



FEMA

Sharing Information
Enhancing Preparedness
Strengthening Homeland Security

**Lessons Learned
Information Sharing**
LLIS.gov

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Mass Care: Private Sector Engagement to Improve Response Coordination for Individuals with Access and Functional Needs

SUMMARY

The [Independence Center](#) (IC), an independent living center and service provider serving individuals with disabilities throughout Colorado, has taken several proactive steps to engage and coordinate with the emergency response community in response to lessons learned from wildfires in 2012. The IC is addressing coordination gaps revealed by those wildfires by engaging the whole community in coordination and planning for the needs of individuals with access and functional needs.

DESCRIPTION

The Waldo Canyon Fire burned more than 29 square miles near Colorado Springs, Colorado in June and July of 2012, destroying 346 homes and causing more than 32,000 evacuations. During the response, individuals with access and functional needs were not aware of where and how to obtain real-time information on the status of accessible shelters and therefore sought refuge in inaccessible shelters.¹ In addition, information on transportation, shelters, and resources was not effectively shared amongst responders because of a lack of a standard reporting procedure.² As a result of these shortfalls, the IC took several proactive steps to engage partners in the emergency response and access and functional needs communities to improve disaster response for this community.

The IC first convened a workshop to discuss the lessons learned from the Waldo Canyon Fire, which was held on August 30, 2012 and attended by local emergency response and access and functional need stakeholders. This workshop revealed that resources and coordination shortfalls amongst responders affected individuals with access and functional needs in several areas, including effective communication of emergency broadcasts, transportation and mobility, and access to shelters.³ The IC has since undertaken several specific coordination efforts, including hiring an Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and supporting resource collaboration.

Hiring an Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

The aforementioned workshop on lessons learned for individuals with access and functional needs from the Waldo Canyon Fire resulted in a report with several recommendations and next steps.⁴ One next step was to engage the community to proactively address issues revealed in the workshop and described in the report.⁵ To that end, the IC hired their own internal emergency preparedness coordinator to integrate and enhance emergency response systems for people with access and functional needs. This position includes the development of a consumer advisory group (CAG) comprised of people with various disabilities who are subject matter experts on the complexities associated with disabilities. Simultaneous to the formation of the CAG, the IC has led regional efforts to establish an access and functional needs working group with community emergency and mass care managers. The CAG and access and functional needs working group will collectively meet throughout 2014 to

LLIS.gov defines a Lesson Learned as a positive or negative experience derived from an actual incident, operation, training, or exercise obtained from a validated After Action Report or interview.

integrate the expertise of people with disabilities into elements of regional emergency operations plans.

Resource Collaboration

During the onset of floods in September 2013, the IC was contacted by FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination to assist in the cross coordination with other Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and disability organizations across the affected flooding areas. Throughout the response, the IC led efforts to ensure that these organizations maintained situational awareness and integrated their unique capabilities into a task force responsible for identifying accessibility issues. This task force collectively communicated on a daily basis and provided timely recommendations and solutions to offices of emergency management in the affected areas. Additionally, the task force has conducted several after action reviews with leaders in the disability community and has found areas to improve upon. Specifically, Colorado based CILs and disability communities have taken efforts to improve reporting, comprehension of all available disability resources, and periodic internal disaster rehearsals or communication/tabletop exercises. Currently, the IC is creating a task force to address the needs of individuals with access and functional needs comprised of staff from other independent living centers with the goal of fostering collaboration during a response.⁶ This task force will develop standard operating procedures for its members to increase their situational awareness of the resources each has available for emergency response.⁷

APPLICABILITY

Communities facing known or likely disaster risks can better plan for those risks if all members of the community engage with response stakeholders to identify the mass care needs of their communities, including individuals with access and functional needs. The CAG model can be used in any community to communicate the mass care needs of the access and functional community to response planners. Similarly, local independent living centers and providers can share information and coordinate their available resources either through an Emergency Operations Center or DRC representative or via their membership on a task force of local centers and providers.

CITATIONS

¹ The Independence Center and the Rocky Mountain ADA Center, *Summary of Findings, Waldo Canyon Fire Forum for People with Disabilities*, October 24, 2012. http://www.theindependencecenter.org/library/PDFs/Waldo_Canyon_Fire_Findings-Waldo_Canyon_Fire_Forum_for_People_with_Disabilities_10-121.pdf.

² Interview of Nick DeSutter, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, The Independence Center, October 2, 2013.

³ The Independence Center and the Rocky Mountain ADA Center, *Summary of Findings, Waldo Canyon Fire Forum for People with Disabilities*, October 24, 2012. http://www.theindependencecenter.org/library/PDFs/Waldo_Canyon_Fire_Findings-Waldo_Canyon_Fire_Forum_for_People_with_Disabilities_10-121.pdf.

⁴ The Independence Center and the Rocky Mountain ADA Center, *Summary of Findings, Waldo Canyon Fire Forum for People with Disabilities*, October 24, 2012. http://www.theindependencecenter.org/library/PDFs/Waldo_Canyon_Fire_Findings-Waldo_Canyon_Fire_Forum_for_People_with_Disabilities_10-121.pdf.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Interview of Nick DeSutter, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, The Independence Center, October 2, 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

DISCLAIMER

Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov) is the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency management and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email feedback@llis.dhs.gov or visit www.llis.gov.