



Impact of Storm Sandy on Connecticut's Residents with Disabilities

Overview

On October 29, 2012, Storm Sandy struck the eastern seaboard of the United States. Connecticut was one among many states that were hard hit by the storm, with residents experiencing power outages for up to eight days, major flood damage and loss of life. For the purposes of assessing the storm's impact on one of the state's most vulnerable populations, the Connecticut Connecticut's Developmental Disabilities Network, including the A. J. Papanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Research, Education and Service, the Connecticut Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Office of Protection and Advocacy, conducted a survey in the aftermath of the storm. The survey was directed at two audiences: 1) self-advocates as well as parents, caregivers and guardians of people with disabilities, and 2) people who work in organizations and state agencies that serve, advocate and work with people with disabilities. A discussion of the methods used in administering the survey and of the findings from the survey is presented below.

Methods

The survey was included as a link to an electronic survey which was sent by email to the list serves of each of the collaborating agencies approximately two weeks after the storm hit. The initial email was sent on November 13, 2012 and included email addresses for 281 people. Two days later a second email was sent which included an additional 20 people, for a total of 301 potential respondents. The email then went *viral* as people forwarded the emails to friends, family and colleagues. Results were analyzed on November 28, 2012.

Results

A total of 78 people started the survey: 40 self-advocates or family members, caregivers or guardians of people with disabilities and 38 people work with, advocate on behalf of, or serve people with disabilities. Of the 78 people who started the survey, 50 completed it. Key findings include:

- over 50% of self-advocates or family members/caregivers or guardians of people with disabilities **were not registered with their town's emergency management team**
- no self advocates or family members, caregivers or guardians of people with disabilities reported staying in a shelter during the storm
- in the few instances when individuals with disabilities interacted with first responders, those interactions were generally positive

Part I: Responses of self-advocates and their family members, caregivers or guardians

1. Please select the group that best describes you:		
Response Options	Percent (%)	Number (n)
I am a self-advocate	45	18
I am the parent/guardian/caregiver of a child or adult with a disability	55	22
Total	100	40

2. Were you/the person you care for registered with your town's emergency management team prior to Storm Sandy?		
Response	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Yes	32.5	13
No	57.5	23
Missing	10	4
Total	100	40

3. Please select the phrase below that best describes your experience with first responders during Storm Sandy and the aftermath:		
First responders were...	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Not at all helpful	0	0
A little helpful	5	2
Moderately helpful	2.5	1
Extremely helpful	2.5	1
I had no experience at all with first responders	70	28
Other (please specify)	10	4
Missing	10	4
Total	100	40

4. Please describe ways in which first responders were helpful or were not helpful to you or the person you care for.

- ❖ I only received an emergency recording from the state of CT explaining there was a storm.
- ❖ Helped remove tree on power line for safety
- ❖ The only helpful experience was the telephone call I received from the emergency center warning me that the storm would impact our area
- ❖ Touch based with me to see if I'm ok...
- ❖ I was never alerted to their services at all. They never contacted me in any way to offer aid.

5. Did first responders seem to have knowledge about how to assist you or the person you care for in a sensitive manner while respecting your autonomy and expertise in your own disability?

Answer Options	Percent (%)	Number (n)
No, not knowledgeable or sensitive at all about assisting me for while respecting my autonomy and expertise in my disability	0	0
Somewhat knowledgeable and sensitive about assisting me while respecting my autonomy and expertise in my disability	10	4
Yes, very knowledgeable and sensitive about assisting me while respecting my autonomy and expertise in my disability	0	0
Missing	90	36
Total	100	40

6. Did you find first responders listened to your needs and requests?

Answer Options	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Yes, my needs and requests were listened to by first responders	100	2
No, my needs and requests were not listened to by first responders	0	0
Other (please specify)	7.5	3
Missing	87.5	35
Total	100	40

7. How much of an impact did the storm have on your ability to carry out your typical routines and activities?

Level of Impact	Percent (%)	Number (n)
No impact	5	2
A small impact	2.5	1
A moderate impact	5	2
Major impact	2.5	1
Devastating impact	0	0
Missing	85	34
Total	100	40

