Wanganui’s Enhanced Task Force Green
Opportunities For Those Seeking Work

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This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Su Olsson (1942–2005), friend, colleague, and objective leader in the Literacy and Employment Programme.
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Introduction

When the Adult Literacy and Employment project was in its initial stages, the devastating February 2004 floods hit the Wanganui region affecting large numbers of farmers and people in the surrounding towns and the city itself. The Literacy and Employment Project team members were meeting community representatives concerned about the problems of low adult literacy in the Wanganui area at the time. A number of these were also involved in flood recovery activities and reconstruction programmes. In talking with these people the team soon became aware that there had been a positive side to the destructive storm. We heard about communities pulling together, but we also heard about Enhanced Task Force Green workers helping clean up and repair the damage.

This scheme was attracting a large number of people. It was offering meaningful if heavy and often dirty work. For participants with low literacy who took part there were not the barriers they usually faced to getting a job. Further, those on the Enhanced Task Force Green scheme were receiving training. Those responsible for the programme reported an increased confidence and sense of purpose among those who took part.

This case study aims to capture some of the story of Wanganui’s Enhanced Task Force Green programme; its benefits and drawbacks, and the lessons to be drawn from it. It is based on in-depth interviews with five participants in the programme and a stakeholders’ focus group of members from the Wanganui District Council, Work and Income (Wanganui), and a local training provider. This information has been supplemented by input from other community members and community agencies, including the Literacy and Employment community partners/subcontractors themselves.

Background: The Storm and the Responses

The damage

The storms that lashed the lower North Island from 14 to 28 February 2004 were the worst in several decades. In some areas, they caused the most devastating floods in a
hundred years, leaving many families homeless, and farms and roads severely damaged by flooding and landslides.

While the weather systems of 14 to 16 February caused the most widespread damage, they were not the only events to cause concern at the time. In total, forty seven severe weather warnings were issued in February 2004, many covering a large part of the country.

On 16 February 2004, much of the western lower North Island was devastated. Small communities were inundated by flood waters and, because of the timing of the storm, the farming community lost not only livestock, but most of the crops that would have been income or fodder for livestock during the colder months. Hill country farmers lost large amounts of farmland in massive slips. Some forests were substantially damaged. Power failures, due to wind and water damage, completely disrupted both family and business life. Loss of telephone links created communication problems. Remaining telephone systems were overwhelmed. Many families lost all of their possessions and others lost their livelihood as well. That there was no loss of life was considered a miracle and a testimony to the competence and courage of some capable and fast thinking people.

The Wanganui River, although very high, did not cause any real damage. Wanganui City damage was mainly from wind rather than water. The Rangitikei, Manawatu, and Waitotara areas were badly affected. Serious flood damage also occurred in Whangaehu-Fordell, Turakina, Fielding, Opiki/Shannon, and Moutoa.

An article in the New Zealand Herald dated Tuesday 24 May 2004, stated: “The floods and associated high winds have caused damage estimated at more than $100 million”, and “More than a week after the initial storms, up to 1000 people remain homeless, others are still without power and telephones, and several roads remain closed”. After that, the true costs, well in excess of the first estimate, were calculated. By the end of February the damage bill was estimated to be close to $300 million (roads $65 million; farms $159–189 million; private claims about $100 million) (The Dominion Post, 2004, cited in Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences Limited, 2004, p. 3). The type of damage encountered included:

- Stock losses through drowning
- Halts to milking and/or a halt to milk pickups by Fonterra, due to factory and/or road closure
- Crop losses, directly as a result of flooding on crops or the inability to process crops
- Loss of pasture off slipped hill country
- Damage to plants and equipment, especially irrigation and water supply equipment
• Damage to farm buildings including homesteads, some of which were beyond repair
• Silting and flood damage to pastures, fencing, water supplies, access tracks, culverts, and farm bridges
• Temporary loss of grazing due to severe silting of land
• Permanent loss of grazing to newly formed riverbeds
• Medium-term loss of production, due to damage to pastures and silage reserves and delays in getting pastures re-established (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2004a).

The Ministry’s report noted that unlike other adverse events, such as a drought or hailstorm, this event resulted in significant on-farm and off-farm infrastructure damage. In addition, community infrastructure damage had on-farm effects, for example, damage to roads preventing access to farms, and damage to community stock water supply schemes. Significant damage to roading, communications, power supply systems, and flood protection structures required immediate funding and labour to restore an infrastructure capable of supporting farming operations.

At 8 June 2004, the cumulative totals of domestic displacement were (Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, 2004a):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals out of their homes</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family units out of their homes</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses uninhabitable</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houses destroyed/condemned</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the challenge to the communities affected by the flood, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management Report, ‘Review of the February 2004 flood event’ (2004b) notes that the flood “stretch[ed] the response and recovery capabilities of the local authority and emergency management agencies involved” (p. 73).
One Government response: Enhanced Task Force Green

On 17 March, 2004, the Government announced a ‘package’ for farmers, growers, and foresters to assist in recovery from the storm. This package was separate from the usual funds provided to Work and Income, Civil Defence, Emergency Management, and voluntary agencies. It was known as the Agriculture Recovery Programme and covered the two key areas of essential infrastructure and crop re-establishment (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2004b).

