# Chapter 4 The work of flood recovery

> "The incompetence of the loss adjusters is soul destroying because it happens once and then you relive it, and you relive it again. Every loss adjuster, you've got to start at the beginning again and they've lost the file and they've lost the papers. So every time you copy everything again and take it again. They must have so many papers from me, it's unbelievable."
>
> James, resident and worker
> Interview, November 14th 2007

> "Can't get in touch with the loss adjustor & end up swearing at a person who called me from the bank. When the driers went in I tried to increase my overdraft limit & the bank said no even though I explained the circumstances. The person who phoned was asking me if I was happy that the bank had paid my direct debits even though I was over my overdraft limit, he didn't mention that they were charging me £125 to do it but why would he? I got a little annoyed & then he tried to get me to swap savings into the account & wouldn't take no for an answer so I had a bit of a shout with a few, very carefully selected profanities thrown in for good measure. Don't think my bank is talking to me now. It just added to the feeling that no-one was trying to help us out & that they didn't care that we have had some difficulties & unforeseen expenses."
>
> Scott, resident
> Diary January 25th 2008

The previous chapter has suggested that the process of recovery itself is one that we need to understand more fully. It is the recovery process itself, more than the flood event, which seems to have the most impact on people and exacerbate, or even produce, vulnerabilities. In this chapter we focus on the recovery process and, more specifically, the work involved in flood recovery. By work we do not mean simply the 'things' that need to happen but the active role that diarists have to take in the process. The work of recovery is then the third core theme of our analysis. Exploring this theme involves a consideration of the following factors, which are addressed in this chapter:

- The work of householders as project managers (including the practical and emotional aspects of getting things repaired).
- How, as part of the repairs process, householders develop new skills which they must use to engage and question 'experts'.
- How householders continue to manage the demands of everyday life while living in abnormal circumstances.
- The emotional impact that the repairs process generates through the conflict of managing different roles and identities.
- Specific issues facing frontline workers – for example, the emotional labour involved in juggling the demands of their employers with the needs of the public and, in some cases, their own flood recovery process.

## 4.1 Householders as project managers

It is clear from residents' diaries that huge amounts of effort are involved in flood recovery, with tasks ranging from chasing quotes and phoning insurance companies to managing builders (see Box 11). This work is all carried out alongside everyday tasks and activities such as going to work, taking the children to school and visiting the supermarket.

**Box 11 Flood recovery work reported in residents' diaries**

The following list describes the different kinds of work that residents reported carrying out in their diaries and interviews:

Endless phone calls, trying to find a house to rent, choosing new things for house every weekend, project managing builders, managing paper work e.g. invoices and claims forms, cleaning (either after builders or trying to get rid of the smell), making choices all the time, keeping a personal record of all correspondence/phone calls, emailing companies to explain not happy with work, making arrangements to meet people, getting quotes, finding builders, posting and faxing things, driving across town to empty dehumidifier bucket, keeping an eye on the workmen, making tea for the builders, re-doing the jobs the builders have done wrong, remedying damage caused to upstairs of house, driving back and forwards between rented house and real house to check on it, having to wait in for deliveries (some of which never come), making a note of snagging issues and calling companies back to correct them, packing and unpacking boxes of belongings, contacting utilities companies to redirect post, phone, bills etc., sorting garden after house is completed.

However, people's diaries and interviews also contain considerable disparities in terms of what kind of work is done by householders, and why. These differences relate to the various ways in which residents become involved in the recovery process and the reasons for this.

**Box 12 The project manager: Leanne's story**

When we first met Leanne in late November 2007, she was living in a static caravan on her drive and the builders were busy inside her house. Our conversation was carried out to the backdrop of banging, hammering and the roar of power tools and was often punctuated by workmen popping in to ask questions. From the frenetic activity going on at the house and Leanne's description of the work involved, it was clear that she had played a central role in the recreation of her home and that, by placing herself in this project manager role, she had created a lot of stress for herself in the process:

> "The buildings insurance company have been a nightmare and the assessor will pass something through, for argument's sake there was a second cheque due to the builder, it was put through on the 2nd November by our assessor, they received it a few days later

**Box continued overleaf**

on the 6th November and then sat on it until last week and did nothing about it. And I rang up and went absolutely ape on the telephone, and screamed and shouted, I tried the nice way and that didn't work, then I tried getting calm but angry and that didn't work. Then I screamed at him and burst into tears and said, 'sorry I'll have to ring you back, I just can't speak to you'. And I just hung up on him and then I had to walk up and down, stamped, hit the wall, cried, made a cup of tea, dried my tears and got back on the phone with determination and said, 'now I've got to sort this, now this isn't good enough, blah de blah'. And he said, 'Well you did, Mrs [surname], you did decide to project manage it yourself, had we have done that you wouldn't perhaps be going through some of this'. I said, 'No probably I wouldn't but judging by all my neighbours and some of them insured by yourselves, they haven't got a builder at all and they are nowhere near as far down the road as I am. So I could have been at that stage, which would have been even worse because heads would have been rolling, and it would have been yours'…

"You see, it's every day and you ring them and they are not in or the answer phone is on and they don't get back to you. You fax them copies of quotes or invoices or what have you and you write on 'please let me know if you have received this and if you are going to approve it or if it's this or if it's that, if it comes within whatever'. And they just don't answer you. So you don't know whether they've received the information or the fax or what. So you ring up and then you can't get through to them to find out either. And if you speak to anybody else, 'Well we are not dealing with your claim, you really need to speak to so and so'. And it's just like hitting a brick wall, you can imagine the frustration."

Leanne, resident
Interview, November 29th, 2007

Just listening to Leanne's account of all of this was exhausting and it was obvious that the project management task on which she had embarked was physically, mentally and emotionally stressful and that this stress was exacerbated by the ways in which she was dealt with by the various agencies handling her case. As a confident and assertive person, Leanne was adamant that she wanted to be in control of the repairs and, as her insurer pointed out, this did, in many ways result in extra stresses, as she took on the responsibility of chasing and coordinating things that would otherwise have been done for her. As Leanne emphasised however, the positive side of the situation was that, by managing things, she was able to ensure that the repairs progressed in good time and that the work was done to the standard she requested. Consequently, although managing the recovery was highly stressful and time consuming for her, she felt she was able to dictate the course of events as much as possible and that her drive and persistence was what enabled her to be back in her home in time for Christmas 2007. That she was retired was also a major advantage as it enabled her to focus on the repairs in a way that would have been quite impossible had she had a full-time job to contend with.

It is interesting to compare her situation with the different kinds of stresses experienced by flooded residents who took a different path to recovery. Leanne's story is in marked contrast to that of Lucy and her husband. Like Leanne, Lucy was retired. However, unlike Leanne, Lucy's husband had elected to use their insurance company's builders as he felt this would involve less risk and bother for them and thereby protect them from the kinds of stresses involved in organising repairs, finding quotes and project

managing tradesmen (in other words, the kinds of stresses experienced by Leanne). However, their decision led to stresses of a different kind as, despite repeatedly trying to chase their insurers, they had to wait for months before any work was started on the house at all.

