

PREPARE

for the future



LEARN

from the past



When disaster strikes: case studies from Calgary's 2013 flood

Prepared by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS is an essential strategic consideration for all organizations. This report presents case studies of nonprofits affected by the Calgary and area floods of 2013. The four distinct experiences are followed by a compilation of key learnings.

The case studies detail unique challenges, observations and outcomes. Some of the organizations had disaster or ‘business’ interruption plans—and they executed them. Others did not: they developed their plan as they lived it.

We offer synthesized insights and key recommendations to help nonprofit organizations prepare for future emergencies, or disasters.

THE CASE STUDIES FEATURED ▼

DISTRESS CENTRE CALGARY

SUBSECTOR • Social Services
SERVICES • 24 hour crisis line, 211 service
STAFF SIZE • 90 full/part time staff, 20 volunteers a day
ANNUAL REVENUES (2012) • \$3.8 million
IMPACT OF FLOOD • Evacuated, transferred phone lines to outside provider, increased demand for services during crisis.

FRESH START RECOVERY

SUBSECTOR • Social Services
SERVICES • Housing, counselling, education programs
STAFF SIZE • 36 full/part time staff
ANNUAL REVENUES (2012) • \$1.6 million
IMPACT OF FLOOD • Accommodated clients from other organizations, cancelled programs, loss of donations, increased demand for services.

YWCA OF CALGARY

SUBSECTOR • Social Services
SERVICES • Housing, counselling, education programs
STAFF SIZE • More than 240
ANNUAL REVENUES (2012) • \$17.4 million
IMPACT OF FLOOD • Evacuated, damaged administrative building, closure of social enterprise.

GREEN FOOLS THEATRE

SUBSECTOR • Arts and Culture
SERVICES • Performances, workshops, camps
STAFF SIZE • 2 paid staff
ANNUAL REVENUES (2012) • \$336,510
IMPACT OF FLOOD • Evacuated, evicted, loss of tools, materials and supplies, financial losses.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES: CALGARY'S 2013 FLOOD

On June 20, 2013, heavy rainfall and a melting snowpack in the mountains west of the city of Calgary, Alberta, led to a catastrophic flood in the city. Rising waters on the Bow and Elbow rivers that flow through the city and the downtown core forced more than 75,000 Calgarians from their homes and affected 4,000 businesses and nonprofit organizations.

The city's downtown core was underwater and without power for almost a week. Total damage to homes, businesses and other property was estimated at \$5 billion. Rebuilding was a community effort and in the weeks and months following the floods, Calgarians donated their time and resources to help their neighbours.

IMPACT ON CALGARY'S NONPROFITS

The flood affected nonprofit organizations in a number of ways. Some were located in the downtown core or near the Bow or Elbow rivers and were evacuated or flooded. Others felt the ripple effect of the flood through increased demand for their services and changes to donation levels.

To better understand the impact of the floods and to learn how well nonprofits are prepared for emergencies, CCVO

conducted a series of surveys. Hundreds of Calgary and Area nonprofit organizations have participated in the surveys detailing the variety and level of damage sustained, the financial implications of the floods and how they addressed their losses. They detailed operational disruptions and identified the extent of their pre-flood emergency preparedness.

The survey reports are available online: calgarycvo.org

WHAT THE CASE STUDIES TELL US

The key learnings of the organizations profiled in these case studies are explored in detail in this report. They include, among others: the importance of an up to date emergency preparedness plan, the value of sector partnerships, the

need to inform and empower staff, the significance of building financial resiliency, the importance of effective communications, and the value of community engagement and collaboration.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE ▼

The short and long term impact of the flood on the nonprofit community has been significant. In the aftermath of the disaster, many organizations asked how they could prepare for another flood. This report encourages organizations to address emergency planning in broader terms. Future crises may include: windstorm, tornado, fire, power outage, pandemic, or other disaster.

DISTRESS CENTRE CALGARY

DEFINING AND CRYSTALLIZING THEIR ROLE

The Distress Centre experience highlights how a comprehensive, up to date emergency response plan can help an organization effectively and efficiently respond to a disaster. In this case, a successful response led to increased clarity and confidence about their critical role as a hub for information, support and coordination in the community, particularly during a crisis.

- Activated comprehensive, up to date disaster response plan
- Had clearly defined staff roles
- Diverted crisis and 211 calls to peer organizations
- Assisted another municipality
- Minimal financial impact
- Enhanced credibility, reputation and potential going forward

WHO

Distress Centre Calgary delivers 24-hour support to Calgary and the surrounding area through a crisis line, free crisis counselling and resource referral services. They also operate Calgary and High River's 211 services that connect callers to community, health, government, and social services

information. They are a mid-sized organization with 45 full time staff and 45 part time staff; each day up to 20 volunteers provide front line services. In 2012, they had revenues of more than \$3.8 million.



Distress Centre's call centre is a hub of activity as volunteers answer crisis support lines.

WHEN THE FLOOD WATERS HIT CALGARY, THE DISTRESS CENTRE WAS PREPARED

As part of their 211 phone service accreditation process, the Distress Centre had developed a comprehensive disaster response plan. Their leadership team updated the plan annually. As a result, when the flood waters started to rise, the team knew what to do, and who needed to lead each piece of work. "We all had the plan in the back of our minds because we had worked with it so much," says Executive Director Joan Roy. "It was not as if we had a document that we just pulled out when the flood hit. We knew what we were supposed to do

without having to talk about it or pull the plan out." However, this was the first time they had activated the plan.

