

Children in trauma – Fiji Times Online

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SCHOOLCHILDREN who survived severe TC Winston in severely-affected areas need to have trauma healing classes, says Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development director Sashi Kiran.

The NGO has been visiting cyclone-affected areas in Ra and got feedback from children, teachers and parents on how children were faring.

“Many children will find it hard to pick up from where they left off before the cyclone”, said Ms Kiran.

“It’s only expected as all these children have been through traumatic experiences.

“Some of them witnessed their homes blown away, some were injured, some lost their loved ones, and they need care first.

“We have spoken with teachers and children at schools. Teachers say that students are just wandering and gazing. They seem to have forgotten past lessons.

“I believe it’s crucial that they go through trauma healing exercises to help them cope and proceed with their education.”

Ms Kiran said children needed to be processed through trauma healing mechanisms which could be as simple as drawing their feelings and sharing their experiences in class just so they knew they’re not alone.

Dr Myrielle Allen, the child psychiatrist at the St Giles Hospital, believes that while trauma healing will help, it will be wrong to say that without healing exercises, recovery will not happen.

“In essence, the symptoms mentioned in your email, are normal reactions after being exposed to a traumatic event, in this case TC Winston”, said Dr Allen.

“There are suggested activities for children at school, and teachers need to be trained to conduct such sessions, like breathing exercises, drawings or games.

“Children are resilient and the greater majority recovers within a few weeks.

“Children need reassurance that the disaster is over and that the focus is on recovery.”

Dr Allen says children need lots of hugs, they need to be informed that their reactions or fears are normal and they need to be given the time to play with friends and family.