**Box 13 The waiting game: Lucy's story**

While Leanne's home was a hive of activity, Lucy's was deserted. Sitting in her caravan on her drive day after day with no work taking place in her house made Lucy feel depressed and totally out of control – particularly as she had to watch all her neighbours – who had appointed their own builders or were with different insurers – make progress on their homes. Consequently, by the time Christmas arrived and Leanne was back in her home, work on Lucy's house had not even started. She wrote repeatedly in her diary about how low this made her feel:

> "Felt down and closed in again last night. If I could only believe repair work would start soon. I feel forgotten by the insurers. Seeing people in their homes settled back in hurts. God knows what it feels like to be homeless. Monday and New Year's Eve tomorrow, have to pin smile on and party at [relatives]. Thank God for family and friends."
>
> Lucy, resident
> Diary, January 30th, 2007

> "Up early Thursday morning, no sign of the builders. Walked dog, came back to van about 8.45 still not even a phone call. Stormed round to other house they've been working on. Apparently they weren't coming, but an electrician was coming to see what needed doing. Lost my temper and rang office to ask what was going on. Was told we'd got our wires crossed and only electrician was calling. Told them electrician and a plumber had been before. 1st electrician not able to do work, so back to the drawing board. [Husband] and I plunged into depression again; thought things were moving at last. Electricians did call at lunch, more waiting for him to price job. I feel like giving up ever living in the house again. Went to launderette and did supermarket shop. Another cold night shut in the coffin as I call the caravan."
>
> Lucy, resident
> Diary, December 16th, 2007

These extracts show that Lucy's attempts to reduce the stress of the recovery process actually resulted in a different kind of 'work' of recovery – the work of constantly chasing the insurers and trying to fight against the considerable emotional frustration and despondency that emerged as a result of feeling so trapped in her situation. This work was, in its own way, just as stressful (if not more so) as the burden of project management that was experienced by Leanne as the diaries show that one of the most difficult aspects of the recovery process for residents to deal with was the constant waiting involved and the inability to control what was happening to them during this time.

Endless waiting was also reported by the council tenants included in our study – all of whom had very little control over the repairs process (see Section 3.3 for more details of council tenants' experiences). Thanks to a new contract agreement within the council, which had been signed before the floods, all

repairs to council homes were carried out by the council's partner building contractors and tenants had very little say over when – or how – this took place. As a result, many ended up feeling trapped in their circumstances and unable to get on with making those changes that were under their control.

**Box 14 No control: Amanda's story**

Years ago, while her husband was still living with her, Amanda had altered her kitchen by moving a wall in order to give herself more living space. However, this became problematic when it came for her kitchen to be re-done and she was told that she might need to put the layout back as it was in order for her new kitchen to be fitted. She found it hard to get a definite answer to the matter from the council and, consequently, was living in a state of indecision where she felt she was unable to make any progress in getting her home back to normality, as she described:

> "It's just the living in this and just not getting any further. If you could get further then you'd be all right. I wouldn't even mind if they'd come and tell me if I've got to take that [wall] down and pull them units away. I mean the door is still there, that's easily solved, do you know what I mean? And then at least I could get my room done."
>
> Amanda, resident
> Interview December 19th, 2007

The work of recovery is then, in part, the less visible form of waiting and doing nothing, often at a time when you are enduring extreme frustration and primitive living conditions. It may seem strange to describe this waiting process as 'work' but this is exactly what it is. For instance, what at first appears to be 'doing nothing' is actually nothing of the kind. In reality, residents often spend large amounts of time chasing the various organisations involved in an effort to get something to happen, with the rest of their time being spent worrying or feeling angry about why things are not happening in the way that they would like. In other words, therefore, the 'work' involved in recovery is not just the physical effort of getting things done but the mental and emotional effort involved in having to coordinate the activities of the various fragmented agencies and companies involved in flood recovery.

A common metaphor used by diarists to describe their journey through the recovery process was that of a 'fight', as Amy described:

> "We are at that stage now but it's a constant fight all the time. As soon as something comes up you know you've got to fight with the loss adjuster, you know it's going to take maybe a week to get things agreed. So it's even got to the stage where you see an email from the insurance company and I've got to the stage where I actually feel sick before I read it because I know I've got to deal with it, I know there's going to be an argument. It's the little things like, they won't agree our kitchen quote at the moment, you know, we've got two companies, fairly similar quotes but they still think it's too

high and so we are having to fight. Whilst you are trying to live your life as normally as you can in a very abnormal situation, you've got to put all this fighting in as well."

Amy, resident
Interview November 1st, 2007

This quote goes some way towards explaining why this waiting process is so incredibly exhausting – not only are you battling a system which feels like it is set up to thwart you (one resident explained that loss adjusters exist to keep insurance claims to a minimum, so it feels like you are confronting obstacles at every stage) – you are also having to battle your own feelings of anger, fear and frustration. Add to this the experience of poor communication between the many agencies involved in flood recovery, some insensitive handling of your circumstances and a few mistakes with your case, and you have an intensely stressful situation that makes things much worse than they need to be for all concerned, as we saw with the issue of Laura's rent payments on p.46. Bruce felt that, had he not spent hours on his mobile phone chasing the various companies involved, he would not have succeeded in getting his family back home in time for Christmas: "If you are not on the ball and you are not chasing it through and you are not hounding people, it sounds awful but due to the magnitude of it all, you are just lost within the system." (Bruce, resident, interview, January 2008).

The work of recovery also involves engaging in how the surrounding built environment is managed. For example**,** several diarists explained that they didn't trust the council and the various agencies to ensure that the drainage infrastructure was properly maintained and improved in order to prevent a repeat incident. As a result, they felt that they had to keep lobbying these organisations to ensure that things were done properly, as this extract from a group discussion shows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Will | And what about, I mean like in terms of the community, you've talked a lot about the community and it coming together and stuff like that. In a sense of it happening again say, has the community learned things that it would you know, would it pull together again? |
| Tessa | You would probably be more, have a bit more authority over, interfere more with the council and say, "Look, the river banks want doing, the gullies need doing". I think everybody might get up a bit about things like that. |
| Helen | Well we are on about, with our committee, every time we have committee meetings, which we have a lot don't we Rose? But every time we have committee meetings the first things we fetch up is the pavements, the gullies, the drains. Every meeting we keep pumping it into the officials that are at our meetings and they get sick to death of hearing it but we keep on to them every time. |
| Tessa | But they don't do anything. |
| Rose | They do in the end. |
| Helen | They do in the end because they get fed up. |

Group discussion, April 24th 2008

In addition to illustrating how recovery does not end when a person moves back into their home, this quote also shows that the work of recovery does not finish at this point either as some residents feel the need to remain vigilant and keep up the pressure on the various authorities involved.

### 4.1.1 Summary: the fight of recovery

There are many different ways in which residents experience the recovery process – from the full-on involvement of project managing to the endless waiting game that is involved when other people are making decisions about your life. All these scenarios involve different kinds of physical, mental and emotional work – even what appears as doing "nothing" requires work in the form of planning, chasing people or battling your own feelings of frustration and despair. Given such circumstances, it isn't hard to see why the most popular description of the process is the metaphor of the 'fight'. Clearly there are links to vulnerability here in that not all residents will have the same capacity or willingness to fight (see Section 3.3). However, there are other aspects of flood recovery work which are even less apparent – most notably, the process of having to acquire new skills in order to manage the recovery and of having to do all this at the same time as managing everyday life and the various pre-existing responsibilities that you have (for example, to family, friends, work etc.). These aspects are discussed in the sections that follow.

## 4.2 Householders developing new skills and questioning expertise

A prominent feature of flood recovery for many diarists was the work of having to acquire new skills and knowledge which could then be used to challenge 'expert' judgements of what constituted an acceptable level of service. In Section 3.1.3 we have already described how residents sometimes had to challenge 'expert' judgements over what constitutes a flood itself – for example, with the contested issue of 'secondary flooding'. However, at group discussions, diarists also explained how they had to learn how to do things like make an insurance claim, choose builders for quotes etc.