While the plan's scenarios did not include flooding, it detailed what staff needed to do in any emergency. They did adjust their plan slightly as they had a smaller leadership team than in previous years. As well, Joan Roy had moved into her position just ten days before the flood having previously held the position of Vice President, Operations.

CONSISTENT CRISIS SUPPORT FOR CALGARIANS

As the provider of Calgary's 211 service, the Distress Centre knew they would have a unique role to play during an emergency. Calgarians, The City of Calgary, Calgary Police, the Government of Alberta and other community organizations would look to them to gather and disseminate reliable and up to date community, health, government, and social services

information. They also knew their 24-hour crisis line would see a call increase once Calgarians started to feel the stress of the situation. No matter what happened to their building, they needed to ensure these critical services stayed up and running.

THE PLAN IN ACTION

Once they activated their plan, the leadership team met every few hours to assess the situation. With road closures and little public transit, volunteers and staff struggled to get to their downtown building. The first stage of their plan called for all staff resources to be dedicated to keeping the phone lines open. In response, trained staff members who were on site took over the phone lines. Part way through the first day they realized something had to change. "I asked the team: 'How do we know when we hit the wall and have to figure out a different way of delivering our services?'" recalls Roy. "There was dead silence. Nobody said anything. Then I said: 'So let me ask the second question, are we there?' Everyone said: 'Yes'."

The original plan was to divert both the 211 and crisis line to The Support Network in Edmonton. However, to avoid overloading one organization, they contacted 211 BC who agreed to handle all the 211 calls. Ultimately, calls were diverted to Edmonton and Vancouver for 24 hours. The Distress Centre forwarded the initial information needed to respond to calls. However, they were not able to provide the centres with ongoing updates about the changing situation in Calgary.

By coincidence, as soon as they diverted the lines, they had to evacuate their building. Fortunately, it was for a short time and there was no flood damage. The first week they were back in their building, staff and volunteers struggled to pass through police blockades surrounding the downtown core. They contacted the police, explained why their staff and volunteers needed access, and the situation was resolved.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The flood had little impact on service delivery. The 211 service and 24-hour crisis lines were open throughout the flood. Some in-person counselling appointments were cancelled, affecting only a few clients. The online chat service was suspended for four days as the team focused on delivering their telephone-based services.

A few weeks after the flood, High River called to ask if the Distress Centre could provide a 211 service for their community. The Distress Centre reassigned staff to help set up and launch the service by mid-July. In late 2013, the call volume from High River was low enough that they could continue to offer the service as part of their standard operations.

Data confirms the Distress Centre's call volume increased significantly during the flood. Months later, while the number of calls dropped to pre-flood levels, they saw an increase in particular high risk issues including child welfare and domestic violence. They monitored the trends and shared the information with the community.

LITTLE FINANCIAL IMPACT

Overall, the flood had minimal financial impact on the organization as the costs they incurred were covered by a \$25,000 grant from The United Way of Calgary and Area and funding from the Government of Alberta. They also received a number of donations for flood-related work.

211 BC and The Support Network did not charge for their coverage of the phone lines. The Distress Centre secured funding to launch the High River 211 service and operate it for four months. The call volume then dropped to a level that could be managed without additional funding.

An important 'in-kind' contribution came from the Calgary Homeless Foundation. The Distress Centre had a staff team working from The Safe Communities Opportunity and Resource Centre (SORCe) in downtown Calgary. When that location was flooded, the Calgary Homeless Foundation allowed the Distress Centre to reassign staff from the building to help set up the 211 service for High River.

CONFIRMING AND CRYSTALLIZING THEIR ROLE

In the U.S., 211 services played a critical role in information sharing during disasters including Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. The Distress Centre knew they would be a central hub for information and coordination during a disaster and the flood experience crystallized and deepened their understanding of this role. It also helped them better define and articulate what needs to be in place for them to effectively support a future disaster response.

The organization's leadership on the Disaster Mental Health Planning Committee was also part of their unique role. The committee was founded in 2001 and the Distress Centre

was an active member since the beginning. Their Manager, Organizational Performance and Support, Paul Bartel, had served as chair since inception. The committee brought community agencies together with the City of Calgary to plan how to effectively use community resources to support the mental health of Calgarians during a disaster. During the flood, the Distress Centre and other committee members provided staff for all evacuation centres and as chair, Bartel took a lead role in coordinating the response and fielding questions from The City of Calgary, Alberta Health, and others.

PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

The Distress Centre is updating their emergency response plan to prepare for a future crisis. They recognize that too many tasks rested with one particular position, and are now training staff as backups. They are exploring options for hosting their technical infrastructure offsite so they can access their systems remotely during a future emergency.

The experience also highlighted the need to focus on reaching out to Calgary's decision makers, police, community agencies and others to reinforce the role of the 211 service during a crisis. Ideally during a crisis, authorities direct people to call 211 for information. Internally, they have processes in place to provide up to date information for 211 to disseminate. While they were able to reach out to Mayor Nenshi to spread the word about 211, they realize they can enhance strategies in this area.

