

Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) in action

Enabling preparedness through peer support and mentoring

Transformational Leadership Approach

[Queenslanders with Disability Network \(QDN\)](#) Peer Leaders have been helping others to learn about Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) through peer support groups and individual mentoring.

QDN worked with a research team at The University of Sydney. Together they applied Transformational Leadership (TL) theory to co-design what has become known as the P-CEP Peer Leadership Program. TL is a leadership style that goes beyond self-interest with the aim of empowering and inspiring others to higher levels of aspiration and achievement. However, it starts with being a role model. Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve said, “TL is aligned with P-CEP, which focuses attention on strengths-based and person-led actions. It starts with what people can do for themselves, what they need support for and how they manage that support every day. This is an important starting point in learning about disaster risks and making an emergency plan.” Before inspiring emergency preparedness in others, it was important for each peer leader to go through their own process of making a plan that was tailored to their support needs and also communicated with the people in their support network.

Transformational leaders stimulate and inspire those they lead to achieve extraordinary outcomes while developing their own leadership capacity. QDN’s Director for Policy and Strategic Engagement, Michelle Moss said, “acting as a role model and having high expectations are the exact qualities that we look for in emerging peer leaders.”

QDN peer leaders inform, connect, lead and negotiate changes so that the people with disability and their support needs are central to emergency planning. When asked how they do this, Ms Moss replied, “They act as a role model by having a P-CEP plan. They hold high expectations and inspire others to help them to make a plan too.”

Peer leaders took their lead from the group to ensure that emergency preparedness was person-centred

Planning that takes place through peer support and mentoring provides a rich opportunity for people to share tips that help others to match emergency preparedness to their support needs. It also opens up space for people to share their worries and concerns about disability and disaster. From the safety of the peer group, peer leaders said that their



members welcomed discussions about emergency planning. That's not to say it wasn't hard.

QDN Peer Leaders learned from their peer groups about the importance of breaking emergency planning down. Elisha, co-convenor of the Brisbane Peer Support Group explained, "Our group realised that it can be emotionally taxing to work on your emergency plan. So, I suggested that people take it step by step. What we've been focusing on now is identifying the gaps that we have in our preparedness and helping each other to fill them."

Toowoomba Peer Leaders Nadia and Sharon also found success in working gradually through the planning process. Nadia said, "The way my group has been working is to start with one section of the capability wheel at a time. For my own planning, I started with the assistance animal bit because animals are a key interest." Nadia took this approach to her peer group where she encouraged members to share pictures of their animals and tell stories about their pets and assistance animals.

The conversational nature of the meetings allowed Nadia and Sharon to prompt discussion about care for pets. That led to a discussion about preparing for your pet in times of emergency. They talked about what their pets might need if they had to

shelter-in-place or evacuate from their home. They discussed things like having enough food, water, medications and other supplies; all the things your pet needs to be comfortable. They also talked about the importance of updating vaccination records. Nadia felt that starting with pets was, "less intimidating and very motivating for my peer group."

Peter's Ipswich Peer Support includes people with different levels of education and different disabilities. "Many people don't have high literacy," Peter said. When introducing Step 1 of the P-CEP, Peter said he "focused on reducing the fear of planning," noting that, "the hardest thing is making people aware is that it is a non-threatening discussion, and the easiest way to do this is by introducing the [capability wheel](#)."

At Step 2, Peter connected his group to a person who could help them understand their disaster risks, saying, "the group responds well to guest speakers as a way to prompt discussion." So, he invited Kristie McKenna, an [Ipswich City Council](#) Emergency Manager to come along to the group to share information about disaster risks and preparedness steps. Kristie continues to attend Peter's peer group to personalise risk information for the people in the group and answer any questions they have. Kristie said, "I have learned so many invaluable lessons, personally as well as for our emergency program and how we can do better for people with disability in disaster."

Rebecca began developing her plan after participating with the other peer leaders. Rebecca said that before the training she had never thought about preparedness before. It was during group discussions with other peer leaders that she came to value its importance. When she heard the presentation of the emergency personnel, Rebecca made a commitment to get herself ready for what she perceived as her greatest risk: house fire! Rebecca's plan included a floor plan of her house,

evacuation route, an emergency kit, and emergency numbers which she placed on her fridge. She also called a meeting of her five support workers to discuss their role in the plan.

Rebecca said, “I am now completely sold on the importance of P-CEP.” She then went about preparing others, starting with her friends and neighbours, followed by activities she designed for her Deception Bay support group.

At her peer support group, Rebecca said, “they were in tables of 4 and having discussions – they talked about their floor plans (for house fire), and together began to work it out. There was a couple who lived in a two-story place and realised they could not get out. We talked about that together. We started to talk about what we would need in a kit – what would you need if you needed to go now. We did that in groups. What we found is that we reminded each other of things we might need. Then we stopped the conversation, and left people to think – and I asked people to have a look at the preparedness line – the ones who actually were at 4 realised they weren’t as prepared as they thought they were. Some of them who were on one, moved themselves up to 2, because they had started planning.”

Lessons Learned:

- For people with disability, emergency preparedness can be overwhelming, messy and confronting – breaking down the conversation using the Capability Wheel and P-CEP steps makes it less intimidating
- Plans won’t be perfect. We need a healthy dose of realistic optimism as we work toward better preparedness plans over time.
- The best ideas come from people with disability who have experience. It is really inspiring to see how others have managed to overcome obstacles to preparedness.

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