

# Flood and Cyclone Report

*It takes a community to help a community.*

AUGUST 2023



**Visionwest**  
Waka Whakakitenga

building hope  
together

| *Kia Tūmanakotia*

# Executive Summary

## The ability to respond immediately

The Auckland Anniversary Weekend (27 January 2023) weather event was unlike any before it. The storm's ferocity and the volume of rainfall took the city by surprise and had a devastating impact on Te Uru o Tāmaki Makaurau West Auckland and other parts of the city. Two weeks later, Cyclone Gabrielle hit bringing more devastation. The result for many whānau was the loss of accommodation and household possessions followed by challenges relating to mental health, personal finances, and food insecurity.

Visionwest responded – a distinctive feature of this response being the speed with which we were able to react to the needs of those affected.

The ability to mobilise so quickly lies in the simple reality that responding to the needs of people who are vulnerable or experiencing difficult times is what we do every day. And, while it is true, we had to pivot some of our services to appropriate delivery mechanisms, and the presence of a crisis meant there was a greater urgency to much of the work we were engaged in, our focus continued to be on walking alongside those who are facing tough times.

Lessons learned during COVID lockdowns proved to be invaluable as we adjusted the way we provided essential services within the context of the weather events.

## It takes a community to help a community

“It takes a community to help a community,” is an apt description of the days, weeks and even months that followed 27 January as Visionwest joined with other social service agencies and organisations, working together, utilising our strengths, and sharing our resources, to ensure essential needs of those impacted by the floods were met.

Through the generosity of the community, Visionwest received, from a variety of sources, over \$670,000 for our flood relief work. As of 23 June, 92% of this money had been spent directly on flood relief with the remaining 8% earmarked for spending in the next few weeks.

## A wraparound response

The result was the ability to be proactive in meeting multiple community needs as they arose including housing, food insecurity, financial, and mental health support.

This report outlines, in detail, Visionwest's response to crisis and the way the community rallied together to help others at their point of greatest need. It also lists some of the observations that will help shape how we respond to crises in the future.

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## Introduction

On Friday 27 January, West Auckland received more than its average January rainfall (201mm) in less than a few hours. The resultant flooding meant that many whānau were displaced, some losing everything they owned, including their home. Because, on a day-to-day basis, we are active in the West Auckland community, Visionwest was able to be part of the immediate response.

The immediate and longer-term response was unprecedented for Visionwest. It was, however, shaped by the mechanisms and protocols established during the COVID pandemic. As with COVID, we had little warning of the timing or extent of the disaster but our teams and the individuals within them were able to meet the events head-on with an understanding of the need to be flexible in our response to community needs.

It must also be noted from the outset that it takes a community to help a community. No one agency or organisation has all the answers or all the resources to respond effectively to events like these but, by working together and playing to our strengths, we can prevail.



## Days of Devastation

Auckland Anniversary 2023 holiday weekend, heavy rainfall across the upper North Island caused widespread catastrophic citywide flooding. From 5pm on Friday 27 January, severe and, in some cases, unexpected, flash flooding occurred, the worst affected areas being West Auckland, North Shore and parts of South Auckland. A state of emergency was declared in Auckland and parts of the upper North Island.

Two weeks later, between 12 February and 14 February, Cyclone Gabrielle battered New Zealand. Once again, heavy rainfall was experienced, this time accompanied by gale-force winds. A nationwide state of emergency was declared with many regions severely affected.

While Hawke's Bay and its surrounding area bore the brunt of this cyclonic assault, Auckland was far from unscathed. Within Greater Auckland, several areas were affected by landslides and many houses were lost. Once again, many whānau lost their homes and possessions, and a number of those battered by the Anniversary Weekend floods were hit hard once again.

In the aftermath of these combined weather events, many whānau were displaced from their homes. Throughout Auckland, up to 8,000 homes were left in need of damage assessment. By Wednesday 8 February (prior to Cyclone Gabrielle), 277 homes had been red stickered, 1,615 yellow stickered, and 2,566 white stickered.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A red sticker indicates the building is unsafe to enter, a yellow sticker that the building has restricted access, and a white sticker indicates damage that is minimal, meaning the property is inhabitable but in need of remedial work.



# Visionwest Response – *Overview*

## PART ONE

# Visionwest Response – Overview

## The Immediate Response

The severity of the Anniversary Weekend flooding required an urgent response from a number of agencies and community organisations. Displaced whānau, many of them traumatised following narrow escapes from flooding and landslips<sup>2</sup>, were left uncertain about where to go or what to do.

As soon as the extent of the flooding in West Auckland was known, the principal at St Leonards School in Kelston opened the school as an evacuation centre. Deputy Prime Minister and local MP Carmel Sepuloni and other community leaders including Sir Michael Jones and Eroni Clarke, initially coordinated the relief effort before Civil Defence and Red Cross arrived to oversee the process and establish an official Civil Defence Centre (CDC). Once the announcement was made that CDCs had been throughout Auckland, large numbers of people began turning up, often with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Some had seen their homes engulfed and had waded to safety through deep water; some with children on their backs, others carrying family pets or whatever valuables they could salvage.



*A flooded Visionwest property.*

Visionwest's response began with the immediate mobilisation of our housing teams. By early Friday evening, within hours of realising the extent of the flooding, the Visionwest Community Tenancy and Supportive Housing teams were on the phone contacting each Visionwest tenant to check on both their personal welfare and the condition of their property. When necessary, help was provided to ensure affected whānau made it to places of shelter.

At the Kelston St Leonards School CDC, Kelston Community Hub had taken on the role of providing food for those who had been displaced from their homes. It was Community Hub volunteers who first reached out to Billie-Jean, Visionwest's Kaiarāhi Tikanga. Billie-Jean, in turn, contacted members of Visionwest's Community Services teams including our Community Connectors. By early Saturday morning, a number of Visionwest staff were at the CDC taking an active role in its set-up and day-to-day running; primarily involving themselves in the task of welcoming and connecting with people as they arrived – many traumatised by the events of the previous few hours.

This role of connecting with displaced whānau turned out to be a critical part of the flood response process and one that must not be downplayed. Civil Defence workers, and first responder agencies including Auckland Emergency Management (AEM) did an excellent job of processing people upon arrival which involved having them complete a one-page assessment form before allocating a camp bed and blankets.

This process, while necessary and well handled, did not necessarily acknowledge the presenting trauma many whānau arrived with, leaving some confused or overwhelmed. Nor did it necessarily fit with the cultural practices represented amongst Māori, Pasifika and other ethnicities who had been displaced without warning. This is written about in greater detail in the Community Connector section.

<sup>2</sup> We must never forget that, over the two weather events, four people lost their lives. As traumatic as it was for many whānau, for those who lost loved ones, it was catastrophic.

*“We were involved in first response stuff; welcoming people bringing them and making sure they were okay. It was just surreal ... the trauma and shock ... there were people who were just numb. You could see it, like it was replaying in their minds over and over ... they didn’t have the ability to process the present, let alone what they were going to do in the hours or days ahead.” Debbie Griffiths – Kaiarāhi Team Leader, Visionwest Community Connectors.*



Debbie Griffiths

This immediate response occurred organically as Visionwest staff responded according to their Visionwest roles and because of the myriad of existing networks Visionwest has within the West Auckland community. Coordination was needed, however, to maintain the effectiveness of our response in the medium to long-term. This was the role of Visionwest’s Emergency Response Team which, by early Saturday morning was meeting to coordinate the support services we were equipped to offer to the relief effort.

A fundraising webpage was also established to enable the public to donate. Funding and flood response expenditure is written about in greater detail in Part Three: Fundraising and Spending.

## The Next Few Days

Within hours, the Kelston Hub found maintaining a food supply for those arriving at and staying at the CDC to be an enormous challenge. The Visionwest staff stationed at the CDC contacted Visionwest’s Pātaka Kai to advise them of the need. Volunteers were called in to pack food at Whata Manaaki, Visionwest’s food warehouse, and bulk food supplies were delivered. Food parcels were also delivered to any flooded homes which Visionwest knew about and to homes that were still inhabited in streets and communities most heavily affected.

Not all those who arrived at the CDC were looking for a place to stay. A significant number came to request support with food. The Kelston Hub used the bulk food supplied by Visionwest to make up food parcels to give away to these people. Others came, not looking for a place to stay but with a need to escape their flooded streets and, for a brief while, connect to something that felt normal.

Over the coming days, a natural apportioning of responsibilities occurred within the CDC. Civil Defence, AEM, and Red Cross handled the important assessment of those arriving before assigning them a place to sleep and introducing them to MSD and other agencies who were providing support.

Visionwest’s established role as an anchor organisation within the West Auckland Community meant we instantly adopted a similar anchoring role for the flood response and we were able to help with moving items in and out of the CDC, feeding displaced people that came into the CDC and, in the days ahead, supporting whānau through the MSD process and ensuring they had access to available support, and setting the tikanga about how whānau were best welcomed and looked after in the evacuation centres.

The value of Visionwest’s work was acknowledged by our inclusion in the daily briefing and debriefing sessions which encompassed all organisations and agencies at the CDC.

These first few days were chaotic but achieved much as people worked to their strengths and proved that a community that works in synergy can do amazing things to support the wider community.