"We have seen a shift with funders and other organizations around the role of the Distress Centre and the [significant and expanded] role we can play in a disaster."

JOAN ROY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- Not directly affected by the flood
- Demonstrated commitment to relationships and collaboration
- Quick decision making and effective action
- Accommodated other agencies and their clients
- Welcoming and practical response
- Integrated learning into policies and procedures

SOLIDIFYING THEIR ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

The experience of Fresh Start Recovery demonstrates how an organization not directly affected during a crisis can provide support to other agencies. It reinforces the importance of building relationships and embracing collaboration. It showcases how a crisis can be an opportunity for staff and clients in treatment to learn the value of community engagement and build a sense of pride through selflessly helping others in need.

FRESH START RECOVERY

WHO

Since 1992, Fresh Start Recovery has offered residential and outpatient treatment for alcohol and drug addiction. In 2011, they opened a new 50 bed facility in north east Calgary. It is one of the largest residential treatment centres in Alberta

and includes counselling rooms, meditation rooms, gym, dining hall, weight room, and a movie theatre. They are a mid-sized organization with 30 full time and six part time staff. In 2012 they had revenues of \$1.6 million.

OPENING THEIR DOORS TO THE COMMUNITY

When news of the flood reached Fresh Start Recovery, their first concern was potential water damage in their new building as it was built on an aqueduct. A check of their water management system confirmed it was working perfectly and they were not at risk of flooding.

They quickly realized their role would be to support community partners. On the first day of flooding, a number of treatment centres called to see if Fresh Start could accommodate their clients. In response, 46 women from Aventa Addiction

Treatment for Women set up their treatment centre in Fresh Start's gym for five days and 12 men from Simon House Recovery Centre stayed in their counselling rooms for more than a week. The Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre brought clients with mobility challenges from a nearby temporary location to use the accessible showers and bathrooms. Due to a lack of space, Fresh Start turned down requests from Correction Services Canada to accommodate men from two downtown community rehabilitation centres.



Fresh Start Recovery's new building was not affected by the floods but was a haven for other community organizations who were evacuated.

ADJUSTING THEIR PLAN

Going into the crisis, Fresh Start Recovery had a comprehensive emergency response plan. It was based on being directly affected by a disaster rather than supporting others who were. Once they knew how many people they would accommodate, they quickly developed a plan to ensure the clients would be comfortable, safe, and have access to

space to continue their treatment programs. To ensure the safety and privacy of Aventa's female clients, they adjusted which doors locked and created a separate space and private access to washrooms. They brought in extra staff to meet the increased need and developed stringent hygiene and cleanliness rules to ensure everyone remained healthy.

WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

Offering a safe place for evacuated clients was a community effort. After a quick phone call, NeighbourLink delivered mattresses and bedding; Fresh Start's clients volunteered to make the beds and set up the temporary living quarters.

As an accredited facility, Aventa had a comprehensive disaster plan which they updated annually. This helped create a smooth transition and minimized the impact on

their clients. They brought food, supplies, and the materials required to run their programs remotely. They also brought staff to provide 24-hour care and support for their clients and to help prepare meals. While not ideal to run their programs offsite, they worked to minimize the impact on their clients' treatment.

BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

While hosting other organizations in their gym and counselling rooms, Fresh Start was not able to run their standard programming for almost two weeks. However, their approach includes helping their clients to build bonds in the community and become productive, giving members of society. The flood brought this learning to the forefront. Inside the building, everyone came together as a community—collaborating on space set up and daily chores. Groups of Fresh Start Recovery's clients also helped flood-ravaged communities with the cleanup. The experiences helped clients and staff better

understand how reaching out to others in the community makes a difference.

It was somewhat challenging to have so many people in the building. With most of the city shut down and transit running sporadically, many clients stayed inside and suffered 'cabin fever'. To relieve some pressure, Fresh Start alumni arranged for a private movie screening at a theatre. They bused everyone there to relax for a few hours.

"We did not let policy or bureaucracy get in the way of making the right decisions and supporting the community."

BRUCE HOLSTEAD, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Providing support for two other organizations led to approximately \$120,000 in additional expenses for staff, food and other costs. Funds from Aventa and a grant from the United Way of Calgary and Area's Emergency Community Support Fund covered the majority of these added expenses.

However, approximately \$200,000 to \$300,000 of anticipated donations did not materialize and were instead diverted to flood recovery work. Nine months after the flood, Fresh Start Recovery was still feeling the loss. While donation levels were starting to recover, many traditional supporters were personally affected by the flood and not in a position to provide support at their previous level.

DEMAND FOR SERVICES

Prior to the flood, Fresh Start Recovery's treatment program wait list was starting to decline. After the flood, from June to December 2013, their wait list increased 30 per cent. In light of evidence linking disasters and increased addiction rates in other communities, they anticipated a longer term impact

on demand for their services. This combined with the loss of donations, concerned the organization. They continued to seek out new sources of funding and built a case to help funders understand the connection between disasters and addiction rates.

