

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Chris Littlewood

Chris Littlewood: We will talk about a lot of different things that are very important and a lot about what has changed about disasters in the last five years. People often forget about what could happen. Nine/11 happened ten years ago and next August we will mark the ten-year anniversary of Katrina. People always think about Katrina as the big hurricane, but that was a long time ago. Sandy was last year. We have had some major tornadoes in the last few years.

There have been some major changes in how emergency management approaches emergencies and disasters. And that's basically what we are going to talk about here today. I'm going to talk about a few of the laws that have been enacted for people with "access and functional" needs and that includes people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing.

The first question is: Who is responsible for safety before, during and after an emergency or disaster incident? Where do people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing fit into "access and functional" needs?

I want to talk very quickly about things that have changed in the last five years: FEMA, ODIC, which is the office of disability integration and coordination. These two are on the national level. FEMA, the federal emergency management administration has ten regions. And back in 2010, Craig Fugate established this. Each of the ten regions have a disabilities coordinator. If you go to FEMA.gov or just do a search for FEMA regions, you can see which region you live in, and you can find out through the ODIC section of its website who the disability coordinator is for your area. I live in region 46789. I think the person that was our disability coordinator just got promoted, so I'm not quite sure who ours is right now. They are working on that. But that is the person to go to if you have a problem.

You'll work more on a local level, and I'll tell you right now, the biggest person that's responsible for your safety you is yourself.

The other thing that I wanted to mention was the 21st century communications and video accessibility act, and it requires that the FCC establish the EEAC. That's Emergency Access Advisory Committee, of which I am a member, and we basically finished most of our recommendations to the FCC as of June. We will talk about one of the big things that we propose to the FCC as being important.

One of the things that we're recommending is next generation 911. Right now, we are on E-911. Next generation isn't going to come around for maybe five, but possibly as long as ten years down the road. But they have already established that multi-media will be very possible. Data, video, images, all those things can be handled simultaneously. So people that are using video phones, or people that are using captioning, they should be able to get the same level of service and the functional equivalency that any other person may use.

I was a co-chair on this subcommittee with the FCC covering media communication line services. And we have the main goal of bridging the accessibility gap for next generation 911 for people with disabilities to public safety access point. You'll hear me refer to PSAP. That's Public Safety Access Point. When you pick up the phone and call 911, that's your public safety access point, whoever answers the phone on the other end is your contact if you're using a TTY. If you use a video phone, and you call 911 direct, it does not go direct to the PSAP.

I want to talk about why this is happening, or why it is important. One of the first responsibilities that we had with the EACC was to do a national survey about what the needs were for people with disabilities for emergencies and emergency communication and these are the two main findings:

First, 83% of respondents indicated that it was very important that they were able to call 911 using the same device that they use every day. So, if you use a video phone, or you use a captioned phone, and you have a call for an emergency, do you want to walk over and take your TTY, blow the dust off it, hook it up, sit down, and say okay, now I'm going to make an emergency call? Does that work well?

No, it does not. The other thing is that 77% of the people said that they wanted to be able to call directly to 911. Right now, like I said if you're using a video phone, you're not calling directly. It's going first to VRS (voice relay service). And there are a couple of reasons why that's problematic. Most VRS companies use a third party system for GPS locators. There are no recordings of anything, or there are in some cases, but there aren't standardized guidelines that all video relay service companies are required to follow for reporting calls. And the training may vary from one company to another for what people need to know about providing interpreting services for emergency calls. So, those are just a couple of things.

This is how 911 works with a foreign language. If you speak a language other than English, if you speak Spanish, or German, or whatever, you call directly to the PSAP, the Public Safety Access Point, and the dispatcher, or the call taker at the 911 center will press a button and conference in somebody else that is able to provide language service and translation for that person. So when we talk about functional equivalency for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, it is very important that we should be able to get the same type of thing, and right now, that's not happening.

Regarding the 911, I had to call 911 through video phone about a month ago. It took 23 minutes to finally get the fire department on scene and most of the trouble was through the VRS.