## Four Critical Steps

Early on, as part of our flood relief effort, and alongside our usual support services which continued to operate, Visionwest took **four critical steps**:

- In the immediate aftermath of a disaster communication to the public is key, and Visionwest played a pivotal role in this.
  - A freephone flood relief hotline was established and widely publicised for whānau to phone in with any flood-related needs. For the first few weeks, this phonenumber was open seven days a week and provided the community with one phone number through which they could access almost all information related to flood relief matters.
  - A user-friendly web-based fact sheet was created from information collated by the West Auckland Together Collective, of which Visionwest is a member. This contained a comprehensive list of information with hyperlinks to the agency and organisational information whānau needed in order to access critical assistance. The importance of creating a central repository for this information cannot be overstated. Coordinating the communication of key information to the public and to other agencies who were having people reach out to them for help is perhaps one of the most critical things Visionwest and West Auckland Together did in the early days following the weather events.

Even at the best of times, many people, especially those with English as a second language, find it difficult to access and navigate relevant information. So, whether it was the Mayoral Relief Fund, Temporary Accommodation Service through MBIE, the Civil Defence payments through MSD, or other funding and service sources – it was listed on our Flood Information webpage.

The page was also available as a printable pdf which we distributed amongst agencies and organisations across West Auckland so that it quickly became the go-to communication for all things relating to flood relief.

- Recognising the need to have staff members who were focused solely on flood relief support, two people were employed on a short-term basis: one as a Flood Relief Coordinator and the second as a Community Connector focusing on the coordination of Visionwest's flood relief activities. This is written about in more detail the community connection section.
- A pop-up pantry was established alongside our Pātaka Kai food parcel service to enable those who had lost the entire contents of their pantry to restock all those smaller items – such as butter, salt, and other condiments – that are essential to cooking but would not necessarily be included in a food parcel.



*A flood relief hotline was quickly established.*



*A pop up pantry was established at Glendale Campus.*



# Visionwest Response – *In Detail*



## PART TWO

# Visionwest Response – In Detail

Part Two of this report looks in greater detail at Visionwest’s response to the specific support needs we encountered. To ensure a complete picture of Visionwest’s response is provided, some information from the overview above is repeated in these following sections and some sections may overlap with the information they contain.

## First Things First

The first thing acknowledged by our Emergency Response Team was that Visionwest is not Civil Defence. Our role was always one of responding to crises in line with the capabilities and strengths of our organisation. This includes utilising the experience and expertise that sits within our support service teams and accessing the many networks that we are a part of throughout West Auckland and further afield.

This required that each Visionwest team worked to its strengths. Some teams were required in the immediate response, some in the days and weeks that followed, some expect to be dealing with issues related to the aftermath of the flooding for some time to come.

It also required that each Visionwest team evaluate how to best deliver services in the midst of this latest crisis. Our previous response to the COVID lockdown events meant we had learned and now understood the need to be flexible in the way services were delivered.

An example of this is seen in the delivery of food support. During the COVID lockdowns we had learned to pivot our service delivery according to the needs and the regulations in force at the time. In the days immediately following the flooding, those most severely affected couldn’t come to Visionwest’s Pātaka Kai for food and, even if they could, they had no way to prepare and cook meals. So, an alternative means of supplying appropriate food was required. The need to be flexible in our food support service delivery is written about in detail in the food support section of this report.

## Response to Housing and Displacement Needs

For those displaced by the Anniversary Day floods, accommodation was an immediate priority. By early evening on Friday 27 January, within hours of realising the extent of the flooding, the Visionwest Community Housing teams were on the phone contacting each tenant to check on both their personal welfare and the condition of their property. Support Navigators from our Supportive Housing team checked on the whānau wellbeing to ascertain who needed support and what support was required. At the same time, Tenancy Managers from our Tenancy Team were doing their own checks; phoning to determine property needs.

*“We knew we had families in low-lying areas, so we called these whānau first. Many reported serious damage and the details had to be passed onto landlords. Our main priority, however, was the families and ensuring they were able to get to safety.” Louise Fruean – Lead Tenancy Manager Visionwest Community Housing – Tenancy.*



Louise Fruean

*Obviously, housing was the first priority but there were other needs that came out of that. So much stuff was lost for people. Things needed replacing and tenants needed support with everything from food to counselling. There was a real collaboration between the two housing teams [Tenancy and Supportive] to make sure we were able to meet the needs of each of the tenants. Sherree Dayal – Clinical Manager Visionwest Community Housing – Supportive.*



*Sherree Dayal*

While only two Visionwest leased properties were totally destroyed, 27 were severely affected and needed extensive repair. The most pressing issue, however, was finding accommodation for those who had been displaced. Many had lost everything and were left with only the clothes they escaped in. For the first night, some of these whānau had gone to the homes of friends or extended family. Many, however, were forced to stay in their cars. By Saturday morning, word was getting around that Civil Defence Centres (CDCs) had been established and people were directed to these.

*The flooding was terrible. We lost everything. When we left our place, the water was knee deep, but it got a lot higher. We went to the school in Kelston then got sent to a hotel but that was only for a few days before we were back at Kelston. After a week or so, a house was found for us. We lost all our furniture, all our food, our clothes ... everything. Miriam.*

Visionwest Community Housing had an immediate concern for those already experiencing homelessness when the storm hit. Our Supportive Housing Project Coordinator, who has experience in connecting with whānau living rough around West Auckland, went out to physically check in on some of the otherwise forgotten street homeless community. He spent time visiting vans, tents, and other rough sleepers, particularly those in parks and places which had been hard hit or in the vicinity of where large trees had come down. Immediate needs were discussed, and support given where appropriate.

## **Observations relating to housing and displacement needs**

A common misconception is that those who live in city suburbs are surrounded by support structures. While this may be true in one sense, a sad feature of modern suburban life is that people often don't know, or may have never met, their neighbours. This caused many of those living in suburban streets to feel isolated and alone following the flooding.

Communication was also an issue resulting in many whānau being uncertain of who to ask for help and where to go to receive it. Those who were forced to leave their homes usually left behind everything meaning their only means of communication was their mobile phone, assuming they had that with them, and it wasn't water damaged. For those who had a phone, limited data or an inability to recharge batteries meant many were unable to access information passed over the internet and were reliant on word of mouth.

Due to the shortage of appropriate emergency housing, we observed that it was challenging for the CDC team to find suitable accommodation and there were examples of whānau being placed in housing that was not suitable for their family situation. For example, a West Auckland woman and her two children were allocated emergency housing. It was for two nights only but was in Papakura, an hour's drive (43 kms) away. She would have had no community or family support, her children would miss school, and she had no vehicle so would need a taxi to take her there. She decided it was not worth it for two nights and remained at the CDC.

We do acknowledge that, within the current constraints relating to housing, it is not surprising that the supply of emergency housing was challenging.

It must also be noted that it wasn't just those whose homes had been destroyed who needed shelter;

*A lady came in to the Pātaka Kai and we got talking. She was from South Head and had been away from her home when the flooding occurred and was now unable to return because of slips. She and her young son had been sleeping in her car. I asked her why she didn't ask for help. She said, 'Well, it was only for a few days and besides, I didn't know where to go.'* Danielle Cleverdon – Visionwest Kai Services Manager.



Danielle Cleverdon

A final observation is that sheltering at a CDC was a challenge for some. For those with mental health conditions, being placed in a dormitory-style situation with unknown people was far from ideal. One mother came to the CDC but had to leave shortly after because the presence of so many people in close proximity provided too much mental stimulation and was detrimental to the behaviour and mental health of her daughter who lives with severe autism.

## Housing Response Statistics

Statistics as of 23 June 2023



**Visionwest leased houses totally destroyed**



**Visionwest leased houses extensively damaged**



**Whānau contacting Visionwest with accommodation needs**

*\*It must be noted that Visionwest's response to the housing need arising from the flooding was not limited to those who were Visionwest tenants. Almost 300 enquiries relating to accommodation were received from whānau who were not Visionwest tenants. Those we couldn't help directly were passed onto relevant agencies and organisations.*

## Response to the Need for Connection

Visionwest has a team of six Community Connectors whose everyday role is to meet whānau who may have a need, listen to their stories, and advise them of the avenues they need to go down to find the appropriate support. The importance of these Community Connectors in Visionwest's flood relief response cannot be overstated – they were invaluable from day one and continue to play a vital role. So much so that we added two staff – a Flood Coordinator and an additional Community Connector – specifically in response to the flood relief needs.

Human connection was an important facet of the flood response. One critical need immediately observed by the Visionwest team was the desire for those struggling with storm-related trauma to experience connection and relationship. The CDCs had robust systems in place for information gathering, processing physical needs, and allocating sleeping spaces. However, many whānau were suffering various degrees of shock which, at times, rendered them unable to coherently provide even the most rudimentary information or to make basic decisions about their future. In many cases, the storms triggered past traumatic experiences for individuals that ran deeper than the loss of material items and brought feelings of total loss and deprivation. This is written about in detail in the response to mental health needs section of this report.

Others were suspicious of the process which required them to hand over personal information. For these whānau it was necessary to connect, listen and take time for trust to be developed before they felt able to complete the CDC assessment forms.

*“Many whānau were in cars outside the Kelston CDC. That included children and elderly people. Many didn't want to come into the Centre itself because they knew they had to fill in forms and were hesitant to give their personal details when they didn't know what that information might be used for. These people were in shock. All they knew for certain was that they needed kai to feed themselves and their children. Our first approach needed to be with a plate of food, not a clipboard.” Billie-Jean Peita – Visionwest Kaiārahi Tikanga.*



Billie Jean Peita

Some of the Visionwest Community Connectors took food out to the cars. The provision of food created a connection, and they were able to chat with whānau in an informal way. Once this relationship was established – something that is very important in Māori and Pasifika cultures – and once we had explained the process that was taking place, whānau were more relaxed about entering the evacuation centre and divulging their personal details.

