benefits and those struggling to pay their mortgages or living in rental accommodation. We also wanted to increase the number of stories from Māori and Pasifika women, refugees and new immigrants and document the stories of women caring for especially vulnerable children – those experiencing anxiety disorders after the quake, intensification of challenging psychological conditions or chronic disabilities. We anticipated working closely with a number of community organisations and schools to identify possible participants.

While the first round of research had overwhelmingly relied on the voluntary input of project leaders and volunteer interviewers, there was now some funding to cover the costs of interviewer training, identification of possible narrators, project management and administration, some interviewing and analysis of qualitative interview material. This reduced the pressure on voluntary workers to undertake large numbers of interviews. The goal was to achieve a further 40 interviews with ‘hard to reach’ women - those whose voices had not yet been heard. We used the same interview questions used in the first stage of the project, and, with input from the Otautahi Maori Women’s Welfare League and PACIFICA, we updated the information sheets and consent documents and revised aspects of our ethical processes.

This report presents the findings of those interviews. From the start, it was clear that these women had some different stories to tell. But their experiences were not entirely different. The fear of a tsunami gripped both sets of women. And in those early moments after the earthquakes, they all struggled with damage and liquefaction and traffic disruption as well as the loss of power, water, and sewage.

They rushed to fetch their children from school, worried about relatives they could not contact, coped with practical challenges like cooking and toileting, and worked to create order out of the chaos.

At the same time, women in the unheard voices study appear to have had a much harder time in the months and years after the quakes than many of the women interviewed a year earlier. They are often struggling financially as a result of higher rents, loss of jobs, increasing demands of children, multiple moves, and increasingly ill health. Some of these struggles occur because earthquake recovery is slow, insurance and EQC issues are dragging on and, as some have pointed out, people in the east will soon be facing their fourth cold winter. The women of the first group were primarily home owners, and many of the women who tell their stories in this report are renters. They face different issues. They are less likely to be negotiating property claims with EQC or insurance companies, but more likely to be living in houses whose rents are increasing, while they have no control over the use of EQC pay outs to repair their cracked and leaky homes.

The unheard women's voices demonstrate that the range of earthquake stories is as wide as the city itself. How the earthquakes were felt, the damage they did, and their effects on land, river and homes differed from person to person, family to family, street to street and neighbourhood to neighbourhood. And those with least financial resources, with children with disabling physical and psychological conditions, in rental accommodation or poor quality houses and existing health issues had to work hardest to make life 'normal' for themselves and those around them. They talk about the difficulties of doing this when houses are demolished around them or damaged by arson, and the loss of friends and neighbours, familiar landmarks and community facilities.

One year on from the earlier research, some of the enduring effects of the earthquakes are being felt. Some still fear another large earthquake. Some do not trust the land, seeing it as a raging beast waiting to unleash itself once more upon the people. As well as fear, there is post traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, panic attacks and sleepless nights. Adults and children alike are affected by the faltering of mental well-being.

Some of these stories have shocked and shaken interviewers. Earlier interviews were often with women who shared life experiences with the interviewers. In 2013 we deliberately talked to people who live in very different circumstances. These are stories about physical and mental hardship, struggle and loss, but they also illustrate the ability of people of all kinds to enable others, make do, fashion collective solutions, call on networks and look after each other. These women tell remarkable stories about the ingenuity, determination, inventiveness and care for others that sustain families, neighbourhoods and communities.

## Women's unheard voices

Who are the women who told these earthquake stories? Most of them were living in eastern Christchurch (for example, New Brighton, Southshore, Shirley, Avonside, Bexley, Bromley, Aranui, Wainoni, Woolston, Phillipstown and Waltham) or another location particularly affected by the earthquakes. They were likely to be in households dependent on a benefit or low paid work, in rental housing, and with children whose schools had identified them as experiencing particular problems after the quakes. A few of the women were teenparents at the time of the quake.

We received assistance from many people and organisations in finding and working with these women. Thanks to school principals, community organisations, various networks among community organisations, friends of friends and others for helping us find the women who participated in this research.

Some of the women were refugees from wars in Afghanistan and Ethiopia. They had lived many years in appalling circumstances prior to coming to New Zealand and struggled to come to this country. As one woman put it:

You live in a refugee camp, it is just survival. How will I spend this day? Will I get water? Will I sleep? Will there be any shotgun? Will they rape? You don't have to think, there is no future, you just think of this day.

Two women who tell their stories in this report, Alia and Roman, were traumatised by the earthquakes and their aftermath. For them it was like going back into a war zone. Having come to Christchurch, and fallen in love with it, it felt like a betrayal when their new lives were so massively shaken up. The earthquakes were difficult for those who had experienced a more peaceful life, but appear much worse for those who come from backgrounds of indescribable fear and uncertainty.

Experiences of anxiety and depression and debilitating tiredness feature in the stories of so many of those interviewed. Panic attacks were often mentioned, and many have sought or received counselling for themselves or their children. For some, the overwhelming feelings of anxiety have almost blotted out their memories of the past three years. Their personal struggles sometimes make their stories hard to read.

A number of the women interviewed were elderly – some in their 80s or early 90s. Most of the older women lived alone. Many older persons were uprooted from their homes by the earthquakes and moved to other parts of the city. Some have lost connection with friends and are lonely and unhappy. Some have made new friends and are thriving. Some have revisited lessons of their youth, including a survivor of the London Blitz, who drew on that experience as the earth shook. Many older people regret that they will not live to see a new Christchurch CBD emerge from the rubble of a flattened city.

A number of the women are parenting alone, surviving either on benefits or in low-paid work. One woman, shortly after our interview with her, gave up her rotting rental accommodation and took her tent into Waltham Park. The publicity led to her being offered a house to rent at an affordable rate. The house is broken, but



liveable. The issue of the condition of houses being let out by landlords comes up a number of times in these stories. Some participants said that landlords are, in some cases, pocketing EQC and insurance pay-outs and continuing to let damaged properties. Media discussion about developing a housing 'warrant of fitness' has emerged from this kind of experience.

It takes considerable effort for participants living on welfare payments to keep their families together. With parents, children and even pets experiencing ongoing anxiety, time and resources often need to be put into family life in ways unknown before. During the period of this research study, increasing pressure is being put on benefit recipients to re-enter the workforce. For some of those we interviewed, this is unthinkable because their children need to know that mothers are nearby while they are at school and will arrive very soon if there is another shake.

Remarkably, despite the multiple problems they face, many women face the future with optimism, or at least stoicism. There is a feeling that the worst is now past, that they have coped and that the future will be brighter. And they can always think of someone who is worse off – someone who lost a family member when the CTV building collapsed, someone who is permanently injured; someone who is paying both their mortgage and rent; someone who is not eligible for a payout because they could not afford house or contents insurance. And they constantly stress that it is people, not things that are important.

## The first earthquakes - 4 September 2010

There were a lot of monsters strutting around Christchurch at 4.37 a.m. on the morning of September 4, 2010:

The younger ones had no idea what it was. They thought it was a big scary monster stomping down the street. They were screaming with everything bashing around and toppling over. It was very frightening. (Adele, mother of four boys, Housing New Zealand home in Avonside)

Ellenor, who is in her 70s, remembers being in bed asleep in her home in Southshore for the September quake and feeling the house shaking "as if a giant had got hold of the whole house and was shaking it... It was out of the blue... no one expected an earthquake in Christchurch".

Caroline, who was living alone in a skyline cottage on her New Brighton back section, describes the vibrations from the quake as if "King Kong had walked down the street and, thinking the house was a money box, had picked it up and shook it to see if there was any money in it".

Helen, who was just over 90, remembered "that September was a very bad one". She got out of bed and "I didn't know what was going on and I went around the house - once it had stopped - and I looked to see if the windows were still in, because I have very big windows in this house. I then went back to bed. And, I thought things will be alright. In London during the air-raids you got used to it - whatever was coming, you know. We used to say 'if your name was on it (the bombs) you'll get it'. But there were dangerous effects on some of the girls. The earthquakes here in New Zealand have been shattering to a lot of people".

The fear of a tsunami drove a number of people from their homes. Caroline got out of bed "and told myself 'you have 5 minutes'... I got Rico my dog and without stopping for a bag got in the car and tore off... I was gone". Wanting to get away from the sea, Caroline found herself driving in pitch black towards St Albans. With no street lights and familiar landmarks gone, it was disorientating.

I shot past QEII .... I reckon I was the first person out of Brighton... The road appeared to be wet then dry and wet then dry, so I slowed down thinking that if the road is slippery ... there might be power lines and I might get electrocuted".

Caroline may have been the first out, but she was by no means the only one to leave her home because of fears of tsunami. Nicki, a single mother in New Brighton with a sick and autistic son, began to wonder if they were safe in the house. She thought about a tsunami. She found a candle and lit it. She didn't know the safest thing to do. After reassuring her son, Nicki finally went outside "and there were people everywhere". She managed to get her car out of the garage, but still didn't know what to do, as there were no phones working. Nicki threw stuff in a bag, especially the insulin for her son. She had trouble getting him into the car because there were broken things all over the floor and with his autism he couldn't cope with the change

and the mess. She drove to a friend's house, but returned home once the threat of a tsunami has passed.

Alia, a refugee from Afghanistan, was already up when the earthquake struck, as it was Ramadan and she had to eat before the day started. She was walking through the house when the shaking started.

It was very scary and I had heard about tsunami before. I thought it was something shaking our house, it was like a washing machine I had, big noise, but it (the house) was suddenly jumping and I fell down, and my children, I shouted them to get off their bed and my son yelled 'come to the yard, Mum we don't want to die'. The power went out. It was a really hard time for me and I was really confused where I go, what I do, because another daughter and son lived separately. I thought we are near the beach in New Brighton and I wanted to save my children from the water. I thought there may be another earthquake that came from the sea.

At around 5 a.m. Alia left her Bromley home with her children and went into the city, and then the whole family decided to go to the Cashmere hills. They stayed there all day along with other Afghani families, returning late afternoon.

A couple of other participants also braved the roads to go and make contact with family members. The rest were divided between those who stayed in bed and those who hustled into hallways, kitchens, gardens and elsewhere to escape the shaking. With no children at home that night, Nippy did not feel the earthquake that strongly and "just slept through it really. Mum rang. Stop ringing, Mum. Daughter rang – she was chucked out of bed".

Michelle was living in New Brighton, but did not think about a tsunami. "I woke being shaken... things were just moving all around me... It was ferocious... The whole house just rocked, and then there was no light". The quake seemed to "shake forever"; even though it was actually only thirty seconds. She is someone who does not like to be in the dark and "it started to freak me out a bit".

It felt like you were on a rocking boat on the ocean. Then there was just silence, absolute silence. And then I started thinking about everything. Where is my son? I rushed into [son's] room and he was still soundly asleep. He slept right through it and was totally unaware of what had happened.

She dashed outside and there were lots of her neighbours "all fresh out of bed". Everyone was just in a state of disbelief and everyone was asking, "What was that?" And someone else said, "It was an earthquake, it was an earthquake!"

Tinks, who lives in Waltham with her grandson, doesn't recall much damage: "to be honest with you, the first earthquake didn't affect me - they don't frighten me. I am a very fatalistic type of person - what's gonna be, is gonna be, so there is nothing that you can do about it. I can't say I liked it. I didn't like it but it didn't frighten me. I just look up to the heavens and say 'if you're gonna take me you're gonna take me. There is nothing I can do about it'.

Ella, a student at Avonside Girls' High School, was at her friend's birthday party and still awake. She was not scared. Because of the birthday setting, "it was kind of enjoyable, like all of my best friends hiding under a table and eating chocolate and barbeque for breakfast. We didn't realise how severe it was until I went back home... so yeah I didn't have too bad an experience".

Gina was living near the AMI Stadium, an area that would be heavily affected in the February shakes. She was woken by the noise and thought that a train had derailed from the track. Her children knew it was an earthquake. They did not lose power at all. On investigation, the top ceramic part of the neighbour's chimney had fallen and was sitting on the windowsill. There was little damage and they lost virtually nothing.

Estelle, who is in her 80s and has fifteen grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren, describes the September earthquake "as something we will never forget. I would say everyone would say that, who experienced it". The hour that it occurred was a time when people were still in bed. She does, however, remember waking up and "all this shaking going on and all the crashing and banging I could hear but there was nothing I could do". As neither Estelle's radio nor phone was working due to the power outage, she was left wondering what to do. After a while she decided to get up and get her battery radio and a torch. She recalled "the minute I opened the door, and put my foot down, there was glass under it, so I was frightened to do anything. And, I thought, 'What do I do?' and so I went back and I lay in bed thinking, 'What can I do?' I don't want to cut my feet and I didn't know how much had fallen out".

Her daughter rang and urged Estelle to stay in bed until daylight, which she did. Her daughter made arrangements to take her mother to her house in Broomfield for breakfast as they had the power on. "By the time I got back here the power had returned. I was then able to turn the tele on, the radio and every other thing. That was so important - to hear what was happening".

"The clean-up wasn't too bad", Estelle considered, although "it took a wee while". "Items had fallen all over the floor everywhere, cupboard doors opened, dishes had fallen out and it was quite a mess. But... I had help with it, as my son-in-law and daughter helped me. But... um... you could just do nothing about it. You just knew it had happened and we have to go on. Initially, there is that awful shock - what was happening? And the frightening (aspect) of it, but once it's over, you think well that's it. It's over - get on. But...it wasn't like that".

The aftershocks were frightening for Estelle too. "Every time one came you thought, 'What's going to happen this time?' You would listen to crockery shaking and things shaking and could do nothing about it". There was a sense of powerlessness... "That was the thing; you know you are not in charge. It's something beyond your control and you just have to live through it. Keep on keeping on".

Dee, a pensioner living in Christchurch City Council housing in Sumner, recalls being in bed when the 4th September quake struck. She had a tallboy with a TV on it close to her bed. "Suddenly this fell off and the room started rocking. All my glasses were on a shelf and they all fell down." Dee got out of bed and stood in the door frame watching everything falling around her - "I think in shock".

Nellie and her three children were all at home asleep in their rented home in Waltham when the earthquake struck:

My son was in bed with me... I got a fright... I woke him up and he said, 'what are you doing woman?' and I said, 'earthquake son, get up' and he said, 'Mum I am still in my undies...let me go back to sleep'. I said, 'No you can't do that'. I could only hear the children's voices as everything was pitch black. The children did not know what it was. 'What is that?' they asked as they came into my bedroom. But I wanted to get them outside quickly. Not realising that the chimney had been damaged, I took them right out under it!

Treena, a young single parent, was asleep, with her son in the next room. After Treena had gotten over her initial shock and the realisation that this was an earthquake, her first thought was for her son. Treena crawled to the next room to discover, to her surprise, that her son was still asleep in his bed. Not knowing what to do next, Treena dialled 111. She spoke to a police woman who told her to remain calm, grab a torch or some kind of light, and shelter under a doorway with her son until it was light. A neighbour arrived: "She came over, she was just holding this basket and she was like right, get your son, get some old shoes, come outside, quick, quick, come on". Treena grabbed her son's pram, put on some old shoes and went outside. At this time she was not aware of what it was like outside, and of the damage the earthquake had done. Her only experience had been the rumbling she had felt and heard inside. Outside, Treena was knee deep in sewage and she could see that her house was on a massive lean. This was at about five in the morning. Around her "all I [could] see [was] chaos: there [were] cars trying to go everywhere, cars falling, beeping, yelling, screaming.... sirens, alarms, everything".

As Treena and her neighbour stood on the footpath discussing what to do next, a young man driving a big truck offered to give Treena and William a ride out of Kaiapoi. Treena put the pram on the back of the truck with food, blanket and nappies and got in and "just fled", to her brother's house.

Michelle W<sup>4</sup> was also alone with her son when the quake struck. Michelle W always left the hall light on, and it never went out. "We must have been part of this tiny grid in South Brighton that didn't lose power". She is very grateful for this as she felt she would have been quite "freaked" with no power and being in the dark. They had a small puppy that was housed in the laundry, and on reaching her, found she had "shit herself". In between aftershocks, Michelle W cleaned up the laundry, and then they all cuddled up in the bedroom.

When Roman, an Ethiopian refugee who has family in Christchurch, but lives alone, felt the shaking she opened the curtains. To her surprise she could not see anyone else outside. In Ethiopia if there is a major occurrence, like a big wind, everyone goes outside and talks about it. But here it was "quiet, no one, no light... I prayed, I

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<sup>4</sup> Two people called Michelle were interviewed. One is only referred to as 'Michelle'. She lives in Central New Brighton. The other participant is referred to as Michelle W. She lives in South Brighton.

prayed, I cried, I cried". After a while she went outside, but still there was no sign of anyone else. She went back to bed and slept.

Her sister and brother in law had been trying to ring Roman, but her cell phone was on silent and her landline was switched off. In the morning they went around to her house and knocked on the window saying, 'Are you alright? Are you there? How can you sleep?' "My brother in law told me to turn on the TV. It was so horrible. In the English school you are taught about New Zealand and the volcanoes, but if you don't experience it, you don't get it, there is nothing like that at home".

Emily A's<sup>5</sup> husband wanted her to get under the bed but, five months pregnant, she could not fit. Her son and his friend were in the lounge, terrified because a mirror had fallen down and smashed. But there was little other damage.

Like many others, Fiona, who lives in Avondale, was wakened by the quake on 4 September and wondered what was happening. "Well, we were all in bed and when it hit – it was the noise - I couldn't understand what the noise was and I actually couldn't understand what the movement was... It never even occurred to me, I never consciously thought "earthquake." It never occurred to Fiona to get out of bed and stand in a doorway.

They had no power; they were in darkness and were not at all prepared for an earthquake. They decided they needed to get a torch from the kitchen. Not thinking about broken glass, Fiona stepped into the kitchen barefoot. She stood on a glass which had fallen down in the shakes, but fortunately hadn't broken. They grabbed the torch and some candles and then all went back to the bedroom.

### **Adele's story**

It was the school holidays the night of the quake. Adele, lived in a Housing New Zealand house in Avonside with her four sons, was sleeping in the living room on mattresses with her boys after they had watched a movie together. When the earthquake started, Adele was woken, startled. "Even though I knew it was an earthquake, and that the Cathedral had lost its spire during a past quake, I never thought Christchurch was a city for quakes". Adele thought that the quake centre was on the West Coast of the South Island or in Wellington. However, "as the quake got bigger and bigger", Adele started to have irrational thoughts such as, "Is this the end of the world?"

"The children screamed, it was terrifying, the TV fell down and smashed and it seemed like a long time from the beginning... The younger ones had no idea what it was."

The street lights went out and "it was pitch black", so Adele used her cigarette lighter to shine on the front door. When she opened it, she saw her neighbour with a torch shining. "All the lampposts were on a lean. It was like a disaster zone". Adele went back inside and lit a candle to enable her to find a torch.

She got the children into her bed after making sure there was nothing to fall on them. "We lay under the blankets for several hours as the aftershocks occurred". The aftershocks were

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<sup>5</sup> There were two Emily's interviewed for this project. Emily who lives in Aranui is referred to as just as Emily. The other Emily, who currently lives in New Brighton, but moved out of Christchurch for a period after the quakes, is referred to as Emily A.

unnerving as "you never knew how big they were going to be". Adele kept reassuring the children that "if the house was going to fall down, it would have fallen down by now". As she cuddled them, she could feel their hearts racing.

Adele listened to the radio talk back. When it got a bit lighter at 6.30a.m., they looked outside at the back yard. Adele thought that "the river must have come down the street, as there was all this dirty sand stuff, in the yard", but then she noticed that the ground itself was not that wet, but there were "all these little holes, a huge big crack in the yard, and liquefaction everywhere and out on the road. I thought 'where has this all come from?' because I did not know anything about liquefaction".

Then they left and Adele risked driving on the roads to visit her grandmother in Linwood... "I assumed the whole city was like Avonside, but once I got past Eastgate it all looked quite normal... no cracks, no liquefaction".

## **Aftermath**

There was not too much damage in Nippy's house in Aranui. There were "broken glasses, but no pictures fell down". She was not aware that the drain behind her dishwasher had broken, causing the floor to rot. An EQC assessor finally arrived to do an assessment just two weeks before the February earthquake.

Gina's rental accommodation near the AMI Stadium also appeared to have little damage, and she spent her time out and about helping her neighbours. She did notice some signs of damage later: "We noticed bugs were coming up from under the house. And we noticed damp coming up the wall. I reckon the sewer main was cracked".

After returning from her day spent on the hills, Alia was not comfortable with all the aftershocks:

It was very scary especially for me. My youngest daughter was very scared but especially for me as I thought I am very unlucky. When I was born and grew up it was the Mujahedeen war in Afghanistan and in Kabul - I had a hard life with the war. I really was under pressure, you know. It was a very hard time just for me and my youngest daughter also - she worried like me.

She slept at her married daughter's house for a week, as it was away from the beach, and during the day went back to clean up all the broken items. There was a small amount of liquefaction around the Bromley area but everything was "okay" except for one week without power and no running water for three days.

Helen who lives in Avonhead was lucky as she did not lose power or water during the September quake. Family members came around and used the shower and took water. She feels that she lives in a 'safe' area: "It is quite a safe house - or well it has been, so far".

Estelle's home, which was also in Avonhead, was damaged in the September quakes but she "kept thinking how lucky I was. There was nothing greatly damaged, but oh the cracks that appeared in the walls, and things like that were frightening, especially when I saw one of my ceilings had two large cracks right across it. The

others all had cracks in them so it was more than I realised. I kept saying 'oh aren't I lucky there is nothing much damaged'. But then the family came in and said, 'what about that and what about this?' There was quite a bit of damage, really".

The liquefaction, house damage and community damage that Christine experienced in Bexley were a sign of things to come. The area was covered in liquefaction and flooding. Christine did put on her gumboots at one point and waded out to have a look around at how things were. The Bexley Road garage was a great source of amazement, because the tank had been empty and the force of the quake had pushed it up out of the ground. But the power came on within a few hours and the New Zealand Army came and cleaned up the liquefaction. Christine's house was checked and seemed OK.

Nicki was fortunate that her property in New Brighton had little damage once the mess was cleaned up. She had power and water fairly quickly and no liquefaction. Her son's school was open. But he was very disturbed by all the aftershocks and couldn't understand why the floor was moving. He would get very upset, especially at night; his sleeping was very disturbed and Nicki was up sometimes between six and twelve times a night to try and settle him.

Kristy, who lives in Woolston with her partner and three school aged children, did not want to worry the children by talking too much about the earthquake. She remained very watchful of them and did not let them go out to play with their mates "'No sorry, it is stay home with Mum today'...I think I was in shock all weekend and it was terrible when it came to having to take the children back to school... I did not really want to let them go".

Walking around the street in Waltham, Nellie could only see by using her cell phone light. The other neighbours were out in their driveways with their cell phone lights shining as well. "Are you guys alright?" "Yep we are all good", they replied. Nellie checked on her two sick neighbours, who were both OK. As she does not drive, a cousin came and got the family at about 7 a.m.

After a while "we moved on, Christchurch was known to have quakes from time to time, we thought that was the last of it for a while. We all considered it was lucky that no one in the city was hurt during that quake".

Emily A's workplace, the Women's Health Information Clinic, was in a brick building that was located on the second floor above Whitcoulls in Cashel Street. It had suffered some damage, but engineers found it to be structurally sound, so the work of the clinic could continue. Emily A felt a little bit of apprehension each time she entered the building.

Dee, who lived alone in CCC housing in Sumner, was sick on 4 September and the next day "I felt terrible, perfectly terrible, you know sick". She was taken to the emergency doctor and diagnosed with pneumonia. She stayed with friends for a couple of weeks, experiencing many aftershocks and "gradually becoming complacent about them". She recalls being dismissive of concerns that there would be another big quake, as she kept thinking, "it won't happen again, it won't happen again like that, you know - how wrong I was."