The time of answering is also a big problem, and that's something to do with MCLS guidelines put forth. We have made recommendations to the FCC. How that's going to happen in the next several years, we will see. That was one of the

things that when we were talking in the plenary sessions with the video relay service providers, and the IP providers, I thought a lot of punches were being thrown at the FCC, and just my personal opinion is that some of it was very on target and needed discussed. Because of the government shutdown, there was nobody here from the FCC to defend what they are doing on that end and why they are doing it. So just take everything with a grain of salt. And like Claude said this morning, one thing that you can do to inform yourself is go to ASKCC.gov and get as much information as possible about how your calls will be received and how you can file a complaint. You can get information for proposed rulemaking and things like that. There is a lot of information on the FCC website.

One thing that I recently heard in regard to my dad, because he is very hard-of-hearing, he had to call the application and I told him, the next time, dial the number 911, make sure he has someone, and then leave the line open and just drop the receiver so they will come. Is that a good idea?

I used to be a police dispatcher and I will tell you, open lines are handled differently with agencies across the nation. It is probably a good idea, if you have no other way to deal with things, just dial 911 and leave it off its hook and wait for emergency responders to respond. That's fine, if you're able to do that. That's one way to get action. One of the things that we point out with MCLS is that it isn't minutes that count, it's seconds. If you're in a major emergency, just opening a 911 line may not be enough. If the dispatcher wants to ask you a question, you want to have open communication back and forth with the call taker, just like anybody else can.

In Legacy 911 with a foreign language, everything is pretty quick and connected right away. If you speak a language other than English, Legacy 911 works right away. If you call relay with a video line, or with a video phone, you call a relay service. Nothing is recorded and you have not talked to the PSAP yet, a 911 center, while waiting for a relay connection. If you have that delay in the connection, when it takes a while for the interpreter to answer, and someone is coming after you with a gun, or your house is burning down, or your child is choking on something, or a bomb just went off down the street, do you want to wait several minutes for somebody to pick up the phone at a relay service?

I don't think we need any answers for that. With 911 through relay service, they do call routing with a GPS locator. When you make a video-phone call, they know where you are but still nothing is recorded.

Seconds count, remember that. Who knows how long it is going to take for relay to connect to the PSAP? Once the call is connected to the PSAP, then they are talking to the interpreter and the call recording starts. There is spoken English between the PSAP and the relay service and the relay service provider's interpreting to the caller. Right now, the only thing that's recorded is spoken English.

With MCLS the recording for chain of evidence starts because for the dispatcher understands what's going on and passes the information on to the first responders as quickly as possible. With MCLS it all is recorded right away. Right now, that doesn't happen. What next generation 911 and MCLS is supposed to do is go directly from caller with a disability to the PSAP. Everything is recorded. GPS locator works right away. All media, audio, video and text are recorded. That's proposed for the future.

The last thing I want to say on MCLS is that a lot of people will say you're shutting out VRS or interpreters. That's absolutely not correct. The point is to get the direct connect with 911. Why can't you get direct connect to 911 just like someone who speaks Spanish? Why can't we press a button and conference call a sign language interpreter so you and everyone can get the information? And Then the PSAP sees immediately what the problem is because you have the video-phone going on right away.

Audience Member: What is MCLS?

Chris Littlewood: Media Communication Line Services. This is how everything wraps together. It is a multi-bridge conference call where everything is connected so everybody, right away, has communication. As soon as you dial 911 and hit send, you're connected.

Another recommendation that has been important with EACC is texting to 911. What happens now is you get a bounce back message right away that says you need to call voice over relay service, that we don't support texting 911 yet. Spring of 2014, that's going to change. If you text to 911, all the carriers have voluntarily committed to provide text 911. One of the other recommendations is that a TTY will do the transition. TTY's are analog, and everything with next generation 911 is digital. Converting will be technically challenging.

Another change in the last five years for emergency planning and disaster planning is the creation of FNSS – Functional Need Support Services. In FNSS, everything that needs to happen for the whole community approach is outlined. That means everybody, not just able-bodied people without any disability or who don't have any functional needs, who don't speak difference language, who don't have transportation issues; it means everybody. FNSS explains what planning needs to take place before an incident occurs for requiring an emergency and disaster response.