This package created the catalyst for the Enhanced Task Force Green programme (ETFG), administered by Work and Income to assist those affected by floods in the Wanganui and South Taranaki areas.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2004c) stated on its website:

Prime Minister Helen Clark, Agricultural Minister Jim Sutton and Civil Defence Minister George Hawkins today announced details of a purpose-designed package for those affected by the February floods.

These measures cover response activities of the emergency services, immediate welfare needs for people affected, labour through Task Force Green to help with the clean-up, support and advisory services, repairing critical infrastructure such as roads and bridges, flexibility to the Income Tax Act, and matching of donations to flood relief appeals.

Further, the then Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Hon. Jim Sutton, announced the provision of ‘industry specific support’ (for all agricultural, horticultural, and forestry industries) that was to be provided through several initiatives including Work and Income and Enhanced Task Force Green. ETFG assistance would be accessed through nine MAF-appointed Agricultural Recovery Facilitators, Rural Coordinators, and a Forestry Recovery Facilitator (New Zealand Government, 2004).

Why ‘Enhanced’ Task Force Green?

Prior to the establishment of ‘Enhanced’ Task Force Green, some council workers who worked on community projects were known as members of Task Force Green. The ‘enhanced’ aspect of the task force was brought about by the extra funding for wages, training, and equipment provided over and above that of a normal ‘task force’. The following quote from New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) on Thursday, 3 August, 2006 gives further explanation – and given that this document is being written in 2006, shows that the ‘enhanced’ aspect has continued:
R DOUG WOOLERTON: How is the eligibility for Enhanced Taskforce
Green assistance assessed?
Hon DAVID BENSON-POPE: Enhanced Taskforce Green does not have any
stand-down requirement, and because of the extra capacity, including the
administrative capacity, we do have the opportunity to get people on to those
farms immediately. That is what is happening. (Item 5, Task Force Green –
Enhanced Assistance to Farmers).

More colloquially, a Council stakeholder put it this way:

And there were boot allowances, tooling allowances - all sorts of incentives to
get us as a Council to take on people. The enhancement was giving these ex-
tra elements to make our life as an employer of people much easier than it
normally is.

Aims of the ETFG package

Key words in the Government announcements were, ‘clean-up’, ‘support,’ ‘repairing,’
and ‘assisting’. Labour and equipment were vital for the clean-up and recovery of
farm businesses, notably debris removal, fence clearing and re-erection, drain and
culvert clearing, repairs to stock water systems, repairs to tracks and bridges, and
other general on-farm infrastructure. Speaking on the issue of labour, on 18 Febru-
ary, 2004, Hansard records that Agricultural Minister, Jim Sutton reported on “the
activation of an Enhanced Task Force Green scheme to provide clean-up support
where needed” (Item 9, Civil Defence – Defence Resources, Manawatu/Rangitikei).

Work and Income were aware of people who could be available and were also aware
of the training that might be required for them to meet the clean-up challenges the
storm had created. In ‘Meeting Skill Needs: A Work and Income Response: Quarter Ended
June 2004’, the Ministry of Social Development (2004) reported that another aim of the
ETFG project was to provide training:

As a result of the recent flooding disaster that affected southern areas of the
Taranaki, Wanganui and Rangitikei communities, a large number of job
seekers found work through Enhanced Task Force Green initiatives. Work
and Income has contracted with [an adult literacy and education provider] to
provide an array of farm contracting skills including fencing, [and] chainsaw
safety for 70 participants. Work and Income has also contracted for 50 driv-
ing licence places by 30 September 2004, again to capitalise on the employ-
ment experience gained by the Task Force Green workers and to cater for the
additional skills required if they are now to obtain sustainable employment
(para. 2).
Implementation of Enhanced Task Force Green

Work and Income (2004) announced the package via several sources including their website, stating:

Approval has been given for Enhanced Task Force Green (ETFG) in all areas affected by the severe flood damage or adverse weather during February 2004.

Local Councils, Federated Farmers and individual employers may now engage with Work and Income to make appropriate arrangements for ETFG workers and supervisors to undertake clean up projects.

It is not necessary for a state of emergency to have been declared by Civil Defence in your area to qualify for Enhanced Task Force Green assistance. Any projects related to the clean up of the flooding or weather damage will qualify.

To build ETFG, Work and Income (Wanganui) approached local people they knew were looking for employment. The news got out, and others offered their services. Gathering at depots, they were organised into work units with team leaders. From these depots, small teams went out to farms, to small communities such as Waitotara, and to Wanganui City.

Sometimes under the supervision of either a team leader, Wanganui training agencies, or a farmer, those employed on ETFG were given training options for a car driving licence, a Heavy Truck and Forklift licence, and NZQA standards in Fencing, ATV’s, Health and Safety in the workplace, First Aid, and Chainsaw Maintenance. To those with some experience already, additional training was offered where needed.

With good leadership and a sense of contributing to the wellbeing of the community, most teams worked cooperatively and effectively. However some teams dissolved due to team members without any real commitment to their workmates or the task.

What was accomplished by ETFG was appreciated by the communities they served. Some participants in the programme thought the project finished too soon when they felt they could have done more. In some cases, the availability of ETFG gangs was extended.

