

# *Tackling the Invisible Fallout of Disasters: A British Columbia Psychosocial Perspective*



## ***Heleen Sandvik***

Provincial Lead,  
Disaster Psychosocial (DPS) Program  
Provincial Health Services



**Provincial Health  
Services Authority**  
Province-wide solutions.  
Better health.

May 16, 2012  
Tacoma, Washington, PNWBHA

# Topics today...

1. What is the Disaster Psychosocial (DPS) Program?
2. Why activate psychosocial supports?
3. Some examples of BC psychosocial responses
4. Questions?

# The Provincial Disaster Psychosocial (DPS) Program

## Who are we?

Funded by Min. Health & administered by Provincial Health Services (PHSA)

- Provincial Lead (staff)
- DPS Committee — reps. (volunteers) BCPA, BCASW, BCACC, PVS, CASC, Red Cross, Salvation Army
- DPS Council — MOH, MCFD, Red Cross, EMBC, JIBC
- DPS Volunteer Network (600 +) — clinical counselors, social workers, psychologists, police victim services, spiritual care

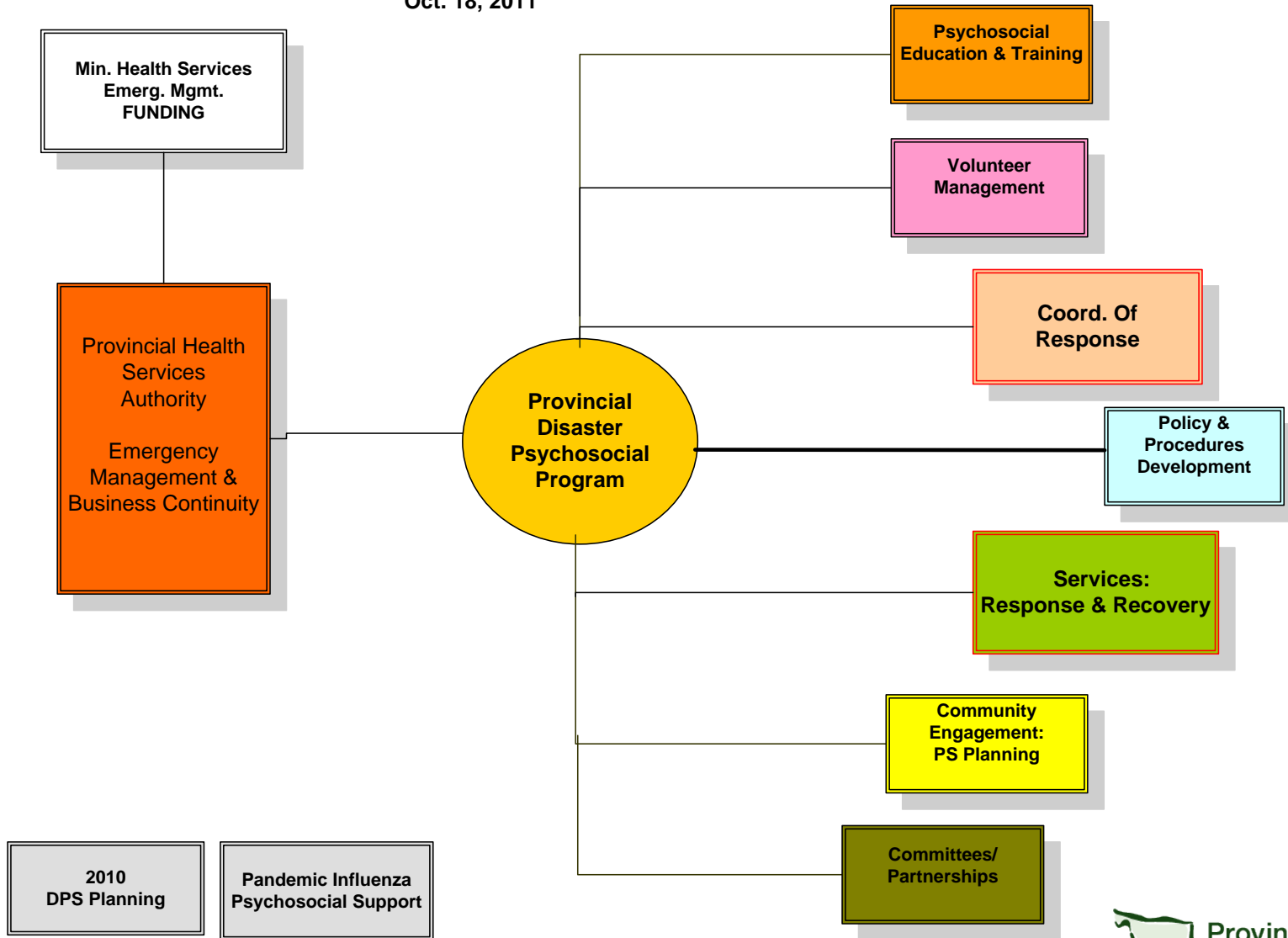
# DPS Program MISSION

## The integration of psychosocial support...

- across all emergency management systems
- for both workers and the public
- during response & recovery

how is that being achieved?

PHSA, Disaster Psychosocial Program Overview  
Oct. 18, 2011



# What are the B.C. Disaster Psychosocial (DPS) Services?

## Leadership

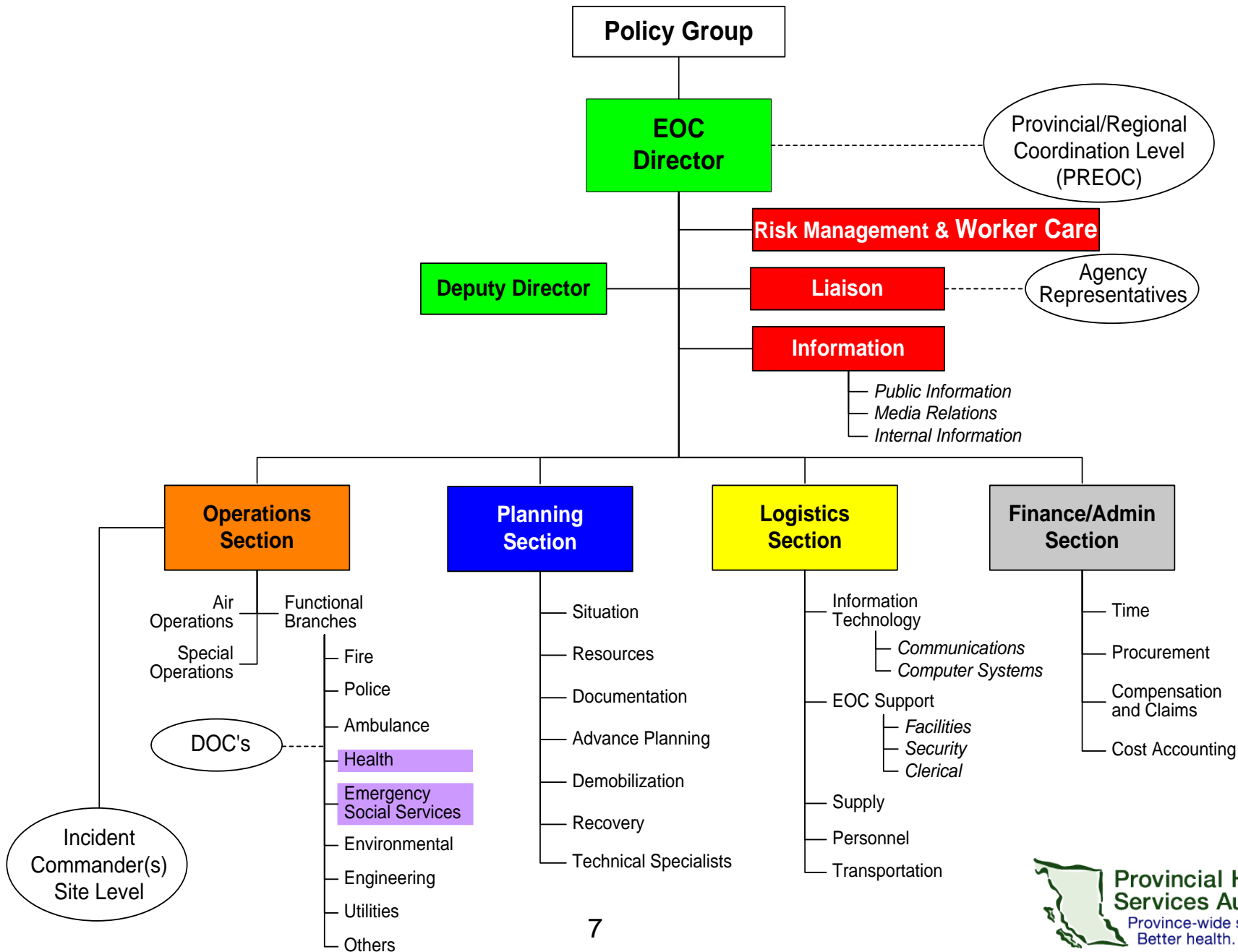
- Collaboration
- Community assessment
- Management & coordination if needed

