



COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS

Mental Health Education and Resource Centre, Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, Ministry of Social Development

In 2013 we developed a pilot scheme for community support in the Port Hills, Dudley Creek and Shirley areas, intended to promote ways to enhance mental health.

The project was initiated by CERA to support property owners in the Port Hills who suffered significant land and property damage and are struggling with on-going issues arising from these problems. We then extended it to other geographic areas with significant land damage due to earthquakes and/or flooding.

The pilot comprised of two workshops. The first focused on enhancing participants' knowledge and skills to improve their mental wellbeing. The second workshop aimed to develop participants' skills to hold (or continue to hold) their own support groups effectively, and encouraged them to share the knowledge and skills they learnt with others in their communities and networks.

We identified a number of trends and needs from the workshops. Earthquake effects are still having a significant impact on our participants' day-to-day lives in areas such as road works, traffic, property damage, stress, financial difficulties, uncertainty and accommodation. Practical support (such as house repairs and child care) was rated by participants as the most significant need in the community, followed by social and emotional support (such as coffee with friends, support groups and counselling). Social and emotional support was identified as needed to help people get through while they wait for practical support and it is also required after, as people adjust to their 'new normal'.

We have heard that as people experience stress or feel overwhelmed they often reduce activities they perceive as 'less important', such as exercise, healthy eating and yoga. But these are activities that support mental health - it is vital that we continue to emphasise to the community the importance of mental health and how this can be achieved each day.

As with all pilots, we picked up a number of tips along the way to improve the development and delivery of the workshops for the future. One of these tips includes working with any existing, natural support groups, rather than creating new ones. The project has the potential to be redelivered to other geographic areas. The project will continue to evolve as greater Christchurch rebuilds and the needs of its people change.

<http://www.mherc.org.nz>

