

NEW JERSEY GROUP FOR ACCESS AND INTEGRATION NEEDS IN EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS (NJ GAINED) REPORT

INTRODUCTION

During times of crisis, the work this group does together is so critical and impactful to the communities we serve. The NJ GAINED team has made such a difference to so many through the work they have been engaged in during COVID response and other times of disaster. The motto of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) consists of the 4 C's (Communication, Collaboration, Cooperation, Coordination). Our NJ GAINED team epitomizes this motto as we consistently work together to meet the needs of New Jerseyans. Through our calls, we communicated critical information to one another and collaborated to find solutions. As a group, we consistently cooperated with each other and coordinated any related activities to provide assistance and information to the Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs (DAFN) Community. NJ GAINED has made a difference to so many in the State of New Jersey. This report is dedicated to all of the great people and organizations that represent NJ GAINED and for their tireless dedication and work to support the most vulnerable in our State during times of crisis.

This NJ GAINED report was compiled thanks to the input and interaction of team members in order to illustrate the value of the group and the work that has been done during the COVID response. This document is designed to highlight the work of NJ GAINED, but more importantly, capture those specific circumstances whereby through our interaction and activity, we identified and addressed an issue and concern. Members of NJ GAINED have contributed so much to our discussions and assisted with ideas and solutions to problems that were identified. The team has all truly made a difference.

This report will provide an introduction and overview of NJ GAINED and provide examples, as provided by team members, how our interactions made a difference during COVID response. The examples provided demonstrate how member organizations, through advocacy and/or action, addressed issues that impacted the most vulnerable populations in the State of New Jersey.

NJ GAINED MEMBER GROUPS

The membership of NJ GAINED consists of emergency management professionals, social services and health care providers, voluntary organizations active in disaster, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and other stakeholders representing the community of people with disabilities and access and functional needs. NJ GAINED members uphold the decisions and policies of NJ GAINED. NJ GAINED members are expected to participate in three NJ GAINED meetings per year, provide information to the NJ GAINED leadership team regarding emergency preparedness activities, adhere to the philosophy, policy, guidance and values of NJ GAINED regarding disaster preparedness, and only represent NJGAINED as authorized by the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) and the New Jersey Department of Human Services (NJDHS). Agency members should have completed, or be working on a disaster business continuity plan. They should all be actively engaged in NJ GAINED and take an active approach to problem solving, as evidenced by active participation in meetings, information-sharing regarding resources, and contributing solutions to issues presented during adverse conditions. Member organizations include:

NJ Department of Human Services (Division of Disability Services, Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Division of Aging Services, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services' Disaster and Terrorism Branch) NJ Office of Emergency Management, NJ Department of Health, NJ Department of Children and Families, NJ Association of Community Providers, NJ Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD), NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities, NJ Institute for Disabilities, Brain Injury Alliance of NJ, NJ Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), NJ Medical Reserve Corps, Disability Rights NJ, Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families, NJ Long Term Care Ombudsman, NJ State Independent Living Council, FEMA Region 2, American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, Project Freedom, Middlesex County Office of Emergency Management, Alliance Center for Independence, Cumberland County Department of Aging and Disability Services, DAWN Center for Independent Living, Noah's Ark Institute, Progress Center for Independent Living, ARC of Mercer County, ARC of Cape May, Quality Insights Renal Network, National Center for

Environmental Health Strategies, Ocean County Core Advisory Group (CAG), Boggs Center–Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Atlantic Center for Independent Living, Mercer County Core Advisory Group.

NJ GAINED OVERVIEW

The NJ Group for Access and Integration Needs in Emergencies and Disasters (NJ GAINED) acts as an advisory board to the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) and the NJ Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP) regarding issues affecting people with Disabilities and Access and Functional Needs (DAFN) in New Jersey before, during and after an emergency or disaster.

