The RESILIENCE PROJECT: Diversity & Disability in Disaster Preparedness
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Abstract: The Resilience Project” is a business approach to foster resilience through educational programming that connects youth to stories of those in the interface between disability, workforce development, and disaster management. The project consists of a series of workshops in emergency planning and training, engaging public safety officials, students and schools in service to elderly and disabled people in their communities.

Introduction:

Three emerging themes—disaster, disability, and the need for workforce development—are converging in the development of communities and businesses, both at home and abroad, against a backdrop of declining public resources and increasing public service needs. These pressures are straining communities while at the same time depriving the younger generation of career opportunities, even in the face of ever-increasing public emergencies. The elderly and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable to weather, health and other emergencies which can overwhelm public resources, threaten the safety of the population, and undermine economic development, most seriously in remote and rural communities. This presentation suggests a way in which to address unmet needs in preparedness and response through a youth training program focused on risk and emergency management and designed to generate economic and personal growth while serving the immediate needs of their communities.

The Resilience Project proposes a business approach to serving the needs of vulnerable populations by engaging youth and local citizens with public officials in planning, preparedness training and service before, during and after emergencies. The goal is to enhance the resilience of individuals, businesses and communities by integrating education and service on these three major themes:

1 Engaging businesses, youth, and public officials in addressing public needs for risk analysis, preparedness and emergency management, and improving service to the most vulnerable citizens—the elderly and disabled.

2 Broadening the scope of emergency management planning and education to encompass both risk analysis and training, expanding business education to include business continuity and emergency management instruction, and engaging the whole community in training for all-hazards preparedness and response and risk mitigation efforts.

3 Fostering entrepreneurship and workforce development, generating needed skills, services and jobs while enhancing the resilience especially of remote and/or
underserved communities, and helping to align the achievement gap and skills mismatch.

The Preparedness Problem:

Much progress has been made over the past decade in developing emergency planning and programs to prepare for, respond to and mitigate a wide range of hazards. This same time period has presented a natural laboratory of disasters, from severe weather emergencies to contagious disease outbreaks, highlighting the urgent need to better address safety and security issues within our communities and businesses. The financial impact of these major disasters clearly demonstrates that investment in planning, hardening of assets and preparedness efforts is significantly less than the cost of recovery, which may disrupt for years.

While progress has been made, the overall awareness and preparedness of the public and our communities remains highly variable. Communities which have recently experienced weather disasters are now making significant changes to building codes, for example, and other policies, and investing in public resources to prepare for the next emergency. Companies such as MasterCard and others with global operations vulnerable to disruption have implemented business continuity management (BCM) and emergency planning to cover a wide range of contingencies, also adapting policies and committing resources. Following the Columbine school shootings, schools across the country are engaging in emergency planning involving officials, teachers and students and training which provides detailed information and instruction for a wide range of potential hazards. State and federal agencies have been conducting research and exercises, producing a wealth of information gleaned from recent experience and best scientific practice (e.g. ICS-incident command systems) and broadly available to the public. Significant changes in practice can already be seen in high-risk industries, which have adopted planning and response strategies and training programs to identify and treat risks in their environments, and in governmental and private agencies which have adopted the ICS/NIMS framework employed in recent large-scale disasters.

In spite of an abundance of available information, and the lessons learned through experience, for a wide range of the public there is still ignorance and failure to take precautions that would prevent serious loss of life and property. Fire Chief Marc Bashoor of Bowie, Maryland, lamented four unnecessary deaths in 2014 due to ignorance of basic fire safety principles, such as having a working smoke detector in the home. "As fire chief, I take each and every one of these fatalities personally — frankly I approach them partially as a failure of our fire prevention and fire safety public education efforts, not that we did anything wrong, but we obviously need to do more," he said. "We should be at zero."¹

In spite of the fact that the number of major disasters has been increasing, a significant proportion of the U.S. population remains complacent. In 2011 there were 99 major disaster declarations, compared with an average of 34 per year for the past 50 years. The American Preparedness Project at Columbia University has been conducting surveys of the U.S. population since 2002. In 2007 findings indicated that only 34% had started preparing for a
major disaster, while 60% reported that they would still need to get organized after receiving a warning of an impending disaster. In spite of this general lack of preparation, 43% of respondents said they felt personally well-prepared even without any warning, while 60% indicated that they believed themselves to be very well prepared with warning.  

