

**Appendix 7m:
Understanding Vulnerable
Customers – DJS Research**



Understanding Vulnerable Customers

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Report structure

- 1 Background & method
- 2 The vulnerable customer
- 3 Water usage & key considerations
- 4 Impact of a disruption or issue with supply
- 5 Desired response & support from YW
- 6 Perceptions & awareness of YW
- 7 Communications preferences
- 8 Recommendations





1.

Background
& method



Background

Yorkshire Water has a good understanding of how it's customers view the company through its monthly domestic tracker and other research studies. Whilst a sub sample of **vulnerable customers** is often consulted in these studies, YW has not conducted research solely with vulnerable customers before. To this end it wishes to commission a research project to understand the unique needs of their vulnerable customer base and the considerations and provision they need to make to meet all customers' needs now and in the future.

More specifically, YW would like to widen its understanding of vulnerable customer groups to ensure it's meeting their needs with service provision generally, through the way it contacts them, the channels it provides for contact and the communications it distributes.

Objectives



1

Explore the different ways in which customers may be vulnerable and build up a greater understanding of these groups.

2

Analyse the different ways in which these customer groups use water and consider ways in which they may depend upon receiving a constant and clean supply.

3

Understand the potential impact that a disruption to supply could have on these groups looking at how, if at all, they might be able to cope and whether this varies between a planned and an unplanned disruption.

4

Identify the ways in which these group would like to be supported in the event of a disruption and the level of assistance they require. Consider the ways in which YW could best communicate both disruption notifications and other forms of communications such as bills.

Research methodology



43 face to face interviews with customers

12 x Ethnic Minorities



3x 2nd generation Pakistani Muslim

3x 2nd generation Indian Hindu/Sikh

3x 1st/2nd generation Polish Christians

3x 2nd generation African Islam/Christians

5 x Elderly



6 x Learning Difficulty



6 x Physical Disability



6 x Mental Disability



3 x Critical Illness



5 x Transient



Research methodology



10 Focus groups with customers

2 x Ethnic Minorities



1x 1st generation Pakistani Muslim
(conducted in Urdu) **1x** 1st generation Indian Hindu/Sikh
(conducted in Hindi)

4 x Elderly



1x Urban 65-74 **1x** Rural 65-74 **1x** Urban 75+ **1x** Rural 75+

4 x Low Income



2x Urban **2x** Rural

Research methodology



5 Depth interviews with Stakeholders

3x F2F & 2x Telephone



A photograph of two hands holding a clear glass, set against a soft-focus background of a sunset or sunrise over a field. The scene is warm and intimate. A semi-transparent pink vertical bar is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

2.

The
vulnerable
customer



Wide scope of vulnerabilities

While there is a **range of classifying codes** for vulnerable customers, our research has found that these customers **can not necessarily be defined** by just **one vulnerability** code, and usually fall into **several categories**.



When speaking with vulnerable customers their needs often span across many different areas.

It is important to understand **'not one size fits all'**



Complex, diverse & interconnecting needs

Vulnerabilities are rarely exclusive or straightforward...

Although a customer may fall into a vulnerability category they might not be defined or adversely impacted by it



Has Cerebral Palsy which limits his ability to do day to day tasks but...

- Runs own business
- Lives independently
- Enjoys walking



Aged 83 and is starting to wind down his number of working days but...

- Is very fit – only recently stopped playing tennis
- Is mentally fit – still works part-time

However, some customers can lead very difficult lives where they have to contend with a number of circumstances that may render them vulnerable



Suffers with bronchiectasis which requires daily physio & often leads to infections but also...

- Has extreme IBS
- Struggles with anxiety
- Has a son who has enuresis



Has PTSD from an abusive relationship and childhood but also...

- Has severe dyslexia
- Extreme bouts of depression
- Suffers with debilitating migraines & neck pain



Has a 30yo daughter with hydrocephalus which leaves her unable to communicate, walk & is incontinent. He is also...

- Has severe arthritis
- Is in his 80s
- Dyslexic

It is important for YW to understand the different ways in which a customer may be vulnerable and the very individual requirements these customers may have.



Clear areas where needs often overlap

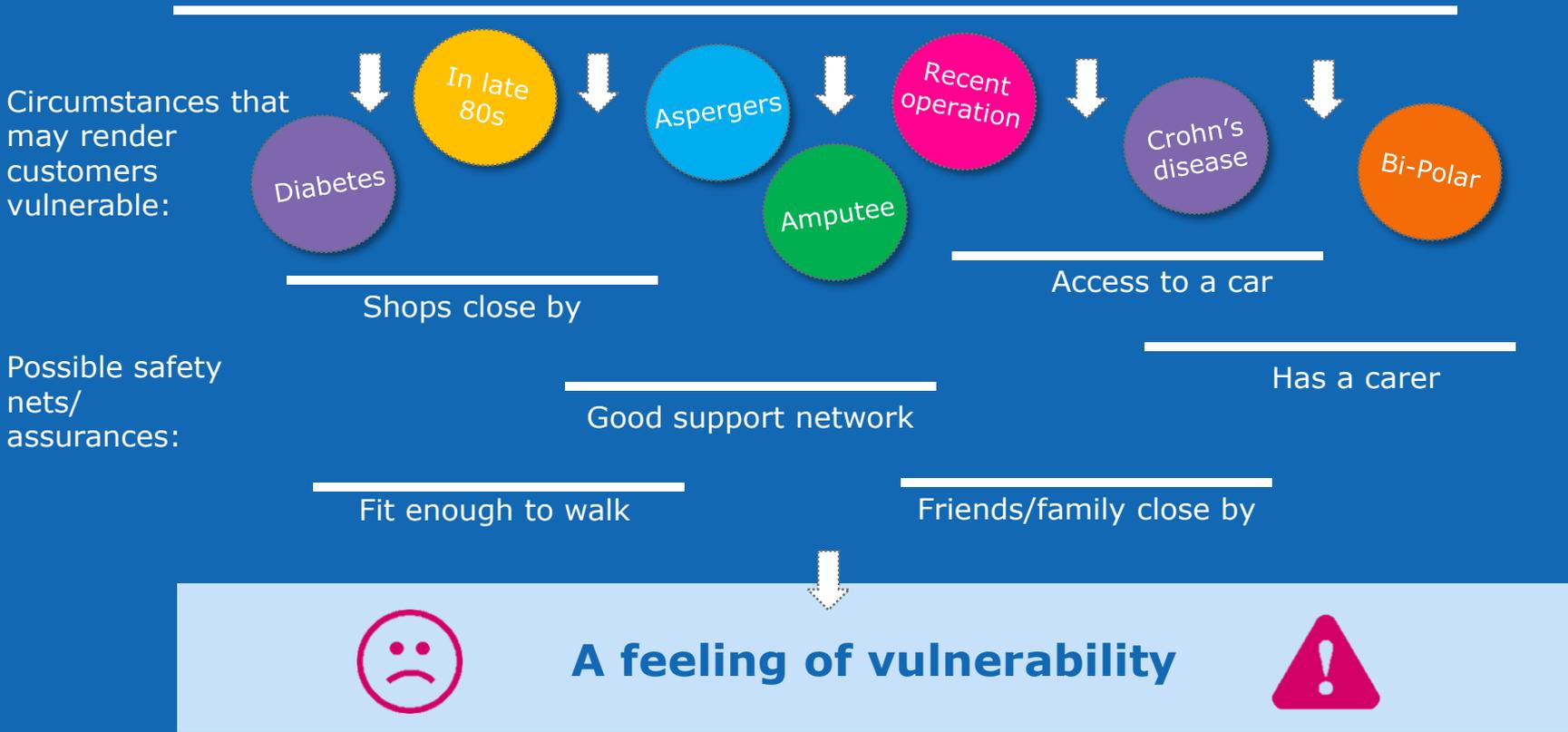
Despite customers having very individual needs and unique circumstances there were some key areas where vulnerabilities often overlapped and would be worth considering when looking at forming a strategy that caters for a multitude of needs.





Many do not consider themselves vulnerable

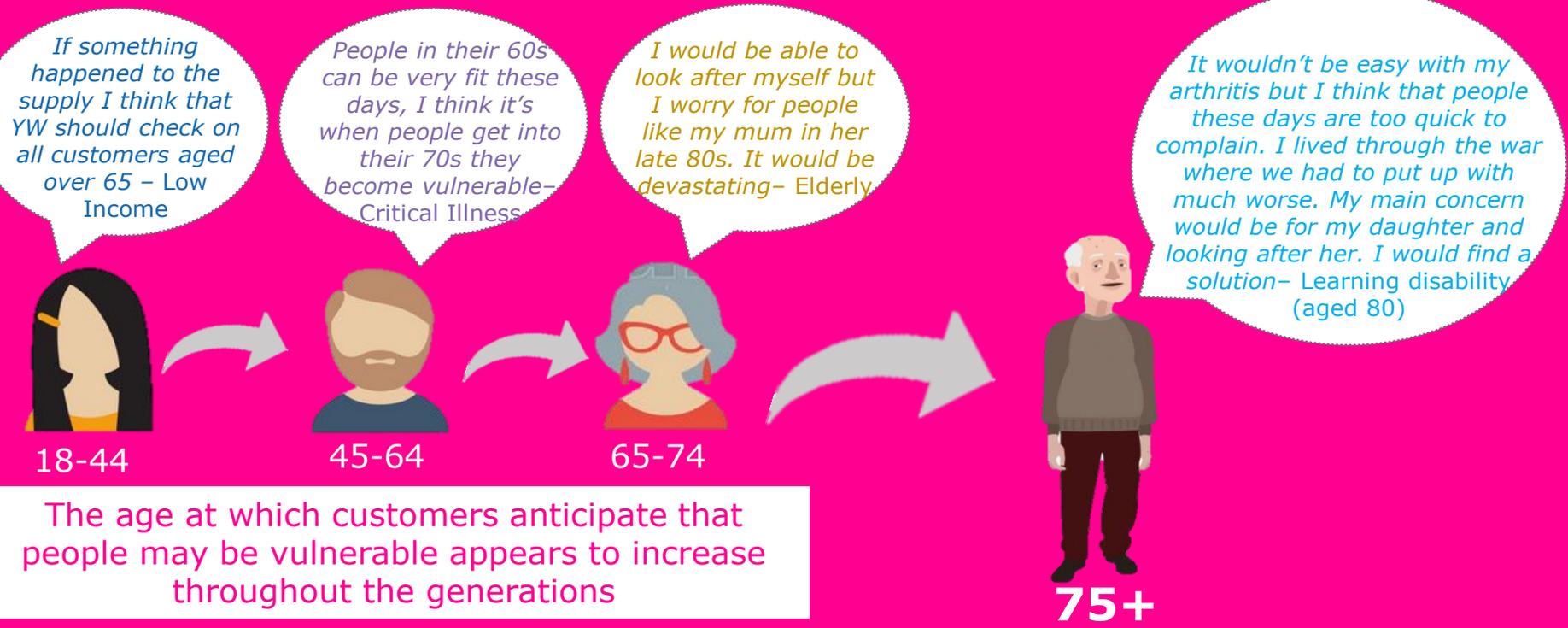
Interestingly, although many of the customers we spoke to are contending with some very difficult circumstances and would admittedly find it very challenging in the event of a disruption, a large proportion of them are adamant that they would be able to cope. Many of those we spoke to feel that there are other groups that are more vulnerable than themselves.





A generational difference

The elderly in particular appear to have a very stoic attitude and do not necessarily expect to receive any form of prioritisation or special support. Although they may seem so to others, they may not necessarily recognise or admit to being vulnerable.



The age at which customers anticipate that people may be vulnerable appears to increase throughout the generations

A reluctance to complain/ask for help

A sense of resilience gained – often from living through WW2

Don't want to people to have to 'go out of their way' for them

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a clear glass filled with water. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset or sunrise with warm, golden light. The image is partially covered by a semi-transparent pink vertical bar on the left side, which contains the text.

3.

Water usage
& key
considerations



An important part of daily life

Unsurprisingly, there are many consistent ways in which customers and their families use water in their day to day lives...



