

REALTIME FILE

Pacific ADA Center  
ADA NATIONAL NETWORK LEARNING SESSION: A FRONTLINE  
VIEW OF THE OROVILLE DAM AND SONOMA AND NAPA  
WILDFIRE DISASTERS  
JANUARY 11, 2018

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>> Lewis Kraus: Welcome to the Emergency Management and Preparedness - Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities Webinar Series. I'm Lewis Kraus from the Pacific ADA Center, your moderator for this series.

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This is the fifth year of this webinar series which shares issues and promising practices in emergency management inclusive of people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. The webinars provide an opportunity for emergency managers, people with disabilities, and others with access and functional needs, first responders, planners, community organizations, and other community partners to exchange knowledge and information on promising practices in emergency -- inclusive emergency preparedness and management for the whole community. The series topics cover emergency preparedness and disaster response, recovery, and mitigation as well as accessibility and reasonable accommodation issues under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the ADA, and other relevant laws.

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Today's ADA National Network Learning Session: A Frontline View of the Oroville Dam and Sonoma and Napa Wildfire Disasters. Two significant disasters have hit Northern California over the past year, the failure of the Oroville Dam and the series of wildfires that hit Sonoma and Napa Counties and reached into the city of Santa Rosa this fall. Local CILs were on the frontlines in evacuation and sheltering efforts. This webinar is going to examine the experience of a local CIL in these disasters.

Our speaker today is Ana Acton. She lives in Nevada City, California, and is the

Executive Director for FREED Center for Independent Living serving Nevada, Yuba, Sutter, Colusa, and Sierra Counties. As a nonprofit Independent Living Resource Center, FREED's goal is to empower people with disabilities to exercise their civil rights in becoming active, productive members of our community. Ana is also serving as the Chair of the California Coalition for Disaster Strategies group, exchanging knowledge about disasters in California.

Ana, I am going to turn it over to you.

>> Ana Acton: Thank you so much, Lewis.

Again, my name is Ana Acton. Good morning or good afternoon to all of you. Thank you so much for taking the time to join this webinar today. I have been asked to present on some of our personal experience as a Center for Independent Living or Independent Living Center as we call them in California, around the two major incidents that happened in California, both the Oroville Dam failure as well as the California wildfire disasters.

A little caveat to this is that I have experience locally with the wildfires that happened in Nevada and Yuba Counties this year and will speak a little bit to the Sonoma County situation as I experienced them as part of the California Disaster Strategies Coalition and also will not be me speaking to a large extent on the Thomas fires as well that happened since we organized this webinar.

Today's title is A Frontline View of the Oroville Dam and Sonoma and Napa Wildfire Disasters. Lewis did a wonderful job introducing me. I'm also the Chair of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers which is a statewide, California statewide, association of Independent Living Centers in California.

I wanted to make a note that FREED, as an Independent Living Center, we serve people of all ages and individuals with any type of disability. And we serve five really rural counties in California including Nevada, Sierra, Cuba, Sutter and Colusa Counties. I think it's important to note that a lot of the experience that I'm going to be talking directly about with FREED's involvement in disaster planning and response is in a rural community in Northern California. So that may have different implications for those of you that are more urban settings. Things may look a little bit different than what I'm describing over this next hour.

We do serve a rural community. It's a very close-knit community. We often work very closely with our local government departments, other nonprofit entities around serving older adults and people with disabilities. And while Centers for Independent Living are focused on serving people with any type of disability, especially in Nevada County, one of the five counties we serve, we really are considered a retirement community. We have a larger than average number of older adults living in Nevada County and it's really kind of this retirement destination for many people. So you'll hear me talk about older adults a lot because we serve a lot of older adults at our Independent Living Center.

So with that, I want to do a quick history on myself in that I've worked for FREED since 2004. The whole issue around natural disasters and specifically wildfires, which we're really going to talk about a lot today, stems really from a personal -- a lot of personal experience with my family. My family moved to the Bay area -- to Nevada County, a very rural area here, in the 1970's. And the year I was born, I think it was actually a County piece of equipment sparked a fire close to our home. My family was away on vacation in the Bay area when this happened. And there were friends there as this wildfire raged through our property and burnt all of our personal belongings. There was actually one of the fire planes that dropped the fire retardant crashed at the top of the hill on a neighboring parcel.

So my earliest memories -- I can remember back to really having a lot of fear around

fire because of the impact that it had on our community and on our family. And my earliest memories are playing in the dirt and the soot and being very black because of, you know, the fire that had come through. So this has always been something that has been important not only to me and my family but to our community living in a very high-risk fire zone. It's really the number one really natural disaster that we experience in Nevada County, anyways.

Today we'll also be talking about the Oroville Dam incident, one of the communities that we serve that really has a lot of impact and potential around flooding in that community.

So with that, the first slide here is really looking at the global perspective of disasters and disabilities. At least 200 million people, including 18 million people with disabilities, will be displaced by climate events by 2015. And I thought I would start with this global perspective largely because this is something that impacts our community. These statistics were from the International Disability and Development Consortium who also, according to the World Disaster Report, says that every child killed by a natural disaster, three additional children will become impaired or disabled due to the disaster. So this is really -- disaster issues, preparedness and response, is really a disability issue as well, being that we are more impacted.

Next I'd like to quickly start with a look at the United States briefly. In 2016 there were 60,236 wildfires burning 5.3 million acres. And in 2017 there was actually less wildfires at 56,186, burning 9.1 million acres. And I found this a really interesting statistic because if you look at this, we see that wildfires actually went down in 2017 but the intensity of those fires, the impact of those fires amplified. With 9.1 million acres burning, you can clearly see there's this larger intensity of wildfires. They're burning larger expanses of land and burning more intensely.

And while today we're really going to be talking about wildfires and Oroville Dam spillway failure, I think many of you throughout the nation are dealing with a multitude of different types of natural disasters and we'll go into detail. We see hurricanes that are doing more damage than ever before. Even just recently with the cold weather hitting the East Coast, right, there is a lot of natural disasters that seem to really be amplified.

