

【研究ノート】

The Christchurch Earthquakes of 2011 & 2012:

Altruism and volunteerism in times of adversity

- A discussion with the President of the Student Volunteer Army

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Introduction

The city of Christchurch, New Zealand was struck by two devastating earthquakes in September 2010 and February 2011 that collectively claimed 185 lives and caused untold damage to the inner-city, suburbs and the surrounding area. In the aftermath of the twin disasters, an ongoing clean-up and subsequent reconstruction effort was launched with multi-sector relief assistance received from across New Zealand and elsewhere. However, the pace of the rebuild came under criticism from a range of sectors, as the authors discovered during an initial on the ground survey in September 2014 in a field trip to the city to survey the extent of the damage and pace of the recovery.

What the authors discovered was that there were still a range of challenges regarding the damage and the pace of the reconstruction across the city and that a great many residents were still fighting to resume their former lives due to ongoing issues with insurance, government disaster compensation, and other bureaucratic processes. On the contrary, they noted the existence of a strong determination among city residents and business owners to restore New Zealand's second largest city to its former glory and that the disasters had brought out a strong sense of community spirit, altruism and determination which was enabling people to come to terms with and gradually deal with the situation.⁽¹⁾

In subsequent trips in August 2015, and February 2016, the authors conducted supplementary investigations into the activities of the cleanup operation, focusing upon one group in particular, the Student Volunteer Army, a student-based volunteer organisation that had taken the initiative to create its own unique grassroots response to the disasters.⁽²⁾ Utilising social media, the founder of the group, Mr. Sam Johnson initially recruited fellow classmates, bringing them together in an ad-hoc response effort to work in whatever ways they could to help their community cope immediately and ongoing following the disasters. As the scale of the disaster became apparent, the SVA expanded rapidly, and following the second more deadly February 2011 earthquake the organisation mobilised up to 13,000 mostly student volunteers from the University of Canterbury

to assist with the clean-up operation. Through cooperating with the staff of various agencies including the city's emergency services, the volunteers dedicated thousands of hours to clear silt and mud from streets and properties and distribute essential supplies, which contributed significantly to the physical aspect of the recovery process. Furthermore, through personal interactions with affected residents, they also facilitated improvements in people's morale and emotional conditions, with their activities having a positive effect on the overall recovery process and thereby contributing towards the community resilience of the people of Christchurch. Subsequently, the SVA has developed into a fully-fledged university organisation.

On the afternoon of February 16th, 2016, almost exactly five years on from the disasters, the authors carried out an unstructured interview with the current President of the organisation, Mr. Alex Cheesebrough at its headquarters, located just off the campus of the University of Canterbury. The purpose of the interview was to give Mr. Cheesebrough an opportunity to explain the current structure of the SVA, outline its recent activities and identify what Japanese people can potentially learn from the New Zealand experience of student volunteers working in a post-disaster scenario and other volunteer activities. These issues are especially pertinent due to the organisation's connection with Japan, which was mentioned in a separate interview with the founder, Sam Johnson who visited towns of the devastated Tohoku region following the massive tsunami and quake off the coast in 2011, working with students at Waseda University to establish a Japanese branch of the organisation. Unfortunately, the Japanese model was not able to succeed to the extent that the New Zealand model was due to a number of factors, which are brought to light in the interview. Furthermore, the interview established that the reasons for the success of the New Zealand model were to a large degree due to the raw initiative of those involved in the original founding of the SVA, as well as the flexibility of the New Zealand authorities that were involved in the clean-up since they decided to allow the students of Christchurch the autonomy they needed to take initiative in the clean-up. It is hoped that the excerpts from the interview reproduced below will provide enlightening primary source material for researchers examining volunteer groups and activities, especially those formed as ad-hoc groups in response to natural disasters.

A discussion with Mr. Alex Cheesebrough, President of the Student Volunteer Army

Zane : So for the 2010 quake, the reason I was interested in New Zealand and the quake in general, the reconstruction following the quake was, I actually was in New Zealand in 2010 and I was in Christchurch the day before the first quake. I was actually in Melbourne and arrived on Saturday morning, the day the earthquake happened. I heard that a big quake had taken place. I'd just started a new job where I am now teaching community development, reconstruction

following disasters, and post-disaster resilience. **James** was also doing similar things up on the coast.

James : In Tohoku, following the tsunami in Japan.

Zane : So I talked to **James** about coming down to New Zealand at some stage and so of course we decided to come down. And there wasn't a lot about Christchurch in Japan in the literature or knowledge about really what happened in Christchurch, about the quakes in general and the disaster relief and reconstruction. So we decided to come down and see Christchurch for ourselves, and me having been here before I thought well.....

James : A comparative study.

Zane : To see where it was going and to see things for myself and then go back and let my faculty know, and write a paper or two about that with **James**.