Put the kettle on

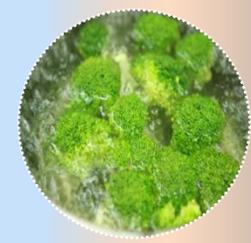
Breakfast



Fill up water bottles for school/work



Cleaning-wash floors/wash car



Prepare & cook tea

Hot drinks



Brush teeth

Use toilet

Showers & teeth brushing

Dishwasher & washing machine on

Hot drinks, water & squash throughout day

Kids paddling pool/water guns etc.

Washing up/dishwasher

Baths/bathe kids

Glass of water to take to bed



Water is particularly essential for vulnerable customers

Whilst water is important to the day to day function of all households, it is especially essential to vulnerable customers with the use of water in the administration of **medical treatments & medications**

Medications & treatments

A significant proportion (if not the majority) of vulnerable customers are taking some form of medication to help manage their conditions or for pain relief, water is used not only for administration but is often important to keep well hydrated on some medications...



Pain killers

Anti-Depressants

Statins

Steroids

Anti-Inflammatories

Beta-Blockers

Anti-Biotics

Anti-Anxiety

Some even use water on a daily basis as part of their treatment...



Every day I have to do numerous inhalations to move the mucus from my lungs & if I don't I'm prone to getting life threatening infections such as pleurisy – Critical Illness

The prospect of **not having access to water to take medicines is very concerning** for some and would potentially leave them in a very difficult or painful situation ...

If I don't take my medications on time I start to deteriorate quite quickly I wouldn't necessarily know – Mental Disability

If I woke up and there was no water to take my tablets then I would start to get a lot of discomfort and it would really restrict me – Physical Disability



Bathing is also an essential function for many

There is clearly a great deal of bathing amongst vulnerable customers too with this used not only for **hygiene** but for **pain** and **mood management** too





Vital to have access to dishwashers & washing machines

Vulnerable customers are in many instances more likely to be doing more laundry and using their dishwashers more frequently



Vulnerable customers are often required to wash more bedding (especially if bed bound) or to wash soiled clothes....

"My son has enuresis so there's a lot of soiled bedding and clothes to wash"
– Physical disability

"During a bad spell I can be virtually bed bound so the bedding needs washing a lot more often" – Physical disability



Many vulnerable customers spend large amounts of time at home therefore get through more dishes. Some also need to sterilise medical equipment to prevent infection....

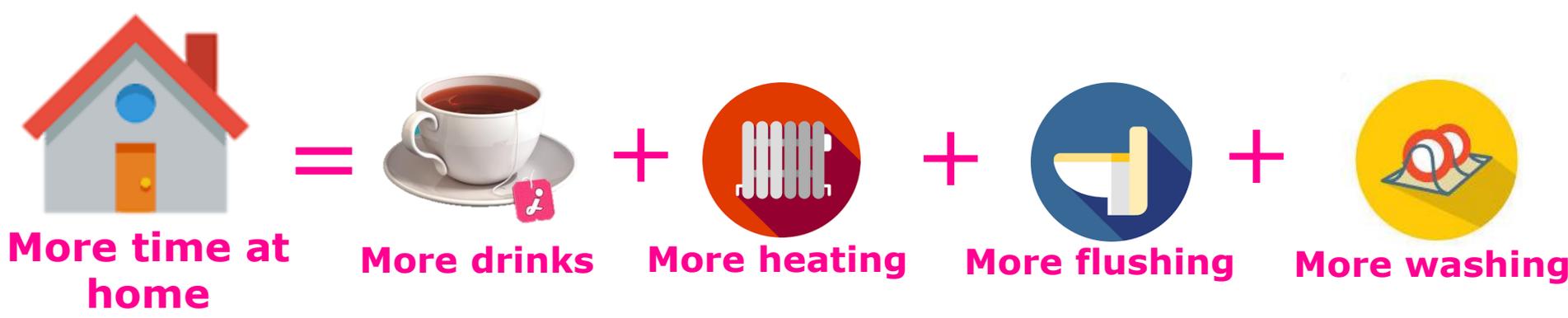
"My immune system is so low that everything has to be cleaned thoroughly" – Physical disability

"She needs a lot of medical equipment that all has to be sterilised – the dishwasher is always on" – Learning disability



More time spent at home increases usage

In addition to more specific needs for water it is often noted by vulnerable customers that their circumstances results in more time spent home. This additional time in the house often means that water usage increases more generally.



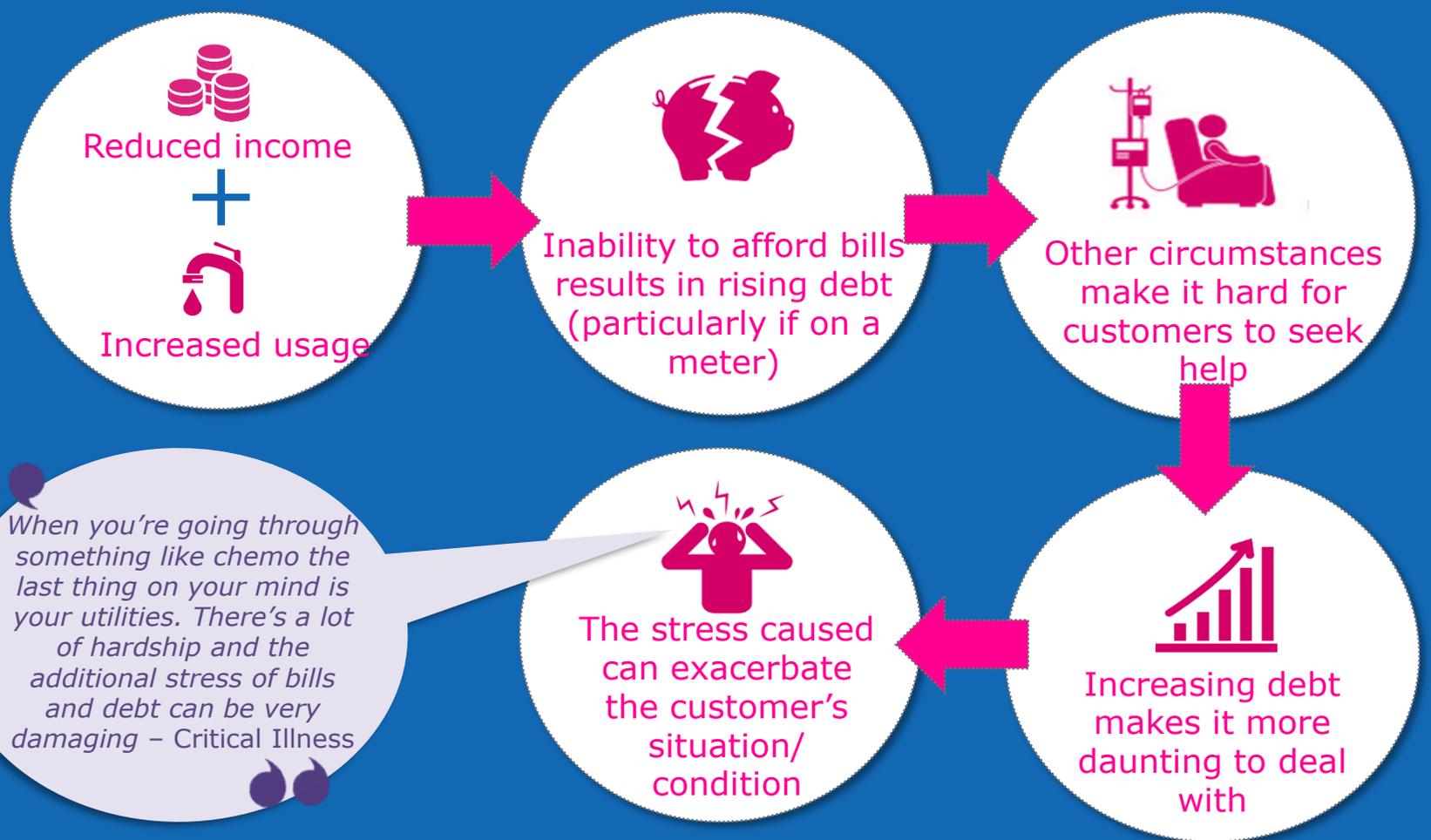
It's not just the things related to your condition it's just more use generally, you're doing more of everything really
- Critical Illness

When you're at home all day you really notice your usage going up, I'm expecting a huge bill at the end of this quarter -
Transient



Vulnerable customers can be prone to arrears

The circumstances that render customers vulnerable not only increases usage but can also result in a reduced income due to inability to work. These factors can often lead to metered customers accruing arrears on their bills. The circumstances leading to their vulnerability can also make it difficult for them to seek help or sort out their bills.



When you're going through something like chemo the last thing on your mind is your utilities. There's a lot of hardship and the additional stress of bills and debt can be very damaging – Critical Illness

In addition to those with vulnerabilities and more general uses of water, **Ethnic Minorities** are also particularly reliant on water with water playing an important role in many of the cultural and religious activities of these groups...





Water – vital for cleansing before prayer

It is very important for **Hindus and Sikhs** to be freshly bathed/showered before prayer and for Hindus it is also sometimes used as part of the prayer ritual itself. Water is seen to be particularly important for the role it plays in food preparations for celebrations/gatherings which are especially important to these groups.



Key uses



Key events



Important in both faiths to be cleansed "**Pavitr**" before prayers although prayers can be performed on a relatively flexible basis (no set frequency)



Hindus gift water along with other items as offerings to the gods – ceremonies can also take place in local rivers



It is very important for both groups to host large family gatherings on special occasions/festivals. These events involve lots of cooking and Indian foods are noted to require lots of water (Rice, curries, chapatis etc.)

Vaisakhi (Sikh New Year)
–April 13th/14th

Diwali (Observed in both faiths) – Oct/Nov

Holi (Hindu harvest festival) – July

We have a large extended family that often come over for gatherings. We get through so much water as we cook big vats of curry, rice & lentils. Not to mention cleaning the house beforehand! – Indian, Sikh





Water is essential for practising Islam

Similarly to Sikhs and Hindus, it is vital for **Muslims** to be cleansed before prayers however Muslims perform a more thorough and formalised washing ritual as well as having to conduct more frequent prayers. It is also essential for Muslims to wash their homes thoroughly before the festival of Eid



Muslims

Key uses



Key events



Muslims perform a set ritual of **Wudu** before prayers (which can be several times a day). This involves the cleansing of specified areas of the face & body. Wudu cannot be performed with water that is unclear or smells/tastes different



Before the festival of **Eid** it is important for Muslims to thoroughly wash and cleanse their homes, cars (carpets, floors etc.). Some also choose to slaughter a lamb for the festival which then needs washing



Muslims also note the great amount of water used in their cooking particularly during feasts. During the fast of **Ramadan**, it is very important for Muslims to be able to drink lots of water to re-hydrate themselves before and after the day time fast is broken

Ramadan – moves each year

Eid-al-Fitr – A month after Ramadan starts

Eid-al-Adha – moves each year



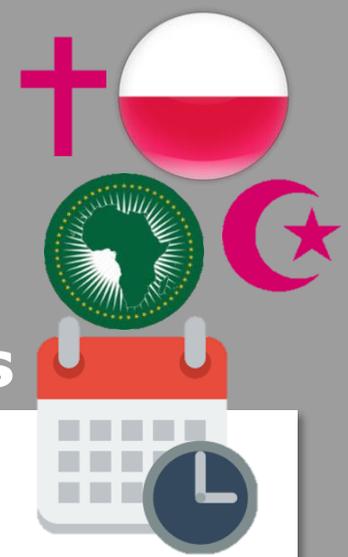
I do my prayers about 5 times a day so I am always washing. I have a bowel condition too which means I need to do it all over again every time I go to the toilet – Pakistani, Muslim





African & Polish customers have a greater appreciation

Those we spoke to were not overly religious but would usually observe the main religious holidays of Christianity or Islam in some way. The main differentiators of these groups are their propensity to be on low incomes and their appreciation of the consistent supply they receive.



Key events

All major Christian holidays

Major Islamic holidays (as specified previously)



Despite largely being in employment many within these groups were on relatively **low incomes** but were managing to meet their payments



Mostly **manual occupations** meant that it was important for these groups to be able to shower, particularly in summer, after a physically demanding day in work



Experiences of water shortages/disruptions in their countries of origin often provides a greater **appreciation** of the reliable supply they receive from YW - they appear less likely to take their water for granted and to not waste.

