Creative New Jersey’s Statewide Conversations – COVID-19 Response

Call #6 – May 6, 2020

Editor’s note: This summary covers the general topics and resources shared during the sixth call in a series of statewide conversations hosted by Creative New Jersey to bring together our network and help people across our state keep connected, share information, and unite in solidarity as we navigate the Coronavirus response in New Jersey.

To register for Creative New Jersey’s Statewide Conversations on COVID-19 Response, click the following link: https://bit.ly/34WETWm. For screen reader-friendly registration, use the following link: https://forms.gle/9kUrVvKr8akMENA6 Calls take place every Wednesday in April and May 2020 (April 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29; May 6, 13, 20, and 27) at 10am.

SUMMARY

Topic: Pandemic Accessibility for All Abilities: How people with disabilities are navigating the COVID-19 reality

Guest speaker #1: Joseph Geleta, Director – Office of Emergency Management, NJ Dept. of Human Services
http://www.ready.nj.gov/

Guest speaker #2: Scott Elliott, Executive Director – Progressive Center for Independent Living
http://pcil.org/

Guest speaker #3: Dr. Bernice Davis, Psy.D., Director – New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, NJ Dept. of Human Services
https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi/home/

This call was developed in partnership with Eyes Like Mine, Inc. (https://www.eyeslikemine.org/) and the Center for Non-Profits (http://www.njnonprofits.org/).

Resources shared by speakers and participants during the call include:
• Programs and services for people with disability, access and functional needs
• Registries and services for emergency communications
• Crisis Counseling and Mental Health hotlines and services
• Apps and tech solutions for improving access and communication to make interactions more accessible

Watch the full recording of this conversation here: https://youtu.be/QdBkRV39IOU
Joseph Geleta (Office of Emergency Management, NJ Dept. of Human Services)
http://www.ready.nj.gov/

About the NJ Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and how it operates:
New Jersey’s Office of Emergency Management works closely with NJ’s state police. The state police coordinate emergency management in our state which is fairly unique – in fact, Michigan is the only other state to have state police coordinate management. Joseph Geleta is the Director of NJ’s OEM.

- OEM works in coordination with Colonel Pat Callahan at the NJ State Police in putting together the state’s emergency operations plan.
- Broken in 15 distinct units
- Dept. of Human Services manages unit #6, which is mass care and emergency assistance, which includes activities including: sheltering, feeding, distribution of emergency supplies and family reunification.

Right now, OEM is working in coordination with state’s Emergency Operations Center because it has been activated in response to this pandemic.

- Emergency Support Function #8 is managed by the NJ Department of Health, and obviously they have a lot on their plate.
- OEM has been supporting our Dept. of Health colleagues.
- Most disasters start local and end local - so when the local office of emergency management (for a municipality) becomes strained, they request assistance from the county OEM, and then the state OEM will assist if needed, working in partnership with agencies across the state.
- If the State OEM becomes strained, we ask for assistance at the federal level from FEMA

How NJ’s State OEM is tackling COVID-19 and people with Disability, Access and Functional Needs (DAFN):
In response to the coronavirus, NJ received a Presidentially declared disaster back in March - DR4488 – which opened up the state to FEMA assistance:

- Those federal resources are in Category B, which includes “public assistance” such as emergency protective measures; and also “individual assistance” which is strictly limited to crisis counselling.
- NJ’s OEM has many partners that help us out in mass care – it’s not just the county and local. We are also working with a lot of community-based, faith-based, non-government organizations, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs) during times of disaster. It’s the relationships we foster outside of government which help aid in disaster response.

This is a very different disaster than we have encountered, it's not like a flood or a hurricane- It's a never-ending marathon

- This is a 24/7 job to help the people we serve which is why the Crisis Counseling Center is so important especially for us in OEM - which is why it is important we all take a break.