For many participants, their work was an act of service among their own communities – places where they were already known. By and large, participants and the stakeholders reported that the experience turned out to be a positive exercise in community relations where ethnic and socio-economic groups, that normally had nothing to do with each other, came to cooperate with and respect one another.
The implementation of ETFG is a positive example of a benefit to a community when Government can provide the structures and the funding for a project that local people can staff. The Government’s response to the crisis included the creation of ETFG and the local people’s response included working on ETFG.

In a report on developing community resilience in recovery from a disaster, Coles and Buckle (2004) observed that:

Emergency services and governments may concentrate upon control of the hazard and the protection of life and property but support in terms of welfare, recovery, reconstruction and development typically comes from local people (Coles & Buckle, 2004, p. 11).

In Wanganui ‘local’ people were individuals (rural and urban), communities (for example, the people of Ratana), and local groups and organizations (e.g. schools, Te Puni Kokiri, clubs, service organisations, and churches). The time, and the contribution of financial and other resources (such as personnel and machinery) from these groups and local companies, ensured the outcomes of the floods were not as bad as they could have been. But they could not have done it alone. Equally necessary was the substantial assistance of a Government funded programme providing finance, labour, equipment, management, and structure. Uncounted hours of work were given to the recovery process by personnel from Civil Defence and their Welfare Team, local power and communications staff, insurance companies, and farming organizations such as Federated Farmers and Rural Women.

As a result of the Government’s contribution, the members of ETFG were therefore part of a wide network of local people working toward the common goal of recovery. Behind their work, there were personnel from Work and Income, the Wanganui District Council, and an educational and adult literacy provider agency. The contribution of personnel from these agencies to organise, manage, and resource, made a difference in the lives of those who worked on the ETFG scheme and, as a result, made a difference in the community itself.

While the ETFG programme was available in other flood stricken areas, it was (according to the Wanganui and District project managers) most successfully implemented in the Wanganui region.

**Demographics of the Wanganui and Districts Enhanced Task Force Green participants**

The total number of participants on the Wanganui ETFG programme was 510. This included 450 males and 60 females. ETFG (Wanganui) was monitored by a team known as the Regional Area Advisory Group which met on a regular basis.
The ages of those participating ranged from 16 years through to 60 years plus, with percentages and numbers shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-54</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity was represented as follows in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Peoples</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Payment details**

Enhanced Task Force Green workers received $9.00 per hour (for 40 hours per week) in line with the new minimum wage rate. ETFG supervisors (where four or more workers were employed) were paid $12.00 per hour for 40 hours per week.
A Case Study: Interviews with Enhanced Task Force Green Participants and Stakeholders

To paint a picture of what involvement in ETFG was like, four ETFG participants were interviewed. The small number of interviewees is due to the difficulty of locating people after the task force had been disbanded. A fifth person interviewed was the manager/organiser of several teams. Despite the small number, the responses were richly informative of what the ETFG experience was like for participants. The discussion below is an impressionistic account of the interviewees’ experience, and should be viewed as a collection of reflections of the ETFG journey.

To gain the perspectives of those involved with the oversight, management, and training of ETFG participants, a stakeholder focus group was also run. The focus group had five participants: two from the Wanganui District Council, two from Work and Income (Wanganui), and one from the adult literacy provider agency.

All interviews were audio-taped with the exception of one EFTG participant and the manager/organiser who chose not to be recorded.

The five ETFG interviewees consisted of four males and one female. One respondent did not fill out a demographics form. The demographics of the remaining four however are outlined here. Three of the participants were aged between 51 and 60 years, while one interviewee was aged between 21 and 30 years. All four interviewees identified as Māori, and all had attended school for up to three years of secondary level education. Two were in full-time employment at the time of interviewing, with one in casual employment, and one who reported as unemployed. Three of the participants stated that English was their first language, while the fourth reported both English and Māori as a first language. Three participants stated that they were affiliated with Whanganui Iwi.

The findings from the interviews and focus group that follow are grouped around the questions that were asked of respondents.

How people heard about Enhanced Task Force Green

The first question that interviewees were asked was how they found out about ETFG. One participant heard about it “from mum”. Three others heard about it from Work and Income. The manager/organiser found out about it as a result of an enquiry:
There are protocols on the marae so not just ‘anyone’ could be involved. So two of us approached WINZ to see what was possible.

It was the stakeholders rather than the participants who mentioned that word of mouth was a very significant means whereby news of the ETFG job opportunities was made known.

**What participants were doing before they joined the programme**

As the programme was funded through Work and Income, there was an initial perception among some farmers, some of the stakeholders, and even the researchers that those involved in ETFG were unemployed, with the opportunity to acquire skills and work a part of the programme. However, the interviews and the reports that interviewees made about others on the programme indicated that not all were unemployed and several were already skilled.

One unemployed participant said, “I wasn’t actually doing much... It was boring... and mum got fed up with me sitting around home all day.” He thought that getting work with ETFG was “A lot easier than going out and doing the leg work” to find a job.

Another was “Doing nothing... Well I could do my gardens, mow the lawn, but that’s nothing to me.” For him, it was the opportunity to engage in something more stimulating because his usual everyday activities “would get...done on the weekends anyway.”

However, the other two participants had been doing seasonal work and just needed more income to “pay the bills.” Both of them, already skilled in key areas for ETFG work, went to Work and Income seeking work. They reported that the ETFG opportunity came at a good time as they and their friends had recently finished their seasonal work.

