

# 2012

## Christchurch Residents' Association Forum

### Report



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NRAD  
15 May 2012

**“The Heart of Community,  
The Soul of Community Governance”**

The symbol below is a call for unity amongst residents' groups across New Zealand. The yellow house is welcoming and friendly and, with its large window, looks out over the rest of the neighbourhood.

The name of the original project – the National Database of Residents' and Progressive Associations – is fashioned in the shape of a koru, representing new growth, and is an acknowledgement of the original residents of the land.

Behind the koru are rays of light symbolising positivity and the embracing warmth and disinfecting properties of sunlight.



# FORUM REPORT

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## Executive Summary

In April 2012 the Draco Foundation (NZ) Charitable Trust (DFNZCT) – a sister organisation to the New Zealand Resilience Trust (NZRT) – facilitated a forum for Christchurch City residents' groups<sup>1</sup>. The event aimed to bring together delegates from residents' groups in the Christchurch City to meet other like-minded people, to share and hear new ideas and to have a say in the future of the City's community governance sector through the development of further initiatives (e.g. a federation).

The conference will be held on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> of April at the Canterbury Netball Centre in Hagley Park. This venue was chosen because of its central location and accessibility by the wider city, and is 'neutral ground' on which residents' groups may convene.

DFNZCT covered the cost of up to three delegates from any residents' association, ensuring attendance was free for these delegates. Lunch and morning/afternoon teas were provided. The only other group invited to send delegates were Christchurch City Community Boards and the Office of the Ombudsmen. Community Board delegates were charged a nominal fee to assist with the cost of catering.

Residents' groups were notified of the event by letter and information pack from the Director, National Residents Association Database (NRAD). This letter was followed up by email and phone calls. A media release was issued and Jarrod Coburn appeared on CTV to promote the event. Delegates registered using an online form at the [www.Residents.org.nz](http://www.Residents.org.nz) website.

The event was well subscribed with around 70 people representing 50% of the active residents' groups in Christchurch City. Feedback from the delegates was universally positive, and a high level of positive media attention resulted. Delegates gave an indication (by show of hands) that they wished for a federation of associations to be investigated. Many indicated in the survey they thought their association would join a federation if one were to be formed.

## Background

Over the past eight years the trustees of DFNZCT and NZRT have come to understand the importance of residents' associations and how much they contribute to creating a democratic society. Indeed, many such groups provide the only check-and-balance to the financial power of property developers and legal power of local bodies. Residents' associations have been active in New Zealand for nearly 150 years and more recently in the city have played a major role in the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes. The organisers of the Christchurch forum believed it was time to recognise the importance of these groups.

This event was organised as the first stage in raising awareness of residents' associations to the wider public, government agencies and media. It was intended to provide a platform for ideas to be discussed, enabling people active in local democracy and community governance to come together, meet, network and form lasting relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> *Resident's Groups* is a general term to describe a broad variety of civil society organisations that represent people. These included residents', ratepayers', progressive and neighbourhood associations, residents' societies, community councils and community associations.

## Community Governance Sector

A total of 131 groups were identified as fitting the scope of this forum, however we could not find contact details for 34 of these groups (assumed inactive) and 17 were in recess, leaving 80 active groups.

## Key Success Factors

The following factors were identified as indicating whether the conference was a success:

|   | Aim  | Measure   | Outcome  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Bring together at least 50 delegates from resident's groups in Christchurch City | The conference must attract at least 50 delegates from residents' associations within Christchurch City (25 groups). These also need to be the "right" kind of people – passionate about their community, interested in promoting local democracy, willing to stand up and be counted and able to motivate others to act.                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70 delegates in attendance throughout the day</li> <li>• 38 groups represented</li> <li>• All delegates were community leaders of considerable experience and capability</li> </ul>   |
| 2 | Generate coverage in local media   | At a minimum we must get coverage on Canterbury Television and in the Press and local community newspapers.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CTV interview</li> <li>• Articles in The Press and the Timaru Herald</li> <li>• Three days on National Radio</li> </ul>   |
| 3 | Spark ongoing activity within Christchurch City residents' associations          | Ongoing activity includes a the national conference planned for late 2012, enhanced media activity from residents' associations who attended, an education programme developed and run by forum participants and the successful development of a Christchurch residents' association federation.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ten volunteers for a working party to scope out a federation</li> <li>• Survey showed 81% of organisations indicated willingness to join a federation</li> <li>• 11 organisations asked for a representative of the Draco Foundation to address a meeting of their group</li> </ul> |
| 4 | Motivate and inspire the delegates   | <p>A survey of delegates taken before- and after the conference will show increased passion and an intent to pursue ideas gained at the conference.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring (of local newspapers and feedback from delegates) will show a greater level of cooperation and coordination amongst residents' associations in Christchurch City.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See next page for outcome of survey</li> </ul>  |

