Editorial

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This special issue is dedicated to documenting social work responses to the 2010-2011 earthquakes in Canterbury, New Zealand. In this issue, the authors have outlined the effects of the earthquakes, embedding these within the complex social, political, organisational and cultural environment of greater Christchurch and surrounding districts. Not one single picture emerges of the disaster impact and recovery processes; a multitude of stories and experiences unfold, each suggesting a range of practice, policy and research implications for social work as a discipline.

Describing natural disasters

Jago (1991) identifies that natural disasters are sudden events and that people are left 'shocked and suffering … there is great physical damage … then comes the long recovery process' (p. 43). Such descriptions draw attention to the unexpected and rapid impact of natural disasters. The experiences that shape these definitions have been influential in developing the response and recovery models which underpin large scale individualised psychosocial relief work, very like those we have seen in Christchurch.

Other more recent explanations of disasters attend more effectively to the collective impact of disasters. The World Health Organisation (2008) notes that disasters are, 'A term describing an event that can be defined spatially and geographically… It implies the interaction of an external stressor with a human community and it carries the implicit concept of non-manageability.' Disasters are '… collective stress situations occurring at a community level as a result of major unwanted consequences' (Winkworth, Healy, Woodward and Camilleri, 2009, p. 5), where a disaster '… overwhelms the capacity of a community to contain and control its consequences' (Gist and Lubin, 1989, p. 352). Such understandings encourage collective responses to disasters including community building activities as part of disaster recovery processes. These types of activities are promoted as the means to enable communities to support their own needs and aspirations (Verity, 2007). Reading through the articles written for this special issue you will see many examples of collective responses that rapidly emerged to respond to the unfamiliar and frightening circumstances that unfolded in the city and surrounding districts.

Alongside the view of the social nature of natural disasters sits an increased recognition of the positive consequences of these sudden events, including the opportunities for growth in helping survivors to '… recognise a previously disorganised life and re-evaluate their values and goals' (Jang & Mendola, 2007, p. 313). Similarly, the positive effects on community relationships and social cohesion are also emphasised as in the initial aftermath many survivors display strong community identification and undertake cooperative and unselfish efforts aimed at rescue, relief, and repair. Individuals and communities are believed to adapt to large scale disasters, and are not seen as helpless victims, but as survivors, who, after the initial aftermath help themselves and one another (Greene & Greene, 2009; Winkworth, Healy, Woodward & Camilleri, 2003). This type of adaptation and resilience was certainly the case in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes. Collective responses sprang up

around the city to offer shelter, supplies of food, washing facilities and labour. Whole groups incorporating hundreds of individuals such as the Student Army (local university students) and the Farmy Army (farmers from surrounding districts) co-ordinated major works for shovelling liquefaction from affected residential properties.

The extent to which all individuals and communities have equal opportunity and means to grow and support each other under these conditions is debateable. Disasters reveal pre-existing structural inequalities which serve to limit the recovery process for many. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of communities such as older people, children, people who are disabled, those who are less educated and/or on a low income, are more prone to the effects of disasters, and tend to have problems with the disaster recovery process (Zakour, 1996; Pyles, 2007; Hossain, 2011; Mathbor, 2007). Less-affluent, marginal locations tend to be occupied by people on low incomes and these areas are at risk of the worst impact of disasters (Hossain, 2011; Zakour & Harell, 2003). Thus many vulnerable individuals face the worst consequences of natural disasters and live in communities which are more at risk from the long term deterioration from disasters (Zakour, 1996; Pyles, 2007, Zakour & Harrell, 2003). These circumstances were certainly evident in the Eastern suburbs with Smith and Kane's article highlighting how residents in these less affluent areas were disenfranchised in relation to access to resources and decision making in the post earthquake environment. It quickly became evident that individual and collective resilience in disaster zones is connected to the broader social structures which privilege some groups over others. Marlowe and Lou's research on the impact of the earthquakes on migrant populations in Christchurch highlighted the nature of disadvantage that some migrant populations experienced.