**Motivation for joining the programme**

Here, responses were frank. A younger man who was “not actually doing too much” was bored and wanted something else to do. An older man was moved to “get off the blimmin’ couch...I was one of those who wanted a job.”
For another, the motivation was simply stated: “To pay the bills, you just get a job.” The fourth respondent found that his own motivation, and Work and Income’s request for him to work in ETFG, were a happy combination. He was being asked by Work and Income to do a job that he also had wanted to learn about:

Well they actually needed somebody to run one of their crews: fella was leaving. They said go down there and see if you can do it. Most of my work’s been out there [in a freezing works] and I actually wanted to learn how to fence. That’s the difference between me and those other’s, they were just there to learn, just like a job. And because WINZ sort of sent them there, so they had to be there sort of thing. Basically it’s because I wanted to do it. To me, I saw you can still make a living out of it when it’s finished. That’s what I actually did when I finished there I went out the back of Taihape. I was keen to learn because I wanted to learn.

**Expectations of participants**

Along with motivation, an enquiry was made into participants’ expectations, given that expectation would fuel motivation in some cases.

One interviewee expected nothing more than something different from his last job which was delivering beds in Wellington.

A second interviewee knew exactly what he was in for; work. And he was not afraid of work.

Well I knew what to expect, you know. It was cleaning fences and all that. Digging out the mud from houses and all that, schools, digging, all sorts. Oh, it was real hard yakker. Mending fences, fixing fences, trimming trees, pulling nails out.

A third respondent indicated he was also expecting nothing other than work:

Fencing is nothing new. We old guys worked. We know how to work. We had to push the young ones along.

A fourth participant was actively expecting to learn fencing to extend his skill base and provide him with further employment opportunities.
What participants reported they did

Participants did, as described earlier in this report, many tasks such as removing mud, repairing fences, cutting up fallen trees, and ripping damaged materials out of buildings.

With some humour, the manager/organiser said that they learned how to “not hit your hand with a hammer.” They also learned how to “wear a mask and practice basic hygiene.” They learned “First Aid, how to operate a chain saw, drive a tractor, drive an ATV, and work a computer.” With the aid of a training organisation, “they helped on farms and learned how to repair four different kinds of fences.” Under the training organisation’s supervision, they also learned how to write reflections on their experience.

For a younger man, it was all new.

I didn’t actually know what I was actually doing when I first started. I thought I was just going out around the town and in the rural area, and just cleaning up until they put me onto a fencing crew.

Pragmatically, an older participant indicated he could do fencing and several other farm jobs, saying, “You just get on with it; get the job done.”

Some work was not pleasant:

In the shed, well they had to get underneath it, and it’s only about as high as this table, and they’ve got to get the mud out. That broke a lot of hearts. It was only about that high. The dags and the mud is all underneath, plus on the top. You’ve got to get under there and manually do it with a shovel. I think that broke or disheartened a lot…broke their will.

For a man who was being a supervisor for the first time, there were challenges.

I actually found it a bit daunting at first, when I first started doing it. I would sooner do it myself, but then you can’t do everything yourself so in the end they had to start doing it.

He went on to describe the challenge he faced with one individual:

The only one that I actually had trouble with was __. Don’t get me wrong, he was a good worker, but if you tried to tell him anything, he would just start mumbling and moaning. And the thing is that he could work, but sometimes he was too busy mumbling. And you try and explain to him he
had to go and fix up something he had done. Some of the things that he used to do he wasn’t supposed to be doing. If he would have listened he would have understood.

For those who were expecting to work, there were no surprises. And even though some of the work was difficult, demanding, and unpleasant, the general sense was ‘you just get on with it’. One exception was the report of a young man who spent the day sitting in a vehicle because he was tired and the work was hard. He received no sympathy when he complained for not getting paid for the day.

**The experience of working in a team**

Some work teams all knew each other, while others were new to one another. It was asked, ‘What was it like working in a team?’

For a younger man, it was a challenge:

> It was a bit nerve-wracking at first because I didn’t really know anyone. [But an older man] took me under his wing for a while and then I had to branch out from there and start asking things about the job and the other guys.

He soon saw that ‘getting along with each other’ was critical. As his social confidence grew, he found he had ‘mates’ and that made it easier for him.

Another participant had been working on big teams in a freezing works and enjoyed working in the programme’s smaller teams. Some gangs were eight, some six, and some four. For him, cooperation was what made the difference because, “you get a grumpy one, mucks the whole team up.”

The manager/organiser indicated that everyone knew each other in her teams and despite the occasional challenge, existing relationships worked well. As they were working in their own community, they knew all the people they were helping also.

An older man reported with some exasperation, that team work was

> hard sometimes. The young don’t want to work and you’ve got to push them. It doesn’t feel good, but that’s the way it was. You can’t let them get away with it. If you do, it just spreads and others think they can get away with it too. You’ve got to nip it in the bud. Now, there are some good young ones, but…I made sure one boy didn’t get paid for the day he sat in the van. I mean, there are standards. It’s not fair to the rest of the crew to pay someone [for doing
nothing]. Some got the sack for not working, for not wanting to work. That happened in all the gangs.

Another man echoed a similar experience. Sometimes the team/gang didn’t gel with each other, or with the work: “And that pissed me off. But when they did gel, that was good. Most of the gangs were like that.”