*Many whānau needed a reassurance and needed to be encouraged that the CDC was a safe place. You have to remember the backgrounds of many of these whānau and understand where many of them have come from. For many, sharing space with strangers was a concern. Debbie Griffiths – Kaiārahi Team Leader, Visionwest Community Connectors.*

The need for people to connect with others went beyond these first few days, however. For some, the need to share their story, often numerous times, was an ongoing part of the healing process.

*I'm a trained counsellor but throughout the entire flood response and even today, I wouldn't call what I was doing counselling as such. I was a listener. I made people a cup of tea and then listened to what they wanted to say. Some had told their story and didn't want to revisit it. For others, the retelling, sometimes two or three times, was a way of processing what had happened.*

*One thing I learned from this is that people need that space to talk and for some people that retelling of their story is important for a number of weeks. You see, now that quite a few weeks have passed, people are receiving food support and budgeting and other practical help, but who is just checking in and asking, "Hey, how are you going? How are things tracking for you?"*

*A couple of weeks after the flood I was dropping off some food to a lady who's had a knee operation and can't get out. She's stuck at home in a property that was still not fixed properly. She's separated from her son who has special medical needs meaning he can't live in the house at the moment. For me to call in, drop that food off, and listen to her story and hear about where she was at at that moment was really important for her. Becks Ogden – Visionwest Flood Relief Community Connector.*



Becks Ogden

Several days into our flood response, Visionwest Community Connectors became aware of the number of whānau who were in need, some of them in dire situations, but with no real understanding of where to go for help or what help was available to them. It was this that prompted Visionwest to proactively seek out those who required support by performing door-to-door welfare checks.

*The focus of our door-to-door teams was to connect with those who had critical needs. We loaded a car up with food parcels and started with door knocking in the most severely hit areas. The first visits were just to trial whether there was a valid need out there. We quickly discovered there was. Simon Radford – Visionwest and Glen Eden Baptist Church (GEBC) Chaplain.*



Simon Radford

Armed with a list of red and yellow-stickered houses, the first visits revealed the significant number of people in local communities who were trying to get by on their own, unaware that there were many avenues of help available. Within days, teams made up of Visionwest staff and trust board members, Community Connectors, and members of GEBC were setting out each morning with boxes of food from the pātaka kai and returning with stories of heartbreak and confusion.

*Some of the places we went to were quite significantly damaged. I'd walk up a driveway and think, "This is pretty badly damaged. There will be no one home here," only to see a face look out the window or have a person hesitantly open the door. Most started out a little wary of our presence assuming we were perhaps insurance assessors or from a government agency. When we explained we were from Visionwest and doing welfare checks, they would open up. Many invited us in to see the state of their flood-affected properties. It was heart-breaking to see what some people had been through and were now struggling to cope with. Simon – Visionwest and GEBC Chaplain.*

It was interesting that, for many of those visited, the most critical need was for them to be able to share their story. Talking to a Visionwest Community Connector in particular gave them the sense that they were sharing with someone who could do something to support them.

Food was also an obvious need for these whānau, but another touchpoint was often the mention of the counselling packages that Visionwest had made available (these are written about in more detail in the response to mental health section of this report). People were anxious and already recognised that they would need outside help to cope in the aftermath of these weather events.

The name and contact details of each person visited were recorded if they expressed a need for support. These were referred back to our Flood Relief Coordinator who ensured a member of the Community Connect team followed up with information, and often hands-on help, of how and where necessary support could be accessed.

The essential role of connecting people to support and advocating for whānau as they access those supports, often for the first time, needs to be acknowledged. This role is ably filled by Community Connectors. It's a role that remains critical, both in times of crisis and in times of normality.

### Observations relating to the need for connection

It truly does take a community to help a community; and something powerful happens when everyone works to their strengths. The collection of information at the CDC was vital and there were organisations with the resources to effectively do that. However, for most whānau, connection at a more relational level is required first and is especially important for some cultures.

This remains applicable throughout all stages of Visionwest's relief response. Many whānau are hesitant to divulge their real needs until they feel they have been listened to and have formed a genuine level of trust with the person working for the responding agency. In the wake of the flood experiences lived through by so many, the onset of shock and trauma meant the most effective first response was food, drink, and a compassionate and listening ear. It was when these connections were made that whānau were able to reach through their immediate trauma and think more coherently about their predicament or allow others to advise and advocate for them.

It must be noted also that many cultures and demographics were hesitant to give out personal information when they were uncertain of the reason for its collection or how it would be used. Others were hesitant to accept help because they did not understand that it was free. Many had been helped by MSD in the past with the proviso that any money provided would be repaid. Some were, therefore, afraid that accepting help would incur debt.

Finally, it must be noted that two other underlying mindsets affected the way people sought out or accepted support after the flooding. The first was the sense of whakama (shame) felt by some. It may seem peculiar that any person would feel shame for something that was outside of their control, but that was a reality for some. Perhaps it was that they had never had to ask for social support before or perhaps it was a sense of guilt at being unable to work through this crisis on their own; the truth remains that sitting with whānau and reassuring them that their situation was not the result of their own actions and that they merited our support was an important part of the connection role.



*Taking calls from whānau on the 0800 line.*

The second mindset we encountered was the Kiwi attitude of, “I know I’m going through a tough time but there are many worse off than me.” It was this attitude that led many to stay in damaged housing without seeking out help, or to steer away from asking for food or counselling help. Once again, these people needed a simple reassurance that, “There will usually be someone worse off than you, but that doesn’t negate your need for support.”

## Connection Response Statistics



**3553**

**Whānau  
Enquiries  
answered**



**164**

**Whānau visited by  
visitation team**

## Response to Food Supply and Support

Following the flood event, the need for food support was immediate, as was Visionwest’s response. Feeding whānau who were turning up to the CDC at St Leonards School, usually cold and hungry, often having spent the night in their car, was an enormous task which the Kelston Community Hub had, by default, taken on. As early as the morning after the Friday evening flood, Billie-Jean, Visionwest’s Kaiarāhi Tikanga, contacted our Pātaka Kai staff to ask for help with supplying food. Over the coming days, a close relationship was formed between Visionwest and Kelston Community Hub as we worked together to provide meals.

In these first few days, food supplied by Visionwest included:

- Food for the Kelston Community Hub to cook and serve at the CDC.
- Food parcels for those who came to the CDC requiring food only.
- Food parcels for other organisations – some of these contacted Visionwest directly, others were in response to us reaching out to schools, local charitable groups, and other organisations offering food support.
- Food parcels which were hand delivered to flood-hit areas.



*Loading supplies at Whata Manaaki*

Each avenue of food supply required careful planning. For instance, those in flood-hit areas were often without power which impacted the type of food supplied and meant special boxes needed to be packed while those at the St Leonards CDC, either in their cars or in the Centre itself, had no food preparation facilities and so food had to be cooked and served as complete meals.

Much of this initial food supply was before we’d secured any flood relief funding and so the food supplied was taken from the Visionwest Pātaka Kai’s existing food stock<sup>3</sup>.

In the coming days and weeks, the reach of Visionwest’s food supply went well beyond the St Leonards CDC. As other Community Hubs opened in which our Community Connectors were helping

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the flood events, the Visionwest Pātaka Kai was feeding 400 – 450 whānau each week as well as supplying bulk food to other food support organisations out of Whata Manaaki, our food storage warehouse.



to coordinate flood relief, food was one of the most urgent and consistent needs. Hubs supported included Hub West and Ranui Baptist Church Hub.

Volunteers from Visionwest were also rostered on to prepare meals for those staying at Hub West while food parcels were also prepared and delivered to the worst hit areas by our door-to-door team.

In addition to this food supply, as soon as possible after the flooding, the Visionwest Pātaka Kai was open for any who required food support and could come to our Glen Eden site to collect it.

Cyclone Gabrielle brought a renewed demand for food support and included areas such as Piha and Karekare which were isolated due to landslips. Visionwest's Pātaka Kai staff were proactive in contacting people in these areas to ask if food support was needed. The answer was a resounding, "Yes."

In response, the Pātaka Kai truck loaded with food and water was dispatched to these West Coast beach settlements. Once there, getting supplies to Karekare was especially tricky because it was completely cut-off by a slip and could be accessed only by a combination of walking and quadbikes. This meant all food and water had to be packaged in such a way that it could be carried to those who needed it.



Supplies for the West Coast beach settlements

Aware that Karekare and the surrounding area was without power, lightweight tramping cookers were sourced and hiked into these remote communities by local volunteers.

Alongside food, our food support service also provided care packages containing household essentials such as nappies, shampoo, sanitary products, and other personal items, and cleaning materials to help with flood clean-ups.

Of the money received for Visionwest's flood relief efforts, 29% was spent on emergency food supply. This does not, however, represent the full amount of food supplied because a number of food companies and organisations supplied actual food products while Visionwest also utilised existing food stores that would have been given away through our Pātaka Kai.

A couple of weeks into Visionwest's flood response, it was noted that many people had lost the entire contents of their pantry. This meant that, while our Pātaka Kai was supplying essential food items, people were often without basic pantry items like salt and butter.

*Many people had lost everything including their entire pantry; everything gone. So, we set up a pop-up pantry stocked with all those extra items that people need to make good, tasty meals. It was like a mini supermarket where people could come and select the goods they needed to replenish their pantries. While only those flood-affected families specifically identified as needing this help were given access to it, there were still over 100 families who went through to receive this support. Danielle Cleverdon – Kai Services Manager.*

It was wonderful to receive a supply of grocery vouchers from Foodstuffs to be used in their supermarkets. Receiving these brought tremendous encouragement to whānau who had been hardest hit by the floods. Having lost control of so much in their lives, being able to go into a supermarket and select exactly what they needed led to a feeling of empowerment and being back in charge of something tangible in their lives.

