



Get Ready for Flood Community Housing Sector Project (Hawkesbury Nepean Valley)

**Action research insights Briefing Paper
Training**



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



INNER SYDNEY VOICE
regional social development council



The Get Ready for Flood Social Housing Sector Project was a joint initiative by Inner Sydney Voice and Infrastructure NSW, and was funded under the Hawkesbury-Nepean Flood Risk Management Strategy. The University of Sydney was the Project Research Partner co-ordinating Participatory Action Research throughout. The Project utilised a sector capacity building approach and was implemented in two stages.

During Stage 1, a Disaster Resilience Network was formed to map key issues facing social housing tenants in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Floodplain, bringing major stakeholders including community housing providers, local government, emergency management agencies, local community services organisations, government and social housing tenants. Gaps in disaster preparedness in relation to social housing tenants and strategies to build tenant and sector support and resilience capacity were identified.

Stage 2 of the Project enacted strategies from Stage 1 including training and development in disaster preparedness with community housing providers, local community service providers and tenants. Flood preparedness information in the form of a flyer was developed collaboratively with tenants. In Stage 2 a number of opportunities for ongoing network and capacity development amongst stakeholders were identified as part of long-term flood preparedness for vulnerable populations in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Floodplain.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) process which ran throughout the Project provided real time data to Project Leaders and stakeholders as the Project progressed. This meant that refinement, based on research evidence could be undertaken to ensure learning was translated immediately into project design and implementation. Use of PAR in this Project ensured quick and practical feedback loops for each activity and for Project objectives overall. This supported a process of adaptation and responsiveness throughout.

Project processes and outcomes are reported in a series of Briefing Papers focused on different aspects and stakeholder groups. This Briefing Paper is one of a set which cover all key elements of Project design, implementation and outcomes.

In Stage 2 the Project adopted a training strategy to build the capacity of staff within Community Housing Providers and local services working with social housing residents. A training session was also held with local residents living in social housing who had participated in Stages 1 and 2 of the Project. This Action Research Insight reports on the strengths and limitations of this strategy drawing on action research discussions with project leaders, observational, interview and survey data. It concludes with recommendations for future knowledge building strategies, including training.

The provision of training developed as a major strategy within the Project following the suspension of face-to-face networking activities. It symbolised the ability of the key partners (ISV, INSW and SES) to respond to the changed circumstances created by the pandemic. The training evolved over time, through critical reflection by those involved in the training and feedback from the Research Team.

The initial training objectives were:

- 1. Housing provider staff are upskilled in flood awareness and flood preparedness information.**
- 2. Housing provider staff understand what their roles and responsibilities are in supporting tenants with flood awareness and preparedness.**
- 3. The project team gain feedback from housing provider staff on the relevant contact points with tenants where this information can be embedded in business-as-usual channels.**

Community Housing Providers and other local community service organisations were offered training sessions for staff and volunteers. Take up was high amongst those offered the opportunity. The focused and practical character of the training program provided a concrete and clear method for organisations to participate in the Project activities.

