



KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBOUR IS A PIECE OF CAKE

Te Raranga

We aim to increase neighbourliness and social capital throughout greater Christchurch by encouraging individuals to develop stronger connections with those that live by them.

We launched in March 2014 with the slogan “Knowing your neighbour is a piece of cake”. We distributed postcards with space to include names and contact details for neighbours to homes throughout Christchurch, Selwyn and parts of the Waimakariri district. With postcard in hand, people might then pop next door or over the road and introduce themselves over a piece of cake or a cup of coffee.

It was a celebration of getting together over something simple and encouraging and reminded Cantabrians that relying on their neighbours was a big part of life after the earthquakes. We hope it will help tackle isolation in the community and make it easier for people to approach their neighbours in the future should they need some support.

This support is important in many contexts, but particularly in the aftermath of disaster. Often the first responders are not trained emergency personnel but rather local residents and neighbours. Existing social networks and community connections create efficient recoveries and contribute towards resilient communities.

In the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes, we saw informal relationships develop spontaneously across neighbourhoods throughout greater Christchurch as people responded to their immediate environment through a shared experience. While some communities have retained these connections, many others have reverted back to life pre-quake.

The earthquakes also weakened social connectedness in some communities as people left due to damage to their homes or concerns about aftershocks - particularly in the hard-hit eastern suburbs. Children’s social networks were disturbed, with some travelling to schools in other parts of town.

Almost twenty years on from the earthquake in Kobe, one of the key lessons for recovery has been that it is impossible in a disaster recovery situation to do anything that isn’t done by citizens on a regular basis. To this end, in order to build social capital and a feeling of connection in local neighbourhoods, activities such as talking to neighbours or attending local events must become part of everyday life - and our Neighbourhood Project helps do just that. We will continue to encourage people to connect and share - because everybody needs good neighbours.

“Just had a wonderful afternoon sharing cake with my neighbours. My next-door neighbour and I baked cakes and dropped postcards and an invitation to afternoon tea into the other 14 houses in our cul-de-sac. 20 neighbours gathered together at our house and had such a good time that we have already begun planning the next event. Thanks for the nudge, Neighbourhood Project!”

“We did a ‘bake off’ and had a great time - the inaugural Chester Community Bake-off was a great success on Sunday afternoon with about 10 different entrants voting on a wide variety of delicious treats!”

“They [the postcards] are ideal for new neighbours and I will continue to give them out as the neighbourhood changes.”

<http://raranga.org.nz/pieceofcake/>