The value of the Foodstuffs vouchers was exceedingly generous and enabled us to give hundreds of dollars' worth of vouchers to those who were in greatest need – size of family and each family's situation was, of course, taken into consideration.

*The real value of food support and food vouchers is that it frees up money that can be used to pay bills or mortgages that whānau have been stressing over and believed they would not be able to meet.*  
*Tulsi Cullen – Visionwest Flood Relief Coordinator.*



Tulsi Cullen

The provision of food to flood affected whānau continues, primarily through our Pātaka Kai and Manaaki Kai (our recently opened social supermarket).

It's difficult to calculate the precise number of whānau Visionwest supported with food during our flood relief response. This is partly because some food was delivered by the truckload (e.g., to Piha and Karekare), or was dropped off at Community Hubs and other organisations providing relief. Also, in the case the Visionwest Pātaka Kai, while whānau were asked if they needed food as a result of the floods, many did not respond or were regular clients anyway.

## Observations relating to food supply

Food is a great connector and a compelling way to begin the process of building trust and relationship with those who have been displaced during a crisis. In those early days, when people first arrived at the CDC they were scared, in shock, and found decision-making difficult. Many were initially hesitant to go into the CDC.

Visionwest staff found that by taking food out to these whānau and simply listening to their stories, those barriers were broken down. People were able to calm their nerves and felt they were being treated as an individual which led to a greater willingness to enter the CDC and participate in the assessment process.

*It was great to see everyone doing what they do best. Visionwest were supplying food, the ladies from the Kelston Community Hub were cooking it and together we feed whānau and had conversations to connect with them and ensure they felt looked after. Meanwhile, Red Cross and Civil Defence were doing an awesome job of processing those who arrived and allocating them off to spaces to rest and sleep. The important thing was that, in the midst of all this, people felt safe and comforted.* Danielle Cleverdon – Visionwest Food Support Manager.

The collecting of information is a vital part of the crisis-relief process, but it needs to be carried out at the appropriate moment – the key at the initial stages was sustenance and connection – Visionwest's food support team played a vital role in this.

## Food Response Statistics

**1011**

Whānau contacting Visionwest with kai as immediate need

**7381\***

Individuals receiving food support

**29%**

Percentage of flood relief funds spent on food support

**67**

Food vouchers distributed

**\$12,000**

Food value provided to St Leonards CDC and Hub West

**\$14,000**

Food value provided to Piha and Karekare

**56**

Whānau visiting the Pop-Up Pantry



*\*Food support statistics are difficult to quantify precisely and some of these statistics are calculated estimates only. The speed with which events unfolded during the flood emergency meant that the first priority of all organisations was to respond to whānau in need rather than capture exact figures right from the beginning.*

## Response to the Need for Household Items

As the critical and urgent needs for food and shelter subsided, Visionwest spoke to affected whānau to determine what support would be required next.

Through the first days of the crisis, it emerged that many of those hardest hit were whānau who were already stretched in their personal finances. As the cost-of-living pressure mounted over the months leading into the floods, many people had made some tough decisions in order to save money for essential weekly costs. One of these decisions was the cancelling of insurances.

The Visionwest Flood Response Team, which included some of our Financial Mentors working alongside our Community Connectors, met many such whānau. Stories were shared of uninsured whānau losing their transport and crucial household items.

With this in mind, Visionwest's Flood Relief Coordinator developed an assessment process whereby all support needs of flood-affected whānau were sensitively reviewed. This uncovered the sad reality that many had lost, and were unable to replace, essential items such as household goods, food, furniture, beds and bedding, whiteware and kitchenware, and pantry goods. Meanwhile, staff undertaking door-to-door visitations and those answering our flood relief phonenumber uncovered other whānau also in need of household goods replacement.

These needs were relayed to our Flood Relief Coordinator who collated them, ensured their validity, and arranged for the purchase of necessary items peculiar to each individual's circumstances.

Of interest here is that, while MSD funding came with a prescribed list of items that could be covered by that money, some of the items most critical to whānau were not listed.

*We met with a lady who had lost most her possessions during the floods but had managed to get together most of what she needed. When we asked if she had any pressing needs, she said she needed a blender, but blenders weren't included in the list of funded items. When we asked more questions, it turned out the blender was needed because of a medical issue that requires her to blend all her food; in other words, it was essential to her health. We contacted a supplier who provided a blender for her for free. Tulsie Cullen – Visionwest Flood Relief Coordinator.*

*I met a lady coming out of a counselling session at our Wellbeing Centre and we got talking. She said, "I never thought I would have gone to counselling, but when you guys supported me with the things I needed in my home after the floods, you suggested that maybe I talk to someone and man, they're good." I asked the lady if she had any other urgent needs; her answer surprised me. She'd managed to re-establish herself pretty well after the flooding but was concerned about the state of her section; her need was for a lawn mower. Hers had been destroyed by the flooding and she was unable to afford a replacement. Brook Turner – Visionwest Head of Service Development and Partnerships.*



Brook Turner

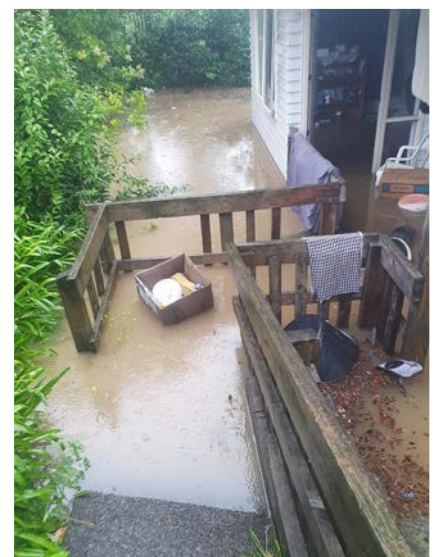
The most common items needing replacement were bedroom items. Items such as dining room tables and wooden chairs can be dried out but, once a mattress gets sodden, it's very difficult for it to be resurrected. The same goes with bedding. Many whānau had stormwater flow through their properties ruining whatever bedding they had. In all, 79 beds and 75 sheet sets were purchased to replace those destroyed in the flooding.

Of interest to our Flood Relief Team were some of the other items required. A few people had lost their lawnmowers and asked if these could be replaced.

*We noticed that there are certain things that stabilise people; things that make people feel things are going to be alright. One of these was having their lawns mowed and looking tidy. That meant, for some people, a lawnmower was important. Tulsie Cullen – Visionwest Flood Relief Coordinator.*

As part of their response to flood relief support, MG Motor Group approached Visionwest with the offer of a six-month free lease of ten vehicles for people who had been left without transport due to the floods. This provision radically changed the future for those who were facing unique transport difficulties which could not be overcome immediately.

The selection of those receiving a vehicle was organised by our Flood Relief Coordinator who recommended those in the direst need to the Head of Flood Response for sign off. Often the recommendation was based on the necessity to be able to travel to work, or to vital health or counselling appointments. The story section of this report contains two stories relating to recipients of this unique and much appreciated flood response.



A flooded Visionwest property

## Observations relating to household possession replacement

The need to replace household possessions destroyed by the floods became a challenge for those who had no contents insurance cover. While some could be critical of people living without such insurance, the reality is, when a whānau is struggling to put food on the table and pay their utility bills, there is a need to find ways of economising and insurance becomes a luxury. Hence, a significant number of those who lost possessions in the flooding were uninsured.

An item that was expected to be in high demand was dehumidifiers, but the initial demand was relatively low. However, a month or so after the flooding, the demand increased markedly. Whānau who coped with drying things from the initial flood found the continual wet weather meant their homes had not dried. Many were experiencing mould or small leaks that slowly developed into larger ones. Others commented on the musty smell in their homes and the fear that the air might be unhealthy. Loan dehumidifiers were given to some whānau, others were supplied with one outright. This serves as a reminder that, following a crisis, not all critical needs are immediate.

## Household Items Replacement Response Statistics

### Statistics as of 23 June 2023

<p><b>84</b></p> <p>Whānau helped with replacement household items</p>	<p><b>\$219,766.93</b></p> <p>Value of items supplied to whānau</p>	<p><b>\$2,616</b></p> <p>Average spend on each whānau</p>
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Most commonly requested items supplied to whānau:

<p><b>31</b></p> <p>Double Beds</p>	<p><b>48</b></p> <p>Single Beds</p>	<p><b>19 / 99</b></p> <p>Dining Tables / and Chairs</p>	<p><b>18</b></p> <p>Whiteware</p>
<p><b>71</b></p> <p>Tallboys and Drawers</p>	<p><b>75</b></p> <p>Sheet sets</p>	<p><b>45</b></p> <p>Lounge (Sofas and chairs)</p>	<p><b>140</b></p> <p>Towels</p>

Interestingly, only a little over \$4,500 was spent on replacing clothing. It seems most people were able to replace day-to-day clothing fairly easily. It was only with the onset of winter that a few came to Visionwest unable to replace items like winter coats and wet-weather gear.

## Response to the Need for Financial Support

Visionwest's Money Mentors service includes a team of four fulltime Financial Mentors. In the days following the floods, the Financial Mentors' work steadily increased with financial relief work initially focusing on either the provision of information relating to funding or advocating for people who were too stressed to handle financial matters themselves. As time progressed, a significant number of more traditional budgeting and debt management requests were received that could be traced back to the flood events.

As mentioned above, many of those hit most severely by the flooding were whānau who were already struggling or just hanging in with respect to personal finances. For this demographic, it often only needs one thing to go wrong, and they are pushed over the edge and into financial crisis. In normal times, this can be an unexpected expense or a lay-off from work – in January – February 2023, it was two devastating weather events that came in close succession.

