

# People, Places and Shifting Paradigms – when ‘South Island’ Stoicism isn’t Enough

Shelley Dean, *Ministry of Education*

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When disasters affect communities the recovery process needs to address numerous heterogeneous groups and diverse reactions. The processes of engagement need to be adapted in place and time and support the diversity inherent in communities. Evidence tells us that after a disaster most of an affected population recovers in time, if given appropriate support, but there remains real distress and stress in living through such a situation. Traumatic events and circumstances can shatter assumptions about one's self and the surrounding family and social network. While a minority of any affected group will experience increased vulnerability and disadvantage, most will re-establish their lives and experience a return to their previous levels of functioning. The pathway to this recovery begins with the establishment of local leadership and essential services, such as school and early childhood services and networks, and the fostering of individual and community resilience and well-being that allows for growth and change and decreases the potential for increased vulnerability and disadvantage.

In 2010 and 2011 the Ministry of Education responded to three significant disaster events in the space of six months, offering support to the education community. The scale of these events was unprecedented and challenged MOE Staff to develop appropriate psychosocial responses, adapting and expanding the existing and well researched ‘traumatic incident service single school model’ for use with multiple schools, towns and a large city. It has been, and continues to be a journey of finding and creating new ways of thinking and working, supported by the development of a range of resources for schools and their communities.

People places and shifting paradigms acknowledges the responses to these disaster events with key principles interwoven through the response descriptions. The way these events are challenging and shaping crisis practice and response are outlined.

The Ministry of Education traumatic incident service typically responds to individual schools and early childhood centres when there is a crisis. Occasionally two or more

education settings may be affected at the same time. This service also supports education settings to have plans and policies to prevent crises and respond as a team when there is an emergency. The service emerged 20 years ago when individual psychologists responded to schools distressed by unexpected crisis events. The service developed over time and now provides a nation-wide crisis response service for school and early childhood services. A district, regional and national delivery structure underlies the delivery which has the ability to work across organisations at a local and national level. With the space of time and hindsight, the Ministry of Education has refined our definition of what crises are, their likely effect on a setting and our core responses.

The Traumatic Incident (TI) service provides a psychosocial response to events that disrupt school or early childhood learning environments, are unexpected, affect lots of people and as a result challenge people's sense of safety and knowledge about their world. People affected are often shocked, never expecting these events to happen to

them, to have affected them the way it did, or the ways they responded to the crises. These responses and perception changes often affect their ability to think clearly and act in the immediate aftermath.

Over 2010 and 2011 the Ministry of Education also experienced as a service a number of disasters we never expected that placed pressure on our staff, resources and also challenged our thinking and extended our practices. A college in Auckland which experienced four student deaths in a short period of time, the September Canterbury earthquake where miraculously no one lost their lives, the Pike River Mining Disaster in November, the deaths of 3 young students in South Auckland schools and the emergence of a Choking game which lead to a number of young people presenting in Emergency departments across Auckland and the February Christchurch earthquake where a number of people lost their lives.

In New Zealand many secondary schools and some primary schools are prepared for these events but despite some of the planning, policies and

preparation, many schools and communities need additional supports when events of this magnitude occur affecting their setting.

In 2010 Kings College experienced the sudden deaths of 4 boys. These quotes from Bradley Fenner, the current principal at the College reported by the Herald (NZ Herald May 22, 2010) demonstrate the effects that can challenge those leading a school to immediately respond. It also describes how these events can demonstrate the strength and growth of their communities, for example,

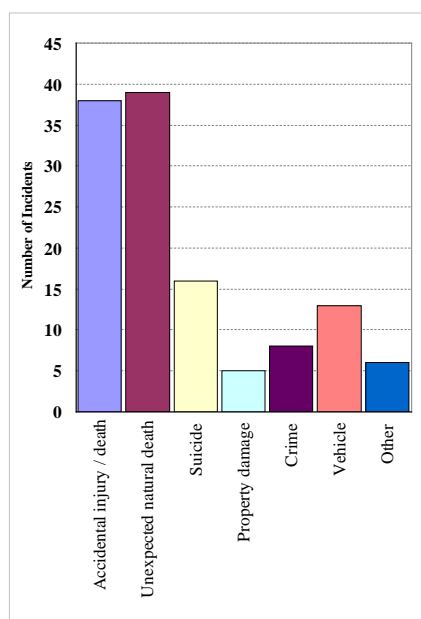
*“I liken the effect of these events as standing in the surf and a big wave knocks you over. You go upside down in the ocean and gradually you get your footing and get re-orientated*

*“To have a sequence like this is very challenging, but you see the strength of the community, you see the heart of the community and it’s a strong one and it has kept beating through-out this*

*“This has been a catalyst for some really worthwhile discussions between parents and their children”.*

So what things will the Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident service typically respond to?

