**ROUGHLY EDITED TRANSCRIPT**

**APRIL**

**CIL‑NET Presents...**

**An IL Conversation via Teleconference**

**Getting it Right:**

**Inclusive Disaster Strategies**

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[Please stand by for captioning.]

>> MARY OLSON: Thanks, folks, for joining us here. We'll get started in about five minutes. I wanted to let you know our captioner has also arrived, and if you need closed captioning you can join us at ‑‑ if you need closed captioning you can join us. Our website has the link at www.APRIL‑rural.org. Thank you.

I see somebody had a hand raised. I just unmuted you. Did you have a question?

>> No, I accidentally pushed that. I'm sorry.

>> Oh, no, I don't you're fine. I just wanted to double check. Thank you.

>> Thank you so much.

>> MARY OLSON: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you again for joining us for our first IL Conversation of the year. Getting it right: Inclusive disaster strategies. Presented by Shari Myers and Paul Timmons.

I'm Mary Olson and I work with APRIL. I just want to make a few announcements and then what we'll do is we'll get going.

First of all, if you need to access CART for today's call please go to the APRIL website at www.APRIL‑rural.org. And you can follow the link that's on our homepage. This was also sent out and the link is available in the reminder emails you may have gotten from APRIL.

If you are having any trouble accessing it, you can email me. That's Mary.olson@MS.UMT.EDU, and I can send you those links and help you walk you through that.

Today's call is going to be recorded thanks to Bill Cochran at SKIL and the audio recording and transcript will be available online at our website underneath that IL Conversations following the call. Today if you would like to add to the topic from your experience or ask any questions, please press star 2 on your phone and that raises your hand so that I can then make your line live.

If you are using CART, you can type your question in the box, and I am going to do my best to monitor that. Also today's speakers have chosen to not use a PowerPoint or materials, and so you don't have to worry about looking for those. I know I've fielded a couple questions already asking. If they have any materials that would be good follow‑up, what we'll do is post those to our website following the call so that you know where to find those.

Also, please remember to evaluate our conversation on our website following the call under the IL Conversation tab or from the email announcements that you received from APRIL or ILRU. Your feedback is really important to us and can only make us stronger as an organization.

This IL Conversation is brought to you by IL NET, which is operated by Independent Living Research Utilization, or ILRU, in partnership with the National Council on Independent Living and the association of programs for rural Independent Living and Utah State University Center for Disabilities. Support is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Community Living.

Without further ado I'm going to introduce you to your presenters.

With us today we have Paul Timmons, Red Cross' new disability integration coordinator. He's also on board and CEO of Portlight Strategies, Incorporated. Paul himself is a person with a disability. He has residual quadriplegia as a result of ‑‑ I apologize, I should have practiced this beforehand ‑‑ Guillain‑Barre syndrome. Paul, you can correct me if I'm wrong. It's a condition in which the body's immune system attacks part of the peripheral nervous system resulting in paralysis. He is a passionate advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and access and functional needs.

Portlight Strategies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization focused specifically on the inclusion of the disability community and planning response and recovery. They are the only deploying Red Cross disability partner providing functional and access needs support, including shelter, accessibility assessments, facilitating partnerships within the local disability communities and in large‑scale events providing long‑term recovering casework. Portlight also acts as FEMA's lead disability partner working closely with a disability cadre in disaster response, training and education and development of best practices. And last but not least, a little bird told me that it could perhaps be Paul's birthday today. So I want to wish him happy birthday and thank you for being with us. Go ahead and take it away.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thank you for that. I can't think of a better group of better people to spend my birthday with. I appreciate this.

As a general rule I probably have no business correcting anyone's French, but Guy yawn beret syndrome that the way I understand it. It's beginning to get a little press in relation to the zika virus. It's becoming a bit topical.

So thank you for the opportunity to talk to you. I really want this to be much more in the nature of a conversation. That's why we're not presenting you with a PowerPoint presentation. I want to be engaged with you on this. There are going to be several break points as Shari and I go through where you can ask questions or make comments or complaints and feel free to interrupt us if something comes up. That's the nature of a conversation. That's what I want this to be.

I'm going to start talking about the Red Cross, where we've been, where we are, and where we're going. I guess I should say, too, that the story is the topic of a cover story in this month's "New Mobility" magazine. I will hit the high points but if you want more details, it's NewMobility.com or I'm sure a lot of you have hard copies. There you go.

For the last three to five years myself and a host of other advocates have been trying to engage with the Red Cross in hopes of helping them get it right with our community. We've met with ‑‑ up until last year frankly we didn't meet with a lot of success.

So in the California wildfires last September we began to see a lot of things go sideways. There were some shelter accessibility issues, there was the unfortunate circumstance where the Red Cross actually lost a couple of our people to nursing homes, and there were some issues around service animals that were handled badly. So I began to turn up ‑‑ I began to turn up the volume a little bit, frankly, with the Red Cross, as did some others, and then right on the heels of that sure ‑‑ Shari and I, by the way, are in Charleston, South Carolina. It's where Portlight is headquartered.

So right on the heels of that we had the South Carolina flooding at the first of October and it began to be more issues popping up, and it was right in my front yard, and I didn't like it, and so I increased the volume even more, and finally we were heard. The Red Cross had about six months prior to the South Carolina floods brought in a new vice president of operations and logistics. His name is Brad Kaiserman. Brad usually certain as ‑‑ previously served as general counsel at FEMA. He worked closely with Marcie Ross at meme a. So Brad heard ‑‑ there were a couple women with the Red Cross, Casey and Katherine, who had been deployed to South Carolina. They saw some of the problems. They got ‑‑ they were able to get Brad's attention, and so we began to see some change, most notably one of the two things ‑‑ so there were two things that the community had been advocating for. One was the establishment of a disability inclusion coordinator at the national level whose job it was to address issues relative to our community. And the other piece that we were advocating for was what we call just‑in‑time training. The ability to get us in front of the volunteers and the staff, on the ground, deployed before they go out to work in the day and give them some quick down and dirty disability competency training so that it was recent top of mind and hopefully impactful in that way.