There were opinions on how the programme could have been run better:

The way I reckon they should have done [it] was handpicked it, instead of just, ‘You go there’, ‘You go because you been on it for a while’. So you go instead of just sitting them down and see if they have got the balls to do it. They haven’t because there were a lot who didn’t. Of 48 of us I would say 30 of them didn’t even have the balls for it.

For all the participants interviewed, the experience of cooperation and community with each other offset the toll of the physical demands.

Benefits that participants felt they received from the programme

The benefits that participants mentioned were not unexpected. They were chiefly the acquisition of new skills, social contact, and income.

For a younger man, the benefits were multilayered. He learnt new skills like fencing as well as gaining social confidence.

Just the knowledge of knowing how to do the fencing would be one because we did all the courses, First Aid, and all that. [We] learnt about those because they always carry on throughout other jobs, and the job that I am doing now…and just the friendship with the guys.

[The whole experience was a] bit of a boost…knowing that I actually had to speak up and ask how to [do something]. Just a good opportunity to go there and work for [the community], and to work full stop, just get that, that extra bit of experience slapped on to my CV and all the extras that came with it. It was great, and the guys that I’ve met.

Another participant’s experience was similar:

We had to do courses with tractors, ATV’s. And another one was chainsaws, and safety. I actually enjoyed that. I didn’t know much about chainsaws.
An older man was very positive about the benefits. He was mixing with new people and finding that age was no barrier:

I really enjoyed it, meeting the cockies, meeting all the farmers...I thought I was getting a bit old for that you know...who’s going to hire someone 58, 59, now, even if I have got the skills?

Then there was sheer pragmatism. The benefit was the income.

The money. I didn’t learn anything. I knew it all.

**Perceived employment opportunities after ETFG**

The purpose of this question was to ascertain how the ETFG experience has contributed to further employment for participants. What was found was that none of the participants interviewed were doing anything that specifically related to what they learned on ETFG. However, comments were made indicating that the fruits of the ETFG experience - the benefits of community networking, new-found confidence, and reawakened motivation - have aided them in their present employment.

Positive participant responses to this question were few. The future employment benefits of the ETFG experience were most obvious to a younger participant. The key things for him were experience and qualifications:

With the courses that we did, the same with the First Aid, having those extra qualifications, and sorts of trades behind you, has been good. I’ve taken the First Aid, health and safety through to the job I am doing now. Out on the farm we use tractors and stuff, so we had to do a certificate in doing that, and chainsaw...pretty much covers all of it.

The response to this question from an older participant, who had been called in by Work and Income to be a supervisor, did not indicate that the ETFG experience improved work opportunities for him elsewhere. He felt that the ETFG experience did not give him anything that would be of benefit in future job searches because he “knew it all”. Further, permanent year-long employment opportunities were not what this participant was looking for as regular seasonal employment at a fertilizer works meant he only needed extra employment in late autumn and winter.

Another participant was equally pragmatic.

It didn’t really lead to any [increased job opportunities]. A lot of them just went back to what they were doing. Some went back to fencing, some of them
back to doing odd jobs, and some went back to the couch like me, but I will be off the couch next week. The younger ones, the ones we had, they’re all out working now.

The manager/organiser knew where most of the people who had worked with her now were. She said that apart from one person, the ETFG experience had not led to any employment specifically related to what had been learned on the programme, even though the training was good. However, she thought that the life skills that were learned were of lasting benefit, including getting on with people, team work, and tikanga. She noted that while it lasted, the involvement in ETFG had economic advantages in that it was better money than what they were paid while on the Bene-fit.

Doing this sort of work again

A younger participant had had a positive experience, had enjoyed learning fencing, and was keen to take it further, but

After the programme one of the guys was setting up another fencing gang for up the river, but something fell through. I was going to go with them to do some more fencing. I was a bit disappointed, but it’s out of my hands.

As a result of that disappointment, he found work in roading and was enjoying that as well as feeling good about the social confidence he learned while with ETFG.

While not wanting another flood with the attendant distress it brought, the variety of the work was what another participant enjoyed:

I wouldn’t mind [doing this kind of work again]. I reckon a lot of the boys want it too because it’s a multi one. You don’t stay on the same job, a mundane job, where you’re stuck, you know. You’ve got to go there again until kingdom come, but this one was two or three days and then we would go to another farm and do something else.

Some reported that they would certainly like to do this kind of work again, but the challenges involved with being told what to do as well as relationships with supervisors were a consideration: “They’ll go back to it, but a lot of them couldn’t get on with the overseer”.

Ever pragmatic, another man would like to do this kind of work again only “if it paid the bills. I mean, it’s not about making money but paying the bills. I’d prefer to stay here [his current job]”.


A fourth man said that he would like to do the ETFG kind of work again because of the contact it generated with work mates, farmers, and the community.

**ETFG participants’ thoughts about community**

Most of the respondents valued the experience of meeting others in the community, often people that they would have otherwise not met. There was also the reward of having made a positive contribution to people in need of their labour:

> Going out there and actually doing something for someone, and for yourself really, because getting off the couch and getting out...it was good...just knowing that you helped out. And if it did come up again and I didn't have a job, I would definitely do it again.

