

Speaker 1: [00:07](#) Hello everyone. Welcome to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes.

Speaker 1: [00:19](#) From the Emergency Management Department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Omar Bourne: [00:25](#) Hello everyone, thank you for listening. I am Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi: [00:29](#) And I'm Allison Pennisi. Thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can, so feel free to add Prep Talk to your favorite RSS feed. You can also follow us on social media. This episode, we are talking about how you can become a volunteer in your community.

Omar Bourne: [00:43](#) That's right, Allison. Now, volunteers can be difference makers who tackle tough challenge, and they help to build communities that are more vibrant.

Allison Pennisi: [00:50](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative). Here to talk with us about volunteering are Paula Gavin, Chief Service Officer at NYC Service, and Jonas Ballreich, Deputy Director of Community Resilience here at New York City Emergency Management.

Omar Bourne: [01:01](#) And later in the episode we'll chat with our Community Emergency Response Team volunteers, also known as CERT, and they'll share their experience in the CERT program and how you can get involved. But first, let's welcome Paula and Jonas. Thank you very much for being here.

Paula Gavin: [01:19](#) Thank you.

Jonas Ballreich: [01:19](#) Thank you very much for having us.

Allison Pennisi: [01:21](#) Paula, let's begin with you. For our listeners who may not be familiar, what is NYC Service as an agency, and how did it get started?

Paula Gavin: [01:29](#) First of all, I have to say happy Volunteer Month to everyone who is volunteering throughout our city.

Omar Bourne: [01:34](#) That is true, that is true.

Paula Gavin: [01:34](#) And thank you for your service. NYC Service is an office of the mayor, and it was formed in 2009. At that time, our president,

Obama, had called for service being much more of a strategic and comprehensive effort for residents. So in 2009 NYC Service was formed, and there are now 200 cities of service throughout the country. It was a great idea that started right here in New York City.

- Paula Gavin: [02:01](#) The mission of NYC Service is to promote volunteerism, engage New Yorkers in volunteer service, build the capacity for volunteers, but also mobilize both volunteers and service share members to address the city's greatest needs. I must add, though, our vision is we want to inspire and empower every New Yorker to volunteer and serve each other.
- Omar Bourne: [02:23](#) Wonderful. Paula, I know one of the core themes of OneNYC is service, and for our listeners, OneNYC is the City's plan for a stronger, more resilient city. My question is, what are some of the plans that you guys have in place to achieve the goals of service, specifically with increasing the City's rate for volunteers?
- Paula Gavin: [02:49](#) There is a measurement of volunteerism that is done by the census, and New York City surprisingly ranks low. So last year one of the things we did was a pilot. We went to western Queens and we actually knocked on doors, talked to residents about volunteering, and what we learned is they actually volunteer three times as much as what was reported in the census.
- Allison Pennisi: [03:11](#) Wow.
- Paula Gavin: [03:12](#) And why they volunteer is close to home on an issue they care about.
- Omar Bourne: [03:16](#) Right.
- Paula Gavin: [03:17](#) So because of that, besides our citywide programs, which are very important to mobilizing volunteers for key issues, we are now really focusing on neighborhoods. We currently have neighborhood plans going on in five communities where we're at the grassroots level, talking to community organizations, finding out how they talk to residents, and developing a plan to communicate and recruit volunteers.
- Omar Bourne: [03:43](#) That's key, and that's important, because people like to be close to home, so to speak. It's kind of what our CERT program is about, people who can be trained in volunteerism and then they go back to their communities and help them with service.

Allison Pennisi: [03:58](#) Absolutely, and what's great is that these people are advocates and they know their communities better than anybody else. So the fact that we have these plans in place is incredibly helpful.

Allison Pennisi: [04:08](#) Speaking of having plans in place, NYC Service, for our listeners, is the lead on New York City's Volunteer Coordination Task Force. New York City Emergency Management plays a role in managing and developing plans for this task force. Can you explain what the Volunteer Coordination Task Force is and why it's necessary? Jonas, we'll start with you.

Jonas Ballreich: [04:29](#) Absolutely. The Volunteer Coordination Task Force is a task force that is stood up in response to a large scale disaster affecting more than 100 households in the city. The Volunteer Coordination Task Force mission is to identify volunteer organizations, volunteer resources at a citywide scale, and identifying actually projects in need, disaster projects in need of such resources, and connecting those two.