**There is a Crisis Counseling Helpline available 7 days a week 8am - 8pm (866 202 HELP 4357)**
- We recommend you take that break and speak to someone when you're going through a crisis.
Commissioner Carol Johnson is very proactive in making sure our vulnerable and disability, access and functional need (DAFN) populations are served throughout this process. Early on she sent out email to our county OEM partners to make sure that they are connecting with those vulnerable populations.

- NJ’s OEM is connecting with vulnerable populations either through Register Ready - NJ’s special needs registry for disasters (information submitted to the registry is confidential):
  - For Registry Assistance, dial 211 (toll-free) and an operator will assist you in registering.
  - Alerts - Mobile / Text (SMS) & E-Mail:
    - NIXLE - Subscribe to the NJ State Police on Nixle Connect
      New Jersey residents can register to receive messages by sending a text message with their zip code to 888777 (data rates may apply depending on your plan). Online registration is also available at www.nixle.com.
  - For Registry Assistance, dial 211 (toll-free) and an operator will assist you in registering.
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      New Jersey residents can register to receive messages by sending a text message with their zip code to 888777 (data rates may apply depending on your plan). Online registration is also available at www.nixle.com.
  - Links to County Offices of Emergency Management, websites, social media and alert systems: http://www.ready.nj.gov/about/association.html
- OEM also works with the various divisions of NJ’s Department of Health & Human Services, which are thoroughly engaged in supporting our populations throughout the crisis. Those divisions include:
  - Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD):
    https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/home/index.html
  - Division of Disability Services (DDS):
    https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds/home/index.html
  - Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH):
    https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddhh/index.shtml
  - Division of Aging Services (DoAS):
    https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/index.html
  - Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):
    https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dmhas/home/index.html
  - Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI):
    https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi/home/index.html
- Wellness checks: For those who feel socially isolated, we are conducting wellness checks - simple phone calls conducted by our county OEMs, Division of Aging Services, and many volunteers.
  - For example, NJ’s OEM and Division of Aging Services, in coordination with area agencies on aging are making sure that seniors who may need groceries delivered have volunteers who can help. Volunteers are also helping at food banks to get food boxes out.

Commissioner Carol Johnson was very proactive and received some much-needed funding:

- Received $36 million in funding to support NJ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP benefits)
- Received $24 million from the “Families First Act” to support Disability, Access and Functional Needs populations, especially those who need direct support service providers who wanted wage increases, because they are going out into the front lines
- Received $6.3 million for the feeding of our seniors, for those who are socially isolated and need food delivered
- Received $20 million to support emergency childcare
Weekly calls that OEM is running:

- County Access and Functional Needs coordinators
- Core advisory groups that are linked in distinctly to our Disability and Access Functional Needs (DAFN) community.
- Statewide Centers for Independent Living: https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds/resources/cntrindlivindex.html
- It’s important that we continue staying in contact DAFN population during this “marathon” and as we may potentially see spikes of new Coronavirus cases as we head into the fall.

Resources Joseph mentioned during the call:

- The NJ Department of Human Services Coronavirus website: https://nj.gov/humanservices/coronavirus.html
- How you can plan and prepare for disasters: https://www.nj.gov/njoem/plan-prepare/index.shtml
- NJ State Crisis Hotline: 866-202-HELP (4357)

Comments and discussion with OEM included:

One participant raised the impact of masks on people who are hard-of-hearing or deaf:

C: One of the critical issues for people who are deaf or suffer hearing loss are MASKS. MASKS are causing huge issues with folks being able to understand people. The mask reduces the decibel level to the person speaking and does not allow for lip reading or facial expression recognition. It is important to be aware of this and come prepared with communication tools (paper and pencil, note writing, ipads, phones, apps, google transcribe, otter). Masks are impacting everyone with a hearing loss, especially seniors.