## The end of the quakes?

The normal life cycle of an earthquake is a major quake, followed by smaller quakes diminishing over time. After the September earthquake, aftershocks continually decreased in frequency and intensity, according to the expected pattern. In September and October, there were several quakes exceeding 5 on the Richter scale, but in November the fives became fours, and in December the fours became threes. People in the city began to breathe again, although there were warnings that there was still the possibility of a large quake.

After the quakes, Michelle and the neighbours who lived in the flats around her became closer. Every time there was a big aftershock, everyone would go outside and they would check up that everyone was there and was OK. They all had one another's phone numbers. But pretty rapidly everything did return to normal. None of them had suffered any particular loss and the damage was superficial so "as long as it did not shake too bad, you could roll with it, it was sweet." The hardest part was the shaking and sometimes what started as something quite little would become quite big.

On Boxing Day 2010, as shoppers hit the sales in large numbers, a modest earthquake, measuring 5 on the Richter scale, but centred right in the city, disrupted post Christmas shopping. While not large by previous standards, the location of the earthquake in such a populated area meant it was a significant event. It also ended the hope that the swarm of earthquakes was nearly over. For Emily A, it also took away her workplace, as the Whitcoulls building was red-stickered. The Women's Health Information Clinic had been closed for the holiday break, but her colleagues had a small window of opportunity to retrieve what they could from the office before parts of the building were demolished.

Nippy remembers the quake as being felt strongly in Aranui:

The Boxing Day quake, that was big, that was huge. We were here and it was huge. That was scary, actually. Had to replace all the glasses again, but didn't make a claim.

The uncertainty this earthquake caused was commented on by Rana. While there was no damage to her private rental home in Bexley, and her 16 year old daughter and 8 year old grandson were safe, "We were all very on edge now and unsure what was or would happen".

What 'happened' was about eight weeks of relative calm (although with many earthquakes still occurring), and then the February earthquake struck.

## The February earthquakes

Emily who lives in a Housing New Zealand home in Aranui didn't feel comfortable sending her seven-year-old granddaughter to school that day. "I rang up the school and said, 'I'm not sending her to school today'. Emily took her granddaughter to work with her. She does volunteer work at the Salvation Army – just on the corner of her street. "All day we had been talking about it at work... We said, 'Well this is a funny day, it feels like an earthquake day' ... and then we started laughing and I thought 'that's not funny, yeah'".

They were back home when the earthquake struck. Emily became tearful as she remembered what her granddaughter said to her as the earthquake was shaking the house. "It was what she said to me... she said, 'If I die... don't ever forget that I loved you'... and I knew then, if I wasn't strong enough... because I didn't want her to think that I was going to be weak... so I just pulled myself together and I said, 'Just hang on to me, we're going to be alright!' ... and then she hurt herself... knocking against the door. The door wouldn't open for us to get out of the room, and I started panicking a bit... and then I thought, 'I can't panic', so I just said to her, 'do you trust me?' ... I said, 'We are going to be alright, as soon as the door can open, we'll go outside'.

Emily's phone was in the house, but "I couldn't get hold of it to ring anybody". She managed to push through the door and get to her phone, but there was no reception. Then they went outside and saw the liquefaction. "My neighbour next door, he had ...a [sink] hole... and all the liquefaction was coming out from it. And it came under our fence and it just – I couldn't believe it – it just filled our whole back yard. And then it shoved this door... and everything was just filling up with liquefaction... through the gap of the door".

Caroline had woken that morning feeling relaxed and decided to go for a drive to view a flat and visit a friend. After viewing the flat in Amberley from the outside, and deciding that she liked it, she and Rico the dog drove on. At Greta Valley she turned inland through Scargill to visit a friend who lived in Waikari. As she got closer to Waikari she became tense: "I felt uptight, a sense of urgency and a desire to get back to Christchurch".

Caroline had a cup of coffee with her friend and went to leave. Her friend asked her to stay longer. Caroline was beginning to feel as if she was trapped and needed to return to Christchurch. She replied to her friend:

I need to get back, can you feel the energy, it's everywhere? I held up my hands and then next minute boom... the lamppost went... it was a good jolt.

Caroline drove back to New Brighton as quickly as possible, anxious about her cat. It was a long, slow trip:

It was unbelievable coming down Queenspark Drive... I couldn't see any asphalt on the road; it was a sea of mud. There were eruptions on one side and metal things coming up in the middle of the road. Families with children in bare feet were plodding knee deep through the mud... it was like a horror

movie... there were no service vehicles, you just had to make your way along the streets, not knowing what you were driving over, and if there were deep holes... I just followed the cars in front.

Caroline's street was a mess, with abandoned vehicles, holes in the road, mud and water everywhere. She rescued her cat and Rico and carried them through the lake of mud into the house. She only lasted until six the next morning, when she put the animals in the car and drove to Amberley, hopefully to take up the new flat.

Michelle was in her flat at New Brighton with her son, who was watching TV. "And the hardest thing for him was that the TV stopped! 'My movie, Mummy! My movie!' And we had to get into the door frame. 'My movie! 'Doorframe!'" Michelle thinks he coped better with it than she did. "It was hard to hold everything together. I thought if I broke down, then he would do the same. So I had to be strong for the both of us."

We were in the door frame as the house was violently shaking... I was holding on him and I also had a neighbour with me. He had only just returned his boys back to his ex-wife. The three of us were huddled in the door frame. We did have a door in that frame at the time, but now it's missing because the earthquake spat it out while we were standing there. It fell in one direction and we were in the other direction.

Michelle could hear water and found that her hot water cylinder was disconnected and water was running down the walls. Michelle suddenly thought about the mains and dashed outside to get the mains turned off. And then she tried to put buckets down to get the water that was coming out of the ceiling. But it was impossible. So she went outside. "I thought, 'Well, the water is just going to drain from the cylinder, the house is going to be damp, but at least we are still alive!'"

Sina, who parents her two teenaged grandsons, was having a good day. They were at school and she was at their rented home in Waltham. She had finished her chores, had a shower and was headed off to Housie in her car. At this point the quake began and it was "like pulling me up... I end up shaking, my feet is lifted up, I scream. I was crying, 'What about [my sons]? Lord.... please Lord, what about my kids?' ... I am their mother... I go on and on to God... It was like He picked me up and threw me down... and there is a big rock over there [in the garden]... and he banged me down... That is why my knee is hurt". Sina points to her left knee.

The liquefaction started coming up in the garden, and Sina was terrified of being buried alive. A friend rang her to say she had the boys. Sina set off to the school to pick them up, still very scared. "I was so scared we all sleep in the lounge". At night they left the sliding door open in case they needed a quick exit. "After a shock we say a prayer". Sina has a strong faith. "I always believe in God and His love for us and, because we were still there [still alive], maybe He wants us to do something".

On the day of the February quake, Adele recalls saying to her son "we will never have another one like that" as he had become anxious again and had started to talk about the earthquake. This was a time when there was a lot of media coverage of Ken Moon, who was predicting the actual date and the size of the quakes. "That very morning, a pupil in her son's class announced that his father believed there would be

another quake". Adele was in the classroom that morning and commented that "no-one can predict anything" to reassure Jack.

She was at home in their home in Avonside when the shaking started. She described two movements, the up and down and the side to side shaking. She got up feeling frightened and cried out a loud "aaaahhhh" sound. She was quite frightened and wanted to run "even though I thought our house was safe, as it had not been red stickered". Her van had fallen down a sinkhole that had opened up. Trying to get it out, Adele's jeans became caked in mud. A relative arrived and pulled the van out of the hole. It took Adele two and a half hours to get to her son's school.

There were a lot of sirens sounding. There were shops collapsed in Stanmore Road. "It looked awful". "Whenever there was an aftershock, people would just jump in the van because they were frightened". When Adele asked one lady who jumped in "where do you want to go?" she replied, "anywhere but here". They drove past people sitting in their cars crying. "It was really very scary".

Nellie and a friend were at home in Waltham cooking noodles for lunch... "The next thing the oven started jumping at me and I am looking at it thinking 'what is going on?' ...and then the floor started disappearing from my legs... 'What is this?' I said to myself, and then we clicked on that it was an earthquake, and my friend went back through the house to get outside".

Nellie turned the back of her stove off, in case something happened, and "we ran through the lounge, but my friend stopped... and I said, 'what are you doing? Just keep going'". Nellie had looked up and saw that the roof, which leaked in the rain, was collapsing. She pushed her friend out into the hallway, and by the time Nellie got under the door frame in the hall, the lounge ceiling had started to cave in. "I just could see all this dust coming from behind me. I had a wall unit in the hallway which was falling down as well... we just had to get out". "We stood on whatever had fallen down just to get outdoors".

Nippy had just got home to Aranui, "I made some coffee and sat on the couch". Next thing her coffee went flying; everything went flying: "it was hell".

Her TV fell over and broke ("I have been through 3 TVs"). Nippy put her shoes on, grabbed her bag with "money and all good stuff" in, and went to leave. She couldn't get out, her door was stuck. Her dog was barking outside. In the end, she kicked the door in and went down the drive to see her neighbour. "She was in shock and her Mum was as white as a ghost, so I got them out of the house".

Nippy and her neighbour went to get their children from two schools. Nippy wanted to walk, but they took the car. Getting down Pages Road was chaotic. Nippy's street was pretty clear, but as soon as they turned into Pages Road there was "flooding and liquefaction everywhere. People were panicking; the cars were just bumper to bumper all the way through".

When she got home with her younger daughter, they went and sat outside. About the only thing not broken in the living area was a pack of beers on the bench, so Nippy

took that outside and drank some. She was worried about her other daughter who was studying at the CPIT polytech in town:

You knew the city was had it before we really knew. We just knew. That there'd be death. That there was going to be death. I started pacing the front, up and down, "where's my daughter?". And my neighbour was there, at the front, "you seen her?" I'm panicking, panicking, come inside, come back out and there she was. She was muddled up and yucky but made it home.

Once her eldest daughter was home, Nippy thought they should set up camp. "We had lost power, water and sewage, but I knew, always knew that you could get water from the hot water cylinder, so we filled up the bath, filled up the container, then just got the long drop done and set up camp. And that was it."

After getting out of her damaged home in Waltham, Nellie kept thinking about her children and that she had to get to them, "but my mate kept trying to hold me, 'can you just wait until it stops shaking?' and she was digging her nails into me holding me so tight. We knew it was really bad". Once the shakes stopped, Nellie and her friend went to Waltham Community Cottage. There were quite a few people gathered there in a state of shock. Nellie ran to Waltham Primary School and grabbed her two younger children who were out on the field with all the others. "You guys OK?" and they replied 'Yeah, mum, freaky though'.

Karen, a New Brighton resident, was not at work, but was helping a friend who had recently had a baby. As it started shaking, Karen "jumped on her friend" throwing herself over the top of her and the baby, to protect them. Her friend, who had been breast feeding at the time, said "Don't squash the baby!"

Karen agreed to drive her friend to the school. The concrete at the end of the driveway had lifted up and scraped the bottom off her car. "The roads were flooding, there was liquefaction everywhere. My friend was worried about car seats, but I told her, 'We are just going around the corner'". Karen had to ring her friend's partner as well because her friend was so distraught.

Emily was having her first baby visit from the well-child provider, and they were talking. "It was quite different to the September quake. The floor of the lounge was like waves and with it went lots of shuddering and the noise was horrendous". There were noises of things falling and breaking in the kitchen and, being a wooden house, everything was rattling. Her husband arrived home quickly and forced a door open. Emily sat outside with her daughter.

Many of the neighbours were coming out of their houses, all looking very shell-shocked and some were crying. They could see dust coming from the Port Hills, Sumner and dust clouds over the central city, so they knew that this time that "things were really bad". She found out that her good friend had picked up her son from school.

Michelle W was at home alone, and got thrown against the door, banging her head. She rushed outside and realised she had to get to her son. With the power off, she tried to manually open the garage door, got it open, but another shake closed it

again and jammed it. She walked to her son's school and stayed there with him for a while. With the back field being so close to the Estuary, water kept seeping up through the ground, causing them to keep constantly on the move to be able to sit at drier spots. She eventually got picked up by her father.

Gina's home near the AMI stadium fared badly in the February earthquake. Her daughter had just walked in from school, which had closed early due to the teacher stop work. "I heard this almighty rumble, and I looked at my daughter and it got worse, and I jumped on top of her to protect her."

Gina said it was odd that she didn't hear anything as it fell. It was only after the shaking stopped that she realised how much damage had been caused. The whole TV cabinet had toppled over; the microwave was on the floor. The contents of the fridge were all over the floor. At first, everything seemed alright outside. Gina and her daughter went to check on the neighbours. Then a powerful aftershock struck, throwing Gina into the side of a car. "Then the water came up. It took about ten minutes to get up to my knees."

Some people were moving into a house on the corner, and a large truck was parked outside. The driver rushed to move the truck, shortly before the road just collapsed, causing a huge hole which then filled with water. Gina's mother arrived and nearly fell into the huge hole in the road.

Dee was sitting down in her Sumner home to watch Emmerdale "as I do at lunch-time, and I have never...I can still feel it. It was like... I was sitting in that chair (Dee pointed to the particular chair) it was going like a see-saw". After things stopped rocking and Dee had heard all the things falling out of her kitchen cupboard, she then saw the mess on the floor. Dee had just filled up her freezer with meat and other supplies - "I had just bought it actually".

Later, the power was still off and there was only one neighbour left in the block of Christchurch City Council flats. Dee said to a friend: "will you come and spend the night with me?" Dee had tried to contact her daughter and her grandson and partner. However, soon after this, her daughter came up the drive. It was such a relief for Dee. It had taken her daughter a long time to get from the city to Sumner, and she took Dee back with her. Dee told her daughter: "look I am not going to go to bed tonight; I am just going to sit on the sofa". So her grandson and his partner dragged a mattress into the lounge "and slept at my feet".

Alia was visiting one of her daughters for lunch to see her baby. "It was very scary, very shaky, and when it happened we couldn't stand. I took my daughter, and we hold each other. Then suddenly I told her, 'take the baby's stuff - we have to leave the house'. The bedroom door was stuck because of the earthquake. I couldn't close it or open it to take the baby out, but we pushed, and we opened the door. I took the baby and she just took the baby's stuff and we go outside".

Her husband arrived later, but he had not picked up their youngest son from school. So Alia and another son went to pick up her youngest son. "All the street was full of liquefaction. The street, it was all with water and it was very hard to drive to come to Chisnallwood School and take my youngest son". They then drove to Alia's house,

but the street was full of water and "I couldn't reach my car". Alia's son said "Mum you stay here and I will go and get some clothes for you". Alia's son walked through the water while Alia stayed in the car with her youngest son. "We just shook".

June was at the hospital, waiting for her auntie's body to come out of the morgue. Arrangements were being made for a memorial service that very day. Apart from the death of her auntie, everything had been "going just fine". The earthquake happened "very unexpectedly." Exiting Christchurch Public Hospital they saw a lot of chaos - "it was just crazy... In Hagley Park the trees were just shaking like this [indicates] ... and we were all like 'what the hell?' It was like it didn't even feel like an earthquake; it was just this thing that happened straight away."

Her two children were at Wainoni Primary School on the other side of town. They made their way along Fitzgerald Avenue and Pages Road. June describes "power lines coming off and hanging in the water", and how she just had "to drive past them". The trip took "nearly two hours just because of the state of the traffic, there was water splashing everywhere and it was really, really crazy". They were unable to make it back over the other side of town for her aunt's memorial service.

"So my poor auntie, she was pretty much just left on her own really, even her own daughter couldn't make it". In fact "no one from Christchurch made it to the service". A burial had been arranged in the North Island for June's aunt with her side of the family. "She did end up getting picked up and taken up North, because she's Māori ... and having a service up there with her side of the family."

Tinks had been over at Hornby Mall, shopping.

I come out of the mall and got into the car, was driving home and I thought if I didn't know better I would say that was an earthquake. But I wasn't sure. I thought it could have been a truck going past or something. And I know I slowed down and put my head out of the window and I said to this couple 'is that an earthquake?' - They said 'yeah'. So I drove home. That frightened me a bit because as I was driving down the road, the road was opening up and shutting. This was the main road coming home into Blenheim Road, and down into Brougham Street, and all I could think of was getting home to make sure my daughter was alright.

Helen was at home alone in Avonhead. Like the September quakes, the February quake made her think of the bombing of London during the Second World War. She was sitting in her chair and grabbed the television. Her ornaments fell all around her. "We just hope we don't have any more".

Another older woman, Estelle, had finished lunch and was relaxing when this earthquake came. "It was dreadful wasn't it? Everything moved and things fell everywhere. My front room was a real mess with everything fallen down. I remember with that one, I actually went outside, because the young woman living next door was out there and she was a real cot case with the first one. And, she was really, really, bad with the second one. I stood with her and I said 'look, it will stop'. She was shaking. She lives with her father who is an invalid. He had a bad stroke a few years ago. She is a very nervy type. She didn't know what to do". Estelle felt

"they were as safe standing there as anywhere". When she went back inside, she found "a dreadful mess".

Mary, whose adult children have left home, was getting ready to have lunch with a friend at her home in Woolston. She was about to have a shower:

Then wah-hoo! I was surfing in the lounge - yes, I was surfing the lounge - standing on one foot and going with waves and going 'Oh! My stuff is getting broken.'

She and her son checked that the neighbours were alright and then they went out to visit a friend. It took them two hours to go a short distance and they decided to return home. Later, they went for a walk and saw big holes, burst pipes and an "unreal" landscape.

Nicki was at home in New Brighton and her son was at school. She described the effects of the earthquake:

It was like a movie stunt, where everything was flying past me, and the bookshelf was rocking back and forth, then fell onto the table. Every single cupboard in my kitchen opened and I stood in the doorway. I didn't know what to do, whether to run outside, what to do! The fridge ended up a foot and a half away from the wall; the pantry opened and everything fell out and smashed. I couldn't believe it, I was really scared.

Nicki was worried about the possibility of a tsunami, and also about her autistic son who was at school. A friend with a four wheel drive tried to drive across town, so Nicki could check on her son, but the roads were blocked with traffic. People were trying to get away from the coast and, on either side of her street, liquefaction and big holes were everywhere, many with cars stuck in them.

Roman was having lunch at the rest home where she worked when the earthquake struck. "It was so bad I peed, I cried. I was so frustrated." Her friend told her to stand at the table and to hold on. "I could not hold on to anything because it was too much". All the workers went to help the residents, who were very confused, as the liquefaction started to come up. "I was crying, but I did not know I was crying. After a while one of my friends told me to go and change... your trousers', and then I cried. It is very sad, and I prayed, "Please God I came from that camp where there is no food, no shelter and now this!" Roman feels she no longer trusts the earth. "It takes time to heal". She got home and found very little damage.

Kristy had EQC inspectors in her rental house in Woolston when the earthquake struck. "It was so bad I was screaming". Her uncle was thrown across the room onto the couch. Kristy, her partner and one of the EQC visitors, sheltered in the door frame with arms around each other. The other EQC visitor stood in the kitchen holding onto the fridge which was toppling over. She was immediately very worried about her children. She sent her uncle to get the oldest boy, then left with her partner to get the two younger children. They left the EQC people to lock up the house. Once the children were retrieved, they returned home.



The roads were torn up and the bridge they had to cross was cracking as they drove over it. Fortunately her uncle had a jeep. He decided to leave the jeep at Kristy's place and bike home as he was not sure how the roads would be. He always keeps a bike in the back of the jeep. "Bucket loads of sewage was coming down our residential street... it was thick, it was disgusting".

### **At work and in the city**

Violet, a mother of two young children, worked full-time as a mental health provider and was living in Lyttelton with her de facto husband and her children at the time of the 22 February quake. She was in the car with a client when the quake struck. Suddenly "my car was in front of another car on the other side of the road and the approaching car was still driving towards me". At first, Violet "did not realise what was happening, my client started screaming, I held on to her arm and asked her to 'try to calm down, I can't help you if you keep screaming'". With her client screaming and mayhem on the road, Violet eventually made it to the nursery school. Violet found her son asleep in his cot. The staff had not wanted to wake him and so had left him sleeping. This infuriated Violet, thinking that the roof could have collapsed on her sleeping baby. "I was not happy... I was so angry". She put him in the car and drove back to work.

She describes the liquefaction coming up, the uncertainty about where to go, and the people: "everyone was so dazed it was like an apocalypse had happened". In particular, she and her client usually went into a particular cafe at that time of the day, but neither had any money this day and they had skipped that stop. The cafe collapsed.

Rana was on duty at the Tuam Street carpark. She had just had lunch and chatted with her mother, and they had been saying they hoped there would not be another earthquake. "Well, lo and behold six minutes later at 12.51pm the whole world turned upside down. We wondered what the hell was going on!"

It took a few seconds to realise it was another earthquake but this was so much more violent than Rana had previously experienced: "My coffee fell on me and I was holding onto a barrier arm as I was getting flung up and down. People were screaming, crying, alarms were going off, dust, dirt and bricks everywhere with an awful smell. The Tuam Street carpark looked like a river had emerged all of a sudden with liquefaction and sewage streaming everywhere". Workers from the nearby Ford Motor company implored Rana to move away quickly from her spot as she was adjacent to a six foot brick wall. People congregated on the grass verge outside the carpark until the water and sewage subsided.

Rana was dealing with people and was then overwhelmed with the need to check on her family; "My family, my family I need to get home to see my family. I went back to the carpark pay booth to lock up. Because there was no power a few of the men had to break the barrier arm so the cars could get out. Drivers stopped at the booth wanting to pay - bless them - but I told them politely to just go".

Ella (aged 15) was at school at Avonside Girls' High School. The school was actually closed because of a teachers' meeting, but Ella had stayed on to do some work.

When the quakes hit, “we were in the drama room, which is obviously a blacked out room with lights everywhere, hanging right above you. We had only just gotten in there with our coffees, lunch and stuff, and all of a sudden the light goes out, you hear this shaking, and you look at the lights rattling above you... So that was pretty scary but we all got out okay. As soon as we actually got outside, we noticed the damage. Because Avonside Girls’ did have a lot of damage ... bricks fallen, everything...”

Ella was not allowed to go home alone, but in the end went with a friend. The roads were wet. “There were water lines bursting everywhere; it took like two hours to drive a ten minute drive”. “It was bumpy, especially in Avonside area; it looked like people were driving through a pond or something...sewage...gross stuff...people stressing and honking. And some of the traffic lights were out... it was kind of scary”. Ella still hadn’t managed to get in contact with her mum. “My phone went out for like twelve hours. I managed to call her at one o’clock that morning. Of course, she was stressing because she had got my voice messages, but she had no idea where I was”.

Fiona went to her son’s school to pick him up before the quake, as the teacher stop work meeting was on and school was finishing early. She took him to work with her, and they were in the outside yard of their business when the earthquake hit. She was looking for her husband who was inside and then she saw him. “He’s staggering like a drunk with the violence of the movement. I spun around to face the road to move further away from the building (which was concrete block) and Brent didn’t think I had moved far enough. He didn’t realise I was about to move, and he actually tackled me and threw me to the ground.” Fiona later found out she had broken her wrist, damaged her elbow and badly cut her chin from this fall.

“I don’t know whether being on the ground, or standing up is the best way to experience an earthquake. But at least when you’re on your own two feet you feel like you can do something. It’s a different sensation to being flat out, then you are feeling it through your whole body.”

Fiona’s journey home with her husband and son from close to the CBD to Avondale was long and scary. At one point they were stopped in Ottawa Road by a man who believed there was a crack in the road and he wasn’t sure how deep it was. They watched an oncoming car cross it before continuing. They went to Fiona’s mother’s home past Porritt Park.