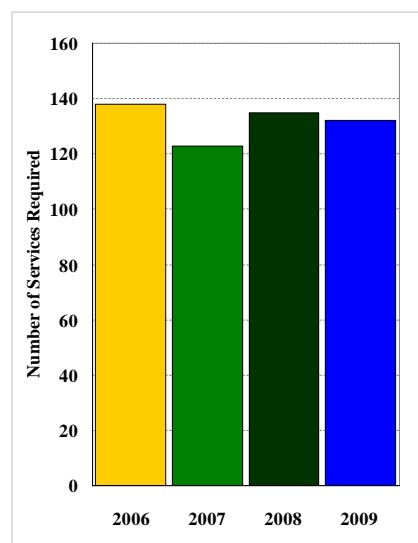
▼ **Figure 1: Incidents by Type**



Typically the Ministry will respond when there has been a serious accident or sudden death, in a school or Early Childhood Education (ECE) community. Whether we respond or not depends on how badly the community has been affected. If you are in a small community school and you’ve only got 30 people at that school and somebody important to your school community dies suddenly, then it is likely to have a big effect on that setting. If a death is expected, or it’s a bigger setting the impact might not be quite the same and the school or ECE service is likely to have the leadership capacity to support those affected. This response is driven by the knowledge that a community needs to lead the response to a crisis and that outside support should support those involved, rather than disrupt or place additional burdens on that response.

A lot of schools after these events start to think “why us”, or others in their communities start predicting other disaster events. Our responses to crises indicate that it doesn’t matter where you are, or who you are, crises are not predictable and the number of crises events are not increasing. What is increasing is media coverage. The way media cover an event influences community recovery.

▼ **Figure 2: Incidents by Year**



New Zealand schools are self governing with an elected Board of Trustees (BOT) responsible for the governance of the school. The A principal, with his/her management team, is responsible for the day to day running of the setting. The management team is in the best place to act, contact emergency services, support teachers and students and their families. Experience has demonstrated that ‘management’ are the inside experts, familiar and trusted faces who know the history of the settings and the community and are part of a shared culture and shared loss. Action by management of a setting increases a community’s sense of comfort and safety during a time of confusion and disruption.

The traumatic incident service is an external service that works by invitation only, alongside Boards of Trustees, school, ECE management groups and teachers, after a crisis. The way we interact with that setting is extremely important as we are coming in as ‘outsiders’, external to the people and setting. So as an external support we need to develop our relationships quickly and sensitively with management, especially when contrasting world views, cultures and lifestyles are confronted.

This support ensures the setting leads the response, establishes leadership in the setting (if none is initially obvious), helps the leadership solve problems across the range of presenting issues, provide support to teachers, children, young people and families and establishes appropriate and safe community involvement and supports

Communication and the relationships that develop during this initial period have the potential to be a resource and support for those affected or conversely a source of additional stress that can undermine post-crisis efforts. Our service benefits from being embedded within the education system, providing services to young people experiencing behaviour challenges or disabilities. The service is supported by a wide range of skilled professionals, not only psychologists, but speech language therapists, special education advisors, occupational

therapists, physiotherapists, Early Intervention teachers, and kaitakawaenga. They can all be part of a crisis team. When a crisis occurs, the formation of an external Ministry of Education team considers the nature of the crisis being experienced, the culture of the setting and community. The team that is formed is based on crisis skills, knowledge of the setting, established relationship, cultural skills to facilitate communication and understanding about the effects and interventions needed. We know from previous experiences that when we come in as external support the complexity of the encounter is particularly influenced by concepts of safety, health, illness and death. From these concepts, appropriate interventions and solutions can be developed. In order for that to happen, we focus our support on the leadership

of that setting, so routines and systems are re-established. We can then utilise various types of knowledge to support the leadership such as understanding of the education sector, crises principles and psychological first aid.

We support management to promote a sense of safety throughout the setting, physically (e.g. earthquake drills, water supplies, engineering inspections) and emotionally (clear communication about routines, access to services, changes in personnel etc.). Another principle that embeds the ministry service delivery is that children look for support from people that they love, know and trust, i.e. their parents and teachers. Teachers despite experiencing the event themselves can help children and young people understand what's happening in developmentally

appropriate ways, provide comfort and explanations *when needed* and know why something different is happening in that setting and promote safety with children and their families such as after the frequent aftershocks Christchurch has experienced. This next series of presentations has been organised around disaster responses to different events and demonstrates the broad conceptual and practical issues faced over the last year providing psychosocial support to schools and ECE services.

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▲ Boys watch rocks fall around Redcliffs School, 22 February 2011 — ©2011 [www.tonybruntphotography.com](http://www.tonybruntphotography.com)

# Principles guiding Practice and Responses to Recent Community Disasters in New Zealand

Rose Brown, *Ministry of Education*

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Supporting early childhood education (ECE) services and schools after events which cause wide spread community distress is an important service provision provided by psychologists and other staff, working for the special education group in the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Ministry has a service delivery practice model that is guided by the principle that local leadership and support is critical in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Children and young people need adults, whom they know well and trust, to lead and restore routines and provide some sense of normality. This presentation outlines the response to support local leadership in the Canterbury and Christchurch earthquakes in September and February.

## The Events

At 4.36am on 4 September, 2010, an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter Scale hit Christchurch. Most people were home sleeping and families were under one roof. While there were no fatalities, there was widespread damage to buildings, particularly those with unreinforced masonry and residential properties due to liquefaction. Many adults and children were badly frightened, waking in the dark, and some children experienced the trauma of being separated from parents who couldn't quickly reach them, due either to the violent shaking, or being unable to enter bedrooms blocked by fallen furniture. Ongoing aftershocks in the days following added to people's distress and anxiety.

The second event was the Pike River Mine disaster, on November 19, 2010 in which 29 miners lost their lives following two explosions in the mine and left a community reeling from the effects.