In 2011, it believe it was, President Obama signed PPD-8, Presidential Policy Directive 8. It defines the whole community approach as everybody being responsible for his or her own safety. It is not the federal government's responsibility to keep you safe in an emergency or disaster. It is your responsibility. It is a community level responsibility. It is the responsibility of non-governmental agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, everyone's responsibility.

We learned lessons from recent disasters. When I say recent, I'm no longer talking about 9/11, or Katrina that happened ten years ago. We learned a lot from them but has everything been perfect since then? No way. A lot of things still need to be fixed.

It's very important for the deaf and hard-of-hearing and the advocates of deaf and hard-of-hearing community make darn sure that an interpreter is present when emergency and communication information is being provided so people who use visual information get it. Also be sure that captions or scrolling across the bottom of the screen do not block the interpreter and vice versa.

Another big time change in the last five years has been Facebook and Twitter. When Bin Laden was found in Pakistan, it wasn't breaking news for CNN first; it was breaking news through Twitter first. If you follow Craig Fugate through FEMA on twitter, many, many times Craig himself will answer you in seconds. How cool is that? Talk about being connected to your constituents and the people you're serving, he is excellent at that. He is very involved with social media especially because people like us who are deaf or hard-of-hearing use visual communication. Social media is so important because it's one of our best resources obtaining information very quickly.

Audience Member: I have a question for you about interpreters for emergency situations. I'm from New York and this happened during a hurricane. I was watching captioning on the TV, with the interpreter (on the screen) but interpreter who was not adequate. She was not able to provide the information fluently. So we had to rely on the captions, but there weren't captions for people talking live on site. There was no CART on site where the interpreter was standing. There was no CART there in that environment. That's a concern.

I'm just wondering why it is that they put a sign language interpreter only for this type of emergency and not captions? I've heard that there is no on-site captioning while there is an interpreter. They don't provide both. Of course, not everyone has a TV and has to use the internet for streaming. The problem with the videos there is no captioning. You have to have understanding of sign language in order to access the information.

Chris Littlewood: That's an excellent point. The best suggestion I can make is for you to use captioning and not sign language if it is not coming through correctly and it is an emergency incident. First change the channel because a lot of times one station over another may provide better captioning. The other thing is to submit a complaint to the FCC that the channel was not employing captioning. That it is required in an emergency situation. That is absolutely important. As you said, not everybody who is deaf or hard-of-hearing uses sign language. That's why it is very important not just to have an interpreter available on the screen but also captions. They must provide communication available to everyone.

Audience Member: But that's only for TV and not for the Internet. If you use the Internet for information ...

Audience Member: TDI currently is working on that issue to make the internet captions readily accessible.

Chris Littlewood: There are several committees beyond EACC that are related to emergency communication, not just on live TV, but through the internet and through captioning.

I'd like to run quickly through some of the myths and truths about emergency management. People who are deaf and hard-of-hearing should go to a special needs shelter. How many people have heard the term special needs? How many people love that term? You like that term? Personally, I don't care if you call it Bob as long as you get it. The main thing for me is that it is about inclusion and access. That term has been changed from special needs to access and functional needs. When you talk about special needs shelters only, those are shelters for people with medical needs. If you're deaf or hard-of-hearing, you are welcome in any general population shelter, I will tell that you right now. If they turn you away, they are in violation of MCLS and your civil rights. Contact Craig Fugate if that happens. There will be big problems later.

It is not the government's job to take care of everybody and keep us safe. It is first your responsibility; it is the community's responsibility; it is every organization's responsibility. Emergency management is providing protection and information to you as soon as possible. It may seem like emergency management is pushing the panic button too soon in a lot of situations, but they are just trying to give you information as soon as possible so that you use that information to protect yourself and your family.