I feel like, at least living in Nevada County, wildfires, for example, have always been our kind of norm, we know that they happen, but I feel like there's a new norm with the intensity and the level of the natural disasters that are happening. We had last year large precipitation in Northern California. We had large amounts of snow for the first time in a few years. It really brings into question around our infrastructure, including things like our dams that we will talk about at least with the Oroville Dam later.

So back to wildfires. I wanted to kind of bring it back closer to home, to California. Last year we had 9,133 fires. We had 1,248,000 acres burn just in California. And then we saw in December, just December, of all times, we saw the Thomas Fire become the largest fire in California state history at over 281,000 acres.

We found an interesting statistic here on the number of homes that are extreme or high risk of wildfires in California being at 2,044,800 homes. And the percentage of homes at extreme or high risk from wildfires in California at 28%. And this is from the California Department of Forestry data.

I think this is really interesting in part of why the issue at least around fires is impacting more people. We see more people moving to rural areas where these fires are more prevalent. And then we even see places like Sonoma County that happened where these are urban areas and you don't really think of wildfires making major impacts, just being devastating

for the community and burning many, many homes. So the threat and the issue is real as I'm sure many of you know.

People with disabilities and older adults are impacted more around these natural disasters, including wildfires. If you look at the number of deaths between the Tubbs Fire in Sonoma, the fire in Yuba, and the Thomas Fire in Southern California, Santa Barbara, we have an estimated 47 deaths from what I could find in my research. And the majority of the deaths were older adults and people with disabilities. And you saw a lot of this in the news.

Here's a quote from an "L.A. Times" article. "A majority were found inside their homes unable to escape as the fire bore down. At least one was in a wheelchair. Another was lying next to a vehicle."

And then there was a quote from Vice President Mike Pence that says, "It's heartbreaking to think that many of the fallen represents in many cases, senior citizens who simply were not able to escape the flames that overcame their homes."

And then you saw reports that included pieces like this. In Santa Rosa, the average age of 10 individuals who died was 75 years old, highlighting a risk among older adults and people with disabilities who live in rural regions.

And then you saw the headlines from "People" magazine design online that said "28-year-old woman in wheelchair dies in California wildfires as father tries to save her," says Aunt."

So we all hear this. Many of these webinars and many of our discussions, we talk about the risk of older adults and people with disabilities during natural disasters and being disproportionately impacted. And here we have it again. So it really kind of proved to be true, again, during the wildfires, that our community is at risk during these incidents.

So for FREED, again, serving these five rural counties it really ended up being the year of disasters for our community. We've always, again, had differing levels of disasters: flooding, wildfires. But there were really two large-scale disasters in 2017 that impacted the communities that we serve; again, Oroville Dam spillway failure and the Wind Complex Fires. And the Wind Complex Fires really encompassed Yuba County and Nevada County as part of that set of fires.

So a little bit about Oroville Dam. The Oroville Dam is in Northern California. It's the tallest dam in the United States, rising 770 feet high. It holds back a reservoir containing 1.1 trillion gallons of water, supplying farms and cities across the state. And it's really a vital piece of Northern California's infrastructure. And this is a picture of the Oroville Dam.

On February 12, 2017, is when we had a major disaster that was presented to our communities. This was impacting any of the flood zones, basically, below the Oroville Dam, including communities in Oroville, Yuba County, Marysville, and others as well as Sutter County and Yuba City and downstream, potentially.

There was a lot of discussion before Sunday, February 12, about the possibility. We had record rains, some of us may recall, in California last year and the reservoirs throughout the state were full. And on Sunday, community members were given a one-hour notification to evacuate due to the threat of uncontrolled flooding if the Oroville Dam spillway were to fail. This instigated the evacuation of estimated 188,000 individuals. Individuals evacuated to neighboring communities, counties.

I'll just note here the evacuation, as I recall, was lifted about two days later from the incident.

While we're going to go into what we did in response to this, this was a huge

emergency for our communities. It not just impacted those that were potentially going to be flooded if the Oroville Dam spillway failed but the surrounding communities really get impacted as people flee and evacuate to higher ground. You saw that from Yolo County to areas, Nevada County, Sacramento and Placer Counties, all were opening evacuation shelters and were trying to accommodate those that were looking -- that needed to evacuate.

So this is a picture of the Oroville Dam Spillway. It started eroding away and causing concern and so they were starting to allow water to go over the emergency spillway. It's off to the left in this picture.

So Sunday evening myself and the Deputy Director for FREED were at home. We started getting this news. We immediately thought of one individual that we had transitioned out of a nursing home about a year beforehand that was living in Yuba City, that we knew had significant disabilities, had no transportation to be able to get out of the flood zone, and so we immediately reached out to her that evening. The next morning when we came to work and realized we're still in an evacuation and wanted to know, gosh, I wonder how many of our consumers are living in that area that might be impacted and did they get out. So we called 571 individuals in the low-lying areas of Yuba and Sutter Counties. So we were able to kind of look on our data base and see who lived in Marysville, Yuba City, other low-lying surrounding areas that might be in the way of water if the spillway were to fail.

We actually were able to get through to quite a few of those individuals. Some already evacuated. But what was interesting is we incurred about 60 to 70 individuals who just flat-out refused to evacuate. We see this a lot with wildfires or natural disasters. People are like: I've lived here since 1951; we've never had a flood; I'm not going to evacuate now. So we maintain that list of people who did not want to evacuate. And it was important because we actually called those individuals a couple more times over the next couple of days to check in with them. And to specifically 57 individuals that refused to evacuate, we maintained this list that we were able to follow up and check in with them to see how they were doing. We gave specific information to seven individuals we contacted on where to evacuate to, where were the shelters, what were the routes that they could use. And we also provided 11 assistive technology devices, equipment to individuals.

Most of those were not people who were in shelter environments. Those were individuals who a majority of them were individuals who had evacuated to Nevada County from Yuba or Sutter County and ended up on our doorstep at our organization and were staying with family members or friends and needed things like shower chairs or transfer pulls or commodes to help accommodate them in the homes that they were staying in.

