

# IDEA CITY



by Renata Hopkins



Imagine a city with cardboard buildings, walls covered with leaping foxes and other colourful pictures, a washing machine that plays music, and its own superhero. It's not as crazy as it sounds – Christchurch has all these things, and more.

After the Christchurch earthquakes, lots of places that people loved were suddenly gone. Pools, sports centres, and movie theatres closed. Many of these are now open again, but others have gone forever. Luckily, Christchurch is full of people with great ideas about how to bring the city back to life. Here are some of the things they've thought up.

## GAP FILLER

When you go to the movies, you sit in a comfortable seat, right? Well, after the earthquakes, some Christchurch people watched movies while riding bicycles! The bikes were hooked up to a battery, which powered the projector and the sound system.

This was one idea from a group of people who call themselves Gap Filler. They are volunteers who use ideas from the community to build exciting, new projects. The group has made a minigolf course as well as a book exchange in a fridge. They also made a Dance-O-Mat, a public dance floor that anyone in the city can enjoy. In one corner, there is a washing machine. Lift the lid, and you'll find a cord to plug in a smart phone or MP3 player. Put two dollars in the machine, and it's party time!

Another Gap Filler project is the Sound Garden. This is a collection of unusual "instruments" on a street corner. Instead of drum kits or guitars, you can play on old fire extinguishers, road signs, plastic tubes, and concrete pipes. People can join in with the diggers and cranes to make a new type of orchestra!





## INVENTIVE BUILDINGS

If you'd like to go somewhere quieter, you can visit the Cardboard Cathedral. This amazing building has a roof made from cardboard tubes – a bit like the tubes inside a roll of tinfoil, only enormous! The walls of the cathedral are made from containers (the big, metal boxes used to transport things on ships and trains).

In Christchurch, containers are used in many ways. They prop up buildings and protect roads from slips and falling rocks. They have also been used to build a whole shopping mall. At the Re:Start mall, the containers have been painted bright colours. They look a bit like plastic building blocks, but inside, they have carpets, lights, and wall coverings, just like real shops.



## GREENING SPACES

Christchurch is known as the Garden City. Since the earthquakes, gardens and flowers have been used to brighten up the streets. In 2011, sculptor Andrew Drummond invited schoolchildren to help with a project called Greening Spaces. They planted colourful flowers where buildings had been knocked down. Many of the children had never planted flowers before. They learned how a garden can turn an empty place into something beautiful.



## TAKING CARE OF EACH OTHER

You've heard of Batman, but what about Flat Man? He's Christchurch's own superhero. Flat Man also has a sidekick called Quake Kid. They deliver food parcels to people who need extra help. They also cheer people up by surprising them with treats. Flat Man's catchphrase is "Be a bruv, share the love."

Sharing the love is a good message – the earthquakes have made life hard for a lot of people. Because of this, a group called the All Right? team has made special posters for Christchurch. The posters remind people to take care of themselves and each other. These posters say things like "It's all right to feel a little blue now and then" and "When did you last share kai with the whānau?" Children can make their own posters with lists of things that make them happy.

The All Right? team has done lots of things to cheer people up. They've given free sandwiches to road workers. They've picked people up from bus stops in a limousine. They even got the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra to play at a supermarket! Flat Man would definitely be pleased.



## STREET ART

Christchurch's main art gallery has been closed since the earthquakes, so the people from the gallery have set up exhibitions in other spaces. And street art is appearing all over town. You might turn a corner and see a huge face looking down at you. On another wall, you'll find strange creatures. Or perhaps you'll see the head of a giant moa. Most of the art is temporary. It's always changing and always surprising – a bit like Christchurch.

Buildings and roads are part of a city. But the heart of a city is its people and their ideas. The buildings and roads of Christchurch are slowly being rebuilt. The people of Christchurch are helping to rebuild the heart of their city too, one good idea at a time.



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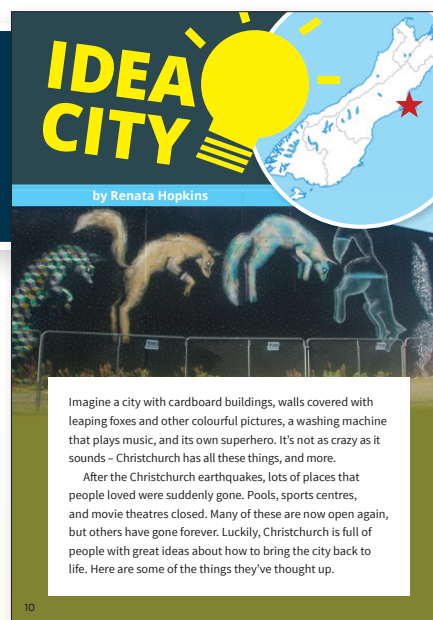
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