

As the Christchurch City Mission raises money to build a \$10.5 million new building, CHARLIE GATES spends a week finding out how they work and the people they help. The first part in the week-long series looks at the food bank.

# When you are stuck help's here

**D**aniel Anderson paces back and forth on the pavement, smoking nervously.

He looks ill at ease and occasionally checks his cellphone as if he just wants something to do with his hands.

The 24-year-old Christchurch man never thought he would have to do this.

It is 8.30 in the morning and he is about to join a queue for the food bank at the Christchurch City Mission.

Anderson worked for five years at a company making custom-built computers until he lost his job, along with three other staff members, about six weeks ago.

He has an eight-year-old son and has turned to the food bank after a string of big bills.

"Never in my life did I think I would come here, but you got to do what you got to do," he says.

"It has been tough. I have been doing odd jobs around the place but nothing major. I am looking for work at the moment. We usually do all right, but we had a whole heap of bills."

At 8.40am an orderly queue suddenly forms from the loose group of about 20 people waiting outside the main doors of the mission.

Behind the locked doors, receptionist Margaret Naismith sits behind a counter preparing to start the day.

"Right, here we go. Time to let them in," she says.

She presses a button on her desk that unlocks the front door. The door opens and the queue moves forward to the counter.

A procession of softly spoken and very polite voices ask for food bank parcels, each giving



## THE FOOD BANK

- The food bank gives out an average of 36 food parcels a day. In 2009, the mission gave out 8673 food parcels, an average of 722 a month.
- It opens at 9am every weekday.
- About 90 per cent of the food is donated by companies, charities and individuals.
- The vegetables are grown by prisoners at Rolleston Prison and by the mission at Governors Bay.

Naismith their name. The people in the queue seem shy, almost ashamed to be asking for food. There is very little eye contact, but plenty of please and thank you.

When the queue clears, Naismith can see out the glass doors, across Gloucester St, an empty car park and all the way to Sugar Loaf and the Port Hills.

"It is quite good to look at the hills when you are getting quite pressured here."

The people in the queue then wait to talk to Mary Wood, food bank co-ordinator for the mission.

Wood talks to each of them privately about why they need the food and gently asks if they need any other services the mission offers.

The food bank is seen as a way for the mission to draw people in and refer them to



**Please help:** Dallas Terangi, 24, receives a Christchurch City Mission food parcel from Ann Abbott. Terangi visited the food bank to help feed his two-year-old son and four family members down from the North Island for the weekend.

Photos: STACY SQUIRES

other services such as drug and alcohol counselling, budget advice or medical attention.

Mark, not his real name, has spoken to Wood and is now waiting for his food parcel to be handed through a window in a building out the back of the mission.

Mark is given seven carrier bags full of food and other goods donated to the mission, such as kitchen cleaner.

Mark then fills a carrier bag with pears and apples donated to the mission.

He smokes a cigarette as he packs his car.

Mark lost his job in November and has found it hard ever since.

"This place is incredible," he says.

"It has been really tough. The way they deal with you, it doesn't make you feel

embarrassed. It makes you feel OK. I have never had to ask for anything. I have always worked. Then suddenly to not be self-sufficient and have to reach out to people. You don't lose your self-respect. That is the most important thing. For me it is shameful to say I lost my job."

Meanwhile, Anderson packs a large blue holdall with his shopping bags full of food so he can carry them home on his bicycle.

"All right, I better get going," he says.

He swings the large, heavy bag onto his shoulder and begins his journey back to his family.

■ **Tomorrow:** The night shelter. If you want to make a donation to the City Mission, visit [www.citymission.org.nz](http://www.citymission.org.nz).