Despite being very anxious about the floods coming again, diarists were able to describe new skills and knowledge that they would use to make the recovery process easier next time round. For example, Andy was adamant that, if his house flooded again, he would make sure he appointed his own builder and question his loss adjuster more about his settlement, while Helen, a council tenant, explained that she would be more aware of how to get in touch with the council about recovery issues:

> "We've sort of already got that plan in our heads, that's what we will do… we've decided that we are not going to go with anything that the insurance companies say, we are going to take the risk ourselves that the work is going to be of the right standard by the end of it"
>
> Andy, resident
> Group discussion, May 1, 2008.

> "If it ever happened again I think I'd be more prepared and more, knowing how the council have reacted with this flood, I know they said they can't guarantee that it's not going to happen again here, because we live on a flood plain and plus these houses are built on a flood plain, on farmland and they said there's no 100 per cent guarantee that it's not going to happen again but if it happened again I know what to expect and how to be prepared and how to get in touch with the council."
>
> Helen, resident
> Interview, January 2008

Therefore some people felt that being flooded had given them more knowledge and skills to help themselves or advise others who are flooded in future.

These 'recovery skills', however, were acquired the hard way i.e. through much work and trial and error. One of the hardest parts of this process involved having to use your own fledgling skills and knowledge to challenge 'expert' pronouncements about the recovery. For example, Nigel got annoyed with his insurance company after he discovered that his next-door neighbour, who had the same insurer and very similar circumstances to him, was getting £100 more for his monthly allowance. In recalling a conversation that he had had with his loss adjuster, he reflected on what he had learnt about the way the insurance industry operated:

> "I think there should be some sort of fixed rate, I'm not saying you all get four hundred pound but… that's what his words to me, 'You negotiated your deal', that was the loss adjuster. I said 'I didn't realise I was negotiating'."
>
> Nigel, resident
> Group discussion, April 24th, 2008

Nigel's experiences present a picture of the insurance industry as a game that has to be played. However, it soon becomes clear that these 'rules' are different for every company. Nobody tells you this and you must therefore work them out for yourself as you go through the recovery process. Clearly, those who are quick to learn the rules do somewhat better than those who do not, as Nigel discovered.

Another good example of the struggles that diarists experienced over issues of knowledge and fairness concerned the problem of 'cowboy' builders. Poor workmanship made more work for diarists in a number of ways. When the work completed on the house was not up to the standard required, residents had to choose between remonstrating with the builders – a difficult task which involved having to pit their judgements against those of the builder – or simply going round and tidying up the work themselves. Some diarists were, by this time, so sick of fighting that they took the latter option, thinking it would be easier to remedy things themselves than to have to go through the struggle of complaining, calling the builders back and making sure it was finished properly.

**Box 15 Poor workmanship leads to upheaval for a second time: Amy's story**

Amy and her husband lived in a rented house some distance away while their home was being repaired but Amy would return everyday to feed their animals (that they had been unable to take with them to the rented house) and check on things. Amy was also appalled at the standards of workmanship conducted in her home. During a group discussion she described how she and her husband confronted the builder with their concerns, only to be told that they had no right to complain about the standard of the work because it was only 'an insurance job'.

**Box continued overleaf**

"It doesn't matter what state the house was before the flooding, it was our home. We loved it, we felt safe there, we felt secure there, that's where we relaxed. And people have come in and they've not really bothered… We actually had a stand up argument with one of our plasterers because above our door wasn't square, it was actually sloping. And we said, "I want a square door, is it a lot to ask for?" And my husband turned round and said to him, 'Would you pay for a job like that?' And the guy turned round and said, 'If I was paying for it, I wouldn't accept it… Why are you expecting me to do it, it's insurance'? And that was the view: 'you are not paying for it, it's insurance'. But all of us have built our homes, we've made our homes to be ours and they've been wiped out in a matter of minutes in a lot of cases. And tried to build something back up when you've had people who, 'Oh it's good enough'. And you are thinking well, you start to get to a stage thinking, 'is it actually good enough or am I being very, very picky?'"

Amy, resident
Group discussion, July 17th 2008

As it happened, Amy was not just being 'picky'. At a subsequent group discussion in October 2008, 16 months after the flooding, she revealed that she was having to move out of her home for a second time because the work completed by the builders was of such a poor standard that the building had become structurally unsound.

Distrust over the standards of workmanship involved also led to people feeling that they had to be constantly on hand to check and monitor the builders. All these factors involved more work for residents, as Amy's story shows (Box 15). The ability to have trust in your builders was crucial for residents. Those lucky enough to have tradesmen that they could trust did not feel the need to visit the house so often and felt confident that they could leave their builder to make sensible decisions about the reinstatement. However, for those without such trust in their workmen, it was a very different story, as Rachel's example illustrates.

**Box 16 "They haven't got a clue who they are sending into my house": Rachel's story**

Rachel's first choice of builder – an acquaintance that she knew and trusted – was rejected by the insurance company because his quote was too high. Consequently, she had to accept their choice of builders, despite not being happy with their skill levels or the quality of workmanship carried out:

"The guys that are doing the house have only been with the company two weeks – they are not tradesmen at all – I know they are not tradesmen because one of the men doing it has actually done some work for me personally in the past. So I know he's not a tradesman in the field that he's working in. It is really unnerving to think that – I don't know anything about building at all but yet these people are in my house doing building work and I'm expected to trust them, not knowing what they are doing really and not having anything to compare it with and not being able to speak to somebody who I do trust about the work that they are doing. And knowing that they've only been working in this company for a couple of weeks is really difficult."

Interview, December 5th 2007

**Box continued overleaf**

As a single Mum, Rachel had to do all the management and chasing of the builders on her own – this was difficult, particularly when she felt the builders weren't taking her concerns seriously, as she felt she had no one to support her or provide advice about what standards were acceptable.

> "I rang the building company and he said 'the plumber will be going tomorrow'. And I said 'well, I want to be there when the plumber goes'. And so he says 'Oh well I'll try and arrange that'. It's like it's not your house, it's like they've taken it out of your hands, they are doing it and you are not involved in the process, which is really disturbing because it is my house and I want to be informed of everything that goes on in my house. I mean I'm going down and quizzing these lads as to the work 'is it 4x4?' and 'how long have you been working for this company?' And I was thinking 'they haven't got a clue who they are sending into my house', which is really disturbing."
>
> Rachel, resident
> Interview, December 5th 2007

As Rachel discovered, it is easy to find yourself having to question the expertise of the builders and fight the attitude that what is 'good enough' for an insurance job is not, in fact, good enough. Insurance promises the replacement of 'like for like' but, according to the diarists, it rarely happens like this, as Leanne described:

> "So you see you don't get your house back like it was, or you don't get what you've done back – you get what they can do back, within the price that the insurance company allows."
>
> Leanne, resident
> Interview, November 29th, 2007

However, it is important to note how much work is involved in trying to negotiate this process – having to argue and question things constantly is exhausting and it is no wonder that some diarists chose to put up with things that they knew should have been corrected, just because they had got fed up of fighting. As Amy explained during a group discussion: "You get to the stage where you haven't got the energy, you settle. You want everybody out of your house." Emma, a pensioner in her 70s, agreed. She went round after her builders scraping paint off the door handles where they had been slapdash and, after the company had left, she paid her own electrician to rectify what she considered was the unsafe wiring left by the previous firm.

### 4.2.1 Summary: negotiating fairness

While diarists report the positive side of having gained new skills and competencies in managing the recovery process, what emerges are accounts of having to negotiate the judgments of the various agencies involved in reinstating the home. In the flood recovery process, fairness is up for negotiation and your ability to enter into this negotiating process will determine how successful you are in regaining the life that you want for yourself and your family. Much of residents' physical and emotional energy is thus

taken up with having to challenge the various agencies' perceptions of what constitutes a fair deal, and so you must fight against your insurance company's notion of what constitutes an acceptable settlement for your claim; fight against your builders' judgement of what they consider to be adequate workmanship; fight against the council's definition of what is an acceptable standard of repairs. It is also important to realise that this work of acquiring skills and arguing over standards goes on at the same time as having to cope with everyday life. In many cases, everyday tasks such as shopping, cooking and washing became harder after the floods, as the following section explains.