That happened in South Carolina. Katherine, Mary, Shari Myers began talking about doing this just in time training and literally within 72 hours Brad blessed it, made it happen, and within 72 hours I was actually beginning to speak before Red Cross people around the state.

So that was a great victory. It made a difference down here. We did the same training in California with some of the Red Cross volunteers and staff that were in California. And then the Texas floods came along, I guess, in early November. Shari and another one of my staff, George CASPER, deployed with the Red Cross to Texas, and things really went very smoothly for our community out there, and the ‑‑ George and Shari saw a lot of the same faces, a lot of the same people that had seen our just‑in‑time trainings in South Carolina and Southern California were also in Texas. So I inclined to think it's not coincidental. I'm inclined to believe the reason it went smoothly in Texas is because of those people hearing that message.

So that was an important piece. After that, sort of under the rubric of be careful what you wish for, Brad approached me and asked me if I would serve as the disability integration advisor for the Red Cross, and I agreed, and furthermore, the Red Cross entered into an engagement with Portlight to begin the help in a broad way all over the country help the organization get this right.

You'll hear me say over and over and over and over again that we're in the relationship business. In the places where we've seen this work, it's been where there have been preexisting relationships, and in the places where it hasn't work, have been where there haven't been appropriate relations between our community and people in the emergency management world.

So one of the things we're doing in the Red Cross is actually building an infrastructure across the country. There are 62 Red Cross regions. Most of them correspond with states, although there are a few states with multiple regions. So in each of those regions we're going to have two people stood up, in fact, we're already in the process of doing that. We'll actually have this project completed by Easter. So that we'll have two people stood up to work as a team, a disability integration coordinator, who is a Red Cross staffer or volunteer who understands the workings of the Red Cross and then a disability integration advisor who is someone from the disability community who understands the Independent Living movement and philosophy and has disability competency. Oh, and by the way, most of those spots are going to come from the CIL community, the IL community, and I'm going to circle back around and talk to you about that a little more later. So that what we've got is two people working together in tandem who understand each other's worlds.

We've also created a national disability Red Cross advisory council. It's made up of about 27 or 28 people from around the country. The Red Cross is divided into [ INAUDIBLE ] national divisions and so we've got at least two people from the disability community on that council and we're meeting monthly. So we've got the just‑in‑time training. The Red Cross, each of the 62 regions is scheduled over the next six or eight months, multi‑day institutes. These are long, intense training episodes for their staff and volunteers. We have a 90‑minute spot in each of those institutes where Shari and myself are doing more in depth disability competency training. We have been ‑‑ by we I mean Portlight ‑‑ have been tasked with auditing every single document within the Red Cross library to go through and make changes as we deem necessary. It's every bit a daunting a task as it sounds like and Shari is doing quite a job with that. When I say we I mostly mean Shari. So that's a fairly important piece. We already have a couple significant victories on that. There is a Red Cross sheltering doctrine document that's about 180 pages that, frankly, we should have been involved in the creation of it from the beginning, but we weren't. That's going to change also. But we were able to go through that with our council and make several dozen significant changes to that, and they were all taken and absorbed into the document.

So we're making progress. This is not just smoke and mirrors. I've been really amazed in the last two months at the hunger and thirst there is amongst the rank and file at the Red Cross to get this right and to listen to us and help figure out how to get it right.

So I think I'm at one of those break points where it might be a good time for me to take any questions or comments or complaints.

>> MARY OLSON: Great, thank you, Paul. I just wanted to make a couple more announcements. Again, if you would like to raise your hand and join the conversation, please do that at any time. That's star 2.

Then also, some folks are still wondering about materials. You know, we don't actually have materials for this particular conversation today, but if the speakers give us any follow‑up materials, what we'll do is we'll post those on the APRIL website so you can have those.

It does look like we have a couple of thoughts here. Your line should be life. Go ahead, please. Your Mike should be live is what I meant.

>> CALLER: Thank you for taking my question. I have a question when you talked about joining with the Red Cross and that you had to get loud. That's been my experience, and I'm just wondering how ‑‑ I'm from Alaska, and when you're loud here, you're kind of looked down upon and not really listened to. So I'm wondering how effective ‑‑ how you went about making that alliance? Then the second part of my question is this issue of two people in and regions and stuff like that. When is that going to happen? Because, it hasn't happened anywhere around here. I'm just wondering whether it's worth contacting the Red Cross locally to talk about that. Thank you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I'm going to take the second piece first. It's happening now and we're getting to you. Okay? And what I would ask you to do, if you're interested in being a piece of this, we'll make sure you get mine and Shari's email, send us an email, and we will plug you into the process. What we want to do is facilitate the initial introductions with your counterpart on the Red Cross side. Saw, yeah, if we haven't gotten to you yet, feel free to get to us. It's 62 regions and there's a lot spinning up. Jump in. The water is warm. And I'll make sure you get our emails and phone numbers, et cetera. Like immediately.

As to the "loud" question, so the game changer was the fact that we had a new person as vice president of operations and logistics. He has done a tremendous job of ‑‑ and continues to do a tremendous job of saying throughout the organization "this is a priority. When you hear people from the community talking, you better start listening." Now, again, I guess in any organization it takes some people a little longer to get the message than it takes others. So I am now in a position to help amplify your loudness and do it within a structure. So if you would like to have a conversation with me about how to do that and what degree of noise is appropriate, again, feel free to reach out to me and I'll have a conversation with any of you at any time on that.