The earthquakes have resulted in the large scale experience of shock and loss centred in some parts of the city and surrounding district, including the regional town of Kaiapoi. Hundreds of people lost family members, friends and workmates. There was damage and loss to thousands of business premises and houses, resulting in people being displaced from their homes, neighbourhoods and places of work. There has been widespread deterioration to community facilities and public amenities such as water, sewage and roads. In the initial aftermath Christchurch Public Hospital social work services needed to respond quickly to assist survivors, link patients to family members and help with the identification of deceased persons. Some interesting practice features of this work are outlined in the article by Maher and Maidment. Meanwhile, as Crump and Stewardson's article reveals, other survivors needed to be transported to different parts of the country to access specialist services. In this way people and services situated across the country became drawn in and connected to the Canterbury rescue and recovery efforts.

Alongside the provision of formal emergency services, people helped each other. There were many acts of kindness in the chaos as people transported others home on the traffic congested and damaged roads, picked up family member's children from schools and checked on neighbours. Evans and Perez-y-Perez highlight the importance of recovering pets and the significance of the human and animal bond relationships in dealing with the events at the time, and in the months immediately following the earthquakes. During the weeks after the earthquake when most of the city's eastern suburbs and parts of Kaiapoi had no power, water and sewage facilities, community members and groups helped each other access the basic necessities. Marlowe and Lou's article highlights the unique vulnerabilities members of different and diverse resettled refugee communities in Christchurch faced, but

also the ways that people drew on their own resources and supported each other. Briggs and Heisenfelt Roark have documented their reflections about volunteering and working professionally in the quake zone bearing witness to, as well as personally experiencing loss and upheaval while tending to others.

The interface between people's personal experiences and the political forces at play were not hard to find. True's article examines the differing effects of disasters on women and men and the increased incidence of gender-based violence particularly against women and girls, highlighting a pattern of vulnerability in the aftermath of disasters. In Christchurch's eastern inner city suburb Smith and Kane's article refers to the way in which the Government's market-driven long-term plan for the central city and top down consultation models have impacted on the capacity for community members to have a voice in their own neighbour-hood, especially in preserving affordable housing. Pre-existing inequalities have come to the fore as vulnerable individuals and communities have become further marginalised.

A new politics has emerged in which insurance companies have shown themselves to be the major power brokers. As Tudor's article identifies accessing insurance cover for repairing and rebuilding homes is a major issue, with growing numbers of homeowners locked in potentially very expensive disputes with their insurers. The government has done little to address the inadequacies of the insurance companies' response; this is despite the Canter-bury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA)'s responsibility to ensure there is an effective insurance market (Migone, 2012). In relation to this political context Cooper-Cabell writes about the role of CERA in the psychosocial recovery for the people of Canterbury. Despite one of the main tenets of the CERA Framework being recovery of individual well-being and community resilience, neo-liberal political agendas have contributed to the failure of policy and support services in this regard.

For social workers responding to need is difficult enough in such chaotic and changing times, but all the more challenging given the parallel process of loss and uncertainty for the practitioners themselves. van Heugten's article identifies, these personal and professional struggles have led some human service workers to re-evaluate their personal and professional priorities. Meanwhile, Milner highlights the importance for social service organisations to balance their work of supporting efforts to create community connectedness with attending to the needs of staff who are themselves impacted by the quakes.

Re-interpreting the role of the environment

Social work as a discipline has a long tradition of understanding human functioning and relationships using the 'person-in-environment paradigm' (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005). Even so, the confronting experience of the earth opening up spilling forth large quantities of liquefaction, shunting boundary fences and established shelter belts sideways, while twisting steel bridges, prompts personal reflection on just how we see our relationship with the environment. Social work's preoccupation with 'the environment' has until recently largely referred to the socio-cultural or psycho social environment (McKinnon, 2008). There is however, nothing like a natural disaster to bring home a true understanding of the force of nature, and reconsider the interrelationship between ourselves and the natural environment.

The earthquakes have meant many in Christchurch have needed to uproot and leave communities where they have developed a sense of belonging. The enduring centrality of

a sense of place and space has become acute with familiar landmarks including buildings, memorials, statues, clocks, parks and even whole streets disappearing under rubble, being 'red zoned' or made off limits. These changes to the surrounding environment are disorienting and cause many to seriously reconsider questions of personal identity and connection. These issues have been canvassed by Tudor, Smith & Kane and Cooper-Cabell in their respective articles where the centrality of neighbourhood, schools and community in the post earthquake environment is examined.

