



Media Release

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First Baby Since Earthquake – Born in Kaikoura Last Night “My first thought was to get dressed; no-one needs to see a naked midwife”

Kaikoura has welcomed its first post-earthquake baby.

Local midwife Bernie Thomas says one of her clients gave birth to a baby boy, at the local birthing unit yesterday evening. The mum stayed in the town because she really wanted to have the baby in her own community with friends and family.

“In fact, most of my clients whose babies are due shortly have made the same decision”, Bernie says. “They want to stay with their homes.”

Two pregnant local women with complications have been flown to Christchurch, as have two pregnant tourists.

Health professionals in the town are working on the basis that services are operating as usual says Bernie, and women with normal pregnancies would normally stay in the town to give birth.

“Flying them out could create unnecessary stress and risk,” she says.

Since the recent earthquake and aftershocks, Bernie has been working virtually around the clock to care for local mothers and babies. At the moment she is the only midwife in the Kaikoura community providing the vital service.

The experienced midwife was asleep at home when the earthquake struck shortly after midnight on Monday 14th November, just over a week ago. The force of the quake was so strong, she says her bed was moving from one side of the room to the other.

“My immediate thought was to get dressed because no-one needs to see a naked midwife. I fell down the stairs trying to get to my 90-year old father who has dementia.”

A truck arrived to take her to the hospital where a pregnant woman needed to be seen and Bernie was able to have her father admitted to the hospital so she could start work. And work she did, through the night “helping anyone who presented”.

The next day Bernie started visiting the women on her books, two of whom had newborn babies. She continued visiting and making contact with women during the week and helping to distribute supplies including water, nappies, hand sanitiser. In between times she was helping at the hospital and clearing up at her own home, managing finally to get her first full sleep on Thursday night.

Bernie has had many challenging roles in her career, including a period working for the Flying Doctor service in Australia and says the earthquake has been unlike anything she has ever experienced.



NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF MIDWIVES (INC)

“I have called on every one of my skills as a midwife and a registered nurse,” she says. “In fact, we all have. It’s quite phenomenal what we can and have achieved together as small seaside community.”

Karen Guilliland, Chief Executive of the New Zealand College of Midwives says “Bernie’s ability to respond in the way she has, personifies the skills and adaptability that midwifery services bring to a community. We saw it in Canterbury in 2010 and 2011, and we’re seeing it again. Every day in New Zealand midwives respond to emergencies both professional and environmental in order to keep mothers and babies safe.”

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