



Joan C. Barnish
Director of Communications
Phone: (860) 418-6044
Cell: (203) 233-0150
joan.barnish@ct.gov

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DDS and Providers Still Amazed at Unprecedented October 2011 Storm

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and their Private provider partners were faced with extraordinary circumstances when the famous October Storm Alfred slammed Connecticut. Dropping over 24 inches around the state and knocking out power to over 850,000 locations, the storm left in its wake, an unprecedented challenge.

As power outages continued for days on end, it became evident that many of the individuals served by the DDS system needed to be moved to different locations. In total over 400 different sites were relocated to hotels, other group homes, provider facilities or employee and family homes. It was a huge undertaking to make sure that everyone had electricity, heat and food.

Here are some of the amazing stories of DDS and Provider staffs that faced the challenges and ultimately found solutions that protected and safe guarded the individuals in their care.

One Group Home Helping Another

Alternative, Inc.

West Region

The first snowstorm, as the Residential Director of Redwood group home, definitely let me know how much I could count on my staff and the agency I work for!

That October week without power started with stranded staff due to impassable roads and even our driveway because of down trees and power lines. Once the roads were passable, staff rose to the challenge that lay ahead.

Quickly our agency came together and provided us with a welcoming temporary home to reside at as long as we needed. Another group home, Fieldstone was 35 minutes away and I was impressed how easily my staff worked together to rearranging their schedules, so they made sense and worked for everyone.

While at our temporary home, we were made to feel as comfortable as possible. There were lots of laughs over the course of the week and several offers of help even though we were imposing on their daily routines.

We worked by flashlights when returning to the house to grab clean clothes for our residents. As the days continued to pass without power, doing laundry at our own homes and handing off necessities to each other's houses on our way to and from work, so our residents could have as much normalcy as possible.

Our staff did their part to make the relocation as much of a fun "adventure" for the residents as possible with lots of help from our new friends at the Fieldstone group home. We worked as a team and more importantly as a family and got through a difficult week. I could not be more proud of how we worked together.

Suzanne Benz

Residential Director

Waterbury ARC Opens Its Doors

Waterbury ARC

West Region

In reading the Commissioner's Notes to Community Providers, Commissioner Macy is looking for stories that show our commitment to the people we serve. I hate to write one part of this because it may sound like I am "blowing my own horn", but as the Commissioner states, he needs stories. So here is ours:

Luckily, our facility never lost power so we opened our building overnight to staff, consumers and their families who were without power. Our facility has a fully equipped kitchen, handicapped accessible shower, a gymnasium and several rooms with sofas, loungers and televisions. Several individuals and families make use of our facility for the duration of their power outage.

One of our staff members works a second job at a residential facility. Their evacuation site made it impossible for one of our consumers to attend his day program and the consumer was very upset by this. Our staff member, Joe Ocasio, took the consumer home to stay with him until the consumer's residence regained power.

Finally, one of our consumers who lives alone with his father was found by our staff in a shelter in Cheshire. His elderly father had been hospitalized when he fell looking at the storm damage and broke several bones. The consumer has several issues and is on a strict regime of medications and living at the shelter was not an option. I took him in to live with my family for three weeks until another alternate placement could be found for him. Right after the storm, it was discovered that the home where he lived with his father posed a health and safety risk so he would not be able to return until it is fixed to make it habitable again. The father has been in a nursing home but is back in the hospital and is gravely ill. My family maintains close ties with the consumer, his case manager and the father's attorney and conservator to ease all the transitions he has been through and will continue to go through.

Deb Vitarelli

Executive Director

Network Response to Storm Alfred, An Astonishing Feat

*Network, Inc
North Region*

The devastation wrought on different areas of Connecticut by Storm Alfred borders on the indescribable. Of course, *all* of Network's clients, staff, and services were *hugely* affected by the monumental upheaval caused by the storm.

A total of ten Network group homes lost power, and the Andover Main office was consequently transformed into an emergency shelter. The way staff members (many of whom obviously were without basic services themselves) came together, cooperated, put aside their own basic needs, and went above and beyond their duties to rise to meet this challenge is not only to be highly commended, but an amazing feat, to say the least.

The instances of the professional, adept, and efficient measures staff took are too numerous to mention, but I will touch on a few. Group home managers and directors worked around the clock, sometimes twenty four hours straight, to meet clients' basic needs and ensure their safety. They not only bought groceries, cooked and served all meals, checked on clients every half an hour all night, but maintained their composure and caring, positive attitudes despite being physically taxed and pushed to the limit. Nursing staff were on call twenty-four hours and also put in many hours at our makeshift shelter. The maintenance department was available at all times for emergency back-up, and worked hard every day to set-up and break-down sleeping accommodations and to address safety issues.

Direct care staff stepped up to put in extra hours for others who called out, again, all in the interest of meeting clients' physical, emotional, and social needs without interruption. The Andover CEP staffs were extremely patient with the disruption to day program clients' routines, and stepped up to pitch in whenever needed. Finally, SLA and CRS staff addressed client needs whenever they arose, whether it be providing an adequate supply of non-perishable foods or making sure clients stayed warm.

To say that I am proud of and impressed by how staff responded to this crisis is an understatement. Staff already demonstrated their commitment and commendable work ethic after Hurricane Irene, and Storm Alfred has demanded an even higher commitment to clients an even greater need for extra support and services. Congratulations to all of you who were involved in this effort to provide consistently high-quality services to our clients without interruption and with personal fortitude and generosity.