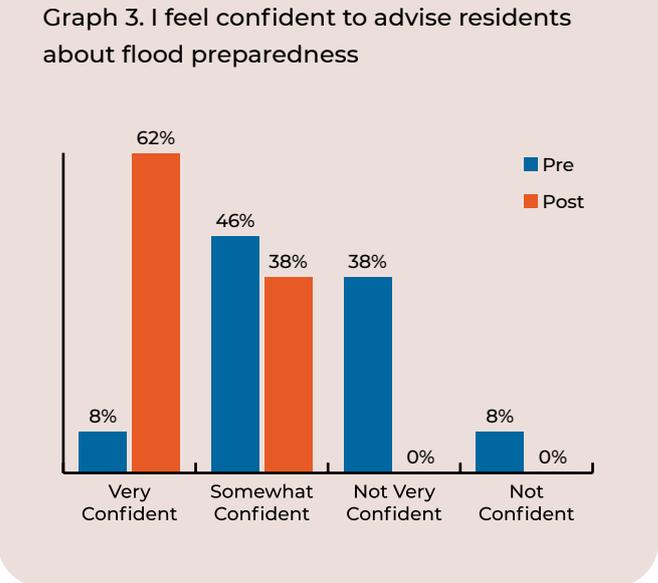
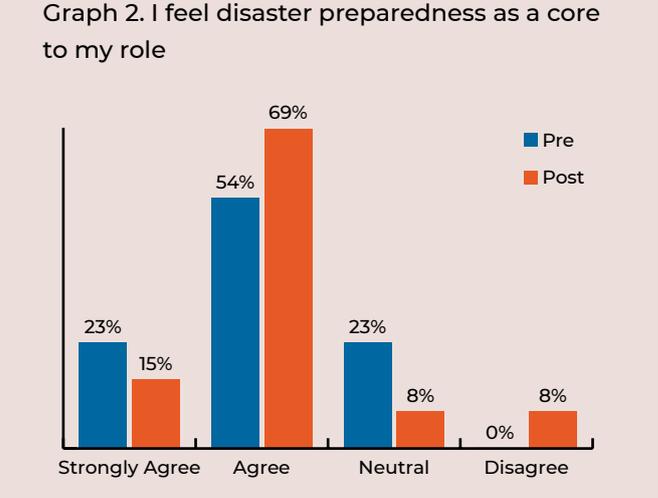
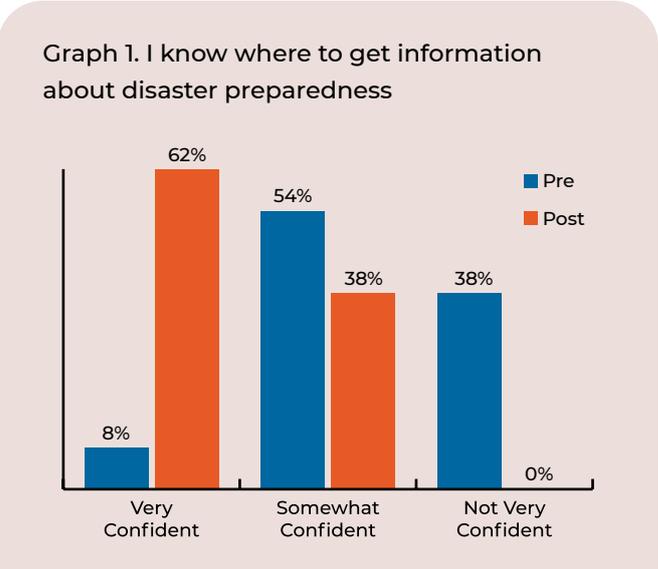
In the exit interviews undertaken for this evaluation the provision of training was seen as a 'trojan horse' enabling the project better access to the Community Housing Providers:

"[We] we're kind of coming up with a lot of barriers, coming up against a lot of barriers with a few different organisations. But then that allowed us to be like this is something that we can offer to you and this is a value add that this project can give to your organisation. And then allowing more of an opportunity to, I guess, see inside their worlds a bit better and build a bit more trust, I guess, and relationship."

The training utilised the expertise of the key partners, INSW and SES, to provide comprehensive information on the impact of flood across the region. Video resources were used to bring to life the scenarios, build knowledge about the nature of flood in the catchment, and to impress on participants the seriousness of the risk. Typically, training sessions went for 2.5 to 3 hours in length either delivered completely on-line or as restrictions eased in a hybrid format (an outline of the training is attached to this Insight). The ISV Project Officer took the role of facilitator in each of the sessions. The training was developed and delivered collaboratively between the key stakeholders in the project and was subject to constant quality improvement:

"And so, it was then working with that team to adapt that training to the group and make sure that okay well let's do this training here, what did we learn, okay it makes sense for us to change it like that, going through that process with them."

Survey data demonstrates positive outcomes from the training. In Graph 1, for example, participants' confidence in relation to knowing where to get information about disaster increased 56% following the training. The training also resulted in an increase in the number of participants who saw disaster preparedness as core to their role (Graph 2). We also saw very large shifts in participants' confidence to support social housing residents in relation to preparing for flood (Graph 3).



As can be seen from the above graphs, the training was generally successful in meeting its goals of raising awareness and confidence among Community Housing staff. Qualitative feedback provided additional information. Of concern was that the training left some participants 'feeling numb',

'shocked by how bad it will be' and 'frightened'. For these staff rather than empower them to act the training left them feeling overwhelmed and unsure how to act. Those interviewed identified a number of specific barriers to their ability to work with 'difficult' tenants, remaining calm, how to communicate these 'worst case' scenarios and the impact on their credibility if they don't eventuate:

"I'd love the skills to tell them what they need to know without scaring them".

