

# Evaluating in traumatic contexts: Not for the faint-hearted



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# *Presentation outline*

## **This presentation covers:**

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



# *The purpose of the evaluation*



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



# *Evaluation aim*



**The Salvation Army sought a review of its response to the two (major) Canterbury earthquakes to discover:**

- What could be done to ensure that the organisation's response to future disaster events is appropriate, effective and consistent with its (short) Mission Statement: "caring for people, transforming lives and reforming society through God in Christ by the Holy Spirit's power".



# *Evaluation objectives*



**Seven research objectives were developed in conjunction with senior Salvation Army staff:**

- To record the Salvation Army's immediate, initial and medium-long term response to the two earthquakes.
- To assess The Salvation Army's disaster response strategy.
- To review the effectiveness of The Salvation Army's governance arrangements.
- To assess the quality of The Salvation Army's connectivity with government, local government and non-government organisations.



# *Evaluation objectives continued*



- To comment on the Salvation Army's internal and external communications.
- To assess the financial performance and outcomes which resulted from the expenditure of the Salvation Army Earthquake Fund.
- To provide suggestions that better equip The Salvation Army to respond and manage welfare, psychosocial and pastoral care for people involved in a future significant disaster.



## *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 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.



# *The Salvation Army summary of service*



## **The Salvation Army's earthquake response:**

- The provision of 27,000 meals at welfare centres, 20,900 chemical toilets, three mobile shower units, 6500 care packages, 11,066 food parcels, 8631 vouchers and debit cards, 253 respite holidays for stressed families, and 1200 Salvation Army personnel from New Zealand and Australia who visited 100,000 affected households providing material, social and spiritual support.

(TSA Annual Report, 2013, p.15)



# *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 experience*



## Setting

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



# *Learning from 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 experience*



## Methodology

- Collaborative design
- In-depth interviewing
- Triangulation



# *Triangulation of data*



## **The project triangulated three sources of data:**

1. A literature review was undertaken to identify key findings arising from the disaster-management research literature.
2. A document review was undertaken of The Salvation Army's earthquake reports and correspondence, along with various external reports.
3. Interviews were undertaken with ten senior Salvation Army staff and three key external stakeholders.



# *Learning from 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 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 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



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We would like to acknowledge the New Zealand Salvation Army who went above and beyond the call of duty in their response to the Canterbury Earthquakes Sept 2010 & Feb 2011.