We are only 60 days into this, so in a lot of ways we're still coming out of the gate. So I would ask you a couple of things: ‑‑ well, I'm not going to say be patient with us. We're moving at warp speed. But feel free to jump in the game.

>> CALLER: Thank you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thanks for both of those.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. Thank you. We have a couple more questions here. Let's see. Alesa?

>> CALLER: Yes, I'm with a CIL in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. We're small but recently I have been trying to get in contact with our local Red Cross so we can get involved in the community and let them know that we're here in case of emergencies or disasters. I enrolled as a volunteer. I haven't received back any kind of verification from them yet. But what I'm wanting to know is a couple of things. One, I definitely want to get your email so that we can be involved in your thing with the regions. And also, not to sound ‑‑ maybe I should already know this answer, but I'm wanting more verification on what disability competency training is or the just‑in‑time training.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Okay. To the first question, if you need any help connecting with your local Red Cross, let me know. To the piece you alluded to, I left something out I need to make a point of. One of the really important pieces of this is that I'm personally committed to, is encouraging people from our community to volunteer at their local Red Cross chapter during blue sky time. Mark Johnson is probably my oldest, closest friend, and I've heard him say a million times, if they don't see us, we don't exist. So I think in that spirit it's critically important that we show up at the Red Cross and that we volunteer [ INAUDIBLE ] oh, and by the way, I'm really interested to hear from anybody who tries that, what sort of reception they get, because a part of this me getting people to the door, but the other part is me making sure there is somebody there to open the door. So you'll be hearing a lot about that. I encourage you to help me with that. So to your question ‑‑ when I say just‑in‑time training think in terms of a 30 to 45‑minute gathering of people who are just about to walk out the door, go out the door, to go to work where we hit them with some broad strokes, high points at the last minute to keep this top of mind and make sure they remember and have exposure to some tools and resources to help them. The regional institute training that I think I may have referred to as disability competency training is just a lot deeper drill. It's 90 minutes to two hours.

So I hope that clarifies, but that's in the structure of a broader training event, and it's just a lot deeper dive. Does that explain it?

>> CALLER: Yeah. How would we get enrolled or get signed up to take that kind of a training?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Volunteer at your local red ‑‑ volunteer at your local Red Cross. Or reach out to us. Each of the regions ‑‑ each of the Red Cross regions is having these institutes, and we're going to be presenting it at every single one of them.

The other piece, we've got a ‑‑ there is a fairly lengthy PowerPoint attendant to that, and we'd be glad to send that out to you. I'm going to do this again but I'm going to give mine and Shari's emails now. Mine is Paul@portlight.org. And Shari's is Shari@portlight.org. And we'll get that you that ‑‑ again in the call, and I think Mary is going to get it out for us as well.

Is there other questions?

>> MARY OLSON: There are a few more questions. Again, if you had your question answered, if you could push star 2 in order to lower your hand, I would appreciate it. That just kind of helps keep the queue clean. But we do have some more folks here. [ INAUDIBLE ]

Your line should be live. Did you have a question?

>> CALLER: I thought I lowered my hand. He already answered my question. Thank you.

>> MARY OLSON: Sorry about that.

>> CALLER: Can you hear me? This is Pat [ INAUDIBLE ]

>> PAUL TIMMONS: This is Paul. I can hear you well.

>> CALLER: I wasn't sure ‑‑ how I would actual ‑‑ I was accessing. I'm with the Red Cross and I'm also representing the forum division and we're so, so, so delighted to be partners with you. We have also reached out to Billy and working with education how we can promote this. So we're just excited you all are doing this and we finally got our act together so to speak in working with you. So I'm smiling from ear to ear.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thank you. So am I.

>> CALLER: (chuckling).

>> MARY OLSON: Great.

Your mic should be live. Did you have a question?

>> CALLER: Hi. This is Kathleen at the Independent Living resource center in Santa Barbara, California. I just had a couple of comments. Our Red Cross is the central California region, and we've had a good relationship for several years now because we've had a year's long relationship and been a member of the VOAD, the volunteer organizations active in disaster, for several years. I am on the executive committee for that. So I think working together as government organizations and NGOs that I think you need to build relationships to get where you want to go in your community for the inclusive disaster planning.

>> MARY OLSON: I apologize. I think I accidentally muted Paul. Let me just pull it back up here.

Paul?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I'm here. I agree with what you said. We're in the relationship business. But I think having said that it's important to remember that we're in a fluid and dynamic space with this and it's important to keep the relationships alive. There's not some point at which I think we can afford to say, okay, we've got it and move on. It's really important to be consistently touching these relationships.

And to that point let me kind of move into a couple of other things about relationships. I am a huge APRIL fan. I would like to see APRIL enter into MOUs with the Red Cross and with FEMA, and I would be glad to facilitate that if there's interest. You know, an MOU is only an MOU, but it can be a great framework around which to begin to deepen and nurture relationships. So if there's any interest in that, I'm very interested ‑‑ Shari and I are very interested in helping to facilitate that.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. I have just one more question for you. This one comes from caption, so I'll be reading it. This is James from southwest Idaho CIL LINC and the Idaho access & functional needs working group. Here in Idaho we have actually begun to build our relationships with the local Red Cross folks. We are seeking to plan a shelter accessibility training and assessment, general outreach and education and more.

I think that was more of a comment. Thank you, James.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: That's good news.

>> MARY OLSON: All right. Take it away, Paul. Thank you.

Again, if you guys have questions, just push star 2 and it raises your hand and we'll make you live, and then once you've asked your question, if you could press that star 2 again to lower your hand, we would appreciate it opinion.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thanks everybody, these questions are good. I will pause again shortly.