The first-hand experience of the damage had its effect:

> It changed me...it was after seeing all that destruction and damage...its pretty blimmin hard to not feel sorry for them...you got a big picture [of the community].

> Make you cry there sometimes, it was bloody sad – especially in Kaiangaroa. Kaingaroa was probably the worst.

The manager/organiser indicated that for her teams, “The community experience was awesome for all of them. They met a wide range of people”.

She noted that one result was the creation of a climate of gratitude; people were so grateful for the participants’ help. She herself was a door opener – she knew people and people knew her - so there was permission for her to bring her team onto peoples’ property. With pride she added:

> And they did a fantastic job compared to some of the ETFG teams. Like, whose fence fell over? Not ours!

Several respondents mentioned how bad they felt for some people and genuine concern was shown for one farmer:

> He was really hit pretty bad with fences and that, but because that farm wasn’t earning 51% of his living, all he was entitled to was our labour, and I felt a bit sad for him because he was one of the worst hit. People like him you meet...he was alright...he would invite us in there for a cup of tea and scones you know.
One man, who was happy to be of assistance to the community, indicated that his perception of the community had not changed simply because “I know a lot of the farmers. I see them here [his seasonal workplace].”

Overall, most ETFG workers were glad to be of assistance. As one interviewee put it:

I really enjoyed it. I’d go back out there. Some of them were quite sad, some of the things that happened. Just seeing the place devastated, looking at it, and like that lady’s trees down. That’s blown over, and was worth nothing…things like that. Oh, it felt pleasing, the things when you had completed it, you know that we did. It was quite pleasing.

**Challenges**

There were some challenges for the ETFG teams, such as farmers who could not quite trust them: “yes we had a few good ones, a few hard-case ones”. Some farmers, perceived to be ungrateful for the task force members’ work, led to some disillusionment among the ETFG workers.

Some of those farmers were quite arrogant; they wanted a lot done for nothing. I mean we were doing things for nothing. Some of them wanted more…they try and take advantage of you. It was only a couple of them not all of them. We did heaps of fencing for that guy, they were on the flats but we did a few going up the hills. That’s the only time we did it, for that guy there, and that guy there didn’t give us nothing, didn’t even give us one bottle of beer – all that fencing we did. Well some of the other guys did. They really appreciated it…’Oh don’t bring any lunch. We’ll have a BBQ.’ You know, some of them were just so happy to get things done.

Sometimes, rather than persevere with those the participants perceived to be untrust- ing and ungrateful, the team would move on:

We did nothing. We’d just bugger off - he was a bit of an arsehole so we’re not going. They’d [the gang] just go, and we’d just take the next one, and there were forty-odd names on there, so we can take another farm. [If] he wasn’t up to scratch, and we didn’t like it, we’d just take the next one.

Most farmers were indeed grateful, but there were farmers who workers thought wanted to be in control. This lead to frustrations:

It was just that this guy was telling us how to put this fence up because he knew we knew nothing, and obviously we didn’t. I said, ‘Oh its all right. You don’t have to do it. Here, just talk to that tutor.’ And he said, ‘You just get over here. I don’t want to be repeating myself.’ I said, ‘He’s our tutor. He knows
how to fence. Talk to him and he will tell us.’ Oh me and that guy got off bad straight away. I was trying to tell him we had a fencing tutor.

However, some farmers were surprised at the competence of the ETFG workers, a factor that gave the workers some pride:

‘These people come from TFG, they don’t know nothing.’ He actually got a fright when we actually started doing it because he just told us what he wanted done and we did it, and he just left us alone. But I know he used to go back and have a look to see if it was right, done properly.

**Conclusion**

From the reports above, it is clear that the Enhanced Task Force Green opportunity was a positive experience for these respondents, irrespective of their life-stages. It provided them with income, training, accountability, work experience, community, and in one case, a sense of worth. It was also a positive experience for the community, many of whom were very grateful for the help they received.

**Stakeholder focus group perceptions**

A focus group was undertaken with the community groups involved with ETFG through either overseeing it or providing adult training services to the participants within it. This focus group was a lively and energetic exchange that complemented and extended what was heard from the participants.

**Thoughts on the Enhanced Task Force Green programme**

**Positives**

The response of the group to the ETFG programme was very positive. The scheme was believed to have satisfied the farmers, urban Wanganui was cleaned up, and workers were believed to have found it “good to be out”. With the experience of getting into “a rhythm of working, getting to work on time”, a number of participants were reported to have thought “You know, being on the benefit is not such a great thing. Might go out and get a job somewhere.” Such change in people’s lives was vigorously affirmed.
The stakeholders mentioned that many participants in the programme were volunteers, and keen to help their communities. Additionally, Work and Income had also waived their usual criteria of people having to be on the unemployment benefit and registered for six months in order to get a job within Task Force Green. As a result, the word spread quickly. Some volunteers were workers from the Waitotara Meat Works which had been flooded. They brought their own work ethic and experience to ETFG.

The group discussed how ‘Enhanced’ Task Force Green had been enhanced by more subsidies, holiday pay, a GST allowance, and boot and tooling allowances, all because of a need for speed. This is the origin of the word ‘Enhanced’ in the project’s name.

**Challenges**

The challenges that emerged in work gangs were thought to be self regulating in that dysfunctional groups disintegrated: “We had one gang which was rotten with drugs which was a bit hard to deal with, but they sort of wound themselves up at the end of the day.”

