

Business person of the year: Sharlene Barnes

Paula Hulburt · 10:00, Oct 26 2018



SUPPLIED

Kaikoura woman Sharlene Barnes has created a mobile app, Skool Loop, to improve communication between schools and parents.

In the moments after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, phone communication was lost for hours.

Mother Sharlene Barnes ran barefoot through liquefaction and sewage to reach her son at school three kilometres away.

It was a crucial moment for the managing director who went on to create mobile app Skool Loop, to help fill the communication gap.

The Kaikōura mother said when the building she was in started to collapse, all she could think about was her son.

Schools who had to phone parents individually or used web-based automated text messages, were not prepared, she said.

"Our building started to collapse, and after the initial thought of helping other people I thought to myself; 'I've got to get to my son'."

"Basically, we had no idea if the school had fallen down or what had happened," she said.

The app uses push notifications to alert parents to school issues and is used by almost 800 schools in New Zealand and Australia.

A Business Communications alumni from the University of Canterbury, Barnes said she knew there had to be a better way of allowing schools and parents to communicate.

But it wasn't until her son introduced her to smartphone apps that she found the platform she needed.

"I knew this is what I was waiting for," she said.

Barnes's 15 years of sales knowledge in her publishing career which she used to her advantage when it came to getting her venture off the ground.

The Skool Loop App is free for anyone to use and Barnes hopes to ultimately increase the number of schools signed up to 5000.

With over 12,000 advertisers involved with the app, Barnes' company has grown to 15 staff members and an annual turnover of \$1.8 million.

"I took a chance and it could go one way or the other ... thankfully it went the right way."

The Marlborough Express