Results of Federal Signal Corporation’s 2012 third-annual Public Safety Survey indicate that Americans still lack critical knowledge of their local emergency alert and notification systems—only 71% even know that they have a system. More disturbing, despite notification, only 47% would take action in response to warning of potential severe weather, with 28% requiring visible confirmation—tornado sighting, flooding, visible fire—before taking action. At the same time, 60% of Americans are confident in government’s ability to protect them, although fewer than 30% think the health system is up to it. Finally, in the event of a catastrophic major disaster, 62% of Americans believe that first responders will arrive to help within several hours—a third think it will take an hour or less! 

The 2008 Annual Survey of the American Public by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness reported that the majority of the 1,500 parents surveyed did not have emergency plans in place for their families, and that in the event of an evacuation order they are “overwhelmingly likely to disregard existing community emergency plans and instead attempt to pick up their children directly from school or day care instead of evacuating separately. Were this to occur in the immediate aftermath of a sudden disaster, chaos would ensue and public safety would be jeopardized.”

Children with disabilities are known to be particularly vulnerable to negative disaster impacts. A 2015 study conducted by the Shriver Center at the University of Massachusetts Medical School surveyed 314 parents of children with developmental disabilities in 35 states to assess the degree to which they believed themselves to be prepared for emergencies, comparing their self-reported preparations against recommendations. Overall, respondents indicated they believed themselves to be moderately well-prepared for emergencies, with 37% of respondents reporting that they had experienced an emergency or disaster. However, when asked about actual preparedness actions, fewer than half of the recommended steps were taken, even by those who considered themselves the most prepared. The authors conclude that “overall, parents in this study appeared under-prepared to meet family disaster needs, although they recognized its importance.”

This lack of preparedness can result in dire consequences for individuals and communities. The tragic stories which emerged from Hurricane Katrina dramatically demonstrated the impact of these disasters on the elderly and disabled. FEMA Director, Craig Fugate acknowledged in 2010 that the agency fell short in living up to the promise of the Americans with Disabilities Act—“especially when it comes to planning for disasters and protecting the vulnerable.” According to Fugate, when Katrina hit in 2005, there were 54 million Americans with disabilities, and while communities with large numbers of disabled were disproportionately impacted, lessons learned were not translated into better preparedness, as demonstrated in the 2007 hurricane season. Disabled people were turned away from shelters, blind and deaf individuals failed to receive
critical public alerts, and disabled citizens suffered from disastrous evacuations and failure to provide services required by the ADA. Acknowledging FEMA’s poor record in serving the disabled during emergencies, Director Fugate explained the problem as arising from FEMA’s historical approach which treated people with disabilities as a separate population, and therefore failed to integrate their needs into every stage of planning.⁶

As early as 2001, The National Organization on Disability launched an Emergency Preparedness Initiative to raise awareness of the functional needs of people with disabilities, and to advocate for their involvement in emergency planning at all levels. Yet by 2010 gaps were still unresolved, leading FEMA to establish the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination in 2010 to factor the needs of people with disabilities into all operations, from emergency communications, evacuation and transportation procedures, to medical supply planning.⁷

The Issues:

All emergencies are local, and we all live in local communities. Although it seems self-evident that everyone, every business and organization physically resides in some community, and therefore has the same physical needs and is vulnerable to the same hazards, and is connected to the same public services as the general population, coordinated planning involving the business community, public officials and ordinary citizens is still not widespread.