One stakeholder summarised the challenge that they faced in operating the ETFG teams by saying:

> The main problem with many of the people that we had apart from literacy and the amount of work – [for] a lot of people, there’s a equal mix of arrogance and ignorance, and to try and blend that into some sort of working unit can often be difficult, you know.

The challenges and dysfunctions that emerged were attributed to human nature by the members of this focus group.

**Perceived benefits of Enhanced Task Force Green**

Education was the first benefit to be noted. The focus group reported how participants were given training – fencing, driving tractors, using ATVs, using chain saws, operating stump grinders and chipping machines, learning First Aid, Occupational Safety and Health, and “We picked up some numeracy and literacy needs as well - that some of them could and couldn't read and write.” These team members were taken to a literacy provider and picked up after class to join their gang.

Literacy issues were mentioned again later in the discussion with the comment that:
I suspect if we had’ve pushed the issue about literacy we would have found a lot more that needed help.

We might have just found there was just one gang that did numeracy literacy rather than doing any work. Is that such a bad thing?

They have to self-acknowledge that. They have got to own it. They have to want to do something about it. Even now we offer them one on one. I mean that’s still there.

There was some laughter about the benefit to some participants of learning how to get out of bed, but it was observed that the training,

made them more competitive, competing in the labour market. When the programme finished, there were those skills that they learnt while they were on Task Force Green. Obviously, they could have that on their CV - a lot of them got CV’s etc and away they went.

A fruit of these achievements was seen to be a rise in self-esteem. When discussing self-esteem among ETFG participants, one respondent said,

I would like to think that that some of these guys got some really good self-esteem out of that because they were part of a team.

And another added,

Even now you see some on the street and they are much happier to talk to you. They won’t walk around looking at the ground; they’ll sit down and have a talk.

With humour it was also noted that some of the benefits to participants were not what were actually intended. Workers were not responsible for loss, damage, or theft and “stuff went”:

Got back a lot of gear that you didn’t lend them didn’t you.

You’re bound to have a few chain saws lost, left on the job, left after dark…or trailers full of fencing gear - ‘Don’t know where it is bro.’

Speaking very positively, one member of the group observed that ETFG participants

got a taste of being a part of a group that wasn’t necessarily involved in just drinking and beating people up. They got involved with a group that liked to work. They got to see the likes of other people, like the work in the District
Council, they got to see community people that needed help of different degrees. They got to see the rural sector that needed help for various reasons in different degrees, and if that didn’t have an impact on them, well you have got to ask yourself what will have an impact?

The experience was seen to be so positive for many participants, that they would have continued in the scheme had it lasted longer: “If we’d have said ‘we’ll keep you on’, they would have said, ‘That’s good’.” This was echoed by two of the participants who thought the programme ended too early when they felt there was more that they could have done.

When asked why participants would have liked to have continued, the response was “well they were just happy. Their comfort zone was really good. Had their work mates, they had a job, they understood what they were doing.” However this was not seen to be completely positive:

They were doing exactly what they were being asked to do. They were getting paid to do it, and it was a nice ‘inside my comfort zone’. Nobody wanted to step up and do something else, and we’d say, ‘Look there’s a list of jobs you boys,’ ... ‘Oh no, no.’

We organized the scheme specifically that they had Friday afternoons off so they could go for job interviews and things like that. Didn’t actually work out...half the time they would go to the doctor or the dentist or something on a Friday afternoon.

Despite the above, a positive spin-off from ETFG was the continuation of the training that ETFG had initiated:

We’re running that marae trades course now, which has come out of Enhanced Task Force Green because the iwi have got eleven or twelve marae, and they are trying to get them to be able to do the building repairs, painting repairs...That’s where they pick up their numeracy literacy skills as well.

Overall, the focus group was very positive about the benefits of Enhanced Task Force Green for those who participated.

**The impact of Enhanced Task Force Green on community attitudes**

The responses of the managers indicated that the perceived effect of the ETFG programme in changing community attitudes toward people on the unemployment
benefit was mixed. Some farmers were surprised to find that people on the dole were capable:

It changed a lot of views of farmers that ‘how useless these pricks are down on the dole’, because they, they continued to pay and see people on the dole and they’re all bloody useless, you know...and all of a sudden, you’ve got a group of them out there, and they can actually do something. Yes, we needed to continue to negotiate about how good or bad the work was, but it was getting done, and that from a farmer’s point of view was pretty responsive – they liked to see that. Because if they didn’t do that, they would have to do it themselves.

However some negative attitudes remained entrenched:

Some of them [farmers] would say, ‘Look I don’t want these guys on because they pinch all sorts of shit ya know,’. ‘Look, please yourself, we’re not going to force them on you. But if you want to do the work that’s fine, but if you want these guys to help you that’s also fine, but you can’t have it both ways. You can’t have them here and then watch them like a bloody hawk all day long; they need to be given a bit of freedom.

But there was appreciation. One of the stakeholders with the Council appreciated the gratitude expressed by members of the public:

Every now and again, there would be people ringing in saying, when are people coming to do ‘their’ thing. Those calls would come through to me, and I factor them into the routine of my teams for the week. They’d get them done. I had a number of calls afterwards, thanking, for getting it done. That’s always nice, and if that’s indicative of community feeling...