Visionwest secured resourcing for our Money Mentors team to handle the longer-term work with people experiencing financial issues such as those relating to insurance, arrears in rent or car payments, and other issues that may arise as a consequence of crises. However, many of the immediate financial needs were handled by the Flood Relief Team and our Community Connectors. These needs covered a wide range of financial issues such as:

- Help negotiating the various flood relief payments available through MSD and the Auckland City Council.
- Help negotiating insurance and property matters.
- The replacement of essential items such as whiteware and furniture – Visionwest's response is recorded in the previous section, above.
- Covering everyday costs such as rent and food.

With regard to the flood relief payments, our Community Connectors were kept busy explaining these to the flood-affected who tended to fall into a couple of categories. There were those who had never previously accessed any type of fund or benefit. These whānau were usually unfamiliar with the process of applying for and receiving financial help. For some, even the acronym MSD was new and unfamiliar.

Then there were those who, as mentioned previously, were familiar with the social welfare system. Many of these people were, however, hesitant to apply for flood relief funding because, when they had received government assistance in the past, it needed to be repaid. Assuming this would be the case with flood relief, they didn't bother applying for fear of going further into debt.

*It's been great to have the Flood Relief Team and the Community Connectors working alongside us because we were already busy with the recent cost of living increases. Now, we have so many people struggling. Many weren't financially stable before the flood and the floods have just topped it off.*

*We are also aware that people have had support from heaps of different services and from funding sources which has eased our initial load. There will come a time though when these services start pulling away. I expect that then many more will realise the seriousness of their financial position and we will see more clients turn up. Jo Wolferstan – Kahukura Financial Mentor Specialist – Team Leader*



Jo Wolferstan

Many of the financial issues faced by whānau are complex and require multiple sessions with a Financial Mentor. The following story gives an example and sums up something of that complexity.

*I was speaking to one woman who said her family's biggest problem was that they were paying a mortgage for a home they couldn't live in. Because they were insured, their insurance company agreed to pay the cost of a rental for six months. However, the way it works is that insurance will only pay out on what your own house would have rented out for. That means, say you had a two-bedroom house that would rent for \$500 a week but the only available rental was a three-bedroom house costing \$650 a week ... that extra \$150 rent is not covered by insurance. You have to pay it out of your own pocket and, on top of that, you must still pay your mortgage.*

*This scenario was not unusual and explains why some homeowners chose to remain living in damaged and, in many ways, uninhabitable properties.*

*Added to this is that the chance of getting a rental close to your current community was low and so many were having to pay extra transport costs to get to and from school or work. Danielle Cleverdon – Visionwest Kai Support Manager.*

Stories like this were common in the weeks following the floods. Many people facing financial challenges were in a sound financial circumstance prior to the storms, but now faced severe financial strain due to the pressure of damaged property, goods, and rising costs.

Visionwest was able to help many cash-challenged whānau by supplying food to offset their weekly grocery costs freeing up savings and other money to be spent on rent, mortgages, or other flood related debt.

Other common financial ramifications included:

- People, especially those with no experience of the social welfare system, dealt with the financial challenges brought by this crisis by exhausting their savings. One person spoken to was just a year or two away from retirement and had, after a few weeks during which they had replaced furniture and been paying rent while their home was repaired, spent a significant part of their retirement savings.
- Many people visiting our Pātaka Kai were whānau who had taken extra people, often extended family, into their homes. While this was something they were happy to do, it proved to be expensive in terms of food costs and increasing utility bills.

## **Observations relating to personal finance and financial support**

Following each of the two weather events, those affected were often in a state of shock. Of these people, many struggled to process information and make decisions that they would usually have handled quite easily. Actions such as negotiating rent issues with their landlord or phoning their insurance company became major challenges that were greatly helped by the support of a third person. This third-party help was provided by our Money Mentors team, our Community Connectors, and our Flood Relief Team.

*One lady is representative of an experience that was happening over and over. Already overwhelmed with the stress of escaping her flooded home, she was struggling to deal with the bureaucracy of her insurance company. She phoned several times and was asked for more information; she sent emails and received no reply; she would phone again and get a different person meaning she had to explain her circumstances once more; she would be put through to another person and be put on hold for long periods... this lady was at the point of emotional collapse and had decided just to give up trying to sort this matter out.*

*That's why it's great to have our Money Mentors service to fall back on. I could call one of our Financial Mentors and know that ladies like this one would receive same day financial support and advocacy just to give her that back up and tell her what her rights are because she was at a point where it was hard to even think. Tulsu Cullen – Visionwest Flood Relief Team Coordinator*

A further observation of those dealing with financial matters is that access to a number of the flood relief payments came to an end too soon. This was particularly so for people who chose to utilise their own savings before accessing or being aware of the available funding.

## Financial Support Response Statistics



9

**Whānau enrolled as Money Mentors clients**

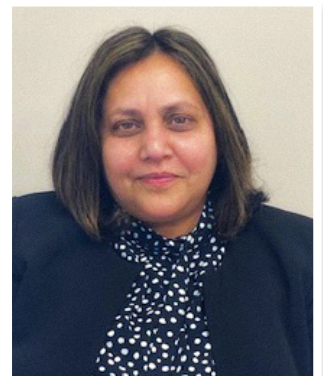
*This is the number of whānau enrolled as Money Mentors clients who will receive multiple sessions of financial mentoring. It does not include the many people who had issues relating to their personal finances, e.g., dealing with insurance companies etc., who were supported by our Community Connector team. This number is expected to increase over time.*

## Response to Mental Health Needs

Following the Christchurch earthquakes, the following phrase emerged, “We’ve rebuilt the city, but we haven’t rebuilt the people.” This phrase contains a caution that we would do well to take heed of – a caution that the counsellors at Visionwest and other mental health organisations have echoed – rebuilding the lives of people following a traumatic experience can take a long time and issues relating to the trauma experienced do not always surface immediately.

*People have lost everything. Others have gone through traumatic experiences. Others are witnessing their children struggling to sleep or living with fear, especially when it rains. For some, it will take a while. They will think, ‘I’m okay. I’ll be alright,’ but eventually it will get too much, and they will realise the need to talk to someone about it. Anthea Lobo – Counselling Practice Manager- Visionwest Wellbeing Centre*

*Trauma is like concussion. It accumulates. The first knock can be stuffed down and, for a lot of people ignored. The second one, maybe the same. But eventually it’s going to explode. Faye Pouesi – Mātanga Oranga Kaiārahi Lead Therapist*



Anthea Lobo

Visionwest’s immediate response to the mental health needs of those affected by the flooding was to earmark \$60,000 worth of counselling to flood relief. Called Care Packages (not to be confused with care packages of essential items provided by Pātaka Kai) this provided those in need of wellbeing support with up to ten sessions with a counsellor from either our Wellbeing Centre or our Mātanga Oranga Kaupapa Māori service.



Counsellors at Visionwest predicted that they wouldn't be inundated with counselling requests in the first few weeks, or perhaps even months, after the flooding – but the reality is, the numbers are already building up.

*I already knew when people have experienced that kind of trauma, they're not going to be ready to come in and talk about anything straightaway. They'll still be needing to land, ground and deal with the immediate needs around what's going on. Faye Pouesi – Mātanga Oranga Kaiārahi Lead Therapist*



Faye Pouesi

Visionwest's first major involvements in the area of mental health needs resulting from the flooding were in the far western part of West Auckland. A member of the Waimauku community (close to Muriwai) noted the number of emergency workers and volunteers who were struggling to cope. She contacted Faye Pouesi, our Mātanga Oranga Kaiārahi Lead Therapist, who agreed to hold an open meeting in Huapai. A number of key people from the community turned up to hear Faye present an overview of trauma and how it affects individuals.

The post-meeting feedback was overwhelmingly positive with people feeling like they could name their feelings and recognise the emotional impact of the weather events on their personal lives and the lives of those around them.

A short time after, a session was offered to parents and guardians of children who had experienced weather-related trauma. Once again, this was extremely valuable as parents were able to understand behaviours they had observed in their children which could have been influenced by the storms. Parents shared heart-rending stories about children disappearing at the first sign of rain. Even when parents called out to them, they refused or were physically unable to answer. These children, traumatised by the flooding events, responded by hiding. Some were found cowering in cupboards; some curled up and shaking in the corner of a room; one was found in a wardrobe where he had pulled all the clothes down on top of him in an effort to escape the noise of the rain.

Faye was able to provide parents with the tools to help calm their children at times like these but also noted that, as time passed, many children would benefit from extended times with a counsellor (or from their parents spending time with a counsellor to learn calming techniques).

Visionwest's second early involvement arose from a visit of our Flood Relief Coordinator to Muriwai and the surrounding area. Speaking with the principal of Waimauku School – the nearest primary school to Muriwai – she was told of the number of children who were showing signs of trauma and anxiety in their everyday activities.

In response, Visionwest sent a counsellor to the school one day a week to meet with children for one-on-one counselling sessions. This has been well received and is ongoing.