Portlight Strategies is FEMA's lead disability partner, and I can tell you we entered into a formal MOU with FEMA in July around the 8825 events in D.C., and then in September the California wildfires happened, and we were able to really show how these relationships and these partners can work. Vance Taylor is the chief of the office of access and functional needs at California office of emergency services. I think I just said all that without tripping over it, which may be a first! But immediately Vance's office and our staff was able to spin up what we called a daily stakeholder call where we had TELOES, people from the Independent Living community, other FEMA partners, the P&A affiliates out there, California Social Services, and we were meeting every single day. If I'm not mistaken, I think we actually spun those calls up before FEMA was particularly engaged out there. It's going to go down in history as a game‑changing best practice. We were able to compare notes, strategize, make sure we weren't engaging in duplication of efforts, and then after ‑‑ and then ‑‑ during actually the South Carolina floods we replicated that to the exact same effect. The disability ‑‑ and our organization, Portlight, is ready, willing and able in conjunction with FEMA and the Red Cross, to spin those up immediately, and by spin them up, I mean, among other things, pay for them. But please make sure, because ‑‑ look, my favorite quota plies to this space better than anything else I've ever heard. My Tyson said: "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." And we have seen that over and over again in this space. It's important to get together and plan. You've got to have a plan. Creating and fine tuning plans is part of keeping the relationships going. But you've also got to plan for when there's no space for your plan, and that's when the relationship piece of this matters. That's when the realtime dialogue and communication matters. And the other piece I would say is as you're connecting with people, emergency managers, Red Cross, whomever, make sure you don't stop there. Make sure this is getting down to the ground level. I have a saying about my situation with the Red Cross, and that is, Carol McGovern and the COO and I can spend an hour every day on the phone agreeing. If it doesn't get out to the couple running the shelter in Idaho, then it doesn't matter. So make sure as you're setting up these coalitions and associations that you're holding the people in the emergency management world accountable for getting this out the door and down their chain of command, because where this really matters is at the point at which shelters are being opened and run, transportation and communication services are being set up and executed, and I would just stress each and every one of you, as we go through this process, let's make sure we're holding folks accountable in that way. And just remember the stakeholder call thing. It was an important tool.

I'm a big fan of exercises. I'm a big fan of shelter exercises. There's a CIL in New Jersey, the Alliance CIL that is sort of the gold standard in these overnight shelter exercises. Marci Roth and I call them pajama parties and we don't mean anything derisive about that, but Carol parks and her staff will bring in all the players and throw curves at the emergency managers and it's a real important exercise. Shari and I would be glad to help you make connections with you with that ‑‑ to do that sort of thing. By the way, please, let's take another moment and see if there are any questions or comments or complaints.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. Thank you.

I do have a couple questions. Let's see. All right, speaker, go ahead.

>> CALLER: This is [ INAUDIBLE ] Kennedy ‑‑ [ INAUDIBLE ]

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Mary?

>> CALLER: I would like to know a little more. I reached out to our Red Cross here in the inland empire of Washington state a number of months ago ‑‑

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Are you guys still there?

>> MARY OLSON: Yeah. Sorry about that. I Paul, can you not hear us?

>> I don't think Paul ‑‑

>> MARY OLSON: Hmm...

Interesting.

>> CALLER: Should I continue with my question?

>> MARY OLSON: Why don't you go ahead and I can always fill him in while I try to get him online here.

>> CALLER: I reached out to our Red Cross here in the area, and I think there was just kind of ‑‑ they said they were going to put us on their resource list, but there's been no other ‑‑ I don't think they know what to do with us as an Independent Living center ‑‑

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Are you guys there?

>> CALLER: Have any of the other centers done anything that have marketed to the Red Cross?

>> MARY OLSON: Paul?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I'm here now. I don't know. I went into a black hole for a few seconds, but I'm back.

>> MARY OLSON: Okay. So basically the question is, they reached out to the Red Cross, and they don't know quite what to do with them as an IL center. Is that right?

>> CALLER: That's basically, yes.

>> MARY OLSON: And he's just wondering if anyone has had a similar experience or ‑‑

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Yes, exactly. And so let me tell you how this is going. I would assume you reached out to your local chapter, is that correct?

>> CALLER: That's correct.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Okay. So we're not quite to the chapter level yet. We plan to start to pivot and start drilling down into the chapter level sometime right after Easter, as soon as we get these regional pieces set up. So what's beginning to happen is, I would say this, they know a lot more than they knew 90 days ago, but they don't know anything like they're going to know over the next 90 days. So it may just be that we're not there yet. And, look, this ‑‑ I think Mary just asked me if I ever heard a similar story. Only about 150 times. So, slowly but surely, as we work through this process, one of my primary goals is to educate at the regional and at the chapter levels on what a great resource the Independent Living center is. We saw that in California. We certainly saw it South Carolina. I need to shout out to my girl Kimberly who I believe is now on the APRIL board. But her center in Columbia was right in the middle of all the stuff we were doing and I think serves as a model for what all the players in this can look for from their CILs.

>> CALLER: Thank you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: But to your point, can I promise you at this point that every chapter in the Red Cross knows that? No. Can I promise you by the 4th of July they'll know it? Yes.

>> CALLER: Okay. Good.

>> SHARI MYERS: This is Shari Myers. Where are you located?

>> CALLER: I'm in Spokane, Washington.

>> SHARI MYERS: Ah, okay. We can probably connect you with some people who can help you in reaching out to Red Cross and actually making some progress there.

>> CALLER: Well, actually since then we've joined the COAD and the Red Cross is there. We're getting there, but I'm just kind of saying the contact I made originally with the Red Cross did not go anywhere.

>> SHARI MYERS: Yeah, we're familiar with that. Like Paul said, it's all process, and we will get to the point where they will engage with you and understand more about what you do and what an important partner you are.

>> CALLER: Great. That would be wonderful.

>> MARY OLSON: Thank you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: And don't feel lonely in this.

>> CALLER: (chuckling).

>> MARY OLSON: We do have a couple more questions. Let me go ahead and open it up. All right. Go ahead with your question, please.