The private sector has assets in the form of facilities, resources and personnel that can contribute to mutual aid in the event of emergencies, and indeed have been effectively deployed in recent disasters. The community also has assets in the form of its people and their capabilities that are often overlooked. There is value in broadening the scope of the way we teach about risk and train emergency management professionals to include in planning and training those in all occupations who may be affected by crises in their communities, and who may have valuable assets to contribute to response and recovery. What is often lacking is a concrete plan—or mechanism—for engaging public officials, businesses, community organizations such as churches and schools, the general public, and especially our youth in collaborative efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from major events in their communities.

The lack of skills and capabilities amongst the local population is itself a risk factor. There are wide divergences in the economic health and resilience of individuals and communities worldwide—and within the U.S. Numerous studies demonstrate a general lack of awareness and preparedness among the general population, who therefore depend on public services and add to the spike in demand in the wake of a disaster—straining already short-staffed service agencies. At the same time, a seemingly intractable mismatch in skills and education leads to the paradox of jobs going unfilled while unemployment remains high—especially in communities disadvantaged by a variety of historical and geographical factors. Where human resources are insufficient to meet local staffing needs, local youth—and in many cases the
elderly and disabled themselves—could be trained to serve local needs. The job ladder can begin with emergency management ‘apprenticeship’ roles to disseminate public information and provide assistance in family emergency planning and response—which can lead to further education and training for technical and professional jobs serving their home communities.

Caring for vulnerable people, especially in rural and remote areas is costly. However, failure to provide timely services increases costs and exacerbates adverse consequences, especially for elderly and disabled. Cost-benefit issues are unavoidable in decisions whether and to what extent to develop and maintain local emergency systems and services. While businesses and other organizations such as schools and churches have assets and resources that can be deployed in an emergency, unfortunately investments in preparedness infrastructure and training are often deferred, leaving a gap too wide to be bridged by philanthropic and private contributions. Budgets are strained and subject to competing demands; therefore, serious cost-benefit analysis often comes only after a disaster. There is still a sense that insurance can cover potential losses and at a lower cost than investments in infrastructure that may never be needed. And much of the public still assumes that governmental agencies will be able to respond immediately to protect them—expectations resulting in severe recriminations when disasters overrun local capabilities.

As Amanda Ripley demonstrated in her book, “The Unthinkable”, the assumption that emergency personnel will quickly arrive to save the day is often unfounded; it is much more likely that in the first moments, hours and days of a critical event people are on their own, and so preparing for the “unthinkable” is good management practice—for businesses, families and individuals. The realization that the very first responders in most critical incidents are “ordinary people” is a more realistic assumption for designing emergency systems and training, and lends urgency to the need to expand the reach of education in risk assessment and emergency response to the general public.  

Local communities do not have the resources to call in the experts, and many are often last served, while local public services are chronically understaffed and underfunded. Increasing population growth and stratification together with shrinking public finances are creating strains in many communities already struggling to meet the needs of their populations; these are often the hardest hit by weather and health emergencies. Communities in remote areas are often physically beyond the reach of reliable communication and other public services. These communities may have high proportions of children, elderly and people with disabilities, and are often characterized by high levels of poverty and vulnerability to environmental hazards, with attendant social and public health problems. Local institutions and communities generally lack the capability to address serious emergencies independently, with the result that in emergencies people in remote areas are often on their own, and may need to prepare to take care of their own needs for an extended period of time, perhaps indefinitely. These issues demonstrate the inconvenient realities that public agencies may not be able to fully respond and recover from a major disaster, and that insurance and public reimbursement are often insufficient to fully cover the losses experienced by individuals and communities in disasters ranging from fire to hurricane to contagious disease.
Emergency management officials and professionals are acutely aware of the need for prior planning and management of information and resources to support rapid and effective response in fast-moving critical incident situations. Perhaps more than any other profession, they are attuned to the needs of disabled individuals, who present special challenges during emergencies for which emergency responders are being trained. How about the rest of us? Recent events have raised awareness in the general public to the hazards they may confront in their “normal” lives. The recognition that most families do not have emergency plans in place highlights the need to better prepare everyone in our communities to take care of themselves and their families, their schools and businesses.