Jonas Ballreich: [04:56](#) The task force is led currently by NYC Service in collaboration with New York City Emergency Management, New York Cares, and NYC VOAD, which is Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

Omar Bourne: [05:06](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Paula Gavin: [05:08](#) What we do at NYC Service at the time of an emergency is be sure to identify the projects that need volunteers.

Allison Pennisi: [05:15](#) Right.

Paula Gavin: [05:15](#) The types of volunteers, where they're needed, what skills are required, and then we coordinate with those groups who have affiliated volunteers who have already been trained and recruited and really match the needs of the projects to the volunteers who are available. During the emergency we also use our website to enable people who want to volunteer to connect to those volunteer organizations. Being affiliated with a volunteer organization is really critical during a major emergency.

Allison Pennisi: [05:45](#) Paula, I love that you bring that up, because I know that NYC Service, as you said, matches volunteers with opportunities that align with their skill sets. Can you talk about what happens when there isn't an emergency, though?

Paula Gavin: [05:56](#) When there is an emergency, or is not?

Allison Pennisi: [05:58](#) Is not.

Paula Gavin: [05:58](#) I'll do both.

Omar Bourne: [05:59](#) Okay.

Allison Pennisi: [05:59](#) Okay, great.

Paula Gavin: [06:01](#) I mean, when there is an emergency, the most important thing for residents of our city who want to help is to not self deploy. To go out as a volunteer to an emergency site and not be prepared is not fair to the individual, nor is it fair to those who need service. We, during the course of an emergency, will find ways to enable those individuals who want to volunteer to connect to organizations who deploy them effectively to what is needed. I say to every resident, if you want to volunteer, first come and figure out where there's the needs and we'll help you to secure the match.

Paula Gavin: [06:40](#) On a day-to-day basis, though, we have a great website, NYC.gov/service, and if you have an interested in volunteering, you can come to that website and at that website you can say your interests, you can say your geography preference, you can say your time of day preference, and there are almost 1,000 volunteer opportunities posted. Some are one time, some are more enduring or recurring. Anyone who wants to volunteer should come to our website and really think about what they want to do, and indeed, where they feel they can be most useful, because the benefits of volunteering are two way, and if you use your skills to help somebody in need, it's really a win-win. It is the website where you can test your interest with what's available.

Allison Pennisi: [07:26](#) Very cool.

Omar Bourne: [07:27](#) Wonderful. Paula, I know that individuals can also collaborate with NYC Service through the Youth Leadership Council. How have younger New Yorkers responded to the call to get involved?

Paula Gavin: [07:40](#) I would say with lots of excitement that one of the things that we really feel is very important to our city is youth voice.

Omar Bourne: [07:46](#) Okay.

Paula Gavin: [07:46](#) Giving young people an opportunity to have a voice in policy practice or advocacy. About two years ago we came up with the

concept of forming Youth Leadership Councils. These are councils that have a partner that's an adult at a City agency, a high school, a community based organization, a police precinct, a NYCHA [New York City Housing Authority] housing development. These councils are in need of youth voice on policy or planning, and so these individuals who sign up and really self nominate themselves then have an opportunity to work on an issue with a focus on policy or practice or advocacy. We have found that young people want that opportunity and they want to have a voice. The great part of it is that they're also learning leadership skills, and those are so critical to college and career readiness. So, young people do respond.

