



A new reality?

The 4th of September 2010 and the 22nd of February 2011 are two dates forever etched into the Cantabrian psyche. CDANZ member Arron Perriam was there.

Many Canterbury businesses were affected by the second large quake. Will they survive? How will they adjust? What will be the impact on our local and national economies? What does the earthquake mean for thousands of Canterbury employees and employers? For those of us working in the Careers field, what is the impact on our businesses?

I have the privilege of working with persons who happen to have a traumatic spinal cord injury (SCI), most often as a result of a serious accident. They were everyday Kiwis going about their everyday activities who happened to stray into that circumstantial realm where 'shit happens' and they are suddenly, without choice, thrust into a 'new reality,' the world of having a SCI. It is a new and enforced reality of learning medical jargon, learning new means of mobilizing oneself, new ways of sleeping eating and toileting, exploring new ways to work.

As a result of the earthquake, 20 people suffered spinal cord injuries.

There is a parallel between learning to live after a SCI and the experience of tens of thousands of Cantabrians caught up in the earthquake. They are now forced to accept, adapt and build a better future, a 'new reality through forced change.'

Remember when EQ stood for emotional intelligence? Some people adjust relatively quickly and seemingly easily to their new reality. Others may never fully recover from the trauma. After the quakes, many thousands left our fair province for sturdier ground. Will they eventually return or will they create a new life for themselves and their families beyond our borders? There are so many unknowns and uncertainties in this new reality!

Three weeks post earthquake, there are some impacts that one can observe, or even speculate a little about, that may provide a small insight into the new reality of living and working in a city shaken to its bones.

On one hand you have the obvious challenges. Complete business premises in the city were destroyed. An already struggling inner city retail network trying to recover from the September quake has been largely re-dismantled. Under insured commercial businesses cannot recover economically to trade again. Employees and employers alike have fled Christchurch in their thousands. Some are unwilling to ever work in the inner city again.

We have the responsible redeployment of staff into other stores and roles around Canterbury businesses but still many of these employees are now underemployed which has a significant impact on families. Many businesses who were appropriately insured have relocated to new premises in new industrial developments and scattered around the suburbs, prompting adaptations to public transport and the urban infrastructure.

Overall there is gross uncertainty for so many people about their immediate living and employment predicament, not to mention the medium term direction of redevelopment of Canterbury.

I hesitate to call them “positive factors” but opportunities emerge. Businesses rethink how and where they will operate. Clearly the architectural and construction sectors will experience a decade of huge development which has spin-offs for our economies. Here is a chance to think about what a vibrant and safe new Millennium inner city could look like.

There is work for Career Practitioners in Canterbury. There is increased demand for redundancy management and support, EAP work and trade training. Youth transitioning into work need our support even more and there are people requiring vocational resettlement after displacement or serious injury.

One way or another, many people have been forced by their new reality to really reassess what really matters to them in life. These are times for Cantabrians when hope and fragility coexist and where friends and family are paramount as we navigate a very new reality.

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