Masks with a clear insert are good for social interactions but not usable in the medical setting because they do not meet the rigorous filtering standards that our hospital workers need to keep themselves safe. https://www.hearinglikeme.com/what-to-know-about-clear-medical-masks-for-lip-reading/

Scott Elliott (Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL))

http://pcil.org/

Scott Elliott is the Executive Director of the Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL), Chair of the NJ Association of Centers for Independent Living, and is a members of the NJ OEM’s statewide NJ GAINED group.
mentioned above by Joseph Geleta. Scott has been working in the independent living and emergency preparedness education fields for about 20 years to help people with disabilities, their families, human service providers and first responders be better prepared in times of disaster. Contact Scott by email at: Scott.elliott@pcil.org or by phone at: 609-581-4500.

Mission of the centers is to provide core services and support to people with disabilities.

- To be clear, PCIL and our sister organizations are not housing providers: we assist people to find their own housing, among other services. There are 500 centers across the nation, 11 in NJ.
- We are governed by people with disabilities, our staff, our board of directors are made up of people with disabilities.
- These centers for independent living work with anyone with a disability and any age, including with our aging populations and school-aged populations.
- We are advocacy and community based, and have been around since the early 70s in California where they were started.
- Our centers cover every county in NJ – some centers cover multiple counties
  - Find the center nearest you at the NJ State Independent Living Council website: https://www.njsilc.org/

COVID-19 Response:

- We are learning that no matter how much we prepare, you are never totally prepared for what comes your way.
  - PCIL COVID-19 resources: http://pcil.org/covid-19-resources/
- Since the middle of March our centers have made contact with 15,000 people with disabilities in NJ
  - Wellness checks is a big part of what we are doing.
- Properly equipped homes: The pandemic has really increased the challenges for many of us and we have folks that are not fully equipped with what they need at their homes, from ramps and technology to generators during a loss of power can be major challenges for people with disabilities.
- Food: Access to food is a big issue across the state. The numbers of people in need in North, Central and South Jersey are currently changing.
- Personal care assistance is a big problem
  - We are working to ensure the families that are home are getting the personal care assistance that they need, and
  - that those personal care assistants are taking precautions to stay safe and contain the possible spread of the virus to their clients.
- Mental health: We are staying focused on mental health around this as well to help families and individuals in a positive way.
  - PCIL is holding weekly Zoom calls focused on positive activities including different forms of art and music to help relieve stress and help people keep busy. We’re looking at doing more of this.
- Other kinds of services range from helping people fill out forms for receiving unemployment, to, job hunting, to assisting someone who had to leave a group home and needed to rent a hospital bed until they could get the bed they needed, to sourcing masks, to working with volunteers to do grocery shopping and picking up medications.
- We working with Project Freedom campuses to help their residents with access to basic needs, as well. https://www.projectfreedom.org/
Advising people on what to do, what not to do, and how we can help them in any way possible regardless of disability, age, or need.

Scott’s colleague in Atlantic County’s Center also said that even if someone is referred to them and they aren’t able to directly assist they can work to connect people to other resources and organizations that may be able to do so.

Dr. Bernice Davis, Psy.D. (Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBNI), NJ Dept. of Human Services)

https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi/home/

Dr. Davis, Director of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), has worked with the NJ Dept. of Human Services for 26 years and with CBVI for 16 of those years. Contact the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired: Call 877-685-8878 or AskCBVI@dhs.state.nj.us.

About the Commission:

CBVI’s mission is to promote and provide services to persons who are blind, deaf, deaf/blind, and visually impaired. All services are from infancy to senior citizens.