We also went to the Emergency Operation Center for Yuba and Nevada Counties and it was actually very lucky, I guess you would say, for us, organizationally capacity-wise that the Yuba County Emergency Operations Center had to relocate out of the potential flood zone and relocated to Nevada County. So I was able to be there for two days and be able to interface both with Yuba County and Nevada County emergency operations and personnel and responders to be able to provide direct impact, coordination, brainstorming on individuals as they became aware that had access and functional needs.

We also had staff visit two shelters in Nevada County that had been opened up. And we deployed an accessible van in to the evacuation zone. So when we started calling individuals and realizing that there were individuals who didn't have transportation and needed accessible transportation, we were able to deploy our staff into the evacuation zone and provided transportation to two individuals; one of which was at their home -- the woman that I

mentioned that Sunday we called and we knew she needed assistance with evacuation. We were able to get her and take her to a shelter. Another individual needed to be transferred from one shelter to -- the shelter that was supposed to be able to provide support for individuals with access and functional needs. So we provided transportation.

We also identified an individual who because of their disability was very reluctant to leave the house or vehicle without medical supplies and personal belongings in their vehicle. So we were able to meet the individual in Yuba-Sutter area. We had a hell of a time finding a gas station that was open and you could get gas from but we were able to identify a gas station, met the individual there because they just were running on fumes with their car and we filled the gas tank for them, allowing them to evacuate to a friend's place.

So I wanted to talk a little bit more about some of the stories that we encountered over that incident. I think it's important to note that we had already been in the planning for disasters with our communities. We have, as an organization, a long history of working with Sutter County, Yuba County and Nevada County specifically around disaster planning and response to varying levels. This is really the first time that I recall being in the Emergency Operations Center but that was really a key piece for us to be able to coordinate and communicate and provide some at least input on how to address some of these issues as they came up.

There were some issues that happened around transportation. And I just want to say with that that, you know, this is a mass evacuation. It was 180,00 people. Luckily it ended up being basically an exercise that didn't result in an actual disaster so there were positive things in that in that we got to learn from this without major impact to human life or damage to the community. Even the paratransit services for Yuba-Sutter, they quickly rose to the occasion from what I could tell. And in that one hour that was given to evacuate Sunday night, they were assisting with evacuating people that were homeless, individuals with disabilities, individuals that did not have their own transportation.

But then the bus drivers evacuated their families because they lived in that community. So for a time it appeared that there wasn't accessible options for people to evacuate the next day when it was still, you know, a mandatory evacuation for many communities. So that's why we deployed our own van, to be able to at least get those that we knew of and assist them.

Managers started reengaging and assisting on Monday but there was a time for a while where because we were in the EOC and because we had a van deployed, when people were being identified by the EOC, by law enforcement that may need assistance with evacuating, we started getting calls to our office. And for a time it was like we were the only accessible office functioning until, like I said, paratransit seemed to reengage and be available and responsive.

I also want to make a note that in this case there was a calculated risk as an organization that we really -- that we made during this time. We knew a few things. We knew if the dam failure happened, that it would take some time for the water to hit Yuba City and Marysville so we had a certain level of confidence to say we can deploy our van down there because we'll get word and they'll get out, hopefully, in time. So there was time that we knew built in to help -- for people to get out of the strike zone if, indeed, the dam failed.

We also learned a lot about capacity issues. We learned about -- for example, Marysville, the city of Marysville that was under mandatory evacuation, literally had I think 10 to 12 police officers total in the town. And not all of them are often on duty at the same time.

So we learned quickly that if you need assistance evacuating, there's simply not necessarily the personnel or capacity for someone to come and assist everyone that may need it just simply due to capacity issues. We also learned about personal assistance in sheltering which I'm going to go into later.

So we picked up the consumer Monday who used the power chair, could only sit up for about four hours at a time, and assisted her to get to a local shelter. Being in the EOC, we thought we identified a shelter where that person could get their personal assistance needs in the shelter met. There was a doctor, I believe, there, and there was other staffing that we thought might be able to help with that. We transferred that individual.

And some of you may have heard this story if you were at the Getting it Right summit in northern -- Southern California in 2017. We picked up the individual. We took her to a shelter only to quickly learn that the shelter was grossly unprepared to meet her needs in the sheltering environment. And there was another individual that we had transferred there that also used a wheelchair that we quickly -- staff who stayed there at the shelter with them realized that the needs of the individual were not able to be met there. The person needed assistance with transferring. So we stayed there until about 6:00 p.m. We were frantically working with OEC to identify a shelter that the individual could be transferred to get the personal assistance needs met.

Later in the day -- and this was like in the morning that we took her to the shelter, maybe by mid-day. I think it was about 6:00 p.m. that evening that we had finally identified a shelter in Yolo County, which is a little bit of a drive away, where there was a Red Cross shelter that sounded like they could provide the needs for the individual. At that point the individual was so uncomfortable from sitting up for so long, not being able to use the bathroom effectively that she just wanted to go home. She didn't want to go to Yolo County. She had no trust in the system, us or those at the shelter at that point that her needs would be able to be met. She said to me, you know, I don't want to go to Yolo County, an hour or whatever it was away, only to find that my needs are not going to be met there. I want to go home.

And this is a situation of someone living in their apartment with the assistive devices they need, the personal assistance that they need. But when it comes to an emergency, she didn't have those assistive devices with her when she transitioned to the shelter and her personal assistant, through IHSS and home supportive services, they evacuated themselves. They evacuated with their families and were not available to her to provide personal assistance. And her mother, who was able to provide personal assistance, was not able to provide that assistance in the shelter because there was not a lift in the shelter. So in her home, with the right equipment, the mother could assist but in the shelter without the right equipment, that wasn't possible. So that woman went back to her home in the evacuation zone because she felt that was a better option than trying to bet on a shelter that could meet her needs.

There was also a woman who was transported to Sacramento, an hour, hour and a half away. They had evacuated her. She used a gurney. She ended up for whatever reason at UC Davis Medical Center. The emergency department there said -- you know are, discharged her because there wasn't I think a medical need for her to be there. And suddenly she's there not with her family and not knowing where to go. We worked with Cal OES with the access and functional needs. We organized transportation for her to her daughter's house in Willis. Now, Willis is a long ways from Sacramento. It's a long ways from her home. And that was arranged through working with the Emergency Operation Center.



