

Children and Young People 'after the rain has gone'
learning lessons for flood recovery and resilience

Hull Children's Flood Project Executive Summary

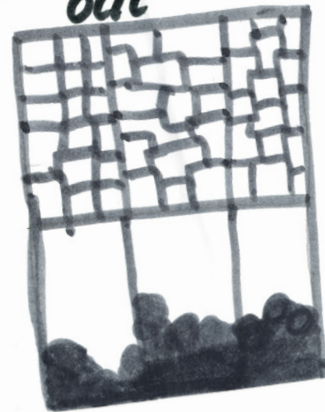
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We had to
go live at my
nanna's .



My house was
in a mess
the builders
were doing it
out



In June 2007
the floods came
into Hull.



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summer 2007 was a time of misery for thousands of households as unprecedented rainfall levels resulted in widespread flooding across the UK. The flooding was particularly severe in the city of Kingston-upon-Hull. Over 110mm of rain fell during the biggest event, overwhelming the city's drainage system and resulting in widespread pluvial flooding. The floods affected over 8,600 households, one man died and 91 of the city's 99 schools were affected (Coulthard et al. 2007b). However, our research shows that establishing who was affected – and how – is more complex than the statistics suggest.

This report details the findings from a participatory research project that set out to identify key issues in children and young people's experience in relation to resilience to flooding and the flood recovery process. Overall the report shows that the flood recovery process was stressful for the flood-affected children in a variety of ways, just as it was for the adults who took part in a 'sister' research project¹. The children differed from the adults in that they found it exciting on the day. However this feeling of exhilaration was quickly replaced by frustration caused by the daily disruption they experienced during the long-term recovery process.

Relatively few accounts of flooding have considered the perspectives of children and the role they might play in building resilience in the future. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Environment Agency and Hull City Council, the project engaged with children (aged 9-19 years) in Hull and identifies key issues in children's experiences in relation to resilience to flooding, the recovery process and the implications for future resilience. Our research used Storyboards (where participants drew pictures or used creative writing to tell their stories), short one-to-one interviews and focus groups with 46 young participants. We also worked with 18 adults, involving in-depth interviews with key service providers and front line workers, together with stakeholder engagement through a project steering group. The project had the following objectives:

- 1) Document children's experiences of flood impact and the flood recovery process, including social, educational and emotional aspects, and the impacts upon wellbeing.
- 2) Analyse the relationship between children's experiences and their accounts of the role of formal and informal support in enabling or inhibiting resilience during the flood recovery process.
- 3) Evaluate the lessons learnt by key agencies in the delivery of services for children, as well as wider services, in the post-disaster recovery period.
- 4) To contribute to the archive generated by the Adult Hull Flood Study and to enable children's voices to become part of the flooding debate.

Key findings

The children are a diverse group and our research showed their experiences were many and varied. Hence, there is no such thing as a homogenous 'child's perspective' on the floods. However, there are certain shared experiences that provide an insight into how disaster recovery can be improved:

- The children's accounts suggest that they already had complex routines and family and social relations. These were disrupted in a number of ways and it is therefore important to contextualise the floods within the rest of their lives. The children who were flooded at school and at home (and in some cases at both their mother's and father's separate homes) experienced extra pressures in coping during the recovery process. It is also important to contextualise the

¹ Whittle, R., Medd, W., Deeming, H., Kashefi, E., Mort, M., Twigger Ross, C., Walker, G., Watson, N. (2010) *After the Rain – learning the lessons from flood recovery in Hull*, final project report for 'Flood, Vulnerability and Urban Resilience: a real-time study of local recovery following the floods of June 2007 in Hull', Lancaster University, Lancaster UK
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impact of the floods within the broader context of the city itself. Hull is characterised by high levels of socio-economic deprivation and many of the children came from low income households, which had a further impact on the family's ability to recover.

- The children's experiences changed over time; at the start of the flood it was exciting for some of them (e.g. moving out of their home and into a caravan was an adventure) but this exhilaration quickly subsided. As a result, it is important to pay attention to the recovery process and not just the event itself.
- The children talked in detail about the disruption (at home and at school); their losses (both tangible e.g. possessions and intangible e.g. family time) and the ensuing stress this caused, leaving some with a pragmatic approach and others fearful about how they would cope if it happened again.
- The children's positive and negative coping strategies and the subsequent changes that the flood brought to their lives are linked to how their parents and teachers reacted. Having some involvement in the repairs and recovery process helped the children to cope better, such as being included in family discussions or providing practical help (e.g. helping to move belongings upstairs, taking tea to the builders).
- Some older children were 'forgotten'. The data reveal a recovery gap particularly amongst the adolescents: i) youth workers assumed the adolescents were being helped at school and at home, whereas some teenagers had no-one to turn to and ii) pupils in transition from primary to secondary school (particularly the 2007 Year 5 cohort who moved in 2008), who had not been recognised at school as flood-affected pupils.

Suggestions for Post Disaster Recovery Action

1. Policy makers, practitioners and researchers need to pay more attention to the recovery process and how children can be supported at home and at school.
2. Parents and carers need to consider ways in which they can involve (rather than exclude) children in the recovery process.
3. The education system (at both local and national level) needs to take the long-term recovery process into account for individual pupils, especially pupils in transition between schools and for those about to begin, or currently working towards, examinations, such as GCSEs.
4. Key service workers need to adopt a more flexible understanding of vulnerability so that the needs and concerns of *all* children and young people are considered. They should also be proactive when offering support because children and young people will not necessarily ask for help.
5. It is important to provide effective support for the front line workers (for example, teachers, classroom assistants, youth group leaders etc.) who work with children and young people.
6. It is important to accommodate children and young people's voices into building resilience for the future – for example, in order to help deal with the challenges of climate change. Service workers should talk to flood-affected children about their experiences of living through an extreme weather event and the kinds of changes they would like to see in future.
7. Storyboards may be a helpful means of incorporating children's voices into policy and practice. We suggest that schools and youth groups consider using storyboards to help young people deal with floods and other kinds of disaster recovery.
8. More needs to be done to enable research to be commissioned quickly in the aftermath of disasters.

In addition to its core focus on floods, the report's conclusions have relevance to other forms of disaster recovery as well as wider issues of institutional change management involving children and young people.

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