## Forum Survey

A survey was given to delegates on arrival with a sealed section to be completed at the end of the day. These two parts were compared to identify the original expectations of delegates and what they experienced during the day.

Many delegates expected knowledge, ideas and the opportunity to network, and these areas were satisfied. A significant

number said they had been inspired by the event, whilst 1 in 10 indicated the forum had increased unity for the sector. In answer to the question “How passionate are you about your role in a residents’ association?” the average response was 4.2 out of a maximum of 5. When asked how effective delegates thought their associations were, the average answer on a scale of 5 was 3.4. The delegates spent an average of 27 hours per month working for their organisation.

Delegates were also asked to name the thing they were most proud of achieving. The following are samples of replies received:

### IMPROVING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

- Saving heritage trees from being cut down
- Stopped a motorway, saved trees
- Pollution control at two major local sites
- Establishment of a free public tennis court
- Flags on lamp poles along main road
- Development of local reserve
- Resolving antisocial incidents
- Re-establishing a building for a community centre

### BUILDING COMMUNITY COHESIVENESS

- Annual community picnic
- Annual fair
- Street Christmas party
- Community barbecue trailer
- Bringing community together through annual picnic
- Community barbecues and fun days
- Collaboration and cohesion within community

### CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITY

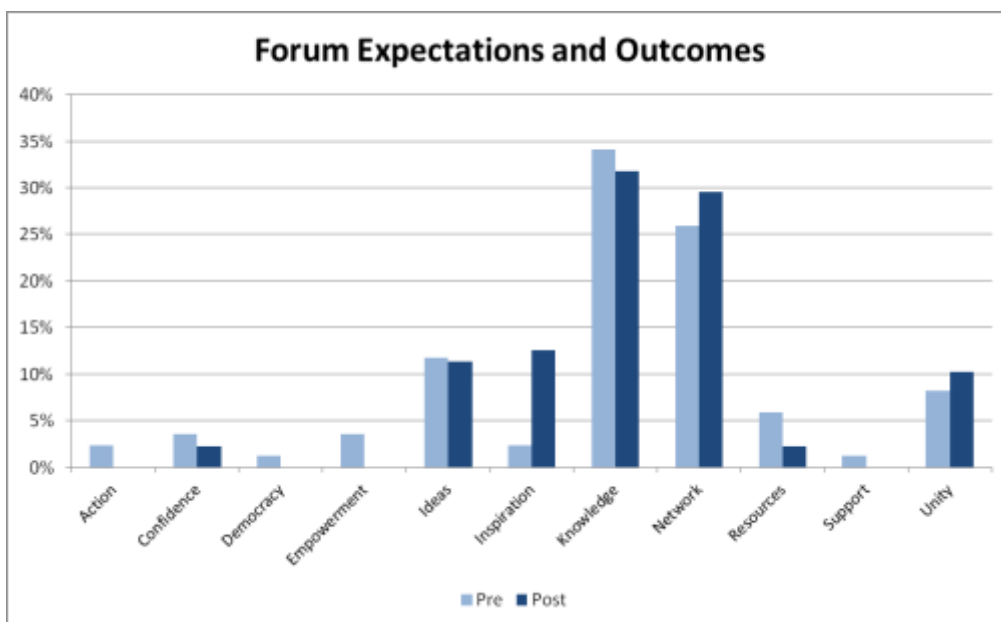
- Reform, led by insurgent community group
- Making university take responsibility for student behaviour
- Reduction on licence length for factory to discharge waste

### RAISING AWARENESS

- Causing Council be more aware of local community issues
- Providing information to residents / support to groups
- Regular community meetings
- Community voice
- Well-established information centre
- Increasing the size of the association

### POST-EARTHQUAKE ASSISTANCE

- Insurance clusters and Red Cross outreach branch
- Supporting vulnerable in the community
- Community recovery plan
- Mobilising residents army after earthquakes and still going!