It was about a week later or longer, I want to say closer to two weeks, where I got a call from this individual, Willis, staying with her daughter. She was up a flight of stairs. The daughter had to go to work. The daughter was concerned she wasn't able to provide proper care for her and how would they get her back home because she needed gurney transport. So, we were, again, able to coordinate with Cal OES and the county to get the individual back home but it was with a lot of difficulty, misunderstanding at times even, and misinformation. There was a quote of thousands of dollars it would cost for Yuba County to bring this person back home. And there was a question of who would pay for it and how. And luckily through coordination with Cal OES and I believe [Indiscernible], we were able to get transport with the medical transport back home but not without a lot of difficulty for that individual and way past the time that the evacuation orders had been lifted.

We got another call from a community member who called us and said: Hey, my neighbor said they got a call from you when the emergency evacuation happened and I didn't get a call. I didn't even know that there was an emergency happening or that we were under evacuation orders. She said she literally went out the door the next morning to what she described as a zombie apocalypse. She had no idea the emergency had happened. She didn't understand why there was no one in her apartment complex or on the streets and was really scared. She was able to connect with a neighbor who gave her our number and called us about that.

So these are a couple of other stories that you saw in "The Sacramento Bee:"

Sandra Rix never left town mainly because of health issues that would have complicated an evacuation, she said. The sheriff said residents including those who are disabled or don't have vehicles should remain in shelters out of the county in case another mandatory evacuation order is issued.

And from Cap Radio, we heard stories such as people spoke of chaos during their emergency with jammed phone lines, evacuation routes leading through flood zones, and elderly and disabled left behind. "I was signed up for every notification service there was," said Alley. "I got nothing. No reverse 911. No text notifications not even my neighbors letting me know."

These were the stories we heard over the Oroville Dam incident. We'll go more into some of the learnings from the experience later in the slides. But I think it's important to note that two main issues really came up. One is notification or lack of notification, not good coordination and messaging between two counties, neighboring counties in evacuation areas, Marysville and Yuba County and Yuba City and Sutter County around what to do. We had Marysville saying it's a mandatory evacuation. We had right across the river, same flood zone and plain, Yuba City that was messaging it different where it wasn't a mandatory evacuation; it was like an advisory evacuation and they had the term exactly wrong.

But it was confusion because people didn't understand. There was a lack of notification that went out in general. People really didn't know where to go to get good information. When you would look online at the websites, there was little to no information. Social media from the county had a little more information. But, again, there's a lot of question and confusion about where to go for resources and what to do.

There was also major issues just with evacuation in general. We have an office that was in the evacuation zone in Marysville. So all the staff for FREED was evacuated. And we could not rely on them obviously to assist with the emergency response because they were responding their own family. They took seven hours for some of our staff to get from the

Marysville office to Sacramento which really should be an hour, hour and a half drive. The roadways were clogged. People could not get out.

We have another consumer who went to evacuate, got stuck in the roads, and decided to turn around and go home and wait until the roadways cleared, which in this incident worked because there was not a failure at the dam but if not, you know, it would not have been a good outcome for that individual.

Ok. I'm going to shift gears a little bit and talk about wildfires and the Wind Complex Fires. This included the Cascade, Lobo, and McCourtney Fires and were in the communities and counties of Yuba and Nevada. So, again, we had learned from our Oroville Dam incident and tried to kind of recreate a similar type of response organizationally, right?

I want to make a note on calling individuals in evacuation zones because a lot of the advocacy that we've done over the years has been against the idea of having a registry specific to people with disabilities, those that need assistance. And there's kind of two reasons for that. Well, really, if we tell people there's someplace that's going to call you and come rescue you during a disaster, we know that's not true. We know there's not capacity to go and assist everyone who may need it. We need people to really take a hard look at personal preparedness and have a plan that assumes no one's coming to get you.

We also -- so, really, it's about the personal preparedness and about the capacity why registries don't happen. But we have kind of advocated with the local counties to say who are your partners that are working with those with access and functional needs in the community. Your Independent Living Centers, your paratransit providers, your regional center, your private pay registries, IHSS or personal assistance services these organizations already have a relationship with individuals. They're already in the community. They may already have their own databases and why not work with them in case of an emergency to connect with individuals that may need assistance or to give them information that they need.

So I had not personally done -- we had talked about calling individuals during a disaster. It wasn't until 2017 that I personally had been involved in doing this. So during the wildfire incident, these wildfires came on very quickly, similar to Sonoma County. Sonoma County is happening at the same time as the ones in Yuba and Nevada Counties. These were wildfires that started in the dead of night that moved extremely fast. So the very next morning, first thing, we started calling individuals that we could identify an evacuation zone or an advisory evacuation zone. We identified 139 individuals that might fall to the category of being a mandatory or advisory evacuation zones, again provided specific information to seven individuals to help them evacuate, where to go, where the shelters were. We provided 10 assistive devices to individuals and to shelters to focus on individuals that were staying with friends or family or those in shelters. And we provided wheelchair transport to three individuals.

We did not assist with evacuation and that was for obvious reasons I would say but, one, we didn't want to put our staff and team in, you know, a dangerous situation. When you have wildfires moving extremely fast and are very unpredictable, the last thing we want to do is cause, you know -- you know, add to the issues and send people in there that, you know, might not be equipped to do that and we didn't have enough information about where was safe to go or not. So we stayed out altogether of the impacted areas but we did provide support for individuals to move between shelters or to move from shelters to hotel rooms or also to return home.

So two individuals we assisted with transport from shelters to hotels. And at least one of those was a return home to their home that luckily had not burned during the fires.

We deployed staff to visit two shelters, again, to identify individuals with disabilities, those with access and functional needs. We visited our Emergency Operation Center in Yuba County. And we got multiple referrals from them.

So while we were not always at the EOC, we had a direct link -- in this case it ended up being with a public health nurse who was called to say, hey, I got this situation and we would brainstorm and we would engage and provide resources where appropriate.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the story in a minute but we provided personal assistance and support to one individual as well during this incident.