- Paula Gavin: [08:39](#) There's another great program in schools called Service in Schools, which is more community project oriented. Young people are recruited from the classroom there and really learn about their city through volunteering. Again, young people, when asked, step up very, very well, so we just need to keep asking for their involvement.
- Omar Bourne: [08:59](#) Oh, we're going to keep asking. Looks like they have a number of ways in which they can get involved, and we like that. This question is going to be for both of you. Paula, I know that you touched on this earlier. Is there a right or a wrong way to volunteer? I know people get excited, they want to get active, they want to get involved, they want to do as much as possible. But can they do it in a wrong way?
- Jonas Ballreich: [09:28](#) That is fabulous question, Omar. I do believe, especially when it comes to disaster volunteerism, unfortunately there is a wrong way to volunteer, which also means there's a right way to volunteer.
- Omar Bourne: [09:39](#) Okay.
- Jonas Ballreich: [09:39](#) To second Paula's message, the issue of self deploying is at the forefront of our concern. While well-intentioned, if volunteers get overly excited, self-deploy into a disaster site, more often than not they risk to become part of the problem rather than the solution. The reason being is first responders, City officials a lot of times need to dedicate scarce resources, basically the time and attention, to its now managing these spontaneous volunteers, as opposed to attending critical needs and response operations.
- Jonas Ballreich: [10:13](#) Therefore, as Paula said, we really urge everyone that wants to volunteer, please ideally pre-affiliate and affiliate yourself prior

to a disaster with a volunteer organization, or check in before self deploying with the American Red Cross, New York Cares, NYC Service, the voluntary organizations active in disaster in New York City.

- Jonas Ballreich: [10:36](#) Lastly, it is important, in order to volunteer correctly, to really heed public messaging guidance from public officials to avoid putting yourself and others in harm, which is always at the forefront of our concern.
- Paula Gavin: [10:52](#) The other aspect of this on a day to day basis is volunteering is good for you, good for your city, and the truth is that the volunteer can benefit as much as the person who is being served by the volunteer. But the first and most important thing is to decide what's important to you. What cause do you care about? What are you willing to commit to, and how much? I think the two key questions is what do I care about, and how much can I devote to this? Because going into a situation and offering to volunteer, you want to be able to deliver on your promise.
- Omar Bourne: [11:26](#) Right.
- Paula Gavin: [11:27](#) Again, if you care about the issue, you're going to be more likely to deliver on your promise, but also being realistic about the time you can devote.
- Paula Gavin: [11:34](#) I'd also say to be a good volunteer is test the organization you're volunteering with. Be sure that they have training and orientation and that they're willing to work with you and partner with you as a volunteer. It does take both sides to be successful. But we do know that those who volunteer live longer, are happier, and really have better careers. So volunteering is truly good for you, and that's real research says that. Anyone who's thinking of volunteering, I just say over and over again, it benefits you, and it certainly benefits the person you serve.
- Omar Bourne: [12:13](#) Allison, it helps you to live longer, so I think we're going to have to sign up for something if you haven't already.
- Allison Pennisi: [12:19](#) Oh yeah, I think so, too.
- Omar Bourne: [12:22](#) Jonas, HelpNowNYC, new website for the city. Can you talk a little bit about that and how that encourages people to volunteer?

Jonas Ballreich: [12:29](#) Absolutely. HelpNowNYC came out of a collaboration between City agencies and volunteer organizations with a stake in disaster volunteerism and donations management. New York City Emergency Management last year partnered up with NYC Service, with the Mayor's Fund, with the Sanitation Department, New York Cares, NYC VOAD, and the American Red Cross to provide a publicly available website with information about the right way and the responsible way to volunteer and donate at the time of a disaster. Since this podcast really focuses on volunteerism, I want to just point out a few resources that are available to our listeners on the website when it comes to volunteering.

Omar Bourne: [13:14](#) Okay.

Jonas Ballreich: [13:14](#) One of them is a guide on how to volunteer during a disaster in New York City. It's a specific guide for New York City focusing on the specific necessity in New York City, such as multicultural language skills, the transportation system, the aging infrastructure. So it goes over some of those details.

Jonas Ballreich: [13:34](#) Another big information piece on the website is the Volunteer Coordination Task Force. It describes what it is, what the task force does, what it doesn't do, and there's also intake sites and survey links on the website allowing organizations willing to be listed as a volunteer organization and resource at the time of disaster, as well as intake surveys allowing to request volunteers for projects in need of such.

Jonas Ballreich: [14:03](#) Lastly, there is a few organizations listed, such as the American Red Cross and New York Cares, and of course agencies such as NYC Service, that I would urge listeners to look into to affiliate yourself with and find good volunteer programs for you at the time of disasters.