## Morning Activities

- 1) The first session of the morning involved a quick introduction from each delegate and their “top issue”, written on a piece of coloured card. Other delegates were encouraged to hold up cards of the same colour if they also share concern about the issue. The “issues” were noted by conference staff and during the break five themes were developed:
  - Respect for Local Voice
  - Sense of Place
  - Transparency, Accountability and Information
  - Influence of Commerce
  - Nurturing Residents’ Groups
- 2) Delegates self-organised into five groups; each group addressed in detail one of the five themes in facilitated discussion.

## Afternoon Activities

- 1) Directly after lunch a representative from each group reported back on the issues and solutions discussed by their table.
- 2) Guest Speaker Jim Candiliotis, President of the Federation of Wellington Progressive and Residents' Associations (FWPRA) spoke for 20 minutes on the role of FWPRA. Time was allowed at the end for questions.
- 3) The remainder of the afternoon saw a ‘world café’-style discussion on next steps/moving forward. There were six tables in total: five focussing on the themes identified earlier in the morning and an additional table focusing on what a federation of residents’ associations could look like in Christchurch. All delegates spent at least 15 minutes at each table and notes of the discussions were taken.

## Media

Media were invited to attend during the first half-hour of the lunch break. Attending were The Press and Radio New Zealand, who interviewed the forum organiser and five delegates.

## Summary of Group Discussions

The following pages summarise the discussions undertaken as part of the forum. The forum delegates participated in two rounds of facilitated discussion, identifying issues and then solutions to those issues.

## **Group One: Respect for Local Voice**

It was recognised that government, commerce and community sectors all have a significant part to play and it is important that residents' associations be recognised as a source of community knowledge.

While local government often send community liaison staff and sometimes elected representatives to connect with residents' associations the information flow is often top down and the residents' associations hit a brick wall.

One approach to get your voice heard is to build your voice and make sure it is worth hearing. Suggestions are: write to Community Boards or make requests for deputation, invite Community Board members and counsellors to meetings, liaise with other residents' associations, map the areas for different residents' associations, build relationships with council staff, distribute a newsletter or e-news, use Facebook/social media/local noticeboards, send a welcome pack to new residents about the association, establish a community directory, combine with neighbouring residents' associations for particular meetings, promote that meetings are open to the public, consider making all residents in the local area members unless they opt out, publicly notify meetings, promote the purpose of the association and what long term and short term issues are being worked on, use residents' association as an umbrella group for other groups funding projects, use community newspapers and connect with local reporters, use local radio stations to promote RAs.

### **Key Elements**

| <b>POSITIVE</b>  | <b>NEGATIVE</b>   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents' associations voices might be stronger (and therefore more attention paid) if the organisations work co-operatively.</li> <li>• Residents' associations should share information with each other rather than each trying to access the same information independently.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A change in mindset is needed by people who have the power to make decisions.</li> </ul> |



## Group Two: Sense of Place

The character of communities in the city has shifted dramatically as a result of amalgamation from local borough/county councils to the current system. This decentralisation has created a disconnect between the council officers and the communities they have influence over. The issues we currently face around sense of place is potentially a systemic flaw: we need to learn to work together more intelligently. We need bureaucracy, but one that works with community, not against it.

Development and competition is leading to degradation of quality living spaces. This is a challenge of moral and financial interests that is happening everywhere. Respect and restoration for existing culture and heritage is being put in the 'too hard basket'. So what are we going to do about this? There is an existing level of 'community sense' that is powerful and residents' groups need to better tap into that feeling. We need to learn from the mistakes that characterise a degradation of place: "Place is more important than profit".

