

From Displacement to Hope: A Guide for Displaced Indigenous Communities and Host Communities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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From *Displacement to Hope: A Guide for Displaced Indigenous Communities and Host Communities* (herein called the Guide) was funded by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and makes recommendations on how to better address the needs of First Nations communities who have been evacuated in order to avoid further harm to their residents. Further to this, the Guide:

1. fosters resilience and support for Indigenous communities to become better prepared in case they have to be evacuated;
2. provides guidelines and recommendations to government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the steps that can be taken to maximize support for displaced populations and minimize the negative impacts of displacement; and
3. provides host communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with advice and recommendations on how to welcome and provide support to displaced populations until they are able to return home.

Displacement and evacuations disproportionately affect First Nations communities across Canada, and there is evidence that evacuations and long-term displacement have negative consequences on community cohesion; mental health and psychosocial well-being; and overall resilience. Evacuations can exacerbate the physical, mental, spiritual, and social impacts of a disaster.

The negative impacts of recent evacuations and the long-term displacements of First Nations communities in Canada have been documented. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken in both peer-reviewed journals and relevant newspaper and magazines articles. The literature review clearly showed how Indigenous families and communities faced continued suffering during and post-evacuation, and also affecting those remaining in the community. Displacements often result in social isolation; lack of access to traditional food; repeated moves; job insecurity; lack of, or inconsistent, access to education; and poor psychological health outcomes.

Following the literature review, a series of Talking Circles were held in three Indigenous communities across Canada:

- Eskasoni Mi'Kmaq Nation, Nova Scotia
- Long Plain First Nation, Manitoba
- Kanaka Bar First Nation and Lytton First Nation, British Columbia

Each of these Talking Circles included up to a dozen members of First Nation communities who had either been evacuated, been on evacuation alert, or had served as a host communities to evacuated Indigenous populations. Each Talking Circle was organized with local community liaisons and the research team was accompanied by an Aboriginal Consultant, Robert Mills, from the Haida First Nation. The questions for the Talking Circles were guided by the literature review and, in all three communities, clearly supported the literature review findings but also added richness of content and addressed many of the gaps in the literature.

In parallel, and following the Talking Circles, a series of face-to-face videoed interviews were held with 19 First Nations residents. These interviews included a pilot video held with the Emergency Coordinator from Cormorant Island, 'Namgis First Nation, British Columbia and members of the three communities who had participated in the Talking Circles. Not all of the persons who were interviewed on video participated in the Talking Circle.

The videos added to our understanding of what had taken place for these First Nations people and their personal stories were moving, honest and in most cases disturbing. Despite the best intentions of many, the experiences of displaced Indigenous people was stressful, traumatic and was in many ways, worse than the actual disaster experience. It was clear that there were many opportunities to reduce the negative impacts for First Nations people and to create a better understanding and awareness of the issues for those whose mandate it is to assist them.

Therefore, the literature review findings, the Talking Circles and the interviewed all contributed the development of the Guide. The recommendations address the need to develop:

- pre-event planning strategies;

- processes to address the evacuation process itself;
- initiatives and services to provide meaningful support to evacuating communities; and
- to put steps in place to improve relationships with host communities.

It is important to realize that while the entire community may be evacuated, in many cases only part of the community is evacuated (e.g., those who live in the flood plain). To improve the planning, evacuation, relocation and recovery process, the recommendations include a number of key strategies, or themes, including:

- the need for improved and transparent communication;
- taking steps to ensure that communities are engaged in the decision-making processes involved in evacuation;
- factors to strengthen community cohesion pre- and post-evacuation;
- the need to hold spiritual events and gatherings to provide opportunities for healing; and
- the importance of ensuring host communities are well-prepared.

The Guide was also reviewed by the Indigenous Steering Committee members and their feedback, plus the feedback from INAC, was incorporated into the final version. It is hoped that the Guide will address the current gaps that exist and increase the awareness of the issues to for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The recommendations are practical, doable and reasonable and ultimately, if followed, will better support and assist displaced Indigenous communities to become more disaster resilient pre-, during and post-disaster.

Based on a combination of common themes and unique circumstances, fourteen of the videoed interviews were edited and turned into a series of four to five minute videos for presentation and viewing at the United Nations Regional Platform of the Americas which was held in Montreal on March 7 to 9, 2017. These videos are now available from the CRHNet website (www.crhnet.ca).

Participating First Nations and Video Presenters

Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Nation, Nova Scotia

- Irene Knockwood
- Darlene Marshall
- Peter Stevens

Long Plain First Nation, Manitoba

- Clemance Assiniboine

- Eunice Assiniboine
- Linda Bunn
- Trudy Anne Hobson
- Liz Merrick
- Kathryn Dawn Myran

Kanaka Bar First Nation and Lytton First Nation, British Columbia

- Christine Brown
- Jennifer Brown
- Jim Brown
- Trevor Robinson
- Merika Sam

Cormorant Island, 'Namgis First Nation, British Columbia

- Shannon Alfred