It had flooded, and you didn’t know where the road was and you didn’t know if there was road. So we drove up on to the river bank; Brent had had to do this to get Mum during the September earthquake, this time the bank was a bit more scary because there were huge cracks in it. So we were up on this bank and you had to dodge around trees and there was a guy that stopped us, he was on a bike, he was another good civilian who was standing there. He wanted to know if we wanted to go over the Avondale Bridge because that bridge was out and you couldn’t get through. And that’s what he did, just stood there telling people that you couldn’t get through.

They continued along the bank “and I can remember looking through the window at the cracks, wondering if they were going to hold up in an aftershock.”

### **Christine's story**

Christine had begun the working year back in at the Workplace Support offices in 64 Cashel Street, and has very vivid memories of where she was the moment the quake struck. She had finished lunch, and decided at 12.30 to go and do the banking, so walked up past the Bridge of Remembrance to the High Street Westpac branch. After finishing that errand, there was still part of the lunch hour left, and as Christine still felt hungry, she popped into Ballantynes to buy a snack.

Christine was in the 'gourmet food' section when the quake hit. The force of it threw her to the ground, and everything went dark. There was an awful lot of noise, banging, smashing, crashing, and Christine could also hear someone whimpering. Then she realised that it was she who was making the sound, curled up in a ball. She tried to get up but couldn't stand because of the ongoing shaking, and briefly wondered if she was going to die. Suddenly a light went on as one of the shop assistants located her torch. When Christine managed to stand up, she asked the assistant "What do we do now?" and was told that they needed to stay and wait where they were. The staff had all received training after the Boxing Day quake, and were advised to stand and wait for clearance.

Christine did not want to stay, as she felt very responsible for the staff at Workplace Support in the absence of the CEO (who was out of the office that day) and wanted to go and check on them. The assistant was adamant, and Christine had to accept that she could not, at that moment, do anything more than just stand and wait. She recalls it as a hideous time, with people evacuating from upper floors and others crying around her. Eventually, a senior staffer arrived, the emergency lighting went on, and customers were ushered out the back entrance onto Lichfield Street, stepping carefully around the fallen glass door canopy, and passed a car buried in rubble, guided by an ashen-faced policeman. (Christine learned two days later that the person in that vehicle had been killed.) She remembers scores of people walking up Lichfield Street, with people comforting each other.

Upon reaching the Lichfield Street Bridge, she had to stop again because of the strong aftershocks, and found herself comforting a young mum with two kids, one in a pushchair, as they waited together on the grass. Christine offered to take her back to the Workplace Support offices, but the woman had already rung her husband to come and collect the family, so she wanted to wait where she was. (Christine often wonders what happened to her.) She then continued down Cambridge Terrace, past the crowds evacuating from Cashel Mall, covered in dust, some with blood on their faces. She found the Workplace Support staff all outside, but still went inside to check that every room was clear. Looking into her own office, she was grateful she had not been in there when the quake hit. The staff continued to wait where they were gathered on lower Cashel St, and were advised by passing Army personnel that they needed to evacuate to Hagley Park. Christine preferred to wait until she could get her car from its roadside park and drive home.

While waiting on the roadside, Christine and her workmates witnessed the bizarre sight of a man in the apartment building next to them, who did not evacuate, but rushed out onto his balcony every time there was an aftershock. Another neighbour simply paced up and down, not knowing what to do with the news that her husband was trapped in the Forsyth Barr building.

The traffic was gridlocked by now, and a man drew up in his car, and called out the window that he was heading up the Cashmere Hills and did anyone need a ride? To Christine's

surprise, the receptionist agreed, and hopped in the car beside this random stranger. Christine gave him the once-over through the window, decided he was most likely trustworthy, and waved her colleague off. She commented that it was just what was happening on this strange day! Christine waited longer until she felt it was safe to go, all the while hearing stories from passers-by, and comforting some of them, as they went to get their kids from the Hagley childcare centre before heading on to Hagley Park.

Christine knew the situation in town "was grim" and finally got to her car, to inch home on a journey that took hours. People were out directing traffic where things were broken. She got onto Ensor's Rd and up Aldwin's Rd, inches at a time (with a very full bladder!) Passing Linwood High School, she saw a taxi that had fallen into a big sink hole. She then headed up Pages Road "taking forever", but she just wanted to get as far as she could. There were lots of people standing out on the roadside, and lots of people walking.

On reflection, she thinks she may have been better to walk home, as she would have got there quicker. She got as far as Bexley Road, and figured that if she went any further, the water would flood her car, so she parked on the roadside, and set off with her shoes in her hand, thinking, "Well I won't be wearing these pantyhose again, will I!" (She was still keen to get to a toilet, but as she was only one kilometre from home, she figured she could "hang on".) It was a case of wading slowly and carefully through the water and liquefaction, up Pages Road and into Bexley Road, where she walked down the centre of the street, looking at the broken houses, and heard a helicopter hover overhead.

She arrived home just before 7pm, much to the relief of her anxious husband. When the quake hit, he had been watching TV and having lunch, sitting on his electric-powered chair. When the power went out, he was pretty much stuck in his chair while the drawers emptied and furniture fell around him. Liquefaction had come up through the toilet, and as the levels rose outside, he was very concerned that it would come into the house. As it was, the silt rose to cover the three steps up to the house, stopping just centimetres below the threshold and the property was entirely flooded. The couple spent 'the most terrifying night ever', in the safest middle bedroom, but got no rest as the aftershocks were absolutely hideous.

Christine was concerned about her daughter, and after a quick breakfast, wanted to go around to South Brighton to see how they were. However, her daughter beat them to it, having come over via the back neighbour's property, as she still could not enter Waitaki Street because of the flooding. They called out to neighbours, and between them, they were able to lift Christine's husband out of the house, and took him through a gap in the back fence, past the neighbour's house and along the river, in the wheel chair that Christine had managed to extract from the boot of the car and heave over the back fence.

They packed a few clothes and personal items, then the others left by car, and Christine walked to their daughter's house in South Brighton with the dog. A decision was made to go to Christine's sister's place in West Melton, which had not been affected this time. They managed to get there by driving along Marine Parade, and down Beach Rd, which was at that stage the only accessible route west from that part of town. She remembers that the road was still a mess, with cars in sinkholes, and that things did not really get any better until Marshlands Road.

## Other earthquakes and aftershocks

After the February earthquake, there were two other shakes that exceeded a six on the Richter scale: 13 June 2011 and 23 December 2011. The June twin shakes occurred in mid-winter, in what was a cold winter for Christchurch. The December shake, two days before Christmas, was almost unbelievable, as the city's residents had begun to relax and think the worst was over. Neither was as damaging as the February earthquake, but there was significant property damage in the June earthquake.

Gina was living with her children at her mum's house when the June quake struck. When the first one hit, they raced down to the school: "the kids were all outside, they were fine." So they left the children at school and went to check on the neighbours. The second quake struck. Gina thought this was the worst one ever, much worse than February:

I was trying to get my neighbour out of the house. A pot fell off the stove and hot soup went everywhere. Outside I could see the driveway open and shut. I saw the water begin to rise up and I started screaming. Just like I screamed in February too! It scared the shit out of me.

Gina was worried about the damage. After the February earthquake, when she had left her own damaged rental home near Lancaster Park, her mother's house in Bromley was a relatively safe haven. She now thought: "where are we all going to go if this house isn't OK?"

The day after the neighbourhood all got together and dug out the gutters, and the neighbour's driveway. "A kid fell down a big hole; the Council took ages to fill it".

Nicki commented that because she lives close to the beach, they seemed to feel the jolts more intensely than others. In the first of the two shocks on 13 June, her bookcase fell over. She had trouble getting her son outside due to his autism. They then left her house and went to her sister's. The large earthquake occurred while she was there, and they stayed outside for a long time. When they eventually went home to New Brighton, there was another huge mess to clean up.

When the June quake hit, the tent was put up again, and Nellie moved the household back out into it. "We had no choice; it was not safe under that ceiling". Even now Nellie is nervous when a truck goes past her Waltham home. "My room goes for gold! It shakes so much. The more the trucks go past, the more the ceiling seems to come apart. The holes are a hell of a lot bigger than they used to be!" There were no repairs done. The landlord is very difficult to contact and the property managers are not helpful. They, too, find the landlord hard to deal with.

Nippy remembers the June quake as 'hell':

I thought that was worse than February... thought that was it. I swore a lot. Same mess again inside, same again... but then I hadn't put a lot back, Stuff was packed in boxes. I didn't worry. A lot of things got broken again. The big stuff got wrecked again..."

Karen also recalls the June earthquake as bad. "This was actually the worst earthquake for me", she said. "I was at home on the computer". With the first shake she debated going to Central New Brighton School to pick up the children, however she restrained herself. "I did not want to be a possessive mother, at the school every five minutes". But when she saw liquefaction outside, Karen knew that the quake must have been serious, so she headed down to the school to get her kids. "What took you so long?" asked a nervous Anna.

The big 6.3 quake hit when they had just got back to their house. "It is the first earthquake I have been with the children. Jack ran outside. I dragged Anna out with me. The wires on the lamppost on the street came down. We held on to a tree".

Julia was at home with her three children when the June quake struck. Julia describes "everyone else was screaming around us, but [son], who has no fear now, was lying on the couch asking, 'Is it over now?'"

The floors of the two storied house "buckled, the bath had shifted, the beds would not sit flat". Julia and the family slept downstairs, in the dinette, for six weeks until another house was found for them in Aranui. She found Housing New Zealand were really helpful in trying to get her a new home to live in. They worked in with Child Youth Protection Services as it was important that her partner did not know where she was living. "We were actually in hiding from my partner".

Adele did not feel the first June quake, as she was on the bus, returning from a school swimming trip. Adele had noticed all the children coming out of the school buildings, in a very orderly way, but did not know the reason until her uncle rung her and told her about the quake. She told the teacher, and they stopped the children from dismounting from the bus. Adele feared for the class left at the swimming pool. They would have experienced the quake in the pool.

Once the school was closed, Adele drove her children back to their Avonside home. Driving down Retreat Road in Avonside "all of a sudden the van rocked, rocked, rocked and the road ripped open. It felt like it ripped open". Adele applied the brakes and held on to the steering wheel. "My littlest boy was going 'Mum! Mum! Mum!' and the van was shaking, shaking, shaking and all I could think about was the power lines". When the quake stopped, Adele made a U turn to drive back to her son's school.

Returning home, she knew that she would have liquefaction to dig out again. "I was so tired and thinking I can't cope with this again, so tired of having to keep it together". Adele dreaded the liquefaction again. "It drives you crazy; it gets in all your wash when you hang it out, it is all the mess".

Whilst the power was off only for a day this time, the local streets were badly damaged. Adele describes one street, "Keller Street, it dipped down in the middle and it was like a lake. Those poor people down that street... having to clean up - you got tired and tired and tired of it".

The June quake was very hard. "You can't live like this, this is just so tough. It was the clean up, the disruption to your life... It had just been going on for so long".

After the February experience, Kristy and her husband had discussed a plan to retrieve the children if another quake hit, and they put this into operation in June. One of their children was at swimming lessons, and was collected by the school bus. The experience of being in the water during the earthquake made him very nervous and fearful of water.

Sina was very upset when the June quake happened during school time and was very relieved to get a call from the mother of one of her teenage grandson's friends saying that she was not to worry as she had collected the boy. "Thank you Lord for looking after him!" Sina prayed. "Thank you for giving the heart to people to look after others".

Her grandson stayed with his friend for two weeks and then he decided that he wanted to return to Sina, so they planned to walk and meet each other. "Well you walk and we walk and we meet in Dallington". Sina recalls that there were "still puddles all over" - referring to the liquefaction.

Michelle W, who lived in South Brighton, also noted liquefaction and flooding in June, as she retrieved her son from school and went to check up on her mother: "What an amazing process it was to watch the liquefaction bubble up".

Emily A's view of the June earthquake was that 'even though we did not sustain too much damage physically, this is the quake that broke the camel's back'. Emily and her friends were "living in a bubble", wanting to venture no further than their immediate area. They didn't want to be separated from their partners or children, and a number of Emily's friends seemed to have regressed to some of their old habits e.g. smoking and drinking. Emily thought that:

...they seemed to be overdosing themselves with the media attention to the earthquakes. On the positive side, there was a pulling together of the community with many a shared barbecue or potluck meal. People seemed to want to stay connected.

The earthquake on 23 December 2011 was, for many, the very last straw. Having survived deadly quakes, damaging shakes and mid-winter freezing quakes, "How dare it shake again, right in the middle of everyone enjoying themselves and gearing up for Christmas!", as Christine put it.

She had stopped in town to collect her husband's medication and nearly got stuck in the lift at the building when the aftershock hit. Some of the staff were evacuating the building, but she was determined not to leave until she had the medicine that her husband needed, so that they could travel on holiday. She found the appropriate staff member under the desk in her office, and together they put the meds together and Christine braved the lift to get them to the car.

Violet also remembers being "really angry about this quake". She left work, and all the neighbours got together to share a meal "but you could see that the kids were

over it and everyone looked ashen faced - as if this could not happen before Christmas".

Jacinta was in her own house with a friend. When the quake struck they heard an almighty roar that sounded like a jet plane. Jacinta's first thought was - "Oh I hope I haven't got it wrong with the tsunami". This had been a concern when she purchased the house in New Brighton since it was only a kilometre from the beach. She has an artesian well under the house which burst - not the water pipes. When looking out of the windows she saw that the house was completely surrounded by water. Her friend decided to leave because she was scared she might get stuck. Luckily the water did not come inside.

### **Dealing with aftershocks**

The aftershocks proved to be "a bit scary" for Mary as "you didn't know whether it was going to keep going or what". Although Mary was frightened by the quakes she went into a mode where "you have to keep calm and carry on and help as many people as you can type thing - you get what I mean?"

She developed a technique to deal with the aftershocks. She would just hold her breath until the quake stopped. Mary noticed that people had different ways of coping with the aftershocks; some other people would dart, some would bolt, but most people did just whatever was right for them.

Emily doesn't worry about the aftershocks anymore. "I don't worry about them now... cause we thought, if we're scared and the kids know we're scared, and then they are going to be scared. It is better just to get on with it and then they can see that it's alright. We are alright" Emily says that she tells her children and grandchildren that "we are so lucky" compared to people in other countries.



## Getting resources

After the February earthquake, a lot of help came into Christchurch. The Red Cross, a large number of community initiatives, charities and communities got together to give needed assistance to communities. The people represented in this study were, in theory at least, the targets of the assistance, but also helped others. This section outlines the kind of help that the women saw, received and gave.

The participants saw many acts of generosity, from the first moment when Nippy stopped at a dairy after the February shake and the Chinese man just said "look take what you want, help yourself ladies". So I grabbed some milk and grabbed a bottle of lemonade for the kids, thought it might help calm them down".

Caroline recalls that the Grace Vineyard Church helped remove the liquefaction. "A wonderful man from Wellington, who had driven down in his own van with his own money, hired a digger and with the help of two German backpackers removed the liquefaction onto the street". At the end of the day, he presented Caroline with a green mug with fudge, napkin and tea bag as a gift from his neighbour in Wellington who had parcelled up 200 of these gifts.

At first, there seemed to be little help for Nippy. She signed up for some Red Cross support. Eventually some men from the army arrived and asked if they could help her. She asked them to fix the front door. "The Kiwi boys couldn't fix it. The guys from the Philippines had it fixed in about five minutes". The local church was offering breakfast and lunch, and Nippy and her neighbours popped over there for coffee sometimes. After a while she needed to go shopping, and they ventured over to the other side of town (she thinks it may have been the Bishopdale Mall). She remembers they had to queue up to get into the supermarket. The Red Cross sent a plumber who reconnected her pipes.

Nippy ended up helping out a number of elderly neighbours in Aranui. She knocked down the fence so that her elderly neighbour next door could come over. She was able to get some milk and bread from the local dairy before it closed down. She also helped the "old boy" around the corner, and another neighbour in her nineties.

Generosity went both ways, and in the period after the earthquakes, neighbours and friends looked out for one another. As Gina put it:

I saw community, everyone was helping everyone. I saw it that day and I didn't see it again until the June quake. So we were helping dig out liquefaction in the street, and in the car ferrying water and a gas cooker to a girlfriend in New Brighton. She has an autistic boy. She lit a fire in a bath outside to cook him his dinner and the fire brigade came and put it out. No offer of help, just put it out. We managed to get her sorted.

Many people used their barbeques to cook meals over the days following the February earthquake, when there was no power on in most eastern communities. Fortuitously, and for no obvious reason, Rana had purchased two canisters of gas from the Warehouse that day during her lunch time. She records that the gas cooker was deployed for the next three days to provide welcome cooked meals.

June's family also used the barbeque, which became the main kitchen. They cooked up all the frozen food. "We didn't have any power, so we had to use the food. We didn't have no electricity or nothing, so we ended up getting a gas bottle and using the barbeque. But we had to use the meat and whatever we had in the freezers at that time. It was just so much longer before the east side got the power going."

June and her mother cooked and shared food with the neighbours. "We were doing the whole sharing thing, you know 'join in, have a feed'. We've all been there for 25 years, so we all knew each other". She explains how in some streets in Avonside they were putting up meals for everyone. "In Avonside, some of the streets were awesome... they were going outside and putting up for anyone that's going past... meals on the barbie and stuff. You know it's really lovely how the community's got together... and actually helped each other... we really did have to get together and support each other".

Nicki was also able to cook on the barbeque. She had people staying with her. She also helped some elderly neighbours. The Red Cross were visiting and a group of French nuns came around bringing food. "None of us had any money". Nevertheless, much of the food in her freezer – whatever they couldn't eat in a few days – had to be thrown out.

Ella and her family in Avonside were reliant on the barbeque, and they did some BBQ baking. They put muffin mix into circular frames for eggs and found that "it was actually quite good because like it cooked the muffin at the bottom but the top was like cookie-doughy". She comments:

Mum was smart, as soon as the earthquake happened she put a plug in the big bath and left the tap running until it got to the top, and so we had a bathtub of water which we used for dishes and stuff like that – it was more for personal hygiene that was the issue.

Her mother had stored drinking water in huge Just Juice bottles in the garage. She was quite prepared "which was good".

A friend of Fiona's had given them a large tanker of water. It had been used for chemicals, so the water was used for washing things and flushing the toilet. After the first week they got a camping toilet, but [son] refused to use this. Fiona found it difficult too with her broken arm.

#### Emily's story

After the February quake, Emily and her family in Aranui were without power, water and toilets. Emily explains how "it took ages for the power to come back on...and all we had were candles... torches... and I remember somebody at [her partner's] job lived on a farm... and he was bringing in water – all we had to do was give him the containers and he would full them up and bring them home".

There was nowhere for Emily's family to shower. Everyone in the neighbourhood was in the same boat. "We all just had bottles". Emily filled a large bucket with bottled water that they

used to clean themselves. "That was the only bucket that you were able to get water out of to have a wash in... It was easier to wash the kids like that... because they were little".

They had been finding it hard to get access to a portaloos "and we had been doing it in a bucket – we used the shed". They cut up one of the chairs, a plastic picnic chair, and had the bucket inside that with the plastic bag. They buried the waste, "even though they said we could put them in the bins". But the City Council was not collecting the bins regularly. Emily didn't feel that it was very hygienic to keep burying their waste "even though we were putting it in bags". Other streets had already got portaloos at this stage; there were no portaloos on their street at all. They kept ringing up to ask when they would be getting a portaloos "and then we thought we'll drive around and see if the other streets were like our street. We saw that every house in some streets had a portaloos... And then we suddenly realised that we were going to be last on the list". When they eventually got a portaloos, after "months and months", it was at the far end of the street "around the corner" and it was for the whole street to use.

At this stage they were using chemical toilets that they had been given. Emily felt that this "was really stupid because you didn't even have a container... They were giving out these chemical toilets", but there was nowhere close by to dispose of them. "You had to go all the way to Hampshire Street to empty them and then carry it all the way back again". In the end they put the waste from the chemical toilet in the car and drove it round to the waste container. After a while they could partially use their toilet, "but you could only pee in there, no solids [were] allowed to go in there". It was nearly a year before they had "a real good flush" again.

Emily was annoyed about how the Council kept leaving them out. "It was like we didn't exist... the Council would say 'what number do you live in?'" The Council put Emily and her neighbour's units "down as one house". Emily rang the Council to ask for a closer area to dispose of waste, but despite delivering a chemical toilet to her, they told her they didn't have her address registered in their system.

"Outside the golf club they pitched a tent in the end where you could go and have showers. And at the stadium on Pages Road you could go there and they had showers and somewhere to do your washing... and then some of the schools had water so you could go there... and then we had the Army who used to come and put on sausage sizzles and hand out bread in the park – which was lovely - and they were giving out OA bread and things like that. All these people, even primary schools, were sending love boxes – and we've still got them because we didn't want to use any of the stuff that they gave us... we've still got them today". The love boxes had "creams and toothpaste and tooth brushes in them." They didn't use them because they wanted to keep them as a memento. "The kids wrote to all these schools which sent love boxes and thanked them".

Emily knew about "a list of places you could go where they were handing out meat and things like that". However, she thought that handing out "basic things" like cans and bread would have been more useful. "We didn't have refrigeration or power, so there was no pointing getting bulk meat or anything like that". Emily would "just buy things once and that would last us". She purchased "mainly bread, tea and milk", but she also made sure they had enough fruit.

Ella had a friend who lived 45 minutes away, so she went over to her place quite a lot and used her shower and "hung out" with her. "We got our power put on pretty quickly, but water was more of an issue. We had maybe five or six days without power, but we had like two weeks without water."

After making it home to Woolston in February, Kristy and the children "hung out" with their neighbours. They had a camp stove and were able to boil water. The camping chairs came out and cups of tea were made. They ate a barbeque provided by the neighbours. Her partner went to clear up the broken crockery and glasses at their house, whilst Kristy kept the children at the neighbours. They returned to their own home at around 6pm.

Ellenor, who is in her late 70s and lives in Southshore, cannot recall the exact sequence but she does remember receiving food parcels from St Luke's, the church she attended. Her neighbour, who she had not seen much of before, came over to see if Ellenor needed anything.

In New Brighton, the Grace Vineyard Church both supplied food and water and acted as a drop in centre. Central New Brighton School also acted as a welfare centre, and Karen acted as a volunteer there.

Michelle recalls that huge resources flowed into Central New Brighton after the February earthquake. "We had choppers coming in on a daily basis... The army was there and the fire department delivering food.... The Roy Stokes Hall opened its doors... and they gave the community everything they could... They gave out hand sanitizers and baby UHT milk so you did not have to worry about keeping it in the fridge... Every time we went down there for something, you would always come away with a box full of things. There was always someone there trying to give you something." Michelle felt guilty about getting more than she needed. "I felt that there were people who needed it more than we did".

She remembers on one occasion, about ten days after the quake that a man stopped with a truck at the end of the drive way. He had a van full of water and asked her if they needed any. She said that they did and asked why he had not been there before. He said the street did not look as if there was a lot of damage, so he had not been there before. It was so good to get fresh water from him. He also provided some lollies to Michelle's little boy – he was very rapt.

One day a woman drove down from Kaikoura with her husband and a load of fresh baking. "She was just giving out plastic plates full of home-made biscuits – things most of us hadn't seen for such a long time. The absolute kindness of strangers was the most amazing thing in the world. People that didn't know us from anywhere else, but they were prepared to give us the shirt off their back to make sure we were OK. It really was incredible... It had broken so many hearts and it had hurt so bad..."

Nicki's friend had an artesian well up the road that continued flowing. The neighbourhood was well served with water. Rana also had plenty of water, as she had stockpiled it after the September earthquake. Adele recalled: "Our lives became, where the day was spent getting water and that sort of thing, like the olden days".

June recalls it as a very difficult time: "And it was the not being able to shower, being dirty for so long, and honestly just having to poo in the buckets that was really, really - just no." This situation went on for weeks and June found it very difficult, "pooing in

bags because we couldn't use the toilets...it just killed me really. I had had enough, inside I was just like... I just want to get out of here”.

