



## stay at homes

As the city's rebuild gains momentum, its workforce is tipped to grow exponentially. ContractAccom is one company brokering beds and extra table settings in private homes. Words Kim Newth Photo Kelly Shakespeare

ContractAccom founders Lesley Fulton and Jackie Thomas.

Christchurch isn't a construction boomtown just yet, but business coach and counsellor Jackie Thomas says we need to be planning now for an influx of contractors as the pace of recovery quickens.

The idea of purpose-built workers' camps has been mooted, but Jackie thinks these have potential to go horribly wrong. She suggests anyone living in a wooden hut and eating takeaways is likely to end up drinking more beer than is good for them. A better and more socially responsible option could be for city residents to open their homes and share their spare rooms and sleepouts. To that end, Jackie and a good friend, IT specialist Lesley Fulton, have set up a website called ContractAccom to support the Christchurch rebuild via a network of friendly, hospitable homeowners prepared to welcome contractors into their homes.

"We believe there are a lot of people in Christchurch who want to support the rebuild and this is a way to do it," Jackie says. "There are a lot of people who want to do something and have room to spare in their houses. On the other hand, we have contractors coming in who really don't

want to live in a motel for weeks on end and would prefer a home away from home."

To ensure contractors have a positive experience, every potential home is screened through ContractAccom's website and vetted by way of a visit. Homes are classified, depending on factors such as quality and level of services. Homeowners need to be able to provide a healthy breakfast and a two-course evening meal, along with wi-fi internet and Sky TV.

"Most of all, we're looking for people who are welcoming, pleasant and flexible. We find our core families are used to having home-stay students, so they know what to expect."

Jackie has worked as a sales manager for BP Oil in the United Kingdom and Europe and also ran a bed-and-breakfast lodge in England catering for contractors. She had her own coaching and training business in the UK and has continued to work in this field since relocating to New Zealand five years ago. Jackie also works with Leadership Management Australasia, a Christchurch staff-development company.

Both Jackie and Lesley have previously hosted

foreign students. Lesley is fluent in five languages and her husband has worked for a language school. After the February earthquake last year, Jackie and Lesley realised the home-stay concept had potential well beyond the education sector and so their new business was born.

"I trialed three contractors here at my own home recently and they were thrilled," Jackie says. "They said it was an outstanding experience."

Personal safety and security might be a concern for some homeowners, but Jackie says contractors coming in for the rebuild have been thoroughly checked by both Immigration New Zealand and their employers before arriving in Christchurch. In her experience, contractors are generally a respectful and hardworking bunch.

As Jackie says: "These guys are in bed by 9.30pm and up at 6am and gone. The biggest hassle I've had is getting them to remember to bring their lunch boxes back!"

Contractors are also provided with general

information, such as where to find medical and fitness services.

Waimairi resident Lesley Wick, who opened her home to a 22-year-old engineering contractor from Auckland in January, says the placement worked out really well. "He was a lovely young chap. You worry about not being a cordon bleu chef, but you soon realise these young guys are just ordinary people and are happy with home-cooked meals. The way I look at it is that if it was my son coming down here, I'd want someone to look after him."

As well as arranging quality accommodation in private homes, ContractAccom offers a "Rooms Direct" service for homeowners simply wishing to list a room.

While their business has been running for some months now, Jackie and Lesley say the main wave of contractors is yet to come.

"What I'd like is for companies to contact us in advance, so we can plan to meet their needs and save them the hassle," Jackie says.