



# FLORIDA INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL, Inc.

## Disasters and People with Disabilities

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September 2006

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*Please submit information you would like to contribute to this publication to Molly Gosline at mg@polaris.net*

**The Florida Independent Living Council, Inc. welcomes Don Dawkins to their staff. Mr. Dawkins will be filling the position of Advocacy Coordinator.**

*The following is an edited version of "Disasters and People with Disabilities— Observations and Recommendations" written by Marc Dubin, Esq. Director of Advocacy for the Center for Independent Living of Broward. Mr. Dubin and the CIL of Broward are to be commended for their positive impact on people with disabilities in South Florida following Hurricane Wilma.*

The Center for Independent Living of Broward (the CIL) is a tax exempt nonprofit based in Tamarac, FL. After several years of watching other Florida communities get hit by hurricanes in the winter of 2005, the CIL along with many other South Florida communities was hit by Hurricane Wilma. The CIL's building was damaged and family members of employees were injured. Nevertheless, within days of the hurricane, CIL employees fanned out across Broward County to locate and serve its consumers. The CIL had been concerned about how people with disabilities would handle a disaster well before Hurricane Wilma had arrived. For months, the CIL had been distributing supplies and conducting an educational campaign to over a thousand consumers—helped by a small grant. The CIL had also met with members of the community to educate them about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and about the need of the community to involve people with disabilities in the process before, during and after the storm. After the hurricane, CIL staff distributed ice, food, and water to clients, as well as generators. Planning before the hurricane meant that the CIL was prepared after the hurricane.

### Disasters and People with Disabilities—Observations and recommendations

We recommend the following concerns be addressed as soon as possible:

1. Collaboration with disability advocates needs to be enhanced.
2. Communication with the deaf and hard of hearing communities needs to be enhanced. All announcements need to be accompanied by sign language interpreters and real time captioning.
3. Transportation of people with disabilities needs to be accessible.
4. There needs to be more information disseminated about what is offered in a Red Cross shelter and in a Special Needs shelter.
5. The policy of requiring pre-registration for entry into a Special Needs shelter needs to be modified. Registration should not be mandatory- it should be voluntary.
6. A statewide voluntary registration of all people with disabilities should be established to enhance the ability of responders to know the needs of people with disabilities and increase the ability of people with disabilities to shelter at home.
7. When a individual with a disability is found to have qualified in one county for admission to a Special Needs shelter, that authorization shall be valid statewide.
8. Service providers assisting people with disabilities after a disaster should be issued state or county authorized identification, allowing them access to gasoline.

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### September Calendar

September 6-8, 2006  
CIL of South Florida  
Technical Assistance  
visit

*Please Note*  
Call FILC @ 850-488-5624 prior to teleconference for call in number.

Thursday  
September 7, 2006 1:30 p.m.  
Advocacy Committee

Thursday,  
September 14, 2006

Planning Committee 1:30 p.m.  
Teleconference

Evaluation Committee 2:30 p.m.  
Teleconference

Thursday  
September 21, 2006

Finance Committee 1:30 p.m.  
Teleconference

Thursday  
September 28, 2006

Executive Committee 2:30 p.m.  
Teleconference

Full Council 3:30  
Teleconference

*Activities initiated/hosted by the Florida Independent Living Council are open to the public. For information about these or any other FILC events please contact the FILC office @ (850)488-5624.*

*(continued from page 1—Disasters and People with Disabilities)*

9. Red Cross shelters should be trained in how to address the needs of people with disabilities, and should work collaboratively with the disability community to better understand how to serve them.

10. Red Cross volunteers working in shelters should receive training in the ADA.

11. Red Cross shelters should be required to keep track of the number of people served and the number and nature of people with disabilities served.

12. Families utilizing Special Needs shelters should not be separated from one another.

13. FEMA and the County should ensure that all materials are available in alternative formats and that sign language interpreters be made available free of charge when paperwork is being filled out that is lengthy or difficult to understand.