## 4.3 Managing everyday life

A key characteristic of life post-flood is that everyday tasks also become more difficult in themselves as a result of changed circumstances.

For some, changed circumstances meant living in another area. This could create a sense of displacement. As Trevor described, living somewhere new also meant having to come to terms with a real sense of displacement as the people and places surrounding you were totally new:

> "It's funny, I haven't seen my neighbours for over six months, it was just like overnight you just, one day you suddenly have your routine and the next day it's just like plucked out of it and plucked into, I don't know what's happened to my neighbours. Things like you go to the local shop for a paper, that's all disappeared, you know, I used to get my milk delivered, I think I still owe the milkman some money and I haven't seen him for six months. I used to pop to the local pub but I haven't been in there for six months. It's just like my normal routine, my normal life, like the people you are used to seeing, your neighbours, it's just like a guillotine and it's all like plucked out of air and deposited in a different area of Hull, it's strange really, yes. Because I've lived in that house twenty odd years, originally it was my parents' house, I got it when they died so again I suppose that's a bit upsetting because you've got memories of a house and then seeing what it's like last time..."
>
> Trevor, resident
> Interview, January 2008

Such displacement was partly about location, but it was also the displacement of daily routines and habits.

The impact on habits and routines was particularly felt for those who had to commute. For example, Laura lived and worked in West Hull but, when her home was flooded, the only rented accommodation she could find was in East Hull. Consequently, her daily commute to work became much longer and more stressful as she had to fight against the morning traffic on the bridge. She and her husband also had to drive back to their property on a regular basis in order to empty the dehumidifier bucket. In addition to this, Laura's family all lived in West Hull, so trying to attend social events and other family occasions became much more difficult. Her diary shows her frustrations on the subject:

> "Don't believe it, all bridges going up AGAIN right on rush hour - what another start to the day. Living East Hull and trying to get City Centre or west near impossible!

> Big family do tonight (Silver Wedding Anniversary and 21st Birthday). A bit peeved as this party's at an indoor party room very near to our flooded home, so would have been handy but due to us living so far away I have to drive so can not join in a celebratory glass of wine or two!"
>
> Laura, resident
> Diary, 9th April 2008

Similarly, Amy reflected on how her daily routine had been thrown completely out of kilter by the fact that she and her husband were having to rent a property a considerable distance from their flooded home:

> "It's actually got to the stage that we are not really doing a lot of shopping because we are not doing a lot of cooking because it's got to the stage where we are grabbing takeaways where we can because our daily routine has been affected such that when I leave work I will go and visit the house, feed the cat, check up with the neighbours, see what's happening. So it could be another hour and a half when I get home on a night. It's thrown the general routine out. I was saying to my work colleague, "I'm looking forward to the day where I don't have to go off and collect the post on a lunchtime or wonder what time should I check the house" and that kind of thing. To actually just have one house to go home to and when you get home that's it, you can sit down and you can enjoy it. I think we are looking forward to that more than anything and that's probably that little light at the end of the tunnel, which we just see every now and again and that's what we are working forward to now I think."
>
> Amy, resident
> Interview, 1st November 2007

Amy's description shows how, in addition to being disruptive, such a change in daily routine is also exhausting with the result that everyday activities, such as cooking meals and relaxing in the evening, take a backseat to all the other forms of work that must be done.

Other forms of temporary accommodation also proved problematic. For example, Duncan, a single man in his 20s who rented privately, found himself living between the homes of various different relations – none of whom could accommodate him on a more permanent basis because they were already giving shelter to other family members who were also flooded. He explained that living between different houses meant every aspect of his life was affected – from the timing of his meals to his hobbies and social life, because he couldn't bring friends back and he had to fit in with his relatives' ways of doing things:

> "I've tried not to live on takeaways because I'm quite heavily into keep fit. I mean my job keeps me fit to a certain extent but obviously if I was eating takeaways every night I'd be the size of a house. So I mean, I do try and get a meal at my Nan's house or my mum's house but obviously you feel guilty as well, you feel as though you are putting on people. But I mean obviously they understand the situation that I've got, I've got no means of providing it for myself."
>
> Duncan, resident
> Interview, December 19th 2007

Nigel and Anna, who also lived with family members after the event, shared Duncan's thoughts on the difficulty of trying to lead a normal life whilst in somebody else's home. For them it wasn't so much the

physical disruption to routine that was important but the simple fact of being unsure of what the 'rules' were and knowing how to behave in a different space.

> "It does affect your daily life because you go out and you are not going home to your own home for a start. As I say when you are in somebody else's house, although they are family… it's like you can't, it's not your house is it? Like going to the loo or washing your hands or just sitting and putting your feet on the chair or sprawl on the settee, you don't, you won't ever say anything but it's not your own home is it? You don't know where things are at other people's houses you know, I've been to her house, I can't reach the blooming cupboards when I go there, everything is on the top shelf. I need a stool, I can't reach, my brother in law is quite big and every cupboard door, it's never the right one; it's always the last one."
>
> Nigel, resident
> Interview, December 5th 2007

Again, having to monitor your own behaviour can be very hard work – Nigel's quote shows how you can never truly relax under such circumstances because living in someone else's space means living by someone else's rules.

For those who were not living in a fully functioning house, the work involved was much more obvious. Emma, who was in her 70s, lived in her garage while her home was being repaired – she had to cook meals on a camping stove and carry all her washing upstairs so that she could clean her clothes in the bath. Lucy, who lived in a touring caravan on her drive, also became increasingly frustrated with having to go to the launderette and cook meals in a tiny space, as this entry from her diary describes:

> "Lost control last night at tea time. Only poaching eggs and bloody smoke alarm went off. Threw everything out of caravan door. So fed up of trying to make meals in caravan, no work surfaces. Fed up of going to launderette. Can't ask people to wash for me – everyone stressed out and busy with Christmas."
>
> Lucy, resident
> Diary, December 2007

Lucy used to describe the caravan as "the coffin" – a very apt description which reflected the sense of claustrophobia and despair that she felt while living in it. For Isobel, who lived upstairs with her husband during the repairs, the lack of space was also an issue. She described her situation as being:

> "Like a caged animal. A single room, I'm used to a nice big through lounge. I'm always up and down my garden because I like my garden and for ages there was no pleasure in even going and having a look at the garden because it was just all covered in a horrible sludge you know… So being up here to me, oh I just felt caged. How many books of Suduko puzzles I've been through heaven only knows there's nothing I can do. Downstairs and my normal living I'm pottering about, I mean I'm not working hard but you find something to potter with all the time don't you? You are up and down doing things, even if it's just to get out your chair and have a nosy at the neighbours you know. But up here you know, you just feel so trapped."
>
> Isobel, resident
> Interview, December 4th 2007

For those with young children, the disruption to everyday life was particularly acute and hard to manage. Michaela had to live in a hotel room with her husband and two young children before a rented house could be found for them and, during her interview, she described how difficult it was to cope with living like this:

> "When we went in the hotel he [husband] was on shifts and he was on earlies that week. So he had to get up really early, he went at five in the morning. We were all in one room with two double beds; we had both the girls there. We had no facilities to make any packed lunch or anything and he couldn't go down and have breakfast because it was too early you know. I mean I remember [husband], when we moved in on that Tuesday, just sat with his head in his hands saying how can we cope?"
>
> Michaela, resident and worker
> Interview, January 2008

A similar experience was had by Bruce and Olivia who had to manage in a hotel room with two young children – things were made particularly difficult by the fact that the baby needed milk bottles sterilising in the middle of the night. The family also found themselves having to vacate their room on weekends because it had been booked by others several months in advance.

