

Volunteering Canterbury

Summary of responses to survey of member organisations October 2011.

The survey was sent out to ascertain the position of our member organisations 8 months after the February 22 earthquake. The objective of the survey was to review our services with some understanding of changed needs.

The online survey was sent out to 272 organisations. 73 responses were received – a 27% response rate.

Some questions invited comments, and these elicited a range of responses. It can be assumed that some comments made by one or two respondents are relevant to more organisations than those one or two, but were not 'front of mind' at the time for all of the people completing the survey.

Most of the participating organisations seem to be working under some difficulty, but while some seem to be struggling to cope, the responses of others indicate a positivity and a movement forward into 2012. Further investigation might be useful to explore the circumstances and attitudes of organisations.

54.5% of participating organisations were displaced by the earthquake.

Of those displaced, 42.5% are in temporary premises, 25% are working from home, 15% have found new permanent premises, and 2.5% are not currently operating.

Comments indicated that two respondents have returned to their original premises after working from home for an extended period of time, two reported that some staff are still working off site although their organisation is in new premises, or in part of their original premises. One has had to change the way they run workshops, and now use various other premises for these. One has had to put Trust work on hold as trustees have had to relocate out of Christchurch.

27.4% of respondents lost paper records in the earthquake; a much smaller number, 11%, lost electronic records. 39.7% reported losing other frequently-used resources.

When asked if they would replace these records and resources, 10% said no, 76.7% will replace some of them, and 13.3% will replace all of them.

Comments on these questions were made by one organisation which lost accounts which were being audited at the time of the quake, and did not get them back for some months; another which retrieved some resources from its inner city office, and one which had records at someone's home and older records archived at the library. One organisation has had their greatest difficulty tracking down members and volunteers, and has lost much valued long term volunteer support.

Waiting for insurance, and a lack of space now, were other reasons for not having replaced resources as yet. A walking guiding operation reports that the resources they lost were the buildings and places of interest – and the tourists!

53.2% reported a decrease in the number of volunteers over the past year, and 69.7% of these attributed the decrease to the earthquakes.

Several commented that people are volunteering less because of personal stress and low energy around their personal circumstances, and they have lost volunteers who have moved away. Two commented that people are less willing to go very far from their homes, and transport is difficult. Some organisations have less space or difficult space and cannot involve as many volunteers, others report that they are building their numbers up again. One commented that there are more volunteers looking for work as there are more people unemployed.

36% reported a greater need for new volunteers since September 2010 and 11 organisations did not respond to this question.

To the question “How has the work done by your agency been affected by the earthquake”, there were 55 different responses, but some common themes. The biggest problems were a lack of venues for workshops and other activities, difficulties with access and transport around Christchurch, and an increase in demand for community support services which need to be provided with reduced staff and resources. Along with this went the comment from some that the pace of work and achievement of outcomes is slower, as workers need to spend more time with clients. Two respondents however, reported a decrease in demand for their services, and one has gone into recess. Increased stress levels in clients and volunteers resulting in lower energy and less motivation, an increase in costs but a loss of fundraising opportunities, and difficulty in finding people who have moved were other issues for several organisations.

Some positive effects were agencies working together more, greater flexibility offered by working from home, and being forced to focus on core services rather than new projects which might help meet funding criteria. Developing different projects and increasing the number and variety of programmes and activities offered were reported by some organisations.

Some need to find new volunteers (including governance volunteers) to replace those who have re-located out of the area, one is waiting for zoning and insurance issues to be resolved, some were disrupted only for a short time and are now back to normal. Two organisations reported working from unsuitable and cramped offices, three found that re-establishing their offices or related practical tasks took time away from service delivery, and one had staff diverted to other earthquake related projects.

One mentoring agency found their service disrupted by the loss of mentors, relocation of children being mentored, and a lack of activities available for mentors to do with their ‘mentees’.

Related to the previous question, but with more of an operational emphasis, the next question asked what organisations were doing differently now.

Responses ranged from 'everything' (three respondents) to 'back to normal' (six respondents) qualified by the comment that there was now greater intensity around the work.

Most common responses acknowledged that organisations are working out of different venues, many people are still working from home, it is generally more difficult to work, and there is more communication within and between organisations. Electronic communication and online services are being used more, and there is greater awareness of the need to back up files. Four respondents noted that they are spending more time in the community or with clients, and some noted that their volunteers' roles have changed.

Networking, and forging partnerships with aligned groups and the community have become more important for four respondents, and a similar number noted that they are having to be more creative and think outside the square.

Other responses included working with funders to recognize that funds are needed for ongoing and core services, running post-quake workshops, accepting longer time frames for work, reducing costs, buying only what they need now because there is no storage space, and doing less promotion.

Of the 62 respondents to the next question (Do your volunteer staff need different skills now?), only 14.5% felt that their volunteers needed different skills now, and suggestions for the kind of training that would be useful included NFP governance, dealing with people with mental health issues (including stress), communication, self-care, and working with a team which may not be all in one location. Other training around current circumstances included working in a temporary location, change management, practical support skills for community initiatives, event management, and general people skills.

56 respondents (77%) had used VolCan services over the past twelve months. 75% had looked to VolCan for information, 57.1% had used our referral of volunteers service. 32.1% had used our support networks, 26.8% had sent someone to a training workshop, 19.6% had nominated a volunteer for an award, and 12.5% had used the Employee Volunteering service.

It is interesting to compare these figures to those reported in a similar survey question two years ago. The use of information services has increased 7% (68% in 2009), use of the volunteer referral service has increased 3.1% (from 54%), use of support networks has increased 3.1% (from 29%), and the use of Employee Volunteering has increased slightly from 12% to 12.5%. There is a 5.4% decrease in nominations for recognition awards (from 25%), and the most significant decrease is seen in attendance at training workshops – down from 39% to 26.8%. These decreases can be attributed to the cancellation of several

training workshops in 2011 due to the earthquakes, and the postponement of the June 2011 awards.

When asked to evaluate the impact of the services used on the work of the organisation, most respondents chose the 'not applicable' option, probably indicating that they had not used that particular service. Of those that rated the services, a negative impact was recorded by two respondents on the referral of volunteers scale; up to five recorded no difference at all across the categories. 40 respondents recorded a positive impact from receiving VolCan information, with 17 recording that as a great deal of positive difference. 28 said VolCan volunteer referrals made a positive difference to their work, and 23 recorded a positive impact from VolCan support. 15 rated the training as making a positive difference, 13 found the recognition of their volunteers positive, and 8 said the Employee Volunteering had had a positive effect on their organisation.

There were 12 responses to the suggestions for other services VolCan could offer. Most offered no suggestions, simply indicating an awareness of what is offered, one asked for Community Business and NFP mentoring from skilled people in the community. One commented that they as a committee "need to make ourselves more aware of how we can use VolCan's services, rather than it being a deficiency of VolCan".

9.11.11