14. We recommend that efforts be undertaken to enhance the ability of consumers to get enough medication to last at least three months. The county and state governments should work with doctors, the legislature, and insurance companies to allow this to occur.

15. A list of drivers and agencies engaging in transportation of people with disabilities to shelters should be developed, and the drivers should undergo training on disability sensitivity. Drivers who fail to show up should be identified and disciplined.

16. Cell phone companies should consider reducing the fee for the use of cell phone minutes during the period of the disaster.

Several consumers reported that they assisted others whose phones did not work, allowing them to make calls to friends, family, and emergency workers, thereby running up their phone bill.

#### **Recommendations:**

We recommend that cell phone companies consider reducing the fees for the use of cell phones during and after the hurricane, for a reasonable period of time, in recognition of how these efforts to assist others enhanced the safety of the community. It is also recommended that late fees be waived.

17. Several consumers reported that FPL issued a estimated bill immediately after the hurricane, and several challenged the accuracy of the estimates. Is FPL planning to amend this bill and issue refunds?

#### **Recommendations:**

We recommend that Florida Power and Light (FPL) review the estimated bills and issue refunds. We also recommend that FPL waive late fees. We also recommend that FPL maintain a registry of people with disabilities who require life sustaining equipment.

18. The Food Stamp distribution program failed to provide adequate notice to the disability community, was conducted on a holiday weekend, and failed to notify people with disabilities that the Center of Independent Living of Broward was a distribution point for the program.

#### **Recommendations:**

We recommend that distribution programs not be conducted on a holiday weekends, and that in the future, efforts be undertaken to enhance awareness that the Center for Independent Living of Broward is a distribution point for the program.

## **"Independence Worth Preserving"**

### **Centers for Independent Living**

**Suncoast Center for Independent Living** serving Sarasota and Manatee Counties, (941) 351-9545

**Coalition for Independent Living Options** serving Okeechobee, St. Lucie, Martin, and Palm Beach Counties, (561) 966-4288

**Center for Independent Living of Broward** serving Broward County, (954) 722-6400

**Disability Resource Center** serving Holmes, Jackson, Washington, Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Liberty, and Franklin Counties, (850) 769-6890

**Center for Independent Living of the Florida Keys** serving the Florida Keys, (305) 453-3491

**Center for Independent Living of North Central Florida** serving Hamilton, Suwanee, Columbia, Lafayette, Dixie, Gilchrist, Union, Bradford, Alachua, Levy, Marion, Putnam, Citrus, Sumter, and Hernando Counties, (352) 378-7474

**Self Reliance, Inc.** serving Hillsborough County, (813) 375-3965

**Center for Independent Living of South Florida** serving Dade County, (305) 751-8025

**Independent Living Resource Center of Northeast Florida** serving Baker, Nassau, Duval, Clay, and St. Johns Counties, (904) 399-8484

**Center for Independent Living of Southwest Florida** serving Charlotte, Glades, Lee, Hendry, and Collier Counties, (239) 277-1447

**Center for Independent Living of Northwest Florida** serving Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties, (850) 595-5566

**Caring and Sharing Center for Independent Living** serving Pasco and Pinellas Counties, (727) 577-0065

**Ability 1st** serving Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, Jefferson, Madison, and Taylor Counties, (850) 575-9621

**Victory Lane Center for Independent Living** serving Flagler and Volusia Counties, (386) 671-1960

**Space Coast Center for Independent Living** serving Brevard and Indian River Counties, (321) 784-9008

**Center for Independent Living of Central Florida** serving Polk, Hardee, DeSoto, Highlands, Lake, Seminole, Orange, and Osceola Counties, (407) 623-1070

*Please feel free to distribute this letter to any other persons/organizations that may be interested.*

**It is the mission of the Florida Independent Living Council to assist and advocate for people with disabilities in achieving equal opportunities. Our vision is to foster change via leadership, collaboration and visibility.**