*Thank you for reaching out to us and offering counselling services for our tamariki and whānau after the devastating weather events. As a school we were able to put a number of things in place immediately to support whānau and staff but were unable to access counselling services to the scale that was needed. Initially we had 122 students and 6 staff displaced.*

*As time goes on, the demand for counselling is increasing with more families asking for this support. Some of our families have been able to return to their homes but we still have 80 students and some staff who cannot and have no idea how long this will continue for.*



*Eugene Destounis at Waimauku School*

*Eugene (Visionwest counsellor assigned to Waimauku School) is a real asset to your service ... to date, nine students have received counselling, taking part in 1-6 sessions. There is a waiting list of five families still waiting to see him. Letter from Waimauku School*

Our Wellbeing Centre Counselling Manager specifically visited four local schools we already have a relationship with and offered help for their students. These schools also talked of the adverse effect the flood events had had on their children. More than one teacher told of the change in countenance that would occur the moment clouds appeared in the sky, and it became a little dull;

*“The children would grow quiet and would have a look of fear in their eyes.”*

With the passing of time and proactive encouragement from other Visionwest support services, an increased number of whānau have contacted our counselling services to request sessions. Some are people who had horrific experiences during the flooding, such as being trapped inside a house as it slid downhill. Others are people who were driven to seek counselling support when they became uncertain about what to do as further rain provoked fear responses in their children. Still others, who had experienced no material loss, struggled emotionally as a result of the flooding and continual torrential rains that followed.

Wellbeing Centre counselling has prioritised flood-impacted clients and provided 133 sessions from February to May this year.

The trigger for emotional and mental health issues following a traumatic event can be complex and even unexpected. One family had been doing quite well financially before the storms hit, owning several rental properties. Unfortunately, several properties were destroyed by a mudslide, devastating years of work to accumulate these properties. For this particular family, it was culturally important to show their extended family that they were succeeding in life. The floods and cyclone robbed them of their source of rental income and they were left with nothing. Shame and financial hardship gripped their lives in the immediate aftermath, leading the family to depart New Zealand to start afresh in their land of origin.



*Landslip affected houses in West Auckland*

## Observations relating to mental health

Following a traumatic event, establishing physical and emotional safety is key. Connection with others often helps with this and allows practical needs and concerns to be voiced and support provided. As settling begins the emotional processing of what has happened occurs. Over time some may experience triggers that alert to the need for counselling support to assist with emotional processing.

This means, following a traumatic event, the need for connection is immediate but the need for formal counselling can build over time. Those with significant trauma may need some time to process what has happened. Alongside their emotional needs, many will also have practical concerns to take care of. As people distance themselves from the event and resettle, they can experience moments where a small experience can trigger the impact from the crisis, and it is in this moment that they recognise their need for support. This can also sometimes be the result of noticing behavioural traits in their young children that have changed since the storms.

The effects of trauma may take years to surface. As mentioned previously, Visionwest's Mātanga Oranga Kaiārahi Lead Therapist suggests that this can be likened to the way we often think about concussion. A person may suffer a traumatic episode and be able to deal with it by "stuffing" it down and getting on with life. Another trauma on top of that may also be dealt with, but eventually the ability to handle one traumatic episode on top of another becomes impossible.

*The first lot of referrals I got in were mostly wives saying their husbands were not coping. They'd say, "I don't know what to do. I don't know how to help him. His drinking has increased. He's a mess. I wake up at night and he's not in the bed."*

*One woman was woken by her husband standing at the front door screaming. He was sleepwalking and dreaming that he could feel the house falling down. He was at the door trying to hold it closed to stop the mud coming in and the wall falling down. and he was holding it down up. Just holding it there... Screaming.*

*When I meet a guy like that, my first task is to find out what's happened to him historically. Those actions reflect inner trauma so I'll track it. Most the work that I've done with those men, I've tracked right back to their childhoods. Faye Pouesi – Mātanga Oranga Kaiārahi Lead Therapist*

Of course, what this means is that trauma from events like the storm may not emerge immediately but can surface later and be triggered by very small events, or a secondary traumatic experience. Often mental health support in the aftermath of environmental disasters is time limited, and therefore, when comes to that point in time when they are ready to face into the loss, pain, and trauma caused by the initial event, people may have missed out on funding for the vital support they need.

For this reason, it is important that, following any trauma-inducing incident, provision or funding for counselling considers the long-term ramifications and takes in a long-term view of mental health recovery within the communities most significantly impacted.

## Mental Health Response Statistics

These statistics are from February to May 2023



**133**

Wellbeing Centre  
Counselling sessions.



**38**

Mātanga Oranga  
sessions



**7**

Group sessions –  
Mātanga Oranga



**5**

Schools  
visited

Our counselling centres expect to receive new referrals for some time as people become more aware of the need for support in this area.

# Fundraising *and Spending*

## PART THREE

# Fundraising and Spending

Within a day of the first flood event, Visionwest had launched a fundraising campaign through our website and began to reach out to various funding sources. As of 23 June 2023, a total of \$657,600 has been raised for our Flood Relief Fund.

Organisations, businesses, agencies, and individuals have been exceedingly generous with their donations to the Flood Relief Fund and Visionwest has processes in place to ensure that all flood funding received goes directly, and in a timely manner, to services supporting our flood-impacted community.

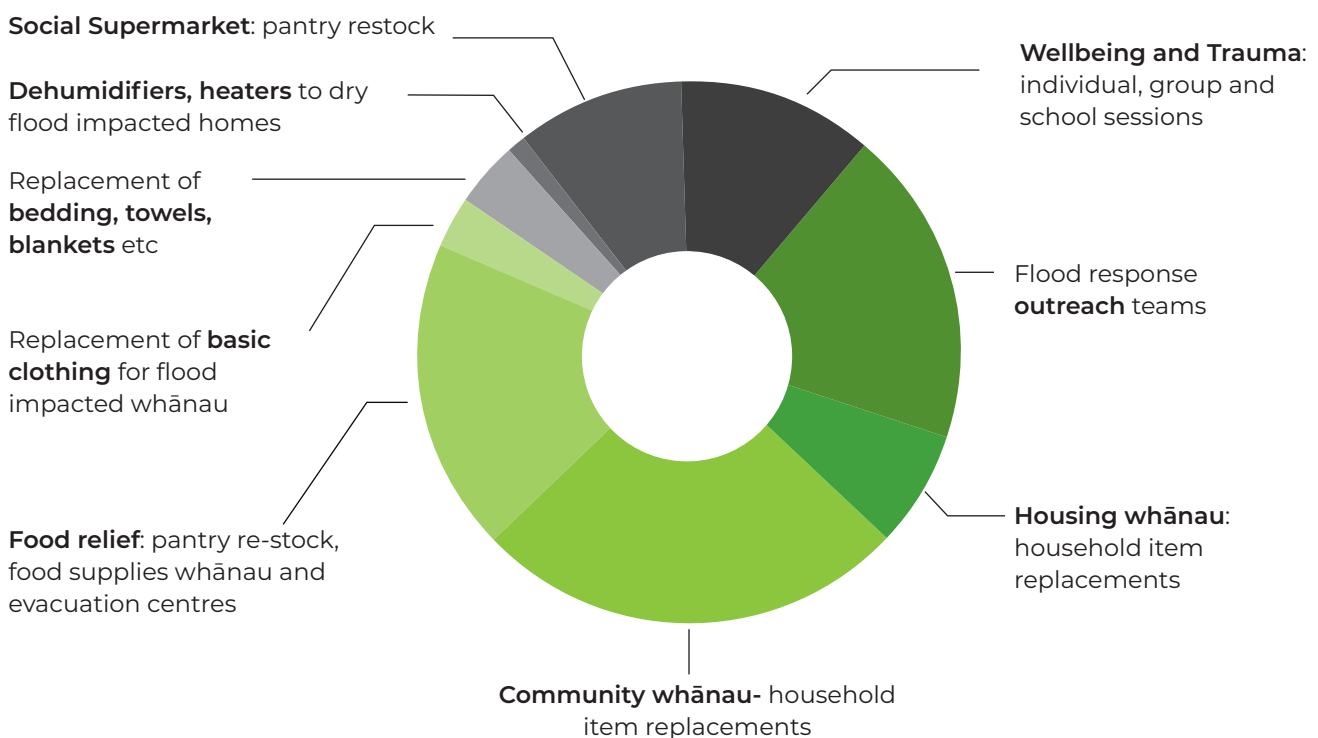
From the flood relief funding received so far, 92% has been redistributed to support flood-impacted whānau. The remaining 8% is being drawn down as needed as requests for support continue to surface.

### How Money Raised was Spent

Based on discussions had with whānau in the early stages of our flood response, Visionwest’s flood relief funding was split into various pools to ensure we could meet the needs of as many whānau as possible.

At regular intervals, we have asked for feedback and reviewed the demand for supports and scaled the funding to the areas most needed.

**At the time of writing, the flood response funding has been spent as follows:**



## Three Phases of Flood Relief Funds Spending

On reflection, Visionwest's spending showed three phases of response from a financial perspective.

### Phase 1: Emergency response.

Even before any flood response funding had been received, we provided \$123,032 worth of food, blankets and bedding, sanitary and toilet items, cleaning products, candles, SIM cards, gas canisters, and other essential items to individuals, other support organisations, and evacuation centres. We also provided emergency supplies to the Piha, Karekare and Muriwai communities. This figure is for tangible items only and does not include the cost of team members seconded to front-line flood response roles.

### Phase 2: Using flood response donations and funding

Utilising the flood response funding, Visionwest has assisted over a significant number of flood-impacted whānau. Each whānau helped involves hours of intensive support with tailored assistance to each individual within each whānau. While some require basic items such as food and clothing, others have a need for a wide range of household items which must be sourced, purchased, and delivered. Such items include beds and bedding, whiteware, lounge and dining furniture, heaters, etc. We supported 84 number of whānau with an average of \$2,616 worth of goods to help them through their flood recovery journey.