I think people in this country take water for granted. Back in Nigeria you have to use bottled water for most things so you know exactly how much you're using. I try and not take advantage of it even though I'm unmetered - African, Christian



On Easter Monday it is a tradition amongst Polish communities to throw buckets of water at each other

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a clear glass. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset or sunrise with warm yellow and orange light. The image is partially covered by a semi-transparent pink vertical bar on the left side, which contains the text.

4.

Impact of a
disruption
or issue
with supply



A planned disruption: A necessary evil

Planned

Vulnerable customers were largely very understanding of the fact that YW sometimes needs to disrupt the supply in order to maintain the network or resolve an issue. A planned stoppage would certainly be difficult for many, however if it is much better than an unplanned incident.

"I'm not saying it would be easy but I think we'd all prefer for Yorkshire Water to do planned work which we all know about in advance to prevent big, unexpected issues" – Learning disability

Might have to go without things that bring comfort/pain relief i.e **heating, baths**

Have to **spend money** on extra water and food preparations

Have to **make arrangements /preparations** on top of what they're currently dealing with in their day to day lives



Helps to maintain/improve water supply

Helps to prevent serious/unplanned disruptions from occurring

At least arrangements can be made or any possible issues anticipated



A planned disruption



Early warning is key to help make plans

Planned

There are a number of ways in which customers would help soften the impact of a planned disruption, with preparations requiring some advanced notice.

Particularly vulnerable

Make arrangements to stay at local **hospices** or **care facilities** if particularly vulnerable

Plan to **stay with friends & family** (if possible)

Ask **family/carers to start bringing bottles of water** with their groceries

Start **collecting water** where possible/where able to physically carry full containers

Make sure to **bath/shower before** supply is turned off

Notice given

A month

A fortnight

A week

A couple of days

Supply outage

Avoid making any plans to host guests/family

Start **purchasing bottles** of water

Start **collecting water** in containers/bath tub

Make sure to **bath/shower before** supply is turned off

Less vulnerable



However, some are less able to prepare

Planned

Whether it be physical restrictions, a lack of resources or simply just not having the foresight/experience of what to do in such situations there are a number of factors that may limit some customers' ability to properly prepare for an outage



Some customers **don't have the physical strength** to fill up and **move around heavy containers of water** whether they're collected at home or bought in a shop

There's no way I could fill up a large bottle and move it around in my condition – Critical Illness



Some customers (particularly younger generations) **wouldn't know how to prepare** either due to **lack of life experience** or even just not being in the **right frame of mind**

If I was on a low then I don't think that I would be able to think about how to prepare– Mental Disability



Some customers simply **don't have the means**/equipment to collect water with many not having **bath tubs**, buckets or large bottles at home

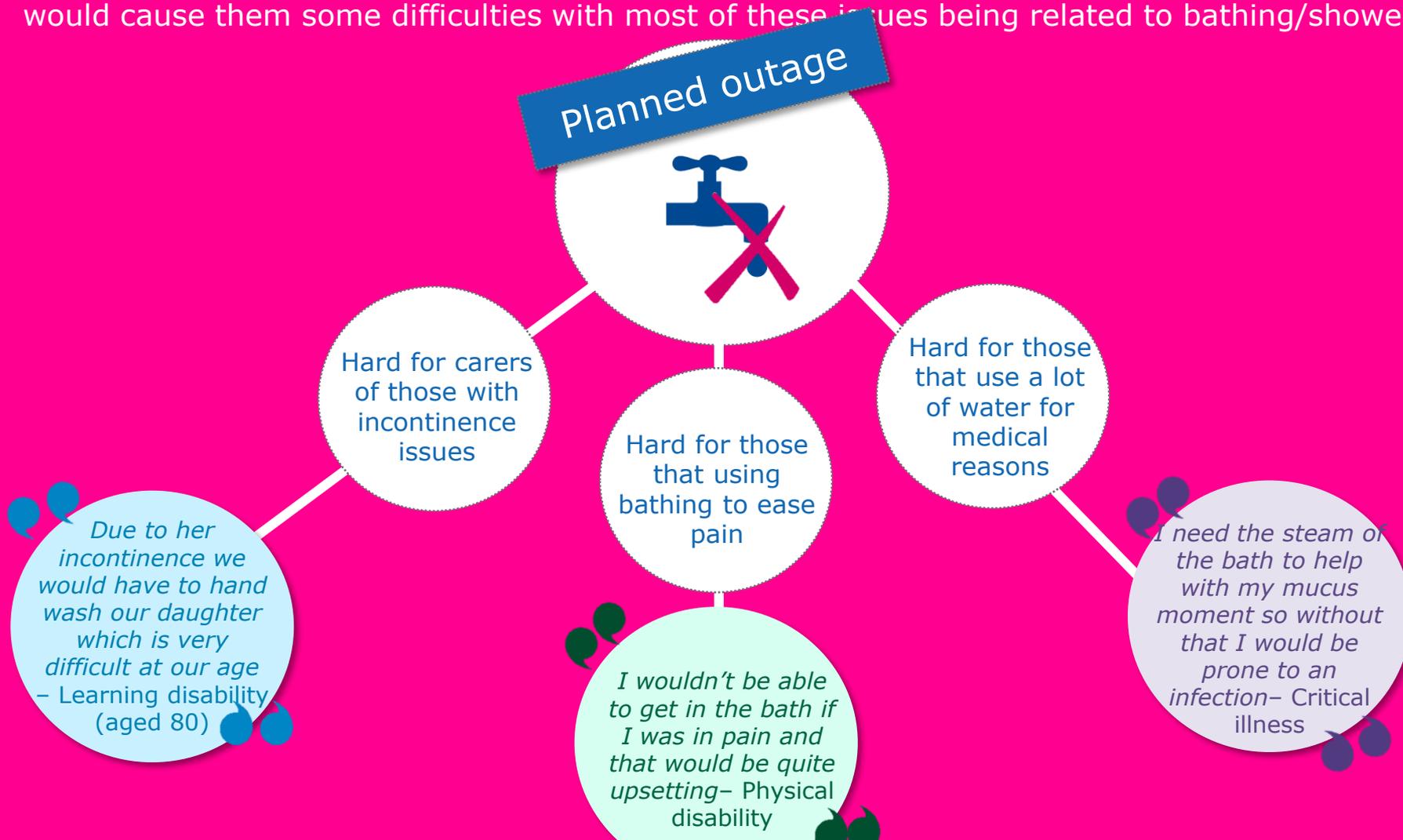
I had to convert my bath into an accessible shower so I wouldn't be able to collect much water– Physical Disability



Some would still struggle – even with prior notice

Planned

Although most customers say that they would 'cope', an outage of any length, even prior notice would cause them some difficulties with most of these issues being related to bathing/showering





Length of cut determines ability to cope

Planned

For vulnerable customers a cut-off of around 6 hours (with prior notice) would be largely manageable but if it goes beyond this point the situation starts to become more problematic

Anything up to about 6 hours would probably be OK as I could just try to sleep through it (even during the day) – Critical illness

If it starts to go into the evening then it gets difficult as the boys do not cope well with disruption to their night time routine – Learning disability

I think that most people can just about cope with the first day but it's when you get into day 2 that things become pretty desperate – Learning disability

Less vulnerable customers (Low income, Ethnic Minority etc.) felt that they could **last for a couple of days** until action was required



Vulnerable customers *usually* could cope with a disruptions to 3 hours, but after this point it becomes more difficult. Those with additional vulnerabilities that make it harder to make preparations in advance would struggle much sooner.



Planned

Time of year is also crucial

There are certain times of year when vulnerable customers felt that the impact of a planned disruption would negatively impact their ability to cope



Problematic

Easier ✓

Problematic

Summer Months

Late spring/Early Autumn

Winter Months

Need to drink more water to stay hydrated

Need to wash more bedding

Need to shower more

Yorkshire Water needs to find the right balance when planning any maintenance works in advance

Need more hot drinks to keep warm

Need heating (combi-boilers)

More hot baths



Preferred time of day can vary

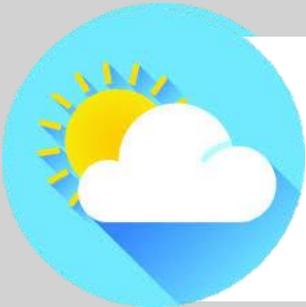
Planned

There is no clear preference in terms of the best time of day for a planned disruption to take place with different groups having different considerations. For the most vulnerable customers there is really no good time at all.



Those in **employment** were generally more averse to disruptions taking place before 9am as this would impact on their morning **routine before work**.

Morning would be very inconvenient as I wouldn't be able to have my pre-work shower and it would really set me off on the wrong footing
- African Christian



Many vulnerable customers are **at home for the large part of day** so a disruption at this time would be no better than at any other time of the day if not worse as **family and friends are more likely to be working/studying**.

The day can be very long and lonely so you would really miss your water and my daughter would be in work so couldn't help me
- Critical illness



Those with **children** say that they have a set **routine in the evening to get the kids bed** and that anything that might break this would be extremely disruptive – particularly for **kids with learning disabilities** where routine is especially important.

Bed time is difficult anyway but the boys at least have their routine which helps – a disruption to supply would be really hard at this time
- Learning disability



An unplanned disruption: a cause for distress

Unplanned

An unplanned disruption would be very concerning for customers but particularly distressing for those with vulnerabilities.

"It's so important for me to have access to water in so many ways. I think I would just go into a complete panic" – Critical illness

Worry that the incident may just be related to own property – **are YW aware?**

Concerns about how they're going to get **enough water to meet their needs**

A sense of uncertainty as to how long it may last makes it **hard to plan** the best solution

Might have to put themselves into an **uncomfortable position to get water**



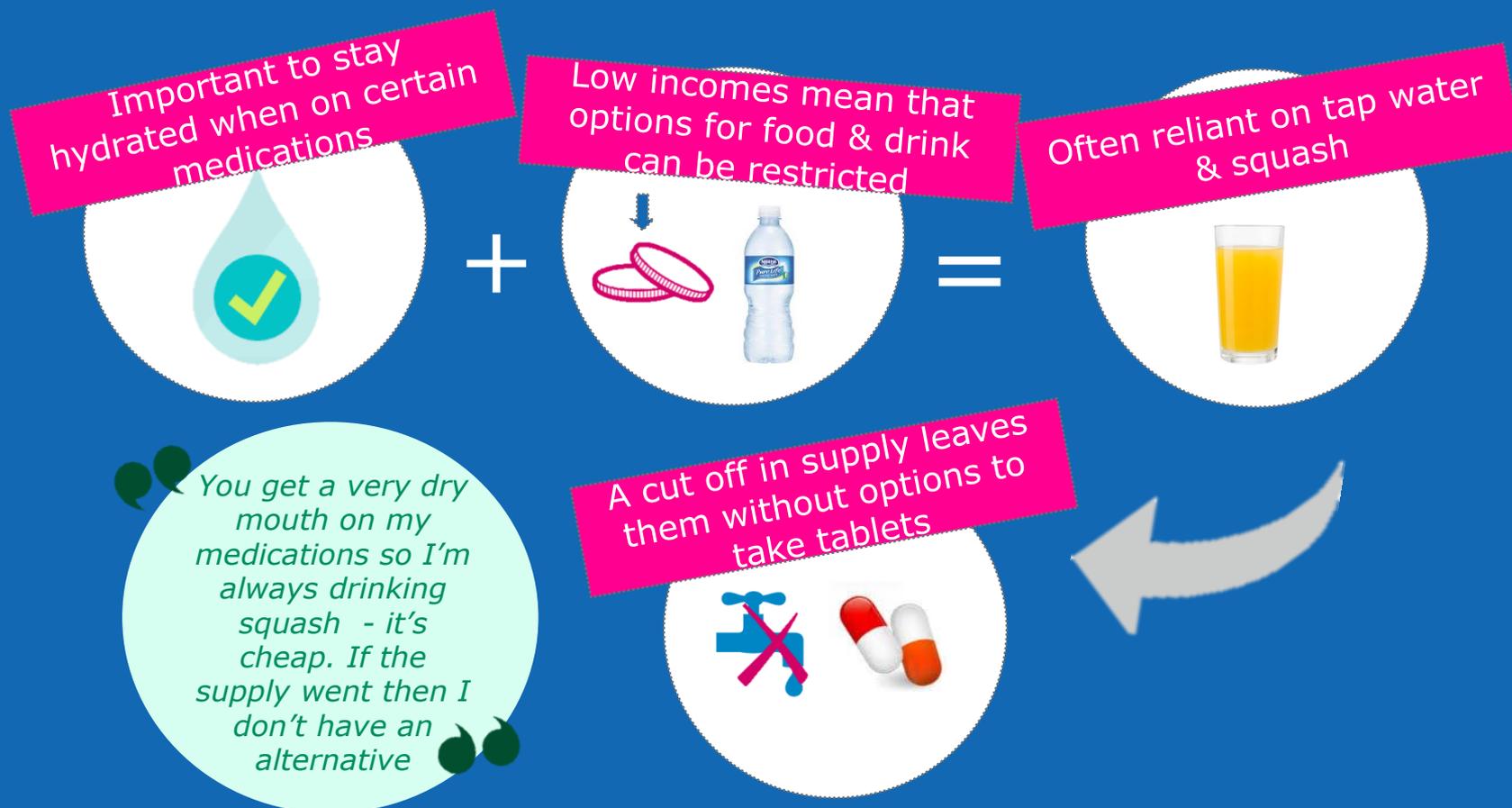
Unplanned disruption



A critical situation for those on medication

Unplanned

An immediate and critical concern for many vulnerable customers would be the inability to take any medications if they didn't have access to an alternative source of water/drinks. Many vulnerable customers are on low incomes so often rely on tap water & squash for a cost effective way to stay hydrated.