The third event, a second major earthquake, hit Christchurch on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011, at 12.51pm, and measured 6.3 on the Richter scale. This time people were scattered across the city at work and school. One hundred and eighty one

people were killed. There was widespread damage to land and buildings. Traffic was brought almost to a standstill for hours as people raced to find loved ones or return to their homes. Phone lines were jammed with people contacting emergency services or ringing family and friends. In schools, children were looked after by teachers and other adults. Unable to return to buildings they sat outside waiting, some until early evening. Concern grew as sporadic reports of deaths and destruction filtered through, leaving children and staff anxious for loved ones, some children wondering if they would see their parents again. Classrooms were left as they were – school books or half-eaten lunches on desks, bags on hooks, clothing and other personal possessions that would not be seen again until weeks later.

## Role of the MOE Special Education Team

There are several reasons why the Ministry's Traumatic Incident service provided the platform for psychosocial support to schools over these events:

The Traumatic Incident Service developed over years in schools / with schools is founded on psychological first aid disaster response principles. It has locally trained and experienced

crises staff available throughout the country. During these events staff were co-opted to boost the capacity of the local Canterbury and West Coast Traumatic Incident (TI) Teams, especially in the initial period immediately following the disasters. Local staff with established relationships with the education community were immediately available. Their familiar faces in schools and broad knowledge of local culture and networks were invaluable. Without insight into the local perspective, authentic interpretation of crisis events and responses would not have been possible within these communities.

Response teams were able to be established immediately with skilled multi-disciplinary field staff who were willing and keen to help and whose core work is service delivery to schools. Following some in-house training in the basics of post crises response, and supported by field co-ordinators, they were a vital part of the MOE staff.

The Ministry as an organisation was able to provide a 'one person' contact making the link to all Ministry services. Although schools were swamped with a range of issues, many were Ministry-managed (e.g.,

buildings, water, staffing, sewerage, media etc) and Ministry staff were able to locate the relevant person or answers and communicate them to schools, enabling them to obtain information and help quickly and efficiently.

### The Contexts

The initial response to the September earthquake acted as a practice run for February (and to some degree the Pike River Mine response), and laid the foundations for the ministry's psychosocial response in schools and ECE services, building each time from subsequent events. These events came close together—a rare experience in New Zealand—with those providing support also experiencing the crises events. This was different to Traumatic Incident work, where the crisis affecting the settings has not been experienced by the external response team. The ongoing and unpredictable threat to well-being complicated the response for those living and responding to schools and early childhood services.

The February quakes were of historical proportion. The city experienced greater physical and property damage and people experienced a pervasive and on going fear of more quakes. The residual impact of September meant that many people were already tired and stressed and the February earthquakes heightened levels of uncertainty, reduced trust in the future and created a new pessimism about the future. The story of each and every subsequent event and individual responses and was heard daily through the media, in schools and ECE services, in staff rooms, in play grounds, homes and communities.

School staff valued information about key post disaster psychosocial supports and likely reactions of children, young people and their families. Schools and ECE management after the September earthquake had a week to plan for the return of children and young people while schools were closed for engineering reports and assessments to be completed.

Following the February earthquake, schools were observed applying what they had learned in September 2010. Their staff appeared comfortable with the language and concepts of psychosocial support, although this had been relatively unfamiliar just a few months earlier. It was clear that Ministry staff had done the job of getting great information out there. The rapid response by ministry staff occurred on the back of previous work supporting the traumatic incident service with trained staff and appropriate post disaster resources. This effectiveness was also recognised by other agencies, some of whom requested assistance with staff training, parent seminars and resources. MOE-produced "tip sheets" were used by local GPs and were in agreement with main support messages across government agencies.

### The concept of "Respond, Recover and Renew" developed over time.

There are three broad stages of disaster response but they are not a simple linear process. At any one time there may be more emphasis in one area than others, and people may be responding, recovering and renewing in different proportions and in different ways at the same time. The process is progressive. Over time the emphasis moves from responding and recovering to the renewal process. Based on research evidence, and in line with international trends, the MOE disaster response is based on psychological first aid rather than the psychological debriefing approach, more common ten or fifteen years ago.

### **Respond: Psychological first aid**

Psychological First Aid is a basic non-intrusive pragmatic care approach with a focus on listening (but not forcing talk), assessing needs and supporting access to short-term solutions. Although the efficacy of psychological first aid is yet to be extensively examined it is an approach that supported the engagement of ministry staff with schools and early childhood services. Those people who experienced disasters were encouraged to have control of their own recovery and find their own solutions as far as possible. They were encouraged to

seek the company of others when and as necessary, with support from Government and community agencies.

Psychological first aid includes focussing on:

- Provision of physical necessities in the immediate aftermath of the event
- Establishing a sense of security – physical safety, connections with other people
- Providing emotional support through listening, information about post disaster reactions and connecting to others
- Communicating access to services with information as soon as possible, and regularly updating information
- Determining immediate needs and meeting them
- Providing social support - linking people to support services and networks

In September 2010 ministry staff put together a presentation for the education community. The presentations were aimed at school and ECE leadership. The priority was to get information out to a lot of people as quickly as possible through school and early childhood management. By Monday, following the Saturday earthquake the presentations were written and invitations sent out. A large venue was hired and the meetings were remarkably well attended. In the first week over 1000 people attended meetings. Small group presentations were also offered, and these included early childhood centres, Kindergarten Association; Out of School Care and Recreation (OSCAR), guidance counsellors, and Alternative Education providers. A number of parent seminars were also held at the request of individual schools. The Ministry received a number of requests from non-government organisations, social services agencies and some private businesses, but had little capacity to respond to these: the Ministry must focus on education.