NJ GAINED identifies issues likely to affect DAFN populations as they prepare to respond to an emergency, or issues likely to affect emergency management personnel as they attempt to assist persons with DAFN before, during and after adverse conditions. Group members may also make recommendations, develop solutions, draft proposed legislation, formulate memos of understanding, and devise products and programs to address identified issues, if requested by the NJOEM or NJOHSP.

The NJ Department of Human Services Division of Disability Services (DDS) and Office of Emergency Management (DHSOEM), in coordination with the NJ Office of Emergency Management, form the leadership team for NJ GAINED. The group meets in-person or via conference calls periodically in order to address any issues confronting the DAFN community. During this COVID response, we met remotely on a weekly basis to address the many issues we were confronted with in order to support the vulnerable populations of our State impacted by COVID.

NJ GAINED meets as a whole committee with established sub-committees when necessary; and only acts as authorized by the NJOEM and the NJ Department of Human Services. An NJOEM representative acts as Co-Chair for the group, liaison to NJOEM, and liaison member to other various related working groups and governmental jurisdictions.

The NJ GAINED team promotes accessibility, opportunity and inclusion and we continue to use the following principles and values to guide our activities and decision making processes:

- Persons with access and functional needs cross every demographic sector of society. Emergency planning activities that address access and integration needs should consider functional models which underscore the dignity and right to self-determination of every human being.
- Social service and health care providers, voluntary organizations active in disaster, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations have unique knowledge, skills and experiences which can inform planning, improve response, and help insure DAFN populations have access to emergency facilities, communication and programs. These groups will be considered key stakeholders in the emergency planning process and assets to disaster management programs.
- Every life matters and we must engage in the whole community approach in our planning and response activities. “Emergency planning must embrace the value that everyone should survive, or when adverse conditions occur, they will not.” (adapted from National Council on Disability report 4/05).

NJ GAINED GENERAL PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS:

Consistent and coordinated emergency plans among jurisdictions allows for continuity of operations that benefit both the jurisdictions and the State.

Considerations made for DAFN populations are integral to every aspect of emergency planning. However, NJ GAINED primarily focuses on those issues that are most complex and historically most common to communities of individuals with DAFN and emergency managers during emergency/disaster planning, response and recovery operations.

Some agencies/organizations that are part of NJGAINED, or local coalitions with a similar mission, may be unfamiliar with developing emergency plans and additional emergency management training may be necessary.

There is a great deal of diversity within DAFN populations; therefore, plans to address the needs of the people with DAFN must include comprehensive strategies that can address a range of challenges. Some individuals have novel or uncommon access and functional needs which are not well understood. NJGAINED members can help increase stakeholder awareness and understanding regarding a wide range of access and functional needs.

Individuals in need of response assistance have typically exhausted all other resources (family, neighbors, public transportation, etc.) and still need assistance with evacuation and/or sheltering before, during, and possibly after a disaster or emergency. These individuals typically reside in single homes or multiple family dwellings and are not residents of hospitals, residential health care facilities, or any state or federally-funded community-based residences or services that are already subject to emergency planning requirements.

The recovery phase of a disaster is enhanced by recovery planning. Recovery planning should incorporate people with DAFN and the agencies that serve them. NJ GAINED members serve as force multipliers regarding the deployment of disaster recovery programs.

NJ GAINED GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

Continue to improve the overall preparedness and response to the DAFN community during emergencies and disasters at the state, county and local levels. In order to achieve this, NJ GAINED focuses on three key areas:

1. Planning

- Integrate DAFN populations into the State Emergency Operations Plan; integrate accessible and inclusive sheltering capability into the NJ Statewide Mass Care Plan; promote a “whole community approach” in emergency planning;
- Improve existing business contingency planning guidance for social service providers and other organizations serving individuals with access and functional needs;
- Develop planning template specific to accessible transportation and evacuation;

- Explore technology applications that can enhance the integration of access and functional needs populations into the emergency management process;
- Expand opportunities for, and coordination of grant-funded projects in order to insure efficient use of federal and state resources;
- Develop strategies for integrating assistive technology resource providers into disaster resource management plans;
- Develop disaster resources for the community of professionals serving individuals with access and functional needs; and
- Identify ways to outreach to individuals with AFN who are not receiving services from agencies, or who are not connected with the formal provision of services.