Unplanned

Skipping doses can lead to complications

Whilst waiting for a supply to return or whilst making arrangements to get water, customers could potentially be missing out on taking doses of their medication or having to seek unsatisfactory alternatives that could render them even more vulnerable.



Poor alternatives

*"Once when my supply was cut off I had to **take my diabetes meds with a can of Coke** which counteracted them" – 2nd Gen Pakistani, Muslim*

*"I once had to **use my nebuliser** when my water was off and it just didn't work as well – it's more of a top-up than a replacement" – Critical illness*



Pain & discomfort

*"I would probably start to **feel my arthritis pretty quickly** which would make it **harder to get out to buy water**" – Elderly*

*"I've been **on a lot of painkillers** since my op so I would not be happy of I couldn't take them – it would be horrendous" – Transient*



A mental deterioration

*"If I skip a dose I start to go downhill and I **wouldn't necessarily know that I was deteriorating**" – Mental Disability*

*"If I couldn't take my meds then there's **no way that I could leave the house** to go to the shops – it might set off an attack" – Mental Disability*



A lack of sanitation could lead to illness

Unplanned

Many vulnerable customers have low immune systems or are more **open to contracting infections** therefore **sanitation is key**. A number of vulnerable customers (often as a result of medical treatments/complications) also experience **bowel issues** which means that the **inability to flush** the toilet is of particular concern.



"It's so important for me to be in a clean environment as I'm really prone to getting infections – a backed up toilet is less than ideal"
– Critical illness



Infection risk



"If my IBS flairs up then I think It would be a horrible situation as we only have one toilet and I wouldn't want my boys to have to deal with that"
– Physical disability



Loss of dignity

These concerns were reflected by the Laura Crane Trust Youth Cancer Charity...

The last thing you need is a non flushing toilet, as the treatment can cause a lot of sickness & bowel problems. With young people especially you're quite embarrassed about your bodily functions so if you have to share a toilet it could be very embarrassing. Your dignity is hung on a coat peg until you get to the end and not all houses have two toilets –
Laura Crane Trust



A shock disruption can have mental implications

For many vulnerable customers the worst aspect of an unplanned disruption would be the psychological and emotional impact of the unexpected cut-off and the disruption this would cause.

Unplanned

Important to prepare both physically & mentally...

Could be particularly disruptive for those with certain learning disabilities as it can often be very **important to maintain a set routine**

The worst thing is that I can't communicate with her properly to let her know why I can't shower her. A break in her routine really upsets her – Learning disability

For customers suffering with mental disabilities it is often important for them to **mentally build themselves up** to disruptive events as there can be a **tendency to self blame**

I sometimes take days to build myself up to cleaning and if it happened on the day I was ready to face it then I would get very upset with myself – like it was my fault – Mental disability

The shock and **uncertainty** of the situation and the **prospect if getting into difficulty** would cause a great deal of **anxiety** for many which could **exacerbate their conditions**

I think that the panic of not having any water would make me very anxious and anxiety tends to make my condition worse – Critical illness



A real problem for those with kids & dependents

For parents and carers of young or severely disabled dependents it is not always practical (and possibly distressing) to bathe them in cold water and many have concerns about having to heat water. Since baby formula should not be made up using bottled water this also creates an additional complication for parents.

These concerns were reflected by CCWater, who worry about the awareness levels of the risks associated with making up formula with bottled water...

Heating up water to bathe/hand wash



"You can't bathe kids in cold bottled water so I would have to heat it up and I wouldn't have a clue how to do that to right temperature" -Low Income

Making up bottles



None of the parents we spoke to mentioned being aware of the advice to not make up baby formula with bottled water

"I think a hand wash would be quite cold and distressing for her - it would also be physically demanding given we're in our 80s" -Learning Disability

You can't use bottled water for baby bottles when you're making up formula. They become very vulnerable in those circumstances, because they aren't really informed. Making sure that it's bottled tap water is important. They've got to be fit for the purpose of the baby bottles too. In those instances, companies should educate customers to raise awareness -
CCWater





Unplanned

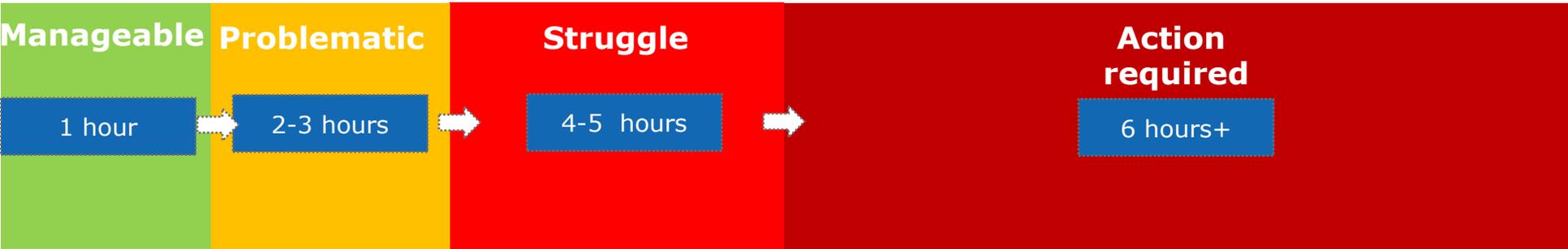
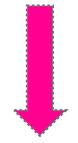
Ability to cope is detrimentally impacted

Vulnerable customers are less able to cope with unplanned incidents therefore the length of time that they can manage for is greatly reduced

I don't think I would be able to cope for very long really as I can't get out to the shops. I could possibly not having anything to drink – Critical Illness

I might still have a bit of water left in the kettle or something in the fridge but after a few hours it would get very difficult – Physical Disability

Less vulnerable customers (Low income, Ethnic Minority etc.) felt that they could **last for a day** without assistance



Vulnerable customers *usually* could cope for an hour so without water but since many cannot easily get out of the house to get water at short notice then action is required much sooner to get water to them – particularly for those that are on medication or incontinent



Discolouration would be just as bad as a cut-off

The vast majority of those we spoke to said that they would not drink or bathe in discoloured water, even if told that it was safe, with many of these saying they wouldn't even want to wash clothes in it. If the water was unsafe this would be worse than a cut-off as they would worry about the residual risk of infection or the risk of children/dependents drinking it.



Safe



Just as bad as a cut-off

- ~~Wouldn't bathe~~
- ~~Wouldn't cook~~
- ~~(Most) Wouldn't wash clothes – especially whites~~
- ~~Wouldn't drink~~

Might wash dishes

Would wash floors & surfaces ✓

Would use on plants ✓



Unsafe



Worse than a cut-off

~~Wouldn't do anything with it!!~~

Would worry about residual infection ✓

Would worry about children/dependents using the water ✓

"I would want them to cut it off if it was unsafe as my son could turn on the tap and drink it" – Polish Christian

Not being able to wash could be particularly distressing for Ethnic Minorities who need to do so for religious purposes as clear water is key to this



A difference in response

Most of the vulnerable customers we spoke to said that they would ring Yorkshire Water in the event of discovering discolouration but the elderly and those with mental disabilities had a slightly different approach.



The majority of vulnerable customers would ring up Yorkshire Water in order to determine whether or not their water was safe to use.



But in some cases....

1st generation Asian ethnic minorities appear to be more likely to **get a relative to ring** for them



The elderly are more likely to **try running their taps** for while to see if they can clear the issue themselves before "*bothering*" Yorkshire Water



Those with mental disabilities are more likely to **wait** a while in case the problem passes or **look online** to see if there are any notifications of what's happening





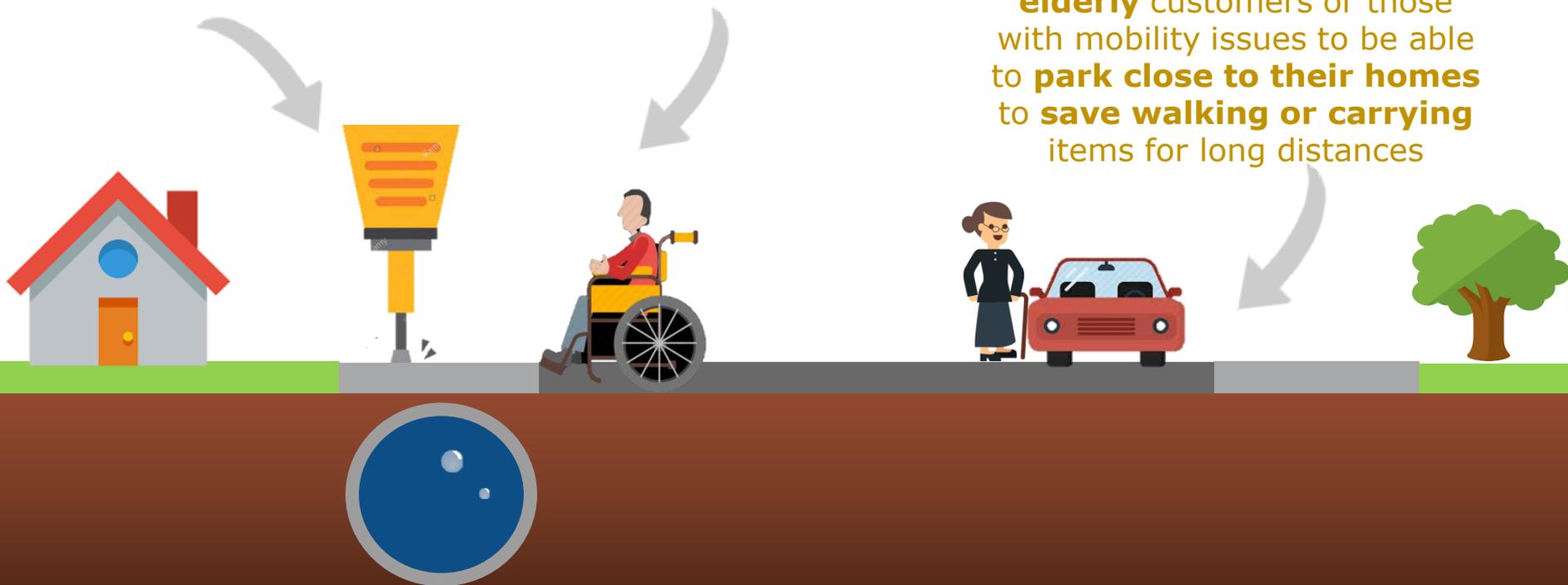
Repair works need to be carefully considered

There are many ways in which repair works can create a number of difficulties for vulnerable customers with most issues being with regards to noise and accessibility.

Loud and sporadic **noises** can negatively affect those with **mental disabilities** such as **PTSD**

Parked **vans or barriers** on **pavements** can make it difficult (or even impossible) for **wheelchair users** to get around

It is often important for very **elderly** customers or those with mobility issues to be able to **park close to their homes** to **save walking or carrying** items for long distances





Reservoirs & rivers provide respite

Vulnerable customers sometimes enjoy the benefits of visiting of YW's recreational sites which can provide them with a sense of wellbeing. An environmental disruption such as pollution could impact upon their ability to enjoy the physical and mental benefits these sites can provide.

