



Evaluation of Red Cross Personal Support services in response to the Queensland Floods 2010-2011 and Cyclone Yasi

Plain English Statement of Results

Australian Red Cross and CQUniversity have completed a study to assess how helpful Red Cross Personal Support services were for people affected by the Queensland Floods 2010-2011 and Cyclone Yasi.

The study was funded by The Thomas Foundation (which funds research and activities to reduce the impact of environmental disasters) so that the Red Cross could find out more about the effectiveness and impact of its Personal Support services. The study was conducted ethically with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of CQUniversity.

Red Cross Personal Support involves giving care and comfort, information, referral to services and other interpersonal assistance to help people recover from a disaster. It is primarily a volunteer-based service, in keeping with Red Cross humanitarian work to assist people who are vulnerable.

During February-May 2012, 70 people took part in the study from flood and cyclone-affected regions across Queensland, including Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Grantham, Murphy's Creek, Toowoomba, Tully, Cairns and Rockhampton. People who received Red Cross Personal Support in these areas were interviewed or completed an internet survey. Red Cross emergency services workers and volunteers who delivered Personal Support participated in focus groups or completed a survey. Officers from local councils, Queensland Department of Communities, and the Australian Psychological Society were interviewed or completed a survey. Previous studies about the psychological and social impacts of disasters were also examined.

Overall the findings suggested that Red Cross Personal Support was an effective way to help people cope in response to the Queensland Floods and Cyclone Yasi. Personal Support services provided by Red Cross helped many people to feel calm and hopeful, to feel connected to others and to access physical, emotional and social support. The study found that Red Cross emergency service workers were seen as trustworthy and respectful of confidential information. All groups consistently said that the most helpful Personal Support services were the basic care and comfort, information and referrals to services that were given to people. Communication skills, the accuracy of information given to people, and helping people to use their own resources were areas that fell short of people's expectations.

The research team recommended that Red Cross Personal Support could be improved by fully adopting the principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) in training and in practice (PFA is a recognised approach to helping people affected by trauma through the provision of comfort, support, connectedness, information, and fostering people's ability to cope). It was also recommended that Red Cross work with other disaster response agencies to ensure clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each agency, help people prepare better for disasters and provide long-term Personal Support to them following disasters, and ensure Personal Support is relevant and accessible to people from culturally diverse backgrounds and children.

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