Gina rang up Work and Income. She said they were "brilliant", and gave her \$500 that was used for petrol, buying essential items and food. Sourcing water was important. There was no power, water or sewage at her mother's house. Gina found an artesian water source. Water was being delivered in trucks but Gina preferred not to stand in queues and listen to all the stories. The Māori wardens came knocking and gave out a box of water. There was a food box from the church, food from Ruth Dyson plus dog food and Easter eggs. Apart from that:

No one offered us food. We were told we lived in the wrong neighbourhood to get free food. We got told to go to Aranui to get food and when we got there we got told to f... off. By the people who live there... a lot of people who live in the area. They had seven boxes of food, we had nothing. What the hell?

Gina recalls it was like the survival of the fittest. Aranui, New Brighton and Wainoni were getting food for 6-8 months after the earthquake. Trucks would come out and people would give them food all the time, including fruit and vegetables. When they were handing out the free heaters, Bromley and Linwood got nothing, the others got it all. "It was quite disheartening, sitting in Bromley, the area fairly munted, and no help."

Nippy remembered a van arriving in the street giving out bakery items. She was aware that further over in Aranui lots of free food was being handed out, including hot meals, but “they never came to see us”.

Losing her job after the February quake changed everything for Nicki, as she has only been able to get the odd cleaning job since then. Her house in New Brighton is draughty and cracked. Nicki's son contracted pneumonia in winter of 2012 because of the damp and cold in her house. Nicki also noticed that other people contracted pneumonia following the earthquakes, which she attributes to cold draughty houses and the dust from liquefaction. Nicki was disgusted with Work and Income who would give with one hand and take away with the other.

"I won't even go to Work and Income. I feel like such a loser, a beggar, when I go there and I've never ever gone there for help. Then I had to go there for power bills consecutively, like all the time, and they wouldn't give me money in the end. So I said, 'well give me a food grant and I'll use my food money to pay my power' ... or else you'd have to use all your money and then go there... they didn't want to help really. Like it was all about, 'well you should be organising your finances better...' It was costing me a fortune in petrol and then I'd have to queue up for petrol - things like that".

The financial outlay from the earthquakes has been huge for Nicki, and at the time of her interview, she is only starting to get out of debt. Her increased expenses included damage to her car from the state of the roads. Since the September 2010 quake, Nicki has had to replace five tyres and the car suspension needed repair. Heating costs were up as the house was draughty and cold. Nicki has had five \$700 power bills and Red Cross helped by contributing \$100 towards each bill.

Alia spent the night of the February 22 earthquake with some of her children and her daughter's young baby at Burnside High School. On their arrival, around 10pm, they found that beds had been provided, "like a mattress, everything and food". They spent one night in the emergency shelter but there was, "too much people around the big hall - we slept all in the same place and I was very worried and uncomfortable". They went the next afternoon to collect some "clothes, food and some stuff for the baby". Alia then contacted her husband, who had stayed at their home (there was no-one to look after their house) - "everything was open, the doors", and explained that she needed to come home. Alia's husband thought that she didn't "need to come home" because there was a lot of liquefaction around the streets and their house in their area, "lots of water". There was no power and no water and Alia's husband thought it would be very hard. He encouraged her to do her shopping at Burnside, as all the streets in the eastern suburbs were closed due to the flooding.

As a result, the second night Alia and some of the family went to some relatives who lived in Burnside. "They contacted us and they said, 'because of the baby, you can come and spend one night here'".

Many organisations and people were involved in digging up the liquefaction that covered streets in the east. Rana's family benefitted from the strenuous efforts of the Student Volunteer Army which removed the liquefaction from their section onto Bexley Road. Christine had two lots of assistance with liquefaction. The New Zealand Army came and helped with shovelling liquefaction and a passer-by saw that their front gates had been buckled shut, so helped open them. She still remembers it as a trying time, stuck in their house looking after two large dogs, surrounded by liquefaction and her husband with his mobility issues. Then people from the local Grace Vineyard Church in New Brighton came and helped dig the liquefaction out of Christine's garage. Everything inside was absolutely wrecked, so they had to take photos of it all for insurance, and then there was the need to obtain valuations and submit claims.

Kristy found it harder to get help. She had to organise and pay for her move herself. She went to Work and Income and found the paperwork and queues very stressful. She turned to the Salvation Army Hope Centre for help. They loaned her money to pay a bond for the Linwood Park Village temporary accommodation. Kristy paid with her own money for the trailers and storage for their possessions.

They came to repair Gina's mother's house in 2013. The family got access to temporary housing, but while the insurance covered rent, it did not cover the bond. "We were lucky. They applied to some place and got the bond for us. And at the end we were able to keep the bond - covered our power and other costs". They were told it would take five weeks, but the house was finished in two weeks. They were told the repair was finished but Gina saw huge problems. A friend came in and identified numerous areas that were not right. "Why wasn't this done, why wasn't that done?"

Nellie's house in Waltham was a mess after the February earthquake. But "when I walked into my place, it was clean, my neighbour Marty had cleaned it up". Nellie found him sitting over at the neighbours. "He had actually been in my place when the

second shake hit. He had a gash on his head from tripping over, and I said to him, 'Did you clean up my house?' and he said, 'Yes', and I said, 'What did you do that for?' and he said, 'Do you want me to chuck it back on the floor?'

She was not receiving much help from the property managers to make her place safe. So a social worker organised for the New Zealand Army to put some reinforcing in to hold the ceiling in place. "It is like held, but more is starting to come away now". Nellie has been through three washing machines since living in the house. "Washing machines do not like the house", she smiles. She does not like asking Work and Income for help, as "they do not make you feel very good when you walk in there". Nellie does not like reaching out for help. "For me I am the one who should be doing the hard work".

## Housing

Six days after the February earthquake, Gina's street became accessible again. She went to start collecting her belongings, and borrowed a utility vehicle. She arrived back on day seven and the landlord was there: "He was such a sneaky bloke. He said right you need to sign this to get your bond back. Then he started cleaning the house out, and I said hey, that's my stuff - I'm still living here. The next day I was on the phone with the tenancy people. On 3 March I returned to find the house was absolutely empty".

All Gina's belongings, including the children's beds, a piano, a freezer and other stuff had been removed by the landlord. She now has up to seven years to pursue the landlord for her bond and damages. She says she will probably need it.

I haven't done anything yet. Mum bought the kids new beds, my sister's buying me a freezer... I just have to deal with anything else. That's my drama I have to take him to court for my bond, and at least \$1500 for the other items.

Gina thought there was a lot of damage to that house near the AMI Stadium. She thought that if the earthquake had gone on for thirty more seconds, it would have fallen down. Gina knows that the landlord has been paid out for the property, but it has not been repaired. When she went past five months later, she saw that he had people living in the house again! She was concerned that they were not safe.

Since the February quakes she has been living with her mum in Bromley. At first they lived in the garage and came inside during the day, and cooked on the gas barbeque. Gina notes that Philipstown was a forgotten suburb. "There were no toilets, not one, for three months. People were pissing and pooping in their yards."

The family now live in her mum's house and the garage is full of Gina's stuff. There were lots of beautiful things broken in her mother's house, such as glassware and other things. Gina cleaned it out and took photos for the insurance. They eventually paid up, but it took ages.

Rana was renting a house in Bexley Road, and arrived home to a shambles. Everything had come out of the cupboards, fridge-freezer and what was not bolted down had tipped over. A big rimu bookcase near the doorway had completed a 360° turn and landed on top of Rana's mother giving her bruises all down one side. Brick work on the house had come apart, the chimney had snapped in two and the house had tilted to the back warping the front door which would not close. A door chain was used to keep the house secure. "I was fully aware of the flooding and knew we would not be going anywhere, so proceeded to clean the house and put everything back in the hope of everything looking normal for the kids".

Rana had plenty of gas for the BBQ and had been stockpiling water since September. No portaloos were delivered immediately, so they adopted a regime of urine in the toilet bowl and solids in a plastic bag. The next day she talked to her letting agent, and received the first of many negative replies. On the Friday, six people arrived to inspect the house and it was red-stickered. The family had one hour to get things out.



They packed what they could: irreplaceable photograph albums, some personal items, plus the cat, and went to stay with Rana's mother. "We, the five of us, were in Mum's one and half bedroom flat in Woolston. I cried and cried and cried". They were to be there until mid April 2011. Rana was banned by her insurance company from returning to the rented house. In April, the house was looted. For two weeks she had been trying to get storage for her belongings. There was no assistance from her insurance company, although storage was part of her policy.

The insurance company paid her out the sum of \$6,547 for all the items taken. Rana takes up the story:

On 20 July 2011 the scenario took a dramatic twist. I received a text from the renting agency JR regarding my belongings still at Bexley Road. I emailed the insurance company and planned to get back to JR. But next thing they emailed to say they had spoken with the insurance company. Consequently JR advised that because I had been paid out they could do as they pleased with my possessions. JR did not have any right to my belongings - after all insurance only paid out on those items which had been stolen in April. How could they have given her the authority to dispose of the remaining contents when I was not allowed to go to get them? JR also stated that EQC had rung them and informed them they could dispose of my contents as they had also paid me out – NOT. Hello! I had not spoken with EQC at that point but they rang that afternoon and contradicted the letting agent's alleged conversation with EQC.

Rana's claim was still being processed by EQC. There is still no resolution to this matter in 2013. The net effect was the loss of most of Rana's furniture and furnishings, and only a tiny payout. Rana now lives in a close community of six units in Woolston. She is grateful for her lovely neighbours and the care they have for each other.

Dee's Christchurch City Council flats in Sumner had been sealed up, leaving Dee in a "sort of limbo". For one day residents were permitted access for about one hour to get clothes to wear. After six weeks, Dee was offered an upstairs flat in Papanui, close to the mall. She accepted the offer and moved in. The Council organised for the Salvation Army to shift Dee's furniture from the Sumner property. Dee insisted on giving them a donation as she was "just overwhelmed with what they did". It took her a long time to settle into the property, but she came to like it eventually.

Once she got home to New Brighton after the February earthquake, Karen went immediately to check on their neighbour, who is elderly. "All she had happen was a cup and a lamp fall over and a big set of drawers". Karen thought, "Oh perhaps it is not as bad as we thought!" However, walking into their home, "It was as if a bomb had gone off. There was food out of the cupboards, there was stuff everywhere". There was a lot of flooding and liquefaction. The liquefaction started at the corner of the street and finished at their house; it included "us, neighbours, and the school".

Visually the damage to the house did not "look too bad, but there were a lot of problems with the foundations, structural stuff... We could not open the back door, a

slab of concrete had lifted up; all our pipes are cracked". The toilet malfunctioned and "it still does not work properly!"

Mary's house in Woolston "was quite munted" and she went to stay at a friend's place, putting her property into her garage. She moved between Christchurch and Picton, and her friend got another boarder. Mary moved into a sleepout for \$200 per week. She ended up applying to Housing New Zealand and was allocated her present home in Shirley.

Sina ended up essentially homeless after the landlord gave her notice. "I desperately wanted a place, I was looking for three weeks and I went to the Tenancy Tribunal for help and they gave me another 21 days". The Tribunal said that they could stay and look for another house, but the landlord wrote and said they had to move out. Sina phoned the 0800 help line and said, "We did not have a place to go to... I was so frustrated, so stressed". She thought that if she was on her own she could go to the refuge, but she was not "going anywhere without my boys". The situation was serious. Sina lost her bond of \$900 for two weeks rent. She went to mediation, but did not get it back on the grounds that she had not removed all of the rubbish. She had paid for people to clean the house and take the rubbish, "but they can't have done it".

They moved into a home with another family in Opawa as they had nowhere to go. They had left the possessions that were not damaged in the garage of the house in Waltham. The family in Opawa offered to collect these things and bring them to their home. Over time items went missing and Sina became more and more distrustful of the family. It was a long six months that they boarded with them. She had known them beforehand as a volunteer who had helped them in court. She paid her board and cooked meals for herself and the boys. She preferred her own food and style of cooking. She got into her own place eventually, but had to move out after the December quake as the house was due to be fixed and more damage was caused. It was a rented house and there had been a lot of uncertainty over its repairs and where Sina and the boys would live. "I am very poor", says Sina and this was very disturbing for her to cope with. When she talked with EQC, they told her that the landlord will pay for temporary accommodation, but the landlord told Sina he was going to fix the house and sell it (Sina's story is continued below)

Adele's family moved out of Avonside in November. She was the last one on the list to move from the Housing New Zealand Avonside area. She was offered a house in St Martins. Adele thought "a state house in St Martins!" she was thrilled. "I felt like crying I could not believe it". It was situated equally between Cashmere High School and Christchurch South Intermediate and Opawa Primary School. Adele is grateful that she has a Housing New Zealand home as the rents have become so exorbitant in Christchurch. "I could not afford to rent a private house. A friend is paying \$400 a week for a house in Wainoni and it is not flash".

Emily can see that in her neighbourhood close to Wainoni Park "they are pulling down the houses... this whole area is owned by Housing New Zealand and so they've already started pulling the houses down here and all these two storeyed ones are going... and the ones across the road, they're going... They are starting down the road here, but they haven't told us what's happening to us yet – nobody's

been around for the last two years actually... They send us round newsletters to tell us which areas are being done right now and that they will get to the eastern suburbs eventually”.

When they came back from Auckland after a brief stay there after the February quake, there was a notice on Emily’s door from Housing New Zealand to say she couldn’t enter her house. Her neighbour had received a similar notice, “but his whole back wall has fallen down and his windows... you could see right through them. In the wintertime he didn’t have any heating or anything so me and my daughter would chase them up”. In response, Housing New Zealand “brought him a heater; they didn’t fix the windows or anything”. Despite the ‘Please don’t enter’ notice, Emily went back into her house.

Emily got tired of living in a damaged home. “Last Christmas I couldn’t stand looking at anything anymore. I said, ‘We are going to enjoy a Christmas... We are going to look like normal people’”. So her partner, Victor, painted the living room for Emily’s Christmas present. They paid for their own paint, because Housing New Zealand hadn’t got round to fixing their house up. Nothing has been fixed in the house yet. “We can’t put anything on the walls because when you go to put your hand on it, it crackles... So all the brickwork; or whatever is inside the walls; is cracked... We can’t use the shower because ... water drips down from somewhere and floods it”

The very week of the earthquake, Julia had just paid a bond on a Housing New Zealand rental place in Aldershot Street. The move had to be deferred until March. It was a long six weeks. There were eight children and three adults living in the one home. "It was a real house full... how we did not kill each other I will never know. I think we have got a lot closer since then".

Roman gets a lot of comfort from her family. "It is good to have a family, a big sister and a younger brother... We cook and talk, having our coffee ceremony. We talk about our families, our mum and dad, we try to forget, we laugh. It makes you wonder would I want to bring a child into this world. Don't want anyone to suffer..."

She says that the earthquakes have made her start to think about so many things. "It makes me scared to get married and have children". At church Roman sees the young children crying and trembling with the aftershocks. "We see their faces, I wonder if I would be strong enough to have children and see them cry".

Christine’s house in Bexley was damaged after the September earthquake, and was eventually red-zoned. She was eventually able to rent a property over the fence from her daughter. Her sick husband was able to return to Christchurch once his health improved, and they became much more settled.

Like many of the others, the overwhelming experience of Caroline was of uncertainty over their property and their future:

I feel like I have been trapped here because I could not now sell the place because of the uncertainty hanging over the property's future. I don't want to live here. I just want to get on with other things. I am very, very angry how the

place is being run. I am concerned about a lack of leadership at present. There are people really suffering.

Whether living in rental accommodation or homes they owned, the people in this study have had multiple problems getting and keeping safe, secure and relatively undamaged roofs over their heads. The extent of the damage to homes and community is further discussed in the next chapter.

## Damage

There are always little reminders about the quakes with the street being flooded again or a truck going past or something being dropped on the floor and it rolls. (Karen, New Brighton mother of school-aged children)

Fiona, who lives in Avondale with her husband and teenage son, acutely feels the impact of the earthquake on this part of the city. "I've worked out actually that since I was five I've lived in four houses and three of them are about to be demolished – one has actually gone – so it's quite weird really. You sort of expect to move out of homes you know and then go back and see what's happened and what people have done with them ... and very shortly I won't have much to show for living in the east most of my life." She thinks that "grieving for the community has been one of the hardest things."

Along with two other neighbours, Dee went for a drive around Sumner to assess the extent of the damage. "It was dreadful. There were great rocks on the road around the area close to Truro Place" (where Dee's flat was located). Dee was in a block of four Christchurch City Council flats in Captain Thomas Courts set back from the road. "One of my friends who had a front flat had a rock fall through the roof, she was in the house at the time, she was so lucky." This friend now lives in Nelson. Dee lamented the loss of community she experienced at Captain Thomas Courts. "It has disconnected a lot of friends because they were older, a lot are in care now - all over the place - and we kept in touch for a while but....it gets too hard".

In the time after the February quakes, Michelle went to a number of funerals. "Dr Angus Binnie was my family doctor... He had been my doctor for a while and a couple of years before the quake we had ended up with another doctor, Dr Alan Sinclair. When the building went down, he went down and we lost him and a lot of his wonderful staff at The Clinic." The Clinic had only recently moved into the CTV building on 10 January because their premises in Gloucester Street became unsafe after the 2010 Boxing Day quake.

Michelle found it difficult to believe that a modern building like that could just fall down. "Every day there were more and more stories that just broke your heart and made you want to cry. I remember reading about this little five month old and the TV had fallen on him... In the ensuing craziness of the quake he died en route to the hospital. It was not just what you were suffering; it was what everyone else was suffering. It was just crazy, it truly was."

Alia has seen the gradual destruction of her Bromley neighbourhood. The house next door was burned down by arsonists around four to five months after the February earthquake. The burned house sat there for about six weeks before the Council came to demolish it. Soon after, the house on the other side was demolished due to earthquake damage. Two households returned after the earthquake and Alia thinks around twenty households left the immediate area. Most of the houses are empty and are likely to be demolished. Living near the beach she continues to be terrified of tsunami and she also feels isolated from the Afghani community who mainly live in the north west of Christchurch.

Ellenor also finds the possibility of a tsunami frightening. "It was really bad in the east". A number of the earthquakes were centred "right here under the sea off shore". Ellenor said this concerned people in the New Brighton and Rocking House Road area. "The buses would not go down Rockinghorse Road "for months and months they stopped short at Caspian Street which must have made it difficult for those residents".

Across the road from Ellenor, the pub and the dairy closed and "the Bridge Street shops have all gone". Although Ellenor did not use these shops a lot, it was convenient having the dairy over the road. The nearest shops are now at New Brighton or Pak 'n Save at Wainoni.

She had been hoping her house would be zoned red, to give her a new start, but it went green and her house will be rebuilt, but not for several years. It is a long wait for someone in their seventies. "I may not live that long".

Nicki described what it was like living in a broken suburb, isolated from her family:

You just don't think of these sorts of things. There was no money in the eftpos machines because everyone had gone mental and taken money out. There was no petrol at the service stations and all the road cones. Stores were closed because of damage - all supermarkets were closed. At Eastgate Mall, the wall fell down. New Brighton Countdown was a mess, someone died in there. And The Palms (shopping centre) was damaged and closed. There was nothing, we had nothing. It was like a war zone.

Overall, Nicki believes that her house in New Brighton is solid and takes comfort in that. It moves but, because it is wooden, it is safe. However, all the frames around her windows have cracked and everything rattles and shakes with wind and passing cars. Nicki's house has dropped in some places and risen in others. Her son has noticed the changes in the floor level in his bedroom and wanted to fix it. The house is bit like a boat and they feel every little jolt.

James and Violet and the children stayed in Rolleston for two weeks. It was during this time that they were told that their Lyttelton house was red stickered. "That sucked. I did not sleep for five nights. I was living on adrenalin, cigarettes and coffee".

Violet kept in touch with Lyttelton neighbours and tried to keep life as normal as possible for the children. It took 18 months for the house to become white stickered. A lot of tests were carried out on the land as the engineers were not sure whether it would "roll down the hill". In July 2012 it became green stickered. However, the house was not habitable. "The roof had collapsed, the windows had caved in and there was no courtyard. It had snowed and rained on it throughout the winter". Eventually they replaced the roof, but the house was in need of fixing.

Violet could not go back to the house for a long time. Her husband "did all the clean up". Violet did not visit the house until the end of 2011. "It was really shocking; everything was wet, all the furniture, clothes, and bed linen. There was mould, it was

stuffed, there were mushrooms growing in the clothes... everything that we had cared for".

She is ambivalent about her home and says "part of me wants to go back and part of me doesn't... I fell in love with the house the way it was". However, she knows that they will return at some stage, to see how comfortable they feel living in it, and living on the hills again. "If we don't like it, we will sell, and go and live on flat land somewhere".

The February earthquake produced a split from floor to ceiling in Tinks's bedroom in Waltham, and from ceiling to floor in her daughter's bedroom. "There was a gap about five centimetres. I could see through into the guy's lounge next door, and she could see into the room next door to her. Yes, there was a hole, about that big, by the door to get into the unit, where liquefaction come through, and we were lucky really that was the only damage."

Aranui, where June lived, was a "blackout area; we were on this side of town so we didn't have power for a long time". June and her children went to live with her mother in Avonside. "I am a single mother ... and I was not going to be by myself". The Avonside house was right next to the red zone. June thought that the area "was even worse" and that her mother should have moved, but "she wasn't going to go anywhere!" June said her mother's Avonside home has "holes [and] she had bricks coming through the ceiling... but she's still there". At the time of the interview the house had "been looked at, but there's still a couple of holes there."

The constant earthquakes affected Adele. "I was so tired and thinking I can't cope with this again, so tired of having to keep it together". Adele dreaded the liquefaction. "It drives you crazy; it gets in all your wash when you hang it out, it is all a mess". In the June earthquakes, although the power was only off for one day, the local streets were badly damaged. By the end of 2011 hardly anyone was living in Adele's Avonside neighbourhood. It was declared a red zone so a lot of people had had to leave. "It was not ideal... All the pretty old houses around Avonside were ruined, our playground park was gone". It was tough.

Being in a Housing New Zealand rented house, Adele "felt in a better position" than those people who had owned their own home and lived in it a long time, as it was harder for them to move. Adele knew that she would have to move at some stage, but she had told HNZ she was not "in a rush, that priority has to go to others".

After staying with a friend for a few months, Nellie and her family decided to move back to their badly damaged rental accommodation in Waltham. "It wasn't too bad", Nellie says about returning home. The chimney was taken down so "that was cool". Mahara and the other children slept in the front of the house in her brother's room "because it was so close to the front door... so we could go straight out" and, as Nellie says, "it was a big door frame, so it was protecting us".

Nellie's daughter remembers that they packed a "whole lot of bags" that they left at the front door in case of a quick get away. "We had bottles filled, a first aid kit, torches ... everything sat at the front door so that all we had to do is chuck everything out into the big yard" adds Nellie. "We were living like that for quite a long

time". Her daughter, who was present at the interview, describes "sleeping with jerseys on, and shoes by the bed or sometimes we would sleep with shoes on just in case".

They lived in a tent in the garden for about three months. They all felt safer out in the tent. "I kept the tent a lot tidier than I kept the house" smiles Nellie. As winter approached "hard and fast", she knew that it was better for the children to move back into the house. However, the power bills were huge, one was nine hundred dollars. It was impossible to heat the house with so many gaps in it and it is not insulated. "The house is so big and tall, and the doors do not all shut, so it is impossible to heat it". The floor level is raised and doors will not close. One window does not close properly and there is a two inch gap at the bottom of it. Nellie was told to stuff the gap with a towel.

