

JUNE 2017 RESEARCH REFLECTION:

Home Grown Research: Its Value and How to Know It's Good

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The word 'research' often conjures up images of overseas experts in academic institutions working with massive data sets and complex theories. While these sorts of studies often produce significant results that are valuable for creating evidence-based policy and practice, it's important not to miss the great research, often small-scale, that's done here in our corner of the world.

Third Sector/Not-for-Profit Sector Recovery in Post-Earthquake Christchurch is one such study. It was commissioned by CERA and carried out in 2015 by local researchers Dr. Chrys Horn, Sarah Wylie and Jane Mountier. It can be found here: <http://ccoss.org.nz/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Third-Sector-Recovery-Report-2016.pdf>

It's not a long report, and is definitely worth a read, especially for people involved in community recovery post-quake.

Research scope

The researchers set out to explore first, how community organisations were coping five years after the first quake. Secondly, they looked at which quake-related issues were on-going for the sector. Finally, they worked with research participants to identify priority actions for dealing with these on-going issues.

Research findings

In brief, the research identifies that the community sector has been adept at coping with a raft of changes initiated by the quakes: in institutional arrangements, community needs, accommodation availability, and volunteer/staff availability. New initiatives were undertaken and new alliances forged across the sector.

On-going issues relate to capacity and volunteer/staff turnover, changing and complex needs among client groups, funding reductions, and accommodation for community groups and their clients.

Priority actions include improving networking, sector capacity and collaboration, while also looking to build the volunteer base and to enable people to access information resources.

What makes good research?

It's worth taking a little space here to look at the way in which this research was done, because there's a lot in it that points to sound research practice. In other words, here are some things to look out for when reading research reports so that you can have some confidence that they are based on good practice.

- The research included a literature review that grounded it in evidence already identified from similar research done elsewhere. It's useful to know this evidence because it often enables the researchers to ask nuanced questions and to dig deeply into particular issues identified by earlier research.



- The research was small scale, but it used a variety of methods to reach its conclusions. In other words, it came at its evidence in a range of ways: interviewing people, an online survey, participant observation (observing people/groups in action), and workshops. The researchers observed that they reached “saturation” very quickly. That is, they quite soon began to hear the same results from this range of methods. This gave them confidence that they were on the right track with the conclusions they were drawing.
- The researchers are transparent about their methods and about the limitations of those methods.
- Finally, and significantly, the researchers returned their research findings to the community from which they drew them in two important ways. First, they directed their research towards identifying priority actions needed for the community sector to deal with the on-going issues identified in the course of the research. Secondly, they have written up the results in a report that is highly readable and is available free online.