Holly and Sam, who rented privately, also found things very hard to manage as they had no insurance and the only accommodation they could afford was a one-bedroom flat on the other side of the city (for more details, see their story on p.49). Being separated from family and friends meant that baby-sitting cover was hard to come by and, with the whole family sleeping in one room and the children sharing a bed, everyone's sleep suffered:

> "Sam and me have been taking it in turns to sleep on the couch with [son] because he just wakes up every time [younger son] wriggles. [Younger son] hasn't had a full night's sleep either in his own bed yet. It's hard with us all being in such a small space."
>
> Holly, resident
> Diary, December 2007

Finally, however, it is important to realise that it was not just the everyday lives of those who were flooded that were affected. Sophie's story (see p.44) shows how her whole family's life was transformed by her mother-in-law's extended stay, while Lynne, whose home was affected when her toilet blocked as a result of the floods, explained what a nightmare this was for herself and her children to live with:

> "For that whole week we had to, my daughter goes to work early so that she can use the toilet. And I have to dash to Tesco to use the toilet up there, first thing in the morning. And then… at some point we had to fill up the toilet, because when I had visitors, is the smell."
>
> Lynne, resident
> Interview, March 5th 2008

Crucially, the floods also had a much broader impact on people's lives as a result of the changes that took place in caring practices (see Box 17).

**Box 17 The impacts on others through changes to care work**

When it comes to understanding flood recovery, care practices are an important but often overlooked area (Sims *et al.* 2009). Our research shows that, as families were displaced and living conditions changed, different kinds of care activities were revealed, disrupted and produced. For example, Caroline, who moved to a rented house a long way from her home during the repairs, felt frustrated and impotent because she could not continue her usual work of caring for her grandson Luke (who was severely disabled). Prior to the floods, she had been making regular visits to her daughter and son-in-law so that she could help with his care and spend precious time with him. However, due to heavy demand, the only rented house she could find was outside the city on the edge of a small village and a long distance from the nearest bus stop.

Caroline herself had a disability which meant that she couldn't drive or walk very far and, as a result, the journey to care for her grandson, which had been easy from her home, became impossible from her rented house. A few months into the study, Caroline reported that her daughter and son-in-law had made the heartbreaking decision to put Luke into permanent care as they could no longer cope with looking after him at home. For Caroline, isolated in her rented house, this personal tragedy was impossible to separate from the impact of the floods. She wrote in her diary:

> "I feel impotent. I can't help them make this horrendous decision, only support them when they make it. Luke is the light of my life, so precious and fragile… Until we moved into this temporary accommodation, I was helping on a regular basis, going to their bungalow to be there when one of them needed to go out, as Luke needs 2 people to care for him at all times. I'm further away now and it's harder for me to go out when it's cold as I don't drive and have to rely on buses. In my lowest moments when logic flies out of the window, I feel very angry at all the agencies who failed in their responsibilities when the floods happened – local council, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water etc. not only for the trauma people have suffered re. damaged homes + property, but the side effects – far reaching and unique to each family. I'm over two miles from the nearest bus stop, further away from the people who need my help most + badly missing my own home which wraps itself around me when I walk through the door."
>
> Caroline, resident
> Diary December 17th, 2007

Therefore, Caroline's spatial displacement and the loss of her home had serious repercussions for her role as carer for her grandson, in both the practical and emotional sense. By disrupting her home, the floods disrupted her caring activities and affected the kind of support she was able to provide, as she was no longer able to offer practical help or draw emotional strength from her surroundings.

### 4.3.1 Summary: maintaining normality

The stories presented in this section show how, in addition to coping with the practicalities of the repairs, the floods can make everyday life much harder to manage. Diarists report the experience of displacement combined with the loss of the familiar, and there are also the knock-on effects for those commuting across the city, the challenges of having to learn to live with others or in confined spaces, the difficulties of maintaining a social life, the frustrations of undertaking simple tasks with children, and the disruptions to care work. This section also shows how the impacts on everyday life extend beyond those who were directly affected by the floods.

## 4.4 Managing roles and identities

We can also see that the work involved in managing everyday life is not all physical – much of the mental and emotional work done by residents also occurs as a result of having to juggle the different responsibilities and identities that we all have as part of life. One of the most stressful consequences of the floods reported by diarists was the experience of having so many different things to do. As the previous sections have described, other responsibilities to do with work, school and home didn't disappear just because a person was flooded and, as a result, the flood work had to be done on top of these existing tasks. As a result, people were having to constantly prioritise and compromise between all these different responsibilities.

In some cases, a consequence of compromising was feelings of guilt and frustration. For example, Abby felt like she had failed her son and her partner because she was always busy coping with the flood work:

> "I feel like we [her and partner] haven't had time to like love each other and that's what I'm finding hard to cope with because we just haven't got the time to maybe show each other the affection we would have before because we are too busy… you just feel guilty… that you are not looking after your family… Not cooking him [son] nice meals do you know, like you are all eating crap, we've all eaten crap for like six months… We are sorting things out and we are going out shopping for bits of wood for this and that and then it's the end of the day and you think, I just don't want to cook. I don't know why, I think I've just got out of it and then you feel lazy and beat yourself up about it."
>
> Abby, resident
> Interview, January 2008

As described previously (see p.40) Melanie was also upset that her newborn baby had to come home to the rented house. Both Abby and Melanie felt that coping with the floods had meant them neglecting their family responsibilities and they blamed themselves for this.

The circumstances, however, reflect in part the division of labour within these households, and there were gender dimensions to this. One participant, who was married with two young children, saw himself as having a key role to play in protecting his household from future floods. He wrote in his diary:

> "I've said it before and I'll state and say again, I feel that it's a man's duty to protect and defend his family and home…..but how can you against rising water levels that you

> have no control over? You have to leave that with the utility companies and in my case Yorkshire Water Authority."
>
> Bruce, resident
> Diary, June 4th 2008

This protector role that he assumed for himself placed a great deal of anxiety on him, particularly during periods of heavy rain (see his story on p.102). However, while Bruce saw himself as bearing the responsibility for keeping his family safe from future floods, our research also shows that women had a crucial role to play during the recovery process itself.

Because the women in our study were more likely to work part-time or be at home looking after children, the responsibility of managing builders, making phonecalls and waiting in for deliveries also tended to fall to them. Though this could reflect a bias in the diaries (i.e. that it was women in these situations who were more able and willing to write diaries), other research does support the gender division of responsibilities in disaster recover (Fordham 1998). Indeed, the experience of an unequal division of work often caused resentment and arguments between couples, as Melanie described in her diary:

> "Me and my husband seem to be arguing more and more as I make decisions regarding the house because I am there at the time and then when I tell him what I have said he goes mad and then we end up having a big argument. As I have said to him before I feel like we are playing piggy in the middle and I am always in the middle."
>
> Melanie, resident
> Diary, 25th February 2008

Similar problems were encountered by Karen – in addition to having a young daughter to look after, she was also working around the clock to support other flooded residents, as well as dealing with the flood damage in her own home. She described how stressful things became while living with her in-laws:

> "They looked after us incredibly but it was extremely stressful because my mother-in-law, as much as she helped, she'd take over with my daughter. My routine for getting and doing, like I didn't cook for six months and I loved cooking, do you know what I mean? I didn't cook for six months because our teas would be done when we got in…I wasn't in control, I didn't do any of my washing or ironing, it was all done, which was good in some respects but like I'm a mother you know, I'm not, so it was that kind of thing. And relationships, mine and my husband's relationship became very strained as did my relationship with my mother in law, I don't want to sound awful here but it was like, I said to him one day, "You are 37, I'm not your girlfriend, I'm your wife, grow up". Because he would just run to his mother, the thing is he went back to living with his mum and dad and a chance to slip back into that. So it was really stressful and it really took us to have a gigantic argument because he didn't come to the house, he came four times in six months, my husband… He couldn't face it so I faced it all on my own."
>
> Karen, resident and worker
> Interview, January 2008