James : Which we've done.

Zane : And so last year [2015] I came back for a second time. And so just before I was going to come back, it's quite interesting, I found something on YouTube about, I think Sam did a presentation? At a Christchurch TED event I think it was?

Alex : Yes, TED X.

Zane : And so I found that and looked at it and thought hold on a minute because in that presentation Sam mentioned the Student Volunteer Army and I'd read a little bit about it. But then he mentioned that they'd actually gone up to Japan, they'd been invited up to take the model up there and see what they could do with it and work with the Japanese. They'd been invited up by a bunch of students I think from Waseda University, so I thought I'd get hold of Sam and so actually I had a bit of a talk with him in Wellington. This was during your winter six or seven months ago [August, 2015].

So I did that and I was talking to **James** and we thought well we'd like to come back down because it's nearly the 5th anniversary of the disaster. So we set up a bunch of meetings and then of course I met Louis [a SVA member] last year, and had a talk with him at the University and so we thought we would just see if we could get hold of the director.

And Sam mentioned to me that you're going in different directions now - moving away from the original concept. Because, correct me if I'm wrong, you've kind of focused upon the cleanup and especially liquefaction after the quake, and it kind of expanded from that. That's kind of my understanding, now you're doing work in other areas and so we were kind of interested in these things. And **James** doesn't know much about what you do and so we're here to talk to you and get your insights. And perhaps just for **James** you could give a little bit of a background.

James : How long have you been involved in this?

Alex : So I've been involved in the Executive for 3 years. So I'm from Christchurch so I was here

when the quake happened but I was still in school. But I've been in the SVA for 3 years but I think we've obviously transitioned quite a lot, because you can't just rely on having disasters to keep you busy! So we've changed our mission statement so now it's to make service a part of the student lifestyle by inspiring and activating students to be the change in their community. So I suppose that basically we focus on volunteering now. So it's the same value set as to why we responded to the first earthquake, but it's not really disaster response anymore.

Well I mean it is within the Christchurch context, because you know we had the earthquake a couple of days ago and we were on stand by for Civil Defence. But so we're still there to respond but it's not our bread and butter. So that's more like what we came out of, and obviously because there were heaps of aftershocks, quite a lot of different opportunities to show - oh liquefaction, I suppose! But now there's not those opportunities, so we do a volunteer event every weekend of the academic year, so we have about 1500 members. But those volunteer projects range hugely, so sometimes an example event of last year: a lot of people leave their bikes on campus and they get confiscated, and so we took them from the University of Canterbury security to this place in town called Rand Bikes which is like a gap-filler project, and we did all the bikes up and gave them to the students who'd had their bikes stolen. So stuff like that, but we also receive quite a few e-mails and phone calls just from residents in Christchurch if they need help with anything. So we try and fit them in.

Zane : So you mean general volunteer activities in the community?

Alex : Yes.

Zane : So do you think that comes from the activities that you did with them before? I think Sam mentioned to me that for many people that was all the SVA had for some of the first people they interacted with after the quake. They didn't have anyone else to turn to, right?

Alex : Yes.

Zane : And so were they the same kind of people that you helped after the quakes?

Alex : Some of them, but it's mainly that people sort of recognised us from the quakes and then quite a lot of media coverage after that with some of the volunteer events that we've done. So we were reasonably well known.

James : It was easy to call upon you perhaps from people who have needs in the community?

Alex : Yes, so we're sort of pretty well known now for what we do. So yes we receive calls for random volunteer projects but we also pro-actively go out and try and find projects that we can do, bird habitat restoration projects or whatever.

James : How many people make up your core group of volunteers now?

Alex : Last year we had 5-600. We've got 1500 members, but in terms of our core group it's probably about 600.

James : That's still significant isn't it? So a request will come in and you'll send out a mass e-mail - 'Can anybody come at this time to do this'?

Alex : Yes, e-mail, Facebook, we've got an app now as well, texting.

James : Your own app? An SVA app?

Alex : Yes it's actually only been released a few days ago.

James : And the Information Technology Department made it for you did they?

Alex : Well, we actually got some students to make it.

James : Wonderful - we'll have to download that! Because there's lots of things which are very interesting for the two of us. We are faculty members from two different universities and in the Japanese case, it is a very conformist, cooperative society but there isn't a tradition of volunteering, there aren't many people who go on the Peace Corp or have a year out. It's just not a common thing to do.

Zane : It's changing very slowly.

James : Very slowly, and so obviously the needs up in the northern part of Japan because of the tsunami are still enormous, so if there were a model like yours which has been extremely successful, what could we as faculty members learn from that? How could we inspire, motivate, what mechanisms are in place?

Alex : Well I think a lot of people said like you can't do it for a disaster but I reckon you just start a volunteer group and then you've got your members, so you just call them your members.