DEFINING A NEW ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Fresh Start Recovery had always worked hard to create relationships in the community. Their experience during the flood reinforced they were on the right track and needed to continue building bridges with other agencies. "We are open to being involved with the community and other organizations recognized this and called us when they were in crisis," observes Bruce Holstead, Director of Operations.

The experience helped them better understand the value of working with others, reinforced their existing relationships and partnerships, and helped build new ones. "It was an amazing representation of what community can do," explains Holstead. "It was a story of coming together. Real time decisions were being made to make a difference."

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

To prepare for a future emergency, Fresh Start Recovery integrated key learnings into their policies and procedures. They anticipate updating their emergency plan to reflect how they can effectively support other organizations during a crisis.

Aventa also adjusted their plan based on an extensive post-flood assessment. The updated plan covers: evacuation from their site, how to set-up a fully functioning remote location, and how to reintegrate once they return to their building.

- Emergency response plan not current
- Relied on adaptability and strong leadership
- Staff empowered to make decisions
- Use of social media aided team connectivity
- Emergency board meetings addressed financial policy issues
- Reached out to agencies and community for help and supplies

CATALYZING A NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The experience of YWCA of Calgary confirms that if an organization's emergency response plan is out of date when a crisis hits, it is essential to adapt quickly and seek solutions that protect the operation and clients. In this case, the organization's response supported and catalyzed the implementation of their new strategic plan, and helped unify the organization.

YWCA
OF
CALGARY

WHO

The YWCA of Calgary is one of Calgary's largest and longest serving social agencies. They have more than 240 staff and in 2012 revenues of \$17.4 million. They operate a variety of housing, counselling and education programs for women.

They also run two shelters: YWCA Sheriff King Home Emergency Shelter in the riverfront neighbourhood of Inglewood, and YWCA Mary Dover House Supportive Housing downtown. When the flood hit, there were 146 women and children staying in the shelters.

REAL TIME PLANNING

When news came that Calgary would most likely face flooding, YWCA's leadership team assessed the potential impact on their operations. They had an emergency response plan but it was out of date. Under the plan, both the downtown and Inglewood shelters were intended to serve as evacuation locations for one another but with both located close to rivers they were each at risk of flooding. In this scenario, the plan

called for clients from both shelters to go to a third location in southeast Calgary, but it had closed earlier that year. Rather than look to the outdated plan, they decided to develop a new plan as the situation developed. "Developing a plan is a good exercise, but the most important plan is the one you make on your feet. It is adapting. Rolling up your sleeves and figuring it out," says Elsbeth Mehrer, YWCA's Director, External Relations.



YWCA's social enterprise, Fitness on 5th had extensive flood damage and eventually closed its doors.

EVACUATING CLIENTS

The Inglewood shelter was the first location to evacuate. Initially Calgary Police wanted to bring the clients to a mass evacuation centre. "Because of the vulnerabilities of the population and the risks for women fleeing family violence, that was not an acceptable solution," says Mehrer. "At that point, we literally started flipping pages in the phone book and calling churches that were on high ground." Once they secured space in a northwest church, they brought equipment, mats, blankets and towels from their downtown

location. The next day, the downtown shelter had to evacuate and clients from both locations spent the second night together at a Calgary Board of Education school.

YWCA staff continued to look for a more permanent housing solution. They secured a Mount Royal University (MRU) residence where they anticipated locating for three or four days. They actually stayed two weeks and staff from both shelters worked together at MRU to run the daily operations and support their clients.

IMPACT ON PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

With both locations evacuated, they suspended programs for a short time. At the Inglewood location, counselling services were cancelled for a week. The impact at the downtown location was more significant. Language classes, the

Employment Resource Centre, and the Parent Link program did not resume for a number of weeks and their two childcare facilities were closed until mid-July.

KEEPING STAFF, BOARD AND STAKEHOLDERS INFORMED

Effective communication was critical to organizing their response and keeping staff, board members, donors, and partners informed. Initially their communication focused on ensuring staff living in neighbourhoods under evacuation notice returned home and prepared to vacate.

Once power was cut off to their downtown building and their main computer server they could not access email, contact information or any documents. They quickly set up a Gmail account and used their new website (which was hosted offsite and could be updated remotely), Facebook and Twitter to ask staff to forward their personal contact details. They used the Gmail account to send daily updates to staff. After a few days, they were able to retrieve their server, install it at their Inglewood location and get their email up and running.

With no access to files and contact lists, they had no way to communicate with their language students, parents who used their childcare facilities, or other clients who accessed drop-in programs such as Parent Link.

During the first few days, the YWCA's executive team took on responsibilities based on where they were and their access to the shelter locations. As the situation progressed, the role of each team member paralleled their regular job description. Administrative and shelter staff temporarily relocated to where they were needed. They were able to access their payroll systems remotely and approved their payroll on time based on data from the previous pay period.

Board members were sent ongoing email updates and they convened an emergency board meeting early in the crisis to ensure they had adequate cash flow.

"We were doing it all: government relations and advocacy work at the same time as we were making sure that women had their prescriptions filled."

ELSBETH MEHRER, DIRECTOR, EXTERNAL RELATIONS

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The flood resulted in \$2 million in lost revenue and additional expenses. This included the cost to remediate the downtown building, lost revenue from their social enterprise, and support for clients during the evacuation. Post flood, they secured enough funding to offset most of the losses. Much of the infrastructure damage at the downtown location was covered by insurance and they used \$25,000 from The United Way of Calgary and Area's Emergency Community Support Fund to pay their insurance deductible.