Recreational sites provide lots of benefits to vulnerable customers



An easy & (often) accessible way to enjoy nature



Helps to de-stress & build up physical strength



Cheap day out for families

Pollution or damage to the environment would take away the enjoyment & solace these sites provide

"I love visiting the local reservoir as I find it really relaxing and cathartic. It doesn't cost me anything either which is great. If there was an incident that prevented me from accessing the site that would be a real shame as it means a lot" – Mental Disability

It is also important that YW ensures that these sites are accessible to all customers



"It can make a real difference to those with disabilities to be able to get out and access these areas. It is important for even pathways to be provided where possible or if not to at least create some sort of accessible platform to allow people in wheelchairs to be able to enjoy the surroundings" – Disability Action Yorkshire

With the exception of Sikhs & Hindus, **ethnic minorities** & those that are largely **house bound** appeared to be the **least concerned** about the impact of an environmental disruption

Ethnic Minorities can in their own ways be negatively impacted by a disruption...





Inability to wash for prayer

It is especially important for Asian ethnic minorities to be able to wash before prayer with the inability to do so likely to cause some degree of distress for those who are particularly devout. Even with prior notice the amount of water needed (particularly for Muslims) would require an impractical amount of water bottles – especially during religious festivals.



Those who can **access a car** would be able to get bottles for prayer fairly quickly but for others the amount of water required for a full family to pray would be **hard to carry**



In areas where there is a particularly high population (especially Muslims) there were concerns that **local, accessible stores may sell out** of water with the high demand



During **religious festivals** (such as Ramadan) there is an **increase in the amount of prayers and ritual washing**. It is also important to have access to plenty of water to **rehydrate before and after religious fasting**.



Muslims **must use water that is clear in colour and scent** to perform ritual washing. There are strict rules governing the type and the quality of the water that can be used for these purposes.

I usually pray 5 times a day which means 5 lots of cleansing, especially with my bowel condition. During Ramadan the amount of prayer increases so a lot of water is used. I don't think the local shop would have enough water bottles for us all to do this – Pakistani Muslim, 2nd generation



Might disrupt preparations for religious festivals

There are a number of ways in which a supply disruption could interfere or impede the preparations and activities of religious festivals. As such days are of particular importance to these customers, any interference could cause an element of distress



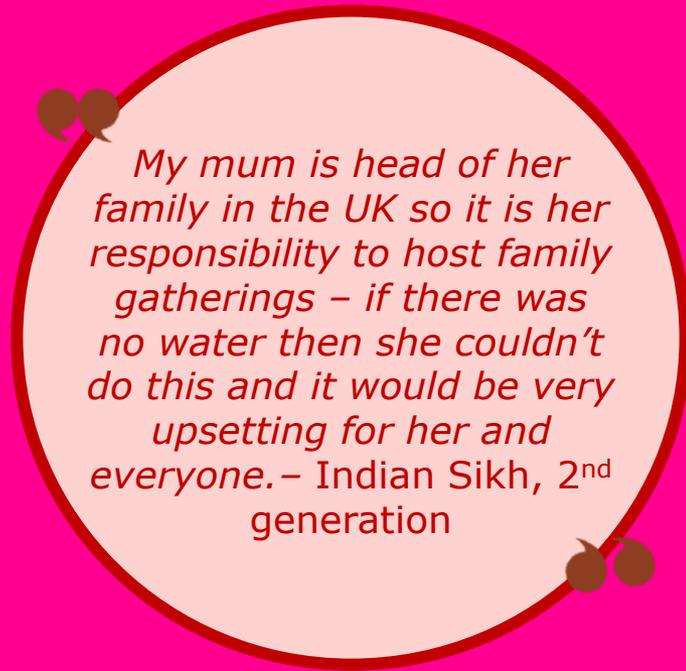
Whether it be Christmas, Eid or Diwali it is important to **all faiths** to be able to prepare and enjoy lots of **food and drink** during religious festivals – the inability to do so would cause a great deal of upset



During certain festivals (noted amongst Sikhs) there can be participation in **processions** to areas of cultural/religious significance. These often take **well established/set routes** so any **repair works in these areas could be very disruptive**



Since Muslims need to **wash their homes and property** thoroughly before Eid, **water bottles alone would not necessarily be sufficient enough** to do this satisfactorily



My mum is head of her family in the UK so it is her responsibility to host family gatherings – if there was no water then she couldn't do this and it would be very upsetting for her and everyone. – Indian Sikh, 2nd generation

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a clear glass. Another hand is positioned below, supporting the glass from underneath. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green field under a bright, hazy sky, suggesting an outdoor setting. The image is partially overlaid by a magenta vertical bar on the left side.

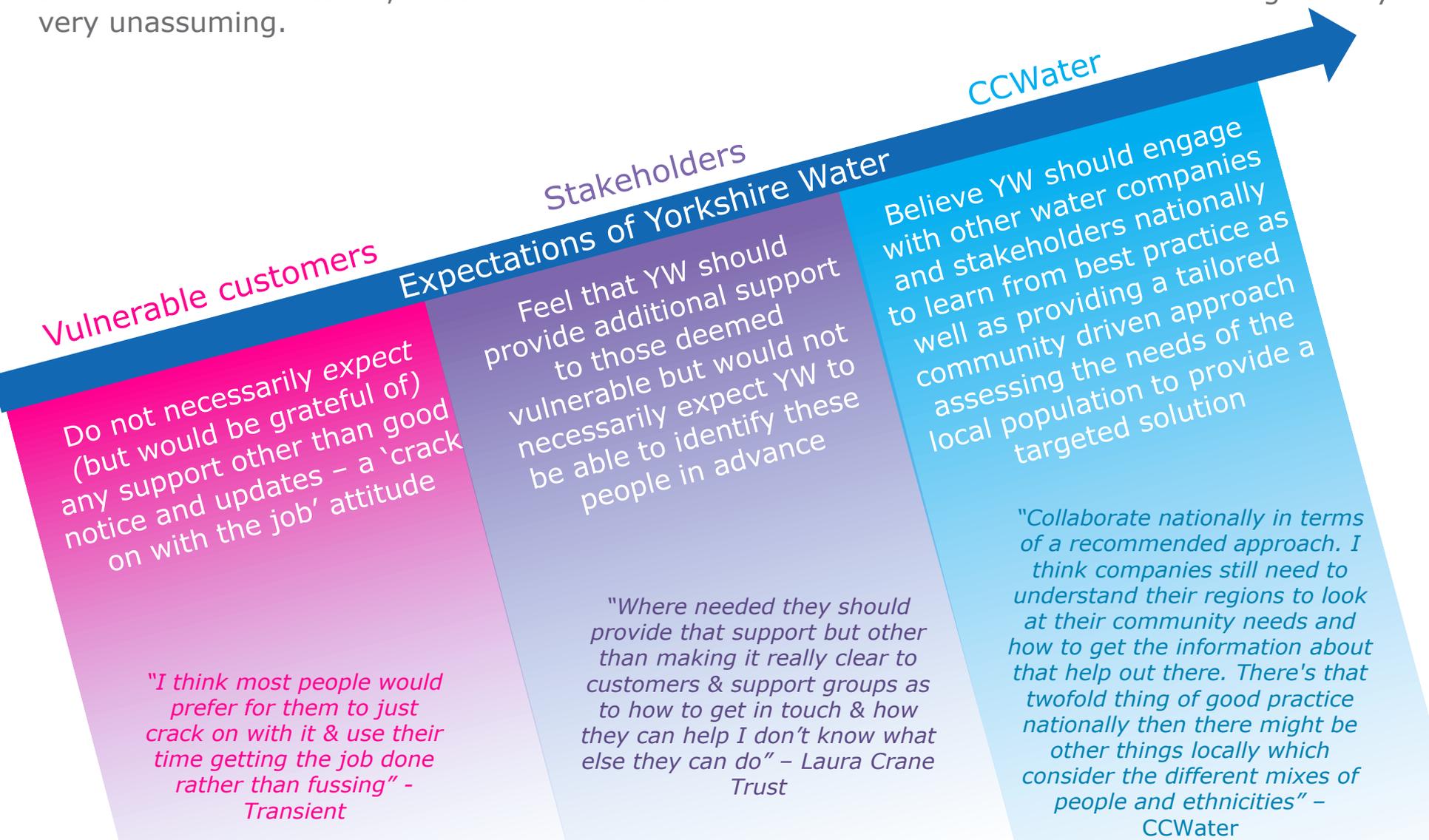
5.

Desired
response &
support



Going above & beyond

The level of response expected from Yorkshire Water in the event of a disruption varies greatly between that of CCWater, Stakeholders and Vulnerable Customers themselves who are generally very unassuming.





Communication is the foremost expectation

Vulnerable customers have varying needs and expectations but first and foremost amongst all groups is the desire to receive any notifications in good time. It is also important that any timings stipulated are accurate and closely kept to.



Planned work should be communicated as **far in advance** as possible, ideally **a month before**, with **reminder updates** closer to the time

Helps to prepare



Notifications acknowledging and explaining unplanned incidents should be **sent out ASAP** in order to **reassure customers** that the problem is being dealt with

Helps to reassure



Timings given should be **accurate and realistic** – better to under promise and over deliver to avoid disappointment. An update should be given if timings cannot be kept

Helps set expectations



As well as **why** a disruption is happening there should be a clear indication of the **area the disruption covers** so customers can make informed arrangements

Helps to plan



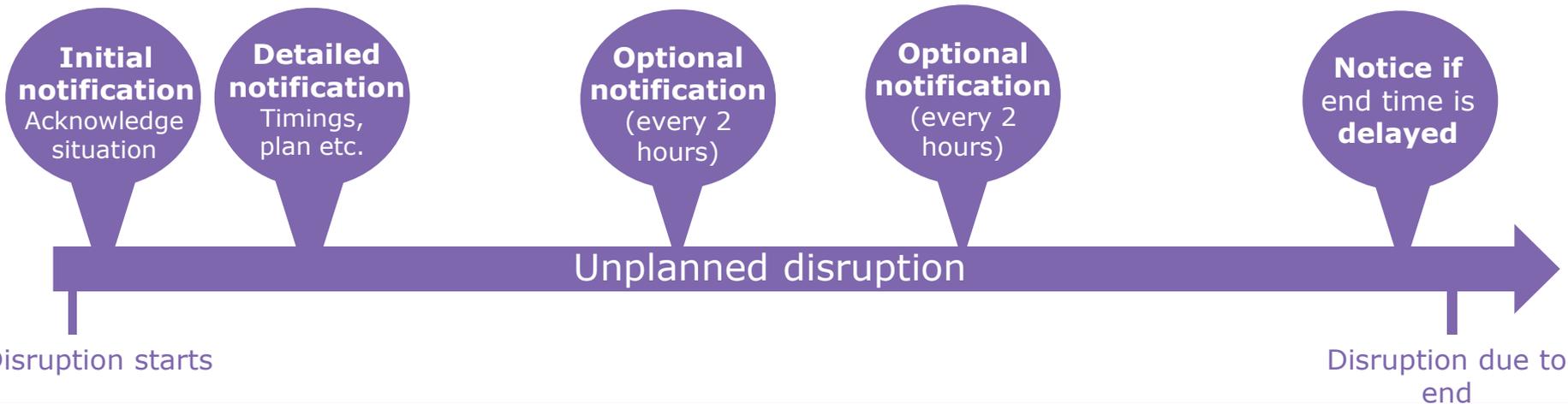
Frequency depends on notice given

The desired frequency in which notifications are received depends largely on whether or not the incident is planned or unplanned.



"Some people will be more concerned than others, some may find lots of updates a bit stressful. I think you should allow people to opt-in to receive regular notification if they want but for most I think it would be too much unless there's a delay" – African, Christian

"I would be very anxious to know exactly what's going on and how much longer it will be, I would want that reassurance at least every couple of hours" – Critical Illness





Additional communications for 'at risk' areas

In areas where a disruption is highly likely, such as flood risk areas, it is noted that Yorkshire Water should ensure that communications about what to expect, what action to take and what Yorkshire Water can do to help should be communicated as standard in preparation for a major incident.