## Supports:

- ***Worker Care***
- Psychological First Aid
  - Assessment
  - One-to-one support
  - Crisis counseling

## Supports cont'd

- Referrals
- Psycho-education sessions
- Development & distribution of materials
- Consultation



# Why activate psychosocial support services?

1. **Worker care:** *'who gets the oxygen first'*? The response depends on leaders and workers, its important to be taken care of
2. **Public: Supporting people's coping skills** = helping people to maintain or return to functioning; which then leads to...
3. **Increased independence** and less dependence on the response and recovery systems, benefits everyone!

**...delegate PS responsibilities to an appropriate person**



**An example of a psychosocial response  
in B.C. – large or small event, it still  
matters**



# Prince George Ice Jam Flood

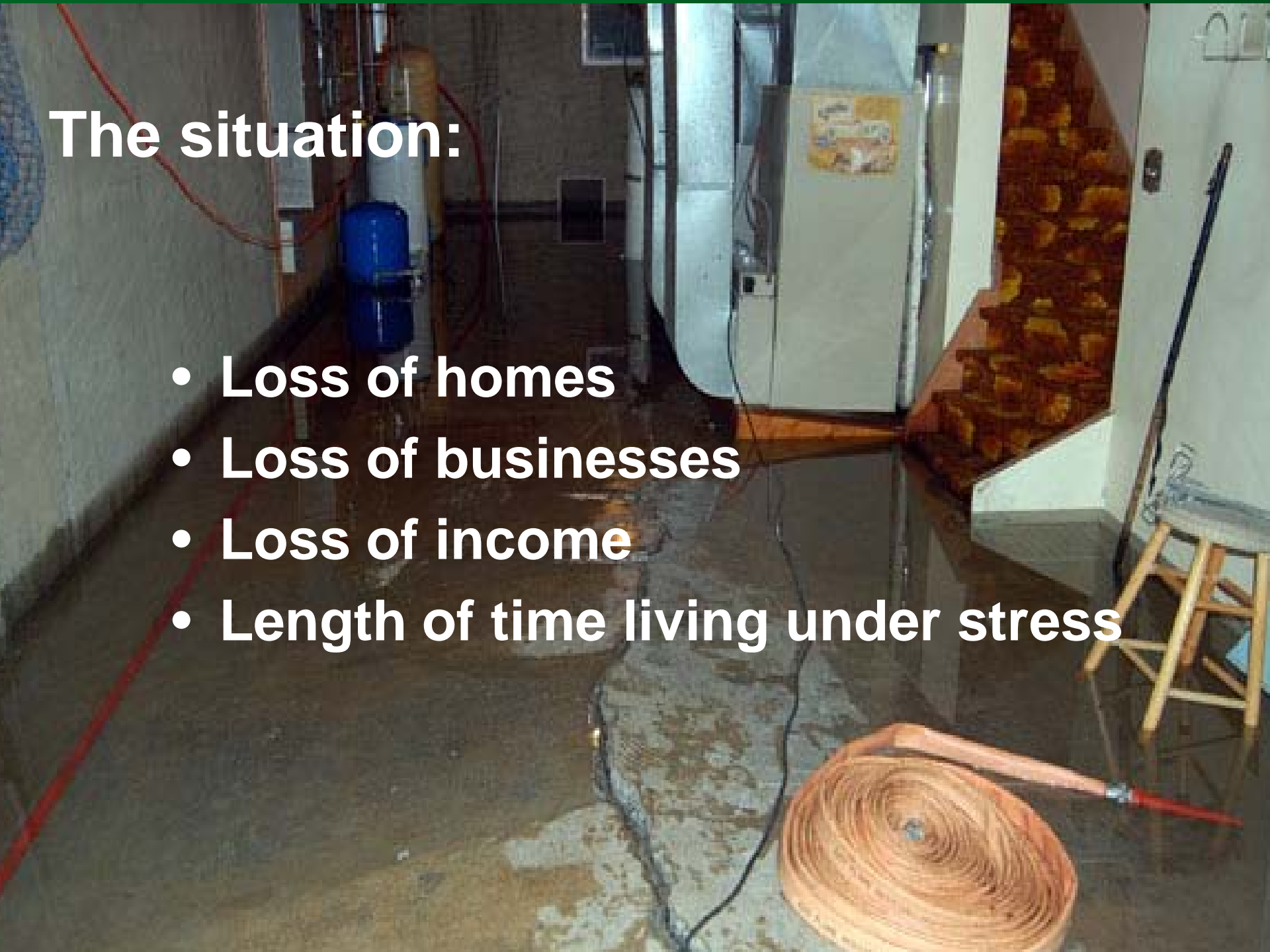
## Dec. 2007- Feb. 2008



- **Central North of BC**
- **Dec. 2007 – 5 km long**
- **Feb. 2008 – 33 km long**
- **24 homes evacuated =**
- **60 people**
- **47 homes on evacuation alert**
- **47 businesses impacted**
- **400 people ‘industrially’ impacted**

# The situation:

- Loss of homes
- Loss of businesses
- Loss of income
- Length of time living under stress





**They'll tell you...**

**Quote:**

**“The stress has been escalating  
as the ice escalates.”**

# How they said they felt

- No sense of control
- High stress levels
- Fatigue & exhaustion
- Financial stress
- Hitting the wall
- High frustration level
- Low tolerance
- Normal stress difficult to manage
- Uncertainty re: the future
- Not knowing how to cope



## Physical Reactions:

↑ BP, pulse & respirations  
Fatigue  
nausea, upset, stomach, diarrhea  
sweating, chills  
tension in shoulders, neck, back  
restlessness



## Cognitive Reactions

Difficulty concentrating  
Difficulty making decisions  
Memory loss  
Confusion  
Excessive rumination

## Emotional Reactions:

strong identification with victims  
anger, blaming  
sadness, grief, depression,  
moodiness  
apathy & feelings of inadequacy,  
vulnerability, suicidal thoughts

## Behavioural Reactions:

withdrawal from family & friends  
↑ alcohol & drug use  
hyperactivity, constant talking  
periods of crying  
sleep pattern changes

# Services Provided in Prince George in 2008

## Agency

- Collaboration with local PS agencies