You may think they will have everything you need at the shelter. There is a vast difference between a public shelter and sheltering with friends or family in a safe area outside of an evacuation zone. It is the difference between a being in a lifeboat and a cruise ship. In a lifeboat, you've got nothing. You have the air you may be able to breathe in, and whatever you can carry when you jump on that boat. On a cruise ship, you have all you can eat and everything else. Therefore, if you make plans to evacuate and go to a safe shelter outside of an evacuation area, you are in a much better situation to be comfortable during an emergency or disaster.

Shelters have to know that the need is there. So everything has to occur in the planning process. You have to talk to emergency management beforehand. How many people in here have a personal or family emergency plan? How many people have practiced it in the last month? How many people have a plan for different types of disasters? How many people have work to do when they leave here today? Me, too. We can always do better. The point is that it is our personal responsibility to protect ourselves and our family. If you have a go bag

of things that you want to take with you on a moment's notice, then you should not only have it at home, but you should have it in your vehicle.

How many people in here are from out of state? How many people brought an emergency go bag with them? So those are just some things to consider. Some things aren't always possible.

Hurricanes have changed a lot in the last 15 years for sure. Worldwide we are talking about climate change because of global warming. I live in Florida, so the number one disaster that we prepare for, obviously, is a hurricane. When you talk about a sheltering in place or evacuating, no place in Florida is more than 65 miles away from the coast. You can potentially be in a flood zone or major impacted zone from a major hurricane anywhere in the state of Florida.

Emergency managers and responders have to assist the whole community, not just the deaf or hard-of-hearing community, not just the general population, not just the people who speak Spanish, not just the people who have transportation issues, who don't own a car, or have used public transportation for the last ten years. Emergency personnel have to take care of all that and the entire community. That means planning what will occur on the part of emergency management, but that also means planning will happen on your part as well.

Helping yourself explains a little bit more about access and functional needs. This is all explained very well in the functional needs support services document that I was mentioning before. The biggest issue related to communication that we were talking about before, related to a sign language interpreter, and captions on TV, are issues that need to be addressed in an emergency. Not just for people with disabilities, but also those people who may not have disabilities are also included in the areas of access and functional needs. The point of all this that the government cannot provide you everything. You have to do everything you can to protect yourself from all the possible disasters or emergencies that might occur.

Anybody in here have a captioned weather radio? NOAA has a captioned weather radio. If you don't have one of those, go to NOAA.gov and find the captioned weather radios. They have to be programmed properly which means you need to get assistance from your local fire department, or something like that to make sure that it is checking the right area, and providing you the right emergency broadcast information. Not only does it provide audio information, you get a captioned scroll if or when emergency information becomes available or necessary.

I tell everybody about this site: knowyourstuff.org. It is very important that people have all their papers and documents in one place. It is a great website for inventorying your property and getting a better idea of what you need. The videos on the site are all captioned. A lot of the information is very important to people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Audience Member: On the weather radio, can that be portable? Does it have to be programmed for certain areas?

Chris Littlewood: There are radio that are battery operated although they are more expensive. Depending on the area you're going to, you would need to re-program the radio. I'm not an expert on those, by any means. But if you go to the NOAA website, they will have a lot of that information.

Here are some things to do for basic preparedness.

I have a medical condition where I take a lot of medications. A lot of times, it is not feasible for me to have the bottles with me. I love it is when emergency places have a two week supply of extra medication at all times. More important than extra medicine is a list of what you take.

A public shelter should be a place of last resort. I had an attorney tell me she thought it was her civic duty in the event of an evacuation to go to a public shelter but that's not correct at all. In my county, there are 1 million people. The maximum capacity of every public shelter in our county is 80,000. So if everybody thought it was her civic duty to go to a public shelter, there would be a big, big problem. The best thing to do is to have a plan for where you're going if you need to evacuate. Plan to shelter in place, if possible.

Shelter in place means, right here, right now, this is where you're going to stay. It could be your house; it could be here. You're going to have the things that you really need to be there for whatever time the disaster moves through the response and recovery area. These are the items that you take at a moment's notice.