The presentations covered post disaster reactions, understanding and

responding to people's reactions, promoting safety, responses matched to developmental stage, and access to supporting resources. Many people felt hugely relieved to know that what they were experiencing was normal and expected after such an event. Parents and school / early childhood centre staff were concerned for the physical and psychological well-being of children, and were uncertain whether or not they should be seeking professional help for them. Ministry staff were able to give some reassurance in that regard, and offer strategies for helping children toward recovery.

Based on a developmental approach, information was given on how children and young people at different ages might respond to the earthquakes, and how best to support them. Similar information was given for adults, and there was often palpable relief as people were reassured of the normality of their reactions and learned about how they could help themselves by doing some quite simple things.

### **Recover**

Practical information was provided to educators about how to support staff and children on their return to school / ECE centres. This included having a plan for the first few days back and first week, ensuring there were routines and structure around the teaching day to support children and young people's sense of security and safety, reducing anxiety. If old and familiar routines were no longer possible, schools were advised to communicate and create new ones.

Schools were advised to open as quickly as possible. The routine and familiarity of being at school was one of the most helpful steps toward recovery for most children (and their families, allowing a return to work). Even after February when children had been in the school during the huge earthquake and subsequent aftershocks that rumbled on for hours, they couldn't wait to get back and there were very few children that were resistant

Safety and communication are important psychosocial strategies. They are key recovery aspects in turn supporting children towards recovery—the need to feel safe and secure. Children needed to know that adults are available to them physically and emotionally, they needed to know the safety plan, their family safety plan and what to do during another quake. Parents needed to know where their children and teenagers are, who they are with, and have a way of communicating when necessary. People feel reassured and have more trust in their children's safety when they have accurate, up-to-date information. Forms of communication included school websites, phone trees, newsletters and meetings.

Schools were advised to practice earthquake drills in a low-key way, without raising anxiety or fear in children. Many schools used the Civil Defence song "The Turtle Safe Song". Children in Christchurch know exactly what to do in an earthquake and do it immediately without prompting. Teachers deserve a great deal of credit for the fact that no child was killed or seriously injured in February, and for their commitment in the hours following the earthquake looking after students even though they were concerned about their own families and homes.

Inclusion is a key principle of psychosocial recovery. Schools were advised to communicate equally with staff and students, and be especially aware of those who were absent or those who are not always part of the daily communication process (e.g. caretaker, teacher aides). Schools were advised to be proactive and observant by setting up a register of students and teachers with needs. This provided a way of tracking every student (and staff member) that was in some way at risk (e.g., no family supports, home damaged, changes in living arrangements; caregivers or parents injured; high level of distress) and provided a systematic way of monitoring to ensure additional support could be provided when needed. The list was advised to be reviewed regularly (daily to begin with) and names added or deleted as

appropriate in the weeks following the disaster.

### **Access to Resources**

A critical aspect of promoting recovery is ensuring that people have relevant and easily accessed information. In the weeks following the earthquake a number of organisations put together information and produced pamphlets or put it on websites. This information was passed to teachers and parents by SE staff as necessary. Resources included:

- MOE Website / MOE Tip Sheets
- Roving principals / teacher support available (funded by MOE)
- National TI 0800 phone response
- Websites (e.g. Skylight, Werry Centre)
- Information about accessing support agencies
- Free access to the Employment Assistance Programme (EAP) for counselling.
- Pamphlets and booklets (e.g., from Skylight)
- Medical support (e.g. Free GP visits were offered by local doctors; Mental Health)

### **Renewing**

Renewing is the stage where schools started to focus on developing resilience and moving forward. There is now an emphasis on looking to the future and finding a new sense of hope. This may have been tenuous at first, but even small steps towards the future helped people feel more in control and hopeful. This is the time when friends and family needed to keep talking and staying connected to each other for support. Children found it helpful to use play / games to explore and understand what happened and told stories over and over as they made sense of events. Having adults who were there who could model healthy coping strategies is really important for children, who take their cue from teachers and parents about how to cope when things go wrong.

Reframing stories was an example of the way teachers helped children's sense of self efficacy and resilience that even when things are very bad they are capable of finding solutions that worked. For example when children say things like "It was so terrifying, we're still sleeping under the table with mum and dad" (lots of families slept under tables for weeks) reframing this as: "Well, isn't that great, so you're looking after one another and you know you're safe and you have a really good plan" takes what some see as a weakness and reframes it as the way the family was keeping everyone safe and together. People feel relieved and comforted when they see themselves as strong and able to cope.

Many schools found creative ways to celebrate the bravery and strength of their students and awarded medals or certificates to all their students in acknowledgment of how they coped

on the day of the earthquake and in subsequent weeks with all the aftershocks and disruption to homes and lives.

The impact of the February 2011 earthquake was much greater. All Christchurch schools were closed for weeks. Some schools were closed much longer, with a few cases exceeding a year. The Ministry set up Learning Hubs: centres established on the site of an operating school, usually in the school hall, for students unable to attend their regular schools for any reason. The Hubs catered for primary and intermediate school students and were staffed by trained teachers who volunteered to be involved. Communication was difficult. MOE managers called the response *Education Welfare Response*. It was a listening and supportive approach. Individual Schools were assigned school liaison teams and individually

contacted, and in most cases visited, many on more than one occasion.