The landlord has never done any repairs to the property. In the recent high winds two of the roof panels came loose. Nellie's property managers told her to ring the fire brigade to repair them. They were shocked at the state of the house. "What are you living in? Has this house ever had repairs?" they asked. They could see the holes in the ceiling. Things remain difficult for Nellie in 2013:

But now my home is no longer safe, it is costing me too much and my kids no longer live with me. It is not a situation I want to be in... All I want is a decent home... one without cracks; one that the ceiling is not going to cave in; one that is not going to cost the earth for power. After the children moved out, some of the ceiling came down. It is quite big chunks of plaster, I was so grateful they weren't there".

Going back to her home in Kaiapoi after the September quake, Treena was shocked to see all of the damage. She describes how "the street was just absolutely flooded, all brown and yuck. It was empty; the town was deserted like a ghost town". They parked the car on the street because they couldn't get up the driveway. The children stayed in the car while Treena went into the house. It was on a lean and the two back door steps had disappeared, with the driveway now level with the house. Inside the house, Treena was confronted with an awful smell which made her dry retch. Some of her belongings were wet and the kitchen was leaking. Its appearance was as if there had been a robbery.

Jacinta's pre-earthquake plan had been to do up her house in New Brighton, perhaps get a boarder in to help pay for the work, and then sell it off, as she only has a small mortgage on the house. But because of the quake, she doesn't want to spend any money on the house, even just for cosmetic repairs. She is in no hurry to take a boarder as her son is currently living with her, although not paying rent. The kitchen needs to be fixed and there is a tarpaulin over the roof which has started to leak. The weather and sun are eroding the house. Jacinta's ex-husband wanted to give her a birthday present, so Jacinta asked him to fix her roof in the kitchen. He hasn't been seen since she made the request!

While she was gardening, Jacinta discovered that the foundation of the house had crumbled, more than anticipated. Reading a newsletter from EQC, she found out that there is an option to be paid out, instead of repairing the house, as it is very old



and EQC does not want to be responsible for ongoing leaks. She has been in limbo for the last three years, with a house that is structurally sound and performed well during the earthquakes but needs repairs. "I am aware that the lean-to will collapse, and the artesian well and crumbling foundation does not bode well".

Gina's mother's house needed a huge amount of fixing. The piles needed redoing, the floors were uneven, there were many gaps, ceilings were broken and holes in the roof. Because Gina's mother has some mental health problems, Gina acted as the agent working with EQC and the insurance company. She found the whole process difficult: "The way they do it is so offensive. They tell you what damage your house has, instead of asking you...".

## Struggles with EQC and insurance

The Earthquake Commission, or EQC, was set up by the New Zealand Government after the 1931 Napier earthquake to provide a fund for future natural disasters, by collecting a levy on household insurance. With no major payouts since its inception, the fund was healthy when the Christchurch earthquakes commenced in 2010. Under the rules, the EQC would pay the first \$100,000 of any claim, known as the 'cap', with the insurance companies meeting additional costs.

Late in 2013, an Ombudsman's report revealed huge problems with the EQC's response to Official Information requests, which reflected a number of fundamental problems in the organisation.<sup>6</sup> Those high-level problems within the organisation were reflected on the ground. In a hugely complex situation, EQC's systems appeared inadequate to deal with claims, assessments, multiple earthquakes, negotiations with other insurance companies and the provision of good information to clients. By 2013, the women in this study expected to have certainty over their situation. Some have had their houses fixed, and are happy. Some are fixed but unhappy, with several facing months or years of disputation. Others still have no agreement on any aspect of their claim, and others still have years to wait until their houses can be rebuilt.

Further complicating factors include the housing situation in Christchurch. Many have had to move house on multiple occasions, adding to their stress. Some have lived with their families in garages and sleepouts. Some, whose stories are told above, have lived in severely damaged rental accommodation, and are concerned that landlords are 'pocketing the cash' from EQC pay outs and continuing to lease out substandard accommodation.

With so many aggravating factors, it is not surprising that many of the women in this study feel themselves to be at war with EQC and their insurance providers. As Adele put it, "Insurance is so difficult and confusing... it makes me feel for people".

There are many points at which relationships between the women in this study and EQC became difficult. Nippy's story provides an illustration of the multiple problems, relating to the small house she owns in Aranui. While the house received little damage in the September quake, in subsequent quakes, commencing with Boxing Day, there was significant damage. The February quake caused huge damage inside the house, which she cleaned up using Janola. She got the yard broom and just shovelled everything, food, broken bits, up together and threw it all away. She didn't think about insurance, and later some of her claim was denied because she did not have evidence of what had been broken. "Insurance was just the furthest

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<sup>6</sup> On 19 December 2013 The Chief Ombudsman released a joint report with the Privacy Commissioner on EQC's compliance with its obligations under the Official Information Act and the Privacy Act when responding to requests for information from its Canterbury customers. See Information Faultlines: Assessing EQC Information in Canterbury [http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/ckeditor\\_assets/attachments/300/information\\_fault\\_lines\\_-\\_accessing\\_eqc\\_information\\_in\\_canterbury.pdf?1387406458](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/ckeditor_assets/attachments/300/information_fault_lines_-_accessing_eqc_information_in_canterbury.pdf?1387406458)

thing from my mind, at the end of the day, it's just stuff". Several other participants had the same problem.

Her second issue with EQC was about broken services. Her approach can be summarised in the following comment:

Insurance was just a waste of time. I didn't get to see anyone and half the time they didn't know what they were talking about anyway - it was too big for them so you just called your mates in. If we had waited for them, we would have been floating off down the street!

The Red Cross sent plumbers in to fix broken water pipes under Nippy's house. Later ("things happened gradually", she notes), she began to have a bad sewage problem, waking up one day to find her house "surrounded by poo". She rang the emergency number and was told there was a two week wait for urgent repairs. Unable to wait, she called in a company called 'Mr Pooman', who fixed the problem. She had to pay cash and was eventually reimbursed by EQC.

She had more problems, which remained unfixed, and in the end she got a friend to come and have a look, who diagnosed that the connection between the house and the main sewer in the road was broken. Eventually (after much swearing, Nippy recalls), the problem was fixed.

Her third issue related to her house. The house had fallen off its foundations, and is now only partially habitable. One side is being held up by a brace. Her house is going to be rebuilt, which essentially means a new house on her own land, but she may have to wait until 2016 or beyond until that happens. In the meantime, she and her daughter sleep in the lounge, as two bedrooms are unable to be occupied due to mould and damp.

Nippy's house is a 'rebuild'; it will be built new from the ground up. She can redesign her house and garage (both have to come down), which is exciting. She wondered about trying to build a flat on her section also. She is worried that something may prevent the rebuild. "It is five or six years after the fact. They said 2015/16 a good couple of years ago. I am trusting them it's going to happen. I mean if we have another disaster.... "

### **Criticism of EQC**

Nicki is very critical of EQC. She believes that their claims systems and processes are open to graft and corruption, "people who had connections or money were having extra repair work done, and people were claiming damage as earthquake damage that was obviously not earthquake related". She says she has seen examples of this kind of behaviour in her work as a cleaner.

She also believed that a large amount of time and money was being wasted on the assessment processes, and describes her own experience as an example:

I thought, yeah, they're here, they're big guys you know and for about half an hour I sat in here waiting, waiting, waiting, and they finally came in and they

walked round like they've as much time in the world and I think, tick, tick, tick, you know, money, money, money. There's no structure, they're not tough on these people, but they're tough on the people who need the work done... I see the dollars ticking up... Nobody's keeping a check on these people. They're getting paid ridiculous hourly rates. It doesn't sit right with me"

Karen has found the uncertainty in dealing with EQC and her insurance company to be the main issue. Karen has spent many hours on the phone with EQC "pushing for what I believe is right. We do not care who fixes our house, we just want it done properly".

There are ongoing problems with her house in New Brighton and with EQC and a lot of uncertainty. Her partner would like to leave Christchurch, however Karen does not want to. The house has been put into TC 3 Category 9. This is an indication of the sort of foundations that will be needed. In late 2013 she said: "It is getting too close to Christmas to stress about all this". All of the house issues have been a problem for Karen as she has been dealing with them as her partner, Peter, has had his own work issues to sort out as a result of fewer employees since the quakes. Recently EQC have settled on the over cap payment for the house. However, there is a hold up with the land decision.

There have been other frustrations for Karen and her family. At one stage they were told by EQC that they could not replace their oven that was damaged in the quake until Fletchers had seen it. They went out and bought a new oven with their own money, "What were we meant to do? Not cook?"

For Emily A, who is now also living in a house she owns in New Brighton, the problem has been inconsistency. Emily felt that EQC have been rather inconsistent with the information they have provided, but she has tried to keep them informed about her movements. The next stage could be a cash settlement, as the damage to her little house has been estimated as under the \$15,000 threshold. Fortunately she has the support of a builder friend to help her through this assessment process.

Jacinta, another New Brighton resident, is reasonably content to let EQC take its time, but a leak in the roof might force her to take action. She wants to rebuild on her damaged section and stay in the area, as she feels it is very safe and she has friends there. She is hoping for action soon. She received a call from the Christchurch City Council research unit and they asked what would improve her life. She answered "a call from EQC would make it better" - that would make the biggest change in her life.

#### **Under attack: Rana's story**

Prior to the earthquakes, Rana was a City Council employee in the Tuam Street car park and living in rental accommodation at the time of the February quake. She has lost her job, her home, her income and, she fears, her reputation. In September 2011 Rana answered a call from an EQC assessor who wished to see her. She relayed her story to her about her belongings being sold by those managing the rental property which she had been forced to leave (see above). As a result, she was investigated by staff from Corporate Risk:

I had to get a signed declaration from a Justice of the Peace stating what I had told the agencies was true. Not once has my story changed as I was there but EQC, JR (property company) and Vero have all come back with different statements and sequence of events I am now being told I abandoned everything. Vero have more or less stated I have stolen everything and according to Vero, JR and EQC plus the Corporate Risk investigator I am unstable. If I am unstable it is with all that I have been through - what they have created.

She found out she was considered unstable via a Privacy Act request she made to see her documentation. Ironically the aforementioned EQC assessor was the subject of a media driven enquiry as to her suitability as an employee, as a member of a family group from Hamilton questionably employed by EQC.

As a Christchurch City Council staff member, Rana continued to be paid until April 2011 when work resumed, albeit a different duty. After the quake the children became stressed which in turn created distress for Rana. This necessitated her taking sick leave until May 2011. "It was so hard the children seeing me crying but what brought me to my senses was the Japanese earthquake. I had to pull myself together". Rana initially started back at work four hours a day but lost her job in September 2011.

I am actually emotionally wrought after all this given the blatant lies that all these companies have stated. I cry all the time, have attended counselling, started all over again setting up home and have financial stress. I still have to pay insurance for \$50,000 worth of contents I no longer have. I keep trying to change insurance companies but keep getting knocked back as I am close to the centre of town. How do they work that out? I am in the process of taking JR to the Tenancy Tribunal, with the assistance of the Community Law Office, but really feel it is a waste of time.

Rana did what she was ordered to do and that was not to go into her rented home at Bexley Road, even though many others did go in. What was she left with? "I have not been able to go out to work as I am 'quote' unstable which may be true now but that is for the mere fact that what EQC, Vero, JR and Corporate Risk have done and said about me".

Rana believes other people are getting on with their lives but she is in a bind. "I feel there is little progress with everything on the back burner and no one cares about us any more although there are others worse off. I am crying, have weight gain and hot flushes. What I miss the most is my (former) lifestyle and holidays".

### **Interim processes and solutions**

Nicki has had many interim problems dealing with EQC. She cites problems with sewage since February 2011 which were only satisfactorily resolved in 2013. The lights in her house have been flickering and working intermittently since February 2011. An urgent request was put in and nothing happened. She received a payout for the September quake, and used it to get some damaged windows fixed. The windows were then damaged again in February. Now she has just received a letter from EQC requesting that she provide proof that the September 2011 payout work was done or return the money (\$4000) paid out, before EQC will go ahead to start the current repairs. Nicki has no receipts for work done and does not have \$4000.

Caroline is also critical of the processes: "After the quakes I thought NZ would be outstanding in the way it would deal with earthquakes". Caroline is very disappointed about responses to the quakes. She is dismayed by the delays and the lack of

professionalism... "I understand it was a huge event, but there appears to be a lack of interest in what is going on in Christchurch, and how it is being managed".

Adele knows people who have had problems with insurance issues. "It seems a bit wrong to me, that people who have houses that do not need a lot of work done to them, have been done first. They have all new flashily done up homes. I do worry the money is getting wasted on small cracks and others are waiting in badly damaged homes". She reflected: "Insurance is so difficult and confusing... it makes me feel for people".

Christine had good service from EQC both after the September earthquake and subsequently. She also had good dealings with Southern Response regarding her car, which was written off by liquefaction.

It is hard to plan for the future whilst there is so much uncertainty over the repair of homes. Peter and Karen have been told that they will have to vacate their property in New Brighton for a minimum of twenty weeks when it is repaired. Finding somewhere near to the school, the school bus route and Karen's job will not be easy. Karen does not want to stress about insurance and temporary housing searches now, before Christmas. They want a nice uninterrupted Christmas this year for the children.

Time is helping Karen to live with the aftermath of the quakes. "we learn how to live with it... for example we have a little routine with the shower now, we know how long we have got before it floods, and how long before it starts coming up the bathroom sink".

### **Issues around repair**

Caroline lived out a town for a while but returned to Christchurch to oversee house repairs. She received conflicting advice from EQC and her insurer over whether the house was safe to live in. "I was so confused, but then the insurer agreed it was not safe".

Since the quakes Caroline has stayed in fifteen different places. Her negotiations with the insurers and EQC and Fletchers have been frustrating with wildly differing estimates of the extent of the damage to her New Brighton home. "I am disgusted with the EQC; they would drive you up the twist... I went to see a lawyer to try and get some sense as I was told it was under cap... Three years later I have just received notice that I am over cap ... waiting for a decision has been awful". As soon as Caroline was told she was over the \$100,000 cap for repairs, her mood lifted, and she felt she could make plans. Currently she is waiting for AA Insurance to advise her of her options.

Violet, her husband and her young children have also lived in several houses. Her family lived in one house for two years, but had to move out as it was being repaired. They have found another property to rent, and have been assured that they can stay until their own place in Lyttelton is repaired, although there is likely to be a rent increase.

Nellie has now organised all her official papers so that when she has to deal with Work and Income, Inland Revenue or other agencies she is properly prepared. The rent on her property in Waltham has not been lowered, despite the state of disrepair, and there have been no EQC repairs done. The house is in a "mess... I have let it go... there is so much to do there... there are so many problems with it... Most of the time, we try to get out of the house. We don't like being there". Once the children go to school, Nellie leaves and goes to the Waltham Community Cottage.

Gina says that is what the people of Canterbury have had to deal with - being told one thing when the other thing is true. Gina explained that, while her mother's house (where she lives) has been fixed, it still has numerous problems:

I am going through the ombudsman. Since it has been fixed I have toxic black mould growing up in my room and in my daughter's room... we have to bear the cost... Our back wall needs replacing. It will cost a bomb. The earthquake made the bath unsteady, so water has been slopping on the floor, and that now needs replacing....

There were many quality problems with the repairs to the house. Gina was told the repairs only included one coat of paint and a choice of 8 wallpapers, all of them very cheap. The water pressure in the house, which was quite good, is now 'stuffed'. EQC sent a person to look at these issues three months ago. It turned out he was an interior designer. Gina "asked him why has my door moved, the wall moved, why are there gaps, why still cracks... he couldn't answer. In the end ... they are not going to do anything."

So Gina is now beginning to go through an appeals process to get the house properly fixed. She has some advice for others: "If you're fighting EQC - and we learned this the hard way - you've got to have a paper trail, and photographic evidence. Don't let them walk all over you".

### **Dealing with insurance companies**

Violet says that dealing with an insurance company has not been easy. Firstly the insurance company lost their contents claim and denied it. It took until 2012 to be paid out for their contents, and they were able to replace a few things. At the moment, there is a "squabble going on over the damage to the house". The insurance assessor has "been very judgemental. It is as if he thinks that our house was a dump before we moved in and that we did not take care of it". Violet's partner has had to do a lot of work to make it possible to go into the house. All the carpet was so wet that black mould was growing under it and it was hard to breathe inside. He and a neighbour have removed the carpet.

They have had many meetings with the insurance assessors, but they do not feel they have "come a long way, the scope of works has been ongoing for three years, and nothing is concrete yet". They have been told it will cost more than half a million dollars to repair it, as the whole house will have to be lifted, and there is debris and sink holes all over the section to deal with. At one stage, it was intimated it might be a rebuild, but now they are being told that they "could not afford the house if it was a

rebuild... even though it would cost less than the \$635,000 to repair". They have been told that they "should not expect betterment".

Violet became very angry when the assessor told her "you are so lucky you will have a nice new house" and "I felt like slapping him because there was nothing wrong with our house before the quake, it was a beautiful house".

### **Rebuilding**

Ellenor, who lives alone in her home in Southshore, commented that she found the insurance process "anxiety making... and she is glad that it is settled". However, the process had been difficult. The house next door to her is bordered by red zone properties, and all along the Estuary is zoned red. The insurance people and EQC have been "fighting over who owned my claim" for a lengthy time. "The EQC people came and walked around and off they went but the insurance people came and did a really thorough check".

She has been told by the insurance company that it would be \$273,000 and a rebuild but EQC had a different costing. In the last few weeks it has finally been confirmed a rebuild. "This has been anxiety making, and 2015 is a long time to wait so my doctor has written to them explaining my age and heart condition" says Ellenor. Ellenor wants to rebuild in Southshore. She likes the area by the sea and the Estuary.

### **Red zone**

Christine's house in Bexley was red-zoned after the February earthquakes. She and her disabled husband endured four moves before eventually finding a house to purchase in September 2012. She believes their land was under-valued in the payout, but that was true of the whole area.



## The effects on the women

Most of the women in this study insist that they are fine. From day to day, most cope very well and are on top of things. Many look after other people as a matter of course, whether family, friends or neighbours. However, many women spoke about how the earthquakes had affected their lives. These effects included financial problems, health problems, losses of various kinds, loneliness, depression, stress, the intersection between earthquake losses and family illness and death and constant battles against bureaucracy. There is almost a new normal – an acceptance among these participants, that life is difficult and the problems they confront will not be resolved in the short term.

### Health problems

Many of the participants had health problems. Reports of panic attacks were common. Gina has had a lot of difficulties with panic attacks. For a while they were occurring daily. She said that she realised she needed to push herself to get back out into the city, in order for her to do things. Her worst moment was having to go up to the sixth floor of the CERA building (HSBC Tower) to pick up a form, which was terrifying for her. Her attitude now is that she has got a cell phone if anything happens to her, so she's going to be alright. "Just took a long time to realise that."

Gina described how she went to some places but not others. For example she will go to Northlands Mall but not Westfield Mall. She has stopped going into town, and gets everything she needs in the suburbs. She is "really, really scared that we are going to have another one and I am not going to be able to get to my family."

In May 2011, while they were staying in Hackthorne Road, Violet started to get anxiety attacks. She knew that she was feeling a strange sense of being displaced, and, although she was lucky to be alive and was very grateful, she became very anxious. She took stress leave and was looking forward to a mental health day with a good book, a warm drink and a day in bed when the first anxiety attack developed. "I did not recognise it at first; I thought I was having a heart attack".

She rang her partner and asked him to come home. At the same time, she called an ambulance. Violet could not move; she could not breathe; it was as if her body had shut down. "My legs and arms had gone numb with pins and needles; I could not get out of bed. It was terrifying. The ambo guys turned up and started doing all these tests and things. James stood in the corner of the room and watched. I became quite hysterical. My body went into hypothermia as my body temperature had dropped so much, all from anxiety!"

Over the next little while Violet went back to work, but she felt her "body was betraying me. I could be doing something completely normal and relaxing like making tea, and I would have a panic attack without any warning". Violet began to develop a fear of having a panic attack in public, so she could not go to a dairy or a shop or a mall. "There is no way I could go to a mall. I just tried to get through the working week without anyone noticing. I always felt as if the ground was moving and I felt like I would pass out, but I kept trying to hide it at work; it was a horrible time".

Violet began to sleep in her clothes and always made sure there was a "go bag" beside the bed. Sleeping in her clothes lasted for about a year. The anxiety is still there, although Violet "is working on it".

In August 2011, Emily A was preparing to move to Auckland. Most of the house was packed, and they were living and sleeping in the lounge. This was not an easy time for Emily as she needed energy to keep herself going and not to have panic attacks when another aftershock struck. She felt that she had regressed to being a little girl again, while still having to be a mum. While things improved later, the effects remained. Tiredness became a real theme for Emily. If there was a way of summing up the last three years it would be "this horrible overwhelming feeling of tiredness and fatigue".

After the February earthquake Alia had a "seizure". She explains that she does not feel safe:

It happened after the after-shocks, I tried to keep away from my thinking, but still in my mind and heart I can't run away from what I am thinking. I feel sad. I feel disappointed when the aftershock has happened, and also, if I see the news I feel sorry for people if they are having an earthquake like Wellington. Earthquake is no problem it's just the nature, but if its tsunami, how should I do because in the past I have a very hard life? Just I want my next generation to be safe.

Health issues have plagued Alia since the earthquakes. She has been unable to sleep and the doctor referred her to some counsellors. "They were very helpful and I have been seven or eight times and they show me the way how to manage with the worry and how to manage with the situation". "How to breathe, how to do deep breathing, meditation techniques - it was helpful". Alia thinks the medical service is okay "but my sleep is still affected, and I need to take sleeping pills, but I am not happy in my inside because maybe I have a habit for medication. I am worried about my health. It has affected my body a lot, because I gain weight, and I feel more angry and eat more". Unfortunately, Alia has had two motor accidents after the earthquake and is now unable to drive a car. This further limits her mobility.

Tinks says her health could be better. "I have psoriasis which gives me arthritis - psoriatic arthritis, osteoarthritis which has come on over the years. I had got a catheter, and I had to drain that three times a day, and then they put a permanent one in there. I had to go to hospital and have an operation. It's a 'suprapubic' it's called, in my stomach. They come once a month and change that. Unless there is trouble, and then they come once a fortnight, but it's gone back to being once a month, now. Yes, so Nurse Maude comes and does that. What worries me most of all is the arthritis - it stops me doing...I tried to explain ...what's wrong with me you can't see, therefore there is nothing wrong with yah. And I just give up trying to explain to people. It's not worth it. The hospital has given me a chair to sit on, to do the dishes. I've got a chair for in the shower and a frame around the toilet. As I said I get a lot of back problems but I am all right around the supermarket because I've got the trolley.

Roman is also anxious. She is conscious that her hair falls out a lot. She has cut it, so that it is shorter. She has also gained weight because she eats more. "My heart pumps a lot if I get a fright". Her doctor is encouraging her to look after herself. "I hate the news now, after the quakes so many things have happened".

"You never know what is going to happen the next minute with an aftershock, or a big earthquake, you never know if it is going to hit you. Sometimes I don't want to listen, the more I listen, the more I am frightened. I hear that the water that comes out from the sea [tsunami] is worse". "We have water all around us here" comments Roman thinking about New Zealand compared to her home country of Ethiopia.

Mary's anxiety affected her ability to live in some areas: "The first area they tried to put me in was Hampshire Street (in Aranui). I went back to Housing New Zealand and basically said, 'I'm on my own, I suffer from depression, post traumatic stress disorder from the earthquake, separation anxiety and here they were going to put me into this unit with fences, just little fences. I felt I would be fighting battle after battle there, you know, I am on my own'".

Following her GPs advice, Nicki has been on antidepressants. The whole situation and the seismic events have been such a struggle for Nicki. Coping with making claims, insurance companies and repairs to her house have been an added strain.

Caroline began to experience muscle tension, which was described by an osteopath as a new syndrome they had found in people who had had to escape a number of times. The body stays in fight and flight mode and forgets to relax. Car trips became very difficult as Caroline's back was so painful. Caroline realized that after the quakes she had to take care of herself. "Following the earthquakes I realized I needed to take better care of myself, especially diet and exercise, because anyone who has been through so much could be vulnerable to more health issues".