These and other unmet needs present both challenges and opportunities:

- How can the needs of remote communities and vulnerable populations be reconceived to identify the risks facing the community and inventory the assets available in the community for addressing these issues, in order to capitalize on those human assets and capabilities?
- How can public officials engage with businesses, schools and the public at large in developing a bottoms-up, community-wide approach to increasing capacity and resilience—by providing training and employment opportunities while addressing staffing needs in emergency services?
- How might entrepreneurial ventures be fostered to fill the preparedness gap while providing opportunities for new ways of serving community needs and providing employment?

The human resources are there in the local communities; the key lies in education and training. The hope for entrepreneurial ventures to lift communities out of the employment paradox by fostering local businesses and connecting with global markets also depends on the skills and capabilities of the people in those communities. The key to developing both resilience and economic opportunity in remote and disadvantaged communities is the recognition that the one thing of value—their primary asset—is their labor.

Research on Resilience:

Resilience is the ability to adapt to changing conditions, to withstand and rapidly recover from disruption due to emergencies—the basis for survival for individuals, businesses and communities.9

Strengthening resilience is a core tenet of international development and a central issue for developing countries. According to CSIS’s Daniel Runde, resilience is an important aspect for achieving long-term broad-based economic growth. “Without strengthening individuals, communities and societies—the whole system—investments by donors and local governments are at risk of being very short-term and missing the target. Resilience should be strengthened across the full spectrum of programs and projects in order to achieve success.”10
Research on resilience has its origins in work with at risk children, based on longstanding research efforts to understand prevalent threats to children's well-being and how to help them withstand these threats. The approach to actually helping children focuses less on what puts children “at risk” than on what goes right even in risky circumstances, and on nurturing internal resilience in the face of those prevalent risks. In this work, which extends back to the 1970s-80s, the term “resilience” refers a quality in children who prevail in spite of significant stress and adversity; they are somehow protected from predictable problems, e.g. juvenile delinquency or school failure, mental health or substance abuse.\(^{11}\)

There is broad agreement that protective factors in families, schools and communities can buffer predicted negative outcomes and foster resilience in children. Barnard found a common thread amongst these key protective factors, including: a caring and supportive relationship with at least one person, communication of high expectations, and opportunities to participate in and contribute meaningfully to one’s social environment. These factors help to develop resilient children, who are characterized by a sense of personal autonomy and purpose, the ability to use problem-solving skills effectively in their daily lives, and social competence that sustains relationships.\(^{12}\) Other research focused on the positive effect of mentors—whether caring individuals from school, church, youth center, 4-H or other clubs and activities—who help to develop resilience in children by imparting a sense of community support and a basis for trust, autonomy and initiative.\(^{14}\)

Grotberg notes that resilient individuals can be strengthened and even transformed by experiences of adversity. She argues that this capability is universal, and focuses on three institutions as loci for resilience: the family, the school and the workplace. Promoting resilience by providing supports and service and fostering inner strengths such as confidence and optimism, respect and empathy helps to build interpersonal and problem-solving skills and strengthens both individuals and organizations.\(^{15}\)

At the level of the community, resilience can be seen in strong social ties and the capability for collaboration and mutual aid—which Francis Fukuyama and James Coleman each identified as social capital.\(^{16}\) Social capital is a genuine asset and a strategic differentiator. In the wake of recent disasters, there has been a renewed focus on neighbors helping one another. According to FEMA Deputy Administrator, Richard Serino, “I think we got away from that….There was the idea that FEMA’s going to come; that the federal government is going to come; that 911 is going to come.” Serino said he saw examples of neighbors taking care of one another, and in one example, even rescuing each other. That is all part of the theme that all disasters are local: When a disaster does strike, neighbors will be the first responders. After the Joplin, Missouri, earthquake, Serino was asked if FEMA could handle all of the year’s disasters. “If we were doing it alone, no,” he said. “FEMA is just a small part of the team. The private sector is what gets communities back up and running.”\(^{17}\)