James : 5-600 even now on stand by?

Alex : Yes probably more than that.

James : What's your position ?

Alex : The President.

James : So you have confidence in the fact that the message can come out and you can bring together 2, 3, 400 within a weekend or something?

Alex : Yes.

James : That's excellent.

Alex : You have more [people] than whoever has actually signed up as a member.

James : Because people want to come along....

Alex : Because if it's a disaster, you're going to get more. It's more like we've got the system set up. We've got an Executive Committee, whereas Sam had to just grab his mates.

Zane : But now you've got the structure in place.

James : How many members are there on the Executive Committee?

Alex : 22.

James : Do you need that many? Pardon the rude question!

Alex : Yes you do.

James : To do what?

Alex : [Explaining while pointing to a poster showing the structure of the SVA Exec Committee] Well here you've got me, so I look after all the events, normal weekend projects and also our big events. We've got a Secretary, Treasurer, two logistics, two events managers and these for big volunteer projects with like 100+ people on one day, so they need quite a lot more forward planning. We are doing an SVA camp in a couple of weeks where we take a hundred students up to Marlborough Sound.

Zane : What is the purpose of the camp?

Alex : To build tracks in the mountains.

Zane : Oh I see.

Alex : And then we've got Communications, Webmaster, and then we have these other initiatives, so we have this PAVE it's called - Practical Academic Volunteering Experience. So it's setting people up with mini-internships at firms and that's like volunteering that's specific to what you're studying.

Zane : That's what we're interested in doing.

James : So you've got tie-ins with the private sector?

Alex : Yes.

James : Like kind of unofficial understandings with companies, that you've got some people who we could send for a short time etc. That's excellent isn't it.

Alex : And then we've also got Legacy Project which is, well you'll find out. It's being released on the 22nd but I can't say anything about it at the moment. But you'll find out in the media what it is.⁽³⁾

And then there are four Platoon Leaders, they organise the weekend projects and then there's one [lady] Kes, she just does the inter-hall competition so it's for the halls of residence for all the first years, so she organises the competition for them.

James : The idea is just to stimulate interest and motivation.

Alex : Yes, and we've got a high school where there's a mentoring programme as well so we get into high schools.

James : This is really dynamic isn't it?

Zane : How did that morph for the original initiative into what you're doing now and who initiated that because didn't Sam initiate it?

Alex : No, not really. So Sam went after a year. But I came in pretty much a couple of years after all the original people had gone. So obviously our Executive changes round, these are all the Exec members actually throughout the years. But Sam was only in the first one so basically from that

second picture onwards it's new people. And obviously the Exec pretty much sometimes completely changes.

Zane : Because here in New Zealand students are only here for three years, not four years.

Alex : Yes some people, like I and all the Engineering students are here for four years, and Law are like here for five years.

Zane : But it's generally three years.

Alex : Yes like I'll be the longest ever serving Exec member - for three years. Yes so I mean it changes quite a lot. But the logo and stuff changed the year before I was here so that had changed then, but by then they were sort of doing things that were pretty rudimentary though. And just they were only doing the big projects, they weren't doing the small weekend projects as well.

Zane : Can you give me an example of a big project?

Alex : Like Connect With Community - we go out and have like a neighbourhood that's had a rough time and we do a whole load of volunteer projects in that neighbourhood and come back for a big community barbecue.

James : So like social-economic areas that are rather deprived, things like that?

Alex : Sometimes. So last year Phillipstown had just lost their primary school because it was getting closed or moved so we did one there. And then New Brighton it's just like neglected by the council and so on. Generally, there's a sense of neglect.

James : So you're in your 3rd year now, and you'll graduate when?

Alex : The end of this year.

James : Sorry I don't know the New Zealand academic timings.

Alex : We start uni in a week [22nd February].

James : So starting in March and finishing in December?

Alex : Yes like November.

James : And the activities of the SVA they don't compromise the amount of time you need to study?

Alex : Well, I don't know - debatable! You can fit it in.

James : And you've got premises here - so the University gave you this did they?

Alex : Yes so now we're partnered with the university which is really cool.

James : And what does that mean?

Alex : Well they give us some funding and they also give us a lot of support as they gave us an office but also printing, we can use some of their vehicles - it's great.

James : Is there any oversight from that? Because the reason for my question is in Japan it's so bureaucratic. People coming in, going through your books.

Alex : You mean like what does the uni get out of it?

James : No, what is the mechanism of the institutional links?

Alex : Well it's just like we have a written agreement and that's all.

Zane : Do you have any criteria you have to fulfil in order to get that? Who established that more formal relationship with the university?

Alex : Well us and our Board, we contacted the uni and had a few discussions.....

James : At a high level I imagine?

Alex : Yes. And then from there we decided that it was beneficial for both parties.