Allison Pennisi: [14:19](#) Yeah. I have to say that it's a really excellent resource for New Yorkers. It's very comprehensive, it's very direct, and really explains clearly what people should do. Like we said before, the right way to volunteer, the right way to even donate monetarily or donate goods, what are the recommendations that the City has for that, as well. I'm glad that you brought that up. For our listeners, that's NYC.gov/helpnow.

Allison Pennisi: [14:44](#) A question for both of you; during emergencies, whether it's heat or winter weather, the mayor and other City officials will emphasize be a good neighbor, and we all believe in that. Be a good neighbor, be a good New Yorker, check in on the elderly

and vulnerable populations. Can you both talk about the importance of helping others in need? Paula, I would like to start with you.

Paula Gavin: [15:05](#) Super. Absolutely key, particularly in a snow storm. Having had a few this year-

Omar Bourne: [15:12](#) Too many.

Paula Gavin: [15:14](#) We know that those who are elderly and or people with disabilities who own a home are very fearful about getting their sidewalks shoveled. This is a perfect time as a neighbor to just reach out to someone and offer that help. It really will make such a difference in their life. Not just shoveling the walk, but making them feel that there's somebody who cares.

Paula Gavin: [15:38](#) There's a term called neighboring, which is like volunteering, and it really does mean that as an individual when you reach out to a neighbor you are indeed volunteering to help them and it can make a huge, huge difference.

Omar Bourne: [15:51](#) Anything you'd like to add on that point, Jonas?

Jonas Ballreich: [15:54](#) Yeah, what I would like to add is that vulnerable populations are really at the forefront of our planning efforts and response efforts. They always will be. The reason being, disasters affect over-proportionately vulnerable populations. Another great example outside of the winter storm are really heat emergencies. We have a lot of heat emergencies in New York City, usually at least two to three per season, and checking in on your neighbor is the right thing to do. Checking to see if they have adequate air conditioning, if they have ample water, medication, food.

Jonas Ballreich: [16:32](#) We can't, as Emergency Management, be as fast as a neighbor. Neighbors have pre-established relationships, there's a sense of trust with the vulnerable populations, as well, which really amplifies and makes the emergency message to, for example, evacuate or to get to a cooling center much easier to convey. Therefore, it's really the right thing to do, and we urge everyone to check in with the vulnerable neighbors and populations in your communities.

Omar Bourne: [17:02](#) What I like about this conversation is that you can sign up, you can go sign up ... Excuse me. You can go sign up to become a volunteer, but also you can do something as simple as picking up the phone and calling a neighbor and saying, "Hey, how are

you doing? Is there anything that you need from me? How can I help?" It's almost like the Wendy Williams give them a call, "how you doing?" You like that? How you doing? But it's great, because it brings you to the core of being a person and just caring for somebody else and letting them know that there's somebody who is thinking about them.

Jonas Ballreich: [17:44](#)

Absolutely. It's the humane, the right thing to do.

Paula Gavin: [17:47](#)

We love to say a line; 8.6 million New Yorkers together serving each other, and the point of that is we are a big city, but we're a big city of individuals. 8.6 million of us here. And by helping your neighbor, you really do form a bond, you really do provide a support structure, and you do that in other ways when you volunteer. But it really means that a city is stronger when it comes together. Resiliency goes beyond building a bridge or building a shoreline that's impervious to a storm. It really is about building the commitment to each other, so 8.6 million New Yorkers together serving each other.

Omar Bourne: [18:31](#)

Wonderful. I like that.

Allison Pennisi: [18:32](#)

Yup. I think that's a great point, and that also brings us to later in our show we will speaking with our Community Emergency Response Team volunteers, or CERTs. They play a very important role in assisting communities during emergencies, but they also can help during blue-sky times. I would like to ask both of you what does that role look like for them, and how can people get involved?

Omar Bourne: [18:56](#)

And for our listeners, blue sky times is non-emergency times.

Allison Pennisi: [19:00](#)

Exactly.

Jonas Ballreich: [19:01](#)

Great. I'm happy to take this one first. The first thing to say is we can't really stress enough how grateful we are for the dedicated service of the CERT volunteers. They have been of tremendous help and assistance to the City, and to Emergency Management at the time of, but also, as you pointed out, during preparedness times, during so-called blue skies.