## References

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# Provision of Support to Schools and Early Childhood Services after the Pike River Disaster

Patrick McEntyre, *Ministry of Education*

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On November 19 2010, 3.44pm, the first explosion at Pike River Mine occurred. Initial reports were unclear, although it was subsequently confirmed 29 miners were trapped, two miners walked out. A second explosion occurred the following Wednesday afternoon, November 24. Police believed, and stated at the time, that no-one would have survived the second event. There were third and fourth explosions, although smaller.

Why did the Ministry of Education have a role and assist the community in this instance?

Following traumatic events, that potentially affect the well-being and education of children and young people, the Ministry has an expectation that disruption to their learning is minimised and that the school as a community can provide much needed support through routines, peer interactions, age appropriate activities, caring and supportive adults for children and young people. When routines are disrupted, the event can challenge our perspective of certainty and safety with reported feelings of uncertainty, disbelief and anxiety for those affected.

Provision of external support services for early childhood services and schools is essential – education settings are potential moderators of the impacts of traumatic events. There is benefit to be gained for the community from supporting the education sector to enhance their sense of self efficacy, social togetherness and preparedness for future events.

Positivity after a crisis may not be enough on its own. Those affected may no longer have the sense that they can predict anything with certainty. Following crisis events, children, and others around them, can have

difficulty accessing solutions and may feel immobilized or overwhelmed. They seek clarity, security, hope and connection in the process of making sense of their position. Supplementary, but culturally relevant, support may be required in order to help a community construct new meanings, to access and build on their resilient foundations. As each crisis event and each response is unique, crisis supporters are challenged with the task of ensuring culturally relevant support on every occasion.

This is the framework that encouraged the cohesion and planning, communication and guided recovery strategies after the Pike River Mining Accident. It assumed that how we plan, respond and what we think – are important to consider, this was guided by “*Managing emergencies and traumatic incidents – guide and resources*”, 2010, [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz) - keyword: traumatic incident.

It is important to acknowledge that local (West Coast) Ministry staff led our response with support of experienced colleagues (from Nelson, Christchurch and Wellington). The existing relationships local staff had with early childhood services and schools were important. They knew the people, the engagement and relationship was reciprocal. Local

Ministry staff were able to quickly identify, respect and align their actions with the cultural practices in the local community, largely as a matter of course. They approached crisis response with the intention of building on strong foundations, utilizing the natural supports of the individuals and communities experiencing this unexpected event.

This supplementary, but culturally relevant, support strengthened the communities ability to problem solve, access their cultural resources and build on their resilient foundations. Local ministry knowledge of the social history, reflected in individual and distributed knowledge and practice, played in discerning appropriate responses. Without insight into the local perspective, authentic interpretation of crisis events and responses would not have been possible.

In hindsight this response could be thought of in three phases. Initially the first 48 hours, secondly, up to and including the second explosion, and finally the following week(s). The community responded paradoxically. Initially school and ECC staff and the community expressed fear, worry, and uncertainty, “*I’m not sure, I don’t know what I have to do*”. At the same time the community responded with increased cooperation, they became very cohesive and collaborative, this



was significant in terms of their ability to cope – strong reliance on each other.

Our initial response, during the first weekend (Sunday evening), was to present general information, outlining some of the key principles of psychological recovery, to the education sector and key members of the community. The local Service Manager contacted and invited all the early childhood services and schools in the Greymouth area to that presentation (110 people attended representing schools and the early childhood sector). At that point we didn't know what had happened but knew there were 29 people missing.

Over the following two weeks we assisted ECC and schools, directly and indirectly, to support their staff and students. We discussed with staff practical ways they could support each other and students through maintaining structure, routine and normality. We shared information on the need to remain calm, maintain social connection, inclusiveness, group efficacy – having a plan, and maintaining hope.

In some cases we provided direct advice and guidance to parents and teachers who held specific concerns about individual children and young people. Those few people that were identified as higher risk of developing more persistent problems, information

was made available about access specialised intervention.

The Ministry also supported and coordinated additional staffing – with teachers from the Nelson area and Christchurch, volunteering to assist in schools. We took an inclusive team approach with one meeting space, decisions were discussed and shared, no-one acted alone. The focus was on supporting local staff with a mix of outside experience. The team was led given the convergence of help – the response needed to be managed, planned, integrated and coordinated. With a routine and process established (24 hour cycle of planning and debrief), actions and meeting minutes were recorded, daily contact was established and maintained with other key agencies – including Police, MSD, Health and NGO's, with reports on our response completed each day for Wellington and the Minister.

Subsequent feedback from the education community and teachers stated the initial meeting was helpful, it brought people together and allowed them to consider how they might respond that week in support of each other and their students. They indicated that allowing local ministry staff to lead the work was important – they knew and trusted them. They told us we had a clear framework, structure and tools, both informative and practical.

Seven days after the first explosion our work was largely completed. Access to resources, coordination with other agencies and internal process was effectively established that follow up, if requested, could be provided by local staff.

The importance teachers have in supporting children and young people following any traumatic event was highlighted earlier this year, in Christchurch, by Sir Peter Gluckman and Robert Lord Winston. They talked to students and staff at a local Primary School, following the June earthquakes. They stated the teacher role is crucial to children and student recovery and for the community – it is acknowledged that children and young people are best supported by those they know and trust. Teachers are effective at being “in role” and despite their own stresses they accept the responsibility to support others.

I want to acknowledge the West Coast community, Greymouth in particular. For those Ministry of Education staff involved it was a privilege to assist the local education and wider community to deal with the grief and disruption to their lives.