2. Training

- Field delivery of emergency management training courses to organizations which serve people with DAFN;
- Deliver personal preparedness workshops to persons with access and functional needs via a “peer-to-peer,” or cohort model;
- Deliver Continuity of Operations Planning Courses for organizations that serve individuals with DAFN;
- Seek US Department of Homeland Security approval for the NJOEM “Community Emergency Response Teams – Working with the DAFN Community” Awareness Level Course;
- Develop a “Community Emergency Response Teams – Working with the DAFN Community” Operations Course;
- Support DAFN training for Medical Reserve Corps volunteers; and
- Support NJ FAST (Functional Assessment Service Team) training.

3. Response

- Improve integration, inclusive, accessible and medical needs shelter readiness in all 21 counties;
- Promote the use of “Register Ready – New Jersey’s Special Needs Registry for Disasters” in all 21 counties;

- Explore the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible and other transportation resources which may be available to aid transit dependent populations;
- Incorporate DAFN resources into the NJOEM Resource Directory Database;
- Explore the potential to engage NJ 211/Find-a-Ride as a disaster transportation disaster resource; and
- Engage NJ FAST operations in activities across the State.

4. Recovery/Continuity plans

- Coordinate disaster recovery and business continuity capabilities at the local, regional and state levels
 - a. Increase social service providers' level of disaster resilience through business continuity planning and mitigation activities.
- Provide recommendations to the NJOEM, the OHSP and FEMA regarding emergency planning for DAFN populations and ways to enhance accessibility of disaster assistance programs during the recovery process.

5. Awareness of NJ GAINED

- Raise awareness of the NJ GAINED group as a unique information resource; advocate for DAFN emergency preparedness among all stakeholders;
- Explore opportunities for strategic partnerships with organizations who can aid in achieving the NJ GAINED's goals;
- Maintain and update the NJ GAINED page on the NJOEM Website;
- Use mass media and social media to promote NJ GAINED goals and objectives;
- Develop talking points and maintain consistent messaging regarding goals and activities related to NJ GAINED.

6. NJ GAINED Internal Activities

- Enhance and grow the internal capabilities of NJ GAINED as a critical asset to New Jersey's emergency management infrastructure;
- Conduct National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) related training for NJ GAINED members;

- Conduct periodic scenario-based emergency management training for NJ GAINED members; and
- Offer presentations to NJ GAINED members to enhance their knowledge, skills and understanding of what is required to manage the disaster-related needs of the DAFN Community.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NJ GAINED ACTIVITIES DURING COVID

The information below represents feedback provided by NJ GAINED Members during COVID response operations. It is important to note that support operations and assistance is ongoing, as this report is submitted.

NJ Department of Human Services - The Department of Human Services' Divisions of Disability Services, Development Disabilities, Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired in partnership with the Rutgers Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, provided a training to New Jersey's COVID-19 vaccine coordinators regarding considerations and accommodations for people with disabilities at vaccine sites.

NJ Department of Human Services Office of Emergency Management (DHSOEM) Staffed the SEOC Mass Care (ESF#6) desk and addressed any DAFN issues raised by the County OEMs through our Mass Care network and conference calls. Coordinated NJ GAINED calls and provided notes for all meetings and discussions.