*Beverly Farrand
Office Manager*

CRI Camps "Out" to Make the Best Out of Storm Alfred

Community Residences, Inc.

Community Residences Inc. lost power in just about every residential facility we have during the freak October storm. Many homes have generators, but several failed or ran out of fuel during the first couple of days without power. One home had their generator fail and so much damage to trees on the street that evacuating became a feat in itself.

Staff from all locations pulled together and created evacuation locations at two day program sites that still had power. CRI housed, over several days, five children's homes, two Adult CLA's, a few individuals that live on their own and several ICF homes at these locations. Staff relocated with them and made the inconvenience as fun as possible with movies, video games, activities etc.

Many individuals living in their own apartments offered shelter to friends that had lost power and allowed them to stay with them during the outage. Day programs were open for business during this time and not only served as a relocation site for programs without power but as a base to do day time activities for day participants as well.

As homes came back on line and people went home, other homes shifted relocation sites to spread out and have more comfortable accommodations. From Saturday to the following Saturday when our final programs came back on line with power, the supervisors, staff and individuals hunkered down, camped out and made the best of the bad situation.

Sherrri Mallinson

West Region

Vinfen and Their Amazing Employees

Vinfen

Michael Duncan

"For being snow-man-of-all-trades during Alfred, a surprise late October snowstorm. Alfred may have left thousands of people in the dark but couldn't dim the love and generosity of the staff of Vinfen Connecticut. Michael, Vinfen's Facilities Director, worked tirelessly around the clock to get generators, gas and needed supplies to make sure the individuals we support were safe and warm throughout the week of Storm Alfred and its aftermath.

Ronald Jameson, Todd Turner, Gerald Smith, Shawn Price and Khamisi Montgomery went above and beyond to keep the program running as smoothly as possible during the storm and the power outages. The staff came in early, reached out to other programs to offer assistance during the storm, and made sure all the individuals in the home were comfortable, got gas and helped another program get gas. They made sure everything was in order until the power was restored.

Luis Huertas and Frank Meneses; for being very helpful to meet the needs of others in the aftermath of Storm Alfred. Luis and Frank also very kindly offered their home to have individuals served in a safe and warm place without hesitating. For one individual who refused to relocate to any other program, he willingly stayed with Frank, and expressed that he had a wonderful week.

Nikolas Otero- for being very helpful in the aftermath of Storm Alfred. Nikolas went above and beyond by communicating his availability meet any need and by doing so was a positive support to several programs throughout the week. Several managers stated that Nik made a huge difference through his flexibility and positive presence.

Brevon Williams-went above and beyond to open his home to Max, an individual served, who could not safely stay in his home after Storm Alfred due to loss of power. Brevon and his family welcomed Max and provided a positive experience for him during such a difficult time, a gesture in which Max and his family very much appreciative of. Max was particularly complementary of Brevon's mother's wonderful home cooking. Max and his family recently nominated Brevon as a staff of the year at Vinfen's local Heroes event.

Nancy Bowden- who, in the heart of Storm Alfred, came in to cook and manage the day program where several of the individuals were displaced from their homes due to power outages. Nancy, who is Vinfen's Fiscal Manager, showed great leadership, and made a huge difference in such a complicated circumstance.

In photo: Nancy Bowden, Fiscal Manager and Elisa Velardo, VP.

Donald Canty-for his exceptional work with supporting an individual with significant behavioral challenges stay calm during the aftermath of Storm Alfred. Donald's positive can do attitude and huge smile put all around him at ease. Donald went above and beyond to make himself available during the storm and in the days thereafter.

ELISA VELARDO

"For opening her home and heart during Alfred, a surprise late October snowstorm. Alfred may have left thousands of people in the dark but couldn't dim the love and generosity of the staff of Vinfen Connecticut." Elisa was nominated by the Vinfen staff and managers for her support and presence during the Storm and it's aftermath.

Executive Director Thankful to West Hartford Church *Jewish Association for Community Living*

To the parishioners of St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church:

This letter is being written so that the parish community is aware of the role our church played in assisting those in need during the recent snowstorm and extensive power outages that resulted.

Some of you know that I am the Executive Director of the Jewish Association for Community Living, a private nonprofit organization that provides residential supports to men and women with developmental disabilities. We operate three group homes and support several other individuals who live in their own apartments and condominiums. All of our programs are in West Hartford, one of the harder hit communities by this storm.

Due to the widespread nature of the outages, many of our emergency relocation options were not available to us. All three of our group homes and several apartments and condominium complexes where our folks live were without power. So too were hotels, the families of our residents and many of our employees that we would have relied on. We had to relocate 28 of our 34 men and women. Late Sunday afternoon of that weekend, we still had 10 residents who were facing a second night in their homes without lights or heat as we were out of options. Then I had an idea.

At 4:00 I approached Fr. Tom, explained our circumstances and asked if the remaining 10 residents and a handful of their support staff could take up residence downstairs in the Urban Center. There wasn't one second of hesitation in his response. Of course we could. I have rarely felt such relief.

Little did anyone know just how long the outages would last, although I have no doubt if we could have predicted we'd be there until Friday, the answer would have been the same; all are welcome in this place.

On Sunday, October 30th and the days that followed, the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare was alive and well at St. Patrick-St. Anthony. On behalf of our residents, their families and our employees, I want to publicly thank Fr. Tom and all the wonderful people of our great parish who rolled out the welcome mat during some very trying times.

Peace and All Good,

Denis Geary

Executive Director