



Above - Executive members of the New Zealand Community Boards Association on stage in the Mt Hutt Memorial Hall during the opening of their conference in Methven.

PHOTOS ROBYN HOOD 120517-RH-104

Left - Enjoying catching up during the opening night of the New Zealand Community Board's conference in Methven (from left) Tim Lindley from Linwood-Central-Heathcote board, Sarah Lock, Methven Community Board and Ashburton District Councillor and former Methven board chairwoman, Liz McMillan.

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SAM JOHNSON

Don't waste life, do what you love

By **SUE NEWMAN**

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If Sam Johnson had his way he would probably rewrite the handbook for New Zealand local government.

Johnson became known as 'earthquake boy' after he galvanised hundreds of students to form what became known as the Student Army.

Groups of students worked for many months post earthquake doing whatever was needed.

The immediate need might have gone, but the student army has not. It has simply reshaped and reinvented itself into a student force that works on a range of projects across New Zealand.

Johnson was one of the keynote speakers at this weekend's New Zealand Community Boards Association conference in Methven and said he was all about ditching hierarchy, enabling people to play their own part in a community, doing things with people rather than for people and listening more to hearts rather than heads.

"Everything I do is about questioning the processes, asking if things can be done differently, about coming together and doing the right things at the right time."

The student army experience



Sam Johnson

showed that if you took a group of people and gave them the tools and the tasks they would be successful, he said.

Johnson sees a future where sharing will take the place of consumption and where the solution to additions of any kind will be found in genuine bonding with other people.

While the student army remained a significant force in the community, its focus had changed and it now had new work streams, Johnson said.

It now focuses on community

work, work that was similar to that handed down as a sentence by judges to offenders.

"The difference is we just do it for a different reason."

"We consider community service to be a privilege. We all have a different role to play in our community, it's just we don't often recognise it."

Johnson said one of his guiding principles came from a meeting with the Dalai Lama.

"He challenged me to grow moments for impact, not empires for ego."

The student army now has a number of new projects under way. These include We Visit that puts students and elderly together and the development of a school project kit, Johnson said.

He continues to be motivated by changing the world by changing attitudes.

"We rely too much on our heads not our hearts, we must be driven by our hearts."

"We have to look at doing things a different way."

"If money is most important you'll spend your life completely wasting your time. It's stupid to spend your time doing things you don't like. Ask yourself, what do you desire?"