- The Commission is under the NJ Department of Humans Services (DHS). The DHS covers all people with or without disabilities. NJ has an estimated 259,000 residents who have varying levels of vision loss. The Commission has been of service to NJ since 1910, making 2020 its 110th anniversary of work and service to NJ.
- CBVI has regional offices statewide. Main Administrative office is in Newark (153 Halsey St Newark,NJ 07102) but has regional offices in New Brunswick (Joseph Kohn Training Center), Newark, Freehold, Cherry Hill, Atlantic City.
- In all of those regional offices we offer services in:
  - Vocational Rehabilitation - focused on maintaining employment, training for employment
  - Independent living services - eye health, diabetic education, orientation and mobility training, i.e how to travel and move around neighborhood or workspaces
  - Project Best - community eye screening service, referral to doctors who specialize in vision, including emergency eye health services
  - ASPIRE (peer to peer support program) started in 2015 which started with 23 care support groups and today has 63. (more on this below)
- CBVI provides a number of different programs and services which can be found on their website: https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi/services/

COVID-19 Response:

- Resources and referrals: One of things we have been doing during the pandemic is provide people with resources/refer people; help them get food, food delivery systems, prescription access, and listen to concerns with transportation. CBVI helps connect people to other DHS divisions for assistance on a variety of areas.
• **Peer Support:** CBVI wants to highlight the ASPIRE program – Peer to peer group meetings occur throughout the state and help to combat social isolation. If people are dealing with visual adjustments or just need to connect, these groups are key.

• **Educational services:** With social distancing, we’ve had to create a remote platform to provide educational services.
  o CVBI Team is still working hard to offer quality education services, and we have been using remote services to help our population learn and compete with sighted peers.
  o Teachers are using assistive technologies, including teleconferencing or video conferencing, to be able to communicate with students and teachers
  o Able to continue teaching braille
  o Specialists teach assistive technology for students or people who are working
  o Library Equal Access Program (LEAP): call The Talking Book and Braille Center at 800-792-8322

• **Blind Business owners and Entrepreneurs:** Federal program that helps blind entrepreneurs and small business owners, many are devastated and we have had phone calls with them to see what services we can offer
  o CBVI Having conversation with small business owners to provide guidance on the unemployment process and just letting them talk sometimes if needed.

• **Wellness calls:** CBVI is reaching out to people to check in and see how they can be of service.

• **Staying connected:** Calling all the consumers that the commission works with to continue to create connections and communication to see what people need. NJ Department of Humans Services Divisions are all working closely together Independent living programs, service programs and vocational programs. All departments work closely together and help each other with services

• **Healthcare worker guide:** The Commission recently developed a healthcare guide for health professionals to distribute and help bridge the gap in understanding how to work with people with different abilities.

**Questions for CBVI included:**

**Q:** We have some colleagues on the call today who do not traditionally service communities of people with disabilities. We want to close that gap. During this time are their ways where all of us can be more inclusive in all of the work that we are doing in order to make sure we are involving our neighbors who have disabilities?

**A:** CBVI has the Aspire Program (peer to peer) which is incredibly diverse and has speakers to connect and provide resources. Have a community outreach coordinator and social workers, so if there is an encounter for someone with a different need, CBVI may be able to address it through a different group or department of DHS.

Scott Elliott: The independent living world tries to build relationships with ANY organization (chambers, rotaries, nonprofits, for-profits) to be able to be all inclusive to provide as much assistance as needed for ANYONE in need. 20% of the NJ population are people with disabilities. There are also a lot of folks with hidden disabilities (mental health).
Q: Thank you to Dr. Davis, my care team of Quintina, Ralph and Toni have helped me immensely. Since they always take good care of me, I'm wondering, is there a stress management program in place to help the case managers and mobility specialists decompress and take care of themselves during this challenging time? Thank you for all that you do.

A: In regard to orientation and mobility specialists: DHS has put out emails that the employee assistance program is available, which includes counseling and support services for the state staff, regardless of department or service. It is very much needed right now. There are also local and larger resources for therapeutic counseling, which also impact mental health issues.

Scott Elliott: There are many local resources for therapeutic counseling. Mental health care impacts people with mobility issues, so please feel free to contact me and you can share my email. Contact Scott by email at: Scott.elliott@pcil.org or by phone at: 609-581-4500.