Send out **communications as standard** in high risk areas to inform customers **in advance of likely scenario**

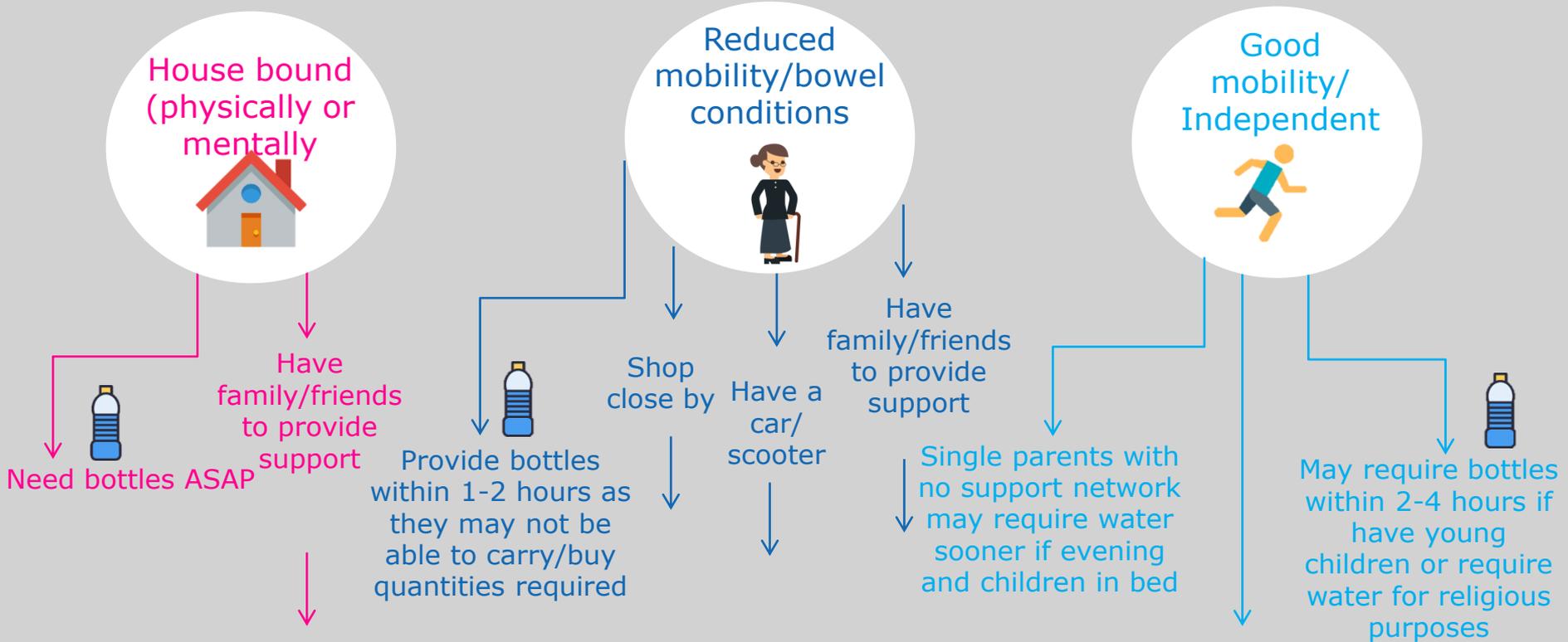


These concerns were reflected by CCWater, who worry about the awareness levels of what do to/who to contact in the event of a major disruption...

"Look at the Calderdale area in Yorkshire, that's flooded every time that they have a severe downpour. We already know that that's a high risk area. There are things we could be doing prior to an incident to make more awareness in the high risk areas to say, "Be prepared, we're here. This is what you can expect." That was feedback that we got an awful lot, that customers just didn't know who to contact, what to do and what to expect. There's no point in leaving it until another incident happens. - CCWater

Water bottles: a necessity or a nicety?

There are a number of factors that determine whether or not a customer would need to be provided with bottled water immediately. For some it is an absolute necessity but for others it is more of a nice gesture.

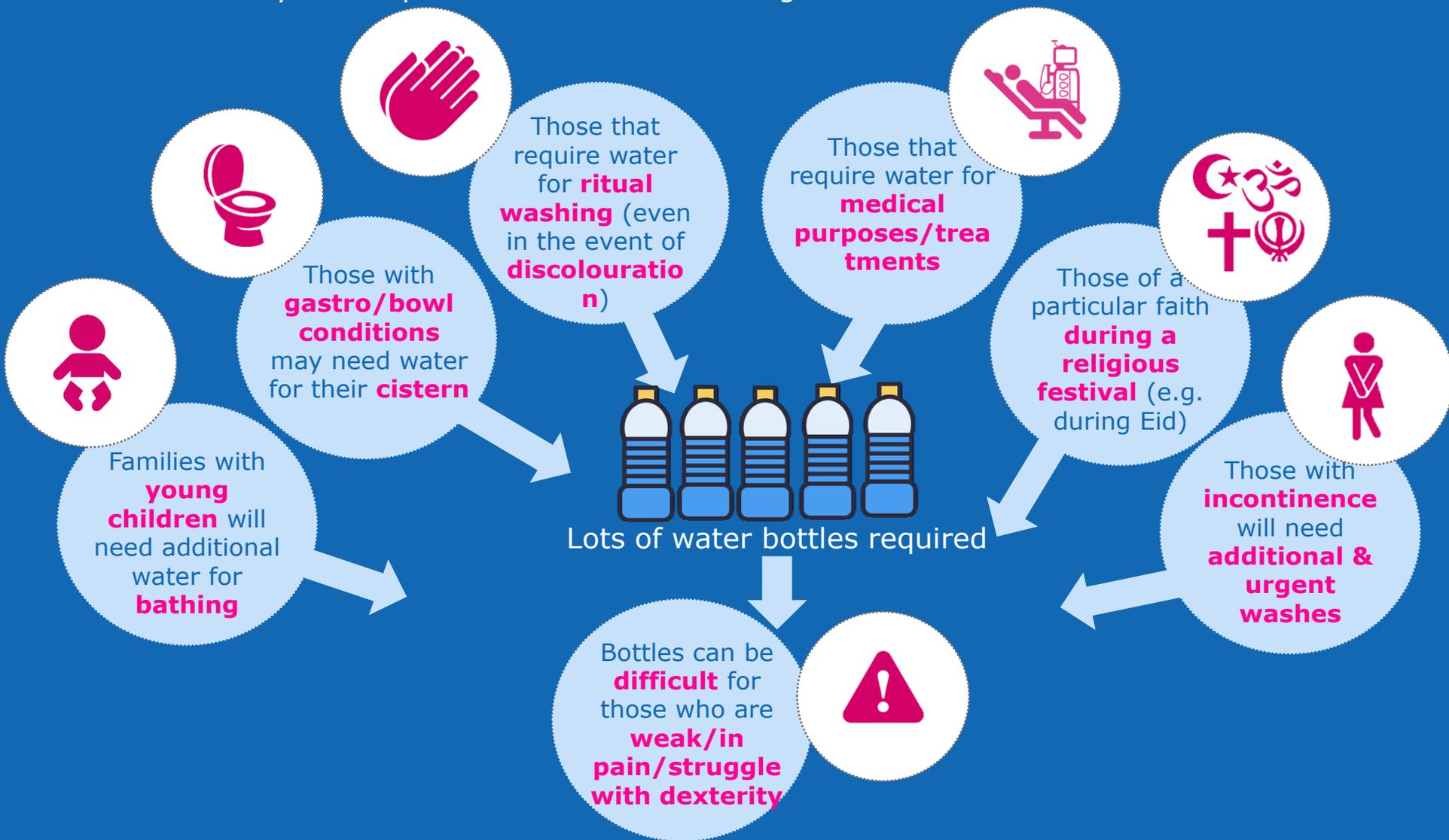


For a disruption of 8 hours or more water bottles would ideally be provided for all to help with sanitation (toilets, washes etc.)



Some may need more water than others

There are certain circumstances where some customers may require more water than others or where bottles may not be practical or sufficient enough.





A better solution than bottles required for some

Where water bottles are insufficient/impractical vulnerable customers often suggested a different variety of containers and solutions.

Solution:

A large **communal water tub/bowser** with smaller containers provided



Good for:

- ✓ Close knit communities
- ✓ Physically able

"Bottles aren't enough when you're doing prayers so in Asian communities a large container on the street might be good like in Pakistan" – Pakistani Muslim

Solution:

YW to deliver an individual **tapped water barrel**



Good for:

- ✓ Those mobility/strength issues
- ✓ Those requiring particularly large quantities

"Even if they brought bottles to me I think I would struggle to carry what I needed upstairs – they could provide a barrel on both levels" – Physical disability

Solution:

Water **tank connected to mains**



Good for:

- ✓ Those with severe disabilities
- ✓ Long term disruption where relocation isn't practical (i.e adapted facilities required)

"Long term we would really struggle with bottles as she has so many needs that require water so something that could hook up to the mains would be ideal" – Learning disability



Accessing facilities in the area

Customers who are less vulnerable and more mobile suggested that it would be good to be able to access local showering facilities.



Suitable local facilities could include...

It's the bathing that's the real issue – particularly if you have kids. They should work something out with the local swimming baths to allow you to use their showering facilities
– Low income



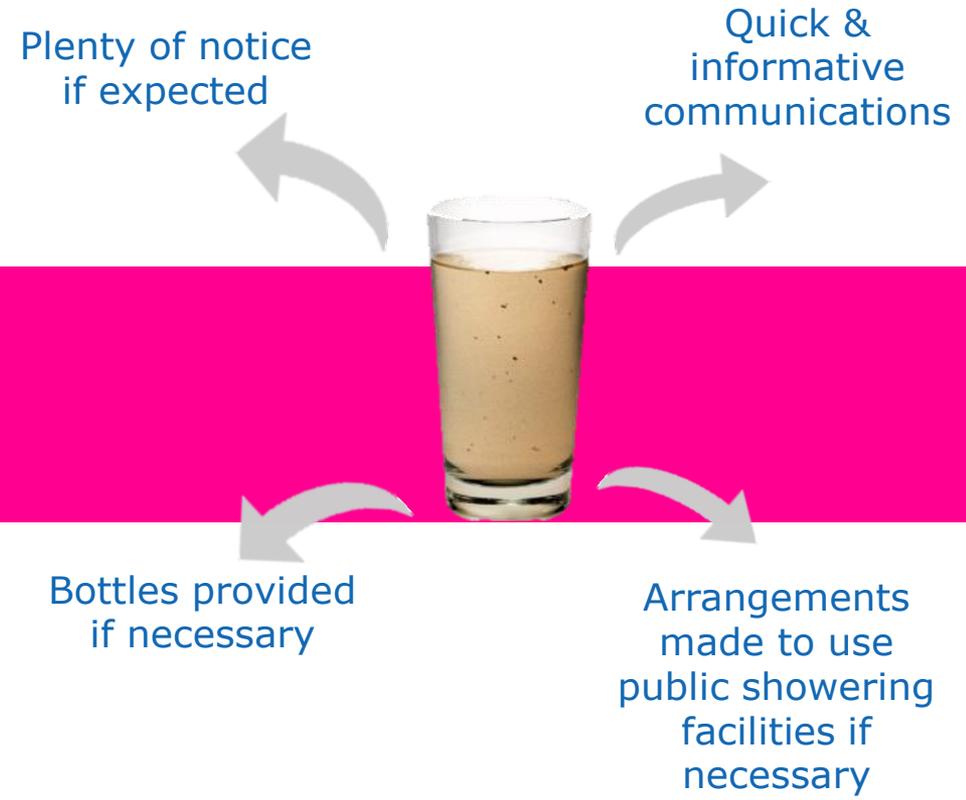
It would be very helpful if we could organise to use showering facilities at the local leisure centre – this would be particularly important for those with incontinence issues
– Disability Action Yorkshire



Discolouration requires the same level of response

For the most part, customers were largely of the opinion that they wouldn't use discoloured water for most vital tasks such as cooking, drinking and washing. As a result, the same level of response as a cut-off is often expected.

We wouldn't be able to use it for Wudu so you'd have the same issue really, we would need a solution fairly quickly – Pakistani Muslim





Compensation sought in some instances

Many customers would expect some form of compensation for the disruption caused whether it be off their bill or vouchers/recompense for any additional costs incurred. This is particularly the case for long-term or frequent disruptions.



