A Lifeline in Emergencies: How The Arc's Accessible Preparedness Training Makes a Difference

People with developmental disabilities face disproportionate risks during disasters due to systemic gaps in emergency preparedness and response. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families often lack access to essential planning tools, financial resources, and inclusive training needed to prepare effectively for emergencies.



Ready & Prepared Workshop on Nov. 13.

To address these gaps and with funding from the Oregon Health Authority, The Arc created a web-based, person-centered Emergency Preparedness Tool tailored for people with disabilities. The Tool was built with support from Cognitopia and Upstream Access and was designed with universal access in mind, featuring multiple formats (text, audio, visual), plain language, and customizable routines to meet diverse needs.

To introduce the Tool, The Arc piloted a series of Ready & Prepared Workshops to offer hands-on, accessible training to people with I/DD and their supporters [e.g., family members, caregivers, direct support professionals (DSPs)]. The Arc recently completed the third training cohort on December 4.

To reinforce learning and maintain engagement, The Arc continues to host monthly online Emergency Preparedness Refresher meetings, where participants revisit preparedness topics, ask questions, and build community support. For example, the virtual meeting this month will focus on holiday safety routines, as there is higher number of structural fires in the month of December.

Elizabeth, a client of The Arc Lane County, completed the most recent six-week emergency preparedness class. During Elizabeth's time in the class she learned many things, including:



- How to use her phone, a tablet and/or a computer in an emergency situation;
- How to change her screen and individualize the font to large, bold letters that are easier to read for her;
- How to personalize the Emergency Preparedness Tool to communicate with her staff, friends, and family so they could learn how to better support her in the event of an emergency situation; and
- How to prepare for extreme weather, and use an emergency solar radio that was provided as part of the class. The solar radio included a charge port, flashlight, reading light, and a compass, all of which she was shown how to use.

Elizabeth said the class was very educational and she enjoyed every session. She appreciated the talking points, visuals, and the one-on-one support.

With tears welling up in her eyes, Elizabeth had a lot to say of the experience.

"If I could get down on my knees and thank all those involved, I would. I loved seeing my disabled community together, learning something we all need and being a part of something bigger. Nobody else is willing to help us. What would happen to us if we didn't have the knowledge on what to do in an emergency? Now, I'm better prepared, and I have a tool and the routines to help me in an emergency situation."