

Case Study

Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) in action

Community Connection in Townsville

Connecting your people to the person-centred planning process

When Tropical Cyclone Kimi was building up off the coast of Townsville in January 2021, the team at lifestyle support and assistance provider Community Connection were alert but not alarmed.

Prior to Kimi, Community Connection had used the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (PCEP) toolkit to co-design plans with each client and their families to ensure everyone knew the actions to take to stay safe. Cyclone Kimi provided the first real test.

Because the organisation already had plans in place, it only took the team about an hour to complete a round of phone calls to each client to check that their plans were current, and that they had everything they needed to stay safe.

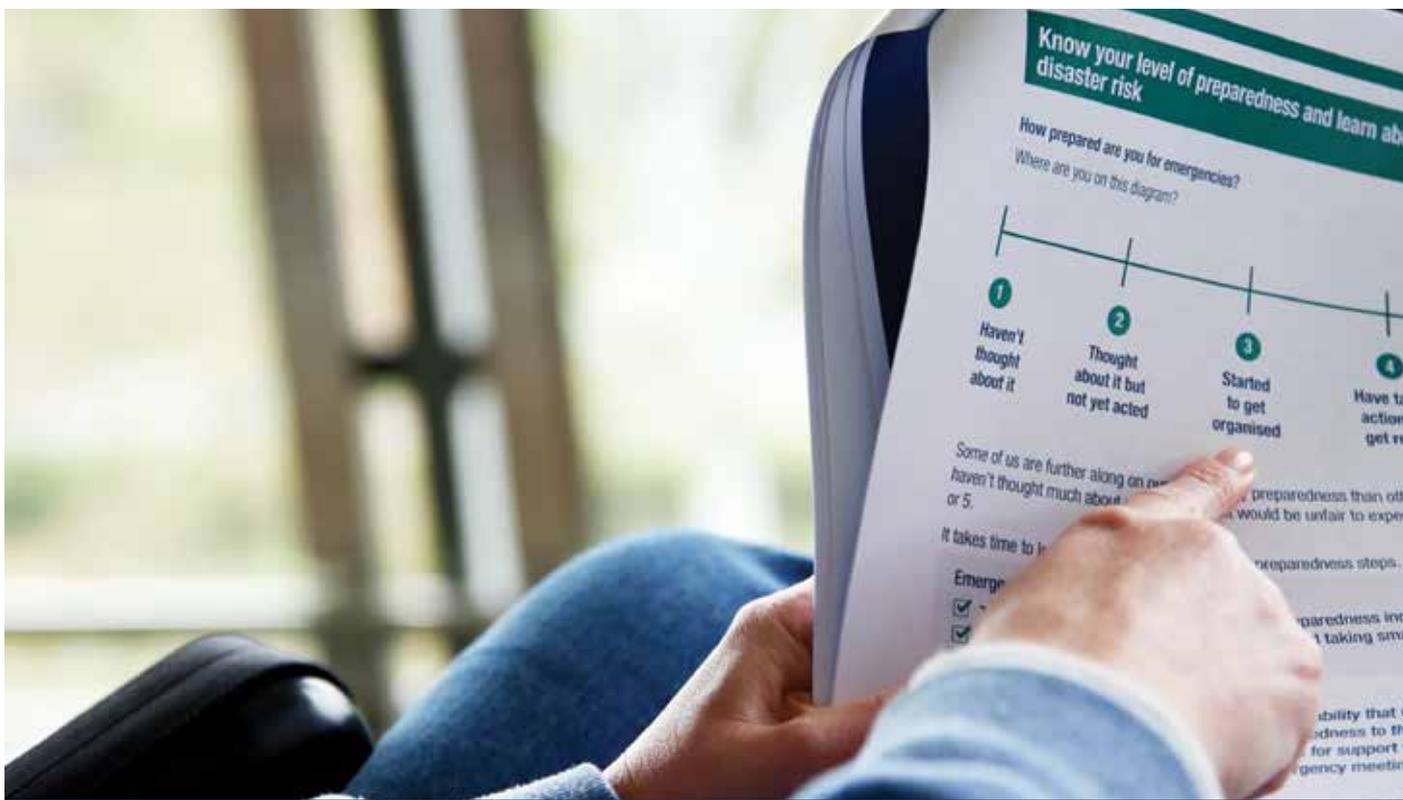
The DIDRR project found most disability providers in Queensland have emergency plans in place that cover safety for their staff but few had carried out consultations with clients to develop their plans.