>> CALLER: This is Heidi up in Alaska. First, I wanted to say to the Washington fellow that he should contact the SILC. They are doing a lot with emergency preparedness and are trying to build a coalition. Similarly, up here we are doing the same. While it's still at the state level, we are working with the Red Cross and Salvation Army, and we have been put into the phone tree for when they're doing emergency planning or when an emergency happens to see if there's any issue around people with disabilities or elders that need to be addressed. So we are making some progress here. My question is: How ‑‑ do you have any great ideas for encouraging consumers to participate in these exercises? We tried a couple of years ago, and we had ‑‑ you know, we sent it out. We had 12 people say that they would show up and two did show up. The next time we didn't have any takers on our request for participants. So I was just curious if you have any great ways to get people with disabilities to be part of the exercises?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I was hoping you did. No, it's ‑‑ look, it's really, really difficult to get people engaged in this, to get people interested in the disaster that hasn't happened. I've ‑‑ one of our corporate sponsors is the weather channel. We have this conversation with the weather channel people, with the Red Cross. We've lived it. It is very, very difficult to gin up interest in the disaster that hasn't happened. I think one great place to begin this process is to spend a little time drilling down finding folks who have been through an event. Because they certainly have a degree of understanding of what this looks like. But, no, it's tough and I think ‑‑ so short just of making a lot of noise and trying to make the case that it's not a matter of "if," it's a matter of "when" is the way to go about this. I am aware of what's going on in Washington state. I had wanted to get Todd Holloway to weigh in and talk about it a little bit. It's one of four or five states doing a great job beginning to make these mid‑level connections. That stuff is crucial. Don't get me wrong, we have to do it. But I can't stress enough, make sure as you go through this process to hold these people accountable for getting it down their chain of command to the most granular level possible, because it's real, real easy for these folks to say, oh, you know, yeah, we meet with so and so once a quarter, we're good, and then when they get punched in the mouth everything comes unwound. So make a part of that strategy making sure to hold these people accountable for getting it down as granular as possible. And we need to make ourselves available to do training and engage with those folks as well.

>> CALLER: Absolutely. Up here we've had an informal group meeting for about 18 months, and just recently after an ADA ‑‑ national ADA presentation earlier this week we all came together, Red Cross, Salvation Army, state emergency preparedness folks and the GUSS council and the SILC and watched this webinar and then decided that we would be not the informal group but the formal disability advisory group for emergency preparedness. So we think that we're on a good start.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: It sounds like a good start. All of this stuff is critical. And at the end of the day, what this does, it's not a magic bullet. It creates relationships. I will say it over and over again, we're in the relationship business.

Are there any other questions or comments or complaints?

>> MARY OLSON: I do have two more, and then I'll let you carry on.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: All right.

>> MARY OLSON: Caller, go ahead.

>> CALLER: So I wanted to address what Spokane had spoke about, the relationship with the Red Cross there, and Todd Holloway is actually sitting here with me on this call as well, so he is going to chime in as well. To Spokane, we're building those relationships now. We have a coalition on inclusive mercy planning. We had our first meeting on February 5th and we're building that coalition with our state disability partners and Centers for Independent Living and we also have the Red Cross that is invited as observers and provide technical assistants and be there as participants and help us build this coalition for future response and obviously for blue skies as well. But we would more than happy to assist in building those relationships and building capacity. In fact, that's our mission and goal to build our whole state, not just the western side, but the eastern side as well, and I'm really ‑‑ for me it's very important to ‑‑ it's my passion to like build up these five because I know there are so much areas that are kind of rural over there, and there's not a lot of staff to do it, so I know as much as support as possible is needed, and we're here for you. And Todd is on the call here and he wants to say a little about that because he works directly with the Red Cross. So I want ‑‑ he is going to chime in a little bit.

>> TODD HOLLOWAY: Absolutely, anybody on the other side of the mountains up here or anywhere actually in Region 10, if you have any questions regarding Red Cross whatsoever, please feel free to reach out to me. I know you're probably on the Region 10 CIL calls. We can certainly connect up with you and connect you with the right people within the Red Cross and we have different ‑‑ the Red Cross map doesn't look like our federal map. It's a little bit different. But we ‑‑ and I should say Paul has the Pacific coast all the way out into Guam and the Hawaiian Islands covered. So we can help.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Todd, I would just like to say to you, if you had answered your email, you would have had about 10 minutes to talk today.

[ LAUGHTER ]

>> TODD HOLLOWAY: I was actually at the coalition meeting when that email came in.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I would like to say something about these local relationships with your Red Cross chapters. They're crucial. You have to have them. Part of my job is to help get them teamed up in the same way that we're doing at the regional ‑‑ at the regional level. And so it's a crucial piece of this, and it's a piece we will be devoting the coming months to. But you should know this... in a large‑scale disaster, because of the nature of the way the Red Cross deploys their staff and volunteers, we saw this in California, we certainly saw it in South Carolina, I probably talked to 500 Red Cross volunteers in South Carolina in the course of two or three days, and I bet you I didn't meet five people from South Carolina in the whole place. In the event of a large‑scale disaster ‑‑ it's the when you get punched in the mouth scenario. Because of the way the Red Cross deploys, they're bringing people in from all over the country, and so what we've seen people find is they had great relationships with their local chapter. It went really smoothly during a multi‑family fire or maybe even a tornado, but just don't underestimate the importance of connecting with these folks at the regional and at the divisional level, and that's Shari's job, and we're help here to help you facilitate those. I think it's important to communicate to everybody who is engaged, those relationships are critical, but in a large‑scale disaster, they're going to be not nearly as important as these regional and divisional relationships are, and frankly it's been a glaring missing piece in a lot of how this stuff has gone sideways. So thank you for that editorial opportunity ‑‑ opportunity for an editorial comment.

