

Emergency Preparedness Strategies for People with Special Needs:
A symposium for people with special needs, caregivers, and providers



Home Based Care
Task Force

LESSONS LEARNED

January 2011

Introduction:

The *NYC Citizen Corps Council* and the *Home Based Care Task Force* hosted the **Emergency Preparedness Strategies for People with Special Needs Symposium** on September 21, 2010 at Brooklyn Borough Hall in Brooklyn, NY.

The symposium brought together more than 130 consumers, caregivers, and home care providers from 86 organizations to address planning needs for people requiring a higher level of support during an emergency event. The symposium created an exchange of ideas between consumers, caregivers, and providers. All attendees are involved in emergency planning for special needs populations.

The event consisted of two parts, targeting different audiences within the special needs community:

The morning session, presented by the NYC Citizen Corps Council, was directed towards consumers and direct care providers. Through panel and roundtable discussions, the session addressed personal preparedness education, tools to create effective support networks, and addressing barriers and challenges. The panel discussion, focusing on the essential services and support that people with disabilities, older adults, and others may need in emergency situations, brought together:

Aaron Belisle (NYC Office of Emergency Management)
Judith Ahronheim (SUNY Downstate Medical Center)
Susan Dooha (Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY)
Tim Elliott (Self Advocacy Association of New York State)

The afternoon session, presented by the Home Based Care Task Force, was directed towards agencies and administrators. This session addressed incorporation of consumers into agency level business continuity planning. The panel discussion, focusing on the difference between meeting the bare minimum regulatory requirements and how incorporating client focused emergency preparedness planning into routine activities can enhance an agency's continuity of operations, brought together:

Alexis Silver (Home Care Association of NY State)
Aaron Belisle (NYC Office of Emergency Management)
Elizabeth Davis (EAD & Associates)
Arnold Ng (NYC Human Resources Administration)
Mikhail Pankov (NY State Department of Health)
Jean Paul Roggiero (Primary Care Development Corporation)

Disclaimer: *The concepts, challenges, and recommendations presented in this document were solely provided by attendees of the Emergency Preparedness Strategies for People with Special Needs Symposium. The information provided does not reflect the views or opinions of the NYC Citizen Corps Council, Home Based Care Alliance or other sponsoring New York City agencies.*

Key Concepts:

Several themes resonated throughout the symposium, presenting challenges and recommendations from participants, panelists, and speakers, including:

1. Individual, community, and agency responsibilities in emergency preparedness
2. Emergency preparedness resources
3. Building networks
4. Operational emergency response plans
5. Organizational emergency preparedness

Concept 1: Individual, community, and agency responsibilities in emergency preparedness

Challenges

- The perception that the responsibility of emergency preparedness is viewed as existing in silos instead of communally.
- Individuals with disabilities often need a higher level of support in all phases of emergency – planning, response and recovery.
- Indifference by the general population to address the need for emergency preparedness despite training and education.

Recommendations

- Actively involve all special needs populations in the planning process from the individual, community and direct service provider perspectives. By using a proactive approach, the processes can be all inclusive and emphasize preparedness from a holistic perspective.
- Engage individuals, neighbors, friends, family, residential building management, service providers, and local businesses and organizations when developing and testing plans.
- Plans must be flexible and rely on multiple individuals and groups for implementation.
- Focus on developing plans for everyday experiences versus large scale emergencies. Plans will become easier to incorporate into every day activities and become more user friendly.
- Exercise, test, and update plans at all levels.

Concept 2: Emergency preparedness resources

Challenges

- Distribution of and access to resources.
- Potential cost to individuals and organizations.
- Limited knowledge and/or access to technology.
- Top down approach to planning disenfranchises consumers who often think they do not have the means to plan for themselves.

Recommendations

- Actively involve all special needs populations in the development and distribution of emergency preparedness resources.
- Resources need to be understood by target population(s).