It is encouraging that there is a growing body of experience and research, and a robust methodology which can be employed at many levels to better prepare decision-makers—and ordinary citizens—to respond effectively. Incident Command Systems (ICS) and the National
Incident Management System (NIMS) provide a framework for response and recovery from disasters that is now implemented throughout the government and leading corporations worldwide. Business continuity management (BCM) is a holistic management methodology that identifies potential events that threaten an organization and provides a framework for building resilience with the capability for effective response—before, during, and after an event—safeguarding the interests of its key stakeholders, the environment, reputation, brand and value creating activities.

If one accepts the likely reality that it will be necessary for individuals and communities to survive and respond to disasters without help for some period of time, then a different mindset is needed—a more pragmatic approach to the issues of preparedness, response and recovery which reconsider the human assets available in our communities and better prepares to protect those most vulnerable. How can we better educate ourselves and the next generation of managers and decision-makers to anticipate, plan for, and effectively respond to and recover from crises and emergencies? How can we extend best practices in emergency preparedness to ordinary citizens, while better connecting them to local emergency management officials? Recommendations are clear – integrate the public and those to be served with public officials in planning and mutual aid ... HOW? The answer lies in community-wide collaboration in preparedness planning and training.

Whole Community Efforts:
A pragmatic approach suggests a place at the table for all stakeholders in collaborative development of robust plans to include the whole community in hardening the resilience of our people and institutions. Providing training and engaging safety officials with the public at multiple levels could create a better-prepared public by addressing complex and emergent needs through coordinated community planning, including the public in a key role.

This, in fact, is the central rationale of FEMA’s Whole Community Approach. FEMA’s goal is to increase individual preparedness and engage with community members working collaboratively to enhance resilience and security at the individual, community and national level. Recognizing that government resources and capabilities can be overwhelmed in large-scale disasters or catastrophes, the whole community approach is a “philosophy” on how to build community resilience by involving residents, community leaders and governmental officials in collectively assessing and understanding best ways to organize and strengthen their assets. Given resource and economic constraints, pooling of efforts and resources through more sophisticated understanding of community needs and capabilities can be a way of compensating for budgetary pressures and achieving more efficient use of resources. Additional benefits of this whole community approach are a more informed, shared understanding of community risks, needs, and capabilities; empowerment of community members; and more resilient communities. “The task of cultivating and sustaining relationships to incorporate the whole community can be challenging; however, the investment yields many dividends. The process is as useful as the product.”
These efforts depend upon the ability to communicate with and engage the public. While the process is clearly beneficial, the means for engaging the public are still evolving, although there are some excellent examples. The Shriver Center program addressed the need expressed by parents of children with disabilities for better preparedness support and training by developing a targeted preparedness training program for emergency responders and for parents of children with disabilities, including a toolkit for in-person training.\(^\text{19}\)

The AARP Foundation has developed the “Mentor Up” program, partnering with businesses and organizations such as the 4-H, Facebook and others to provide tools and instruction to assist young people in mentoring elderly citizens. Noting that 25% of people 55 and older cannot use the internet, and 66% are physically inactive, Mentor Up trains young people as “digital coaches” to teach computer skills in order to help older people re-engage with their communities.\(^\text{20}\)

The University of Maryland’s “Resilience Project” is based on a similar rationale which also recognizes the underlying importance of targeting and tailoring public information and providing that information and training through mediated interpersonal channels. Engagement in any form has intrinsic benefits, while targeted, facilitated engagement can help to bridge gaps in public service and develop resilience in local communities. The assumption is that guidance and engagement will improve the probability that public safety and health messages will be understood and recommendations will be adopted. Our approach is centered on the special role that students can play in facilitating the first steps of assessing risks and raising awareness in their communities, connecting with public officials, and in the process preparing them for service during emergencies.