Division of Disability Services (DDS) distributed nearly 48,000 home delivered meals to individuals with disabilities under the age of 60 from April 2020 to June 30th, 2021. With the assistance of County Coordinators, DDS distributed Personal Protective Equipment including surgical masks and gloves to nearly 500 consumers on the Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP). DDS staff continues to serve on the Service Animal Working Group in order to provide key facts about service animals for disaster shelter workers, service animal emergency preparedness guidance for handlers, COVID-19 considerations to support service animals in human shelters and service animal guidance for emergency shelter managers and workers. DDS provided valuable information to partners on grant funding opportunities to support COVID response as well as updated and included

information in the NJ Resources Guide and to callers to the DDS Information and Referral Hotline (1-888-285-3036).

New Jersey Office of Emergency Management/ FEMA – working through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) were able to quickly identify DAFN issues raised through the County Offices of Emergency Management (OEMs) and resolve same through the communication network set up through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) and Eteam. Worked in coordination with FEMA Region 2 and their Disability Integration Team in order to address DAFN issues and provide access to important webinar and stakeholder calls.

Dialysis Patient Transport Issues – Early on during COVID response operations concerns were raised regarding the transportation of dialysis patients through Quality Insights Renal Network and various County Offices of Emergency Management. Working through our network of contacts, we were able to provide transportation solutions for those in need.

County OEM engagement – Working through our County Offices of Emergency Management and the County Coordinators Association we were able to ensure vulnerable populations were being contacted through Register Ready and other means in order to assess emergent needs.

Division of Aging Services (DOAS) - assisted senior citizens with grocery deliveries during COVID response. By connecting with volunteer groups such as Jersey Cares through NJ GAINED, calls to their program began in April 2020 and is still ongoing. Nearly 700 grocery shopping orders were filled for these seniors that were unable to get to the store. For Fiscal Year 2020, DOAS reported a total of 4,629,525 Home Delivered – 4,519,197 through our Area Plan Contract Older Americans Act services, 106,638 Medline Shelf Stable Meals (Purchased by the Department shortly after the shutdown) and 3,690 meals from our NJ Assistance through Community Caregiving (JACC) program. DOAS states that the information shared during the NJ GAINED calls has benefited their network by providing them with new supports, for both their staff and consumers they serve. The connections made through the mental health services provided by the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services such as webinars, support groups, phone and text lines was very

important to those they serve. Other resources provided by NJ GAINED that they shared through their networks were the Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) tools (picture cards) and the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) resources.

NJ Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NJVOAD) – connected VOAD groups to concerns raised by the DAFN Community through the NJ GAINED calls. Connected groups such as Jersey Cares, Team Rubicon and others to support COVID response operations. Assisted with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) donations and distribution to groups in need.

American Red Cross – worked in coordination with DOAS on their grocery delivery initiative. Developed the Virtual Family Assistance Center website in order to connect those impacted by COVID to various resources

FEMA information and disability stakeholder meetings – The FEMA Region 2 team participated in all meetings and provided valuable information on COVID related material or training associated with the DAFN community. Assisted with making connections to those groups in need of PPE when it was available for distribution. Supported Core Advisory Group (CAG) development.

Division of Developmental Disabilities – shared valuable information regarding Developmental Center activity and website links for information regarding same.

Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities of the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School – shared valuable information and resources on their website on COVID-19, Vaccination Facts for the Developmental Disabilities community, Helping Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Become Comfortable with Face Masks, Wearing a Face Mask, A Parent's Guide: Helping Your Child Wear a Face Mask and many other valuable links. Please visit their website <https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/links/COVID-19Resources.html>.

Abilities Expo – promoted this virtual event and members participated in order to share information with the DAFN community. More information can be found at this website <https://www.abilities.com/>.

Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program Award – members of NJ GAINED wrote letters of support for this grant application that resulted in the State of New Jersey being one of 10 regions in the Nation to receive the award. Thanks to the support of our members, the award will be used to support valuable emergency preparedness training for the DAFN community as well as offer support and resources for overnight sheltering during a disaster.

NJ FAST Program – thanks to input and guidance from members, the State of New Jersey graduated its first NJ Functional Assessment Service Team (FAST). The group was trained and ready to respond during any type of disaster to ensure that shelters have the necessary staff and resources to support the DAFN community.