James : So I imagine you've got a budget, premises as you mentioned, access to some vehicles, you've got a code of practice: 'These kind of activities we will do, these we won't, these are our expectations of our members', things like that.

Alex : Yes. So we have sponsors and we have UC [the University of Canterbury] who are our partner. So we have some of the initiatives that we're really pushing or that UC really want us to push, and they are the Legacy Project, the in-schools and the Practical Academic Volunteering Experience which ties into their co-curricula transcript. It's not an academic transcript but it includes all these sort of things. So then if people come to our events we can scan them in and then we can know that they've been to these projects. And then the university can put it on their official transcript because they've done these things.

James : Oh I see, so in a sense they get academic credit for their involvement?

Alex : Not academic, it's like a co-curricula transcript so it's an official transcript but it's not academic.

James : Right, they have that in the United States don't they?

Alex : It's just all of these things that you've done and been involved in.

James : Extra-curricula things.

Alex : So like for sport, you've played rowing for Canterbury or whatever.

Zane : So it looks very good on your CV doesn't it?

Alex : Yes it's like official.

James : So that, was it created especially or did it exist for other sports teams and you were added to it?

Alex : Well it's actually just only really being launched this year but the idea, it wasn't because of us really. It was mainly influenced by us.

James : So it was a mechanism that existed and you kind of joined it, if you like?

Alex : Yes.

James : That's awesome **Alex** isn't it? Are those documents confidential? They wouldn't be on the web?

Alex : Well the agreement with UC is confidential.

James : Yes I understand. It's very impressive.

Zane : So just going back to the quakes, are you still undertaking any activities that are related to the quakes at all?

Alex : I suppose indirectly, just because.....

Zane : Disaster relief, anything like that?

Alex : Well we do disaster response, so like the flooding a couple of years ago we responded to that because it was really bad. So we were helping people because there were landslides and stuff. So helping shovel things but also helping people move out of the house when the water had got into all of their stuff.

Zane : You know like so many communities are still struggling obviously, almost 5 years on so you don't do anything with them?

Alex : Well, I suppose a lot of our weekend projects are helping people that the reason why they need help is maybe indirectly because of the earthquakes. But then a lot of them aren't, they are completely new.

Zane : So it's just like whoever needs help, you guys are just there to respond basically?

Alex : Pretty much, yes.

James : That's nice. And other agencies presumably, the police, the fire brigade, the ambulance etc. you have presumably unwritten agreements with these people that this kind of activity you can safely do, and people aren't treading on each other's toes....

Alex : Yes, sort of like we're on call for Civil Defence.

James : What does that mean?

Zane : You were saying that from the other day, weren't you? Like you said, I was going to ask what does that mean? Because it's like you had the quake and then you're 'on call'. So what do you actually do?

Alex : Yes well basically we're on standby so we're like a contact for people, you know residents that are in need, that have all this liquefaction down the street, can't get the car out, whatever.

James : OK and then in that case they call directly to you, they don't have to go through somebody else?

Alex : That's Civil Defence, ah yes they can come directly to us.

Zane : Civil Defence will point them in your direction?

Alex : Or yes, or Civil Defence will do that yes.

James : Civil Defence is a Ministry is it?

Zane : It's an agency.

James : I see. So you've got a very positive, cooperative relationship with these agencies?

Alex : Yes.

Zane : That's quite amazing because when I talked to Sam.....

Alex : We didn't at the start though.....

Zane : No, that's what Sam was saying...well that's one of the reasons he founded the SVA. That's because he rang up saying, 'Can I help?' and they said 'What qualifications do you have?' and he said 'I don't have any' and so that's why he started the whole SVA basically, right?

Alex : Yes and then the media got behind the SVA and therefore Civil Defence were like, 'Oh yes, go on then.'

James : 'We'll let them do it,' I see. But now it's established?

Alex : Yes now we're like Christchurch City Council a couple of days ago sent out an e-mail being like 'If you've got any liquefaction or anything, contact the SVA at infoSVA.org.'

Zane : Wow, did you have any calls regarding that? [the earthquake of February 2016]

Alex : No we didn't actually in the end. We went to check out the liquefaction in the east but it was pretty minor.

Zane : Oh you had some? Because we were out there the other day trying to look for some and we couldn't find any, it was just very minor was it?

Alex : Really minor, and when we got there it had all, you know the really minor stuff had been cleared.

Zane : Yes people had cleared it by themselves.

Alex : We thought that, you know, if anyone needed help we were there but....

James : You didn't get a call on this occasion?

Alex : No.

James : This is why this seems so sensible and so necessary that you can in a sense respond when the emergency calls come in, but you're not just sat around twiddling your thumbs if there are no emergency calls.

Alex : Well because if you're twiddling your thumbs you probably would not exist. Because why would you be there?

