Including People with Disabilities in Disaster Drills and Exercises

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Background

- IDPH has been awarded the Disability and Health Program (DHP) funding through CDC since 1996
- Focus on preventing secondary conditions in people with disabilities (PWD)
- Expanded to ADA compliance and universal design
- Funded for preparedness activities after 9/11
- Joined the department in 2005
My Background

- 20 years social work
- Disability expertise
- ADA expertise
- Emergency response
- Planner
- Blended all together = accessible sheltering

Photo courtesy of FEMA/Patsy Lynch
Grant Activities

• Main focus on individual preparedness
• Difficult to measure progress or success
• Large scale disasters potentially could eliminate personal planning
• Preparedness evolved into Whole Community Planning
• Expanding the planning process to inclusive and accessible
Current Grant Activities

Target: Promote State participation of people with disabilities in emergency planning and exercise planning

Activities: Promote the inclusion of people with disabilities and their caregivers, attendants or other key support people in emergency preparedness training and education exercises.

- Participated in 2012 and 2016 Des Moines International Airport Exercise
- Provided technical assistance on exercise planning, identifying participants, evaluator
Des Moines International Airport

- FAA requires full scale exercise for the airport to maintain its license/certification to operate, every three years
- Scenario for each is a simulated passenger air plane crash
Purpose for Exercise

• Test and evaluate the Des Moines International Airport Emergency Plan (AEP) and capabilities
• Included state, county, and local emergency responders
• Local hospitals and county medical examiner
• Public, private entities and service providers
Exercise Participants

• Full Scale Exercise held on August 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2012
• 351 people participated – 110 actors
• 6 PWD participated, including developmental, mobility, low to no hearing and communication disabilities
• Full Scale Exercise held on August 8, 2015
• Over 300 people participated – 152 actors
• 8 PWD participated, including mobility, developmental disability, mental health and low to no hearing
Exercise Participants

2015 exercise

- 2 Federal agencies
- 2 State agencies
- 2 county agencies
- 8 municipal agencies
- 8 hospitals
- 2 public entities
- 3 private entities
Polk County Emergency Management (PCEM) hosted a hotwash after both exercises.

Responders struggled with responding to the PWD/actors.

Questioned if PWD would even be on a plane.

Had little understanding how to communicate or assist with evacuating them from the crash site.

Left power wheel chair outside during rain delay.

Responders spoke to care givers, not PWD/actors.

Did not secure crash site from PWD/actors.
Hotwash

• Overhead announcements were not provided in alternate method
• Low to no vision not addressed
• Some responders believed PWD with power chairs would not be on a plane
• Blurred response from day to day disaster to major event
• Meaning, they went into “get them to the hospital” my piece is done
• In large scale events, infrastructure may not be in place
• The exercise provided a different way to look at response
Outcomes

• Had a candid discussion about PWD living independent
• Importance of assistive technology and how it needs to be evacuated with the person
• Ask what assistance PWD need
• Responders agreed that they needed training on how to communicate more effectively with PWD
• Provided recommendations for training and modifications to plans
• All players need instruction on their role in the exercise
Disability Experience

• Better understanding of the role of emergency management
• Better understanding what their personal role is in preparedness
• Non-injured PWD/actors reported that transportation partners were knowledgeable, felt comfortable and safe
Partnerships

• PCEM has worked extensively with the DHP on inclusive disaster planning, response and recovery

• PCEM also has an established partnership with LINK Associates; a greater Des Moines community based non-profit organization that provides support services to adults with developmental disabilities and their families

• This partnership includes a robust accessible transportation capability which has been activated several times in the past few years for evacuation purposes for fires and flooding
Possible Opportunities for Participation in a Disaster Exercise

- County emergency managers and planners
- Airport exercise
- Academic institutions
- Hospitals, care facilities
- Providers
- Events centers
Your Role

Evaluators

• Observe and document performance against established capability targets and critical tasks
• Evaluate and provide feedback on a designated functional area of the exercise
• You are a SME in disability and hold desirable expertise to the exercise
• Volunteer as an evaluators
• Come to the table to solve problems
Partnerships for Emergency Managers and Planners

- Local, county and state public health
- Area on Aging
- Easter Seals
- Disability councils, boards and commissions
- Disability providers
- Direct care providers
- Local VOAD
- If you don’t know where to start, contact me
Contact

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