8. Please describe the impact of the storm on your ability to carry out your typical routines and activities.

- ❖ Lost 2 days of wages to stay home with my son.
- ❖ Power loss for 4 days at home and 5 days at school completely disrupted daily routines.
- ❖ It had no impact. Lost power. Our power company (Bozrah Light & power) got it back extremely fast (within 24 hours).
- ❖ It had no impact at all on me. I lost power, but Bozrah Light & Power had it back within 24 hours.
- ❖ Little problems this time around. No issues, was more prepared.
- ❖ Nothing major, lost power but had water so I was able to ensure my loved one was OK.
- ❖ Roads were blocked but other than that – nothing.
- ❖ Could not drive for several hours due to downed trees. Work canceled.
- ❖ Schools were closed, private therapy was continued in our home. We also lost internet, so no TV.
- ❖ Since our school lost power, our child was thrown off his routine and did not receive services for three days. Though we also lost power in our residence it was slightly easier to keep him together, but one more day would have found us heading for a hotel, if we could find one.
- ❖ No school or work for a couple of days, change in routine difficult
- ❖ The ward that I am responsible for needed to stay at a staff's home overnight.
- ❖ No work and I wasn't able to shop or travel
- ❖ I had no choice but to stay inside my home.
- ❖ For 2 days we could not leave our condo complex due to down trees and wires. I work

from home and could not work. After 2 days I was able to drive into work and carry out my normal routine.

- ❖ I had an increased waiting time for my regular transportation provider and a disagreement with my oxygen provider. I had called for an extra oxygen tank. They explained as long as I had 4 hrs of reserve tanks I would be fine. This is what they said to all their clients. I only had 2 hrs of reserve supply but they said they could not deliver it until my regular area's delivery day of Wednesday. They told me to call after 4 hours of having no power and they would try at that time to make an earlier delivery. This was totally unacceptable to me. I understood it was better to plan for emergencies and strive to be prepared for the "what if's".
- ❖ Just touch base with me assuring how things are around me
- ❖ I had to stay home alone during the storm, but I was fortunate and had no power outage. I just stayed home until there was enough clean-up that it seemed safe to drive around town. One or two events were cancelled due to the storm.
- ❖ Other than closures in the area and increases in pain in my joints and bones, it did not impact me.
- ❖ Motorized wheelchair does not do well in the rain, and the van systems were shut down making me effectively stuck in my building.

9. Which of the following issues have you or the person you care for faced as a result of the storm:

Response Options	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Evacuated from home	2.5	1
Power outage at home	47.5	19
Flood damage at home	0	0
Personal care attendant (PCA) unable support me/person I care for (due to travel problems, access, etc.)	7.5	3
Unable to take medication because of lack of access to pharmacy	5	2
Unable to keep medical appointment due to storm related access issues (e.g., transportation, blocked roads, power outages)	15	6
Other (please specify)	17.5	7
Missing	2.5	2
Total	100	40

9a. Other Issues faced as a result of the storm

- ❖ Change of routine threw off child with ASD.
- ❖ Loss of services due to school closure.
- ❖ Needed to leave home due to lack of heat.
- ❖ Stay out of home.
- ❖ Being in the dark and petrified of the dark at X years old.

10. Did you or person you care for stay in a shelter during or after the storm?		
Response	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Yes	0	0
No	70	28
Missing	30	12
Total	100	40

11. Did you or person you care for stay at home during the aftermath of the storm?		
Response	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Yes	67.5	27
No	2.5	1
Missing	30	12
Total	100	40

12. Was there continued delivery of services in your home in the aftermath of the storm, including:					
Services	Yes	No	Not applicable	Missing	Total
Meals on Wheels	0	0	27	13	27
Home health aides/visiting nurse services/personal attendants	6	4	17	13	27
Proxy pick up of supplies, food, medications, etc.	5	0	22	13	27

13. Which county do you or person you care for live in?

County	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Fairfield County	10	4
Hartford County	20	8
Litchfield County	2.5	2
Middlesex County	2.5	2
New Haven County	15	6
New London County	12.5	5
Tolland County	0	0
Windham County	2.5	1
Missing	30	12
Total	100	40

14. Please provide any additional information you would like to share that would have made the aftermath of the storm better for you or the person you care for.

- ❖ Keep sign language interpreter in full TV screen along with captions.
- ❖ Someone on CTFeat passed around a wonderful social story about hurricanes that was very helpful.
- ❖ We were very lucky and were spared any serious difficulty, although we were as prepared as we could be with a new generator and an adequate storm kit.
- ❖ My son was very anxious. Given both Hurricane Irene and now Sandy, he is anxious when he sees utility trucks.
- ❖ For to have been better prepare with the help of my support team.
- ❖ Please continue reaching out to people with disabilities during and after major storms.
- ❖ Nothing could have made it better for me. I was impressed again that the Town of New Britain did such a good job of communicating with me about shelter availabilities and other services (and changes in service) as a result of the storm.

Responses of Professionals

15. Please select the group that best describes you:		
Groups	Percent (%)	Number (n)
I work in a state agency	30	12
I work in a disability advocacy organization	12	4
I am a professional who works with people with disabilities (e.g., teacher, SLP, OT, PT, paraprofessional, etc.)	45	17
I am a legislator/policymaker	0	0
Other (please describe)	21	8
Total	100	38

*Respondents were permitted to select more than one response option.

