



**STUDENT  
VOLUNTEER  
ARMY**

## Student Volunteer Army



The Student Volunteer Army (SVA) is well versed in helping out in times of crisis. SVA was formed after the Christchurch Earthquakes in 2010 when founder, Sam Johnson, was a student at the University of Canterbury. He and a team of other students organised 11,000 volunteers to shovel liquefaction (equivalent to the weight of the Empire State Building) out of the city. The Student Volunteer Army was born!

In the years since, the Student Volunteer Army has worked to develop a volunteering culture in New Zealand at all stages of education. They encourage primary, secondary and tertiary students to volunteer in the community. The University of Canterbury SVA Club is the largest on campus, with over 3,000 members every year! The Club works on over 50 community based projects per year, as well as responding to disasters such as the Christchurch Earthquakes, the Mosque Attacks and COVID-19.

SVA have mobilised once again in response to the current global pandemic. They're helping the most vulnerable members of the community access essential services – in particular over 65s, immunocompromised people and healthcare workers and their families. SVA's army of volunteers have been busy with a range of jobs. Approximately 1000 volunteers have been transporting groceries to those in need, delivering prescriptions from pharmacies to housebound clients, and helping with childcare for healthcare workers.

Sam Johnson, founder and chief executive of SVA, says that even with crisis response experience, they haven't been without difficulties. "It's been challenging to create a response that could be scaled up and rolled out nationwide at speed, coupled with the operational complexities of operating during a lockdown", Sam says.

Ensuring the safety of everyone involved has been their number one priority. "We have taken every precaution available in this regard. All volunteers are screened, interviewed, and police and reference checked. Volunteering end-to-end has been designed to minimise, if not eradicate, person-to-person contact at every opportunity. Each day that a volunteer works, we assess them for health and impress that if they are not 100% healthy, they will not volunteer."

The SVA recognise that the wellbeing of their volunteers directly affects the wellbeing of the people they help. SVA help keep their volunteers enthused and happy by offering online yoga passes and support from a dedicated welfare team, who oversee the welfare of volunteers and recipients.

Positive stories have flowed in as a result of the fantastic work that SVA are doing. Sam shares:

"My favourite story so far was from a lady who had groceries delivered, and said that the sight of a volunteer coming down her driveway was amazing, as she'd been in lockdown since before the implementation of Alert Level 4. The volunteer dropped her groceries, walked back and turned, pulled down their mask and smiled and waved - she said it made her week!"

SVA is offering nationwide grocery delivery, pharmacy delivery and childcare to key groups that are affected by the pandemic. To get help, donate or volunteer yourself, head to [www.sva.org.nz](http://www.sva.org.nz).