So this is FREED stories from the frontline. So we, from the Oroville Dam incident, we deepened our relationship with Yuba County and our partnership, developed a personal relationship more. So I actually got a call at 2:00 a.m. from Yuba County saying we're opening the EOC, we have these fires that are happening; you're welcome to come to the EOC and provide support. So we also got an e-mail I want to say from Nevada County saying: Hey, we have shelters: can you come visit the shelters and see if there's any assistance that you can provide?

I wanted to review a story of an individual, a consumer, living in the community. And I'm going to read it as he wrote it and provided to me.

"2:00 a.m. the phone rang. It was CAL Fire. A blaze was headed our way. Evacuate. I'm an 81-year-old disabled man and use a power chair. My wife and I had discussed this possibility and thought we were prepared. We were not. We had set aside a supply of medications, copies of important documents, names, phone numbers, cash, and clothing but we never rehearsed getting my power chair into the car and now we couldn't manage it. Nothing to do but get out fast and leave it.

A difficult drive along winding roads through the pitch black night, finally dawn, a town and a motel with one vacancy. Miracle, miracle, they had a wheelchair. But my problems were not over. I simply could not fight out of this chair. I couldn't use the bathroom. I was trapped.

I called FREED. Was there anything at all they could do to help me? They sent a remarkable caregiver to our motel room. She brought some supplies we had failed to bring with us and helped me. That day and night with my mobility and personal needs she was courteous, cheerful, and well trained, a marvel.

Further, FREED sent a special van to our home using a medical [Indiscernible] to gain access into the area to pick up my power chair and bring it to my motel room. However, the evacuation order was lifted at that time and we returned home. All was well. No damage. And there in the garage was my power chair. I couldn't wait to get back in it and yet felt traumatized from my experience without it.

The lesson? Disabled persons too easily become victims in civil emergencies. Develop a plan. Rehearse the plan. Contact the agencies such as FREED and let them know about yourself. There will be more fires in California more often. Do all you can now. I know I will."

So that came from a consumer. I mentioned during the Oroville Dam incident that there was someone who was not provided with personal assistance services in a shelter. Again, in this situation this individual had evacuated himself to a motel room. When I was in contact with him, he said, you know, my wife, who is also in her 80s is my personal attendant. She provides care to me in the home but she can't help me in the motel without my power chair because he can transfer using the manual wheelchair that the motel provided, couldn't

transfer. So he had it set up at home. He was able to be independent with his needs. But then in this foreign environment was not able to utilize his personal assistance, his wife, who was older as well. So he said, you know, I'll go to a shelter, to wherever I need to go to get my personal care needs met. I don't need to stay in this motel.

So in communications with the Emergency Operations Center, the same issue came up again. They were not able to provide personal assistance in any of the shelters in that area. In hindsight we probably could have transitioned him up to a shelter in Nevada County that was able to provide personal assistance there but at the time it just made more sense -- we have a personal assistant registry. It's a private pay type of registry. We were able to identify someone there who could assist the individual in the motel and made those arrangements and brought the medical supplies to him, assistive technology so that between the personal assistant and the devices he was able to maintain in the motel overnight until the evacuation orders had been lifted and he could return home. We were able to get permission from the county to go into the evacuation zone to get the power wheelchair with our van that had a lift but at the same time the evacuation orders were lifted and we were -- we didn't need to do it and he was able to return home.

So that is a little bit on some of those stories that happened. I wanted to speak a little bit on capacity, organizational capacity building that allowed us to be able to respond in the way that we did. There were a few key pieces that allowed us to be a partner with the counties as well as respond to our community needs.

We have a long established relationship with our local Offices of Emergency Services. So we've been participating in local emergency plans and trainings for a long time. They see us as a partner and invite us to the table in many cases. A lot of that transpired around developing those local emergency plans, FEMA trainings that we participated in, Cal OES, those kinds of things over the years.

We also have a policy basically of having our emergency contact on hand for all of our staff. So we're able to communicate with our staff. In the event of emergency if we have to close an office due to disaster, we are able to connect and have communication. We have the ability and a plan around office relocation. We have two offices, one in Grass Valley, one in Marysville. If one of those closes due to a circumstance or a disaster, we're able to relocate staff if they're not personally being impacted to our other office. We're able to forward phone calls if we need to. So that really is an advantage.

We also have the possibility of relocating to a completely different building in one of our communities. We've never had to try that. I think I need to dust off that plan a little bit and connect with those places we've identified that we might relocate our office to because we never actually had to do that given that we have the two offices but I think it's something that needs to be looked at.

So we do have that plan for staff, that's evacuated during a disaster. And we have an online consumer database. So we have a way -- we have Laptops for administrative staff that have access to our online consumer database which was huge. That allowed us to call individuals Sunday night. That allowed us to relocate to another location to have the same access to consumer names, addresses, phone numbers.

We also have done community education on personal preparedness over the years. It's something we've done more or less of depending on the year. Last year we had a conference in aging and disability in Nevada County and we had one of the major themes, after the Oroville Dam, around personal preparedness. We provided go bags that people could

use to put their personal important items in. We provided training on how to prepare on a personal level.

We also have some funding. As a Center for Independent Living we get funding through the Administration for Community Living that allows us to respond to disasters in our specific area. There's some issues there, I would say, that need to be addressed on an advocacy level around utilizing those funds to help with response outside our designated catchment areas but we also have state funding that's a little more flexible that way through the Department of Rehabilitation that gives us some resources to respond not only in our catchment areas but to coordinate across the state.

We also are fortunate, at least in California -- I know this is not the case in other states -- but the Department of Rehabilitation has a Transition Grant Fund through the use of 7 -- Rehab Act 7(b) dollars that has recently been expanded to allow us to use up to \$4,500 to assist people in transitioning at institutions but also they expanded it to allow us to assist people within an emergency shelter, or housing during an emergency, for example, as part of the recovery process. So we'll talk a little more about that in a minute. I just want to drive home the piece around planning; that that is where you can start to build the relationships with your counties or with your local jurisdictions, cities, what have you.