Zane : I kind of imagine that if they had something like this in Japan, I would say there would be layers of bureaucracy. And I think actually the authorities would have problems interacting with students, letting students do what they do here, giving them that much responsibility. I think decentralising that kind of responsibility would be very difficult in Japan. It's very top down.

Alex : So you could just be like, 'No stuff you', and just do it anyway.

James : [Laughs] That would be nice.

Zane : That's the attitude that I think they [the SVA] took at the start you see, and that's what they did and so it morphed, and they found that 13,000 students were helping and they couldn't

ignore that, they got the media coverage and stuff.

James : Yes that's remarkable.

Zane : So it could have just petered out, and I think that's what Sam was saying, telling me why he thought that it didn't go very well in Japan. You know that whole 'authority thing'.

James : Do the activities that you're doing right now really enthuse you as they did when you first joined?

Alex : Yes I think so.

James : Tell me about that.

Alex : I don't know, like I think it's the emotional reward you get from doing all of these projects, a lot of the small ones particularly, when someone's like really appreciative and they couldn't have done something without you. You know that's why you do it. And you also do it for the social aspect of volunteering and all the other positive things that come out of it.

James : This is so nice. The various bureaucratic, administrative barriers that we face but to some extent.....

Zane : Yes well the Japanese students wouldn't say, 'Stuff you', they just can't, it's not in their psyche to do that.

James : Because you know if the teacher decides they all go, 'Yes, sir', and then.....

Alex : But then if you.... I think the way I'd see it working would be like just do a volunteer club and then you've got like what we do but over there, and then when the disaster happens at least you've got a bit of like organisation.

Zane : They do do that, don't get me wrong, they do have volunteer clubs but they go through their professors and they always go on some event up to, for example, the coast [referring to the Tohoku region of Honshu Island, Japan that was devastated by the Tsunami and Earthquake of March 11, 2011].

Alex : But surely the students' associations in the universities are they strong or not?

Zane : No.

Alex : Because here they are really strong and the students' associations, well they work pretty collaboratively, but they are not the same organisation.

Zane : I don't think a formal student association exists at Japanese universities.

Alex : Really?

James : In my university in Toyo for example, it's a big university, there's 30,000 students there, and they've got every single club you can imagine. They've got the most bizarre clubs, there's literally the Hide and Seek club! And they go around Tokyo and play hide and seek in Tokyo Dome and stuff like that literally. And all of the sports clubs under the sun but they all must follow the guidelines, the strictures of the Gakuseibu, the student administrative section. And

they need a professor's name on the top of the paper and so it's a pyramid.

Alex : You need to get a community professor and then you're good. In a way you just need the professor to say 'oh yes, sweet as'. And we've got a professor.....

Zane : Well informally they have, it'll happen, then perhaps I think we could do it on the side and forgo the administration and let them do that, but it's on a small scale.

James : But even so, the dynamic nature of what Alex is describing, and the ongoing-ness if you like is really nice. Because you know Japanese students, they are world-wise and very keen to cooperate and participate in circumstances like this, and often it's the bureaucracy and administration that gets in the way. And then like the initial enthusiasm then evaporates. I saw that four years ago after the tsunami.

Zane : They're not given any autonomy you see.

James : That's it, everything is decided by the administration.

Zane : And they don't challenge those structures at all.

James : Alex, the model that you established here, of course very nationally well-known, and internationally because Sam has been speaking outside New Zealand and other things, have you exported this model to other universities in New Zealand, do you have tie-ups with Victoria or Auckland?

Alex : Yes, it's interesting because they've tried to, but they've all sort of failed for now.

James : Really, why is that?

Alex : Because well I think it's a mixture of a few things. I think the SVA, you know, because we came out of the earthquake and got huge media coverage. Therefore you've already got a way to like get sponsorship or get money or whatever. Whereas if you haven't done anything, you need money to start the club, but how are you going to get money if you haven't done anything..... Which comes first? It's like the chicken and the egg.

Zane : Well here you had the quake, so you had impetus.

Alex : Also like this university has a huge club culture so we have 137 clubs and everyone is involved in clubs so I think that has helped a lot. And for example, 33% of our students vote in our student association elections, whereas only 1% of Auckland university students vote.

James : Only 1% !?

Alex : So the buy-in into the university thing is greater.

James : Is that a South Island thing, a Canterbury thing?

Alex : It's a Canterbury thing. But you know there's no reason why it can't..... I think you just need, I think probably to really kick one off you'd need..... And they do do some stuff in Otago, but it's like through the Students' Association, the Students' Association itself sort of does it, it's not a club. And they don't have as much buy-in. I think if you got the Student's Association or

the university to fund a volunteer club to start off at least, then you could do some stuff.

James : As executive members, and again if you don't want to answer this question then don't, can you draw expenses?