Community gratitude took many forms, including providing lunch:

This little old lady, she would make lunch for them everyday, and she would take it out and sit down there and have lunch with them, and to some people they would have been a bunch of scroates you know, but she was happy to have lunch with them because they were doing the work for her, and hopefully they didn’t nick anything from her place.

One farmer gave ETFG workers sides of sheep meat. Another man took workers out to McDonalds several times. Other workers received gifts of fruit after working very long hours to aerate pear trees that were in danger of dying because of the mud. To express gratitude, ETFG managers provided beer, coke, lemonade, and food on Friday afternoons.
Change in participants’ attitudes toward the community

It was perceived that participants’ gained a better understanding of the way in which the community worked and the reasons that certain things were done in the community. When participants turned up, worked hard, and were appreciated, they experienced a sense of self-worth:

Also, lots of occasions, especially with the urban ones, if they were clearing up on the streets, people would come out and say, something’s gone down on my own property, and I said, I told the guys, that should be the responsibility of the individual, but if you gonna help out the old lady, do it, and they did it, and they got thanked, and they appreciated getting thanked by a member of the public for the work that they were doing, so that must have helped. It would help my self esteem if somebody thanked me more often.

Changes that would benefit a new ETFG programme

While members of the stakeholder focus group seemed happy with how the programme ran, some weaknesses were noted. One critical change noted was the need to ensure adequate supervision of work teams. There was an expectation by managers that farmers would provide supervision, but it was found that farmers could not necessarily supervise the ETFG gang on top of their other work.

The farmer was busy trying to do other things, like to continue to run his farm, and he didn’t have the time to go along with the gang all day just digging out fences…there was more productive things for him to be doing.

When they went out on the farm, the farmer should have given them some supervision or kept an eye on them, that didn’t eventuate. So that was probably one of our down falls.

The farmers were told, when I spoke to them about what they wanted for work, - I had a list of the things that I would read out to the farmer and I said, ‘Look these guys come with a supervisor, but you need to tell him what you want and what you expect. If you’re not going to work with them you need to make it pretty clear that he understands that’.

Suggestions included that the farmer himself provide an appropriate supervisor. This did occur in one case with the supervisor being the farmer’s son. A second suggestion was a person known by the stakeholders (a semi retired person) who they
thought would have made an excellent supervisor. There was an energy to think through who was known in the community with the necessary leadership and people-skills to supervise work gangs.

Another issue the group highlighted for attention in future similar disasters was the necessity for a quicker response and improved communication from the Government:

From when this happened in February, we never got any clues as to what the Government package was going to be until the first week of May. So we were out there trying to gather the information.

Also needed was a quicker response to the provision of training programmes:

We probably should start [the training] earlier… It should be part of the start up package… if you had an Enhanced Task Force Green.

You can't actually go out and do a job until you have done these things, so what would happen is we would say look, these are the people, First Aid certificates, chain saw skills and health and safety, half day course…two days, I've got you all those things, and then you can get out and do it. That's all it would take.

I think, the next time, we just need to sharpen our pencils and make sure that we act a bit quicker that's all.

**Conclusion**

Those who took part in the focus group were all well aware of the purposes, procedures, and personnel involved in Enhanced Task Force Green. They were also aware of the huge contribution that ETFG had made to the community and the benefits that it brought to individuals in the rural and urban communities. However, they were conscious of the limitations and the need to do some things differently in a similar situation. Their energy and good humour was a testament to their own positive involvement in the welfare of the Wanganui District community.
Literacy and Employment Implications

The storm of February 2004 had a devastating effect on rural households, farms, towns, businesses, and Wanganui City. It drew forth a response of aid from the people of the local community and the Government – the former being quicker than the latter. One Government response was the creation of the Enhanced Task Force Green programme as part of the Agriculture Recovery Programme. The involvement of these 510 people provided critical assistance to those affected by storm damage as well as providing new opportunities for training and income.

While all participants were offered training opportunities, no literacy issues were named by the five individuals who were interviewed. They reported they were all competent in use of oral and written language and capable with the maths necessary for what they were doing. It was only in the stakeholders’ focus group that any literacy issues were mentioned. It was indicated that some literacy needs did become obvious and those in most obvious need were sent to a literacy training provider. There was the suggestion that many more with literacy needs probably went unnoticed, and should something like Enhanced Task Force Green be needed again, there should be pathways through which these needs could be identified and met.

If the reports received are a good indication of the wider picture of employment, then it could be said that the training that ETFG provided did not significantly resource participants for further employment in occupations specifically related to the training they received. Nonetheless, it appears that the ETFG experience awakened personal motivation for some participants, and provided work discipline and mate-ship as well as an income that had been earned with their own labour. ETFG resulted in moving at least two men ‘off the couch’ and fixed the boredom that one participant complained of. Some members of ETFG found that the experience, confidence, and pride of achievement gained, led on to further work with some, it was reported, having gone to jobs in larger centres such as Auckland, and further afield to Australia. The manager/organiser interviewed said that everyone in her teams was now employed (including one in voluntary work). Some who were employed before joining ETFG have either returned to former work or picked up new jobs.

Along with the direct benefits to the community that came from the creation of Enhanced Task Force Green, many of the individuals involved have been resourced with life skills and opportunities that have moved them into active employment.
References