Practice is important. My kids think it is a big game, but they still do it. We set off the fire alarm in the house, sometimes if I'm trying to get somebody out of my easy chair, I'll set off the fire alarm. We have several places to meet. This is especially important for the children, because guess where the number one place that firefighters find deceased children? Under the bed.

That's where they think is their safe place. They need to know that their safe place is at the front door. I'm going to use myself as an example. We have at the front door, at the mailbox, at Ms. Jerry's house across the street, or around the next corner. My kids know them all. We have never gone all the way around the corner since my kids are pretty little. It is an ongoing process.

Some very important things for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing are hearing aid batteries. How many have their emergency preparedness kit at home? How many people, raise your hand, wear hearing aids or have cochlear implants? How many people have extra batteries in your kit?

Good.

Social media, a lot of people are using their smart phones a lot, and that's only as good as how long a charge lasts. You will need an AC adapter for your cellphone to charge in the car or solar-powered adapters. Do a Google search for that.

If you're hoping to be lucky in an emergency or disaster, the best way to achieve that is to be prepared; it's the Boy Scout motto. Only you know what's best for you. You can't expect a public shelter to provide the things that are best for you. You have to be able to tell people what you need. You have to have good communication. You have to have prepared for the things that you need.

You don't want to disregard the information that public officials are providing. If they say you must evacuate now, it is in your best interest to evacuate. There is your lifeboat. There is your cruise ship. In which place would you be more comfortable?

Audience Member: Depends on the captain.

Chris Littlewood: Yeah, I suppose the captain does have a little bit of influence. In a lifeboat, you're your own captain in a lot of cases. Some of these things are very important: a support network, out of state contacts. If you live in Boston, or DC, have family contacts, have one person for everybody to contact out of state, in Chicago or New Mexico, wherever. This is so people can check on you and make sure you're okay by contacting somebody out of state so there won't be flooded phone lines or lines down that create all kinds of problems.

Audience Member: One thing we need to remember, when we have our smart phones, is that we probably do not know the phone number without our phone. You should probably have that phone number in your wallet.

Chris Littlewood: Good point. Smart phones make me stupid. Have those crucial numbers written down in your go bag with your medical list, with your personal support network, your emergency contact lists.

Audience Member: A while ago I was at a meeting and this woman was doing a presentation on ICE, in case of emergency. You can program that into your cellphone under I-C-E and put your contact information in there. That way, when you get into trouble and you're hurt and you can't respond, the police and the emergency team are able to track down and contact your loved ones.

Chris: I've never heard of that one: I like it. Very good.

Self assessment. Know what you can and cannot do for yourself. Do you use your voice? Do you sign only? Do people understand you? That's important, because then you know what communication barriers you're going to be up against. You need to do a good self-assessment and show that you can plan accordingly.

How many people said they have some type of emergency plan? Good. How many people have knocked on the door at their local fire department and asked, "What do I need to do? What information do I need to provide for you to best serve me?" In most areas, the local fire department has a form for cautionary notes that they can provide to the PSAP 911. It might say that you're deaf or hard-of-hearing and what accommodations you may require. So if you just have a 911 open line in an emergency, but your cautionary notes say you're deaf, then responders are going to expect that. Also, if you have done cautionary notes, make sure you update them every year. Every year. You need to be in constant regular contact with your local emergency responders to protect yourself and your family.

Audience Member: I am a licensed security officer. I'm a certified volunteer, as well as certified in CPR. I work with security officers to go to different events. If an emergency were to happen and people were to evacuate on the street, my concern is with the security portion. I don't get enough information. My concern is that the security service is leaving out too much. For instance, keep watching me because I'm deaf. If an emergency were to happen, I told the deaf service providers that these people who work with me should have the information; they should be giving this information about emergencies because I've already been certified. But they don't know how to work with me and that's a concern. If an emergency were to happen, how would they be able to communicate with me?

They are passing the buck a little bit and saying they will write on paper, but they don't fully understand the issue. What would have to happen beyond that. So it is important to educate what needs to happen during an emergency. But in my local community, where deaf people live, there is one certified volunteer in the community, but the next volunteer is a hard-of-hearing person, and that's quite a distance in between, and so there aren't enough people in the community who are certified volunteers ready to act with emergencies and to get access to communication. We are trying hard to solve the problem, but it really is a difficult issue and I hope that I see resolution in the future.