Alex : Yes.

James : So that would be presumably university budget?

Alex : No it's not just university budget, it's grants, our principal sponsor, other sponsors....

Zane : Who is your principal sponsor?

Alex : City Care. So they're an engineering contractor in New Zealand.

James : And you've got the Faculty of Engineering here so that's a tie-in is it - as in it's located right next door?

Alex : Yes, well Canterbury is known for being really good at especially civil engineering but that's not the reason why they sponsored us. They sponsored us because we are just a natural fit I think between City Care and us. They do a lot of parks and recreation work, I mean they do a whole lot of stuff. But our main contact in City Care, Dylan, I see him quite frequently and he sets us up with other contacts, different projects and stuff. But City Care are there to like, I mean if we're clearing green waste or whatever, they are there with a clipper [weed eater] to like clip the grass, which is one reason why the sponsorship makes sense because we naturally do the same thing.

James : I see.

Alex : And also it gives their employees a chance if they want to come along to some of our events.

James : And it's good experience for you as students with potential interning, making contacts during the process.

Alex : Yes. And it's you know the corporate social responsibility.

James : This is how it might work in Japan, it's the PPP Public Private Partnership angle. You know if you tie that into shushoku katsudo [the period students begin looking for jobs] in some way or another otherwise, you know you'd just get sidelined.

Zane : Yes. I think in Japan students are considered as children really - they're not considered as adults. They're treated as children. I think that's part of the culture.

James : And they don't question it themselves because of the society.

Zane : Yes and they think that, they actually call themselves children in fact, until after they graduate and get work. I think you're not really considered an adult until you start working in Japan at a company. And so before that you're a child and so if anything goes wrong it goes back to the parents. And so the students are not really allowed to take responsibility, the university won't let the students take responsibility - they'll work with the parents and so I think, that

would be... I don't know how that would work.

Alex : We are given a huge amount of responsibility.

Zane : Yes well, because you're treated more like an adult in New Zealand, you see.

James : And that must be well understood if anybody is volunteering to join the SVA, they are I imagine made aware of 'these are the ways that we operate. These are the responsibilities that we have and therefore you must accept those responsibilities.' Is that made clear?

Alex : I think these are like unwritten rules. I can't even think of any times we've had really inappropriate behaviour from an SVA member.

James : I'm sorry that wasn't what I meant. In terms of injuries, insurance, things like that.

Alex : We make sure yes, we say before all our big events we sign a waiver to say you know 'We accept.....'

James : 'We're not going to sue the university!'

Zane : I've got a question, so if there was a big disaster, say with the quake, if there was a bigger quake, what's the process you'd go through to get volunteers out and about?

Alex : Yes, well we did that a couple of days ago basically!

Zane : Say if the quake happens at 4 o'clock in the morning, so could you tell me what would happen?

Alex : Well you'd get up, watch the news or whatever, try to gather as much information as you can, maybe have an Executive meeting pretty soon. But a lot of the initial response is gathering information, and then you decide when you're going to do a response, where you're going to do a response, send out....

Zane : Calls?

Alex : Yes, e-mail, Facebook etc. Call the relevant agencies maybe, if you're given enough time to get information, to see whether they want you to do a response. Like we call Civil Defence, the Red Cross and stuff because they are the ones that generally receive all the calls. And then from there we just you know allocate each other roles in the response.

James : And then you go?

Alex : And then you know the next day or two days later we turn up in the east side car park or wherever with all our tools and where to go and stuff. I don't know, yes that's how we respond.

James : It would be nice if that existed in our universities wouldn't it? Even on a smaller scale.

Zane : So you're pretty much within 48 hours on the ground you'd say?

Alex : Yes.

James : And you've got your modus operandi, you've got your terms of reference. You're not going back to rule books and stuff, you know what to do and you can act within 48 hours?

Alex : Yes well we've...the Exec did a coordinated incident management system course last year,

which is about emergency management and things like that. It's just one day, but that's helped some of us.

James : This is what would be demanded of us, it would be like everything in triplicate, how do you respond?

Alex : But that's the first time that any of these Execs have done that course. The guys that did the big earthquake had never done that. They just basically did it but didn't realise.

Zane : It was trial and error right?

Alex : Yes pretty much.

Zane : OK so did you have any issues or problems over the years?

Alex : Yes well I don't know, until a couple of years ago we had like no money and I thought that the club was going to dissolve. And then we got partnership with UC, and City Care came along with their principal sponsorship deal and that sort of saved us.

Zane : I mean like serious injuries?

Alex : No we haven't had any serious injuries. We've had things like nails through a foot.

Zane : You know again in Japan what they do is use insurance, as it's a big issue.

Alex : Well we've got public liability insurance.