Jonas Ballreich: [19:23](#)

How CERT volunteers help spread the preparedness message is by partnering up with Ready New York, our preparedness program for individual and families, as well as partnering up with Community Preparedness, our preparedness program for community organizations and community groups. What that really means is CERT volunteers go out in their neighborhoods

and set up community meetings, community presentations at senior centers, community centers, or tabling at community fairs, spreading the individual preparedness message and the importance of having an emergency plan, having a Go Bag in case of an evacuation, having ample supplies such as food, water, and medication, which we can't stress enough. And of course having a pre-identified meeting place.

- Jonas Ballreich: [20:05](#) When it comes to the preparedness message for community organizations, CERT volunteers have started in the recent months to go out more and more to reach out to these organizations in their communities and stressing the importance of forming planning teams, or forming community networks, forming community partnerships. Because at the end of the day really what it comes down to, only in partnership, when we have large networks, we have sufficient resources to leverage, that allow us to effectively respond to a disaster.
- Jonas Ballreich: [20:34](#) CERT, again, has been a tremendous force multiplier, a tremendous help to spreading their community preparedness and individual preparedness message, and we're very grateful for having CERT.
- Paula Gavin: [20:46](#) The other thing that I can say about CERT, besides their dedication, devotion, and just the ability to do hard work well, is that in times of big City events they have also volunteered. So, inauguration, which I had the honor to help organize, which you recall was ten degrees, we had a group of CERT volunteers who came out who really helped us manage the crowd, manage the event. So, there are times where just their ability to be so, so dedicated can make a difference. Any time we have a ticker tape parade ... Hopefully that'll happen for one of our teams soon. There are many ways that I think CERT volunteers really commit to their local neighborhoods, but commit to their city at large.
- Omar Bourne: [21:29](#) Wonderful conversation that we are having here. I'm just going to ask any last thoughts to our listeners on the importance of volunteering and what they can do to get involved?
- Paula Gavin: [21:38](#) I'd just like to repeat again, because it is just so vital that in a city of 8.6 million people, that help you give just comes back to you. I've heard it from so many volunteers that it's transformative. Every year we do something called Volunteers Count, and we collect up the number of volunteers who are working with City agencies and nonprofits, and this year that

count will be close to 600,000, and many of them do 100 hours or more a year. Many do 500 hours.

Omar Bourne: [22:10](#)

Wow.

Allison Pennisi: [22:10](#)

Wow.

Paula Gavin: [22:11](#)

Many do 1,000 hours. But what you hear from them, it's not the hours, it's just really the good feelings they get, and the skills they learn, and the friends they meet. So volunteering is good for you and good for your city.

Jonas Ballreich: [22:26](#)

That is a great point. I want to just add to that, that during the disaster, basically the definition of disaster means that resources, existing resources are overtaxed. They're overwhelmed. And by having dedicated volunteers, engaging dedicated volunteers in response efforts, and in recovery efforts, City officials, first responders free up additional capacity to actually attend to the most critical areas of need. What that means is really we couldn't do our job without volunteers. To just remind our listeners again, volunteer services in disaster really refers to, for example, spreading the emergency message. Canvas, for example, for unmet needs in your neighborhood, providing emergency feeding services, donations, and even helping repair and rebuilding homes. At the end of the day, it is really our volunteers that we depend on to get the job done. In order to be a good volunteer and to be able to be really helpful, please pre-affiliate with a volunteer organization prior to a disaster, such as New York Cares, NYC Service, of course the American Red Cross, and NYC VOAD.

Allison Pennisi: [23:42](#)

These have been really excellent points. Like we've said before, and we'll say it again, it's good for you, good for our city, Paula and Jonas, thank you very much for being with us. Remember, you can sign up to become a volunteer by visiting [NYC.gov/service](http://NYC.gov/service).

Omar Bourne: [23:57](#)

Thank you guys very much, and our next guests have answered the call on volunteering, helping their fellow New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies.

Omar Bourne: [24:15](#)

Welcome back. Our next guests have answered the call on volunteering, helping their fellow New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies.

Allison Pennisi: [24:23](#)

That's right, Omar. Our guests are all Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT, volunteers. Here with us are Eric

Hebert, Brooklyn Borough Coordinator, and we also have Rebecca Torres, who's a CERT volunteer in Manhattan, and she's a Ready New York presenter.