For Karen, therefore, a major part of the recovery work involved juggling her job with her responsibilities as a mother – all of which was thrown up in the air by having to live with her in-laws and her husband's

lack of interest in the repairs. In short, it felt as if all the burden of managing recovery fell to Karen – she was so busy supporting everyone else that she felt as if there was no one there to help her. Similar sentiments were expressed by Leanne, who wrote in her diary:

> "Got to keep going for all my dependents – mum, husband, animals and sons and grandson – they all look to me for their needs. I'm the mainstay of the family but feel nobody is there for me."
>
> Leanne, resident
> Diary, April 7th 2008

Leanne and Karen felt like they had to do all the work of flood recovery on their own, despite the fact that they had husbands whom they felt should have been supporting them. However, Rachel, a single Mum, also felt very alone with things:

> "Me and the kids are on our own, so I've not got a guide there sort of saying, 'that's not right' or that 'you should be doing it like that', so that's a little bit difficult. And I think people tend to think because you are a woman on your own, 'it will be fine, just put that down she won't know'. And they do sort of tend to speak down to you a little bit, builders and things like that. I mean I'm lucky that I've got a brother in law who is a joiner, I mean he's obviously got his work, and I've got a friend who's got his own building firm. So I do, like yesterday with the woodchip flooring, I rang my builder friend and I said, 'look this is what they are doing, is that right'?... So I have got people there that will help me but it is difficult because you are dealing with it all on your own and that is difficult. And there's nobody to bounce it off either, you know, when you are sat chatting and things like that you know, there's nobody to talk to on a night about it. Because everybody else gets sick of hearing about the fact that you've been flooded you know."
>
> Rachel, resident
> Interview, December 5th 2007

The above quotation shows that not only did Rachel have to do all of the flood work herself – she also felt she had to work harder to overcome the disadvantage that her status as a single woman gave her.

Rachel's account also points to the emotional work involved in dealing with outside agencies (see Laura's case study on p.46). In an extract from her diaries she described the kinds of role conflicts that arose when dealing with professionals – on the one hand, feeling you had to be business-like and detached while, on the other, being overcome by your extreme sense of stress and frustration:

| | |
|---|---|
| Tuesday | Left another message [with loss adjuster]. No response, if he just called me back, it's so frustrating. This seems to be taking up my whole life - god what did I do before the flood? |
| Wednesday | Well finally spoke to [loss adjuster]. He said he didn't call back because didn't know what to say. The builders are being pulled off (not that they have done any work). I just broke down. Here I am a 37 year old mother of 2 crying on the phone to a total stranger. Well I say crying, I was ranting really. Think I really needed to do it though. May be he'll do something now. |
| Thursday | Did food shopping and usual cleaning and stuff. Rang a friend who said he would come and look at what needs to be done. I feel so useless and out of |

> control. I just want some help. Spoke to [loss adjuster] again. He is a really nice guy and I feel a bit guilty for shouting at him but he has got new builders for me to meet next week. Spoke to him for about 45 minutes, it's nice that he takes the time but I am sure he thinks I am a nutter. If one more person tells me about their friend who hasn't even been stripped out yet I swear I'll kill them.
>
> Rachel, resident
> Diary, January 28th 2008

This awkwardness of wanting to push your loss adjuster for a response while also not wanting to be seen to be too pushy, was a conflict that lots of participants talked about. As Charlotte explained: "It's horrible to be made to feel like you are harassing people as well, because that's how you feel, that you are harassing people when you ring them up all the time."

Another key issue, of course, was how to manage the flood recovery at the same time as a full-time job. Sally, who had just finished her maternity leave, had gone back to work part-time after the floods. She was really grateful that she had been able to take the option of part-time work because, had she not done so, she felt she would have been unable to cope with what was already a difficult situation:

> "I went back two days in September and if I hadn't had those three days off I don't know where we'd be with the house now. I think that needs to be a recommendation that people are allowed time off. I remember the carpets going down just before Christmas and I got to the house and it was just dust everywhere and I just burst into tears and I just phoned Andy at work and said, "I've got [daughter] here, I can't put her down anywhere, it's filthy, the carpets are coming, I need to vacuum, I need to sweep, what the hell I am supposed to do?" And he was able to drop everything, he's a teacher, and he just ran into someone else's room and said "Look are you free, Sally is going to fly in a minute". And he was lucky enough because he does live five minutes down the road. But if I'd gone back full time, I was the one doing a lot of the co-ordinating…"
>
> Sally, resident
> Group discussion, May 1st 2008

As described on p.78, there were also implications for those with caring roles and responsibilities. Rose and Helen were active members of their local community group and, when the floods occurred, they found themselves on the frontline of having to support some of the most vulnerable elderly residents in the area who had nowhere else to turn to. Both Rose and Helen were pensioners in their 60s who were also flooded themselves but, when the formal support networks put in place for residents failed, they began taking on more of the recovery work themselves as local people saw them as providing a point of contact to the council.

> "We were given a caseworker… but she went off with stress. So of course they didn't have a caseworker, I was the caseworker. In fact [local MP] said to me, Rose, why don't you take it on?" I said, "They wouldn't pay me to do it and I wouldn't want it actually. I do what I can do for the people and if they need my help they know they can come". I was having people knocking at the door, 'what do we do about this?, what do we do

about that?', which I don't mind. If I can help I will help and if our committee can help… we will help. They know they only have to come and see us".

Rose, resident
Interview, February 6th 2008

Although Rose and Helen were glad of the chance to help, and did as much as they could, this quote shows how they found it difficult to juggle the demands of the community with their own repairs process and family responsibilities:

### 4.4.1 Summary: emotional conflicts

It is difficult to capture the mental and emotional work of diarists as they negotiate, prioritise and compromise in the work of recovery and everyday life. What we have done however is point to a number of areas of emotional stress that emerge in negotiating roles and responsibilities during the recovery process. While some of the stresses are those that we might expect in many busy households (feelings of guilt and frustration, the stress of negotiating the division of labour in the home, juggling work and family responsibilities) these are amplified in the context of displacement (described in section 4.3) as well as by the task of negotiating the flood recovery process and through dealings with outside agencies (see Laura's story on p.46).

## 4.5 Front Line Workers

Think of frontline workers in relation to flooding and the images that come to mind tend to be of the people involved in the immediate emergency response efforts – for example, the Fire and Rescue Service, Police, Environment Agency staff and other emergency services workers. However, deciding who counts as a frontline worker during the longer-term recovery process is more difficult as the diversity of workers and their roles is so great. In relation to disaster response work, similar conclusions were drawn from Convery *et al.'s* study of Foot and Mouth Disease in Cumbria (*Convery et al.* 2008). When looking at the roles that different actors played in disaster recovery, the researchers found that it was difficult to predict who would find themselves acting as a support worker. Partly this was because of the variety of individuals and organizations (from farm hands to vets, local teachers and clergymen) who were co-opted into performing surprising roles in the recovery process, but also because "the frontline often emerges in unexpected places" (*Convery et al.* 2008 p.114). In this section we highlight the role of front line workers and their experiences in the flood recovery process.