So let's go into some learning here. How are we doing with time? Ok. So learning. I want to start with evacuation notification. As mentioned with the Oroville Dam incident, people debriefed with County and city, I think one of the major issues was the notification, confusion over whether it was mandatory advisory evacuations areas. There's a lot of feedback about that. And that also came up even during our wildfires that we have locally. I've heard people say, you know, I just wasn't notified. Even though notifications did go out, we have things like Code Red where we really want to encourage people to sign up for and to get the notifications even in an accessible manner that go out to the whole community.

We heard about people being stuck on the highways trying to evacuate. I think this was a community issue for communities like Yuba County and Sutter County. How do you get mass people to evacuate in a timely manner? The infrastructure just simply is not there. Or it is not utilized effectively.

And I wanted to bring attention to the Tubbs Fire in Sonoma County because there's a large number, 500 approximately, deaf individuals living in that -- in Sonoma County. From my understanding, the alert system was not activated there. And from what I've understood, you know, maybe they didn't have a way to notify individuals in this specific impacted areas. It would have gone out to, say, the whole county or something to that effect. So they did not use it at all which I think is really something hopefully we can learn from. I would rather be woken up in the middle of the night and find out that the alert is not meant for me than not sending out an alert which may be the only way that individuals will learn that they need to evacuate, especially those who are deaf or hard of hearing. So always err on the side of activating an alert system even if it's broader than your intended audience I guess is what I was saying.

You saw our goals and testimony from deaf individuals who were some of the last people to evacuate in Sonoma County, leaving with the fire right on their building and home and being woken up by the neighbors who had to break into their homes in some cases to notify them.

We see, again with evacuation notifications, lack of interpreters or captioning for that. I know this is something Cal OES is very aware of. We work collaboratively through our Disaster Strategies Coalition around this. It's an ongoing issue of making sure not only do you

have interpreters that are in screen with any TV-related notifications that they actually are professional interpreters. And then captioning as well is another key piece that needs to go out. Remember, if a notification has to cover the whole expanse: TV, radio, notification calls, texts, all of the above needs to happen. The coordination, messaging across jurisdictions could be super helpful in incidents like that because, again, there was confusing messaging with just neighboring counties or cities.

Have a way for people to get reliable and updated information. This is a struggle. This was a struggle especially during Oroville Dam, I would say with just getting reliable, up-to-date information. We worked directly with Cal OES, very supportive and helpful. What we found, like in one case, we got an updated list of shelters to call individuals only to find out that some of those shelters had already closed or were in the process of closing. So how do we get reliable, updated information to our partners? In Nevada County, we have 211, which is an asset to the community so it doesn't bog down the 911. People call to know where the shelters are. Those kinds of resources can be very helpful.

Again, send out the notifications even if it goes to a wider than impacted -- wider audience than who is being impacted. And communication must go out in multiple ways and in accessible format.

So transportation and evacuation. People with disabilities and older adults were left behind. We especially saw that through the Oroville incident. It really is an issue. We really need to have these relationship and understanding with both our paratransit -- anyone that has accessible basically transportation in a community, working with our nursing homes, so they're responsible and have a plan to evacuate individuals in an accessible manner from their facilities.

And the Oroville Dam incident I talked a little bit about paratransit capacity. The ambulance was the main one on the frontlines transporting people out of the evacuation areas to the shelters or to the hospitals or where they needed to but then later on there seemed to be confusion about how they were going to get paid to do so. And I think a lot of that -- like was there any way to reimburse them for their expenses that they stepped up and provided assistance for? You know, without an agreement, without an understanding, an MOU in place, how -- where everyone is on the same page, then that can be difficult to accomplish.

We also got reports that there are medical transport companies that were charging individuals to evacuate. This just simply shouldn't happen. As communities, we really need to look at making sure are the medical transports taking advantage of the situation. And maybe not, really. I think they're doing the best they can with the resources they have but there really should be no incidents where someone who needs assistance with evacuating can only do so if they pay to have it done. That's something we should look at with our planning and response.

Looking at transporting people long distances. I talked about the woman who was transported a few hours drive away and had difficulty getting back home. So how do we avoid that from happening. That's an issue. It makes recovery really difficult. And, again, if we have plans, if we have shelters that are able to take individuals living in the community already, then, you know, sheltering as local to home as possible makes a recovery piece easier.

We talked about deploying the van in Oroville and the wildfires that we did not deploy into the evacuation zone because of the risk to FREED staff and what have you. So kind of knowing when your resources might be useful and knowing when, you know, you might be causing more problems.

So again, the learning transportation for evacuation must include free accessible

resources. People need a number to call to get assistance with accessible transportation. And this is something we -- when we talk with our local jurisdictions about around emergency planning, there's some resistance to it. The fear is that we don't want to give a phone number for someone to call to get accessible transportation because we're going to get inundated with calls we simply cannot respond to. I think that's a valid concern. Right? There's only so much capacity that counties and fire departments, you know, there's only so many resources available, and especially during disasters that we can call upon. So we have to figure out how do we ensure that someone who need accessible transportation can be evacuated with their assistive devices so they're more independent in a sheltering environment or when they're not at home with personal preparedness and coming up with a plan knowing that there may be no one to come and get you and what are you going to do.

MOUs with transit services are really needed, again, to help address who is going to pay for what and how -- what do we need to do to get reimbursed and who are we going to call and do we have the numbers and how are we going to coordinate in the middle of the night when a wildfire or other natural disaster hits. We have to remember when it comes to evacuation and transportation, the flip side is the repopulation side. We have to remember we have to provide that assistance, too. We help people get out, people help themselves get out and need help to get back home. How are we going to address that?

Sheltering. Again, we need a real time updated list of shelters that are available so we can provide that information to individuals that call us or we may call. Shelters were not prepared to provide personal assistance care or specialized equipment. For two incidents, you know, we had a community that wasn't able to provide personal assistance in the shelter. This is a difficult one that I hear from counties that this is something we have to be able to address and learn from so that the next time this happens we have a system in place.

Also what we learned is that especially when there's a wide scale disaster, the AFN equipment, the accessible cots, ADA cots, bathrooms, showers, and resources might take a while to get to that shelter. In Oroville, when you're talking about that large-scale of an evacuation, getting the resources there are tough. I think almost 24 hours I want to say. I could be wrong. But we evacuated Sunday night is when the evacuation started. It was the one shelter we were with consumers at that it was Monday I think around 5:00, 6:00 p.m. that water got there even and we still didn't have ADA cots as a recall. So it takes time to get stuff there.