These staff also highlighted the many structural barriers that limited social housing residents' ability 'to get ready'. Many social housing residents live week to week with very little free funds, few could afford insurance cover, many had limited family or friends who could help, some had pets they would not leave, some had limited mobile phone access, many had limited education and poor literacy which made written communication difficult whilst others' first language was not English. Accordingly, whilst they felt the information provided in the training was very important, they felt 'stuck' about how they could best help their tenants prepare for flood. In this context, training provided an important starting point for knowledge building and engagement with workers, but also highlighted the complexity of the challenges in supporting social housing tenants in preparedness. Research data reveal the need for follow up and longer-term capacity building activities to effectively support resilience building, working alongside community housing workers to develop practical ongoing strategies.

There was some evidence however that the training had resulted in direct changes to practice among Community Housing staff. One staff person described going through her tenant files and identifying those that might require additional support due to age, disability or isolation. Another was working with tenants to scan and store tenants' important information (driver's license, Medicare card, pension card, etc.) onto a USB for tenants to keep safe. Many people in the training indicated a desire for information resources pitched at tenants that could be distributed.

In addition, there was evidence that the training had organisational impacts. In one Community Housing provider staff who attended the training

were developing a whole of agency plan, with all staff 'banding in together' to better support social housing residents. In another agency staff were exploring how their existing community engagement strategies (which built trust with residents) could integrate flood preparedness. The training also raised awareness among organisational management of the large number of their staff living within the flood plain and likely to be impacted by flood. One Community Housing Provider provided information on flood impact to all staff, not just those involved in providing support to social housing residents. A number of Community Housing providers indicated a willingness to include flood related information in 'Welcome' kits for new tenants as well as in other regular communications (such as newsletters).

A note on Logistics

As has been reported, interruptions and changes of approach resulting from COVID-19 restrictions meant that training took place largely using a hybrid, or on-line format. This enabled a wide range of participants to complete the training even within the context of the pandemic, however, there were a number of challenges in delivering the training this way, which should be noted in the design of future training. Having trainers both face to face and on line during the training was challenging for both presenters and participants. For on-line presenters in a face-to-face session, the lack of visual cues and challenges with hearing participant questions created barriers in rapport building and interactions. Information provision worked more effectively in this context but more participatory parts of the training were less successful using hybrid communication. Face to face training which includes time for participants to process both the volume and confronting nature of some information about disasters, and interactive activities to integrate learning and lived experience amongst participants is recommended for future iterations. This was not possible during the pandemic and learning from the hybrid experience was valuable in building knowledge about effective worker and tenant training in disaster preparedness.

The value of the training as one important strategy for worker capacity building in disaster preparedness was clearly demonstrated during the project. Who and how such training might be delivered in the future is important to determine to support the sustainability of this strategy.

Recommendations

1. Face to face training can provide an important first experience for workers in awareness raising and linking disaster preparedness with their day to day core business. Training design and delivery options need to be further developed for a range of stakeholders working with social housing tenants.
2. Advice on educational design should be sought in relation to hybrid delivery and the integration of digital information resources.
3. Training providers in the disaster field need to be particularly sensitive to the participant's context due to the overwhelming nature of the content.

Training Overview

- **Session 1 (11:00am – 12:00pm)**
 - › 5 minutes at beginning for the pre-training evaluation. Facilitated by Research Team via Survey Monkey.
 - › INSW and SES to facilitate session on flood awareness.
 - › Activities using the NSW SES website in identifying suburbs relevant to their work against the floodplain, and the videos showing what the different flood levels look like within the specific regions in the floodplain.
- **Break/Lunch (12:00pm – 1:00pm)**
- **Session 2 (1:00pm – 2:30pm)**
 - › SES to facilitate session on flood preparedness.
 - › Activities using the NSW SES website in identifying relevant evacuation routes, understanding the warning signs, and understanding the other resources that are available.
 - › ISV to facilitate session providing an update on what is happening through the Get Ready For Flood Social Housing Project, other organisations/agencies who are involved to support this work, resources being developed (e.g. flood flyer).
 - › This will lead into time for discussion with the participants: how can they help their clients access this information, how they are processing this information, what they see their roles and responsibilities can be in this context, where they see contact points for the sharing of this information to be embedded, whether they have any questions and things to clarify etc.
 - › 5 minutes at the end for the post-training evaluation. Facilitated by Research team via Survey Monkey.