

# EMERGING TALENT MEMBERS IN FOCUS



The Emerging Talent Network has been established by Infrastructure New Zealand to develop the next generation of infrastructure leaders. Each month we will be profiling an ET member working in a different part of the industry each week. If you would like to be profiled, or would like to nominate someone to be profiled, please answer the questions below and send your picture through to [Tara](#).

**We would like to introduce Thomas Parackal from Citycare in Christchurch as this week's Emerging Talent Member in Focus.**



**THOMAS PARACKAL**  
JUNIOR PROJECT ENGINEER



### **1. What organisation are you with, and what do you do day-to-day?**

I've been with Citycare since March 2019, working within their Property Sector on the Christchurch Airport contract as a Junior Project Engineer. The unique deliverables and specific requirements as part of working on the airport campus has seen me juggle between predominately managing and delivering projects as part of the Capital projects team and of late, diving more into Facilities Management-oriented roles. The role often requires simultaneously delivering a range of projects to different clients, often with a completely different delivery team. These projects are varied and can range between minor facilities upgrades / major building refurbishments / structural strengthening and facilities management services both within the terminal buildings and all other outlying buildings and services on the airport campus.

### **2. Tell us about your career background and how you got to this position/role?**

While pursuing my master's degree in Construction Management at the University of Canterbury, my research project required me to meet with and interview key personnel in the Construction Industry to understand factors that determined when a contractor should get involved in the pre-construction phase of a project. Citycare played a key role in my research as the SCIRT (Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team) alliance was a shining beacon for the early involvement of the contractor to drive better project outcomes. This saw me interacting with members from the senior executive team and as a result, I built strong relationships within the company. So, when I graduated, I naturally reached out to Citycare and expressed my interest to join if an opening arose. I was interviewed and subsequently offered a position as a Junior Project Engineer and have been working with them since.

### **3. Tell us about a project you are currently working on and why it interests you?**

I'm currently in the process of closing out Phase 1 of the International Antarctic Centre Upgrade. The International Antarctic Centre runs their operations 7 days a week and is a major tourist attraction often on the "must-do" list when in Christchurch. The Centre is currently in the process of a major staged overhaul which includes new attractions, a new interior fit out and structural modifications. I learnt quickly that modifications made to any existing facility, especially in the context of an international tourist attraction, is more complex than new builds. The clients were clear in their

requirements - a tight timeline, absolute minimum disruptions during the day to facilitate uninterrupted operations for the public, a spotless work site, and all of this in conjunction with the welfare of the 11 penguins that reside at the Centre that were to be strictly adhered to. Being the primary contractor on the project, we were tasked with carefully planning and executing work around a fully functional tourist attraction that still required all building systems to function optimally during the day but had to be isolated at night, allowing us to work through. This along with the inexpressible satisfaction of working around animals is probably what makes this project one of my most rewarding.

**4. What are the biggest successes/challenges with the new ways of working? (i.e., video conferencing, lack of events and in-person meetings, etc.)**

As a contractor and service provider, site visits and face to face meetings with our clients are an integral part of who we are. A lot of this came to an abrupt halt as we moved into lock down. However, the defining characteristic of any business is its ability to adapt to a changing environment. Since going into lockdown, a significant change that came about was that there were a lot more meetings (virtual of course, but meetings nevertheless). A lot of what would have been a tap on the shoulder or an informal conversation at work was conveyed through formal scheduled meetings. However, moving into Level 1 should see more of us back at our workspaces, which would bring back some amount of normalcy.

The lockdown landscape did however bring with it a lot of positives as well. More emails meant we had more written formal records and clearer instructions. Another key positive was the importance that was put on personal hygiene at our worksites over and above enhanced COVID-19 health and safety plans. While this significantly increased paperwork and admin around a project, I still think that it works as a positive in the bigger picture. But possibly the most significant success was that a lot more importance was given to mental health and wellbeing of staff in the work environment. At a time when our social interactions were very limited, Citycare used “Yammer”, an internal social networking platform, to interact and remain socially close while being physically distant.

**5. Can you think of one example where your age diversity has materially affected the outcome of a work situation or project, either positively or negatively?**

Age diversity now plays an increasingly crucial role in any organizational structure. It brings with it a plethora of knowledge and pragmatic experience of the seasoned along with a rather refreshingly positive, naive inquisitiveness and technological prowess of the next generation. I recall a recent minor works project that we needed to urgently deliver over Christmas that was rather intricate and required subcontractor specialization. As you can imagine, getting through to almost anyone over the holidays can be a task by itself and we were not able to get through to our contractor by phone or email. So, I did what to me was the most logical next step – Facebook! Lo and behold, here I was waiting for my connecting flight at Singapore Changi Airport while chatting away and discussing with my sub-contractor and working through the urgent requirements.

I unequivocally believe that we as the younger generation possess the ability to quickly adapt to any changing environment and possess the confidence to rely on the power of social media when required. We also tend to be more connected to not just our own internal teams, but our contractors and clients as well. To be fair, we have had decades of technological advancements that got us here!

**To learn more about opportunities for a career with Citycare click [here](#) or you can connect with Thomas on [LinkedIn](#).**

