

Evaluating in traumatic contexts: Not for the faint-hearted

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Presentation outline

- The evaluation
- The design
- The findings
- Our learning
 - Setting
 - Ethics
 - Evaluators
 - Outcome
 - Advice





The purpose of the evaluation

- **Context** : The Salvation Army's (TSA) response to the Canterbury earthquakes, September 2010 and February 2011
- **Aim and objectives**
- **Timeframe**: The evaluation was undertaken during July – September 2014

The evaluation design



- **Co-designed**
- **Sample selection:** key stakeholders were identified to be interviewed with the help of TSA
- **Methods:** international literature review on disaster management to identify best practice, document review, F:F and telephone interviews and conversations. The interview data was triangulated with the document review and the literature review.
- **Analysis:** Thematic analysis

Some key findings



- Able to respond to a disaster in a quick and timely manner.
- Capacity to supply extensive on-the-ground staff and volunteer personnel at short notice for extended period of time.
- Logistical capacity to organise extensive support services: catering, care packages/vouchers, psychosocial services.
- Trustworthy and approachable service provider.

A learning organisation



- From the experiences of the first major earthquake in Sept 2010 TSA was better prepared in the Feb 2011.
- The enormity of the Feb 2011 earthquake with significant loss of life and infra-structure damage, stretched TSA.
- Opportunities to learn from the best practice disaster management included reviewing e.g.: governance structures, operational leadership and key staff training, infra-structure and resources, internal and external relationships and communications.

Learning from the experience



- Setting
 - Unprecedented
 - No blueprint
 - Constantly changing
 - Volatile
 - Traumatic
 - On-going
 - Complex
 - Compressed time
 - Intensification of emotions

Learning from the experience



- Ethics
 - Gaining access
 - Sensitive approach
 - Careful lead-in
 - Building trust
 - Tensions within organisation
 - On and off the record
 - Interviewee catharsis
 - Giving voice
 - Fair representation of issues

Learning from the experience



- Evaluators
 - Understanding of the context
 - Range of experiences
 - Empathy with objectivity
 - Insider vs outsider
 - Stepping into their shoes and then back
 - Peeling back the layers
 - Awareness of the nuances
 - Responsibility to the emerging story
 - Need for debriefing

Learning from the experience



- Presentation of findings
 - Giving voice to the issues
 - Honouring the participants
 - Articulating their experiences
 - Providing different perspectives
 - Supporting with evidence
 - Getting to the heart of the matter
 - Framing for impact and acceptance
 - Suggesting solutions
 - Writing for multiple audiences

Learning from the experience



- Advice
 - It takes more time
 - It needs more flexibility
 - It requires careful navigating
 - It uses all the knowledge, skill and facilities an evaluator has
 - It is exhausting for both parties
 - It needs debriefing, reflection and review