The length and the frequency of a disruption is key to whether or not customers would expect some form of compensation

"It's the number of happenings, if you were off for a day once a year or once every two or three years you'd think nothing of it, but if it was for a day once a week it would be a totally different picture. As far as I'm concerned you're paying for a service you expect a service" - Elderly

"It happens for 8 hours during the day then I think that's fine but it's when you start having to spend a lot of money to buy bottles for washing or eating out" - African Christian

In the event of a frequent or lengthy disruption customers were able to suggest a number of ways in which Yorkshire Water could provide compensation



Direct compensation for any expenses incurred



Vouchers for local restaurants/eateries

Vouchers for bottled water



A slight reduction on the next bill (e.g. £20 off)

Least suggested

Most suggested





Customers expect to have to contact YW for help

Customers generally do not expect Yorkshire Water to pre-emptively safeguard them without them having been informed of their condition.

There was **virtually no expectation** of Yorkshire Water to be able to **identify vulnerable customers in advance** of or in the event of an incident...

"I don't see how Yorkshire Water could know if someone was vulnerable, there's the obvious things such as age but that doesn't necessarily make you vulnerable" – Mental disability

"I'm not sure what the solution is really, I think it's important to help people when in need but I don't think anyone would expect them to know who these people are" – Critical illness



However, it was felt that Yorkshire Water did have a responsibility to make it **absolutely clear** to customers how they could help and **how they can get in touch**

"If they don't know then they can't do anything it's about making sure it's properly communicated. They should make it as easy as possible for people to reach out if they're struggling" – Laura Crane Trust

"All they can do is make it really clear, put it in big letters, put in everything they send, let everyone know that they can help" – Learning disability

Challenge to identify potentially vulnerable customers....



Customers feel that the best thing that Yorkshire Water can do is to make the help they can offer as visible and as clear as possible....



We can help!!





A reluctance to ask for help

Even if Yorkshire Water make it really clear as to how they can help, some customers may feel uncomfortable to ask for help or admit vulnerability.

The **elderly** and those with **physical disabilities** were identified as being groups that may be particularly **reluctant to ask for help** or admit to being vulnerable...



"Older people are often too proud to ask for help, it's that generational thing. They don't like to put upon people" – Low Income

"Some people with disabilities would not like to think of themselves as vulnerable or disadvantaged so you do face a challenge in encouraging people like that to come forward"
– Disability Action Yorkshire

This view was also reflected by the Contact the Elderly charity...

Although customers place most of the onus on those with vulnerabilities to get in touch, many also suggested that **neighbours, friends** or **carers** who could also **help to identify those who may be vulnerable**...

"The really elderly guy in the flat next door would really struggle and I bet he wouldn't think to contact Yorkshire Water for help – It would be good if we could do it for them" – African Christian



"What we're trying to do is reach out to the family members or next of kin and ask them to make sure that their elderly relative is on the priority list or for people to think about an elderly resident who might be living alone. They're often very afraid of letting people know"
– Contact the Elderly



Realistic expectations of financial support

Customers feel that it is important for YW to provide support to those that struggle with bills during times of hardship, however they do feel that it is important that this support still places the onus on the customer to pay for what they use

Suggested solutions that strike the right balance include...

Spreading debt payments over a longer time period

Spread regular payments over 12 months rather than 10

Provide those with health problems or disabilities with an allowance to account for extra water usage

A payment 'holiday' during times of particular hardship (i.e. undergoing medical treatment, recovering from a traumatic event etc.)



- Leads to complacency
- Open to people taking advantage
- Less money for YW to reinvest in the network

- Leads to hardship
- Leads to water poverty
- Additional stress for those already undergoing difficult circumstances

Writing off debt

Insisting on full/on time payments





A knock on the door is welcome

Surprisingly, vulnerable customers are very open to having Yorkshire Water visit them face to face with a visible local presence being welcomed in the event of a disruption. However, customers would like reassurance that anyone at the door is genuinely from Yorkshire Water.

A visible **local presence** is **reassuring** in the event of a major disruption



- 👍 Reassuring
- 👍 Visible & tangible efforts
- 👍 Don't feel 'abandoned'

The majority of customers, including the elderly & those with mental disabilities would **welcome speaking to someone from Yorkshire Water at their door** and think that it's **nice way for them to check if they're coping** with the situation.



- 👍 A personal touch
- 👍 Easier to express concerns or difficulties
- 👍 Shows that YW care

However, many are aware of the dangers posed by bogus callers or other unwanted visitors (salesmen, debt collectors etc.). However, customers were able to think of a number of ways in which Yorkshire Water could reassure them.



- Yorkshire Water van outside
- Yorkshire Water branded clothing
- High-vis clothing



- Yorkshire Water ID badge & branded lanyard
- A letter/call to give prior notice
- Leave behind a leaflet or bottles on doorstep if no answer



Additional considerations when door knocking

In addition to providing lots of reassurance in terms of the Yorkshire Water caller being a genuine employee, there are additional considerations to be taken into account for ethnic minorities and those with mental disabilities.

Problem

Muslim females may not feel comfortable allowing a male stranger into their property (to deliver water or to fix a problem) if they are on their own



Solution

Yorkshire Water should consider sending out female colleagues to areas where there is a high population of Muslims or at least warn them that a male colleague will be coming round



Problem

Those with mental disabilities often admit to being wary of social situations or anticipating worse case scenarios which can make them nervous of people at their door



Solution

It was suggested that staff could be trained to be especially friendly and approachable – even the knock itself is important!

I know it sounds crazy to most people but the way someone knocks on the door and their attitude can make a massive difference – if someone knocks like a bailiff then I won't answer – Mental Disability



Avoid or prioritise response during religious events

There was a general consensus that Yorkshire Water should, where possible, consider the needs of different ethnic groups and religions when planning maintenance work or providing alternative water solutions

- Plan disruptions around key religious festivals
- Avoid creating roadworks when outdoor events are traditionally held
- Prioritise providing water to places of worship or burial care
- Consider providing more/better replacement water solutions during special cultural/religious events

We only have two big religious occasions a year so if it happened on one of those days we would not be pleased with Yorkshire Water – Indian Sikh, 2nd generation

I would expect them to make sure that mosques and funeral parlours were prioritised as it's very important to be able to wash our relatives when they pass – Pakistani Muslim, 2nd generation



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a clear glass filled with water. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset or sunrise with warm yellow and orange light. The image is partially covered by a semi-transparent pink vertical bar on the left side.

6.

Perceptions
& awareness
of Yorkshire
Water



Mixed levels of awareness

Whilst all customers are aware of Yorkshire Water, there is a great deal of confusion about the organisation's remit and responsibilities beyond the supply of clean water.



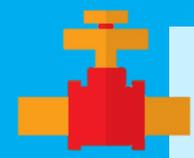
The provision of a constant supply of safe, clean water is top of mind



Most also recognise the company's responsibility to deal with waste water



Many note the organisation's long heritage, with the majority believing YW to have a good reputation



There is a level of confusion regarding the relationship between YW and the council and who has responsibility to maintain the sewerage network



Some customers believe that they could choose to switch their domestic water supplier if they wanted to – some even believe YW to be a nationwide supplier



YW's environmental responsibilities were rarely top of mind with awareness of the maintenance or recreational sites often being linked to the proximity of local reservoirs

Ethnic minorities in particular appear to be unsure of YW's responsibilities and the structure of the wider domestic water market...



They must be a good company as all of my family are with them. Everyone seems to use them so I think people are very satisfied with the service – Indian Sikh

They are a national company I think, they just use Yorkshire for the brand name – Indian Hindu



A positive picture

Despite there being mixed levels of awareness regarding the functions and responsibilities of the company, Yorkshire Water is generally very well regarded with many factors driving this positive perception.

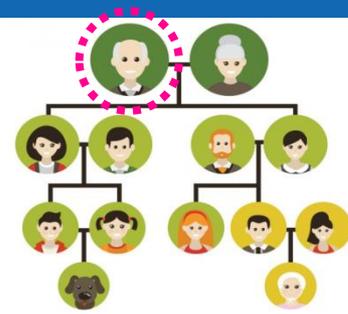




A nice but sometimes distant relative

Customers can quite easily relate to Yorkshire Water as being a member of their family, especially since they generally think of them fondly but not always frequently.

There is a virtually unanimous perception of Yorkshire Water being an **older** relative with many often referring to them as **distant**....



*I think of them as being my **ancestors**, so you know of them but not much about them – Low Income*

*I'd say they're like a **distant uncle** that you've heard nice things about and think of fondly but that you perhaps don't see very often so they're not always on your mind – Critical Illness*

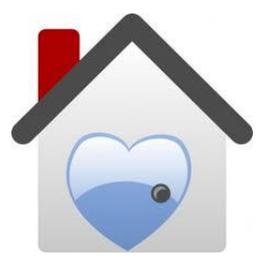
However, those that have directly **experienced good customer service** from them tend to think of them as being a closer relation....



*I would say a **mother figure** as I think they genuinely care & they really looked after us when we had an issue – Elderly*

*I see them as a **Grandma** as they were very caring and considerate over the phone....they've been around for a long time so know what they're doing – Elderly*

And just **like family**, you can't **choose them**, you just have to get on with them....



*Like **family**, you don't get to pick them they're just there. They're like **parents**, you can't live without them but they annoy you sometimes as well – Low Income*



7.

Communication
preferences

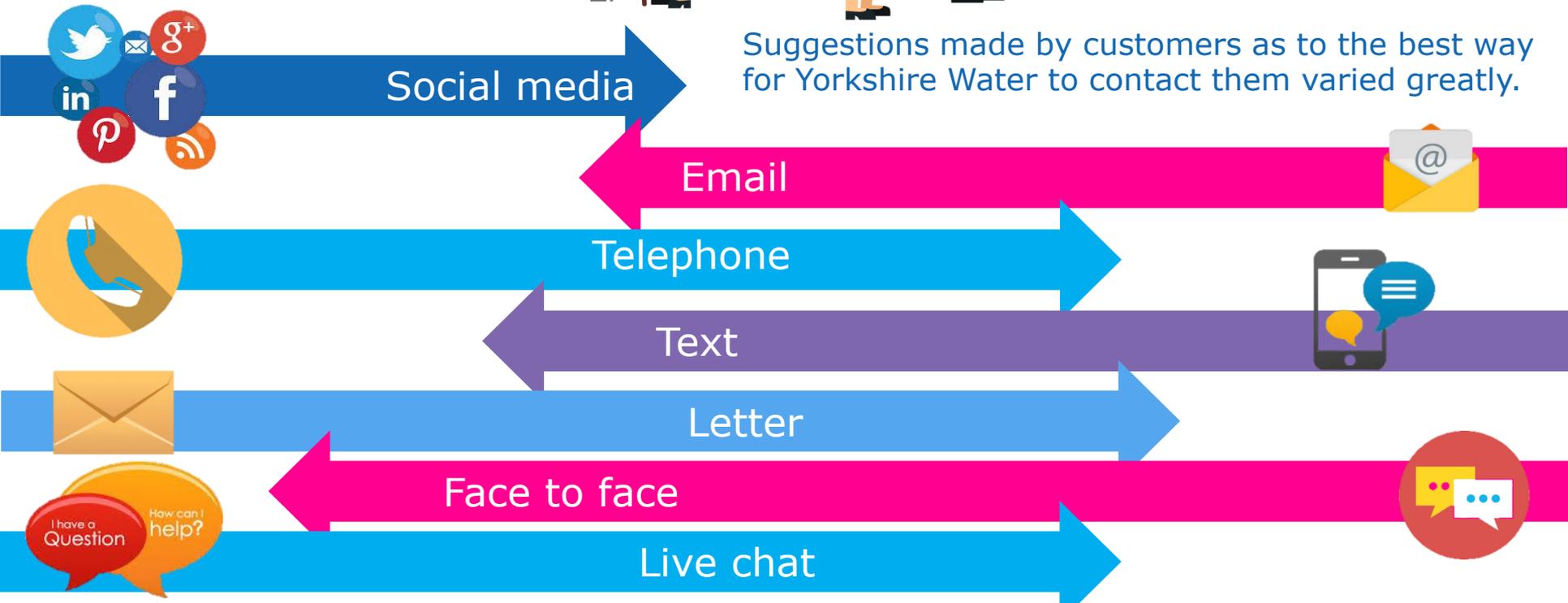


All routes to capture all audiences

Different groups of vulnerable customers all have different preferences with regard to communications. In order for Yorkshire Water to reach out to all customers it is important to have a multi-channel approach to ensure that there is no room for anyone to 'slip through the net'.