We have identified four kinds of front line workers that emerge during the recovery process:

1. Permanent and temporary staff whose jobs were created specifically to deal with the issue of flood recovery. For example, Charlotte was employed by Hull City Council's Flood Advice Service through which she provided assistance to flooded residents – both over the telephone and in person – on a range of issues, from dealing with insurance claims to resolving issues with building contractors and helping poorer residents access additional forms of financial aid.
2. Those whose pre-existing job roles were transformed to deal with flooding issues. The best example

of this in Hull was the work of the community wardens. Hull's community wardens work in neighbourhood teams across the city to help residents with issues of concern to them, such as anti-social behaviour, vandalism and environmental problems. However, after the floods, the wardens were enlisted to perform a range of activities, from evacuating schools and care homes on the day of the floods, through to helping residents fill out assistance forms and performing caravan safety checks during the longer-term recovery process.

3. 'Traditional' intermediary roles. The flood recovery process consisted of a heightened role for well-known intermediaries who exist to bridge the gap between individual residents and the various companies and agencies that they need to deal with after a flood. The clearest example of this is the work of the loss adjusters and the Citizen's Advice Bureau.
4. Informal work that was carried out in a voluntary capacity by community groups across the city. For example, Hazel belonged to a church in the heart of a badly flooded area of the city. She described how, despite having only 17 members, the church was able to respond flexibly and quickly to the needs of the local community in ways that were impossible for larger, more bureaucratic organizations that were restricted by funding constraints or organizational protocols regarding recovery (see Box 20).

Some diarists who found themselves in worker roles reported positive feelings and job satisfaction in relation to a number of factors, including: the ability to help residents who were struggling; the chance to share experiences and receive support from colleagues; the opportunity to get their own troubles in perspective; new skills and an enhanced CV that could be used to pursue new career directions in future, and positive benefits for the organisations that they worked for (e.g. public recognition). Box 18 gives some sense of this for Charlotte.

**Box 18 Rewarding aspects of frontline work: Charlotte's story**

Charlotte worked for the council's Flood Advice Service (FAS) and was also flooded herself. At times, she found it very difficult to cope with the flooding at home and at work. However, on the whole, her experience of working for the FAS was positive as she was glad to have the opportunity of helping people with their problems:

> "We held a meal at the Guildhall for flooded residents of Hull… It was fantastic; Emily and I met all those people we have dealt with over the past few months. Everyone had a lovely time and it was nice to forget about the bad effects of the flooding and concentrate on the good aspects, for example the way people have been pulling together. We got some lovely cards thanking us for our help, which let us know we have made a difference, which is nice."
>
> Charlotte, resident and worker
> Diary, January 28th 2008

**Box continued overleaf**

Charlotte also made lots of new friends through her work with the FAS and the company of these colleagues, together with the back-up of her manager, who she found to be very supportive, was vital. She felt that, although there were stresses associated with her dual role, working for the FAS had helped her cope better at home and at work:

Charlotte: I think doing this job has helped.
Beccy: Really?
Charlotte: Yeah, because it has made me realise that I'm not as badly off as I thought I was. Do you know what I mean? [Laughing] And I wouldn't have met Emily and Marie [the community wardens who work at the flood advice centre with her] if I hadn't done this job!
Beccy: So some positive things have come out of the flood?
Charlotte: Oh yeah. I think doing this has definitely helped. But then I think being flooded has helped me do this in a weird way. Do you know what I mean?

Charlotte, resident and worker
Interview, November 14th 2007

Working for the FAS also benefitted Charlotte in the long term as she was able to move on to a new job that used the skills and experience she had gained while working for the FAS. She felt that, had she not had this prior experience, she would not have been hired for her new position.

There were also benefits for particular organizations, such as Hull's Community Wardens, who played a significant role in supporting residents after the floods. In Hull, the Community Wardens[1] normally deal with issues of anti-social behaviour and local environmental issues. However, their local knowledge of their communities was invaluable in helping the council respond to the floods. James, who was very involved with the wardens through his work, felt that the floods had helped people acknowledge the important role that the wardens played in their communities and their ability to use their skills flexibly.

Beccy: Do you get a sense that anything positive has come out of the floods or not?
James: I think recognition for the wardens from people like the Council because I think they've not only recognised the flexibility, how quickly they can respond, but I think they've also recognised that they have skills and one of those skills is to talk to the public because a lot of people you know, can sit in an office and talk to the public across the table but to go out and talk to them in their homes and be understanding. And we've seen some wardens, especially some of the younger ones, who didn't want to go out and do it, who were getting very upset when they were at somebody's house and they were all weeping and they do this eight times a day. And they found that very demoralising and emotional, but they've done a super job. So I think yes, there have been positive things coming out of it.

James, resident and worker
Interview, November 14th 2007

For some frontline workers, however, there were also some very difficult challenges to be faced. Karen, a community development worker who was also flooded, worked to organise free days out for flooded

[1] The wardens are funded by Hull City Council but managed by the Goodwin Development Trust, a third sector organization.

residents. However, places on the trips were limited and she found herself experiencing hostility from those who could not go:

> Karen: We got hailed abuse, absolutely ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. Me and [colleague] again were crying on each other.
> Elham: While you were walking around or they'd phone you?
> Karen: It was mini-bus or the coaches were there to pick people up, we'd get abuse because they wanted to go on two or three activities and they'd only got on one.
> Elham: Oh the people you helped were abusing you?
> Karen: Yes, the people who couldn't get on it, so we put them on another list for other activities. People on the telephones just awful and people in the street as well because I used to take my little girl to a school up there, I took her out to start a new school, not because of that generally but because I worked so closely in the area I didn't want [daughter], because I get it, point their finger at school, I've had someone do that to me right up close to me, giving me a load of abuse for them and their children not going bowling.
>
> Karen, resident and worker
> Interview, January 2008

Such abuse was particularly hurtful for workers like Karen because there was an assumption that those in worker roles were unaffected when Karen was also struggling with flood damage at home, as were many of her colleagues.

Key to frontline working was the 'emotional labour' involved, an arduous task for those who had also been flooded themselves. The need to maintain a separation between "staying strong" for flooded residents while suppressing the negative emotions associated with disaster work or the loss of your own home posed a tough challenge for workers. This was especially difficult for those whose friends and neighbours knew about their job roles. For example, Natalie worked for the council and was heavily involved in the flood support work, even though her own home was also flooded. She described how the days and weeks after the flood became a nightmare for her as, in addition to working long shifts at the council and dealing with the problems at her own home, neighbours would accost her about flood matters in the street, in the supermarket – even at the local pub where she was trying to relax after a difficult day.

The tension between trying to empathise with residents on a personal level whilst also having to maintain a degree of detachment in order to stay strong was a particular source of difficulty in cases of dishonesty. Both Karen and Charlotte described starting their jobs with a strong sense of sympathy for residents. However, as time progressed, they had to become more cautious in their assessments of others. This was a difficult line to tread, as Charlotte explained:

> "Now I realise that there are people who are dishonest. You know, working here, we've had people trying to claim benefits and flood relief stuff when they haven't been flooded. And it has made me realise that, you know – that when people come in here and you can't check everything, and you're helping them – that a lot of these people are

> absolutely trying it on. But then obviously you can't go thinking like that all the time because obviously there's people that are really… It's a bit like being a detective, really. We've been ringing everywhere – seeing if they're allowed certain things that they say they should be."
>
> Charlotte, resident and worker
> Interview, November 14th 2007

Disaster work is never going to be easy, however frontline workers reported a number of specific issues that made their work more difficult. Some Front Line Workers (FLWs) felt they had a lack of support from their employers. This was particularly so for those who were also affected at home and who felt their employers did not recognize that they were also "flood victims" with needs. Within their organizations they reported a lack of formal opportunities to debrief with colleagues, a lack of basic equipment and resources (e.g. protective clothing, food and drink), and a failure to learn from their experiences. (See Box 19).