>> MARY OLSON: All right. We'll do one more, and then we'll let you carry on. Let's see. All right, go ahead, please.

>> CALLER: Hello.

>> CALLER: Good morning. Good afternoon. I don't know if anyone can hear me. My name is Monty Rodriguez, and I'm disabled resources center in California in City of Long Beach. I just want to share we are currently ‑‑ have an MOU with the local Red Cross here and also the City of Long Beach preparedness disasters is coming over to do a training. We had in the past years a good relationship with the Red Cross where they come and ask us, you know, to provide training and information to the volunteers there when it comes to emergency ‑‑ people with disabilities. So I just want to share that with you and want to say for those that don't have that yet, try to make the connection with the local chapter. I know a lot of times it's hard because it's lack of information, but they also provide training here, but the main part is how to help those in an emergency needed, especially people with disabilities. I just wanted to share that with you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thank you. Very good. This is how this happens. And Marci Roth and I talk a lot about the fact that I think we're at a tipping point and I think some of the things I'm hearing on this call are manifestations of that.

So a couple of other things that are going to be spinning up as a result of our engagement with the Red Cross. I think I mentioned earlier there are seven Red Cross divisions. We are in the process now of outfitting and staging 10 deployable modules with some ‑‑ some nominal accessibility essentials, portable ramps, some wheelchairs, some things. So that stuff ‑‑ and the idea here is this is not a perfect solution, but what we want to try to get ahead of this this incessant business of trying to figure this stuff out in the swirling chaotic aftermath of an event. So there's going to be some tools available to Red Cross folks that are going to be deployed when everything else rolls. I think I mentioned we're doing a turtle audit survey. The other thing we're doing is a monthly call. We're calling it a "getting it right" call. Anybody in the Red Cross is able to be on this call. The last couple have been sort of introductory and then basic. Beginning this month the ‑‑ and we've had hundreds of people on this call, by the way. It underscores my observation there's a great hunger for this throughout the organization. This month we're going to be discussing mental health issues in sheltering, but each month is going to be a different subject, and I would welcome your input if there's something you think we ought to be talking about. Feel free to reach out to me and Shari and we'll spin up that conversation. So that's an important piece.

Mary, someone had texted me would like to say a few words. What do they need to do in order to raise their hand?

>> MARY OLSON: Star 2.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Okay. Star 2.

>> MARY OLSON: While they are doing that, I wanted to read through a couple things coming through on caption. First of all, Alesa is in Bartlesville, Oklahoma ‑‑

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I just lost you, Mary.

>> MARY OLSON: You can't hear me again? Well, while we get Paul on the line I'm going to voice some of these comments. Alesa ‑‑

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I lost you.

>> MARY OLSON: We can hear you, Paul. Let me email, Paul.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I don't know how this is going to work, but I'm going to give it a shot. We are joined on the call by someone who works pretty intimately with us during the California wildfire response, I referenced him earlier. He is the chief of the office of access and functional needs for the California office of emergency services. That's twice in a row I have said that. Vance Taylor, would you like to weigh in here and just give a little bit of insight and commentary? Meanwhile, we'll see if we can figure out what needs to be done in order for us to hear you again.

>> Absolutely. Thank you, Paul. And thanks to everybody. So one of the things that Paul talked a lot about was the fires that happened here in Northern California, and at the end of last year, and what we saw was there were some good things that happened and there were some challenges that we really ran up against. And what we've been able to do is really learn from what went well, and I see that Paul and company are incorporating that into what the Red Cross is doing now, but it will become really standard practice. And so seeing the progress that's going on, for us, is really ‑‑ makes us feel very optimistic. I think that it is also really something impressive to see when Red Cross can say, yeah, there were some missed steps, and now we're correcting, and we're [ INAUDIBLE ] and so for us as our partners we see that as something that's particularly to be hopeful about and because we rely on the Red Cross to help obviously in the shelter environment and in what we do with regards to response and even recovery, we're in it together. I feel like whether it's Cal OES or others, we succeed together or we fail together, and what I see coming out on the [indiscernible] front are solutions coming from our community that are being implemented by members of our community and a Red Cross that is now much more aware and cognizant of the need, experience and circumstances of the members of this community. And so it becomes almost the version of for us, by us in terms of emergency management. And that brings my buy in not just from [ INAUDIBLE ] but it also provides buy‑in from our stakeholders and our partners. So I can't give enough kudos to Paul and his team and the folks at Red Cross for the progress that they can play in what seems like a relatively short amount of time even though I know Paul and company have been trying to push this boulder up a hill for a very long time. So thanks, Paul.

>> MARY OLSON: Thank you for your comment. Again, if you would like to ask a question, you are able to please push star 2 and it raises your hand, or you can type it into the box. I apologize, folks. We usually don't have so many technical issues. The first one of the year always seems to be a little bit more difficult than others, but hopefully we'll get it all worked out. Paul, can you hear us?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I can hear you very well.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. So, again, if you have a question for Paul, please press star 2 ‑‑

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Did Vance say anything bad about me, Mary?

>> MARY OLSON: No, only nice things. And I apologize. There are some folks that are going to have to leave early, but luckily I want to remind people we do ‑‑ are creating a transcript as well as audio recording and so you can always pick us up after the call. While we're waiting for people to raise their hands, I do have again ‑‑ I was saying Alesa is in Bartlesville, Oklahoma and she was saying they have similar situations there, they have a very small CIL and have contacted emergency management with their response being that we have your contact inform foe on file, thank you. Red Cross has not responded at all yet. We're just going to keep pushing and have signed up to volunteer. Just recently 11,000 acres burned and thankfully there were no injuries, but there are folks concerned.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Reach out to me, please, and I'll help facilitate a Red Cross response to you.

>> MARY OLSON: Excellent.