Zane : Yes what is it called? The Accident Compensation in New Zealand? So under ACC, everyone's entitled so if you have an accident that just covers you. So in Japan you would have to have all of these things, with insurance it would be a massive issue. And that's probably the first thing that will come up [in any negotiations with universities in Japan]. 'What happens if something falls on you?'

James : What I'd be tempted to do is just what you were saying earlier: that we kind of say that something is in the offing and just do it. And then ask permission after it's done. Because if you ask permission in the beginning they're just going to say, 'No, no, no, we've got to get the lawyers involved.....'. Which is like, 'No thank you!'

Zane : I can imagine. Do you know how many meetings you'd need to have?

James : Probably a dozen.

Zane : More than that.....

James : It would take a whole semester to set the thing up.

Zane : Probably a couple of years to actually get it up and going. It wouldn't be within weeks.

James : We'd need to be a bit *gaijin* about it - [to Alex] *gaijin* is the word for foreigner. The foreigners can actually get away with stuff in Japan because 'they didn't know the right mechanism'. And you can take advantage of that - 'Didn't know about that, sorry!'

Zane : So another question I had was regarding the future: where do you see yourself you know say 3-5 years down the road?

Alex : Hopefully we'll just be doing much the same although just on a bigger scale, and moving into those new initiatives because we hadn't started the three new initiatives last year.

Zane : And you've got the secret one coming up?

Alex : Yes.

James : We'll keep an eye open for that.

Alex : It'll be on the 22nd of Feb, the anniversary of the earthquake.

Zane : Oh that's why it's called Legacy. So pretty much the same then really, just on a larger scale?

Alex : Yes.

Zane : And not any more organised..... Do you think you're pretty well organised, you've got the structure down? You don't have to tweak it?

Alex : We're pretty good, yes we're always tweaking things.

James : But if you've got good core members, you know then it should be pretty solid. Is that right?

Alex : Well those members change every year, our membership base. So from tomorrow we've wiped our membership base as of today, so we get completely new members. And that's for UCSA [the University of Canterbury Student Association], a safety thing.

Zane : And so you actually, like you recruit.....so the membership's only for one year?

Alex : Yes.

Zane : Why is that?

Alex : The members have to sign up again - that's a UCSA requirement. It's so you can't say your club has got 5000 members.

James : When it actually hasn't.

Alex : It's only got.....every year....

James : Eight hundred.

Alex : Yes. And everyone, well I mean we're different because it's free, but for lots of clubs you have to pay. So like you can't....that's why you have to sign up every year.

Zane : So if you're free, your core membership year by year, are members increasing, is it stable, or is it decreasing?

Alex : It's increasing just a bit, there's about 14-1500 at the moment, last year.

James : And how many students are there in the university altogether?

Alex : I think it's about 12,000.

James : That's actually not all that big then. Well compared to 30,000.....how many at Rikkyo?

Zane : Over 20,000.

James : That's 50,000 between us then.

Zane : And we can't come up with something.....?

James : Well we should be able to come up with it.

Alex : You just need a bit of money, and you need a group of students that are really keen, and like an Exec.

Zane : I think the students are keen but the administration are not keen, they get in the way.

Alex : So just get the students to go out and find money or you guys help them facilitate find money.

James : How much do you reckon we need – as a ballpark figure?

Alex : You wouldn't need much but you could apply for like community money. For the first few years our budget was pretty low. I don't know how we even did our events, maybe it was \$10,000. But now it's like about \$35-40,000.

James : That's significant isn't it?

Zane : A \$40,000 budget, so is that a yearly budget? And if you don't use it up is it cut, is it reviewed?

Alex : No we just keep it.

Zane : So does it rollover?

Alex : Yes.

James : Right, so you're managing all of that? Wow, because Finance [at a Japanese university] would be all over that wouldn't they?

Alex : Well we have a treasurer, we apply for grants.

Zane : This wouldn't work in Japan at all.

James : It wouldn't, because we'd be submitting reports twice or three times a year.

Alex : Why don't you just.....do they not have clubs?

Zane : Yes they do.

Alex : But how do they get funding?

Zane : They've got circles, they've got two things in Japan. You have official university clubs and a circle is a non-official one, really. So you could do it through a circle, but a circle is not taken seriously.

James : It's probably better if they're not taken seriously because then they'd just leave us to do what we wanted to do.

Zane : But then getting tie-ups and getting budgets and stuff done, that's going to be entirely student-initiated with zero back up [support].

James : [To **Zane**] I think you'd have more scope in your university than mine – it's because of the stance of it. [To **Alex**] There was one other question I had for you. Your current projects that you're involved in now or ones in recent years, months or whatever, have you had faculty staff

coming along and helping? Participation from teaching staff because they're into it as well?

Alex : Yes, we'd like more to come along.

James : Because that's nice too, isn't it? A different energy, expertise?