**Box 19 A lack of support for frontline workers: Michaela and Natalie's story**

Many frontline workers had to contend with flooding issues at home, as well as at work. For Charlotte, who had understanding managers and colleagues, the chance to share experiences at work was a positive occurrence that helped her cope with her problems. However, Michaela and Natalie, who worked on the frontline of the council's emergency response efforts, were hurt and angered that their employers never thanked them or showed any concern about their home situations:

> "It maybe would have been nice at some point for somebody somewhere to have actually said, 'Can we just have five minutes, can we have a chat, how's it going?' Just so at least you thought, oh that was quite nice. Or just a personal email or, I don't mean, just something just to say we appreciate what you've done, and we appreciate you are in the same position, I don't know what you would do but just something."
>
> Michaela, resident and worker
> Group discussion, September 25th 2008

This is not about how the council responded to the needs of its residents – both Natalie and Michaela felt that the council responded well to the floods and they praised what they saw as the very high levels of support and care that were given to residents. Instead, their complaint was with the lack of support given to frontline staff. They explained how they were denied holidays and pushed into working very long hours with no assurances about pay or overtime on the grounds that the city's 'flood victims' needed their support.

> Natalie: I'd asked for a Christmas off because my husband was going to be working in the house, so I said, "Well can I have Christmas off so that I can help fetch and carry, go and get?" "Oh what if the flood victims who are living in caravans need help?" "I am a flood victim living in a caravan, what if I need help?"
>
> Elham: So in a way, when you went to work, you had to be a different person?

**Box continued overleaf**

Natalie: I'm not a flood victim at work and I'm just going out and doing… The management side of it, they've not asked us once if we are OK, neither myself nor Michaela.

Natalie, resident and worker
Interview, January 2008

However, perhaps hardest of all was the fact that they felt their employers had not taken on board any of the lessons from the floods in terms of how they would treat their employees in future:

Beccy: Have your employers learned from this? In terms of how they would treat their workers?
Natalie: No.
Beccy: They haven't? So they've not acknowledged there's a problem?
Michaela: I don't think it has had any impact at all…
Beccy: So you don't think they were even aware that this is an issue?
Natalie: I don't even think that people realised that their employees went through it with others, I really don't.

Group discussion, September 25th 2008

A further form of stress for frontline workers concerned disagreement with the way the flood recovery process was managed. For example, Charlotte became stressed when having to carry out activities that she felt were ineffective and unfair, as she wrote in her diary:

> "I was closing cases at work this week (signing off those properties which had been supposedly finished). I felt that this was premature as I knew from first hand experience that this was not always the case. I was uneasy about this as I felt this was more to do with massaging figures than actual progress!"

Charlotte, resident and worker
Diary, November 26th 2008

Charlotte found herself in a difficult position because she was on the frontline of dealing with residents' requests for help and this, combined with her experience of flooding in her own home, meant that she had a real understanding of – and empathy for – the problems people were experiencing. However, as a result of her job, she was acting within a hierarchy as a representative of an organization and, consequently, she felt powerless to challenge or change what she perceived to be unfair practices resulting from political pressure on the council to 'finish' the recovery progress by describing home repairs as completed when there was work still to be done.

It is also important to realize that those working to support flooded residents in an informal capacity also faced stresses in the course of performing such roles. For example, as described in the previous section, Rose and Helen found it hard to juggle managing their own repairs with helping the vulnerable elderly residents around them. Equally, Hazel coordinated a flood support programme through her local church

which played a key role in helping local people recover (see Box 20 for examples of the work conducted by the church).

**Box 20 Community support from a local church**

Hazel's church was located in the centre of an area that was badly flooded. The church building was, itself, affected by the incident and, as members were cleaning up in the days following the flood, they realized the difficulties that residents were confronted with and began to think about how they could help with this. They started by opening the church building as a space where residents could escape their flooded homes and meet each other for tea and coffee. However, within days, donations of furniture, clothing and money began to arrive from other churches and members of the public that could then be passed on to flooded families in the area. Residents were having trouble getting cleaning products for their homes as everywhere in Hull had sold out of these items, so church members went up to Beverley to buy a big stock of materials which they then brought back and distributed to residents. The church also organized free day trips for flooded families and created a play area for children who had nowhere to play at the church building. Many families coming to the church for help were struggling to get information about the repair of their homes and so volunteers also made phone calls and enquiries on behalf of those who were having difficulties.

Hazel found it very rewarding to be able to help people and she felt that, as a result of the work carried out, her church now had a clearer sense of the role that it could play in supporting the local community. However, she admitted that her focus on the flood work had also created difficulties for her own family:

> "Obviously we weren't flooded but I have a family of my own and I think they suffered that summer because both myself and my husband were very involved in what was going on at the church. And when we weren't at the church… we were running around picking up donations and sorting out things like the cleaning fluid and on the telephone. And so it did put a strain on us as well."
>
> Hazel, worker
> Interview, March 2nd 2009

Unfortunately we were unable to interview any loss adjusters as part of our study. However, anecdotal evidence (for example, stories of people's loss adjusters having to take time off for stress and discussions with stakeholders at our final project workshop) suggests that the volume of work and the difficulties encountered made things very hard for them too.

### 4.5.1 Summary: emotions on the frontline

This section shows that, in some cases, the floods resulted in the development of new skills and new forms of recognition for both individuals and particular organizations. However, we have also shown that workers, as well as residents, can be vulnerable in the recovery process after disasters and that workers, like residents, are equally deserving of support. This is particularly important to recognise in the case of those cast in the dual role of worker/resident, for whom the difficulties involved in frontline work may

be amplified. The particular experiences of frontline work reflect the forms of support on offer to residents as well as pressures from their organizations, their relationship with the public, and for some, the difficulty of also managing their own flood recovery process. We have shown how there were considerable differences between employers between the forms of support that were (or were not) offered to workers, and the corresponding effect this had on their ability to cope with the stresses they were under. Finally we have also highlighted the fact that much of the work contributed to the recovery effort came from volunteers, who faced many of the same issues and challenges to those working for the public and private sectors.

## 4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the work of flood recovery. For many diarists recovery doesn't just happen without their active involvement. Diarists find themselves becoming project managers actively chasing – 'fighting' in some cases – to get their homes back. Through the physical, mental and emotional work of such engagement, diarists also find themselves developing new skills and competencies. Partly this reflects a need to negotiate with 'experts' about the status of the home or the quality of the work, or to negotiate what constitutes a fair deal. In some cases, extra work is also created by having to overcome disadvantages such as being a single mother (see Rachel's story, Box 16). Meanwhile, there is also the work of managing everyday life – the routines and habits which have become disrupted through various forms of geographical displacement and new living conditions. Such work extends beyond those immediately affected by the flood to include those playing host to friends or relatives. In some cases, having to deal with flood work also means that other activities of caring or supporting vulnerable people have to take a back seat. Underlying this work is also the emotional labour involved in managing the conflicts that emerge in balancing different roles and identities.

While some of the stresses are those that we might expect in many busy households (feelings of guilt and frustration, the stress of negotiating the division of labour in the home, juggling work and family responsibilities), these are heightened in the context of displacement (described in section 4.3) and by having to negotiate with outside agencies to recover your home. For some, the process of flood recovery also involves supporting others in addition to managing their own flood recovery process. Such frontline workers engage in largely unrecognized emotional labour in relationship to the organizations they work in, the public they engage with, and in some cases, in relation to their own flood recovery process. We have shown how those who find themselves in the dual role of worker and flooded resident are particularly vulnerable to the stresses involved in recovery if they do not receive adequate support from their employers. Finally, it is important to recognize that volunteers also played a key part in the recovery effort, and that they, too, are not immune to the pressures experienced by paid workers.