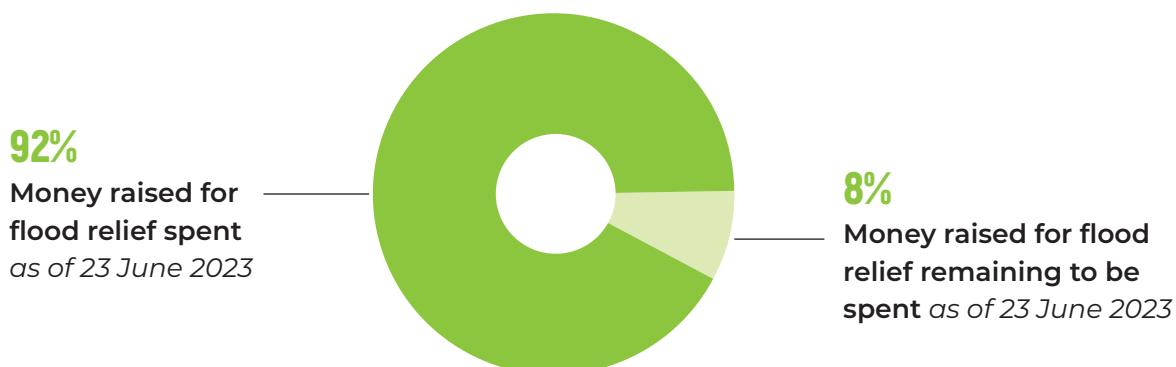


Added to this support is the ten MG cars provided to those in need of a vehicle, thanks to MG Motor Group and food vouchers, thanks to Foodstuffs.

Alongside these tangible items are the other support services provided by Visionwest. These include housing, financial mentoring, and counselling.

### Phase 3: Now

A few months on from the events, we are actively reviewing feedback and talking to whānau in need of further support, so we can allocate the remaining money to where it is needed most.





Flood Relief

*Support Statistics*



## PART FOUR

# Flood Relief Support Statistics

Unless otherwise stated, the following statistics represent the flood relief support provided by Visionwest up to Friday 23 June 2023.

### Overview



**3,553**

Whānau Enquiries answered



**3,152**

Whānau supported with food



**84**

Households helped with replacement items



**\$657,600**

Money raised for flood-affected whānau

### Housing



**2**

Visionwest leased houses totally destroyed



**27**

Visionwest leased houses extensively damaged



**296**

Whānau contacting Visionwest with accommodation needs

### Connection



**3553**

Whānau Enquiries answered



**164**

Whānau visited by visitation team

## Food Support



29%

Percentage of flood relief funds spent on food support



1,011

Whānau contacting Visionwest with kai as immediate need



7,381

Individuals receiving food support



67

Food vouchers distributed



56

Whānau visiting the Pop-Up Pantry

\$12,000

Food value provided to St Leonards CDC and Hub West

\$14,000

Food value provided to Piha and Karekare

## Replacement of Household Goods



84

Whānau helped with replacement household items



\$219,766.<sup>93</sup>

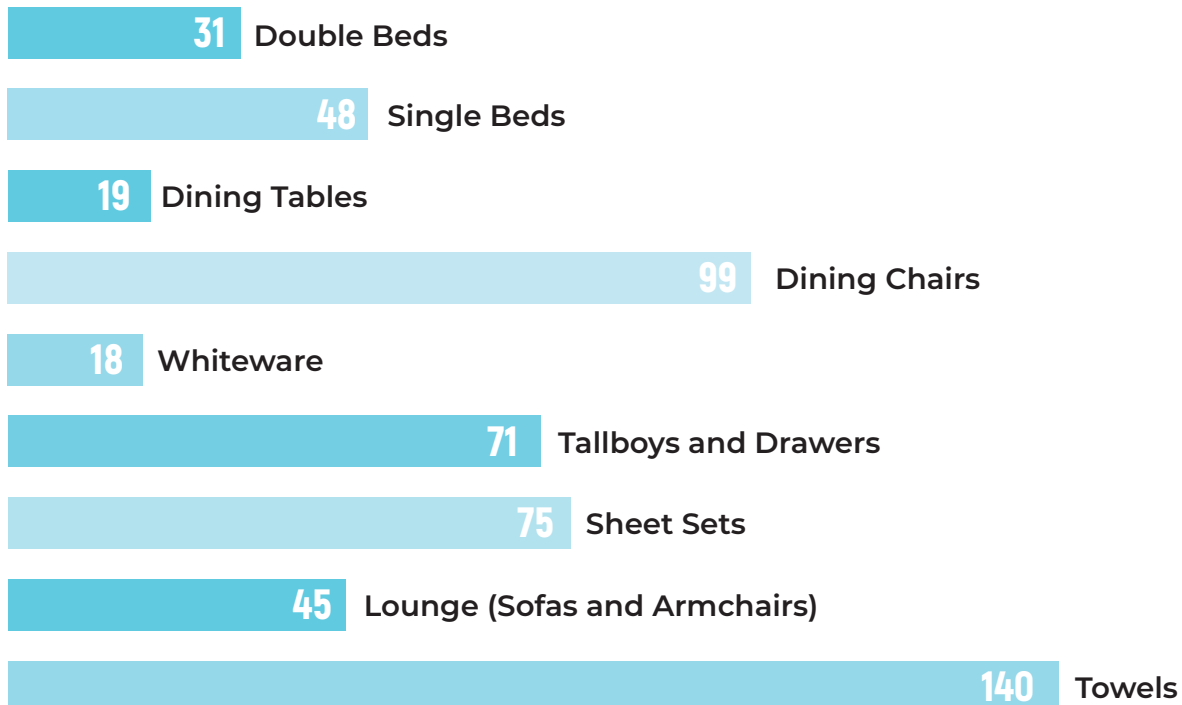
Value of items supplied to whānau



\$2,616

Average spend on each whānau

Most commonly requested items supplied to whānau:



## Financial Mentoring Support



9\*

Whānau enrolled as Money Mentors clients

*\*This is the number of whānau enrolled as Money Mentors clients who will receive multiple sessions of financial mentoring. It does not include the many people who had issues relating to their personal finances, e.g., dealing with insurance companies etc., that were responded to by our Community Connector teams.*

## Mental Health



133

Wellbeing Centre Counselling sessions.



38

Mātanga Oranga sessions



7

Group sessions – Mātanga Oranga



5

Schools visited

These statistics are from February to May 2023.

Our counselling centres expect to receive new referrals for some time as people become more aware of their need for personal support in this area.

92%

Money raised for flood relief spent as of 23 June 2023



8%

Money raised for flood relief remaining to be spent as of 23 June 2023

A photograph of a cluttered room, likely a storage area or a room in transition. The floor is covered with various items: several cardboard boxes of different sizes, some open and some closed. A large, crumpled brown paper bag sits in the center. A blue plastic laundry basket is filled with folded clothes, including a green top and a red and black patterned item. A black bag with a silver buckle is visible in the foreground. The lighting is dim, and the overall scene suggests a state of disarray or the aftermath of a move.

# Thanks and *Whānau Stories*

## PART FIVE

# Thanks to Our Supporters

It takes a community to help a community – Visionwest wishes to acknowledge those agencies, organisations and businesses who were so generous in their support of our flood relief efforts. This includes (in alphabetical order):

Auckland City Mission

Auckland Emergency  
Management AEM

Baptist Churches of New Zealand

Bunnings

Central Church

Civil Defence

Clare Foundation

Eastern Districts Country Music Club

Elsie Steele Trust

Fair Food

Fonterra

Foodstuffs North Island

Foundation North

Genesis Energy

Gull New Zealand Ltd

Home Foundation

Kaiārahi Trust

Little Kowhai Charitable Trust

MG Motor Group

Ministry of Social Development  
(MSD)

New Zealand Food Network

New Zealand Red Cross

Rank Group Limited

Simplicity Charitable Trust

SkyCity Entertainment Group

St James Anglican Church

Steadfast NZ Foundation

Tegel

The Gift Trust

Torpedo 7

Wall Fabrics

West Auckland Together

Wilberforce Foundation

Z Energy Ltd

*Thank you* also to the many individuals and businesses who contributed money, time, and goods and services – your generosity made a difference at a time when our community needed it most.

## Conclusion

A distinctive feature of Visionwest's response to the weather events that devastated parts of Tāmaki Makaurau is the speed with which we were able to react to the needs of those affected. The ability to mobilise so quickly lies in the simple reality that responding to the needs of people who are vulnerable or experiencing difficult times is what we do every day.

While it is true, we had to pivot some of our services to appropriate service delivery mechanisms, and the presence of a crisis meant there was a greater urgency to much of the work we were engaged in, our focus continued to be on walking alongside those who are facing tough times.

What differed from day-to-day service delivery was the total loss that so many had experienced and that, while many of those most seriously impacted were already struggling financially, a natural event like the flooding is not discriminatory when it comes to who it touches. This meant for many of those affected, the courage to ask for support and the process of accessing support agencies and organisations was completely new.

This report outlines, in detail, Visionwest's response to the support needs we encountered. In concluding this report, we need to acknowledge that one organisation cannot do everything. It was a privilege to work alongside so many other agencies, community groups and businesses who rose to the challenge of this crisis and responded with diligence and commitment.

*It does indeed take a community to help a community.*





Stories:

## Sophia's Flood Story

**For six years Sophia\* and her whānau, including Sophia's elderly mother, lived happily and without incident in the same Auckland rental property – the Auckland Anniversary weekend floods changed everything. Flood waters engulfed the bottom level of their two-storied home, including their bedrooms, damaging all household items, and rendering the downstairs uninhabitable.**

Sophia took her whānau to Hub West and spoke with the Auckland Emergency Management team. They were able to offer emergency housing in South Auckland, but only for two or three days. Sophia decided moving her whānau so far for such a short time would be too stressful for them all. Besides, her children were due to start back at school and the disruption would be too great; she was eager to get them back in a normal routine after the frightening experience they had all been through.