There was no damage at the Inglewood location. The downtown building had significant damage in the basement and at ground level. Most of this space was dedicated to the YWCA's social enterprise—a fitness centre that generated close to \$300,000 in annual revenues. These funds helped finance mission-focused programs and services. With an estimated \$800,000 required to remediate the space and reopen the fitness centre, they decided to shut the operation permanently.

CATALYZING A NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In March 2013, just months before the flood, the YWCA launched a new strategic plan that focused on delivering programs and services directly aligned with their mission to 'intervene, empower and lead when and where women need us most'. The early closure of the fitness centre aligned with the new strategic direction. However, closing the social enterprise meant they had to quickly shift their business model in terms of operations, financing and staffing.

Their flood experience reinforced the core belief behind their new strategic direction: that vulnerable women—whether fleeing violence, isolated, or experiencing poverty and homelessness—have similar needs. "The foundation of our new strategy is that when she needs us most, we will wrap supports around her and help her thrive in community," explains Mehrer. "With all our clients in one place, the flood brought this strategy to life." The organization's flood response shifted the organization's culture and led to less division between their locations and the sharing of resources, including on call staff.

PREPARING FOR A FUTURE EMERGENCY

Without an up to date plan, staff spent the first few days of the flood planning a response, seeking alternate housing, and securing the help they needed to operate offsite. As the days progressed and they found a mid-term housing solution, their attention moved to getting the organization up and running and assessing the damage.

Looking ahead to the future, they are considering how to capture the critical aspects of their response. They are determining the systems needed to access information

remotely such as a backup of the server offsite and current hard copy contact lists. "Post flood I carry a copy of the crisis communications plan, the board contact list, and a personal emergency kit in my car," says Mehrer. "You can have all these codified plans, but unless you have them with you they are of little use."

The Calgary and Area Women's Shelter Director Network, of which YWCA is a member, is also developing an emergency response plan for all women's shelters in Calgary.

GREEN FOOLS THEATRE

DEVASTATION LAUNCHES A NEW BUSINESS MODEL

The experience of Green Fools Theatre during the flood highlights the devastating impact a crisis can have on a small organization with limited financial resources. It demonstrates how an organization that has to rebuild from the ground up can turn the situation into an opportunity to redefine how they work—and, move forward to a brighter, more financially stable future.

- No existing emergency response plan
- Quick delegation of staff and volunteers
- Prioritization to save irreplaceable puppets and costumes
- Peer organizations gave immediate hands-on help
- Adversity led to strategic longterm collaboration
- Commitment to building internal fund development expertise

WHO

The Green Fools Theatre is a small charity creating, performing and teaching physical theatre arts since 1991. They stage theatre productions; offer workshops, circus camps, school, community and outreach programs; and run two annual events: The Halloween Howl and the April Fool's Day Parade. They have

two full time staff members and in 2012 annual revenues of \$336,510. At the time of the flood they were renting an older theatre in Calgary's Erlton neighbourhood, close to the banks of the Elbow River.



Volunteers salvaged everything they could from the Green Fools flooded theatre before they were evicted.

QUICK RESPONSE

While the Green Fools Theatre did not have an emergency response plan in place, they were familiar with problem solving and dealing with last minute challenges associated with a performance or gig, or the furnace dying in their theatre.

When Calgary Police gave them a two hour evacuation notice, they reached out to the theatre community through Facebook. "We said: 'If anyone can help, we only have two hours to get everything out of the theatre'," recalls Dean Bareham, one of the theatre's Co-Artistic Directors. A dozen volunteers showed up to pull puppets and costumes from the basement storage. There was no time to rescue any tools or materials. Eventually, the basement filled with almost seven feet of water and remaining supplies were destroyed.

Two days into the flood, their landlord determined the building was too badly damaged to repair and served them with a formal eviction notice. They asked for five days to get more than 5,000 square feet of items out of the main level

of the building. They used Facebook again and mobilized 60 volunteers from the theatre community. "All we did was post on Facebook and everyone came running," says Administrator Shelley Carroll. "Everyone in the community wanted to help, especially people who were not personally affected."

They packed and moved everything that could be salvaged. "We had bleach stations, cleaning stations, and people with backpack sprayers cleaning everything as it came out," recalls Bareham. "We were washing things, drying things, putting things in boxes. We mobilized."

Once evicted, they passed the news on to their contract performers and other theatre companies who had booked the space for performances and rehearsals. They kept their board of directors updated by email, and held a series of emergency board meetings to deal with critical issues. Board members offered strong support through donations and by providing storage space for the theatre's materials.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Quest Theatre offered Green Fools Theatre temporary office space and storage for their stilts and circus gear so they could continue their day-to-day paid performances. In total, their

programs and performances stopped for seven days. However, without their own theatre space, they could not host workshops, run circus training, or rehearse for performances.