Chris Littlewood: Thank you. Although including the community is very important, our primary target audience is first responders because a lot of the time they are clueless on how best to help the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. That's why I say, don't wait for them to come to you. They have no idea where you are. Many emergency managers I have spoken to in my state and nationally have no idea how best to serve its deaf and hard-of-hearing community. It is hard for me to even say this, but I've had emergency managers say to me, if people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing function so well in their day-to-day lives, why do they need so much extra assistance during an emergency? Are you kidding me? Can you believe that somebody would actually say that? The answer is by definition in a disaster your resources are overwhelmed. The best suggestion I can make to everyone is to help with the education and the outreach to public safety.

Audience Member: We can even go a step further and become part of the effort to take care of our community by joining CERT or becoming a part of the Red Cross as the person with the information. That's very empowering for me. I live on an island and I know what my resources are, but I would prefer to be the informer. It really is empowering and it gives me control. Yes, you struggle with interpreters and captions, but not until you are on the inside do you have the power to make the changes we want. I hope that you will all do the same and be a part of your community. I just became a member of the disability integration advisory group at the federal level.

Chris Littlewood: Thank you very much. Another thing to realize is that a lot of times the first responders in a disaster are your neighbors. Has anybody ever heard of CERT, community emergency response team? Get involved. Florida was one of the first states with CERT, California as well. Gallaudet also did some of the training. In the state of Florida, we have more than 75 interpreters trained in emergency response teams.

Nevertheless, more people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing need to knock on doors of the people involved in the disaster response programs and say they want to be involved. A lot of the program people have no idea how to provide accommodation even though by law they should. All the information for CERT is free and should be accessible to people with disabilities. So help them, educate them. My philosophy is always friendly advocacy. I'm never going to scream at somebody if somebody tells me they can't. But I'm going to show them the way. If I'm not working doing this, I'm volunteering doing this. My own emergency managers need a lot of help in my county. I am on the contacts list for them; I am the informer for the other people in my deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. So they contact me and I send out my information to the right people, to the president of my ALDA chapter, to the board for ALDA, to all the people in the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Be the informer. Be very involved and be prepared to be a first responder yourself because you could be.

Audience Member: In my community in Maryland, we have a reverse 911 call and text that is pushed out to everyone. You can also get reverse 911 by e-mail in whatever format you prefer? Is that available the nationwide?

Chris Littlewood: Yes, it should be, and in a lot of places it is called something other than reverse 911. I was just talking to Jim House from TDI yesterday, about how a lot of people are confused about what reverse 911 means. It is just a contact tree of information that's e-mailed out, sending information to the entire community, the same way a call would be received at a 911 center. The information is bounced back and sent out to the community. You have to ask your local emergency managers how to be a part of that. If they are sending you

reverse 911 information in a voice call, and you don't do voice calls, what good is that?

However, for each community it is different so you need to check with your local community about how it is set up. You're probably all set, but I'm just saying it might be different in areas outside of Maryland.

Audience Member: What about SMOC 911? Is that different from reverse 911? I signed up on the Internet, and I get an e-mail every six months to update.

Chris: When did you fill out that form?

Audience Member: I have had it at least eight or nine months.

Chris: Did anybody contact you?

Audience Member: Just by e-mail telling me to do it.

Chris: That's what I'm saying. Everybody needs to talk to a real person in his or her local community, knocking on the door of the fire or police department, or public safety commission and get the information.

Audience Member: I'm from San Francisco, east bay, the earthquake community. I don't have a car or a TV; I live alone; and my only communication is by text or IP relay on my laptop. My local fire department sent a notice around saying something about emergency preparedness. So I signed up and they asked me how best do I receive information, how mobile I was and they got my entire profile online. Now I will have a 911 reverse text if there is emergency. Maybe an earthquake occurs in the south bay area with continuing tremors spreading around the bay area. I will get that information via text and if something happens to me, like a bookcase falls on me, they will know where I am and that I'm deaf. Is that what is supposed to be happening nationally?