Q: It’s awesome that you teach braille. Is this only for the those with vision loss or impairment? Could anyone learn this?

A: The commission for the blind has eligibility requirements for those we teach. Only for persons who are deemed eligible.

RESOURCES

Additional resources shared by participants on our call:

Additional resources suggested:
- food delivery meals on wheels for seniors: www.gogograndparent.com
- NJ211 – Dial 211 from your phone is also a statewide resource by dialing 211
- Focusing on accessibility is huge - all organizations can work on making their workplaces more accessible and to minimize bias in their employment and hiring practices. Also, a lot of setups for remote work would be extremely helpful as longer-term options for employees with disabilities or to help others with disabilities

Upcoming programs from Eyes Like Mine and the Greater Vision Foundation:
- Eyes Like Mine: https://www.eyeslikemine.org/
- Eyes Like Mine Audio Book Club: Call 978-990-5223  Access Code: 2561166
  o Register for the Audio Book Club here: https://forms.gle/8V9FLqHNGVYbbCm96
- Eyes Like Mine – Mimosas with the Mamas on Saturday May 9th 1pm-3pm. Register here: https://forms.gle/ZQu3pwB8cAYpVFNh8

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info@creativenj.org          www.creativenj.org
• Eyes Like Mine Cut the Corona Karaoke Hotline (2pm-4pm) and Facebook Watch Party (4pm-5pm) every Sunday: Call 978-990-5233  Access Code: 2561166
• Greater Vision Foundation’s Blind Talent 20/20 – June 2020. Register for auditions at www.blindtalent.org or email gvfblindtalent@gmail.com

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**Creative New Jersey – Accessibility Tech**

**Apps, Tips and Tricks to help people of all abilities connect**

Creative New Jersey has been working with community members to be more inclusive in our programming. As we continue to grow into improving our accessibility to all people, we have learned about technology that can help people across our state connect. We have some suggested smartphone app technology that you may want to try. We have included information on apps to assist:

- Low vision, blind, and sighted individuals
- Hard of hearing, deaf and hearing individuals
- Tips on open captioning, closed captioning and large print documents
- Translation for speakers of different languages

Website links are included for each app, and you can use your phone’s camera to scan the QR codes listed, as well. Scanning the QR codes with your Smartphone should prompt you to open the app store on your phone. You can also open your smartphone’s app store and search for the app by name.

This short list of apps, tips and tricks is by no means comprehensive – this is just where we have started and we welcome other suggestions, tips and tricks from all of you! Please share your thoughts with us by emailing Director of Programming Kacy O’Brien at kobrien@creativenj.org.

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**Accessibility**

**Smartphone Apps**

There are several smartphone apps that you can download for free that can assist with accessibility – for everyone, not just those who are differently-abled. You can search your phone’s app store for options, and here are some suggestions:
For navigating physical spaces with low-vision / blindness:
Aira (pronounced Eye-Rah) is a visual navigation app that allows you to call into a center that connects you with a live person who can help you navigate spaces, read signs, and more. The navigator will access your smartphone’s camera and will see what the phone is pointed at in real-time. NOTE: calls that last under five minutes are free. Calls over five minutes have a cost to them – contact Aira for more details. Link to Aira: https://aira.io/

For communicating between hard-of-hearing / deaf / hearing individuals:
Live Transcribe is an Android phone app and eyeHear is an iPhone App that, like voice text-messaging, transcribes what a person is saying in real time and displays it on the screen of your phone to be read. This app is most effective in one-to-one or small group conversations, and may be less effective in larger groups and settings with background noise. Link to Live Transcribe (android): https://bit.ly/35FKiRZ. Link to eyeHear - iOS (iphones): https://apple.co/2SKyAR8
Continuation of apps for communicating between hard-of-hearing / deaf / hearing individuals:

**eyeHear iPhone App**

![eyeHear iPhone App](image)

**iPhone QR code**

![SCAN ME](image)

**Open Captioning**

We recently learned about a way to do open captioning (real-time captions) at live events in a way that can be free or low-cost. This is not an ideal option, but it can help organizations and groups with tight budgets to take the first steps to making programs accessible. While this method may not perfectly capture all words and does not capture punctuation, it is a low-cost solution for open captioning.

