Feature story

Rebuilding Townsville with commitment, compassion and strength

HPW staff responded with dedication of the highest order to help Townsville residents recover from devastating monsoonal floods in late January and early February 2019. The region saw a staggering 1200mm of rainfall in just seven days, the equivalent of Townsville’s average annual rainfall. The scale of the disaster required a swift and coordinated response between government agencies and support organisations, with HPW’s focus on assessing the damage to assets and sourcing alternative accommodation for residents most in need.

Once residents were evacuated, Housing teams worked around the clock to support more than 1,800 displaced people. The team’s dedication ensured that every impacted resident had a place to stay while damage was assessed, and repairs undertaken.

Housing staff were located in Community Recovery Hubs and conducted outreach work to support people into emergency accommodation and then on to medium and longer-term housing. This work was complemented by the establishment of the Rental Recovery Hub, a partnership between the department, Real Estate Institute Queensland, Tenants Queensland and Residential Tenancies Authority, which supported private tenants, landlords and real estate agents.

Public housing tenants were also well supported with people assisted into emergency accommodation while their properties were repaired and made safe for their return.

Building and Asset Services (BAS) staff coordinated repairs to 775 state government assets, including social housing properties, with getting schools back open one of the team’s first priorities.

Many Townsville sporting clubs were also impacted, with floodwater causing extensive damage to pitches and sporting equipment. Sport and Recreation worked with clubs to repair facilities and reopen them to the public, helping restore a sense of normality for residents.

For many people impacted by the disaster, the Smart Service Queensland (SSQ) team was their first point of contact with the department. The SSQ team responded to more than 70,000 calls with information about government support services, while Queensland Shared Services worked quickly behind the scenes to ensure prompt payment of over $30 million in community recovery funds to more than 67,000 people.

Throughout the recovery effort, communication was instrumental in keeping residents updated about where to go for help and support. A coordinated campaign saw print advertising, community events, signage, flyers, media, social media, web and video used to inform and connect people with support services. Social media was particularly powerful, with messages reaching over 375,000 people across Facebook and Twitter.

HPW staff played a vital role in leading the housing recovery response and restoring government infrastructure. Other staff contributed as part of the Community Recovery Ready Reserve. Housing recovery staff provided a frontline response, working with compassion, talking to vulnerable people, assessing their needs and helping them access the right support.

The department is proud of its role in the recovery effort in Townsville and the many messages of thanks from residents are testament to the agency’s unwavering commitment. The Townsville flood response is a standout example of our strength in working together and collaborating across government and industry to deliver for Queenslanders.
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