This left Sophia with only one option. She moved the family into the upstairs lounge of their flooded home. Tarpaulins and other materials were laid on the lower-level floors to help mask the overwhelming stench of damp rising and Sophia began to think about how to get their lives back on track.

Then the report came that a Cyclone Gabrielle was on its way.

Fearing another flood, Sophia contacted her landlady to arrange sandbags. When the landlady arrived, instead of sandbags, she had a yellow sticker and a 90-day notice to vacate the property.

Sophia and her children were devastated. Added to the incredible stress they were already facing having lost so much, they now had to find new accommodation.

Sophia met with a Visionwest Community Connector who was able to answer her immediate support needs and helped her work through the various options to find housing but, with so many others looking for housing, it was not going to be easy.

The whānau's story has a happy ending, however. Sophia found a five-bedroom home which is perfect for the family's needs. It's closer to her work and the children's schools, and has a better space for her mother to live in.

Visionwest was able to supply replacement furniture and bedding for Sophia and her family and Sophia has been to our Mātanga Oranga trauma counselling service for support.





Stories:

## *Rex's Flood Story*

**It's late evening on 27 January. It's been raining heavily for almost five hours and Rex's\* entire street is under water. It's to the roof lines of many houses. Cars are fully submerged. The power and volume of water is frightening.**

Rex and his children are relaxing at home when the floodwaters hit. In less than 20 minutes the water has risen to the top of the internal door frames. Being inside the house is frightening because the pressure of the water makes doors difficult to open and escape from but the whānau eventually make it out. Standing up the road a way and staring back at his flooded home, Rex is grateful they were able to get away from the flood waters and that his children were strong enough to swim to safety.

Two days after escaping, Rex returned to assess the damage and retrieve whatever he could, but there was nothing worth salvaging. He stayed in the wreckage of his home for just a short while before being forced to leave. The stench was toxic, and his skin reacted to the water and silt. Rubbish, sewage, and mud had swept through his and all the neighbouring

houses and properties. A day later Rex's home was red stickered.

Rex and his children made their way to emergency accommodation at Hub West (run by MPHS Community Trust with food, bedding and other practical and wellbeing support provided by Visionwest).

A week later, Rex was doing his very best to keep routine and get his children back to attending school. That wasn't easy because he first needed to find clothes and other essential items for his children. He was also very concerned for his children and still openly speaks about how distressing the experience was for all of them.

Finding replacement accommodation was not easy for Rex. He was offered emergency housing but turned it down because, having lived in emergency housing previously, he was aware that his stay there would be very short-lived before his whānau was displaced once again. In the meantime, Rex remained at Hub West because he felt safe and somewhat settled. Through it all, he tried to stay as positive as possible, but the underlying stress remains obvious.



Stories:

## Naia's Flood Story

**When the flooding hit, Naia\* had only minutes to escape. The water was close to benchtop level in her kitchen when she fled.**

Outside everything was floating. Her car was water-filled and undrivable. She waded through the floodwater and made it to dry ground. Someone gave her a ride to a Civil Defence Centre where she was provided with emergency housing but that was only for a week. She then went to a community hub. That's where she met Debbie, Kaiarāhi Team Leader, Visionwest Community Connectors.

Debbie helped Naia register for emergency housing but, even if a place is found for her, there's no guarantee of how long it will be available. Naia has car insurance but, when contact was made with the insurance company, they gave no indication of when an assessor could view the car or when a payout would happen.

In the meantime, Naia returned to the house. All the internal floors had been lifted by the flooding, all power outlets were underwater, and all her belongings damaged beyond repair. The situation left Naia anxious and in shock at the realisation that her life had changed so quickly. In one evening, she lost her accommodation, all her possessions including her car, and was left with no idea about when her life would return to normal. What she did have was Visionwest helping and supporting her as she navigated the relief system and began to piece her life back together.

A couple of months on, Naia is in a far better place both physically and within herself. She and her cat are settled in new accommodation that is safe and warm and most her practical needs have been met.



Stories of people who received a MG loan vehicle:

## *Nick and Corinne's Story*

**Nick and Corinne have two children – a one-year old and a three-year old. They were all asleep when a mudslide hit and their Karekare house collapsed around them. Nick and Corinne were able to climb out of the wreckage and into silent darkness where their initial reaction was one of panic. They feared the worst for their children. Then they heard crying. They were able to locate their children and pull them from the debris.**

The storm continued to rage around them as the family walked in pitch black to find a house and ask for help. Injured, bleeding, and in need of medical attention, they were trapped in Karekare for four days. During this time, they stayed with a nearby family who they had previously never met. Two days after the house's collapse, a member of the neighbouring family went to Nick and Corinne's in an attempt to find Wolf, their beloved pet dog. He was found and the family was reunited.

After four days, having lost everything and still requiring medical attention, the family was helicoptered out of Karekare. They went to stay with a family member in Glenfield but the situation was far from ideal and retraumatizing for them. What's more, Nick and Corinne were both due to return to their jobs in Henderson with the children returning to day-care in Hobsonville. They found themselves in a situation where they had no savings and a mortgage, rates, and the usual household bills to pay. Paying for a rental property on top of their other expenses was impossible. They had borrowed a car, but only for the short term.

Like many of those who experienced the worst of the catastrophic Auckland weather events, the family's mental health has suffered. The children are not sleeping; the eldest is traumatised and hides under the bed. Nick admits to waking constantly throughout the night with nightmares as he relives the event that almost took their lives. Exhaustion is taking a toll.

Nick and Corinne recently returned to the site of their destroyed house with an insurance assessor and were emotionally overwhelmed when confronted by the devastation and what little is left of their home.

There came a time when Nick and Corinne made a drastic but necessary decision. They chose to leave the place they were staying due to increasing trauma for their family. Borrowing a tiny old car, they packed all they had into it and drove off with nowhere to go, knowing they may be sleeping in the car if no emergency housing could be found.

Amazingly, a local West Auckland resident who they had never met heard of their situation and offered them a safe place to stay while they recovered and got back on their feet. It is only one bedroom and not really large enough for their family, but it is safe, free, and dry; and it is a place where the family can finally start healing.

The use of a vehicle supplied through Visionwest by MG Motor Group means Nick and Corinne have been able to return to work, their children have been able to go to day care, and they have been able to start to heal together as a family through attending trauma counselling appointments at Visionwest.

# Debra's Story

**Debra was returning home from visiting her elderly and unwell mother when she was caught in the flood. The deluge caused her car brakes to fail but she managed to make it home using only the car's handbrake. Later examination by a mechanic revealed that water damage to the electronics and mechanics meant the car was irreparable and written-off. That car was her only transport.**

Debra lives Titirangi. The survivor of a brain tumour – after which she had to learn to walk again – Debra has ongoing medical needs. Now, without transport and living an hour's walk from the closest shops, she was forced to cancel her medical appointments; Ubers and taxis would not come out to her address because of road damage caused by the flooding.

Debra has a couple of important family responsibilities. Her son has fulltime custody of his two young children and Debra supports him by often looking after her grandsons. She is also the main support for her mother who has just returned home from a stint in hospital. While hospitalised, Debra's mother had a severe reaction to her medication and had to be resuscitated. Nearly losing her mother and now not being able to visit her has been incredibly stressful for Debra. This stress is heightened by the difficulty of contact – there is no cell phone reception in her area.

During the flood and cyclone, Debra was without power and water. Fortunately, a neighbour helped out by providing water and charging her phone using solar power. The house Debra rents is noncompliant and has major cracks causing leaks, however, the landlord who lives beside her is not interested in fixing it. He has talked about wanting to bulldoze the property, but Debra desperately

wants to stay because she fears finding a new home in the current housing crisis would prove impossible. The landlord increased her rent, which she complied with out of fear of becoming one of the increasing number of homeless in Auckland. She is worried about winter coming and having a safe dry home.

The week she found out she had a brain tumour, Debra's husband of 11 years left her. Since then, she has experienced major anxiety and is still left with many medical issues. On top of all this, she was a witness to a hit and run which killed a young man close to the Glen Eden shops and knew the elderly man who was punched by a woman in Glen Eden and later died. She lost her father to Covid in Australia and was unable to attend his funeral because her medical condition prevented her from flying. Her one main family support, a brother, is leaving later this year to live in China, his wife's homeland.

Her home in the bush has been a sanctuary in this time as the noise and busyness of crowded suburbs increases her anxiety and stress.

Debra's car was insured but she has been told that it may be weeks away from settlement because of the current volume of cars being assessed. She will be tasked with finding a car, something that she would find difficult at the best of times. Having no transport and after all she has endured makes it doubly tough.

Visionwest, thanks to the generosity of MG Motor Group, were able to give Debra six-months free use of a vehicle. This means she's been able to return her life to at least partial normality. She's also been referred to counselling with Visionwest's Wellbeing Centre. Without transport that would be almost impossible to get to. With transport, she will be able to attend counselling and medical appointments and feel in touch with the outside world again.

# Thank you to Whānau.

We are grateful to whānau for sharing their stories. Stories within this report are used with permission. In some cases, whānau asked that their names be changed.



As part of our ongoing support for whānau who have children still feeling the emotional affects of the flooding, Visionwest has organised a number of family events aimed at creating some normalcy and family fun. These have included indoor climbing, ten pin bowling and farm visits.

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**Read the latest Visionwest impact reports:**

[visionwest.org.nz/impact-reports](https://visionwest.org.nz/impact-reports)

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