At the time of interview, Sina remains incapacitated by a knee injured during the February 2011 earthquake. Her mobility has been badly affected and many of her activities are curtailed. Sina really wants to establish a new garden in the school holidays this year. "I always have a garden - we want to clean up all outside". She has to be careful she does not go outside whilst it is still cold as she is prone to asthma. Her mother died from asthma. But when the weather warms up, she wants to plant eggplants, strawberries and tomatoes.

The 22 February quakes and their aftermath had a major effect on June's life – it was the worst time. "I ended up on medication really as well. It just really got to me." She was also pregnant at the time, and found a rental property in Picton, fully furnished:

I ended up selling everything that we had in our house, which wasn't much, but we had \$1000 to get us a furnished house in Picton. We left everything else here, let the house go, and moved up to Picton.

Nellie suffers from depression and has become a hoarder. "If I see something that is not wanted, I think to myself, 'we are going to need it', so I will grab it, but I have cluttered my place up so much that it unbearable for the kids".

Julia has been referred through a mental health agency for counselling. "The earthquake has probably affected me in more ways than I think". She finds herself more protective of the children now when it comes to allowing them to go and play with other families. "I don't let them go to the park on their own". Julia thinks that being overprotective is a result of the earthquakes.

## Resources

Tinks thought that the earthquakes did disrupt her life "quite a bit". It affected her financial situation and placed her under considerable financial strain. Tinks survives financially from week to week. "I haven't got a car. I haven't had a car for over twelve months. Just couldn't afford the upkeep of it. The registration. It wasn't insured, but I couldn't afford the warrant and registration and things, it just got too much so it had to go. Which, believe you me was not nice".

A friend now comes and takes Tinks to different places, but she has obtained taxi vouchers "so I have to sort of plan what days to go where. I keep looking out for a car - don't know how I would pay for it - I haven't got any money! The only day I have any money is 'payday'."

Once she pays the rent and bills, there is only a tiny amount of money left over to cover other costs and food. The City Mission paid for her grandson's school uniform and they have helped a lot. She has had food grants and parcels. Another drain on her resources is purchasing items for a loved grandson, who is serving a long sentence in prison.

Nicki didn't know about many of the services available to help people after the quakes, so she exhausted all her money, without realising that she could have got more help. She was forced to apply for a mortgage holiday on her New Brighton home from the bank, and she had to get it extended, because she couldn't survive on her current income. Nicki was not able to pay her rates and now is in debt.

It was the one thing that I wasn't getting pestered about; like I needed the power. I thought, 'well I can just fob the rates off a bit, I need the power, I need the water, I need the food, I need the gas, you know, I can't survive without these'. I put \$60 on my rates this week; it is the first bit I've put [anything] on since all this happened. They had to take something out of my mortgage account to pay my rates.

All the financial worry on top of coping with the earthquakes, and her son's total dependence on her, has been hugely stressful.

Budgeting is important for Dee as she has no surplus funds. She manages to keep ahead with her power bill because "I pay them [Empower] so much every pay day. I am in credit there. That's quite a good way of saving really, because I can draw it out any time. I am coping". She owns a car but can't afford to run it any more as she has to be very conscious of expenditure. "I am not complaining about that really, it's just the mental effect it has on me. I get very shaky. Even my sister said to me 'you haven't been the same since the earthquakes'. She couldn't get over when I was

living with her, the fact that I was just shaking all the time. Even now, about the same time every afternoon I get the shakes". Dee appreciates her family and says "my family are really good to me, very supportive".

Due to her panic attacks, and her son's health problems, Violet moved from full-time to part-time work. "I was spread too thinly, I was not there for family and I was not there for my clients". Now she is focussed on the kids and is feeling more positive about this. She loves her work and wants to keep on top of it as well as family life. She had been in her position of employment for seven years which is a big part of her life. "It is healthier for me to work than not work and to be thinking about other people than myself".

"It has been so long since we could plan for the future, we are still in limbo, the hardest thing is we can't plan, we have to pay our mortgage, can't do any of the things we were planning on doing, we are just waiting". Violet stresses that she is not ungrateful and wants to be positive...." I can't afford to let myself get down or angry".

Mary finds that meeting the running costs of her car difficult. "It's hard. It's hard. You walk when you haven't got the petrol. You gotta, you know, you have to keep petrol to get to your job or to get to wherever you are going. You know what I mean. A person on a benefit can't just jump in their car and use it every day and go wherever. It just doesn't work that way."

### **Relationships and loss**

Not only did the February quake cause damage to Mary's property at Shire Lane, it proved to be difficult for Mary at a very personal level as well. "I had been seeing a person who lived in Christchurch. This person actually got really hurt in the CBD. He was actually lying by dead bodies for hours. We lost contact for about a week and I didn't find out that he had been in hospital until after he got out, and made contact with me. Yeah, yeah, it was hard. I couldn't stay here. So in the end I was going up and down from Christchurch to Picton. I would stay up there for a while and then come back down".

In early October 2012, Christine's husband became very ill with double pneumonia and a urinary tract infection, and was taken into hospital again. Nothing had been unpacked in their new home in South Brighton at this point, so it hadn't really become their "home" yet. Sadly, he never came back to it, as he was so unwell that he needed to go into rehabilitation at Princess Margaret Hospital and in December was transferred back to Christchurch Public Hospital for a procedure to drain fluid from his lungs. They took Christmas to him on the afternoon of the 25th December, as he did not have the strength or energy to come home even for a day. (This Christmas outdid the previous Christmas in awfulness.) They celebrated as much as they could the fact that he was still with them.

His health deteriorated even further, and "he passed on to heaven on February 15th 2013". Christine speculates that the stress of the last two years must surely have exacerbated his health conditions and hastened his passing

## Feeling unsafe

From time to time Mary does see some of her less desirable neighbours in Shirley when they walk past or drive past. "You sort of can't get away from it when you are chucked in the area, can you? I am just lucky to have two good neighbours. One is a male nurse and the other is a family from overseas. You know, that is one good thing. In the neighbourhood...you are on guard the whole time." Mary would just like to be in a nicer area. "It wouldn't matter where, but somewhere I feel safe".

Kristy still feels fear and does not like to be far from her Woolston home - she has only been into the city a couple of times since the February quakes. She would like to train as a teacher aide one day, but thinks she may not be quite ready as she feels safer at home at the moment. She does enjoy the parent help work she does each week. "With my mum gone my main support has gone.... we don't have a washing machine at the moment [and] I can't take it around to Mum, so I have to go to a Laundromat". But she does not like having to stay in the Laundromat whilst the washing is being done. Kristy enjoys going out to do chores once a week, but she does not like to stay out too long. "I hang out at home a bit... I know it's because I want to be near my kids if something happened".

After the September earthquakes, Treena didn't enjoy living alone and felt nervous about being in the two storied house in Redwood which she moved to after leaving Kaiapoi. She moved her bed from the upstairs bedroom downstairs, because she felt the aftershocks less down there. Treena still avoids the inner city, as she is frightened "that I might be unlucky".

## Recovering

Christine thinks we are all older and wiser for our experience, but also that the quakes have taken a toll on our energy - we are all more tired. Christine is looking forward to getting past that and regaining energy. (She commented that the Red Cross DVD by Dr Rob Gordon has been really helpful in understanding the "three year tiredness".) She found it helpful to talk about her earthquake experiences during her interview, because the three years had somehow "crunched together", and it was good to look back and think, "Did we really do all that?"

Like many others, Jacinta felt stressed and tired after the February earthquakes. "I can't tell if it felt harder because of the earthquake or it just was harder, it was exhausting". Things eased up a bit for her when the power and electricity was restored.

June is now 30. She still doesn't have much support. . "I mean I can't say it's any better, it's just gone back to normal. I'm just trying to take care of my kids". June is still on medication for depression and she is concerned about the recent aftershocks. "Since we've been having another couple of earthquakes lately, it's just like 'Oh no!'... Is it going to happen again?"

Like many others, June has tried to move on. "I think a lot of people have just forgotten about it... They have just tried to move on, the ones that are around, and just hope that it won't happen again". She is thankful that she wasn't as badly

affected as some people since the earthquakes. "I was the person who didn't lose anybody in the CTV building, so that was great".

She thinks about the places that she used to go to in the city. "I always used to go in to the city, that's where all the shops were, the bars, the clubs on The Strip ... when I used to go out with my friends". She used to go into the city a lot more frequently than she does now. "I catch the buses into town; I don't mind going in there now":

Just look at our city... just look at Colombo Street, we don't have a Square, and we don't have a... anything. All these beautiful things that we did have in the city... like, you've just seen the city fall so bad, it was not funny.

## Family life

For many people with children, the period after the major quakes was a very difficult time. "Everything started getting to me... just the little things like boiling a jug were gone". Adele considered leaving Christchurch and going to stay elsewhere. Jack, her eldest son, went to Timaru with her sister's family for a week. Adele and the boys went to stay with a friend in Woolston who had electricity. This was not an easy time, as she had three children herself, and a family friend had died in the CTV building. Adele also had a friend who died in the CTV building, although she did not find out about this for a month or so afterwards. It was very upsetting. Adele thought about what it would have been like for her friend's young daughter, whose mum never came to get her from school.

Adele did not take the children near town as she felt there was enough media coverage for them to take in. "It is traumatic enough for an adult to deal with this, hearing about the teenage boy who died on the bus and the little kiddies". "This was in our own city... It was a lot of people to die... It could have happened to one of us if we happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time".

Gina noticed lots of overcrowding after the quakes. "I had foster kids here - you just had to deal with the crowding really. The lady across road had 20 people staying with her, with no water, no power."

Nicki was very tired. "I am so tired by 4pm, I am dead on my feet each day... but still I have got to run around after the children's sport" ... Her daughter still goes into her bed every night for a hug and then goes back to her own room. Her son would never sleep in a bunk again. They have given their bunks away and he now has "a cool double bed". Every day the family makes a point of knowing where each other is and discuss a plan should they need to get to each other quickly. All the children slept in the family bed for months after the quakes. Nicki says, "that is what parents are for!" She slept on a camp stretcher to allow room for everyone and when she moved them back into their own beds, she slept with them for the first few nights to get them settled.

In October 2011 while Christine's husband was in hospital she had a slip at home and split her forehead, requiring seven staples. Be it stress, or rushing around, or whatever, Christine recognises that they were still particularly vulnerable. Another work move also occurred around this time - from St Aidan's Church, into business premises in Halkett Street. So with work shifting four times, and Christine shifting house four times, it was just a whole lot of disruptions.

She recalls that everything seemed out of whack - the footpaths were broken, and the Estuary walks were broken, there were road works everywhere, so the routine of coming home from work and going for walk just went out the window. The house was gone, the car was gone, and even their dog had to relocate to live in the country, as two large dogs at the daughter's place was too much.

With her youngest child at pre-school, June is keen to get some work to provide extra income for the family. She is currently sorting out her CV with the help of Work and Income. "We just need extra money really instead of having to scrape on what



we have which just buys our food and power". All of her children are at school or preschool now from nine until 3 p.m. This gives June "time to make a little extra cash".

June's ideal job is to work at the hospital taking food around to people. She had previously worked for OCS Limited (a commercial cleaning company), cleaning wards, and has done some factory work too; but wants to try something different. She wants to work in the hospital delivering food to patients because "I just want to work with the patients". June wants to do "something that would cheer up someone and just socially talking to people as well. I think I would really enjoy that".

In the long term, she would like to go to Australia. She has been there before but she wants to take the kids there and "take them to Water World". She hopes to save money after getting a job. "A goal would be to get over there and get some passports going – that's why we need the money... I'd love to live over there. I've been there a few times – my kids haven't – but we've got family there as well."

### **Family difficulties**

Just before the September earthquakes, Gina's stepdad was sent to prison for paedophilia, and the family was still dealing with the aftermath of that when the earthquakes hit. With one severely autistic son, another son with major health problems, and a mother with a mental illness, Gina said:

I've been fighting all my life. The mental health people, if I'm not fighting them I'm fighting the Education Department. If I'm not fighting them it's CYFS.... It's an ongoing battle. My mum is very lucky because who would do this for her if I was not here? Because she's not mentally able.

The earthquakes have made all Gina's struggles more complicated, especially in relation to dealing with EQC regarding her mother's house. She now thinks her priorities have changed. Her focus is on her family and loved ones, whereas before it was on her house and car. She thinks that in the future she will go back to fostering and care giving. Before the earthquakes she was cleaning.

Violet's family has been coping with major stress effects. Violet has been having panic attacks, and her children have both had eczema. Violet recalls starting to have a glass of bourbon in the evenings, "just one, but I had to have the one drink - that became our routine. We would come home from work and got into a hibernating mode. After the kids were in bed, we would sit on the porch and talk about our worries". They have had to put their wedding plans on hold. The venue has been demolished and they cannot think about a wedding and all it entails at the moment. Paying rates, a mortgage and rent "is crippling us".

She notes: "It has been so long since we could plan for the future, we are still in limbo, the hardest thing is we can't plan, we have to pay our mortgage, can't do any of the things we were planning on doing, we are just waiting". Violet stresses that she is not ungrateful and wants to be positive...." I can't afford to let myself get down or angry".

Emily A's relationship with her partner was tested in the period after the quake, and they were having financial difficulties. They went to live in Auckland and then she decided to move back to her house in South Brighton with her two children. She was pregnant at the time. Living on the DPB is not easy, but they are living in their own house, and with good management they have not fallen into a hole. There are times when Emily wishes she did not have to be so frugal, but she knows she has the strength to keep her family together and provide for them. "The Brighton beach has been a great rock to me. I have been able to go there, have a good stomp or just do some deep breathing. Plus it brings back many happy childhood memories for me".

Julia's partner had become very controlling and abusive. "It was not until after the earthquake that I did acknowledge what he was really like... and he has not changed". Julia returned to the relationship, for a time, but is now clear that it is over.

## **Pets**

Pets were not forgotten as families evacuated their houses. Gina spent a couple of days rounding up her five cats, while another participant never found her three cats. One person lost all her fish as the tank exploded, while another saved theirs in a bucket.

Caroline organised for Rico, her dog, to have a few days in a kennel for a break. He had been with her right through the drama of the quakes, and although he did not seem badly affected, Caroline felt he needed a holiday.

One of Kristy's family cats lost all its fur due to the quake stress, but she nursed it back to good health. All Julia's cats moved with her, but subsequently vanished. She was upset over her cats leaving. "I was quite gutted". She has since acquired a new family of cats.

## Effects on children

Nippy's daughter has become insecure since the earthquakes. "I just have to be there for her, until she gets more secure. But how long that will take I don't know. She just wants to know that I can be down at the school in ten minutes. 'What are you doing today, how far are you going to be?'".

Nippy says she is not anxious about this, and just goes with it. "Not much you can do about it. I talk to her. She's just scared, basically". On the day Nippy was interviewed for the Women's Voices project, her daughter was home sick from school. When Nippy took the interviewer outside to show her the house damage, the daughter followed them out – she will not even stay in the house by herself.

Recently, however, Work and Income has been pressuring Nippy to take on part time work, in line with recent legislative changes. At this point Nippy feels that her daughter needs her to be available at all times, as her only security lies in knowing that Nippy is always available. In short, there is a tension between her benefit obligations and her parenting role.

One or two of Estelle's grandchildren "were really distressed, they found it very, very difficult and were terrified every time there was another aftershock, you know, they ran screaming looking for comfort". Most of Estelle's grandchildren are grown up and have children of their own, which makes Estelle a great-grandmother to thirteen children. For Estelle, being a great-grandmother means "that you keep in touch with all the different generations. It's rather lovely". Estelle's two youngest grandchildren are younger "than my first great-grandchildren and they were the ones who were more upset".

Christine noticed that her granddaughter, who had been at day-care at the time of the quake, was quite traumatised by it. The home had no sewerage, and to Christine's mind, the memories of 'double-bagging' and emptying chemical toilets are best forgotten! The child does not like being in a room where the door is shut and she always leaves the toilet door open. She needed to have a couple of sessions with a child psychologist after she developed some behaviour that were not normal for her, and needed to be attended to. Christine thinks the effects will be ongoing for a while, in spite of constant reassurances. The moment a door bangs or a truck hits a pot hole; everyone is back on "meerkat alert"!

One of Kristy's sons was at Pioneer Stadium taking swimming lessons with his class in the June earthquake. Since then, he has become very frightened of water, even showers were an issue, and he would not swim at the beach. He is still very clingy with Kristy and likes to know where she is and what time she is collecting him. A year on and he is at a new intermediate school and has started to swim in the pool again with encouragement from the staff. She said: "I feel very responsible for the family knowing that we have made the decision to stay living in Christchurch..."

Violet's children have both had stress-related symptoms. Her son has had eczema and asthma, which has now nearly gone, and her daughter now has eczema. Violet considers the family is now getting over the stress, and getting to know each other again.

Adele's younger two boys, and her eldest, were not too traumatised by the quakes. However her other son, who had "been quite nervy" since a house fire, did remain upset after the quakes. He did not sleep well, and was quite anxious even with trucks passing by on the road. Adele tried to screen him from hearing the local news or looking at the internet. But this was difficult with adults and other school children, who would talk about "another big quake, which would feed into his anxiety". Adele says "I try to make the children grateful for what we have. If little things trouble them, I say to them, 'do you remember when we did not have power or water?' And 'we are alive'". Adele is glad that she lives in New Zealand - "it is a blessed country".

The earthquakes took a toll on Nellie and her children. Nellie was depressed as a result of living in her damaged rental home in Waltham. She says that she "feels stuck... I can't do anything to that house... all I want is out ... I have been there for so long putting up with it... for four years".

At times she just stayed in bed. The children used to send in her youngest son to the bedroom to try and get her up if she is having a bad day. "We know she won't get angry with my younger brother", as her daughter put it.

Nellie's daughter (who was present at her interview) commented that many young people went off the rails at that time:

Before the earthquake we were all fine - we all went back to our own houses, but after the quake we started drifting, we all fell apart, kids would use red stickered houses to meet up in. There was one house in Ferry Road with a sleep out on it where the kids would gather.

After the quakes, Nellie's daughter started staying away from home. "It was quite bad for a while there". She would spend time with other teenagers in the streets of Linwood. Sometimes Nellie would go and get her back, as well as the other teenagers, and make them stay with her as she did not like them drifting around homeless. "I was taking care of all her mates in the abandoned houses... I knew there would be adults staying there as well. I knew if adults got their hands on those kids it would not be good... There were 12 and 13 year olds at risk. I made them come back here. I fed them".

Julia's young son had just got out of day nappies, but after the quake he "kept peeing himself and pooing himself. It put him right back, I think it was fright". Fortunately Julia could do their washing at her friend's house, where they lived for six weeks. However, her son has since had further problems. He is currently receiving treatment at Whakatata House. A car is essential for getting him to the counselling centre as well as to the medical centre. He is displaying signs of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder as well as dyspraxia. She loves him dearly, but he is a handful and, because of his problems, other people do not like to offer to have him to play. He is an "escape artist". Julia has to keep her front door locked, or else he will take off. He has recently started staying at school full time. At the moment he is under a psychologist, and a social worker and speech therapist also work with him.

Karen's daughter has had "wicked anxiety issues" and was diagnosed with earthquake anxiety by disassociation. For months she had a bed made up in Karen's room. She became fearful of strong winds and rain. The Australian floods upset her and she would believe that any flooding in Christchurch would lead to a disaster. They have had major flooding in the area. The high tide can flood their street twice a day, despite Christchurch City Council efforts to repair the roads. Karen has to make sure there are always gumboots in the car just in case.

"We have to turn power points off at the wall or else she worries we could have a fire". Around the time when Auckland had a small tornado, the wind picked up in Brighton and Karen had to collect her daughter from school, she was "beside herself". Even now with strong wind, when the house creaks, the Karen's daughter becomes very anxious. Aftershocks unsettle her and she will go into Karen's bed for a reassuring cuddle, but she can now return to her own bedroom. Her asthma was exacerbated by the dampness of the house. With water lying under the house and the many gaps in the house, it is hard to keep their New Brighton home at an even temperature.

Central New Brighton School has put support in place for anxious children. There is a tapping technique whereby people who are anxious tap themselves on their arms by way of a distraction. "It is a calming thing". It works for some children. Karen talks about the difficulties they have had trying to work around her daughter and her anxieties. It has taken time and "she has done it in her own time. Really it has only been the last few months that she has been getting better". Anna spends time on her own in her bedroom now, and does not need to wear earplugs to avoid hearing the noise of road repairs.

After the September earthquake, a very pregnant Emily found that her son had become "like a little shadow to me, and needed lots of reassurance. I found this quite taxing as I was finding the pregnancy taxing enough". The baby was born early and Christmas was difficult, and the boy reacted badly to the February earthquake. It was a very emotional reunion when he and his mother could cuddle one another. "It was a very awkward group cuddle with the children crying and my friend and I trying to be brave". Emily was concerned that the message of reassurance she and her friends had been giving was undermined by the continued earthquakes.

She recalls it took a long time for her son to become independent again and Emily needed to walk him to and from school. He was not the happy, bubbly, confident child he used to be. Emily was also feeling extremely tired. "I was full of grief and anger at not being able to be the new mum again that I had envisaged, plus I was lacking in energy for myself as well as for the family".

Michelle's son would not sleep in his room anymore. He didn't want to sleep far away from Michelle. She would crawl into bed and he would just be there. Nippy's daughter still shares the lounge with her mother. Many of the children in this study carry the marks of anxiety and stress into their lives.

Her grandchildren are part of Emily's thinking about her future. "They've got big ideas. They want to get a good job and they want to stay at school and they want to travel - so good for them!" I say, 'Do it when you are young'. They are high

achievers, but it all comes down to the parents, I think". Emily thinks that "these kids are going to go somewhere... so we have to be there too. You look around here now and you think, 'what are these kids going to have, what's going to be here for them?'... If they want something then they are the only ones to go out and get it for themselves".

### **The children's education**

Alia's children's education has also been affected by the earthquake. One son was studying at Shirley Boys' High School and this school was closed for a long time. He was required to change to Hagley College which involved catching two buses and a change of classmates. In addition, a large number of families have moved out of their neighbourhood.

Rana's eldest daughter had attended Avonside Girls' High School, which was seriously damaged by the February earthquake. The Ministry of Education arranged for students to be transported to schools in the west side of the city. But a highly unusual scenario evolved as schools co-existing on one site had to reschedule their entire school programme to either the morning or afternoon. "It really scared her as school for her started at 1 pm and she would not arrive home until 6.30".

After the February quake, Linwood College was closed and all the pupils were sent to Cashmere High School in Spreydon. Sina did not like this, as it was a long way away from her. "It really stressed me; make me very worried about the boys moving away. When they were at Linwood they were closer", and she felt that she could at least get to them, but not so with Cashmere High School.

When Kristy took the children back to school after the June quakes, she was determined to drop them off and not stay "hanging around the school gates like some of the other mums". She did not want her fears and insecurity being passed on to the children. "That was really hard... I cried every time I left the school gates". The fear became worse as the children grew older and all went to different schools. Now there is one child at secondary school, one at intermediate and one at primary.

Julia liked to help with the breakfast club at the school when it was funded at her children's school. A group of parents are getting together to make this happen again, along with the Methodist Mission. Julia is helping with this initiative. "I like to help out with the school. They have done a lot for us giving us blankets and hot water bottles and such". She has initiated a breakfast of pancakes once a term and "it is good for my son, as well, as he has problems". He likes to help out with the dishes at school.

Kristy has returned to parent help at Opawa School and is being encouraged to look at doing formal training in teacher aide work. At the moment she is somewhat reluctant because of the cost and not sure that she wants to be too far away from home and the children. The children belong to a St John's group which has given them all a wider social life. Kristy has made friends with other parents and they socialise together whilst the children are at the group.