- PS assessment of community (affected people and workers) needs and capacity

## Community

- One on one sessions
- Supportive presence at Community Information Forums
- Neighbour 2 Neighbour support group
- Reference shelf at the local library
- Follow up calls to individuals
- Potluck organized by the community members

## Worker Care

- Prince George Worker care plan developed





**What about the WORKERS?**

**And the LEADERS ?**



# Worker stress reactions during disaster response

- Sleep disruption
- Over or under-eating
- Fatigue
- Avoidance of others
- Little patience
- Reluctance to rest
- Reluctant to leave after long working hours
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Confusion
- Easily startled, anxious, depressed
- Anger, frustration
- Crying, easily moved
- Drinking more alcohol or taking more prescription drugs

*Other ideas?*

# What can Worker Care look like?



# A few tips to get started:

- Assess possible effects on people due to length of time working, living conditions, environmental
- Implement the policy on maximum work hours
- Access to technology for communication with loved ones
- Diversions such as; magazines, treadmill, outdoor walks, etc
- Psychosocial support people during and after shifts
  - **\*\*Establish a buddy system\*\***



**Prince George today ~ Lakeland  
Mill explosion**

# Psychosocial supports for Prince George 2012

- **DPS Program activated by Northern Health Authority**, for the Prince George community members effected by the Lakeland Mill explosion
- **Provincial Lead formed a Prince George PS working group:**
- **Community Support meeting May 1<sup>st</sup>. Arranged by:**
  - City of Prince George
  - Northern Health Authority
  - Canadian Red Cross
  - Provincial Health (PHSA) DPS Prog.
  - Police Victim Services

**We're also resilient and creative**



# Helpful Websites

- <http://www.getprepared.gc.ca/index-eng.aspx> - family Emergency Preparedness planning
- Introduction to Emergency Social Services (ESS):  
<http://www.jibc.ca/course/ess100>
- Introduction to Disaster Psychosocial Services:  
<http://www.jibc.ca/course/hem132>
- Disaster Psychosocial Awareness for Leaders  
<http://www.jibc.ca/course/hem133>
- (DEEP) Center for Disaster & Extreme Emergency Preparedness, Miami Univ., Miller School of Medicine  
<http://www.deep.med.miami.edu>

**Any questions?**



**Thank you!**