

AoA Older Americans Month 2008 Program Champion

Project: Disaster Preparedness for Frail Elders and People with Disabilities in Southern Oregon

Organization: Senior and Disability Services of Rogue Valley Council of Governments.

Project Description

The Emergency Preparedness Project for Frail Elders and People with Disabilities for Jackson and Josephine Counties has turned out to be a “leadership project” for the whole state of Oregon. Efforts of the Senior and Disability Services of Rogue Valley Council of Governments (SDS RVCOG), which were motivated by a flood in 1997, inadvertently put us ahead of the curve when the national focus turned to preparedness for vulnerable people after the Katrina and Rita hurricanes. The agency believes the model could be duplicated in other rural or even urban areas.

SDS RVCOG is an Area Agency on Aging covering two mostly rural counties in Southern Oregon. The agency stepped into the emergency preparedness arena when it accepted the invitation of one County Emergency Manager to help sort out the human service community, which, she said, looked like a “plate of spaghetti” to emergency responders. The County and SDS RVCOG received funding for a joint emergency preparedness project—one of the first non-bricks-and-mortar projects funded by FEMA. This grant and the development of the products kicked off a process which has eventually benefitted the rest of the state in regards to emergency preparedness for vulnerable populations. The three original components are still in operation today:

- A 15-minute video, called “*Planning Ahead for Special Needs during a Disaster,*” which helps people with a variety of disabilities plan for their own safety. SDS RVCOG has distributed more than a thousand copies within Oregon and across the country. For years it was viewable on the website of the National Organization on Disabilities.
- A GIS-Based Disaster Registry, which uses volunteers to keep the data current. SDS RVCOG distributes CDs with the data and map to the Emergency Operations Centers and 911 Centers in both counties, so rescuers can identify where vulnerable people live at the time of an emergency event.
- A public education campaign about preparedness, including a poster for senior nutrition sites, print and electronic media campaigns and speakers at local venues such as meal sites, churches, and service organizations. And a second educational campaign about vulnerable people and preparedness for responders, governmental commissions and state-wide conferences.

SDS RVCOG was called on by one of its counties to assist in the writing of the Emergency Operations Plan. Those community discussions initiated included players from all realms--the emergency response, amateur radio operators, public health and hospitals, durable medical equipment providers, parish nurses, long term care facilities, para transit providers and childcare providers, as well as human service providers. The conversations subsequently lead to:

- The formation of two Special Needs Emergency Preparedness Committees made up of representatives of local public and private human service, health and public safety agencies—one in each county we serve. SDS RVCOG leveraged HRSA funds to staff the committees.
- The planning of a Vulnerable Populations Branch to be activated when necessary by Emergency Operations Centers for both counties
- The representation of vulnerable populations on the local COAD (Community Organizations Active in Disaster)

- Replication of the Vulnerable Populations Committee model in other areas of the state
- SDS RVCOG's leadership of a state-wide Disaster Registry Interest Group.
- The contracting by Oregon's office of Seniors and People with Disabilities with RVCOG for staff to assist with the state agency's internal emergency preparedness planning and the development of expectations and rules for its contracted long term care and service providers.

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