The team at Community Connection were an exception. The organisation's frontline support workers, called Lifestyle Assistants, continue to hold conversations with new clients to develop tailored emergency response plans and with existing clients to review their plans and make adjustments as needed.

Cyclone Niran followed in early March 2021 providing another opportunity to test the strength of Community Connection's approach. Luckily, there was no direct hit from Niran, but as a Far North Queensland city, Townsville experiences severe weather events most years and saw severe flooding in 2019.

Community Connection's emergency preparedness planning journey

Community Connection started working to develop its disaster preparedness knowledge in 2018. New staff joined that year bringing with them previous disaster management experience from roles in local government and state government.



Staff also attended a workshop run by Townsville City Council about disaster preparation that included how best to support people with disability. The workshop provided Community Connections with ideas on how head office staff could support Lifestyle Assistants to work directly with clients on emergency response planning. Their focus was on building client capacity in a practical way that also considered their personal preferences and life circumstances.

Community Connection started with the basics to build a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) that recognised each client would need their own emergency response plan.

In addition to the workshop learnings, the organisation referred to the [Planning for Business Continuity in Times of Disaster](#) guide developed by the [CSIA](#). This resource identifies actions to consider at every stage of an emergency response.

Lifestyle Assistants worked with clients and their families to develop an emergency response plan covering three phases:

- What clients and staff should do prior to an emergency?
- The supports and actions needed to stay safe during an emergency.
- What actions and supports are needed after a disaster?

When the [Queenslanders with Disability Network \(QDN\)](#) started promoting the all hazards [PCEP toolkit](#), which includes a conversation guide, Community Connection had another resource to rely on.

The first question Lifestyle Assistants asked their clients was what assistance they actually wanted in developing their plan. This helped the organisation quickly gain an appreciation of how crucial the person-centred approach would be to success.

Person-centred conversations

Lifestyle Assistants used the resources to sit down with clients and support them to lead information-gathering conversations.

They used the [P-CEP Workbook](#) to help clients think through their requirements in the event of an emergency and to identify the strengths they would draw on. These questions included, 'Does the street you live on flood? What would you need to take with you if you evacuated? Do you have any pets that you'd need to bring with you? Do you have family nearby? Could you get to them and how long would it take you to get there?'

Despite the close working relationship Lifestyle Assistants already had with their clients, the disaster preparedness conversations surfaced new information. One of these involved clients talking about their pets, which led into discussions about scenarios covering sheltering in place with pets and evacuating with pets. Emergency plans that included pets was not something the organisation had considered prior to using the PCEP toolkit.

All the resulting information and emergency plans were then stored by Community Connection in a way that was easy for staff to access.

Taking the next steps to strengthen DIDRR

Community Connection view emergency preparedness with clients as a dynamic process. Lifestyle Assistants will continue to use the [PCEP toolkit](#) over the next six to 12 months to hold more conversations with clients and families. The team anticipates that these discussions will identify information gaps as well as surface new information so individual emergency response plans can be further updated and strengthened.

Lessons learnt by Community Connections your organisation can leverage

- Find out if any of your team have experience in person-centred planning or co-design that you can draw on.
- Use the PCEP tool and also the CSIA resources on Business Continuity Planning for natural disasters to structure your emergency planning.
- Understand client emergency preparedness plans are dynamic and require regular review as the needs and strengths of people change over time.

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