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# The Education Welfare Response Immediately Following the February 2011 Earthquake

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The February 2011 Christchurch earthquake was of magnitude 6.3 centred 10 kilometres south-east of the centre of Christchurch. It caused widespread damage across Christchurch, New Zealand's second most populous city. 181 people were killed in the earthquake, which was New Zealand's second-deadliest natural disaster. The purpose of this paper is to briefly outline and reflect on some of the key aspects of the Education Welfare Response in the *immediate* aftermath of the February earthquake. Many Ministry of Education, Special Education staff were involved in the response and this paper is an attempt to recognise their work.

The Education Welfare Response (EWR)<sup>3</sup> was a part of a larger Ministry of Education (MOE) response included a wide range of activities: working across early childhood (EC), primary, secondary and tertiary sectors: property, payroll, resourcing, leadership, involvement with the Minister, ICT, facilities management, finances, special education provision, relocation of students to other areas, interagency liaison, communication, donations, international students, and MOE business continuity.

Valuable experience was found in the MOE building, being surrounded

by dedicated people who worked very hard for extended periods of time, and were highly committed to their work and the well-being of those affected by the earthquake.

There were a number of elements to the EWR immediately following the earthquake which led to ongoing support for schools and early childhood centres. These included:

- Formation of a core team of experienced TI practitioners
- Liaison with other ministry groups and the management group
- Figuring out the best thing to do
- Initial contacts with schools by the core EWR team
- Presentations to several large groups of school /early childhood staff
- Creation of a help sheet
- Creation of and direction to web based resources
- Formation and support of the larger liaison staff group
- Record keeping.

A core team of experienced Traumatic Incident practitioners was quickly brought together by MOE management. This included staff from Canterbury who had experience of the previous earthquake, and others from elsewhere in the country who were there for varying amounts of time. Some of these staff had worked together previously, which certainly assisted team formation. Those from outside were aware that local staff would in the end be the ones carrying on, but wanted to be helpful in the short-term: "*We were just there for a little while..*" and "*Locals will provide the long term support*". They were also very aware of the stress that local staff were often under, and the commitment these staff made by turning up to work in the EWR when often things at home were chaotic. The team was led by a Special Education manager who was part of the wider MOE leadership group and provided liaison with other MOE groups, but this liaison also became the responsibility of other EWR members who rapidly learned a great deal about MOE acronyms and roles.

Figuring out what to do was an important aspect of the intensive team environment. Members of the core

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<sup>33</sup> The Education Welfare Response (EWR) name was chosen instead of Special Education's traditional Traumatic Incident (TI) response name to better reflect the scale of the disaster and changes in processes to extend the capacity of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) response.

team had considerable experience in assisting schools and early childhood centres with Traumatic Incidents, but of course most had little or no experience of a disaster of this kind. Consequently, the “figuring out what to do” was a part of the team process. We wanted to help but had little idea what to expect. Even the minor quakes on the first day in the Ministry building, which was partially damaged, were quite alarming, and the team would stand around looking brave but quite frankly, worried.

The EWR team developed over time. The theme of flexibility of roles has emerged from review interviews with staff involved at the time, and seems significant in retrospect, as the work often involved staff finding and taking on roles that they were most comfortable with within the team, and often being challenged in their roles. Review interviews with team members have shown that they were willing to be involved in a range of tasks. Comments such as “we did what needed to be done” and “I didn’t know what we would do but it soon became obvious” reflect the rapid development and collaborative nature of the EWR. Overall, members of the EWR quickly felt valued by the Ministry of education management support and then by the education sector, so that being part of it was a valuable experience for them.

Working as a team and being aware of self and others’ capacity was a significant theme from review interviews. Historically this kind of awareness has always been a value within the TI service. Checks occurred informally within the team in an ongoing way, and were particularly important because at times there was a real sense of urgency in wanting to help which had the potential to exhaust any individual’s personal resources.

Figuring out the best thing to do was an on-going team process for the team that drew on previous TI experiences. Review interviews have shown that a core value in this process, that was perhaps unspoken at the time but has always been implicit in the TI service, was the value of rapid and responsive practice. The

team made considered decisions, but acted on them as quickly as possible.

Things that helped with the “figuring out” process included regular scheduled meetings and diligent record keeping. Minutes of team meetings with action steps that could be reviewed at the next meeting really helped. We set up and maintained a register of contacts with schools and early childhood centres which helped ensure that issues and needs discovered were addressed in a systematic manner by the team and, as needed, passed on to other parts of the ministry. Given the large number of schools and centres in the area, careful management of large amounts of information was essential.

Initially, the EWR team made contact with outlying schools that were functioning or almost functioning. Principals welcomed and valued the contact. Many schools were enrolling new students. A number had staff affected. Some had a need for follow up and support which the team then planned and delivered.

Another of the first jobs the EWR team did was to create a relevant help sheet. This contained some principles of responding to traumatic incidents – restoring and maintaining normal structures, ensuring inclusion of those in the school or EC community, addressing and ensuring communication, and consultation – developing understanding of responses to loss and grief. It contained some specific ideas relevant to schools and centres. It also contained the relevant helpline contact numbers. For the EWR this sheet served two purposes at least – it was something concrete and helpful, with a simple and consistent message, to share with the people that we were working with, and it also helped the team identify our own common beliefs and approaches, helping our own group formation and coherence.