When Adele returned home after staying with a friend after the February quake, they had no power or water in their Housing New Zealand home in Avonside for four and a half weeks. The children returned to school "which was a lot harder that time". The school held a welcome the day before they went back, to try and help the pupils feel safe. After all this was "the last place that the boys had been when it had happened". However, Adele was reassured as she knew "the school is very organised about safety".

Six weeks or so after the February quake, Violet realised that the children would have to return to school. Even though they were living in Cashmere, they kept Sophia at Lyttelton Main Primary School as they liked it and wanted as little change as possible for her. "We tried to not let the children see that we were anxious. Sophia knew that we had lost our home, and everything was different, but we did not want her routines unsettled".

Treena continued her education through Karanga Mai at Kaiapoi (a school programme for teenage parents) through the earthquakes. As her Kaiapoi home had been written off, she was living in temporary accommodation in the city. Then she got a flat. In the meantime, her son had started school at St Albans Primary School.

Emily A decided to enrol her son at Richmond Primary School. This school is now going to close, but it was a wonderful school which was very inclusive of all children regardless of their socio-economic circumstances or ethnicity. It was another adventure getting to and from school with two bus trips morning and afternoon. They met some great people and fantastic bus drivers.

A large percentage of the staff at Central New Brighton School live in the red zone. Karen is well aware of the stress they were under, coming to school to work, and support the children, and putting their own problems to the side. The school was closed for three and a half weeks after the February earthquake.

The impending Ministry of Education closure of Central New Brighton School has led to a lot of discussion with Karen's daughter as to where she would enrol. She did not want to go to South Brighton School, as she did not feel safe going down there. She saw they still had portaloos and it was too far away from home. Despite the new three way merger that is being proposed, she does not feel comfortable attending school because of the building work that will be occurring. The new site will be on North New Brighton School grounds. The fact that they are planning a new school means that a lot of discussion has been had on the quakes and how to make the school a safe place. "Quakes are discussed a lot, the whole earthquake thing is still very much in my head; it is still real". However, the Board of Trustees has been very aware that they need to give the families time to deal with their own quake issues before asking them to consult on a new school. There is a need to "give them time".

Karen is on the Central New Brighton School Board of Trustees and she has been appointed to the board for the new merged school. "This is pretty much creating the new school, doing the vision, appointing the principal". Karen sees this as a great experience. "Not many people will be able to say they have had the opportunity to create this new school". Karen has a long family history associated with Brighton

school. "My grandparents were on the PTA that established the school hall and swimming pool for Central. I will be taking a small part of the history on with me".

She spends some hours working as a teacher aide for a special needs child at the school as well. "I like to keep myself busy as it keeps my mind off things".

### **Changing schools – Ella's story**

Ella, an interviewee, was 15 years old when the February earthquake hit. "We were off school for like weeks, but then Mum shipped me off to Dunedin for month". Ella stayed with some family friends. "Our second family's down there". After trying out Otago Girls' for a few days, Ella decided "it wasn't really my jam", and she enrolled at Logan Park High School.

Because Ella knew she was only going to be there for a short while, she decided to do subjects that she wanted to do, "not subjects my parents expected to me to do". "Through high school I did Latin and French – you know, 'smart subjects', whereas I went to Logan Park and I did photography, easy maths instead of hard maths ...drama and art and painting and film studies".

"It was really interesting having a new start...no one knew me at that school...at Logan Park I didn't know a single person, no one had expectations of me... I guess it was a chance to reinvent myself... It was quite cool... I changed - a lot". During the five weeks Ella was at Logan Park she started dressing differently.

In some ways Ella reinvented herself. "Instead of wearing cute floral dresses with small heels, I got into my Doc Martins and oversized jumpers". Ella described how her fashion changes were initially practical. The bus stop was quite far away "and I couldn't walk that far in heels". Ella went to the second hand stores and brought a whole lot of oversized jumpers. "I started wearing a lot of black, I don't know why, I wasn't depressed or anything, I just wanted to. And I changed from this really girly girl...and kind of got into the punky kind of scene, I guess. And because no one in Dunedin knew that wasn't me, it just was me".

Ella thinks that her personality changed quite a lot over this time. "I used to be quite shy and timid... I'd find it hard to talk to people I didn't know...I wouldn't be leader of anything". At Logan Park she got to say what she wanted to say and became comfortable talking to strangers.

Ella was there about five weeks and she decided that "I wasn't going go back, I'd like what I'd become...All teenagers want to be perfect and it was like, 'Nup, I'm just going to be who I am', instead of what people wanted me to be". When Ella got back to Christchurch, some of her friends were a bit shocked about the way she had changed. "They were like, 'What have you done?'".

At that stage Avonside Girls' High had temporarily merged with Burnside High School and "everyone was stressed". Burnside students were at school from 8am -1pm and Avonside Girls' students from 1pm - 6pm. It took an hour to get to Burnside High on the bus, so Ella ended up buying a car. She found the afternoon classes very difficult -"everything I loved outside of school was either on in the afternoon...or had been cancelled because of the earthquake... I missed all my dancing; I missed all the things I really loved". She found herself going to school and coming home and going to school again, "which was pretty tedious, because I didn't really like school".

Ella understands that her friends had difficulty adjusting to the way she had changed. "Lots of my friends were stressed of course; they had lost their homes, which was fair enough.



Lots of them were angry for no real reason, but because their families were angry”. So she came back to a lot of stress and anger and sadness, “and I, of course, came back quite happy in myself. So there was a lot of tension.”

Ella moved to Hagley Community College at the beginning of 2012. “So that was a really big time for me – getting into my own skin...I can almost guarantee that, if the earthquake didn’t happen, I’d still be shy, timid, Ella who likes to dance and be in the background ... not in your face, probably still be with the same group of friends”.

## Changing communities

The women in this study have seen a remarkable amount of change around them during and since the earthquakes. Some of the change related to physical damage or the struggle for survival. Some women had to change the way they lived their lives. Others had to take on a range of bureaucracies, finding housing or struggle to meet the needs of their children. Some of the participants became involved in activities in their communities. This section outlines changes in communities, women's responses to those changes and contributions in their communities.

### Abandoned communities and looting

After the February earthquake, Nippy found that many of her neighbours in Aranui were packing up and leaving. Those who didn't leave often stayed because they had to. Some were quite vulnerable:

And that's who I felt for - the oldies who were by themselves and were too scared to go anywhere. They were the ones that needed help, not some of the ones I knew. As a matter of fact some of them were not even seen, and one's in her seventies and the other's in her nineties. I was looking after them every day. They were shaking, terrified.

Water deliveries came to the local church, "which was all very well for me, but not so good for the oldies, those in a walking frame". Again, Nippy had to make sure they were looked after. The empty houses in the area attracted "lots of young ones with backpacks around". Houses were getting looted.

Not everything in Nippy's community was negative. A few days after the February quake, her family took a torch and three lanterns, went down to pub (closed now) and joined others in a trivial pursuit night. The pub put on a big barbeque cook up to use everything in the freezer. "It was great".

### Leaving Christchurch and coming back

Alia went to Auckland for a time with some of her children, but eventually was persuaded by her husband to return to Christchurch. One problem was that she felt isolated in her house. Most of the Afghan community lived in other parts of the city. She had befriended her neighbours, but one family left before the earthquakes and another moved out as a result of earthquake damage. Subsequently, the house "was burned by some naughty boys". Now the house is demolished, leaving Alia feeling unsafe in her home.

Estelle is an active member in her Anglican parish and she received "wonderful support". "Several groups came out and spoke to our church groups and that's where I gained my most support.

Mary encouraged her daughter and grandchildren, to take advantage of the offer to move people out of the city. They moved to Auckland and are still there. Mary is thinking of joining them there:

I wish they would come back, but I am thinking about going, though. I haven't many friends here anymore. It's quite a depressing place. There is nothing to do, just garden, the people aren't happy. The thing is that if I drive around I get quite angry because I think, well... nothing has been done here, nothing has been rebuilt; people are still living in sheds. Look at the place!

When Emily returned to Christchurch from Auckland with her two children she was five months pregnant and she needed to establish herself with a midwife. She also wanted to be involved with the Home Birth Group again. Coming back into familiar territory in New Brighton was a welcome relief in many respects, but their immediate area had changed in the few months they had been away. Some of the local shops had closed, roads were being dug up and some repaired. Fortunately, throughout this time, the local dairy and petrol station had stayed open. Then there came another period of cleaning, unpacking, and re-sorting when they shifted from the family home into her own smaller house while maintaining as much stability for her children as she could. She set up counselling at Mairehau High School for her son, should it be required.

June spent much of 2011 in her rental house in Picton. But then the lady who owned the property decided to leave the country, and June was homeless again. She told the woman: "It's just ridiculous; I have left everything, I have nothing and yet you are telling me I have to leave?" And she was like 'well I'm going to England', so she went to England, and she didn't even give my bond back. So she still has my money, I think she owes me \$1,300. I think she took my money and left to England with it because she didn't even lodge it".

So the family came back to Christchurch and stayed with June's mother. "We were pretty much stuck with no bond to come back with. So we came back, and slept in a tiny lounge, me and my three kids, my newborn and my two boys, on one mattress". But June and her children were uncomfortable in that house. "To me it was already like I was broken, half broken and it was just ...hard getting back there and not feeling welcome". June and the children ended up going to a refuge. "And my poor kids, they just had to go through hell. But at least they got to come back to their old school which they had left".

With the help of a social worker, she was able to get furnishings for her own property, and was eventually allocated her current home by Housing New Zealand. They now have furniture - "we've got stuff, I mean it's not stuff like I'd like to have, but it's still a table and a couch and beds".

June says that her Picton experience "was a good excuse to get away really, but it still didn't work out...I didn't want to come back - ever."

### **The state of the east**

Estelle's walking group decided in 2012 to do a bus trip to the eastern suburbs. Most of the members are over 70 years, and Estelle thinks there are at least three, who are over 80 years. The group caught a bus to Sumner. Estelle was horrified at the considerable damage there stating "I don't mind if I don't come back, it was so shocking". The walking group then decided to go to Brighton. Six weeks later they

embarked on a trip there on the bus. "Again, when you see everything looking so down and out it hits you very, very hard. I think it was the roads to Sumner that got me the worst. The poor old bus, it shook and rattled. It was dreadful. The roads around Avonhead are good in comparison but still not as good as they were but certainly a lot better than that".

Ellenor does not think she has been too badly affected by the quakes, but reflects that this may be "because a lot of other things have been going on for me, especially the breast cancer". The house next door is bordered by red zone properties, and all along the Estuary is zoned red. The closure of QE11 has affected Ellenor as she is not able to walk very far but she tries to keep fit. The cost and distance of travelling to the other side of town to a public pool is prohibitive and so now she goes to Wainoni to a 'sit and be fit' exercise club several times a week. She has also found an exercise class behind where QE11 used to be. "It is harder walking and so I need to do something".

For Julia, Aranui has lost a lot. "We have lost the swimming pool, QE11. That was a big thing. We now have to travel so far to take the children swimming. We don't get to go swimming that much". But Julia says the children like to go to the beach which is nearby. Julia has found some good neighbours who "keep an eye out for her and the children". Her house is described as a 'safe house' by the police. They know to follow up if there is a complaint, so that Julia and the children are protected from their father. She likes the community and notices that people are a lot friendlier since the quakes. "It is really good... especially the school; I have got to know a lot of parents through the time of the quakes". In her experience people rallied around and helped each other out.

Mary reflected: "It's horrible; we will never get over it. I never thought in my lifetime that I would ever see this. This sort of thing only happened overseas. I think Christchurch will be a very modern, beautiful city when it's done, but it won't be in my lifetime. Not in my lifetime and I am only 52 - I am not old!"

Ellenor has to travel into the city to attend her pottery classes in Peterborough Street. She says it is the only reason she goes into the city. Before the earthquakes, the Risingholme Community Centre provided a wide range of courses to people in the eastern suburbs. It was closed after the February earthquake, although is currently re-establishing on a new site.

Fiona thinks that other people are often making plans for the eastern suburbs without really consulting those who live there. She cites the example of plans for wetlands close to where she lives. "Someone was telling me how I wanted to live, and what I wanted on the borders of my property... the loss of control has been the hardest... It is like we have been left and people don't recognise unless you have lost your community, how much you are tied to it... Having to go further afield for things and just not having the people around that you knew".

### **Fragmented communities**

Christine knows that some of her neighbours are in Rangiora, some out in Redwood, and some round the corner in South Brighton. The folk who lived over the road are

now in Waimate. Sometimes, she bumps into old neighbours in unexpected places. The people who went to Waimate had been out of their house since September 2010, and had come up to see their former home being demolished when Christine caught up with them. She is glad to know that now they would have a person to call in on if they were ever to visit Waimate.

Treena felt a huge dilemma when viewing the earthquake damage. She found it hard to know whether to prioritise family first, or just to help out anyone that "you saw or knew might be in trouble". After viewing her aunt's house, Treena remembers confronting her brother for not believing her about the damage. However she could understand his disbelief after viewing many properties which had not been damaged at all. She described how "some parts you just go around the corners and some houses are tipped upside down, across the road some houses are fine".

After the earthquake, Treena started feeling more connected to other places in the world which had had natural disasters. She felt like she had more of a sense of empathy for the people affected, and was just more aware of what was going on in world, although she also has a sense of helplessness.

### **Community activities**

Christine had the support of family, the input from the local recovery Hub and also found it good to belong to the Court Theatre Supporters group. The original theatre was damaged, but it was great to see the new theatre take shape, and to reconnect with the eight people in her 'usher group' again. On the day of announcing the new venue and building project plans, the supporters group were all invited to a special afternoon tea. The theatre has now been built inside an old granary shed, and it is absolutely flourishing. Christine is also part of a neighbourhood group; a couple of them were red zoned but have relocated to North Shore. Pretty much everyone from this group is in a state of relocation or rebuild.

Nellie likes to visit Waltham Community Cottage when she is down. "Even when I have my darkest thoughts, I like to see them. I know they can pull me out of it, get me thinking straight again... My daughter got me to the Waltham Cottage. She came home one day wearing a new jacket. I asked her where she got it from, and she told me about the cottage".

The resilience of people amazes Karen. "We are starting to really see the effects now on Brighton because we have lost so many houses - people have had to move out. You see a lot of smashed windows". She attributes a lot of the community positivity to the Grace Vineyard Church in New Brighton. They have put on a lot of events for children and families. Her own children attend meetings there and Jack is a leader at one of the youth groups there. They have weekend camps, "all for \$25, it is amazing!" She does not see it as very "churchy". "There is always that Christian content, but it is not rammed down their throats and it is always at the end".

Grace Vineyard Church provides a lot of support for the school with mentors going to visit, helping out with transportation and helping at sports days. They provided welfare packages and a drop in centre as well as fun days at the school for the children when the school was closed because of the quake. Since the earthquake,

the church has received grants to build a preschool and a drop in centre. "There is going to be an upgrade and it will be made a lot bigger".

Caroline did not have a lot of contact with her near neighbours, but she started to attend the St Faiths drop in centre "which was amazing". She bought a second hand stove and had a chemical loo installed. In the early days she was not keen on the portaloos and preferred to use the back yard or toilets in Brighton. She was not working at that time. Caroline is a trained nurse and had been working in a nursing home. "To be honest I did not feel much like working then".

Ellenor "dropped into various places like the marae for cups of tea over the days after the quake". She remembers "everyone was in shock".

Michelle recalls the community spirit in the days after the February earthquake. About four days after the quake, the leader of the opposition, Phil Goff, came out to New Brighton and delivered hot meals. This was really appreciated, as having a hot meal was a treat at that time. Lianne Dalziel was also a great source of support. "But she spent more time over in the Bexley area, as it had been totally destroyed... I remember we used to turn the TV on for a few hours at night (so that we did have enough power) and she would be on the TV, and she was absolutely incredible." The generator was very important at that time. It was used for three hours a day to keep the freezer cold and to have two hours of TV at night. "Other than that we were relying on candles, torches... We were without power for 19 days. It was a very, very long time." When the power came back on Michelle and her neighbours went and fiddled with every power switch. "It was the most novel thing in the world."

It was ten months before they could flush their toilets properly. After the February quake they made their own makeshift toilet in the garage for the set of flats with a pail and lined it with a black bin sack and put the stuff out in the bin. "If the door was down, it meant it was occupied. No air freshener – it was not pretty!"

A month after the quake, camp toilets [chemical toilets] were delivered – "the most horrible things in the world!" You had to be on the spot when the NZ Army came with the chemical toilets. "You needed to fill out a consent form for a toilet and sign for it. It felt like you were signing your life away for a toilet! "They had to carry the contents of the toilets to the "little outlet at the end of the road" to empty them. However, they were still much better to sit on than a bucket.

Just living was very, very hard work. They had no local supermarket because the water main had a blow in the floor and it had destroyed Countdown – just down the road. They build a desalination plant in New Brighton itself, right down on the waterfront and John Key came to open it. But Michelle did not think that the water tasted nice. "It just tasted different... We were able to get it down at the Roy Stokes Hall in skins. There were also lots of brands of mineral water".

## **Better communities**

Kristy notes that there are some positive effects of the quakes. "We see more of our neighbours... the children go and hang out at their place and we have cups of coffee together". One set of neighbours moved out to Oxford for a while and would return

regularly with water for Kristy's family and other neighbours. The immediate neighbourhood has become a tighter knit group with neighbours enjoying coffees together. Nearby are the new Woolston Tannery, a smart retail and restaurant complex which Kristy thinks is good for the area.

Living in Brighton, Caroline has experienced a great sense of community support. "People were amazing... Brighton was amazing". People have asked her how she got on living in Brighton during the quakes and, because of the community spirit; Caroline says that she "would rather be out here than anywhere else". However she did come and go between Brighton, Amberley and Blenheim after the quakes.

Roman is grateful to the people "who drive around and give toothbrushes and oranges and give you a hug, it is good". She is very glad to be in a cul de sac with elderly neighbours, "I can do for them". After the quakes, when she had no water, the neighbours brought her water and milk. One of the elderly women, who is not able to get out to the shops "comes over to talk with me, which is awesome".

Karen said that neighbours really looked after each other. "We had strangers knocking on the door asking if there was anything that we needed. You don't realise how much other people care when they are in the same situation. It is quite surreal".

Between September 2010 and February 2011 Michelle W worked across all the wards of the city to get community organisations to tell their stories and to share experiences with one another in order to discuss what their roles were and could be. From these meetings, Michelle W was able to identify what these organisations needed. For the community organisations it confirmed that they didn't need to throw out their strategic plans. Instead, they could continue on with the roles that they already had and get back to running their programmes again.

Michelle W was also involved with recovery advocates, resident associations and a CERA community team. Here the anniversary celebrations for the February quake were discussed. They realised that not all people would want to go to a formal function and service in Hagley Park. Michelle W was given the task of organising an alternative symbolic happening and the River of Flowers was created. The idea was to float flowers down the river at different points where local communities or families could get together. It could also be a time for people to go back and meet up with their local community, especially those who had been in the worse affected areas. There would be support from others if needed. At a point close to the time of the earthquake, Michelle planned that people would honour this by holding a time for silence. The flowers would gradually join together and symbolise support for each other as they floated out to sea. This River of Flowers is still an important anniversary event.

Another project in the planning stage is Creating Places of Tranquillity. These are garden areas which will represent the culturally diverse communities that make up Christchurch. Some of these communities which were vulnerable before the quakes are even more vulnerable now. Michelle W sees the Places of Tranquillity as a way we can reach out to these vulnerable communities and support them by raising visibility. The gardens will create cultural awareness and will provide spaces where individuals can find comfort and support in a familiar setting. The problem at this

stage of the project is finding temporary accommodation for two years for the gardens. There needs to be an establishment phase to make the gardens look stable and firm before they are relocated to their permanent homes. It is hoped that these permanent homes will be along the Avon River banks. The aim is to have a couple of the gardens created by autumn 2014, if suitable sites can be found.

Jacinta intends to stay in New Brighton and rebuild on her section. A number of Jacinta's friends live in the area, so her support networks are in place. She is also involved in a number of community activities. The choir is still going during the day for older people and Jacinta has been fielding calls from elderly people who are interested in joining. The choir performs in different languages besides English. The Trust's aim is for "the participants to sing properly". They practice one evening a week. She is very involved with the Green party in her electorate. Gardening takes up her time, plus "of course, listening to my children".

Ella thinks that the quakes have increased people's sense of community. "I was never into the whole community thing before the quake... but it's been good to see people coming together - which is great." She has become involved in the White Elephant Trust that mounts no alcohol/drug free events for youth in Christchurch.

She is critical of the Christchurch City Council and thinks that it took them a long time "to get up and running". On the other hand, she understands that the rebuild is going to be "a lengthy process" She thinks that "the elections couldn't have come at a better time. I'm stoked to see so many new faces on the Council".

Ella worries that the city is not a good place for young people. "I'm quite disappointed that the central city took so long. I think the only thing I'm really angry about is the alcohol policy. I'm quite worried that... unless they change their mind Christchurch is going to become a retirement village". She is not that keen on going out until the early hours, "but a lot of people I know are, and a lot of people would leave because of it".

The central city is now a place where Ella spends a lot of time. "I get to see a lot of stuff happening... It's cool, but it's not really interesting enough... A lot of things haven't really changed... Over the past two years the city hasn't really changed that much... Restart popped up, cool, a couple of bars have popped up, awesome, but nothing really that big, unfortunately". Despite this, she is really positive about life in Christchurch. "I love Christchurch. I love the convenience of Christchurch. I love how everyone knows someone that knows someone. I love the feeling you get from (most) of the people here...'

Ella has younger siblings and she hopes that "by the time they get to my age, they'll get to experience the central city, like the central city nightlife... I got to taste it, but I was only 15. So I got to go into town and see people walking around and see everyone... I got the taste of it, but I never really experienced it. So I hope my siblings have that experience that I didn't get at my age... At 18 you're meant to go out, to club, to party, it's like... a rite of passage kind of thing". She reflects on what she has only heard about and not experienced:



To be honest, I've heard so much about Christchurch nightlife before the earthquake, I would love to see Sol Square open up...Poplar Lane...I've heard so much about these places and bars, like Double Happy... just awesome places that I never got to experience. So I'd just love to see the nightlife scene jump back up and come back into action – cause if we have a nightlife we'll get people in.

Ella thinks that a lot of young people don't have anywhere to go. If the White Elephant Trust got a youth venue, they could "give young people stuff to do in the city". She would also like to see some cycle lanes pop up as they were mapped out in the city plan.

## Christchurch present and future

Christchurch as it is presently is very distressing to Rana and, if she did not feel responsible for her mother, she would leave the city. "I find the city very disorientating now". Getting about is a nightmare with the road conditions. She has "the financial burden of eight weekly wheel-balance and alignment. Actually I think Brighton was forgotten and still is".

I had to use all my redundancy money from the Christchurch City Council to live on as I was not entitled to any support until I was down to my last \$30. I hate Christchurch. I am ashamed at what has happened in town, the mess and unfortunately, as I said to my daughter, the mess in town is through human incompetence not the earthquake. I go to New Brighton everyday and see that EQC, CCC, the insurance companies, the Government, CERA and SCIRT have turned our city into a war zone. Shame. Shame. Shame. Three years on I am still fighting. Fighting to get what is mine.

For Christine, the earthquakes have led to "the loss of our whole city, and our identity really." Driving into work through town and looking at the back end of buildings falling down, she asks herself, "Did this really happen?" She is particularly concerned about the old Odeon Theatre on Tuam St, which backs onto St Asaph Street. Early on, the end wall had fallen away leaving the plush red velvet seats exposed to the elements, and now, as Christine drives to work along the same route, the building is still there in its broken state, but the seats are now an ugly gray, covered in dust. It makes her want to say, "Come on guys, it's been months now! When are we ever going to tidy this up?"