This open captioning requires a Chrome Browser. Open a Google doc where you want the text to be displayed. Click the “Tools” menu at the top of the Google doc and choose “Voice Typing”. You will see a microphone icon appear of the left of your screen. You can choose the language that the text will display in to help with word recognition (don’t speak in English but choose Spanish as the language – it’s not a translator). Click the microphone icon to turn it on and speak. You will see the text appear in the Google doc. If you pause for too long while speaking, the microphone will turn off and if you click away into another program the microphone will stop recording. You will need to click it again to reactivate it.
If you’re interested in learning more about how the Google Voice Typing open captioning set up works for your own organization or group, you can speak with Creative New Jersey Director of Programming, Kacy O’Brien. We learned about this from Thyson Halley at the Newark Public Library, so you can also reach out to him to learn more about this technology. We are still working on ways to be able to integrate open captioning (real-time captions) on Zoom calls.

**Closed Captioning**

Closed captions (transcription of a video that is applied as captions after the video is completed) are available as an automatic feature for most videos when uploaded to YouTube. Once you have uploaded a video to YouTube and waited for captions to be generated, you can edit the captions in the Details section of the video you are editing. Scroll to “Subtitles and CC for original video language” and you will see “English by YouTube (automatic).” Click the three dots to get a dropdown menu and select “Edit on Classical Studio.” You will see a new screen that has a column of all the captions for your video on the left side of the screen and the video itself on the right side of the screen. Click the “Edit” button above the video. This will open up your captions for editing.

**Large Print documents**

Large print documents can always help. Make sure they are high contrast, without formatting like italics that can make the text hard to read. Also make sure that fonts are easy to read (no cursive fonts). Enlarge the font size to 36.

**Multilingual Translation Apps / Aplicaciones de traducción multilingüe / Aplicativos de tradução multilíngue / Applications de traduction multilingues**

There are smart phone apps that can assist you with translating from one language to another. These work best in one-to-one conversations, and may not be as effective in group or noisier settings. You can search your app store for free translators. Google Translate is one that we have used, which works on both Android and iPhones, and is free to use. Link to Google Translate: [https://bit.ly/3dn7x6b](https://bit.ly/3dn7x6b)
Español
Existen aplicaciones de teléfonos inteligentes que pueden ayudarlo a traducir de un idioma a otro. Funcionan mejor en conversaciones uno a uno y pueden no ser tan efectivas en entornos grupales o ruidosos. Puede buscar traductores gratuitos en su tienda de aplicaciones. Google Translate es uno que hemos utilizado, que funciona tanto en Android como en iPhone, y es de uso gratuito.

Português
Existem aplicativos para smartphones que podem ajudá-lo na tradução de um idioma para outro. Eles funcionam melhor em conversas individuais e podem não ser tão eficazes em configurações de grupo ou mais ruidosas. Você pode pesquisar tradutores gratuitos na sua loja de aplicativos. O Google Translate é aquele que usamos, que funciona tanto no Android quanto no iPhone, e é gratuito.

Français
Il existe des applications pour téléphones intelligents qui peuvent vous aider à traduire d’une langue à une autre. Ceux-ci fonctionnent mieux dans les conversations en tête-à-tête et peuvent ne pas être aussi efficaces en groupe ou dans des environnements plus bruyants. Vous pouvez rechercher des traducteurs gratuits dans votre App Store. Google Translate est celui que nous avons utilisé, qui fonctionne à la fois sur Android et sur iPhone, et est gratuit.

Creative New Jersey’s programming is made possible because of leadership support from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

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