Grass-roots organisations (such as residents' groups) are being squashed by top-level impositions and pressure, the potential for growth from communities is latent. This is a health issue: personal care for where we live, which gives or reflects the soul of a place, reflects back on our own personal wellbeing. Crime is an early indicator of low sense of place/community.

Sumner community is an example of how a community can go through a process of organising themselves, which means cooperation or working together effectively, not ignoring the existing social capital and aspects that help Sumner, that is reflected in the speed of Sumner's recovery.

Collective action is a key to overcoming barriers.

Residents' groups can build local strength through inviting representatives of important local organisations (e.g. Plunket, RSA) to their meetings; organise a working bee (some family-friendly activity focus) e.g. a swap-meet, community pot luck event, art groups, community picnic, etc.; connect with real estate agents who know who is moving into a particular area (e.g. Buckets of Love); boosting the diversity of how they communicate with their community: community noticeboard, newsletter, Facebook group, radio... using mass media to give residents' groups a place in your community.

### Key Elements

| POSITIVE   | NEGATIVE  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents' groups have a key role to play in preserving sense of place</li> <li>• There is a role for residents' groups to be a leader in community, providing a 'space' for other local groups to gather and discuss ways to improve sense of place</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working independently makes the task a lot harder – collective action is needed</li> <li>• Degradation of a sense of place negatively affects the health of a community</li> <li>• Community character is not a priority for commerce or government</li> </ul> |

### **Group Three: Transparency, Accountability and Information**

There was a sense of frustration with the approach taken by local government towards protecting information, reasons for decisions, decision-making processes and the consequences of decisions made. Community organisations can be frustrated by a “we know best” attitude of people in authority.

There was also concern that there was little room for engagement with developers (particularly when plans were non-notified) and development can impact upon the aesthetics, character and dynamic of a community.

Sometimes accessing information can be difficult because enquiries are referred on or websites are difficult to navigate.

Within residents’ associations there can be institutionalised knowledge. That knowledge needs to be shared and passed on.

A key tool for residents’ associations is the use of legislative responsibilities to disclose information such as the Official Information Act, Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act and the Public Records Act. The conference was also reminded about the right to request to make deputations direct to Community Boards.

General comments were: Linking up builds power, there is a need to protect democratic process, information needs to be shared such as through an email list or a combined website for residents’ associations, foster direct relationships with good communicators, make requests for services and get job numbers.

#### **Key Elements**

| <b>POSITIVE</b>   | <b>NEGATIVE</b>  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents’ associations also need to be transparent and accountable within their own organisations and to the community.</li> <li>• Residents’ associations could establish an email network to share information they have obtained so another organisation doesn’t need to duplicate effort.</li> <li>• Residents’ associations can be smarter about using legislation and entitlements to access information and be heard.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is concern that Councils use “Public Excluded Business” as the rule rather than an exception.</li> <li>• The community exerts energy and resources to provide comment which is then ignored or just “disappears” into a convoluted or slow process over which they are given no further involvement.</li> <li>• The Christchurch City Council developed, but has not ratified, a Residents’ Associations policy.</li> </ul> |

## Group Four: Influence of Commerce

It was recognised that government, commerce and community sectors all have a significant part to play and it is important to see all points of view and work together. However, commerce can have be ‘dark force’, for example the alcohol lobby. Other negative influences of commerce was a move by commercial cricket to take over the recreational cricket spaces in Hagley Park.

It was noted that business is often indifferent to aesthetics, so transparency required in planning discussions. The delegates advocated for consistency in planning approaches as there is an opportunity to develop a significant city. The right decisions are needed (who makes them? What’s the hurry?).

CERA has no apparent evaluation, community organisations need input and there needs to be better linkages to NGOs. The CERA Community Forum is a drain on community leader’s time as it is unpaid. It was mooted that CERA needs to take a much greater lead in the rebuild of key facilities (e.g. conference centre) to get things moving.

Community groups can work with commercial interests but there needs to be an effective strategy for dealing with authority groups: determined persistence, resource-intensive, being taken seriously, having the overall goals identified (no diversions leading to compromise on key points).

Overall it was agreed that residents’ groups need to remain vigilant to the activities of the commercial sector. Residents’ associations need to focus on contacting as many residents as possible and get them on their mailing lists, that way they build up their level of communication and their reach.