Eric Hebert: [24:40](#)

Hello.

Rebecca Torres: [24:40](#)

Thank you for having us.

Eric Hebert: [24:42](#)

Yes, thank you.

Omar Bourne: [24:42](#)

Thank you very much for being here.

Rebecca Torres: [24:43](#)

Absolutely.

Omar Bourne: [24:44](#)

Now, for our listeners, the New York City CERT program started in 2003 with just over 100 volunteers. Today, we have more than 1,300 credentialed volunteers from more than 50 teams throughout the city, so we've expanded a lot. To our volunteers, we want to say, first of all, thank you very much. Our first question, how did you find out about CERT, and what or who influenced you in joining? Eric, go ahead?

Eric Hebert: [25:17](#)

Certainly. My background is with the US Coast Guard, and for 15 years I was a volunteer manager for the Coast Guard Auxiliary. During that time I did encounter a partnership with CERT, and so I know of its existence. When Hurricane Sandy hit, or Superstorm Sandy hit, I found that I needed to take my focus away from the big national picture and focus on my own community.

Omar Bourne: [25:46](#)

Right.

Eric Hebert: [25:47](#)

I looked at a couple of different opportunities, and I found that the Community Emergency Response Team was exactly what I wanted to do, and so I went ahead and signed up and joined CERT.

Omar Bourne: [25:59](#)

Wonderful. How about you, Rebecca?

Rebecca Torres: [26:01](#)

Awesome. Well, I belong to Police Service Area Six Community Council. I'm currently the vice president there, but back in 2010 the Community Affairs detective, John Ramos, brought in our local CERT team to speak at our local meeting, and they gave a presentation, and I was like, "Wow, he's right," because he had mentioned it might be something you might want to do, be interested in, and I was like ... I jumped on it. So, filled out the application, and here I am.

Omar Bourne: [26:33](#) Wonderful.

Allison Pennisi: [26:34](#) That's fantastic. What are some of the skills that you learned during training? Rebecca, I would like to start with you.

Rebecca Torres: [26:41](#) Oh, some of the skills. Okay, psychological first aid.

Allison Pennisi: [26:45](#) Wow. Okay.

Rebecca Torres: [26:45](#) Very important to me, because I can carry that during my daily routine every day.

Omar Bourne: [26:51](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Torres: [26:52](#) Because you don't need an emergency to use that.

Omar Bourne: [26:54](#) Right.

Rebecca Torres: [26:54](#) CPR with AED, learned that. There's actually quite a few, because I've done a lot of trainings.

Omar Bourne: [27:02](#) Yeah, that's good. That's very good.

Allison Pennisi: [27:04](#) That's fantastic. Eric, what about you?

Eric Hebert: [27:06](#) I'd like to echo the psychological first aid as a very important training to learn. Listen, protect, and connect, I think is a very valuable service that we can use at any time in our civilian life, as well as our service life. That, to me, is very, very important. We continue that training with New York City's First Lady's New York City Thrive [NYC] program in the mental health first aid trainings. It's going to be a full day training, I'm really looking forward to that.

Allison Pennisi: [27:42](#) Very cool.

Omar Bourne: [27:43](#) Wonderful. What I liked about what both of you mentioned is that there were skills that you learned that you can take with you in your every day course of life and it's not just during an emergency that you can use these skills, but it's something that you can take with you, so that is wonderful. What was your favorite class?

Eric Hebert: [28:03](#) My favorite class that I've taken so far, and the one that I've used the most, is traffic control.

Allison Pennisi: [28:08](#) Wow.

