

## Case Study



### Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) in action

## Hot Topics Peer Support Group

[Hot Topics Peer Support Groups](#) are run by and for people with intellectual disability. There are groups in Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Donna Best, a long-term self-advocate with intellectual disability is the Convenor of the Brisbane Hot Topics group which has been running for 20 years.

Donna has a long history of leadership and advocacy that supports people with intellectual disability to have a better life. When Donna joined the [Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Peer Leadership program](#), she made a commitment to bring awareness and preparedness messages to her group and enable her members to make personal emergency preparedness plans.

With the support from the group's membership, Donna identified emergency preparedness as a hot topic and set about co-designing group sessions to engage her peers in making an emergency plan using the [Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness \(P-CEP\) Workbook](#).

Every fortnight, Donna and six of the Hot Topics members came along. Some brought their support workers to join in the discussion. The support workers were helpful when facilitating group activities. They also helped by continuing the preparedness activities with the people they support outside of the group meetings.

With support from [Queenslanders with Disability Network \(QDN\)](#), Donna adapted the P-CEP Workbook to into a series of group activities matched to each step of P-CEP.

### Step 1: Identify your strengths and support needs in everyday life

In the first session, QDN photocopied and enlarged each element from the [Capability Wheel](#). Pictures of each element were placed on the wall. Each element was also copied onto a single sheet of paper. The paper had a lot of white space for writing or drawing.

During the discussion, members took turns identifying elements that were most important to them, writing, and drawing key messages about how they manage their health, access and use transportation, care for their pets, etc.

### Step 2. Know your level of emergency preparedness and learn about your disaster risk

At this step, QDN supported Donna to invite the [Brisbane City Council](#) Emergency Manager to come along. The group shared their experiences of disasters. The Emergency Manager shared Council resources using the large computer screen.

Donna facilitated a Q&A session so that her members had the opportunity to ask their questions about disaster risks and preparedness actions they could take.

There was a lot of discussion about what to expect at an evacuation centre. One member shared his experience of evacuation during the 2011 Brisbane floods. He explained how hard it was for him to sleep because he could not transfer from his wheelchair to a low cot for sleeping. The group was really interested in his experience.

The discussion gave the group a chance to explain what would help them in the future. This was a good opportunity for mutual learning. Members of the Hot Topics group learned how important it was to have other options in an evacuation – such as going to the home of family or friends to be safe in an emergency. The Emergency Manager also learned how important it was to involve people with intellectual disability in Council planning activities. She planned to invite the group to Council's next simulated evacuation planning session which, the Emergency Manager said, would help with making the Local Disaster Management Plan more effective for people with intellectual disability.

Connecting people with intellectual disability to their local Council was an important role that QDN played in supporting the Hot Topics group with their emergency planning process. Donna said, "they all became really confident to ask questions of the Emergency Manager."

### **Step 3. Plan for how you will manage your support needs in an emergency**

Getting ready means getting organised before an emergency happens. QDN printed pages 36 - 38 from the P-CEP Workbook for each group member. Together they worked through the Personal Emergency Preparedness Plan section by finding and documenting emergency contact information and phone numbers. Then they worked together through the Get Organised page to identify their

personal emergency contacts and document their information. Finally, they talked about making an emergency kit. They used the checklist on page 38 to review what they already had at home and things they would need to get. The group discussed two scenarios: sheltering in place for seven days or longer and evacuating to a place of safety. Each person talked about the things they would need to stay or to go.

QDN staff and support workers also helped each member to sign up to Brisbane City Council's emergency alert system on their phones. QDN staff, Lou Abson said, "it took additional time to help each person through it, but signing up to the alert was a practical action that provided the group with additional motivation to continue their preparedness."

The third group session ended with a call to action: Each person would put their emergency kit together. Some had help from their support worker. One Hot Topics member said, "I have my backpack all ready, first aid kit, a crank torch, and fire blankets all ready. I also have an emergency kit for my dog now."

Another member reflected, "I've learned to be more proactive in planning for what I need. I bought a first aid kit that was recommended by the disability agency I work for, a battery powered radio, and I've learned to stock up on supplies. This has really helped me because of the pandemic and lockdowns."

A third person reported, "I live alone in a two-bedroom unit, and I now realise that the responsibility is primarily on me to be prepared. I have spoken with my neighbours about what we can each do to help each other out in emergencies."

One of the support workers said, "this group is more prepared than most of my friends and families. Most valuable has been the sharing of ideas – they come up with so many good suggestions that they share with each other."

## Step 4. Communicate the plan with the people in your support network and address gaps through collaboration

When the group came back together for the last session, each person had a chance to review their emergency plan. QDN printed My Emergency Preparedness Plan on A3 paper. Together, the group documented their preparedness actions. The planning template captured the key things each person learned. Members took the plan home with them to continue the conversation with their support workers, family and friends.

One member said, “the hardest thing is remembering it all. So, having ongoing conversations with my support workers is really helpful for me to remember what I need to plan and do.” He continued by saying, “being on the same page with my support workers is really important.”

When reflecting on the experience, Donna said, “the journey has been really exciting, and the group has already asked me for more sessions on emergency preparedness.”

## Lessons Learned

- Planning as a group helps people with intellectual disability to learn from and support each other to take preparedness actions.
- It takes time to plan with people with intellectual disability. Re-visit planning and support conversations on a regular basis to build confidence and strengthen preparedness.
- Disability organisations can connect people with intellectual disability to their local Council. This supports mutual learning that leads to better individual preparedness and increased participation of people with disability in community planning activities.

The form is titled "My Emergency Preparedness Plan" and is designed to be filled out on a piece of paper that can be placed inside a backpack. The form is divided into several sections:

- Top Left:** "If I need help I will call:" with fields for Name, Phone number, Relationship, Contact 2, Name, Phone number, Relationship, and Support worker contact details.
- Top Right:** "If I need to evacuate I will go to:" and "If I need to evacuate I need to take:" with checkboxes.
- Middle Left:** "Numbers and links to emergency warnings:" with fields for My council and Other.
- Middle Right:** "If I need to shelter at home, my first three steps are:" with checkboxes.
- Bottom Right:** "I will share my emergency plan with:" with checkboxes.
- Backpack Illustration:** A central illustration of a backpack with a front pocket. The front pocket has a "Name:" field and an "Evacuation point where I live:" field.

The QDN logo is visible in the bottom left corner of the form.

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For more information: [www.collaborating4inclusion.org](http://www.collaborating4inclusion.org)

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