

From Crisis to Resilience

Practical Lessons in UWC Disaster Response

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United Way
Cape Breton

Together, we are possibility.

The UWC Movement provides a critical role in times of great need. Natural and human-made crisis and disasters can arise at any time in any community. When it does, a thoughtful and coordinated approach to planning and partnering is critical to responding effectively.

Timeline for United Way disaster preparedness

Before A Disaster

Most municipal and provincial disaster plans do not have a poverty lens for support or move beyond a focus on safety. Assumptions of self-sufficiency of residents is often greatly misunderstood. Even insurance companies assume their clients have the resources to manage for 24-48 hours on their own. Those living in poverty do not have the resources such as credit cards to purchase emergency housing, transportation or food.

In anticipation of local disasters it's important to create emergency preparedness plan and protocols, partnerships and collaborations within and across communities.

Convey a stakeholders meeting to create cross sector understandings of who does what, when in an emergency. Commit to the development of emergency plans and protocols.

It would be good to know more about the responsibilities and capabilities of government and non-profit organizations in case of a disaster.

For example:

1. For Red Cross, the decision to take control happens at the National level, which can take some time, and
2. Samaritan's Purse will travel to volunteer to help.

You should identify your local representatives in non-profit organizations that aid in emergency situations.

- 211
- Red Cross
- Victim Services (Canadian Mental Health)
- Government Social Services Departments and EMO
- Emergency housing and food programs
- Municipal representation
- Non-profit partners
- Provincial UW partners
- United Way Centraide Canada



Disaster Pending – Safety First

Begin to implement individual and organizational emergency plans.

Disaster – Safety First

- During the event, it is important to follow the lead of municipal and/or provincial disaster teams.
- It's important to note that this is considered the 'honeymoon period', immediately following the disaster, when the community and the public at large rally to help those in need. Communication and transparency are important in making this last as long as possible. As time passes, there is more criticism of the community leaders.
- You could be called upon to start receiving donations immediately. You should know your capacity to do so (perhaps a policy needs to be developed) because depending on the length of the disaster, media coverage happens quickly and disappears just as quickly.
- Remember that most United Ways are not able to fund individuals, so you will need to partner with another organization to write cheques. Most organizations that have the capacity to do this are National which may require a local bank account to write cheques. This all takes precious time while people are waiting to be helped.
- Important to note you have to communicate that if you raise more money than you need, the surplus will go to into your general account.
- Implementation of organizational emergency plans, if you have one.
- Communication with the public is vital in a disaster, don't assume that government is fulfilling that role. (It didn't happen for us and to minimize the number of phone calls, I worked with a local radio station to give daily updates.)
- Mobilize 211 as community information resource, partnering with other 211s, as needed, in partnership with lead disaster response agencies.
- Assess the short and long term impact on human services.
- Deploy emergency community support funds to sustain agencies to respond pending Red Cross involvement. Sometimes small non-profit organizations don't offer to help because of their limited capacity but could do more with more resources i.e. fund additional staff.
- Many United Ways or their funded programs can provide space and other non-financial resources in the event of emergencies.

Early Recovery

After Government, United Ways are often called upon by the media and public for leadership and perspective in humanitarian aid. You want to be aware of multi-sectoral key stakeholders, including partners, donors, and community organizations.

- Look at your partnerships, funded programs and where to access help and support
- Engage the strong national and local multi-sectoral relationships including partnerships with neighbouring UWCs
- Have a clear understanding of a disaster poverty lens and resource the community accordingly
- Promote and encourage giving with credibility, transparency and the confidence of the community. Celebrate being part of a National organization with the security that offers, while having the ability to keep donations local.
- Mobilize 211 as a community information resource, partnering with other 211s, as needed.
- To coordinate distributing funds to those in immediate need of food, clothing and shelter, you need to have a database of persons in need. For example, our municipality set up a helpline to register needs. We partnered with The Salvation Army to administer funds as quickly as possible.
- Lead / support the transition into recovery communicating to the public available support for victims of the disaster.
- Work with corporate sector around any investment. You may be asked to partner on a community fundraiser. Know that they need a charity number to apply for a lottery license or to issue receipts and may look to you to provide this.
- Assess the long term impact on human services. As people living in poverty are typically less resilient, this may mean that 'more' is expected from your funded programs.
- Wait lists for counselling can be long. Plan for interim solutions. As a partner, you may have direct contact with victims who are desperate, be confident on where to send them for help. (Expect threats of suicide)
- If you are involved in distribution of funds, expect that government takes a long time to process Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA) claims. (For example, our disaster was October 2016 and DFA claims are not expected to be completed until September 2017)



Long Term Recovery & Resiliency Role

- Provide or support the table that brings together key organizations for action planning in recovery and resiliency.
- Understand that resiliency can take up to three years, with significant struggle on the anniversary of the disaster. You may need to re-convene human services and other community leaders to support recovery as well as host or engage in planning additional financial investment.
- Deepen relationships with community agencies with expertise in supporting families, children and the unique challenges of vulnerable people who are experiencing crisis.
- 2-1-1 as an invaluable asset for provision of information and collection of offers of assistance.

Notification to United Way Centraide Canada

UWCC will help to assess the situation, offer support, link you to resources, and if needed, can provide assistance with 211, communications, fund development, etc.