- Eric Hebert: [28:09](#) I found that we learned the basics of how to control an intersection, and the advanced training class where we had ... I had the opportunity to have a police officer who loved traffic stand right with me and directly mentor me while I'm controlling a live intersection, was very invaluable, and I found that was the skill that I've most used in the field.
- Allison Pennisi: [28:34](#) Is there an emergency or situation that stands out in your mind that you've used your skills that were from training? I mean, you know, we talk about psychological first aid, obviously that's definitely used during emergencies and recovery operations, but I would like for you to sort of share with our audience how those skills have translated in times of an emergency.
- Rebecca Torres: [28:54](#) Well, if I have to go to one, I think I would have to go more recently for me, because it really impacted me greatly, and that was when I worked the Hurricane Maria Relief Service Center. There were thousands of people coming in, hundreds, by the day to the service center. A lot of them needed the psychological first aid, some needed other things, and I was able to use various trainings, because I also needed to control the flow of the people. I exercised that, I exercised my psychological first aid, I even at one point got to use my CPR knowledge.
- Rebecca Torres: [29:36](#) It was a very humbling experience for me. It was great. It was awesome. The people that came, even though they had their issues and their problems, you know, back in Puerto Rico, some came from Texas, you felt like they were part of family you were helping, and it was greatly appreciated.
- Allison Pennisi: [29:56](#) You know, that's something that we spoke about earlier this episode, is on being a good neighbor, no matter who that may be. People who are misplaced due to recent hurricanes, or somebody who might have been misplaced because of a tragedy like a no-notice event like a building explosion and subsequent collapse. I think it really speaks to what the CERT program is all about and what volunteers, like the two of you, have done to help New Yorkers, and even those who come to New York City and need assistance. It could be something as simple as providing a listening, non-judgmental ear, or even something like traffic management, which is something that is always needed, especially during a time of an emergency or a major event here in New York City.
- Omar Bourne: [30:44](#) Yeah, and we tend to focus on CERT volunteers during emergencies, but you guys are also volunteering during non-emergencies, and Paula mentioned this earlier in our earlier

segment. Can you share some of those experiences with our listeners? I know during the last inauguration of our mayor CERT volunteers were there helping out, and you guys help out a lot during non-emergency times, so can you explain to our listeners what that may look like? Eric?

- Eric Hebert: [31:17](#) Yes, certainly. I'm lucky enough that I live out in Coney Island and it is a certainly a privilege to work, live, and play in America's Playground. We have so many fun events that we can come out and help the community. We just did the Blessing of the Rise. We also do the Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest. We get to do the Mermaid Parade.
- Omar Bourne: [31:46](#) Are you in the contest?
- Eric Hebert: [31:46](#) No, I'm not in the contest. I'm helping ... Mostly what we're doing there is we're doing crowd management and crowd monitoring.
- Allison Pennisi: [31:52](#) Okay.
- Eric Hebert: [31:53](#) And we get to practice our skills of teamwork, communication, and preparedness in case of an emergency. Luckily there hasn't been any incidences during these events. The Polar Bear Plunge is another great one.
- Omar Bourne: [32:11](#) Wow.
- Eric Hebert: [32:11](#) The community has gotten quite used to us being there and helping us manage the area. In fact, for the Polar Bear Plunge on New Year's Day, there we are, and for the last several years I've been the last guy that is controlling when they enter the water, and making sure they do it safely.
- Omar Bourne: [32:31](#) Right.
- Eric Hebert: [32:34](#) And now we also just started doing the New Year's Eve ball drop at the parachute jump in Coney Island.
- Allison Pennisi: [32:42](#) Nice.
- Omar Bourne: [32:42](#) Coney Island, right? Yeah.
- Eric Hebert: [32:44](#) [Brooklyn] Borough President, Eric Adams, for Brooklyn says, "Tourists go to Time Square. New Yorkers go to Coney Island."
- Omar Bourne: [32:52](#) I like that.

Eric Hebert: [32:54](#) So, it is not only an opportunity to assist the community, but also help us train in the essential skills of teamwork, incident command system, communications, and preparedness.

Omar Bourne: [33:09](#) Wonderful.

Rebecca Torres: [33:10](#) Awesome. Let's see, we've also done some National Night Outs, the marathons, the bike tours. I know I've done three bike tours myself, and I've taken a different position in each one. Every time I do a bike tour I try to do something different to experience something different.

Omar Bourne: [33:32](#) I like how you guys really get involved in these events that are ... They're New York events, you know? They're what people in Brooklyn go to, what New Yorkers go to, you're in Coney Island, you're at a bike tour. I love it. I love it. It shows, for our listeners, these skills can be used not just in emergencies. You can take these skills with you every day, and I love that.

Allison Pennisi: [33:58](#) Yup.