16. What part of the state does your organization serve?		
Answer Options	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Statewide	13	5
Fairfield County	18	7
Hartford County	13	5
Litchfield County	5	2
Middlesex County	3	1
New London County	8	3
Tolland County	0	0
Windham County	5	2
Other (please describe)	5	2
Missing	29	11
Total	100	38

17. How much of an impact did the storm have on your agency's/organization's ability to carry out its daily activities with regard to working with and serving people with disabilities?

Level of Impact	Percent (%)	Number (n)
No impact	16	6
A small impact	24	9
A moderate impact	8	3
Major impact	13	5
Devastating impact	0	0
Missing	39	15
Total	100	38

18. Please describe the impact the storm has had on people with disabilities from your organization's perspective.

- ❖ Two locations lost power for 48 hours resulting in some relocations.
- ❖ The residents of two group homes needed to be evacuated to other homes due to power outages. While obviously disturbing, they made out well. Our hosts were welcoming and accommodating. Supported employment and day support options were cancelled for two days. Given the challenges faced by people in shoreline communities, our people did pretty well.
- ❖ It was reported that approximately 110 group homes and/or other residential programs had to relocate due to the storm. Many could not return to their homes for more than a week. Because DDS requires private providers and public programs to utilize an Emergency Relocation Book and other evacuation procedures, consumers and staff are prepared and trained for relocation in an incident such as this. I visited a CLA where 6 people live approximately 9 days after the storm. They had returned 2 days prior to my visit. They explained their experience during the storm as a bit scary but they knew exactly what to do to keep safe, and where they had to relocate to. I was amazed at their calmness and ability to handle such a situation as relocating during a hurricane. Kudos to the agency's support staff!
- ❖ Some people needed to be relocated during power outages.
- ❖ Many people lost power. A few had to be evacuated from their homes.
- ❖ Day service closed for one day. One home lost power for approximately 36 hours.
- ❖ Loss of services
- ❖ Big disruption for affected families.
- ❖ We were closed for two days due to the storm.

- ❖ Many staff members were unable to return to work due to loss of power/water/passable roadways, which limited services delivered to people with disabilities. Many people with disabilities that receive services from my agencies were left homeless after evacuations and flooding of their homes. Most were without food and heat. Public transportation was not available for several days and the agency was closed for two days.
- ❖ Hard to attend classes, complete assignments.
- ❖ People were shell shocked
- ❖ Little interruption of services by our agency.

19. Please describe any outreach efforts your organization has implemented to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are addressed in the aftermath of the storm.

- ❖ We worked the streets and emergency shelter
- ❖ Constant contact with families, via phone, internet or driving to their homes to check in.
- ❖ We were, and remain, prepared for a full evacuation of all our residential program as we did during Storm Alfred. HARC's headquarters served as an excellent shelter and there were food, supplies and blow-up mattresses for all our residents and guests. Food, medication, clothing and other essentials were stocked in preparation for the storm.
- ❖ Gathering donations (clothes, flashlights...)
- ❖ Power outage for three days but we had generator power for the outage.
- ❖ Our staff carried out several preparation steps to ensure we had the ability to provide continuous care and maintain safety.
- ❖ Distributed info about assistance from Family to Family.
- ❖ Working with appropriate community agencies to insure needs are addressed
- ❖ Preparation was made prior to the storm to ensure people had the resources they would need should there be a power outage as well as who to contact from the team if they were in need of assistance.
- ❖ Continued psychiatric and case management services.
- ❖ A lot of information was provided about gaining access to food donations and cleaning supplies. Supplies were delivered to homes when available.
- ❖ The department is working with providers to ensure agency and individual's needs are met.
- ❖ For us it was business as usual, as we cater to those in need.

20. Has your organization been engaged with any state officials on disaster case management efforts?

Response Options	Percent (%)	Number (n)
Yes	11	4
No	42	16
Missing	47	18
Total	100	38

21. Please describe your activities with state officials on disaster case management efforts.

- ❖ We provided DDS with information regarding re-locations as requested.
- ❖ We worked together with community and shelter officials to identify and meet needs

22. Please provide any additional information you think is important for us to know about ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities in Connecticut are addressed in the aftermath of Storm Sandy.

- ❖ CLP needs to be prepared for helping out with live wires that were hanging close to one group home. The response time for this hazard took too long.
- ❖ People's food stamps and disability payments have been late or cut off so people with extreme need are having to wait for care.
- ❖ Training of first responders.
- ❖ To help our clients have a better understanding of what happened and to help them get involved, our clients baked many goods to bring to the crews cleaning up the beach.