Much as the early 4H program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture helped to disseminate modern farming practices to families through instruction to students, the resilience program is designed to close the “awareness gap” and provide a basis for public education and collaboration in emergency planning led by well-informed student mentors. Participating students can play valuable roles in helping to disseminate and communicate critical information and in assisting the elderly and people with disabilities in preparedness and response during emergencies. At the same time they will be gaining valuable skills, preparing them for college and/or work, while creating a recruiting pipeline well-aligned with shared community needs.

Many elderly and disabled citizens can also play an important role in emergency planning and assist short-staffed public services during emergencies. By recognizing the disabled and elderly in our communities not just as vulnerable individuals dependent on public services for survival, but as human assets capable of contributing skills and abilities needed to take a role in their own protection and that of their community during disasters, efforts can then focus on developing the mechanisms for engaging them productively with public officials. By extending programming and instruction through the schools and churches we can then connect these most vulnerable neighbors to the other readily available and valuable human assets in every community—our youth.
The Resilience Project:

The Resilience Project presents a model for such planning and engagement, which we have piloted this semester with undergraduate business students. A partnership between the University of Maryland’s Smith School of Business and the University of Maryland’s Emergency Management Program, the Resilience Project seeks to address the disconnect between workforce development and unmet community needs through a business approach to workforce development—neither charity nor welfare—by providing valuable train-the-trainer programming based on best practices in emergency management. Programming is organized around three major components—all-hazards risk analysis, emergency response and planning, and communication and social media in disaster management. The goal is to engage our students with public officials in helping to disseminate public education on preparedness and assist in providing services to elders and the disabled in their communities.

Workshops held locally in partnership with schools and emergency management professionals lead to a “Youth Summit” bringing together participating students to collaborate in workshops where they design emergency plans for their families and communities, while creating a support network of engaged and knowledgeable students working with local officials and able to contribute to preparedness and response. Program deliverables consist of a media package and strategy for ongoing workshops and summits as a platform for continuing community education and public service.

The Resilience Project Youth Summit:

The Resilience Project Youth Summit consists of four components: an interview project, workshops and/or information display, a roundtable forum for discussion and planning, and a media package and strategy as “take-aways”. Summits are designed in two modes:

A “Pop-Up” summit is a self-contained for an event or one-day program, with interviews on site and information provided through poster shows, demonstrations, outdoor media etc, and ad hoc engagements of drop-in participants in roundtable sessions, much like a product demonstration.

A full Youth Summit, including pre-summit assignments, interviews and on-site workshops, is an invitational event bringing together public officials and participating students for a full-day program consisting of a keynote speaker, workshops and simulation, interactive roundtable, and take-home assignments.

Both Summit formats include the interview process and a media package and strategy—a platform which can be used for multiple summits and workshops, which can be tailored to different environments and issues, and which can incorporate new content at each event.

The Interview Process provides input to the Summit roundtables and a voice for participants to share their stories and contribute to planning. Student mentors participate in interviews both
as subjects and as interviewers, and then edit and compile their narratives. The invitation to the full Youth summit includes a prior assignment for each participant to first be interviewed and then to interview a family member or fellow student. During the Pop-up Summits, an interview booth will be set up, in which mentors record interviews with visitors. Interviews can also be taken as the first activity in a Full-Day summit, or recorded in advance, to guide workshop and roundtable activities. Participants’ stories are included along with information on safety and preparedness in the media package provided to schools and public officials to serve as a basis for engaging in summit roundtable and planning sessions, and for participating in public education activities in their home communities.

Logistically, the distinction is in how the Summits are organized: Occasional “Pop-up Summits” with programming centered on interviews and ad hoc roundtable “forums” can be added to other public and/or school events as concurrent activities running throughout the event, or as a special session within a larger program. Pop-up summits can be offered in grocery store parking lots, at the county fair, at school events—expanding the reach of public information by providing an easily available forum for the public to drop in, engaging without commitment or the social awkwardness of door-to-door canvassing, which is costly and time-consuming. Deeper education and ongoing engagement can be provided through full “Youth Summits” which are organized as culminating events to longer-term involvement between public officials and after-school or other educational programs, thereby allowing for assignments before and after the summits, and facilitating ongoing programming.