In just one day the relationship between residing in Christchurch and surrounding districts, with earth wide seismic activity became a lived reality. Many residents electronically bookmarked Geonet, an online site that displays most recent seismic activity. Monitoring earthquake activity here in New Zealand and elsewhere became a regular feature of daily routines. Each night scientific reports were presented on the television news about the ever changing local seismic activity including detailed examination of the movement of tectonic plates in and around the Pacific Rim. These changes in our way of life and daily activities brought home the fact that '… our human social world does not operate in a silo from the rest of nature. The human world is not the main focus but, instead, is an inextricable part of the Earth and the natural realm' (Miller, Hayward & Shaw, 2012, p. 271). In this regard we were reminded that consideration of environmental activity for social work needs to extend beyond the social environment to take account of the fact that the earth is shared by humans and non humans, with the wellbeing of all being inextricably linked.

Evans and Perez-y-Perez's work on animal rescue reported in this special issue is a practical demonstration of how social work needs to be concerned with broad questions of humanity. This reconceptualisation of the 'environment' for social work as a discipline includes consideration of how the natural world, including environmental disasters such as flood, fire and earthquakes impact on humans, but also raises questions about how human activity impacts on the wellbeing of the natural world. This positioning requires social workers to move beyond the 'domestication' of the profession in terms of helping people to adapt to stressors, to adopt instead a sense of transformative global consciousness (Coates, 2003). In recent years a new wave of social work literature and education has emerged encouraging practitioners to engage with environmental social work, where issues related to environmental justice in disaster recovery are canvassed (Dominelli, 2013). Social work has been late to enter these debates, yet the impact of the Christchurch earthquakes have brought home to many living in the city how dependent we are as a population on the grace and goodwill of the natural world in which we live.

While there is no doubt that social work has played a significant role in the provision of relief and recovery processes after all the major earthquakes in the Canterbury region (as articles in this special issue can attest), the extent to which this work has been visible outside of the profession is debatable.

Invisible work, invisible pain
The gendered nature of both the predominately female workforce in social work, and disaster recovery response is well documented (Enarson, 2012; Gibelman, 2003). While the televised news reports on the Canterbury earthquakes featured many male figures from Civil Defence and Emergency Services, the work of women as volunteers and social service practitioners occurred in the background, soon after the first wave of the emergency response. Specific

details about the nature of this service provision are provided in Milner's contribution to this issue where the role of non government social service organisations in contributing to widespread and ongoing community support initiatives is described. A more personal account of volunteering and being part of the community response is offered by Briggs and Heisenfelt Roark. In this regard gender has been a marker of difference reflecting 'the basis for division of labour in the household, community and labour force' (Enarson, 2012, p. 23), where the substantial contribution of the female volunteer and social service workforce in Canterbury was largely unseen.

In a different vein, reports of violence against women post earthquakes rose. Women's refuges in Christchurch were full to overflowing with the female workforce staffing these facilities, working hard behind closed doors to the quell trauma associated with experiencing both the earthquakes and subsequent violence. Increased levels of violence against women post disaster in New Zealand have been recorded in earlier research (Houghton, 2010), with True's article in this edition documenting this trend using examples from both Christchurch and other international disaster zones.

The collective organising and leadership of women providing low key, low cost initiatives to strengthen community connectedness and a sense of wellbeing was evident almost immediately post disaster. These initiatives included supplying hot coffee and tea for people queuing for water; creating hundreds of hand-made hearts and giving them away to lift the spirits of people in Lyttelton, baking food supplies for emergency workers and volunteers, and sewing additional hospital gowns for the Christchurch Public Hospital Intensive Care Unit. These low key informal responses have subsequently been followed up by long term collective advocacy efforts for people experiencing difficulties with housing and negotiating with insurance companies. While largely hidden, the formal and informal work of women in the earthquake recovery has been substantial.

The large scale and sudden impact of the disaster events that took place in Canterbury during 2010-2011 presented challenges and opportunities for social work practice. In this special issue we create space to examine a range of social work responses to the disaster. The articles in this edition are testimony to the evolving principles of well-being and the notion of environment, giving voice to social justice imperatives while creating opportunities for acknowledging and developing social work's role in disaster recovery.

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