And is there a way to get equipment strategically placed throughout California that allows us easier access from our supporting communities, too. Because remember, you could have a disaster that impacts your entire county or state for that matter. And how do we partner with our surrounding areas to get that needed support? And remember, shelters have integrated. These are individuals living in the community with their assistive devices and should be able to be accommodated in a sheltering environment.

So you know, on the flip side of this, we had a county that provided personal assistance services. I think the quote from one of the staff was for the first time we had an individual that was in the shelter that used a breathing machine, that was using a gurney, that could not even at home was not using a wheelchair, was laying in bed, that had been transported to the shelter and they provided assistance to her. The county had a relationship with the Sacramento state nursing interns of there were nursing interns from a neighboring -- from Sacramento County coming up to provide that support. It was a really contrast between the other county we're dealing with not able to provide personal assistance and then another county that was providing it with Sacramento state interns.

And, I will say, that they arranged for an IHSS provider to come to the shelter for someone who needed it. And that was the first time that that really happened that the IHSS provider didn't work out because the evacuation orders were lifted and the person went home and didn't need the support in the shelter. So that was really powerful to see the county really rise to that occasion and bring those supports into the shelter.

Again, I keep saying this but the balance between personal preparedness and shelter preparedness. If you have a minute to evacuation, of course you just grab your stuff, yourself, and you get out, however means you can. If you have half an hour, an hour, a day, it's really different and it's really, you know, what do you grab and really ensuring that you bring things that are going to help you be as self-sufficient as possible at least for a couple of days while other services can be arranged in a shelter environment.

We visited shelters. Again, the county invited us to do so. And what was really interesting is that when you go to a shelter, you will find that there are Red Cross staff who are doing tremendous work. We have county staff there. But it really took us going and asking individuals and connecting with the individuals in the shelter that we were able to identify things that had not come up for whatever reason during the registration into the shelter and also people thinking of things -- there was a lot of use for medications there was a lot of needs that we were able to identify and help coordinate getting those needs met. And this was the same in Sonoma County. Some of the Independent Living Centers there were deployed as FAST team members or not as FAST team members and were able to do a lot of that connecting with individuals and getting them the assistive device that they needed in the shelters.

We don't have a local FAST team. I forget the acronym on that. The state does have a FAST team that was deployed at least during the Oroville Dam incident. I'll say that, you know, in some counties have them, some jurisdictions don't. I think there's a real need for organization teams to address access and functional needs in the shelter but also beyond that. So there's really a need for coordination and collaboration and the Emergency Operation Center during evacuation, during repopulation. It really crosses the gamut.

So I think that's one of the things I'd like to see is a larger focus on, this coordination efforts not just being shelters. And also being local coordination teams. Because something I hear from local jurisdictions is we don't want some state FAST team coming in and telling us what to do. We're doing the best we can. So to me, the idea of having Centers for Independent Living, other partners, regional center, working together with local people on the local level I think would have a really effective outcome in helping to address access and functional needs.

So a little bit on Emergency Operations Center. Invite your AFN partners to the table and EOC. Prioritize AFN and you can take care of the whole community. And exchange personal contacts with your director of emergency services. And if you can co-locate your Emergency Operation Center with surrounding Counties that impacted to me that would help with coordination, with messaging and notification sort of issues.

We have a county, for example, here -- I'll say Nevada County that really has taken -- they prioritize AFN. This is their philosophy that I hear the director -- manager of operations say, you know, if you take care of access and functional needs, you can address the whole community and you make it a prioritization through all phases of planning and response and recovery. That has been the philosophy that he has used.

So recovery. This is really an area that I'll say straight out that could use some room -- there's room for improvement. It's something that we've done planning and response



now. But the recovery piece we need to figure out what our role is. There's a lot of disconnect or confusion about the state's role, FEMA's role, and local coordination, I'll say. And that's like from an organizational perspective. I can say that. Like, I get unclear -- even though it's been explained to me, attempted to explain to me really what is the role. We are working with individuals, one specific individual I can think of, who we're able to help, a renter lost their home in the fires and we are providing assistance with housing search, found an apartment, a place for them to rent, helping with home setup and getting them reengaged in their own home.

We really need to be looking at the mitigation funding that comes into the state and making sure it's compliant with the Rehab Act and accessibility. There's a huge opportunity here. And there's a requirement that new funding coming into the state goes towards accessibility and can help improve accessibility in our communities. Right? If homes were wiped out in a wildfire and there's mitigation funding coming into our communities to help with rebuilding, are those homes being built universally designed? Are apartment complexes being built that have sufficient accessible units? Those kinds of things that we can look at.

And even from individuals, just yesterday someone who was impacted by the wildfires said it really was difficult to navigate between FEMA and Cal OES for individuals for her. She said it got better with time but it's really confusing as someone trying to access the services it's not easy.

And then planning. Again, it all starts with planning. Develop a relationship with local offices of emergency services. Participate in local disaster plans and trainings and emergency management and AFN meetings. Many of our communities and for us have quarterly or monthly or twice a year, you know, meetings specifically around access and functional needs. Invite your partners to the table, those serving people with disabilities, older adults. Know that a plan is needed. It's a place to start.

Similar to -- I have a 5-year-old son. Similar to my birthing plan, the minute I went into the hospital and one thing went wrong, they're not in compliance with my plan, it got thrown out the window. So, again, plans are important. The environment, the conversations and then when the emergency comes, some of it may be thrown out but at least we have something to go to, we have some institutional memory of what we talked about that we can kind of go back to.

The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers has been a key partner through these disasters. We have the Disability Organizing Network, working on some of the systemic issues. They're taking emergency preparedness as a priority. How many of us are working with our local jurisdictions on our disaster plans and how can we ensure access and functional needs are being met?

