Community led recovery

(Chapter 6 of Canterbury Earthquake Social Recovery Services and Support video)

Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority

This video explains how recovery agencies can support communities to lead their own recovery, and showcases community-led social recovery initiatives. The ‘Summer of Fun’ and ‘Piece of Cake’ were community-led activities designed to support families and communities to rebuild social ties after the earthquakes. Community workers identify key lessons to encourage neighbourliness and strengthen social connectedness.

Matthew Pratt: One of the things about community led recovery, is that you can't go in and fix communities. If you go in on, and come in top down and try to fix things and try to make things better, the communities will never learn. You need to think of ways and techniques to support communities, to lead recovery themselves, whatever that looks like for them, and provide ways to facilitate and broker that.

Jill Hawkey: Initially after the earthquakes, there was a lot of neighbourliness, and people put their barbecues out on the street, and everybody was checking on each other, but about a year after the earthquake, you really did begin to notice that there was some drop off in terms of that community care. It was around the time that many people in the local Methodist parishes were getting incredibly frustrated because they couldn't move forward. They just felt they couldn't do anything and respond to the community needs. That's really where the Summer of Fun came from.

The Anglicans and the Methodists came together with CERA, and we went to the Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust for funding. The very first year, I think we had $40 thousand dollars, to run these 40 events over the summer period. There were a whole range of different events, not just your standard community fun days. You had kayaking on the river, you had sailing on the estuary, you had a whole lot of things, but the criteria was that it had to be open to the whole community, and as much as possible, had to be free to the community.

Matthew Pratt: There was face painting, there was candy floss, there was a barbecue going, archery. We had a bouncy castle away from the archery. It was those types of things. They weren't anything clever. We used local artists and local bands would come in. There were traditional events anybody could put on.

Jill Hawkey: The second year of the Summer of Fun, when a lot more organisations came on board, we also looked at how we could support community organisations with resources. One of those things we did was actually buy a trailer. It's a trailer that's brightly painted with Summer of Fun on the outside, and it's got a barbecue in there, and it's got marquees and lots of games. A group can just actually book the trailer and everything's there for them.

One of the great things about the Summer of Fun is that it really has allowed some grassroots community development work, and neighbourhood building to happen. There's much stronger engagement now between different organisations and the local communities, but also between neighbours.

Anika Voisey: Piece of Cake is an opportunity in the last weekend of March to get together with your neighbours, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, in a way that works for you. Food is a great connector, we know, across all cultures. Our suggestions was just, "Why don't you invite your neighbours over for coffee and a cake?" We got some really strong feedback from people, that they got some pleasant surprises. They got to know their neighbours. It was much easier, and much more fun than they thought it would be.

Man: They went from being 'the neighbours who complained about noise level all the time', to 'Good old Rob and Stacey', who were keen to help out with a trailer.

Anika Voisey: A lot of people were inspired from that point on to go, "Actually, we're going to have a monthly dinner with each other. We're going to connect in a stronger way," because they were beginning to see the importance of connection, the importance of getting to know the people around them to build a safer community.
It also is a way to grieve collectively for what had happened to our city, and look at moving forward going, "This is our neighbourhood, and we’re going to reclaim this and build it together."

When a project is led by people, when they feel they've got ownership of it, it just gives a completely different vibe. It just gives a lightness to it. It's an opportunity to get out, enjoy themselves, get to know their neighbours. It's a great feeling.