Suggestions made by customers as to the best way for Yorkshire Water to contact them varied greatly.





Media preference related to age

The spectrum of effective communications appears to correlate most closely with the age of a customer

"People are often sharing things that are going on the area – put it on Facebook" – Low Income

"I'm always on my phone – all the time. I prefer to speak to people" – Pakistani Muslim

"They should put it on the wireless if there's an urgent announcement" – Elderly



- Targeted **social media** campaigns are a good way to communicate **urgent notifications**
- Less likely to have a landline or answer unknown numbers so **texts are essential**
- Monitor **emails**

- Often have **mobile** to hand – **texts and calls** welcomed
- Those working are **easily contactable by email**
- **Would still like to receive a letter**, particularly for important communications

- **Letters are a must!**
- **Landline** calls – leave a voicemail if no answer
- **Radio** is good for **urgent notifications**

All age groups appear open to face to face so long as it is used in conjunction with other forms of communications, however it is worth bearing in mind that a face to face methodology was used to conduct the research.

Can't just rely on a letter

Although a letter is often expected for formal communications, some groups of vulnerable customers are unlikely to open their letters in good time.

Letters can be left for long periods of time before opened therefore are **not best for urgent notifications**

This is particularly the case for...

Those with **learning disabilities** can sometimes find letters hard to read/understand

The **very elderly** can sometimes struggle with small text and will not always be aware of the option to request a bigger font size

Those with **physical disabilities** can struggle to pick up letters that have fallen onto the floor

Those with **mental disabilities** can often find opening letters arduous or associate them with bad news

Those on **low incomes** can sometimes associate letters with bills or struggle to understand them

Although getting customers to open letters is a challenge, many said that a **leaflet would go straight in the bin** as they're easily mistaken for junk. Many elderly respondents also noted being **wary** of receiving a number of **leaflets from YW recently about insurance**.





A personal touch preferred by the elderly

Elderly customers are particularly averse to generic or automated communications, with these alone certainly not being sufficient in the event of a major disruption. The fear of not being able to speak to someone directly can often put the elderly off from making contact.



Automated phone lines can be confusing and off-putting

"There's often a fear of the telephone, particularly these automated instructions. Sometimes their hearing isn't good and they can't hear the reply. Growing up they've been used to a personal response so there's a fear of new technology" – Contact The Elderly



A desire to speak to a 'real' person



Generic letters can be frustrating and appear impersonal



Contact The Elderly suggest that elderly customers should be **reassured** by YW that if they ring a number they will **speak to a person & not have to follow recorded instructions**

"If they're going to do something outside of my house I would like someone to come round and speak to me, not just some standard letter that doesn't mean anything. They should check to make sure people can still access their cars OK" – Elderly



Mental Disabilities: A patient and friendly tone desired

Those with mental disabilities can sometimes struggle with the formal tone of communications and can often be reluctant to get in touch for help due to a fear of being judged.

Problems



Can find the overly formal tone of letters accusatory

Worry about having to explain their conditions over the phone for fear of judgment

Can get anxious when talking on the phone and can struggle to quickly articulate their concerns

"I find that letters can often come across quite formal and stern which make me feel like I've done something wrong even if I haven't" – Mental Disability

Make sure communications use clear but friendly and reassuring language

Allow them to register their condition online/via webchat/upon signing up so that when they call their condition is flagged up automatically

Refer them to a specially trained advisor who has a patient, understanding and friendly tone

"When you have Bi-Polar you're overly aware of people's body language and tone – you don't want to interact with people that are too abrupt but then you're worried if they seem overly cautious" – Mental Disability

Solutions





Language options for ethnic minorities

First generation ethnic minorities can sometimes struggle with communications due to language barriers which can result in a lack of understanding. Older people from ethnic minorities often rely on their younger relatives to communicate on their behalf.



- 1st generations often speak very **limited English** – skills not adequate to understand communications beyond their bill
- 2nd generations often prefer verbal communications but can **struggle with strong regional accents**
- Often have a **limited understanding** of YW and water services more generally
- Older or 1st generations may need **family or friends to speak on their behalf** but are sometimes **prevented by strict company policies**

Do a language needs assessment

When you take on a new customer you should be asking the question do you speak English? Are you able to read English? What language do you need this literature in? Then they're going to know what's going on and seek help if needed. The other thing is there are plenty of organisations out there that deliver support to local community groups in their language. – Citizens Advice Bureau

Provide an information pack

I think they need welcome packs get to some key information out including how to use the sewer system, how to get help for your bills, how to register for somebody who needs extra help. It is expanding out to understand what their customers needs are – CCWater


A number of customers also welcomed YW getting more involved with community groups and events to provide information and support



Adaptable comms for learning disabilities

It was recognised that YW currently give customers the ability to request a larger font size if desired but that this does not go far enough to cater for the needs of those with learning disabilities.



- Can find **certain colours difficult** – Dyslexics particularly struggle to read black text on white backgrounds
- Can struggle to engage with **lots of information/text**
- Find **particular font types difficult** to read
- Can struggle with **a lot of numerical information**
- Can find it easier to read and understand **information on a screen** rather than on paper

Tailor bills/letters 

"It would be good to be able to go online and tailor the way things are displayed so changing fonts and colours etc." – Learning disability

Websites and accounts responsive to mobile devices 

"A lot online billing and information isn't designed for mobile use which is a shame as it's a lot easier for me to take in." – Learning disability

A number of customers suggested that bills or letters should be summarized into key points at the start so that they can easily understand them 

Collaboration with charities & communities

In addition to information targeted at the consumer it is suggested that Yorkshire Water could do more to reach out to people through grassroots organisations and establishments.

Yorkshire Water needs to create a support network with 'on the ground' organisations to target harder to reach groups that may not be responsive to traditional media communications.



"Media's brilliant to get a quick messaging out but you need to engage with communities to think about actually what would work for all the range of people. Whether it is door knocking, whether it is having community representatives. You could collaborate with local community groups to help with going door to door" - CCWater

"Macmillan nurses are in a fantastic position to identify those that need support and provide them with information. They should provide a support pack stipulating who they can help and how they can help. We would happily put it on our website" - Laura Crane trust Cancer Charity

A hand holding a glass of water against a bright, sunlit background. The image is partially obscured by a magenta overlay on the left side.

8.

Conclusions &
recommendations



Safeguarding is right thing to do

Customers generally feel that safeguarding those that are vulnerable is morally the right thing to do given how essential water is to life but often recognised that YW don't *have* to do it.

Yorkshire Water should safeguard customers because...



It essential for life e.g. **hydration**, to take medications etc.



It essential for **sanitation** e.g. to prevent infections



Customers have **no option to change** provider so cannot go elsewhere if the service fails them

Many do not necessarily *expect* Yorkshire Water to have a duty of care to them personally and have a very unassuming but grateful attitude to any help that YW could provide them with if they were struggling

You shouldn't expect anything in life. It would be the decent thing to do but we would never assume they'd help us – Learning disability

I would be very grateful of anything they could do to help but I wouldn't expect it. I think it would be nice though – Critical Illness

I don't think they're under any obligation but I think that it would be a lovely gesture and reflect well on them – Mental disability



A multitude of ways to safeguard

Ways in which it is felt that Yorkshire Water should consider safeguarding customers include practical assistance, financial support/advice & good communications



Communications should be...

Accurate & timely ✓

Personalised ✓

Easy to read ✓

Reassuring ✓

Appropriate for the audience ✓



Financial support/advice should include...

Water saving advice ✓

Clearer advice on metering (pros, cons etc.) ✓

Debt assistance ✓

Early notifications of when an account is in debt ✓

Flexible payment options ✓



Practical assistance could include...

Free fitting of water saving devices ✓

Provision of water source in the event of a disruption ✓

A home visit in the event of a disruption ✓

Considerately timed maintenance works ✓



Recommendations

- 1 Key to helping vulnerable customers is identifying where they live. This is easy to do with low income families through the services of companies such as Experian.
- 2 However, this won't cover all vulnerable customers. Another method is to encourage customers to sign up to YW's Helping Hands scheme.
- 3 To do this, YW needs to raise awareness of Helping Hands and other services it offers to vulnerable groups. CCWater reported awareness of such services amongst YW customers at 47% in 2015.

It is important that YW not only raises awareness of these services among vulnerable customers, but also among those not currently vulnerable. This is because:

 - many vulnerable customers either don't see themselves as vulnerable/or won't be reached by marketing, so it will be down to their family/friends to persuade them to sign up/use these services
 - We can all be vulnerable at different times in our lives so it's good to be aware that these services exist
- 4
- 5 Another way YW can identify vulnerable customers is through its customer facing staff, who should all be trained so that they can identify vulnerabilities, handle customers appropriately and offer support.
- 6 YW also needs to continue to build relationships with community groups, charities, housing associations etc. who can help YW access these groups and provide support to them



Recommendations

1

As well as building relationships with support groups, YW should be raising its profile in local communities. This not only raises awareness of what YW does (awareness levels are particularly low amongst some vulnerable groups) but also increases YW's understanding of its vulnerable customers.

2

YW can raise its profile by attending local community events, having an increased presence during disruptions and holding sessions with customers in the community.

3

In addition, extending YW's education programme and offering welcome packs for new customers will help inform the next generation of customers about what Yorkshire Water does and the services it provides. This is also another way of raising awareness of its current services amongst the parents and grandparents of future customers.

4

Having a greater presence in the community and being seen to be helping customers in the community will not only raise awareness but also raise customers' opinion of YW, thus increasing trust in the organisation. This will also make it easier for vulnerable customers to feel that they can interact with Yorkshire Water.

5

It is important that customers are aware of all the channels YW offers for contacting them and that YW uses multiple channels to contact these customers, in line with the recommendations laid out in this research.

6

Consideration should also be given to a dedicated helpline for vulnerable customers.



Recommendations

1

YW should have consideration for customer needs when planning works. Not one time of the day satisfies all, but it's clear that the longer the interruption the bigger the impact. To counteract this:

- Consider more regular shorter periods of planned works
- Avoid key religious/cultural festivals

2

Not all interruptions are planned. Continue to develop your strategy for unplanned events in line with the recommendations in this research. Consider launching community pages on social media as one way of interacting with customers.

3

For areas more frequently affected by unplanned events, consider issuing information to all households informing them what to do in the event of an interruption, flood etc.

This should include practical tips, ways to contact YW, an opportunity to opt into update texts/calls/emails and details of partner organisations involved.

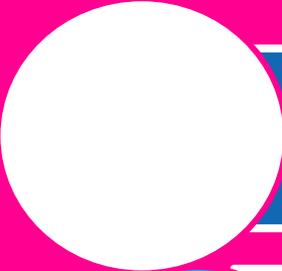
4

As well as partnering with community groups and charities, consider building relationships with leisure centres/hotels and laundrettes. These can provide essential support to customers during longer interruptions e.g. showers/toilet facilities/baths/washing of clothes/bed linen

5

Whilst many customers transcend many vulnerable customer categories, many having needs unique to only 1-2 categories. We have provided a quick and easy reference tool for each category.

Recommendations – communications



Yorkshire Water should use a multichannel approach and provide a variety of options to tailor communications to the need of different groups.



Yorkshire Water should provide more display and formatting options to those with learning disabilities, allowing customers to change things like colours, fonts and layout to make it as easy as possible for customers to read and understand information.



Yorkshire Water should consider providing a different contact number to elderly customers so that they can speak to a 'real' person straight away and not have to navigate through automated commands which can be confusing and off-putting.



It is important to ensure that communications are clear but not overly formal in tone. In the event of a disruption communications and customer services staff should be friendly and reassuring. There should be the ability to register a mental disability online or in writing so that these customers do not have to go into any great detail about their condition over the phone.



Quite often customers can find themselves getting into arrears without even realising – Yorkshire Water should notify a customer as soon as this happens and before the debt becomes too intimidating or unmanageable. Communications about debt should take a helpful and concerned tone as opposed to appearing like demand notice.