Chris Littlewood: FNSS puts out policies nationally. But it is up to the local community to do the preparedness. The whole community approach makes it everybody's responsibility. When you talked about doing it four months ago online, that's good, but being late-deafened, I like to do everything face to face. I think nothing is happening yet if I am not talking to a live person.

Audience Member: I should go to my local fire department and say, hey, that's me.

Chris: Yes, that's my biggest recommendation. Then you can become the informer. You can tell everybody else who lives in your local community about emergency preparedness. .

Audience Member: When I mentioned doing CERT training in 2008 in Colorado, we got written up in the national press for that. It was a really good

experience because we got to train the trainers and tell them how to present to deaf and hard-of-hearing people because it is really different. We were confident that all that information that we shared with the planners was making it back into the system.

Last month, my apartment was flooded. I had water up to my knees. We had to shut off the power and I had to evacuate and move everything out in four days. I had helpers who are volunteers. It has been the worst experience of my life, so far. Just now, I got an e-mail from my upstairs neighbor, "Hi, Rebecca, FEMA is trying to get in touch with you." They didn't leave a phone number. I'm supposed to go to the FEMA website. They did not respond to my I-Pad. They have information for me and I'm here at ALDAcon, and I have no way to get that information. I have to go into the FEMA center every day, or every other day, for the last month. I am exhausted. This has been a horrible experience and I consider myself really well prepared for this.

I know that when I get back, I've got a lot of work to do, and I want to be volunteering again, to be on the inside helping out because I have experienced exactly how bad things work. All of my adaptive equipment, my captioned telephone, my TTY, everything I need to communicate with was on a bottom shelf in my office and was flooded and destroyed. Try getting a new captioned telephone in Boulder, Colorado, when you need one immediately. Doesn't happen. So try to buy a TTY in town, they are not available anywhere. So this I-Pad has been my only link. I don't have a cellphone. I don't have a car. I don't have a TV. I-Pad is my only link to the world. I see a lot of work that has to be done, but first I have to move back into my house and feel safe and secure again. If I had seen one friendly face, one person in the disaster center who was pre-trained to deal with deaf and hard-of-hearing people but, no, people kept asking for my phone number. I don't have any phone number. I have e-mail and that's it. If everything is set up only for telephone, we have a lot of work to do. I'm so grateful for Chris Littlewood and Larry Littleton and everyone else working on disaster planning, for blazing the trail and starting the awareness and getting structures in place. I agree, we need to be on the inside, pushing and not on the outside..

Chris Littlewood: Thank you very much. I know you've had a rough several months. I have a couple of questions for you. Do you have a TTY app for your i-Pad? I'm asking this question because Gallaudet's Dr. Voglar and Norman Williams are resources. Norman developed a PC or MAC application for TTY that is not proprietary, I don't think. The Gallaudet TAP program is available.

Audience Member: I don't see me anywhere in this presentation. I have just moved to a place where I don't know anyone and it is a long way from the NTID community where I had been for the past 30 years. I don't know any deaf people where I live now. When I tell someone I can't hear and then try to explain what needs to be done to make me be more involved, they don't understand. So, I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't think a letter will do.

Chris Littlewood: Who do you want to write a letter to? What resources do you need?

Audience Member: I need what everyone else needs. I need what everybody else in here needs, or some kind of contact. And I'm not sure how to get it. The weird part is the fire department, it is about two blocks from me –

Chris Littlewood: You're going to go visit the fire department. Are you looking for help contacting the fire department in your area?

Audience Member: I don't know what to do.

Chris Littlewood: Let me be a resource to you. We can talk after this and I'm glad to help facilitate a connection if I can.

Thank you very much. Thank you so much for your involvement.

Chris Littlewood has been a public safety educator and training project manager for nearly 20 years. He holds the ALDA seat for the Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing appointed by Governor Christ in 2010. He has also served on the FCC Emergency Access Advisory Committee (2010-2013).