The national practice advisor on Traumatic Incidents was also involved from Wellington in providing help and support, and in providing web based resources. The comments we had from schools were that it was easy to access

this information and that it was helpful to them.

Schools were at different stages in recovery and they moved from stage to stage. The most affected schools were assigned MOE project teams which included a Special Education person with welfare experience.

The EWR team proactively offered presentations to a number of groups of school and early childhood principals and teachers, and some other groups, based on the previous experience with the earlier Canterbury earthquake. These were attended by hundreds of teachers and principals, and were well received.

As the EWR progressed, the formation of the larger ECE/School liaison staff group began. About sixty five staff volunteered to be part of it, which was a significant proportion of the total Canterbury Special Education team, and said a great deal about the commitment of staff who were often personally affected by the earthquake themselves. Training sessions were held for these staff covering traumatic incident principles, organisation, resources, and first steps. Staff were assigned to groups of schools and early childhood centres, worked in teams of two or three, and were supported by the experienced core EWR team members. The role of the liaison staff was to connect with the leaders of early childhood centres and schools to assist them to support the return and well-being of staff and students. The role was not always straightforward as *“schools have an expectation that they will be supported without necessarily knowing what they need.”* This was a new way of working for our service, but our experience has been that it was valued and helpful, and that this model of working received very positive feedback from ECE and schools.

In addition, the liaison team model was also a very valuable model for some of the Christchurch staff, who were often affected by the earthquake themselves in different ways. Ensuring inclusion of those involved in traumatic incidents has been a key theme in our TI work and this was the case for our own staff too.

*The Education Welfare Response immediately following the February 2011 Earthquake*

The feedback which we have was that for them, helping others was a way of helping themselves. It is interesting to reflect on the worth of people being involved in this way using Seligman's (2011) description of the components of well-being which include not only positive emotion but probably more importantly, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement.

As one person put it, "It's about people doing whatever they can do at

the level they can." Another said "You do what you can at the time." And another said "it also allowed me to work alongside really experienced people and I learned so much from that. The ownership and involvement offered in the role helped me move past my own circumstances." She talked of "Experiencing the wonderful feeling of being able to help just a little."

**Reference**

Seligman, Martin E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. New York: Free Press.

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▲ Evolving versions of community safety, September 2011 — ©2011 Geoff Trotter

# Long Term Support in Schools and Early Childhood Services after February 2011

Shelley Dean, *Ministry of Education*

The Ministry of Education was challenged by the provision of long-term support. The Ministry needed to consider what this would look like, who needed to receive it and why. Additional costs and burdens needed to be considered on those already responding and supporting the education community through the ongoing effects of the earthquakes. Information is not extensive internationally or domestically on long term supports and there is little mention about the role teachers and schools have in providing support for children young people and their families. The Ministry of Education had already considered and put in place supports and interventions, but were hearing, through schools and other agencies, various views on additional needs.

Internationally there is some information on programmes and some information about delivery – usually by experts outside of the school sector or using a “train the trainer” model within communities to respond to post traumatic stress in children and young people.

Teachers were important support to children and young people in September and again in February. Children and young people looked to them with each aftershock. Teachers needed to manage their own responses and reactions in order to support the children in their care. Teachers also needed to provide appropriate responses and answers to challenging earthquake related questions. The February earthquakes added further complexity, stress and challenge as it resulted in combined classes, new students or children in multi-aged classes, learning hubs, new classroom school settings, limited teaching times where the different schools shared sites, crowded classrooms, shortened days. For some teachers this meant their personal routines changed as they were no longer able to go home at the same time, have meal times with their own family and travel times doubled.

The Victoria State University psychosocial department made contact with the ministry after the September Earthquake and began sharing their learnings from providing psychosocial

support after the Victoria Bush Fires in Australia. They told us how important it was to continue to provide support for teachers, and said that if they could turn back time, they would have provided more direct support to schools. This approach was also supported by the Joint Centre for Disaster Research who joined with us to extend the psychosocial response within schools in Christchurch.

To develop a long term strategy to support teachers we advertised through various education networks and surveyed teachers’ well-being needs in May 2011. The survey asked “what is your teaching position (management, early childhood, primary or secondary teacher, or other), where do you live, where do you work, what are your well-being needs, and what support do you need for yourself, and the children and students you teach”.

One hundred and ninety four responses were received, 36 % primary, 28 % secondary 24% management 10% other and 3 responses from the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector.

As many ECE are privately run as business operations, many teachers were unaware of the survey and there was no established network to inform them. The Ministry was communicating through newsletters to

the education sector and there was some concern that early childhood teachers were not accessing information through their management structures, so Ministry staff began to set up network meetings with early childhood teachers to support ECE staff and to attract ECE teachers to those network meetings.

The survey was re-advertised for the ECE sector but only received six responses.

The survey indicated good coverage over the rest of the sector, and we had similar response rates from secondary, primary and management. What we found was that most teachers had not accessed previous well-being workshops, which was surprising for the Ministry. Most education sector managers had attended well-being workshops but it appeared that messages and resources had not visibly or physically filtered through to teaching staff. When we started to look at the responses, we initially thought that where teachers lived and where they worked would provide information on where to direct resource or support. When analysed, the data indicated that where teachers taught and lived had no effect on their perceived need for support. The survey indicated 15% had no needs. In some of the worst areas some teachers indicated that “we’re fine, we’re okay, whereas in other less affected areas

teachers stated concerns and fears about what was happening and the support they needed. There were no discernable geographic patterns to well-being.

