

Case Study



Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) in action

MADEC in Mackay

Tailoring the P-CEP process to each client to minimise the stress of disaster planning

Mackay lies on the East Coast of Queensland about 970 kilometres north of Brisbane. To the east lies the Coral Sea and Great Barrier Reef, and to the west fertile agricultural land and the start of the Pioneer River that runs through the city.

Mackay is home to about 130,000 people and has been identified amongst the locations in Queensland made more vulnerable to extreme weather events due to changes in climate.

Supporting people to become more adept at emergency preparedness is a priority for not-for-profit organisation [MADEC](#), which provides a range of community services to people of all ages including disability and youth services.

First established in 1973 as the Mackay and District Education Centre, MADEC offers people with disability Supported Independent Living Services, Accommodation Services, Support Coordination and NDIS Plan Management.

Like the rest of Mackay, MADEC is all too familiar with seasonal weather events. Traditionally, it has developed safety plans for clients that promote self-sufficiency as much as possible knowing emergency services may not always be able to assist every person during a natural disaster.

However, the organisation had not accessed the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) toolkit until Karen Bonham attended a Business Continuity Planning workshop in November 2020 and was involved in disaster planning discussions with other providers. Karen joined MADEC in May 2020 as a Disability Manager and was later appointed to her current role of Community Development Coordinator.

Prior to joining MADEC, Karen managed the tenancies of people accessing the National Rental Affordability Scheme. She and the team worked directly with tenants to develop their extensive person-centred disaster management plans.



“MADEC’s comprehensive safety plan covers everything from food and drink to transportation. We ask questions such as, ‘are you able to mobilise yourself and, if so, to what extent? Do you have family nearby? How do we best support you in a shelter in place event? What would you need to feel safe and comfortable in an evacuation event?’”

While this approach resulted in a plan tailored to an individual person, it followed a set process which did not have clients at the centre of the plan, and had minimal client input. Having said that, most clients supported by MADEC have complex needs and reduced capacity for comprehending the disaster planning concepts.

“Even when following step-by-step guides or tools, it is critical to work with each person in a way that utilises their strengths and considers their individual capacities,” Karen says. “There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach.”

P-CEP has helped the MADEC team incorporate each person’s intellectual, emotional and psychological capacity to meaningfully engage in disaster preparation conversations and take an approach that is comfortable for that client.

Some clients could be triggered by conversations about disaster scenarios and others would be more comfortable having family take part in the conversations for added support.

A conversation about what may happen in a storm or cyclone could be quite measured but a client who lives with an anxiety issue may only be able to focus on worse case scenarios.

The MADEC team has begun discussing client needs from a situational comfort perspective, to help them understand how they could approach conversations about disaster preparedness in ways that helped people remain feeling safe.

In these moments, Karen remembered Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) lead, Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve, telling those learning about using PCEP with clients that, ‘we bring the risk in this process’.

“That was a phenomenally successful process for us. It meant that our roles were very clear. In the event of an emergency, we knew who was responsible for what and at what point,” Karen says.

“As part of our intake process at MADEC, we do a participant care plan, which includes all that person’s basic information including medical information. We then develop a really detailed safety plan. The safety plan involves us preparing for as many events as we can think of that could impact that client,” she explains.

“Obviously, if there’s a cyclone and there’s flooding and a person has to evacuate, then that’s going to relate to a lot of people in Mackay including our clients.”

Using P-CEP to go beyond the checklist and tailor conversations

Karen was able to draw on her prior experience to start conversations with MADEC colleagues, encouraging them to think more deeply about what clients experience when developing preparedness plans.

“That really resonated for me; the risk is that we’ll be clumsy and uninformed in the way we approach this process with clients,” Karen says. “That we could create another level of distress and risk for clients because if stressed, they could then pull away from the process and not be prepared if a natural hazard occurred.”

MADEC’s solution involves adjusting the tone and context of the discussions to suit each client.

“It’s about relating the question to something that, while not super comfortable, is familiar,” Karen says.

An example would be talking to a client about planning for an unexpected hospital stay that could last several days rather than starting with questions about planning for a severe storm. Karen says, “We need to start planning conversations by drawing on their own life experiences.”

The questions and language used would depend on each client but could cover the personal items they would need to take to feel comfortable in hospital; the people they would want around them - family members, friends or support workers - and the language to use to put them most at ease in discussing their hospital stay.

Taking the next steps to strengthen DIDRR

“Our plan from here is to ask ourselves, ‘what’s already in our safety planning that can inform how we approach disaster planning?’” says Karen.

“A really obvious step is for Support Coordinators to be able to spend time with each client to support them to develop their emergency plan,” she says.

“That plan then becomes a living document that goes to every service provider each client works with. The information is commonly shared, but is updated by the Service Coordinator with their client, as the person who knows them in the broadest sense.”

Lessons learnt your organisation could leverage

- Remember that each client is an individual. Let each person guide you on how they want to discuss preparedness planning and the information they want to provide.
- The [P-CEP Toolkit](#) gives needed structure to guide emergency planning. Use it!
- Use plain English when writing plans. It’s important to avoid complex language becoming a barrier to clients participating in their own plans or being supported to action them.

This case study was produced as part of the Disability Inclusive and Disaster Resilient Queensland Project which was proudly supported by the Queensland Government through the Queensland Disaster Resilience Fund (QDRF) and the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy. It was led by the Centre for Disability Research and Policy at the University of Sydney and conducted in partnership with the Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) and the Community Services Industry Alliance (CSIA)

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