NJ Register Ready Update and Revision – members provided input and guidance for an update to New Jersey's DAFN registry and database known as Register Ready. Members encouraged registration to the database through our numerous networks, and developed a Public Service Announcement (PSA) for the Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to encourage registration.

Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing – ensured American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters were in place during Governor's Emergency Press Briefings. They developed several Public Service Announcements on COVID response in American Sign Language for dissemination to the public, developed and provided a pre-vaccination checklist communication cards for dissemination to assist deaf and hard of hearing residents getting vaccinated and funded ASL in-person and remote interpreters at each vaccination mega site.

DAFN Plan Review and Input – members of the group provided valuable insight and guidance on the crafting of the State's Emergency Operations Plan as it relates to Mass Care Response and more specifically, supporting the DAFN community during a disaster.

Disability Rights NJ (DRNJ) - DRNJ is the designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in the State of New Jersey. DRNJ provides legal representation, advocacy, technical assistance, education and training, and information and referral to people with disabilities, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Through the pandemic, DRNJ has advocated to ensure that individuals with DAFN needs and concerns are addressed. DRNJ advocated for people with disabilities to have a support person with them during hospital stays to make sure that they received the treatment and support they needed. DRNJ also hosted a number of virtual town halls with network partners so we could hear directly from the disability community and share information through NJ GAINED. DRNJ continues to actively address concerns by providing recommendations to the Governor's Office as well as the legislature. DRNJ continues to actively represent and support individuals with disabilities and their families.

Mobile COVID Testing Assistance - members provided guidance and input regarding the need for mobile COVID Testing for those in the DAFN community that were unable to get to a testing location.

Vaccine Distribution and Administration Planning with NJDOH – members have been involved in working closely with the NJ Department of Health in providing guidance on COVID vaccine distribution and administration to the DAFN community.

NJ State Independent Living Council (NJSILC) – in addition to providing valuable information and interaction to the meetings, NJSILC developed and prepared an Emergency Preparedness Booklet entitled, “New Jersey Pathways to Preparedness: A Guide to Personal Preparedness for Individuals with Disabilities, Including Those with Access and Functional Needs.”

Alliance Center for Independence – developed a DAFN Overnight Sheltering Guidebook in coordination with the County Office of Emergency Management in order to provide guidance and support for the DAFN community during a sheltering operation. Information was shared with the County Offices of Emergency

Management in order to assist them with their planning and operational needs in regards to supporting the DAFN community in their shelters.

Core Advisory Group (CAG) Development – members have been working with various Counties in order to support the development of County CAGs to address DAFN issues and concerns at the local level.

NJ State Sheltering Task Force (NJSTF) – members participated as part of the NJSTF in order to ensure the needs of the DAFN community are addressed in sheltering operations. As part of the NJSTF, a DAFN subcommittee was formed in order to more directly focus on those issues and concerns that have been identified during sheltering operations

NJ Service Animal Working Group – members participate on this group in order to address concerns and issues relative to service animals and how they relate to mass care operations and the law as per the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA)

CONCLUSION

NJ GAINED continues to meet regularly and address the concerns and issues identified by the DAFN Community. This report reflects a snapshot in time of how this group collectively responded to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations in our state during this pandemic. Each member of the NJ GAINED team is dedicated to serving the cause of the DAFN community and throughout this pandemic conducted themselves in an extraordinary fashion with the utmost professionalism and passion. As this report illustrates, by working together, we have been able to address a many of the issues and concerns that have been raised since the beginning of this pandemic. All members of NJ GAINED will continue the great work begun so long ago during the creation of this group. We will ensure that OPPORTUNITY, ACCESSIBILITY and INCLUSION are always afforded to the DAFN Community.

This report is dedicated to the members of NJ GAINED for their tireless efforts throughout this pandemic and their continued commitment to serve the most vulnerable populations in our state. Thank you.