Rebecca Torres: [33:59](#) Yeah. The great part for me is when you do something and you help someone, and then they remember it.

Omar Bourne: [34:06](#) Right.

Allison Pennisi: [34:06](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rebecca Torres: [34:06](#) Because two weeks ago I was actually in Costco and this lady came up to me and she's like, "Oh, hi, how are you?" And I looked at her and I'm like ... You know, for me it was like, okay, backtrack, backtrack, backtrack.

Omar Bourne: [34:20](#) Who is this? Yeah.

Rebecca Torres: [34:21](#) And I'm like, I panicked for a quick second, then I looked at her daughter and I was like, "Oh, how are you?" I recognized her from the Hurricane Relief Service Center.

Omar Bourne: [34:27](#) Wow.

Allison Pennisi: [34:27](#) Wow.

Rebecca Torres: [34:28](#) She had come in, she actually didn't have a blankie for her daughter, and I said, "When you come back, I'm a have something for you," and I actually crocheted a blanket for her

daughter. She was so grateful and she actually remembered my face. I was so surprised.

- Allison Pennisi: [34:43](#) That's incredible.
- Omar Bourne: [34:45](#) Powerful. Powerful stories about how you can help others. I love it. Eric, I know we were speaking a little earlier before we got into the studio, and you were talking about kind of your pillars of volunteering.
- Eric Hebert: [35:00](#) My corner-
- Omar Bourne: [35:01](#) Your cornerstones, yeah. Can you share a little bit about that with us?
- Eric Hebert: [35:06](#) Certainly. I've developed four cornerstones for CERT; community service, emergency preparedness, response operations, and team fellowship. I think that everything we do falls into those four categories. Community service, I mean, that's at the core of everything, all the motivations for what we do. Emergency preparedness and response operations really defines the things we do. And a fourth cornerstone I really think we need to understand is team fellowship, is that we're friends.
- Rebecca Torres: [35:45](#) Absolutely. Absolutely.
- Eric Hebert: [35:46](#) You know, I see Rebecca, I get a big hug and kiss when I arrive and there's Rebecca, because we've worked together before.
- Omar Bourne: [35:53](#) Right.
- Eric Hebert: [35:54](#) You develop friendships, you develop really caring about each other. Another aspect that I call is me, us, them. Whenever we're out in the field, you look after yourself, because if something happens to you, you become an affected person, you're no longer ... Be able to volunteer. You gotta look out for your team.
- Omar Bourne: [36:23](#) Right.
- Eric Hebert: [36:24](#) We have to look out for each other. Then we can serve the community. Me, us, them. The community and the team helps. Having things like picnics and dinners and raising a glass together-
- Rebecca Torres: [36:40](#) We become like a second family, so to speak.

Eric Hebert: [36:42](#) Yes. We are a second family, and Rebecca is a good friend and I really appreciate working with her.

Rebecca Torres: [36:48](#) Thank you, I love working with you, as well.

Omar Bourne: [36:53](#) I love it, I love it, I love it. I mean, this episode, from Paula Gavin with NYC Service, Jonas with Emergency Management talking about the VOADS, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters, and then our CERT volunteers. This has been a touching episode. It really speaks to getting together as individuals, as New Yorkers, to help other people. I am amazed at the work that everyone is doing, and I know New Yorkers, some people who especially come from outside of New York, you know, oh, New Yorkers are all about themselves, it's hustle and bustle. Yes, New York is a hustle and bustle place, but there are tons of New Yorkers who are out there looking out for each other. New York is a community and there are people who are willing to volunteer to help others, and I love that. Love it.

Allison Pennisi: [37:59](#) And to echo that, I also think it's great that volunteering, you know, you are helping your fellow community members. You're supporting first responders, you're supporting the field of emergency management, and some people may not even realize that that's what volunteering is. You're supporting the work of government, you're supporting the work of non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations, and just one another. You're supporting your neighbors. It's something that I think we're all very grateful for the service that volunteers provide, and we really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us about your experiences with the CERT program.

Eric Hebert: [38:39](#) Well thank you Allison, thank you Omar. Thank you Rebecca.

Paula Gavin: [38:40](#) Thank you, Eric.

Speaker 1: [38:42](#) That's this episode of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard, you can listen any time online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.