

Creative resilience in Wood Buffalo: How the arts and culture can be a major contributor to local recovery and rebuilding

Key findings from a research project for Arts Council Wood Buffalo
by Hill Strategies Research Inc.



August 31, 2016

Research shows that the arts and culture can play an important role in community resilience and togetherness following a disaster. Here's how.

- Arts and culture activities **help bring the community together**, encourage a sense of community, enhance local pride, and help with closure after a traumatic situation.
- **Art strengthens the community's ability to respond in every way.** It brings us together, connects us; it's a critical piece that would be missing otherwise in how we are thinking about rebuilding.
- Arts and culture initiatives are some of the primary ways in which citizens are able to **participate in the creation of a new local identity.** As such, arts and culture initiatives **should be included in official post-disaster recovery processes.**
- After a disaster, the arts can **help build new connections and new communities, while also helping to reconnect existing communities.**
- Given that **artists have much to offer in post-disaster situations**, efforts should be made to **engage the arts community in local rebuilding efforts.** It is also important to ensure that artists and cultural workers successfully return to Wood Buffalo.
- **Cultural work** that is rooted in community and social networks **can advance a just and creative recovery and a truly resilient city.**
- A custom survey shows that **Wood Buffalo residents have favourable perceptions of artists and do support the arts.** Wood Buffalo residents have a strong recognition of the importance of the arts for quality of life.
- **Art can empower disaster survivors to take control of their thoughts, their feelings, and their narratives, and thus to begin the long process of recovery.**

- Children might be one of the most under-served populations among disaster survivors. **Creative activities can help children express their feelings, increase their resilience, and heal.**
- **Small-scale and participatory arts and culture activities** (the kinds of activities that are most common in Wood Buffalo) **can have an important impact on community wellbeing.**
- **Local arts councils can provide valuable post-disaster assistance:**
 - Providing on-the-ground assistance to artists and cultural workers in order to ensure their return and effectiveness.
 - Helping to get small cultural organizations back on their feet.
 - Establishing a cultural working party to coordinate efforts regarding support programs and to ensure that arts and culture remain on the agenda as the community enters a rebuilding phase.
- **Challenges in longer-term recovery efforts** include keeping artists activated, ongoing infrastructure needs, maintenance of neighbourhood networks, remaining on the agenda of recovery officials, and financial support for creative efforts.