The main well-being themes that came out of the survey indicated that teachers needed.

- Information about supporting families
- Information on children and student well-being
- Information to supporting their own well-being

Teachers shared their concerns about site-sharing, increased additional teaching demands and the differences provided by management in different schools relating to travel and leave provisions and general support for teaching staff

Teachers also provided us with ideas to support their well-being. Some ideas offered were:

- teacher-tips for children,
- tips on self-care, and sleeping
- classroom tips,
- manager support and consistency,
- and ideas to support optimism back in their lives,

To confirm what teachers were telling us we held four face-to-face focus group meetings to feedback to teachers the information from the surveys and to check that we had correctly listened to their voices.

We had planned meetings in June, but unfortunately in June there were another series of strong aftershocks and a number of schools closed down for 2 or 3 days, so only two of those meetings went ahead.

*What teachers emphatically stated they didn't need.*

Teachers stated they didn't want things that took up extra time and extra resources, and/or placed additional burdens in their daily lives.

*What teachers stated they needed.*

During the meetings teachers confirmed that they needed accessible, readily available information. Teachers suggested that information should be placed on the site that teachers access frequently for teaching resources – on Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI). On the site they wanted information on children's reactions and recovery, behaviour, self care and positive recovery stories and supports available to families.

This information enabled us to start to form a long term plan and to communicate this to the sector. The plan extended access to school wide positive behaviour, Triple P parenting programmes and resources for families, ready access to tips-sheets and across agency resources. With permission from the Mental Health Foundation we adopted the "5 ways to well-being" framework and visual resources already developed to support communities in Christchurch. This framework was first established by the UK Government's Foresight

Project on Mental Capital and Well-being who reviewed inter-disciplinary work to identify a set of evidence-based actions to improve well-being, which individuals would be encouraged to build into their daily lives: Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning, and Give.

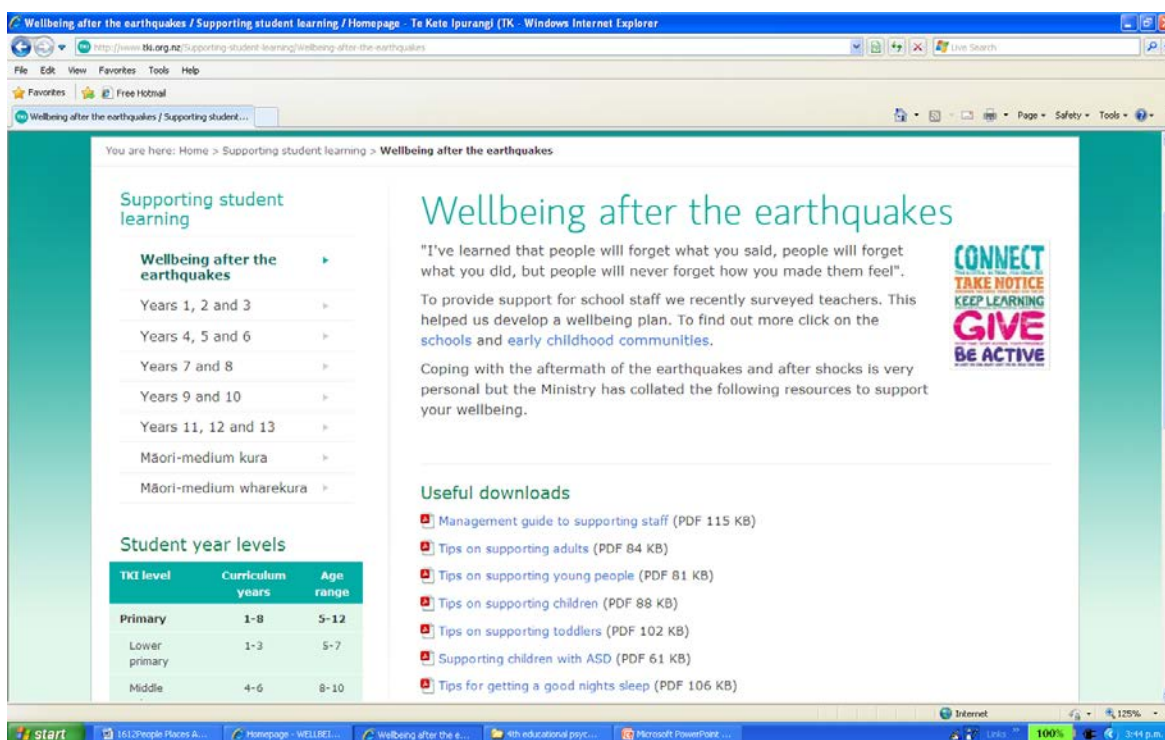
The initial site was quickly established and information about the on-going development of the site was advertised through sector meetings

Differing notions of appropriate support varied across agencies and within the sector which highlighted that specific responses needed to be further constructed in collaboration with the wider community (not just with teachers) and include members of all the Canterbury support systems. Further sector wide meetings were held with groups of people who were experiencing the needs of the education sector in different ways and whose notions of appropriate support and action varied. This collaborative approach lead by education brought together diverse groups and together constructed a tiered framework to support the healthy recovery of children and young people in schools. The TKI site has been redeveloped to reflect this. It continues to grow organically and collaboratively across the sectors [www.well-being.tki.org.nz](http://www.well-being.tki.org.nz)

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▼ **Figure 1:** The Initial Site



▼ **Figure 2:** The Redeveloped Site