- Develop and/or strengthen communication with community networks for effective distribution of planning resources.
- Use free resources currently available, including:
 - Emergency Notification Systems
 - NY-Alert: www.nyalert.gov
 - Notify NYC: www.NYC.gov/notify or call 311
 - Advance Warning System (For NYC special needs service providers): www.advancewarningsystemnyc.org
 - Emergency Preparedness Educational Materials
 - Ready New York: www.NYC.gov/readyny

Concept 3: Building networks

Challenges

- Isolation and stigmatization of people with special needs.
- Likely gaps in service:
 - Individuals without personal support network
 - Between consumer and direct service provider
 - Between families of homebound consumers and home care providers
 - Between several direct service providers caring for the same consumer
 - Between agency and community

Recommendations

- Utilize more local and grassroots organizations such as block associations and parishes that know a local community to develop relationships.
- Train government officials, first responders, volunteers, and community members in disability awareness to learn how to more effectively and greatly incorporate people with special needs and other vulnerable populations into community.
- Greater government agency coordination through participation on established committees, task forces, and trade organizations.
- Foster greater understanding and acceptance among consumers, caregivers and service providers by empowering the special needs community.
- Create networks by engaging and involving individuals, neighbors, friends, family, government, residential building management, and local businesses and organizations.
- Networks do not have to be focused on emergency preparedness to address preparedness issues.
- Exercise, test, and update networks at all levels.

Concept 4: Operational emergency response plans

Challenges:

- Preparing for emergencies with advance warning such as snow storms, heat waves, and transit strikes, hurricanes versus emergencies with little to no warning, such as blackouts, fires, and floods.
- Blind trust by the general population in government and service provider emergency plans.

- Misinformation and/or lack of understanding of how plans impact the special needs community.
- Indifference towards emergency preparedness despite training and education.
- Overall implementation of plans during an emergency.

Recommendations:

- Reinforce importance of flexible and adaptable emergency plans centered on the needs of individuals and their environment.
- Actively involve all special needs populations in the development, practicing, and distribution of emergency preparedness plans.
- Test and update individual and agency plans at regular intervals.
- Engage community networks in identifying people with special needs who may need assistance during an emergency and evacuation.
- Answer important questions such as:
 - What would happen if a client is bedridden or can't walk down the stairs in case of an emergency?
 - When there is an emergency, how would a senior citizen using a wheelchair evacuate from a high rise building?
 - How can building effective networks assist?

Concept 5: Organizational emergency preparedness

Challenges

- Staff members' dual responsibilities as a family and staff member.
- Increased responsibilities and decreased funding.
- Insufficient staffing levels during emergencies adversely impact successful implementation of emergency plans for special needs individuals.

Recommendations

- Agencies need to work together.
- Starting small, develop continuity of operations plans.
- While there may be guidelines in planning, plans must remain flexible and be adapted to the relevant personnel and/or environment.
- Promote individual emergency preparedness to staff and clients.
- Government coordination in developing relationships.
- Exercise, test, and update plans at all levels.

Get Involved:

If you are interested in further exploring and addressing any of the concepts discussed at the Symposium, there are two organizations that your organization may be interested in getting involved with:

NYC Citizen Corps Council

Part of the national Citizen Corps initiative, the NYC Citizen Corps Council brings together local leaders from community organizations, government, the private sector, and volunteer programs. The Council promotes grassroots emergency preparedness and volunteerism and helps enable New Yorkers to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

The NYC Citizen Corps Council's preparedness activities are managed by four task forces, each of which focuses on a different demographic group: immigrants and individuals with limited English proficiency, people with special needs, youth, and volunteers. The Special Needs Task Force brings together community leaders to conduct outreach specifically for New York City's special needs communities. This task force develops new preparedness messaging to prepare special needs communities and promotes cultural understanding within the emergency management field.

For more information about the NYC Citizen Corps Council, visit www.NYC.gov/citizencorps or contact Justin Land at citizencorps@oem.nyc.gov.

Home Based Care Alliance

Home based care service providers and key governmental organizations formed the Home Based Care Task Force in 2006. The original mission was to identify and address important emergency access and response policy issues affecting the home care community. We successfully initiated dialogue on policy issues like transportation assistance, frozen zone access and facilitated merging OEM's evacuation zone data with agency client demographic information. Meanwhile the Task Force built a strong presence with critical public safety and human services city agencies, and established a seat in OEM's Emergency Operations Center. The members of the Task Force decided in the fall of 2010 the original mission was complete but there remained a need for home care focused collaborative work. As of November 2010, the Task Force reorganized into the Home Based Care Alliance.

Home Based Care Alliance is comprised of an Executive Committee and General Membership. The Executive Committee is comprised of active, 'hands-on' members with a role in developing and pushing forward both policy initiatives and relevant programming to the wider Alliance membership. We invite anyone who is willing to be an active participant to join us on the Executive Committee. Organizations with a consumer base receiving services in the home are invited to going the General Membership. If you are not already a member and wish to be included in Alliance communications, events and workshops please contact Martha Kenton at mkenton@oem.nyc.gov to be added to the mailing list.