It was suggested that project-oriented community-private partnerships between residents’ associations and commerce could be a worthwhile area to investigate.

### Key Elements

| POSITIVE  | NEGATIVE  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community would like to influence commercial interests by design panels or properly constituted community groups</li> <li>• Good commercial development benefits community (win/win scenario)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business influencing not for the better</li> <li>• Quick and dirty development unwanted by community (e.g. liquor outlets, gambling machines)... local rules needed</li> </ul> |

## Group Five: Nurturing Residents' Groups

There are key people who are supporting residents' groups by sheer grit, sinking many hours a week into meetings, promotion, dealing with local issues and governance. Discussion centred around how to ease or share the burden, and how to improve the effectiveness of residents' groups.

Much of the workload falls to a handful of individuals within each group, a lot of that work involves keeping people together and dealing with councils that in turn take no notice. Keeping members and sustainability are major concerns that need to be dealt with.

Organisational membership could be improved through adopting a positive approach in mission statements and objectives, communicating on a regular basis with the community using newsletters and other means, and by marketing 'motivation' to the citizenry. Some communication channels work better than others (for example, local newspapers won't necessarily connect to youth whereas social media such as Facebook will).

Councils and central government generally don't feel residents' groups have 'mandate' to represent community. Explicit support can be gained through surveying and research and adopting a project-based approach.

Great importance was ascribed to knowing people in an area. This enhances a group's social capital and also helps with word-of-mouth advertising: people are more likely to support or get involved with a group they know something about or know someone who is directly involved. However there are people who use residents' groups for their own personal agendas – this sometimes contributes to the failure of a group.

There are various models of residents' group. Some operate street-by-street whereas others cover whole or multiple suburbs. Some own their own buildings and have lots of money, some continually have to apply for funding, some operate (successfully) with no money at all. A space to meeting is important though and some areas don't have a space (e.g. community centre) to hold meetings.

### Key Elements

| POSITIVE   | NEGATIVE   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great demand from communities for the services offered by residents' groups</li> <li>• Opportunity to grow and develop residents' groups in ways that share the burden and involve more of the community</li> <li>• Lots of diversity in methods and means of doing things – lots to learn from each other</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huge workload for key people</li> <li>• Perceived apathy amongst citizens (or is it simply frustration?)</li> <li>• People using residents' groups for their own personal agenda</li> </ul> |

## Group Six: What a Federation Could Look Like

Discussion around the federation of residents' groups in Christchurch focused on what such a body could provide its membership, and the scope within which it would operate.

Delegates wanted an umbrella group who would support and nurture the sector, but not represent it, nor deal with individual issues.

A federation should be free of partisan politics, not be a drain on the time of members, not charge fees, and be free of external influence from local or central government.

Benefits identified were ensuring agencies stick to legal processes, highlighting inequality, "clout", the ability to receive information and disseminate it to members and providing advocacy on behalf of residents' associations.

| Aim                          | Activity   |
|------------------------------|--|
| It should Empower            | Promote inclusiveness<br>Develop networks and channels<br>Emphasise similarities<br>Operate a website<br>Be a knowledge bank<br>Equal participation<br>Earn mana   |
| It should be a Catalyst      | For working together<br>Harness the willingness to help  |
| It should Coordinate         | Reduce duplication<br>Collective ideas<br>Local skills<br>Point of contact<br>Undertake projects<br>Share experiences<br>Find sponsorship<br>Bring the groups together and share resources<br>Run a website and Facebook page<br>Be an information clearinghouse<br>Work-in with Non Governmental Organisations<br>Provide regular updates<br>Advise on major changes to law, policies, etc. |
| It should Communicate        | On the web<br>Provide forums, both physical and virtual<br>Raise public awareness of the sector<br>Marketing residents' associations   |
| It should provide Support    | Provide advice both in terms of who to talk to as well as what to do<br>Come up with / share ideas<br>Share stories<br>Engender sectorial support<br>Help residents' groups build capability   |
| It should undertake Research |  |
| It should Educate            | Provide a pool of speakers for residents' association meetings<br>Provide education on rights, law changes and powers<br>Run workshops<br>Build social capital<br>Use crowd-sourcing   |