Let's see. I don't see that I have any other hands raised right now. I know that ‑‑ oh, says he's pushing star 2 and can't be heard. Hmm... Luis, if you could push star 2 one more time. I don't see your hand being raised. Alesa says, thank you, Paul, I will be emailing you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Great.

>> MARY OLSON: Why don't you go ahead and maybe I can get Louis. If I don't end up ‑‑ if I don't see your hand if you could type in your question we'll get you answered. So go ahead, Paul.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I'm going to let Shari ‑‑ there's a project that Portlight has been working on the last year that is coming to fruition, literally we'll be done with phase 1 of it in the next 24 hours. Shari has carried the water on this so I will let her tell you about it. I think it will be interesting to this group.

>> SHARI MYERS: We, in the course of our work, we have found, as we come across emergency managers we interact with, we find them saying I went through four years or eight years of school and I have advanced degrees in emergency management and no one ever speaks about access and functional needs, I didn't learn anything, there were no courses. So we decided that we needed to fill that gap ‑‑ we decided someone need to do and it might as well be us, and we have spent the last year developing a 100‑level, entry‑level college course for potential emergency managers, public health officials, so on and so on, and it will address first and foremost sort of exposing these students to disability culture, the Independent Living philosophy, disabusing them of whatever they have been taught or heard about the medical model, and helping them to understand what an important part we are in their planning and preparedness and response [ INAUDIBLE ] we're hoping to begin a pilot program. If not over the summer, then first part of the fall. We have created this in such a way that we have modules that can be plugged into existing curricula if the school ‑‑ if a school wants to try it out that way. We're also going to be incorporating a fair amount of that training in into our Red Cross training. Pretty exciting. And we have a lot of buy‑in from a number of universities. There are only 49 in the United States that offer an emergency management degree program but we're hoping we're not going to be limited just to that.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Mary, are you there?

>> MARY OLSON: We are here.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I'm sort of at the end of my organized thoughts but I'm glad to attempt to answer any questions or respond to comments or complaints.

>> MARY OLSON: Thank you, Paul. I'm trying to get ‑‑ there is a question. Just trying to figure out technical issues, which seems to be the theme of my day. Again, if you have any questions, you can push star 2. That raises your hand. Or you can type it into the chat box. I'll voice that for you.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I would also like to reiterate, I'm very curious to hear if you think this was beneficial. Please email me at.

>> PAUL TIMMONS:@portlight.org, and if there was anything you didn't like about it, please email Shari@portlight.org.

>> MARY OLSON: Excellent. I actually do have a comment/question. Is it Luis? Says that we are involved with the voluntary organizations active in disasters. It's VOAD. Since the Katrina hurricane. Is anyone else involved with that?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Luis, I can address that from sort of a national, global perspective. I'm aware of a number of different disability stakeholder organizations involved with VOAD at the state level around the country, and VOAD, like a lot of other stuff, looks better in some states than it does in others. In some states it looks really, really good. In others, it's maybe less impactful and less effective. But my general rule of that is let's go with what's working for us. So, yeah, there are a number of organizations that are plugged in around the country in that way.

>> SHARI MYERS: I think, too, it's critical that we educate VOAD about reaching out to our various and sundry stakeholders, CILs, [indiscernible] et cetera because they don't really think about us being out here, so we have to speak up and be heard. That's like really ‑‑ why it's really important to get engaged with them, be involved in their phone calls, and blue sky time as well so that they know who you are and they know how to reach out to and how important you are to them.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Any more questions or comments, Mary? And I cannot hear you. So based on previous experience I'm going to go with the assumption ‑‑ there you are.

>> MARY OLSON: Sorry. I was just going through the captioning scrolls, and Joni is saying that ‑‑ let's see ‑‑ that they are involved with VOAD. I apologize. My screen is jumping. They're involved with VOAD and, in fact, two other coworkers here at their Center for Independent Living are as well. They're also involved with the Northern Nevada Functional Needs and Assessment Group. That's Joni. And Kathy wants folks to know they have a very good working relationship with their local EMA. They actually come to us for assistance. There are two staff members at their CIL there are cert trained. So there are some great relationships going on out there.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Yeah, there are. There are. It's gratifying to hear about all of this, too.

>> MARY OLSON: Do you have a question, caller? Hmm... might have lost him. Again, yeah, if you could push star 2, raise your hand, or you can type into the chat box and we'll get you answered.

Go ahead, please.

>> CALLER: Mary, can you hear me?

>> MARY OLSON: I can.

>> CALLER: Paul, thank you for the enlightening discussion today. Paul, I got kind of a different question maybe. Thinking about many years ago there were issues and concerns about folks that had service animals going in and out of the shelters and I know they have been sorting that out. One of the things that's been happening really more, I suppose, towards airlines and the air carrier act, most folks are bringing on what's called emotional support animals, and I know that's not something addressed under ADA, but in practice, is that kind of an issue sometimes for folks or what's your tact on it or thoughts on it for folks not just bringing in like a support ‑‑ a support animal like a seeing eye dog but more of an emotional support animal? Is there any thoughts on that?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thanks, Glen. It's good to hear from you, by the way. It is far and a way the most common issue on our institute presentations. Frankly, usually we end up going down some hypothetical, what if somebody shows up with a service chicken with rabies hole that's not productive. And actually we're really up to our eyeballs figuring this out. The Reds cross to their credit is pretty open minded on this piece. The ADA specifically refers to service dogs and miniature horses. Generally speaking, the Red Cross around the country ‑‑ as a matter of national doctrine and policy has been far more open minded than that. I think the way this is going to shake out, Glen, is the Red Cross has done ‑‑ purely from the Red Cross perspective, the Red Cross has done a lot of stuff generally across the board in terms of dealing with pets and animals over the last couple of years, and I think they're rapidly getting to a place where it's not going to become the issue that it has been because I think they're going to get to a point where they're able to manage the much broader issue of pets and animals and then the issue of service animals, comfort animals, et cetera, et cetera, is going to become largely a moot point. Does that offer you any clarity or does it just muddy the waters worse that?

