

LEARNING FROM OLDER PEOPLE'S FLOOD EXPERIENCES

Research-based Guidelines for Improved Response

Community Resilience and Good Ageing: Doing Better in Bad Times Research Programme

This research summary brings together findings from interviews and focus groups with older people who have experienced floods. It identifies what helps older people's recovery, what older people contribute to community resilience, and what organisations can do to support older people and their communities to recover well.

The full research report is at: <http://resilience.goodhomes.co.nz>. Titled "*We had our retirement all worked out, and then ...*" *Learning from Older People's Flood Experiences*, the report describes what happened in the floods, the material, social and emotional impacts and the challenges of recovery. The report focuses on what can be learned from the experiences of older people to help build their own and their communities' resilience. Here are some of the learnings.

What Older People Contribute

Older people have capabilities, skills, knowledge and resources that can help others to get prepared, contribute to recovery and to building up community resilience. Those include:

- Organisational and management skills.
- Camping and outdoor living skills such as knowing how to make a fire to cook on and making a temporary toilet.
- Knowledge about food storage.
- Knowledge about bulk water collection and storage.
- First aid expertise.
- Equipment to share.
- Knowledge of the local area, the history of flooding, local flood infrastructure and changes in land use.
- Ideas to contribute to emergency planning and implementation.

Useful Amenities and Equipment

Older people found the most useful resources in a flood included:

- A woodburner for heat, cooking and drying clothes.
- Water tanks for drinking water.
- Camp cookers and barbeques for cooking.
- At least a week's supply of food.
- Bottled water.
- A week's supply of medication.
- Battery powered torches and lanterns.
- Plug-in phone.
- Battery radio.
- An emergency kit with dry clothing, water and food.
- Shovel, spade, chainsaw and wheelbarrow for clearing drains and debris.
- Access to tractor, digger, four-wheel drive vehicles and dinghies.

Most Useful Immediate Help

Some of the most useful organisational responses reported were:

- Provision of cooked food and hot drinks.
- Help with packing up household goods.
- Washing clothes and household linen.
- Provision of storage facilities.
- Provision of areas under cover where household goods could be dried out.
- Provision of free skips and rubbish disposal.



Supporting Older People to Recover Well

- Work with older people feeling isolated and alone, or having to deal with the flood clean-up and repairs by themselves. This may include help with assessing and organising what needs to be done, as well as help with the physical work.
- Ensure that personnel in response and recovery roles have the appropriate skills and approaches to work with older people. Personnel should acknowledge and understand the emotional impacts of losing treasured items, gardens, and changes to home surroundings.
- Identify vulnerable older people living independently and plan for how they will be reached and what support they will need in an emergency.
- Identify those reliant on care services, those with health conditions, those without family support or not linked into any organisation.
- Identify and plan for assisting older residents in locations especially at risk of natural hazard events.
- Work with older people's networks through organisations such as Grey Power, Age Concern, RSA, U3A, CAB, churches and service clubs to identify the particular supports and information older people need.
- Insurers may need to tailor their responses to older people, particularly those who are vulnerable, to help them resolve their claims and get repairs dealt with quickly.
- Involve older people more in emergency planning and response.

Older People's Information Needs

- Widely publicise information on what to do with pets if evacuation is required, and whether there are evacuation or other facilities available for pets.
- Assist older people to become more aware of the natural hazards or risks in their location and how they can live with those risks.

- Ensure that older people can access information easily and through channels other than electronically as many older people do not use digital devices.
- Many older people want to be well prepared and to be able to help themselves as much as they can in an emergency. However, they may need information and advice tailored to their circumstances and capabilities.
- Ensure that older people know what assistance is available in an emergency and how they can access it.

Support Flood-affected Communities

- Ensure that policies and operational practices allow sufficient recovery time, and that support timeframes reflect the real, extended time periods during which help and support is required.
- Improve coordination and management of road and site access for flood-affected residents.
- Improve the management of drainage and flood mitigation infrastructure, including giving residents information about planned flood mitigation works.
- Review how regulation, management and monitoring of changing land use and land use practices, such as forestry, farming, roads and subdivision can reduce the frequency and intensity of flood events.
- Help people to make simple, practical changes to increase their household resilience to adverse natural events.

This research report was authored by Dr Bev James, Public Policy & Research, and Kay Saville-Smith, CRESA.

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