DEVASTATING FINANCIAL LOSSES

Eight months after the flood, the financial impact was more acute as the theatre struggled to maintain its operations. Flood-related losses were an estimated \$30,000 to \$50,000 for lost tools, materials, and supplies; lost revenue for cancelled booking and rentals; and costs associated with cleaning, packing and moving. Once they eventually secured a new theatre space, this led to additional costs for moving and to re-establish.

Since the Erlton theatre was affected by overland flooding, they were not eligible for insurance coverage. They pursued a number of funding options to try to cover their losses. They launched a GoFundMe online crowdfunding campaign, but after a quick peak they raised just over \$4,000. They applied to The Calgary Arts Development Association's Alberta Arts Flood Rebuild Fund, but they were not successful in the first round of applications. They submitted a funding request to the Government of Alberta, but at the time of this report they

were waiting for a decision. They explored other funding options including from The Canadian Red Cross.

Like many nonprofit organizations, they did not have an emergency contingency fund. They were also halfway through their fiscal year with no significant funding opportunities; their scheduled casino was six months away. For the first time in their history, they ran a deficit. Bareham considered the drastic measure of not taking a salary until the situation improved.

Historically, they raised money through paid performance and corporate gigs rather than through fundraising campaigns. With significant flood-related losses, and a weaker corporate market as Calgary businesses faced their own financial distress, they focused on fundraising for the first time. Without appropriate infrastructure or expertise within the organization, it was a challenge.

"We wish it didn't happen this way, but it will be better in the long run. This new way of working creates a lot of opportunity."

SHELLEY CARROLL, ADMINISTRATOR

THE CHALLENGES OF GETTING UP AND RUNNING

Access to their supplies, costumes and puppets stored in unheated shipping containers at the edge of the city was challenging. "Our storage containers are under three feet of drifted snow and we have to wait until spring until we can even get into the storage bins to see what is in there and what can be salvaged," explains Carroll. They did pull out the basic

necessities and tried to work with the minimum of materials; even this proved challenging. They normally require a month to organize and pack their operations, but in the face of the flood's rising waters, they packed everything into boxes in five days and did not know where things were.

MOVING ON TO A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Their search for affordable space led Green Fools Theatre to develop a new business model. Eight months after the flood, they launched a shared space arrangement with two theatre companies who previously rented space in their old theatre: Ghost River Theatre and Calgary Young People's Theatre. "Let's face it, in this city, rent has not gotten cheaper," says Bareham. "Unless we wanted to spend 50 per cent of our budget on rent, we had no choice but to look at sharing space."

The shared space business model challenged the organization but offered new opportunities. "We have gone from running our own place and doing what we want, when we want, to sharing," explains Bareham. The shift allowed them to evolve how they worked, and moved them from an underground

theatre without appropriate zoning and a 'pay what you can' at the door approach, to a licensed and legal performing space.

The collaboration also saved a long-standing performance venue that a local dance company had run for 20 years and was destined to be repurposed. Under the new five year agreement between the three companies, the space will be available for other companies to rent at least 20 weeks a year. Their new business model also means lower costs, new audiences, and new opportunities to work together on projects. They launched a GoFundMe campaign to raise money for new stage curtains and equipment. By the end of March 2013, they raised more than \$18,000 towards their goal of \$20,000.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

When searching for a new space, Green Fools Theatre considered options around the city, but downtown is the best location to reach their audience. While their new venue is also

near the river, they confirmed it was not affected by the flood. They increased their insurance coverage and continued to explore insurance options for any future flood damage.

SURVIVING AND THRIVING

Each organization profiled in this report faced different circumstances. There are a number of common themes and key learnings that connect their experiences. Their experiences suggest actions nonprofit organizations can take to ensure effective planning and response to diverse emergencies, disasters or major 'business' interruption.

KEY LEARNING ▼

HAVE AN UP TO DATE PLAN

Comprehensive emergency planning is broad and considers a variety of scenarios and how an organization can respond. It details what needs to happen when disaster strikes, how an organization can continue to provide services and how it can get back up and running once the crisis is over. Ideally, the emergency response plan is ingrained in the strategic operations of the organization.

The experiences shared in this report underscore the value of planning. They highlight how the process constantly evolves and that plans require regular review and update. The Distress Centre leadership team had worked with their plan for years as part of an accreditation process. When the flood hit they knew how to respond, the key services to keep active, and the role of each member of the leadership team. With a solid plan in place, they could be flexible and adjust their strategies as the situation changed.

A detailed plan helped Aventa Addiction Treatment for Women minimize the impact on their clients by supporting a smooth transition to their temporary location at Fresh Start Recovery. The plan supported a quick evacuation and ensured they brought along all resources required to continue their treatment program offsite. Their planning helped Fresh Start Recovery address the added demand for food and supplies.

While the YWCA and Green Fools Theatre did not have an up to date plan and were able to successfully respond to the crisis, critical staff and volunteer time was used to build a plan during their reaction. Their response time was longer, and some key considerations were overlooked. They relied on adaptability and strong leadership to navigate the crisis.

ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS

The experiences confirm the value of developing reciprocal agreements as part the planning process. During their response to the crisis, each organization reached out to others in the community for support. Or, organizations came to them for help. Quest Theatre offered the Green Fools Theatre temporary office space. Aventa reached out to Fresh Start Recovery for temporary housing. The YWCA contacted a number of organizations when looking for temporary housing. The Distress Centre did have a agreement in place with a crisis call centre in Edmonton, but they still searched for someone to cover their 211 services. Asking who you can turn to in a crisis, and who can turn to us—and making these connections before a disaster strikes—saves time and energy during an emergency.

