

School of Public Health

Emergency plans in schools: Individualised disaster planning for students with impaired vision

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Gretchen A. Good, PhD, COMS, CVRT

Introduction:

Gretchen Good

- Mum
- PWD
- Researcher
- Lecturer in Rehabilitation



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1. I am a Mum to 2 children. Leo and Tiffany both have Down syndrome and Leo is also deaf-blind. We have lots of hope for their future and faith in those who will help them through their education and into meaningful employment and quality lives!
2. I live with disabilities. I lost my vision at age 19. Was a Braille reader and white cane user for 9 years.
3. I have a history of working as a practitioner as a job developer for former prisoners, as a job coach for blind clients in a State vocational rehabilitation service, as Vision Rehabilitation Therapist. I came to NZ in 1992 and worked for the RNZFB and then for Workbridge. I then came to Massey to lecture in the Rehabilitation Programme.
4. I am a researcher. My areas of interest are mostly disability across the lifespan. My particular interest is in Activities, Independence and Life Satisfaction. I am currently researching the impact of the earthquakes on blind people in Christchurch; Rape Prevention Education in High Schools, disaster preparation in schools and Ageing and Development in Communities.

My motivation for this research:



Earthquakes in Palmerston North at the beginning of Leo's school career scared me. I realised he had no individualised plan for an emergency or disaster. The school did not agree with me that there is a need for such an individualised plan. So I started this research. With my previous experience in researching disaster impacts on those with disabilities, it was a good project for me to embark on. The school now has a plan that I have devised with some help from his teacher, but it is not displayed anywhere.

Outline of my research

1. The research problem: school plans for potential disasters
2. The research questions
3. Results of literature review
4. Recommendations
5. Conclusion



This is based on a full paper I presented to SPEVI which is a literature review

The research problem

Natural disasters:

- blizzards
- extreme heat
- earthquakes
- floods
- tsunamis
- volcanic eruption and ashfall
- hurricanes



Blizzard at a school

The research problem

Natural disasters (cont'd):

- cyclones
- tornadoes
- lightning strikes
- avalanches
- landslips
- fires



KARACHI: Schools, colleges and universities are likely to close due to threat of tropical Cyclone Nilofar in Sindh from October 30 to November 1.

The research problem

Human made and industrial disasters:

- gas leaks
- chemical spills
- airline crashes
- nuclear accidents
- exposure to noxious agents or toxic waste
- dam failures
- electrical fires
- construction or plant accidents



Chernobyl classroom

The research problem Human made disasters (cont'd)

- suspicious goods
- bomb threats
- gang behavior
- assaults
- hostage situations
- student riots
- trespassers
- violent intruders, shootings or other threats that require school lockdowns.



First year students in a lockdown drill in San Francisco

Your imagination can go wild thinking about how a child or school might cope in such a situation. And yet very few of us have done anything to prepare for such events.

The research questions

Do schools make plans to assist children in schools with significant impairments of vision in case of disaster or emergency?

What should be in such a plan?



Results:

Very few schools provide individualised emergency plans for children with special needs

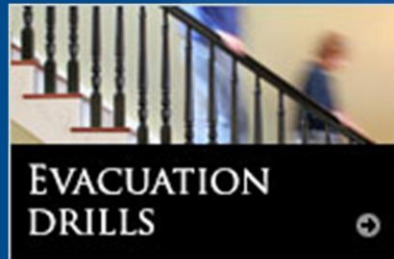
Safety plans must be made carefully as it may be appropriate to have a plan that covers a span of 2-3 days in the event that a child is unable to be reunited with family.



Does your child or individual children you work with have plans in place in the event of such a disaster?

Results

Disaster planning is more often than not overlooked in IEPs. Evacuation planning and emergency preparedness need much more attention at the individual student level.



Students with impaired vision will have specific challenges in disasters that can include missing visual cues, such as new obstructions that can occur during an emergency. And those with multiple disabilities require more options or alternatives in the development of emergency and evacuation plans.

Factors that make people with disabilities vulnerable in an emergency

- They tend to be invisible in emergency systems.
- They may not be able to comprehend the disaster and its consequences.
- They may be excluded from the disaster response efforts and may become particularly affected by changes in terrain resulting from the disaster.