Michelle does not go into the city any more. "The city itself scares me... I don't recognise the city any more... it is just not the same... The city I remember was full of lots of old buildings... It is now full of all these glass shoe boxes or containers. And I'm sorry they are not attractive... I worry that by being in the city, something else is going to shake again." She does not go into the city unless she had to be there. "If I don't have to, I don't bother".

Michelle thinks that neither EQC nor the Christchurch City Council is doing enough. "They seem to focus only on the CBD, it's like the rest of us have been forgotten - that we are not part of Christchurch any more. I would never wish this upon anybody - the pain, the heartache, the feeling of dread. It is not something you will ever understand unless you go through it".

There have been shocking errors made resulting in lives being lost.... And Caroline is concerned that three years on, not one prosecution has occurred. "My heart bleeds for the families involved".

Nippy says that "it's the people that keep you here. There's not much here on this side of town for the kids now. I am excited about the rebuild, but will it happen in our lifetimes?"

With respect to the future rebuilding of Christchurch, Mary remembers all the buildings that have gone. "They've gone. It's just empty. It's really hard to remember

what was there and what wasn't. I just can't see anyone wanting to go back into the city. I don't like going there. It's horrible. It's just a big reminder of it and it's even worse because of all the gaps. You try and remember what was there and you get quite lost in town. I honestly can't see people wanting to work back in town".

Adele is sad that a lot of the heritage buildings have gone. Whilst she likes some of the new places in Sydenham, "the older stuff in the city was always there, we took it for granted; it does feel like a new place". When she goes into Cashel Street Mall, Adele notices the change. She used to frequent the Bus Exchange a lot, as she did not drive until a few years ago. "We used to have such a busy city. It is amazing how quickly we have got used to having no city centre".

Tinks also regrets the loss of the old Christchurch CBD:

Oh look, well, I would like to see it back the way it was. All my familiar landmarks are gone, more or less. I am upset about the Cathedral. I get upset about the Catholic Cathedral. Now, I'm watchin' the Town Hall. It's hard. It's real hard because, you know, in my mind, that's Christchurch. It's my Christchurch. If they go, then my Christchurch has gone. But then, I would learn to live with it. I haven't been into town for so long it's not funny. My friend will come up to Christchurch and he will pick me up and he will say 'come on Tinks', he says, 'we will take you for a ride'. And he will take me around town. I said, 'Everything has gone. Where am I?' Can't even remember what street there is because the landmarks have all gone. Silly things like the dairy that was on the corner of Cashel Street and Fitzgerald have gone. We were over Cashel Street before I realised it. Stupid things like that. You know, it's all gone. It's sort of like my generation.

Mary doesn't like going into tall buildings now; she doesn't enter them. When she goes into malls she has an escape plan. "Like, I will go to Eastgate Mall, The Palms; I am a bit dicey about it. I have got my map ready before I go in as to what I am going to do. It sticks in my head, but you never know you could just freeze. I normally don't. I won't park under the car park. I won't park near anything that is big. I have my little survival kit ready - gas bottle, pump, and tent - a survival kit if you have to get out".

Mary thinks it would be a shame to lose the Cathedral in the Square. "It's an icon. It's Cathedral Square. What are they going to call it if the Cathedral goes? I mean we have lost everything else; surely we can keep at least one building! They are taking buildings down that they shouldn't even have been taken down".

Helen is also sad about the loss of the two cathedrals:

I am very sorry about the Cathedral - I think it's going. And that was always lovely at Christmas time. My mother-in-law, being English, would go into town and she would take my son's little toys that he didn't want. It was just lovely to go into the Square in Christchurch and see the Cathedral, you know. It is something that I don't know that they will ever build another one the same. It will be more modern.

Helen mentioned that she was very upset about the Catholic Cathedral too and had phoned the ZB radio station, Mike Yardley's talkback, to tell him she thought there was "too much fuss about the Anglican cathedral in the Square and what about the Catholic Cathedral which she thought was very beautiful". Helen felt that the talkback host wasn't that interested in her view "but was more interested in her Scottish accent". "And he was a Catholic too".

Helen is in her 90s, and does not believe that she will see Christchurch when it is rebuilt. She thinks it needs to be rebuilt for the children coming up. "It will never be the same, it will be modern and different".

Gina would love to see the city restored to how it used to be. She wants to see the cathedral rebuilt as a landmark, and all the public buildings restored. On the other hand:

The people of Christchurch matter, not the buildings. We don't want the tourists in to see how we are living. I mean we are all still living it, dealing with the devastation. It has take three years before people really only realised how much they have gone through.... and there are other people worse than me.

Mary says that she is "dead against the Cardboard Cathedral" She thinks that "they could have been helping people that needed help. It's only a church. You can pray anywhere to God. God is just wherever you want him to be. It's a big waste of money. What? Five million for cardboard that is not permanent and then the cardboard got wet? I am against it. It should have gone to the community to rebuild the roads. That's my present point of view".

Although Mary had worked with the sports teams at Cathedral College, she is indifferent as to whether the Catholic Cathedral is rebuilt. "It's only a church. You don't have to go to church to be a good Christian, to be a good person. I mean it's a beautiful building, but if there is ever another one, next time people might be in it. Next time it might not do as well as it did. I think maybe it's a Godsend that no-one was killed. It's a shame to see it go, but I think it needs to".

Estelle's connection to Christ Church Cathedral meant that she spent a lot of time there. "St Michaels and the Cathedral were the special places for me in Christchurch. The Catholic Cathedral was a very beautiful building too. When the children were growing up, the family visited the [Canterbury] Museum, the library and all the facilities that were available, so it was sad for me with the earthquakes. I have hardly been back in (the city) since the quakes. I don't really like going in and seeing all the empty spaces. It's quite different".

Nicki also gets upset when she sees on the news stories about people who have severe damage who haven't had anything done. Nicki also feels sad for people, like her mother in her seventies, who will never see the city fixed, and those in their eighties who are still waiting for their houses to be fixed. She wonders what is going to happen to all the open land on the east side of the city.

With respect to her property Ellenor waited "a long, long time" to see if it was going to go red or green. "We were orange for a long time... and after a long wait we had

decided that we wanted to be red". Ellenor and her son, Seth, and his family had made the decision that they would like to move to Nelson, right away from Christchurch.

In the last year she has been told that the property is zoned green TC3 land and that it will be a rebuild, but not for several years. It is a long wait for someone in their seventies. "I may not live that long". She comments: "Christchurch has all gone with the earthquakes. All the houses are levelled on the other side of the river and all around Bexley houses are levelled".

As Julia says, "the rebuild is starting to happen" but she also thinks that "it looks empty in town though". She took the kids through the town when it was opened and the red zone removed. "The two younger ones did not understand it... 'Look mum they are pulling that building down'. Eliot loves diggers, so he enjoyed the demolition work".

As a suburb Aranui is missing out on "decent parks". Julia would also like to see more housing in the area and a new pool. A new library has been built and its helpful staff and the play area for children has "been a godsend". Julia finds she cannot take her son there at busy times, as his behaviour is not easy to manage. He likes to use the computers, but does not find the notion of sharing easy.

Jacinta feels that Christchurch is "getting smaller and smaller", with a lot of people moving out, and many of the people who are coming to Christchurch are only here for the rebuild. She knows a lot of people who have moved away from Christchurch and they are not planning to return. The ongoing repairs and road works are wearing people down and everyone "seems to be a bit traumatised and uninterested and tense".

Karen wants to stay in the Brighton area. She wants the children to have access to the centre and all that it provides. "I don't want the kids hanging out at the malls. I would rather they were at Grace Vineyard Centre with their friends. They cater for all the age groups and do age appropriate things". The Brighton Public Library is a popular venue for after school groups to meet up and organised volley ball sessions take place on the beach in front of the library. Brighton feels like a safe place for Karen and the family. There is a lot more organised activity since the quakes and the amount of crime appears to be less.

After visiting her sister in Avonside recently, Adele noticed how green the grass was in the parks, and how nice it looked. "I would like it to be a nice river park; it was always a nice area. The river was the main feature... you can't exactly walk beside the river in the city at the moment. I would like for it to always be remembered. I would hate to see the land stay as it is as it looks so uncared for".

"Sometimes I think 'why is everything not rebuilt?' but at other times, I think it is going to take years. I do think we have had a huge opportunity. As I see it the opportunity is getting lost with the Council and Gerry Brownlee and all the problems. It is hard to imagine the city is ever going to be there again!"

Treena went to Cashel Mall for lunch for her birthday in 2013 and was amazed by what they had done with the space. She felt that this demonstrated how the city had come together creatively, and felt that the recycling and reusing of materials could be used elsewhere. She would like to see fragments of the Anglican Cathedral reused in a memorial, as in the fireman's memorial on Kilmore Street to the Twin Towers. This could be a more valuable way of using the crumbled building than just "chucking the fragments away".

She feels very strongly that Cashel Mall is important to the city, and she knows some people who have started building sleep outs and houses out of shipping containers in response to the example of the container mall. She really hopes that Cashel Mall isn't replaced by "boring city buildings". She believes city development money would be better spent on new housing, or replacing suburbs, for people who are still living in camp grounds. Treena also has come to like the term 'Quake City' and sees the earthquake as part of the future of Christchurch's identity. She doesn't believe that this is something we should cover up in the re-building of the city. Instead she maintains that the value of creativity in the city should be seen and be allowed to evolve. Treena sees Cashel Mall as a positive outcome of the earthquakes.

Christine commented on the great new buildings in Victoria and New Regent Streets, and the amazing work being done to restore the Theatre Royal, now that those 'concrete-nibbling dinosaurs', the deconstruction cranes, have done their work. The rebuild that is starting to happen is pretty exciting and Christine hopes that she will get to see the centre of the city restored.

Helen has a vision for the city centre she will probably never see:

I do hope they have a lovely cathedral in the square and from then on department stores. There is Ballantynes in town but other than that they will have to put a few more big department stores, restaurants and hotels. They need to make some gardens if they can, make nice gardens in the Square, somewhere if they have got room to improve, you know. Make it lovely to look at. Everything green will be nice. Not too many high rise buildings. They are not necessary. They can make them just two or three stories, but they don't need monstrous high rises in Christchurch. It's not built for that. It wasn't like that when we came here but they did have big buildings, especially that one in town that has had to be taken down bit by bit. It was the Grand Chancellor. I have been there and stayed there for a weekend with a friend. Actually I won it in a competition. It was very nice but it was cold and calculated, I thought. It wants something more friendly. There will be other hotels eventually.

Estelle, a woman in her 80s, thinks:

"We are going to have a wonderful city. I just wish I would be here long enough to see it. When you get on in years you know you are not going to see it. I am absolutely delighted that our church has got a new cardboard cathedral (as they call it) but I call it the Transitional Cathedral. It's a place where people can gather together and gain strength from each other. I think it's so important. I would like to see the new one when they build it, but I

doubt I will. My own church is damaged. We are still worshipping in a hall. There is so much damage, but I know from it, good will come. There is going to be a lovely new city here I am sure. It will be a delight to see. It will be a place to be proud of again". With respect to the design of the cathedral, Estelle "just loved the old one". "It's a forward move and I am quite happy about there being a new one. I feel we are going to lose our dear St Peter's church too. It could be replaced with a new one - we don't know yet but it's in the offering. If it happens, so what - it's the people that matter".

When she thinks about the future of Christchurch, Kristy would love to see a stadium in Christchurch... "especially on this side of town... I love rugby; it is a favourite sport of mine... I want that cover".... It is her number one priority... "I am really looking forward to the stadium... I love to be right there with the action..." Kristy would not like to see high rise buildings in Christchurch. When she went to Dunedin for the holidays, she found herself "pumping rescue remedy as I was so fearful of the buildings and the Meridian Mall which sways..."

Michelle W never saw herself as an adult living in Christchurch. She found the city parochial and provincial. When she had first left Christchurch she did not plan to return. She thought that she would move to Wellington where she has many friends. She showed her son her old school, the family home and the now demolished home she lived in when a teenager. She is finding it an interesting process of "realising that you do have an attachment to an area, and then you have to let it go". And because she has seen what amazing things communities have done, she has a lot of hope for Christchurch. "It has been the shake-up that Christchurch needed".

Emily A is optimistic about the future of Christchurch. She feels that "Christchurch will be the phoenix from the ashes. There are a lot of positive community initiatives in our immediate area, with support groups, vegetable co-op, lunches and good networking at a grass root level". She has seen a number of her friends sell their properties and move either out of town or to another area of Christchurch, resulting in new faces appearing in their place. It has been a long journey, but at this stage, she and her family would not want to live anywhere else.

Roman says:

I miss the city, the people, the crowds. Cathedral Square, where you meet people from all the nations, I miss that.

She misses the tourists who make Christchurch come alive. Roman does not like to go to the city now. "It makes me feel very angry and very sad". There is an air of uncertainty which Roman does not like. "I ask myself when?" As a student, her teacher and social worker took her to "every corner of the city to see what was what and what is new". All that is gone and it saddens Roman. "I have so many memories in a short time" of her new city. In Christchurch "every plant has a flower, even in the grass the weeds flower... I love that; that is exciting. I do not know the names of the plants I love them, every single plant". For Roman there is still the fear that there will be more earthquakes. "I hope and pray for the next generation that this place will look awesome".

Michelle W knows that there are people in authority that need to make some big decisions to make Christchurch a world class city, and she hopes that they have the vision to do this. "And not a muddy version of a world class city, but the real thing". She sees how everyone can help to inspire; by staying on, creating innovative new ways of doing things and helping those in the decision making areas make the right decisions for the city.

Emily recognises that there are people who are worse off than her and her family. "There are a lot of people out there who are worse off, a huge amount of people are worse off than we are... People that can't even live in their own houses; people that are still paying for houses that are long gone"... Emily doesn't understand "why people will have to keep paying for sections that their houses are no longer on. It's almost like the Council is milking everything they can get... They are meant to be there helping people.... and then you have all these elections and people will come out of the woodwork that you've never heard of and you think, 'Where did these people come from?'"

Emily voted in the local body elections in 2013. "The only people I voted for were people that actually come here and come around and talk to you; people that have come into the area and asked you how you were. I don't vote for people that don't... I don't care how many degrees they've had... things like that don't interest me. It's the people who actually talk to you that I'm interested in".

I won't vote for somebody that doesn't even know you're here, that won't even come in their cars to see you, see how your houses are or see you how your street is, or even bother to go to the schools to see how the schools are coping... I'm only interested in people that actually come here.



## Conclusion to this part of the study

The women in these pages represent the voices that are rarely heard. They do not write to the newspapers about their situation, and many of them felt fobbed off by bureaucracy when trying to get their problems resolved. Some women, like Rana, are now in a dreadful situation. She is without work, out of pocket and with little resolution in sight. She used all her redundancy pay to live on, and was told she could not get government support until she was down to her last \$30. In addition, partly because she has contested what has happened to her, Rana has been labeled as 'unstable', a term applied to her by various agencies.

Yet the women who tell these earthquake stories are resilient. They frequently comment, while telling dire stories, that there are others worse off than they are – hence the title of this report. But the legacy of the earthquakes is, in many cases, years of poor quality housing, families still living in overcrowded conditions, often sleeping in living rooms together, poor health including unresolved injuries, anxiety and depression arising from the earthquakes and, for many, ongoing fear of another large quake.

A key finding from this research is the unevenness of the earthquake response. In an ideal world, the amount and nature of assistance provided to people would be proportionate to their need. These women's stories have clearly demonstrated that, in relation to the Christchurch earthquakes, this has not been the case. In the days immediately following the February quake, food was dropped in certain places, the portaloos clustered in certain areas (sometimes one per house, sometimes less than one per street), and water deliveries were haphazard rather than systematic. In the same way, assistance from Work and Income, from the range of organisations involved in emergency responses, from EQC and insurance companies, often depends on who a person speaks to, rather than an assessment of their actual situation.

These women's stories highlight exceptional largesse in some parts of the city, the hoarding of food by some people, and, on the other hand, unmet needs in other streets and neighbourhoods. Perhaps this lumpy distribution of aid is inevitable after any large disaster, but it had material effects on some of the women in this study.

Enarson (1998 p. 159) notes that:

Gendered vulnerability does not derive from a single factor, such as household headship or poverty, but reflects historically and culturally specific patterns of relations in social institutions, culture and personal lives. Intersecting with economic, racial and other inequalities, these relationships create hazardous social conditions placing different groups of women differently at risk when disastrous events unfold.

The Women's Unheard Voices project clearly shows "different groups of women differently at risk". At times, it is also interesting how institutions respond when challenged. When Nippy finally lost her temper and used 'the F word', eight Council staff arrived to inspect her sewer, but patient hours spent on the phone trying to access entitlements (and being made to feel guilty about it) sometimes generate no

response. These women's stories of interaction with a range of private businesses, local government officials, and state bureaucracies illustrate of the challenges that women on low incomes with few financial resources face as they attempt to put their homes and lives together after the quakes.

Many of the women interviewed have faced fundamental shake-ups of their lives. Sometimes this was the direct result of the earthquakes, such as workplaces being lost, houses becoming unsafe, or decisions to stay put in sub-standard housing because they did not want to move out of familiar neighbourhoods. At other times, more fundamental factors have shaped their lives, such as the need to look after family members who were sick, fearful or suffering from anxiety. Occasionally the quakes generate a shift in values, or even a total change of outlook and style, as Ella, one of the youngest participants, experienced. She changed schools, clothing style, friends, interests; future career plans and became involved in community-based activities for youth in Christchurch.

Enarson (1998 p. 163) has concluded that: "The complex intersection of class, race and gender power shaping organisational interaction between relief workers and disaster victims is not well documented, but seems likely to affect agency services as well as the work experiences of voluntary or paid female responders".

This study demonstrates this complexity. Women in Christchurch, especially those in the areas most affected by the quakes, were both victims needing responses from agencies, and also supporters of others in their own communities, especially of the elderly and those with disabilities. Whether it was older people helping the young, or the younger women helping elderly neighbours, or initiatives to share resources, as people in Avonside went out into the streets to cook up the meat in their freezers for all-comers, a large amount of help was provided below the radar of official aid.

Many of the women who told these earthquake stories said that they enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on their experience, and tell their stories. For some women, it clarified their current situation, helped them to recognize what had been achieved, and made them feel happier. Telling their stories made others cry – sometimes for the first time since 22 February 2011. Their earthquake stories are, of course, by no means complete. Less than half of the women interviewed are currently living in properties that are fixed, warm, and comfortable. Many of them are now facing their fourth cold winter in damaged homes, sometimes sleeping together as a family in their living rooms. Things are less than ideal, but most are coping.

They frequently commented on how long everything took. How long it took to make decision about zoning, how long to demolish the central city and get building again, how long it took for EQC and insurance companies to act. They are impatient for the rebuild. Many of the older women think that they will never see the new Christchurch 'rise from the ashes like a phoenix' – the aspiration of one of the younger participants. Some just want to ensure that their children get to live in a good city, one day.

The final word goes to Estelle, a woman in her 80s, who waited for some time for her claim to be settled. She began to wonder if they were waiting her out:

After a couple of years you start to think, 'Oh well, perhaps they are waiting... waiting, hoping I won't require it'. You really do, you just start to think, 'Why do we wait so long?'

## Glossary

4 September 2010	At 4.37a.m. a 7.1 magnitude earthquake took place on the Greendale fault, 35 km west of Christchurch. There was widespread damage in the central city and various suburbs, and some injuries, but no-one was killed.
Boxing Day quake 2010	The city was crammed with people shopping when a 5 magnitude shake erupted right under the central city. It was frightening for those who were there.
22 February 2011	The big earthquake, 6.3 magnitude, but shallow and aimed “like and arrow at the heart of the city”. Massive damage. 185 people died.
13 June 2011	Twin quakes around lunchtime, the first 5.8 the second 6.4. Depending on location, for some this was the strongest and most damaging earthquake. There were no deaths.
23 December 2011	Another 6.3 magnitude quake, but less damaging. Most participants can only vaguely recall this quake.
Earthquake Commission (ECQ)	The government agency set up to collect earthquake levies, which they did competently for many years. However, they appeared largely unprepared for the scale of the Canterbury earthquakes.
Fletchers	Fletchers Construction Company, the private company contracted to handle repairs for the EQC that are over \$15,000 and under \$100,000. Fletchers usually contracts a range of builders who are registered with the company to complete the repairs.
Land categories e.g. TC3	For land zoned ‘green’ and available for building homes, TC1, TC2 and TC3 are used to describe the need for foundations in any rebuilds on particular pieces of land.
Opt out	The ability to not use the Fletchers Construction Company to organise the repair of homes costed at under \$100,000 but over \$15,000, but to choose your own builder. An amount is agreed on, and a builder contracted by the owner.
Over cap	EQC insures up to \$100,000 of claims for the repair or rebuilding of property. Insurance companies have to

	meet the costs of repairs or rebuilding over that amount.
Red zone (central city)	The area closed off after the February earthquakes. Parts of the city remained closed for 1-2 years, and parts are still inaccessible.
Red zone (suburbs)	Areas which cannot be lived in or built upon, where householders got a payout from the government for their land and property (if they were insured) in compensation for having to move.
Southern Response	The AMI insurance company failed after the 22 February quake, and was taken over by another insurance company, IAG. A government-owned company was set up which took over AMI claims for Canterbury earthquake damage before 5 April 2012. The new temporary company was given the name 'Southern Response'.
Under cap	Houses assessed as repairable for less than \$100,000. In this case, the full costs of the repairs would be met by EQC.
White zone	A temporary zone, mainly of certain parts of the Port Hills, before final decisions on the status of this land were made.
Work and Income	The New Zealand government's benefits and employment agency. Many of the women in this study received their primary income as a state benefit (the Domestic Purposes Benefit or National Superannuation). Some of them were in low paid employment and had children in their households. They usually received additional income under the Working for Families programme.

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# Appendix 1: Interview questions

## *Women's Voices / Ngā Reo O Ngā Wahine*

### *Recording women's experiences of the Christchurch earthquakes*

#### **Interview schedule**

##### **1. Before the quakes**

**Please tell me a bit about yourself, your whānau/family, and your life before the earthquakes.**

*Where did you live, what did you do? What was your life like before the quakes?*

##### **2. Quake experiences**

**Please tell me about your experiences of the Canterbury earthquakes. Talk about any of the quakes – 4 September 2010, 26 December 2010, 22 February 2011, 13 June 2011, 23 December 2011. What about the aftershocks?**

*Where were you? What happened? Who was with you? What did you do? What did others do? What were your concerns for members of your whānau/family, workmates, neighbours, friends, other people around you?*

##### **3. Impact of the quakes**

**How did the earthquakes affect you, your whānau/family and others who are close to you?**

*Did your life change after the quakes? How? What stayed the same?*

##### **4. Post-quake life**

**What is your life like now and what about the future?**

*Where you are living, what you are doing with your whānau/family or in your community, what are your hopes/concerns for yourself, your whānau/family, your neighbourhood, your suburb and Christchurch?*

Contact details: Judith Sutherland, Project Manager Women's Voices/Ngā Reo O Ngā Wahine, [brujude@xtra.co.nz](mailto:brujude@xtra.co.nz) (03) 332-5229

Rosemary Du Plessis, Research Coordinator, [rosemary.duplessis@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.duplessis@canterbury.ac.nz) (03) 364-2878

## Appendix 2: Interviewers

### *Women's Voices / Ngā Reo O Ngā Wahine*

*Recording women's experiences of the Christchurch earthquakes*

#### **Interviewers – Women's Unheard Voices**

Judith Sutherland  
Rosemary Du Plessis  
Liz Gordon  
Helen Gibson  
Brigid Buckenham  
Elizabeth Ashby  
Linda Telfer  
Melissa Parsons  
Rikke Betts  
Billa Field  
Helen McCaul  
Danielle O'Halloran  
Hikatea Bull  
Dora Langsbury