TAKE ACTION ► Seek out resources and expertise to develop a comprehensive emergency response plan. Engage staff in the process and update annually.

INFORM AND EMPOWER STAFF

With or without a plan—and even with strong leadership—responding to a disaster was a team effort for all the featured organizations. Staff needed to be informed, have a clear understanding of the organization, know their role during the crisis and have the authority to make quick decisions.

By engaging the leadership team in its annual disaster planning, the Distress Centre's staff had the information and authority to respond quickly. With a new Executive Director who had moved to the position from Vice President of Operations just weeks before the flood, the decision making process was a team effort. They did realize they should have previously informed all staff of their distinct roles during a disaster. As a hub of information, the counselling and phone line staff needed to be in contact with the organization to help assess resources and to decide when they needed to turn to a partner for help. Following the flood, they did enhance staff preparedness.

The YWCA did not have an up to date plan, yet they were organized. Members of the leadership team were at different locations and had authority to make quick decisions without wading through levels of bureaucracy. Each executive team member had a clear understanding of their role and accountabilities and their flood response matched the existing organizational structure. Staff made decisions based on their guiding mission: to intervene, empower and lead when and where women needed them the most.

While the Green Fools Theatre did not have a plan in place, they were quick to delegate work to staff and volunteers. With only two employees in Calgary, they made decisions as a team. They assessed their situation and prioritized saving irreplaceable puppets and costumes, not tools and other replaceable materials.

When Fresh Start Recovery's Executive Director received a call from Aventa and Simon House asking if they could bring their clients, he quickly said 'yes'. From there, decision making was passed to the operational level where staff had the authority to determine how to support almost 50 additional clients in their building.

Most of the organizations planned to more clearly define the role of all levels of staff during an emergency: who needs to be available, what types of tasks they will handle, and how this will be communicated to staff.

The organizations recognized that the crisis and the changes in roles and locations led to increased staff workloads and stress. The organizations looked for ways to acknowledge this. Fresh Start Recovery hosted a staff retreat for strategic planning and took the time to recognize and celebrate everyone's hard work.

TAKE ACTION ► Engage key staff in an annual planning process. Inform all staff about the plan and their role as a member of the organization. Ensure staff in key roles has authority to make quick decisions during a crisis.

BUILD FINANCIAL RESILIENCY

All four organizations had financial losses related to the flood ranging from \$30,000 to \$2 million. All, except Green Fools Theatre, were able to recover the majority of their expenses through insurance and support from funders. Their experiences confirm the need for financial policies that allow for access to additional cash flow during a disaster, operating reserves to support rebuilding, and to secure fundraising expertise and advice.

All these organizations demonstrated financial resiliency by filling the gap between operating needs and expenses during the flood, and their revenues. This resiliency was critical in the days, weeks and months it took to rebuild each organization's operations. The organizations incurred unanticipated expenses during the response phase, lost earned revenue when their facilities were closed, and lost donations when donor attention was diverted to immediate community needs. Resiliency was particularly important when insurance did not cover all the infrastructure damage.

FUNDRAISE AND BUILD A CASE

Most of the organizations turned to their in-house fundraising expertise to access flood-related funding from the United Way of Calgary and Area, the Government of Alberta, and others. Accessing this funding was critical to their ability to bounce back. They built effective case statements to demonstrate the impact of the flood on their operations. Fresh Start Recovery, who had a funding shortfall of \$200,000 to \$300,000 and saw the demand for their services rise, built an evidence-based case that demonstrated the link between disasters and higher addiction levels. While the demand for the Distress Centre's services eventually dropped back to pre-flood levels, they did gather and assess data to determine if they needed to build a case for additional support.

Following the financial devastation of the flood and a weaker market for their paid work, Green Fools Theatre built up their internal fundraising capacity to help make up the financial shortfall. By building their expertise, they hoped to build a strong case for support.

TAKE ACTION ► Ensure policies are in place that allow quick access to cash flow during an emergency and help support rebuilding efforts. Seek out the fundraising expertise needed to access post-disaster funding options.

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Each organization stressed the importance of effective communication with their staff, board, volunteers, partners and others during the crisis. Several of the organizations had their core 'clients' with them, so communication with this audience remained consistent.

Depending on circumstances, the organizations used different methods to communicate within their response teams and stay organized. The YWCA had a comprehensive crisis communications plan that defined who to reach and what to share. Initially, when YWCA staff members were organizing clients at different locations, they relied heavily on cell phones. In contrast, the Distress Centre had access to their building and staff met face-to-face every few hours.

All the organizations defined their response to the crisis as an operational-level decision, rather than governance. They focused on keeping their boards informed rather than directly involving them. Updates were provided by email and phone. Emergency board meetings were held for board approval on policy-related issues.

At the community level, communication with other agencies and government helped the organizations access needed information, approvals, supplies and services. The Distress Centre stayed in close contact with the Calgary Emergency Management Association and other organizations. They shared information with their colleagues on the Disaster Mental Health Planning Committee; Fresh Start and the YWCA both reached out to NeighbourLink.