There's also the Tech Act Grantees for Ability Tools, networked with Independent Living Centers. We use them a lot in Sonoma and, you know, the Wind Complex, the Thomas Fire, around when an assistive device was identified as a need that we were able to look at our partner, Independent Living Center, see who has it and coordinate to get that equipment to the individuals that need it.

They have a Richard Devylder Disaster Relief Fund. He really has been a champion for disaster preparedness in California.

We have our California Disaster Strategies Coalition. And there's really a need, whether it's Cal OES or our coalition -- how do we coordinate during and after a disaster? And there's a need for it because some of us are in it or doing it for the first time and trying to

respond to our community and we can learn from one another. We can help coordinate resources when appropriate.

I'm going to end on personal preparedness. I said it throughout this presentation but we really have to balance, have to drive home access and functional needs during the planning and response through all levels and make a priority but we also have to drive home personal preparedness.

On wildfires we have issues around defensible space there. May be local organizations like in our communities that can help with clearing defensible space for people of low income or have disabilities. You need to know where your evacuation routes are. How are you going to transport yourself and your assistive devices? Bring medication with you. You know, if there's any specific paperwork. What are you going to do around personal assistance? If your personal assistance or have to evacuate or are impacted, do you have a backup plan? Do you have a network of people that can connect with you and call you and check in on you?

Living in a rural community myself, it was really a relief when this last year we had the Ponderosa Fire and my community was under mandatory evacuation and I had family members and community members contacting me saying, Hey, do you need assistance? Hey, can we help? We really have to look to ourselves and how well we are prepared to deal with these things. Again, because, you know, while we deal with these disasters, I feel like these are conversations we need to be having with our friends, our family, our neighbors, our community, our peers. It needs to become part of our vocabulary on a daily basis so that we can prepare individually and think through these things as well as prepare as a community. We have to realize that there is not the capacity for someone to come and save you if you need assistance maybe. So what can we do to help ourselves? The phones may be out. What are we going to do in those cases?

So with that, I will end there. I think I've gone a little bit long. I do apologize.

>> Lewis Kraus: Yes, thank you, Ana. That was a tremendous presentation. It's a lot of information. I hope all of you were able to get a lot out of it. We only have time for a couple of questions.

First of all, for any of you wondering, access and functional needs is what AFN stands for when Ana was referring to AFN, access and functional needs.

Here's a few questions you can write your questions in. We'll try to get to them. But here's what we have so far.

The first person -- question that came in I think got answered pretty much but the question was: Were the individuals who passed away in these emergencies -- did they wait until the last minute before evacuating? Did government mandate evacuations or were those voluntary and did residents stay thinking they would not be impacted?

And let me answer this a little bit quickly here. I think this question is coming up in terms of what's going on right now in Southern California. I think Ana answered this question pretty well about the kinds of people who are involved and the kinds of people who could or could not evacuate. I think the question about evacuations is really relevant to -- the part that's relevant for us in this conversation is people with disabilities and older adults who could not evacuate or would require a lot of assistance or a significant amount of assistance to be able to evacuate.

Unless you want to add something to that, Ana, I think we should move on to the next question.

>> Ana Acton: That's fine.

>> Lewis Kraus: Next question is -- and this was also answered. How did you make phone calls to individuals? Did you have a calling center? Did you have a way to reach out to your clientele to send them information via Facebook or other pre-established platforms?

>> Ana Acton: I think that was addressed. So what we did is basically took all of our staff off of what they would have been doing and just directed them -- those that were available and not evacuated themselves and directed us assist with phones.

>> Lewis Kraus: Great. Next question or point brought up: Thanks. Very informative presentation. Thanks for sharing. To let you know, 211 is not accessible to Relay Service users because they will need a 10-digit number to reach their local 211 agency, not the 211 agency near the Relay Service call centers which are located in different parts of this country. It's important to include 10-digit numbers besides 211 during publicity.

>> Ana Acton: Great point. Thank you so much for pointing that out.

>> Lewis Kraus: Ok. Next point: Can you address any cost reimbursement was sought or provided for nonprofit assistance that was provided in either event maybe through the CDAA PNP program, FEMA, or Stafford Act?

>> Ana Acton: Great question and something I think needs to be addressed. We were able to get reimbursement from our -- overtime for our staff, purchasing some assistive devices for the Oroville Dam incident. But we did that directly through -- it was our first experience with that. We did it through Cal OES who partnered with I believe Portlight to provide reimbursement in that case. I could be wrong on the exact source of who reimbursed us but it was coordinated through Cal OES. And I was told it should be coordinated through our local jurisdictions, counties.

So during the second wildfire incident I have not requested reimbursement because we did not incur a large -- we didn't have staff working overtime and we didn't incur large expenditures during that incident. But I think that's a conversation that needs to happen because we should have agreements with our local counties or cities to know how we're going to be reimbursed and we have not done that at this point.

>> Lewis Kraus: Ok. I do want to make sure one of the points we got here is the coordination of an Independent Living Center or disability organization with local emergency management. So those who are listening who are in emergency management and want to know how to reach the disability community, this is -- this was a session for you to understand what a local disability organization can actually do or does do in an emergency and what they can offer in terms of assistance in an emergency.

And for those of you who are at CILs or other disability organizations who are listening, you can understand from Ana's presentation a little bit about how reaching out to your local Emergency Management Office is really going to be key when an emergency does reach your community and how you can really be important in the planning during the event.

I realize many of you still have questions. I apologize if you didn't get a chance to ask your question. There's Ana's contact information if you want to contact her with your question or you can contact our regional -- your regional ADA Center at 1-800-949-4232.

You will also, all of you who are here, will receive an e-mail with a link to an online session evaluation. Please complete that for today's program. We really value your input and want to make sure that our funder is aware of the impact of our work.

I want to thank Ana today for sharing her time and knowledge with us. It was a really excellent presentation.

A reminder to all of you, the session was recorded. It will be available for viewing

next week at the [www.adapresentations.org/archives.php](http://www.adapresentations.org/archives.php) page.

We look forward to speaking with you again in February for our National Network Learning Session, Review of Emergency Preparedness Litigation. Watch for your e-mail about this in a couple of weeks.

Thank you again, Ana. And thank you all for attending today's session. Have a great rest of your day.

Bye-bye.