How are plans going to be made? Parents and advocates might need to remind others of this:

Factors that make people with disabilities vulnerable in an emergency

- They may lose the ability to use a mobility aid and, as a result, lose access to a safe location, adequate shelter, water, sanitation and other services.
- They may experience emotional distress that has long-term consequences.
- They may misinterpret the situation.
- They may have communication difficulties, making them more vulnerable in disaster situations.



And Reunification is often slowed or does not happen with children with impairments.

What the current research tells us:

Children and adults with disabilities are often excluded from emergency planning. Disaster response professionals assume parents will protect children in disasters, even though children are often away from families, when in school, with friends or being cared for by others. Emergency management agencies and schools often neglect the needs of those with disabilities in their planning.




Solutions?

IEEP Individualised Evacuation Emergency Plan
(Asher & Pollak, 2009)

IELP Individualised Emergency Lockdown Plan
(Clarke, Embury, Jones & Yssel, 2014)

IESP Individualised evacuation and sheltering plan
(Brunner & Lewis, 2004)



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Should be addendums to the school's crisis management plan
Grab and Go kits

Much more attention needs to be directed at the needs of children with disabilities in the aftermath of a disaster. Life-threatening consequences can arise from separation from parents and caregivers, illness and disease, malnutrition and abuse, stigma, social distancing and purposeful abandonment (Peek & Stough, 2010), making careful disaster planning for disabled children in schools crucial.

Recommendations



- Set up traumatic incident support teams.
- Review emergency plans annually.
- Implement training in schools and for those responsible for children during transit to and from school and in before and after-school care.
- Implement training for school nurses who may need a better understanding of the longer term needs of specific students with disabilities should a disaster last several days.

Recommendations



- Practice drills in schools.
- Set up communication systems within schools, with parents and with the wider community (including law enforcement, fire safety, public health, emergency services, pediatric and mental health professionals)
- Teach children about safety, well-being and natural disaster preparedness.

Recommendations



- Identify those who need an individualised plan for evacuation, sheltering lockdown or other disaster situation (not necessarily just those with IEPs).
- Ensure the school has supplies needed for up to 72 hours (food, medication, water).
- Ensure children with individualised plans have a three day supply of medications, medical equipment, identification and tools they need for communication at hand in case of emergency.

Recommendations



- Consider whether debris might obstruct the evacuation of staff and students, generally and those with disabilities specifically and plan alternative emergency shelter locations.
- Identify alternative, accessible, safe shelter locations and communicate these locations to emergency responders.
- Because many students who are blind are also hearing impaired, consider providing basic sign language training to designated school staff
- Have a plan for reunification with families for children with disabilities.

Recommendations



- Consider what training is needed to assist students with disabilities who may become upset when routines are disrupted.
- Add a simple question at the end of each individualised education program (IEP) meeting that simply asks "Is there a need for a specific plan for this student's individual needs if there were a crisis in the building?"



Child friendly spaces with trained screened volunteers in emergency shelters

while schools may have a risk management plan for those with disabilities, there is no provision made (at present) to cater for these students in an evacuation or lockdown situation. Boon and colleagues also note that developed protocols will safeguard students so that appropriate responses and procedures are not left up to the staff present on the day an emergency arises who may or may not know how to manage the situation safely (Boon *et al.* 2011).

Individualising a Plan in case of emergency or disaster for a vision impaired child:

- Have a grab-and-go bag
- Plan two escape routes and a plan to follow if you have help and if you don't
- Have family contact information available
- Set up a buddy system
- Have a spare cane available
- Have an alternative communication method available
- Keep 3 days of medicine and food handy

Areas of refuge

List of medicines

Practice drills

Heavy gloves for feeling over glass or debris

Colored poncho for visibility by others

Conclusion

- Make a plan.
- Devise it.
- Laminate it.
- Post it.



Leo's Plan

In an Emergency Leo can become frightened and run or freeze with loud noises or unexpected events. He will not respond to his name if called.

Therefore a plan for an emergency is his Teacher's Aide will assist Leo and be responsible for his safety in the event of an earthquake, fire, evacuation or other emergency.

Because the teacher's aide is not always with Leo, someone he knows and trusts will be available to assist him (Suzanne Richard). The named assistant should be aware that Leo may need to be carried if he freezes, or prevented from running. Because of Leo's poor vision, clear signage will mark the evacuation route from his classroom and evacuation and other drills are practiced regularly.

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To help with reunification with his family, Leo has a card in his backpack with family contact details.