During the flood, the featured organizations turned to Facebook and Twitter to provide quick, real time updates. They shared the status of their programs, thanked funders and supporters, reached out to staff and volunteers, and promoted fundraising events. With Internet access they were able to post updates remotely and from their cell phones. Social media was a critical tool for the YWCA as it helped them reach staff and build a new contact list to use via Gmail.

TAKE ACTION ► When developing a plan, ensure the organization can communicate effectively in a variety of scenarios. Consider a crisis communication plan that defines how social media and other tools can support the emergency response plan.

ENGAGE AND COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY

Community support was critical. Existing relationships and partnerships were the source of volunteers, support and cooperation. Even before the flood, working with others in the community was a core value for all the organizations.

Calgary has a close knit theatre community and when Green Fools put out a call for help, the community responded. Without this help, the organization would have lost almost everything. When they started to develop their new shared space operation, the community once again rallied to help all three organizations in the collaboration get the space up and running.

The YWCA is a long standing organization with deep roots in Calgary and the community responded enthusiastically to their calls for support. Calgarians donated generously, organizations opened their doors to the YWCA's clients, and government provided the services and approvals needed to house their clients in temporary locations.

Fresh Start Recovery had always focused on building relationships with other agencies. Their experience during the flood reinforced they were on the right track. When disaster struck, other organizations called them—knowing they would be open to providing support. In a different situation, if Fresh Start Recovery needed help, they would have a number of strong partners to turn to.

Community cooperation was critical to the Distress Centre's ability to run an effective 211 service and coordinate the Disaster Mental Health Planning Committee. They had built a reputation as a reliable hub for community information. Their strong relationships with other agencies ensured they had the credibility needed to coordinate a response.

TAKE ACTION ► When planning, consider what community support you might need in a crisis, and what you can offer others who need help. Build and nurture key relationships and networks before a crisis hits.

INTEGRATE LEARNINGS TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

Most of the organizations reflected on what worked and did not work, and captured this in a formal way. The Distress Centre, Fresh Start Recovery and Aventa all updated their plans. Fresh Start Recovery's guest Aventa undertook an extensive post-flood evaluation that defined what they needed to add or change in their plan. Fresh Start Recovery added a new section to their plan that documented how they could support other organizations during an emergency. The YWCA looked for ways to capture their experience and make changes to their operations, for example, how to access information offsite during an emergency.

BUILD REDUNDANCY AND BACKUPS

Most organizations either pointed to the value of having developed back-up plans and built in redundancy, or pointed to this as an area they were working on for the future.

When they activated their response plan, the Distress Centre quickly realized that too many tasks were assigned to one staff member. After the flood, they assessed how they could change this and trained others on key tasks. This would help avoid

staff overload and burnout. It also ensured they would have the knowledge and expertise needed even if a particular person was unavailable when a disaster struck.

The YWCA developed a plan for critical information and supplies to be included in an 'agency backpack' in the case of a future evacuation.

DISASTERS CAN LEAD TO ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION ▼

When faced with a crisis and its aftermath, organizations can choose a number of reactions. They may see it as a challenge that is too great to overcome. Or, like the organizations featured in these case studies, they may see it as an opportunity to move in new directions—and, to more clearly define who they are and what they do.

While the case study organizations faced very different circumstances during the flood, a common thread that defined their experience was that it led to organizational transformation.

- The Green Fools Theatre used the devastation of the flood to launch new business model based on shared space and collaboration
- The flood helped Distress Centre Calgary gain clarity about their role as a central hub for information and coordination during an emergency
- The flood catalyzed YWCA of Calgary's new strategic direction by bringing their strategy to life, unifying the organization, and speeding up the implementation of their new plan
- By opening their doors to evacuated agencies, Fresh Start Recovery gained a renewed focus on the value of building bridges with others and working collaboratively

The experiences shared in this report are just a few of the remarkable stories of resiliency, survival and transformation resulting from Calgary's 2013 flood.

What's important is how nonprofits, funders, government, and others, take and use the valuable information and insights gleaned through these diverse situations.

It is an opportunity for nonprofit leaders to drive the strategic and practical planning that will prepare their organization for a future emergency or crisis. To ensure emergency preparedness is reflected in their priorities and ingrained in their culture; that

they have the plans, systems and support needed to protect their organization's infrastructure, services and reputation.

Funders, government and other stakeholders can use the knowledge to better understand how to help organizations prepare for a future disaster, and respond and rebuild afterwards.

While a disaster, emergency or crisis can be overwhelming and challenging they can be navigated with appropriate planning and preparation—and can be an opportunity for meaningful growth and transformation.

CCVO assists Alberta nonprofits to strengthen their emergency preparedness.

In addition to these case studies, we are documenting the insights of community leaders, funders, government and other stakeholders regarding the impact of the floods on Alberta nonprofits. Our final report will synthesize the results of our province-wide surveys, these case studies and focus groups.

Planning tools and professional development opportunities will complement the resources we make available.

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The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) promotes and strengthens the nonprofit sector by developing and sharing resources, knowledge, building connections, leading collaborative work, and giving voice to critical issues affecting our sector.



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