## APPENDICES

### Appendix One – Timeline

| Date              | Communication                                   | Promotion  | Funding  | Content                                | Miscellaneous          |
|-------------------|---|--|--|--|------------------------|
| 16 Jan            |   | begin series of face-to-face meetings with residents' associations |  |  |                        |
| 8 Mar             | direct mail out to all residents' associations  | letters to Community Boards  | letters to relevant government agencies and business |  |                        |
| 17 Mar            | pre-conference media release<br>reminder emails | conference materials designed and approved                         |  | speakers confirmed<br>agenda confirmed |                        |
| 2 Apr             |   |  | funding secured                                      |  | setup design finalised |
| 16 Apr            |   | conference materials printed                                       |  |  | catering confirmed     |
| 18 Apr            | personal approach to select media               | delegate media pack finalised                                      |  | facilitator information sent           |                        |
| 21 Apr            | <b>&lt; &lt; &lt; F O R U M &gt; &gt; &gt;</b>  |  |  |  |                        |
| 22 Apr            | post-forum media release                        |  |  |  |                        |
| 23 Apr-<br>22 Aug | report back                                     |  |  |  | outreach programme     |

## Appendix Two – Event Programme

| Start time | End Time | Activity  | Length |
|------------|----------|---|--------|
| 9:00       | 9:59     | Delegate registration   | 1:00   |
| 10:00      | 10:14    | Introduction from Jarrod Coburn, Director of NRAD (Draco Foundation)  | 0:15   |
| 10:15      | 11:14    | Personal introduction and "top issue" from each delegate  | 1:00   |
| 11:15      | 11:29    | Break and networking/feedback opportunity   | 0:15   |
| 11:30      | 12:44    | Individual group discussion: "Top Issues Affecting Residents' Groups in the City"   | 1:15   |
| 12:45      | 13:29    | Lunch and networking (note: media have been invited to attend at this time)   | 0:45   |
| 13:30      | 13:59    | Report back on Top Issues discussion  | 0:30   |
| 14:00      | 14:44    | Guest Speaker: Jim Candiliotis, President of the Federation of Wellington Progressive and Residents' Associations (FWPRA) | 0:45   |
| 14:45      | 14:59    | Break and networking/feedback opportunity   | 0:15   |
| 15:00      | 16:29    | World cafe-style discussion on next steps/moving forward  | 1:30   |
| 16:30      | 17:29    | Report back and deliberation on "next steps" discussion   | 1:00   |
| 17:30      |          | Close of forum  |        |
| 18:00      |          | Social event (optional) \$25/head   |        |

## **Appendix Three – Key Personnel and Supporters**

### **Facilitators**

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Katherine Peet       | Community advocacy, treaty relations          |
| John Peet            | Engineering, sustainable development          |
| Hon. Sir Kerry Burke | Local government, good governance             |
| Jim Candiliotis      | Civil society, community resilience           |
| Erin Ebborn          | Not-for-profit governance, social justice     |
| Jarrold Coburn       | Community governance, community activism      |
| Jim Candiliotis      | Federations, stewardship of residents' groups |

### **Guest Speaker**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Jim Candiliotis | Wellington Federation of Progressive and Residents' Associations |
|-----------------|--|

### **Media Liaison**

Erin Ebborn

### **Forum Organiser**

Jarrold Coburn

### **Sponsors / Supporters**

Christchurch Diocesan Earthquake Recovery Fund  
 Draco Foundation (NZ) Charitable Trust  
 Office of the Ombudsmen  
 Lyttelton Mt Herbert Community Board  
 Burwood Pegasus Community Board  
 Spreydon-Heathcote Community Board  
 Fendalton-Waimairi Community Board  
 New Zealand Banking Ombudsman [www.bankomb.org.nz](http://www.bankomb.org.nz)  
 Commissioner for Financial Literacy and Retirement Income [www.sorted.org.nz](http://www.sorted.org.nz)

*“Grateful thanks go to the people who helped make this day possible, and the people who gave up their day to find a new way forward.”*