Zane : I'm thinking about maybe next year or something, bringing maybe if I can get a group of students to come down and observe what you do and take them out on some of your projects.

James : They could stand and watch, they wouldn't get in the way. Or you could give them a shovel!

Alex : I wouldn't want them to stand and watch, I'd want them to get involved.

James : Would that be conceivable? Because that would be entirely decided by you.

Alex : Yes, definitely.

Zane : Would you sign here....?!

Alex : Well it depends what time of the year you come.

Zane : Again Japan's so restrictive in the way this all works, it'll be either in our....New Zealand's winter - August, or it would be right now. August or February would be good.

James : When are you principally active?

Alex : August would be better because February we haven't started university yet.

Zane : That's quite good, August is better because it's during the academic year right? It's at the end of the semester.

Alex : You've got to check the University of Canterbury key academic dates for whatever you guys think, because if we're like in exams then we won't be doing anything.

Zane : Yes of course.

James : When do your classes end for what would that be, the Autumn term?

Alex : I think they sort of end.....we have exams in June, late June, so we should be into Term 3 in August.

James : So around the beginning of August?

Alex : Yes maybe.

Zane : That's good timing.

James : Because the exam period will be over at the end of July for us.

Zane : There'd be a lot of interest in my department if I put a proposal together you know.

James : I envy the freedom that you have to operate, even as a Faculty member.

Zane : So could I ask you: before you moved to these offices, you got this building obviously, you made an agreement [with the university], where were you based before?

Alex : It was bloody crazy, we were like in flats, library discussion rooms.

James : And so it was all ad-hoc?

Alex : Well I mean we'd meet, but we didn't have an office.

James : So in people's front rooms or in the cafeteria or something?

Alex : Yes.

James : That's nice too you know, it's got real impetus.

Zane : You managed to still get 13,000 students involved and you managed to achieve what they did! That's pretty unbelievable, it's amazing.

James : So you've just mentioned that it still continues to enthrall you, your drive is slowly to increase the membership. So that's kind of enough in the short to medium term - would that be fair?

Alex : Yes, we've started three new initiatives just last year which haven't really been properly kicked off yet, because last year was a bit of a trial. So now this year is put the trial into effect - it's actually going.

James : There must be something we can do [at our universities in Japan].

Zane : Well at least, I don't know, some collaboration on something. Maybe bring some of the SVA members over to Japan.

James : As I say, your faculty will have more scope than mine.

Zane : Me being involved in community development, some of them may be really interested, especially because Tokyo is expecting a big earthquake.

James : And we've got the Olympics coming in four years. Did you have any knowledge of what happened when the SVA went to Japan? Did you know what happened then?

Alex : It was sort of the SVA, but it was sort of just Sam and Jason doing their own thing basically.

James : So they just jumped on a plane and came?

Alex : Yes.

Zane : It's my understanding that they were invited by some students from Waseda University who'd heard about the SVA, obviously it was big news following the earthquakes. And then of course 3/11 happened and they said 'This is happening to us' so they called up the SVA in New Zealand and said, 'Could you come over and help us?'. So Sam and Jason went and did some work up there. I think they were there for about two weeks. And they worked up there, and they shovelled out stuff, and they worked with the students at Waseda, but then it kind of petered out. They tried to set up a Facebook page but it didn't work, it had only about 4 or 5 hits on it. So I saw that they've still got the original Facebook page there. Yes it just hasn't been updated at all for the last 3 or 4 years.

James : Thank you very much for your time Alex.

Alex : All good.

James : Are you in the middle of doing stuff today?

Alex : We've got Clubs Day tomorrow so we're sorting out new people for that, preparing.

Zane : Would you be willing.....could I follow up on a few points over mail or something? Would that be alright?

Alex : Yes.

James : This is brilliant - thank you so much for your time. It's been a pleasure.

Alex : All good, no worries.

Zane : I didn't really know what to expect, but this has helped us immensely. Thanks so much.

- (1) Refer to the initial paper: Ritchie, Z & Short, J. *Challenges to community resilience in a post-natural disaster context: observations and reflections on the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011*. Bulletin of the College of Community and Human Services Rikkyo University, 2015,3, pp. 89-103
- (2) Short, J. & Ritchie, Z. *Towards the enhancement of resilience in a Disaster Management context: The contribution of the Student Volunteer Army to community reconstruction in the aftermath of the Christchurch Earthquakes of 2010 and 2011*. Toyohogaku [Toyo University Faculty of Law Journal], 60:1, pp. 1-25, 2016.7
- (3) [http://www.healthychristchurch.org/New Zealand/news/signatory-notice-board/2015/4/university-partnership-with-the-student-volunteer-army](http://www.healthychristchurch.org>New Zealand/news/signatory-notice-board/2015/4/university-partnership-with-the-student-volunteer-army)