>> CALLER: I think that's helpful. Thank you, Paul.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. Thank you.

Paul, while we're waiting for more potential questions to come in, do you have any final thoughts or comments that you would like to leave our listeners with or, you know, any resources that you say, yes, absolutely, if you're just getting started in this process, this is what you need?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Well, to the first point, Shari and I are here to serve as a resource for you, particularly but not exclusively, as it relates to reaching out to the Red Cross. If you have any questions about how that process might look, if you're not happy with any of the results you've got, I would strongly encourage you to reach out to us. We can help facilitate that. I think it's also important for us to be reaching out to the local community management people, but the biggest piece from my perspective about this is that ‑‑ is the relationship piece and the granularity of that piece. So by all means facilitate mid‑level relations that hold the participants accountable for getting it down their chain of command, all the way down their chain of command, and be available ‑‑ and also ‑‑ so the whole issue of training. There's a lot of training material out there, but remember, at the granular service delivery level, that's where it matters. And so just build the relationships, but as a part of that, hold people accountable for making sure it gets out of their office and out of their sphere and down their hierarchy, down their hierarchy, not up.

>> MARY OLSON: We had a couple of folks in the captioning talking about they were having some troubles connecting on the county ‑‑ with the county staff. Do you have any suggestions for them with that?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Turn up the volume!

>> MARY OLSON: All right.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I know that sounds somewhat flippant, but the fact of the matter is ‑‑ folks will take advantage of any opportunity to marginalize us, and it's up to us not to give it to them. If that means throwing up and down and throwing a temper tantrum, God knows, I've proven I'm not above it.

>> SHARI MYERS: I think this goes back to the question about participating inner and sizes. I believe that came from somebody in Alaska. We heard from people who have volunteered, went to participate in an exercise, and were essentially to sit over here, wait, we'll come get you, we'll let you know when we need you. They don't know what to do with us. And so it's really important that we do engage with our Emergency Management Agencies and be a part of the planning of the exercise, not just being a part of the exercise itself.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: And the last thing I would like to say, this business of people from our community volunteering at the Red Cross during blue sky times is critical. I am trying to develop a culture whereby we're welcomed. I know of some cases where we have been. I know of some horror stories where we haven't been. And I really want to hear those from you.

>> MARY OLSON: Go ahead, caller.

>> CALLER: Hello?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Hi.

>> CALLER: Okay. You can hear me. Great.

I just wanted to comment on the local ‑‑ the granular level as you call it. I agree that's the most important. Because in Alaska there is Anchorage and then there is everybody else, which is rural Alaska, and we live in rural Alaska. We have a volunteer fire department, you know, probably six‑man police force, total. So it's very small here, but as you know, we had a 7.1 earthquake about a month and a half ago and it lasted about 45 seconds, gas lines broke, four houses blew up. They did have an evacuation of that area. What I heard was that the shelter they sent them to, the National Guard arm re, is not accessible, so it's great they worked on the state and regional level but it's the local level that's hurting the most and the one that needs the most assistant, because that's where they're going to respond. We're going to respond where we live, not in the state or the regional level. So the importance ‑‑ the importance is locally. I've run into a lot of brick walls locally, and we're trying. We're going to continue to try. I'm actually going to be doing a training for the different Independent Living Centers around our state around with disabilities preparing for emergencies and also how to get involved in your community planning. So hopefully I'll be able to reach out to more people with disabilities. Recently we had a drill down here, a mass care drill, National Guard was involved, and Red Cross and everything, and we had five people with disabilities volunteer, and I can relate to the woman who just spoke because we were put in a corner. I was one of them. And I had to wait an hour and‑and‑a‑half to get permission to take my service dog into the ambulance. These are things that need to get down to the local level because that's where it's going to happen. And I know a lot of my consumers here, as well as myself, didn't know what to do after that earthquake. We didn't know who to call. Didn't know what to do. And it's just even more important in rural areas that we really work locally because that's the important part right there. Thanks for letting me comment.

>> MARY OLSON: Thank you. So along with that comment, we also have one from ‑‑ I apologize if I'm going to mess up your name ‑‑ Alfonis. I know that VOAD and Red Cross are very active here in Honolulu. They meet every third Wednesday of every month. My question is: Is this a channel you are already or planning to engage?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Absolutely. Like I said, the VOADs are the critical piece of this. But I would encourage any of the local stakeholder organizations to get engaged with that and show up and make them give you space in the room if they're not already.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. That's all the questions that I have thus far. Again, for folks listening on the line, we appreciate your feedback. If you could go to the APRIL website and fill out our evaluation link for the IL Conversations we would appreciate it. And we will be sending out the audio transcript and the audio recording itself will be on the website and will be going out online along with Paul and Shari's contact information. So with that, Paul and Shari, do you have any closing comments?

>> PAUL TIMMONS: I just want to appreciate the opportunity. It was a lot of fun, and I really appreciate it. I hope it was useful.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. And one last call for any last burning questions or comments. Again that's star 2 or type it in the box. One more? Go ahead, please.

>> CALLER: Happy birthday, Paul !

>> Yes, happy birthday.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thank you.

>> Is that [indiscernible]

>> We could sing to you, but I don't know.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Well, if we're done, I just want to thank everybody for being a part of this. It felt really good to be a part of it and I'm going to declare it to be party time and let everybody get back to what they're up to.

>> Great. Well, we appreciate it. Again, we will be putting that contact information up. And we'll be sending out our IL Conversation series. So please join us on our next call. Thank you to everybody again.

>> PAUL TIMMONS: Thanks, everybody.