Summit workshops provide practical information and opportunities to engage with public officials in action-learning instruction and exercises. Each Summit is organized around a specific theme: Fire safety, weather, health, etc. Content is drawn from official publications and websites, and included in handouts and a questionnaire which serves as an agenda and worksheet for roundtable discussions and planning. Workshops each consist of a 30 minute presentation and facilitated discussion led by public officials and experts on emergency management, using the questionnaires as a guide and take-away. Topics include risk and impact analysis, disaster management and preparedness, and communication and media strategies. For the Pop-Up summits, this information can be presented in the form of computer displays and/or poster shows which can be set up with the interview booth.

Roundtable discussions and follow-on assignments engage and connect participants: The Summit roundtable gives participants the opportunity to share their individual stories and to express their definitions of “disability” and “resilience”. Through facilitated discussions on a theme of disability and disaster preparedness, students will broaden their cultural understanding and empathy, as a basis for working together in teams on a planning exercise, which is to design emergency management plans for their families, schools and communities, based on what they have learned.

The summit concludes with an assignment to report back to teachers and public officials, and to attend subsequent summits as mentors, and thus is a platform to facilitate ongoing engagement. Students are encouraged to engage with the public officials in their communities,
continuing their preparedness education by serving as mentors to their fellow students and partners to public safety officials.

Student participants serving as mentors in train-the-trainer programming in their home communities can apply media techniques learned in the student summit to further help to disseminate critical information to those who are most dependent on public services in emergencies. Ideally, through training and technology, and with help from youth in their communities, elderly and disabled people can also contribute to the critical communication and information functions upon which we all depend—thus closing the circle linking workforce development, public service and resilience.

There are multiple benefits to be gained from the Resilience Project:
The approach is well-aligned with current governmental initiatives at the local, state and federal level which seek to engage and communicate with the general public and welcome efforts to more widely disseminate public information. Engaging student mentors with schools and public officials through Resilience Project interviews, summits and workshops and follow-on activities can provide a needed mechanism to help extend the reach of public agencies in promoting information to the public and involving the public in emergency planning.

Valuable information can be gleaned from the interview process and summit roundtables which can contribute important insights to public officials in planning and public education while at the same time giving voice to citizens who often feel overlooked in the process. It is people’s perceptions and experienced reality that officials most need to understand in order help people manage in emergencies. Interactive websites and other media which facilitate public input are often not used by those with the greatest need, who may ignore or simply fail to understand public service and other official announcements. How to raise awareness and help educate the public and inspire them to act is the challenge.

The resilience project takes that challenge as an opportunity to reach out through student programming to help push out critical information to the public, and in the process facilitate two-way communication helping to give voice to people with disabilities, whose perspective is critically important input for disaster preparedness and planning.

By participating in interviews, workshops and roundtables, student mentors and summit participants will acquire valuable skills and understanding of others’ perspectives and goals, respect for differences and the ability to engage effectively in cross-cultural and cross-generational communication. Younger students—and especially disabled youth—will benefit by engaging with student mentors in project activities that help to pass on skills and motivation through friendly role models, showing a pathway to success which they can also follow.

Resilience is enhanced for participating students, businesses and communities through the very process of engagement. In this project we are proposing engagement in emergency management education and programming as a platform for collaboration and service, but the service roles could vary. Research on resilience demonstrates a common thread from
childhood through adulthood, with corresponding characteristics in organizations and communities—a supportive social environment and a positive, active mindset and capabilities which can be fostered and taught at all levels.

Because emergency management training is scaled to provide broadly accessible information, engaging youth, elders and people with disabilities in public education and planning can help to develop skills in the general population and enable “ordinary” citizens to play a meaningful role in emergency preparedness and response. Extending this model of engagement into local workforce development, a tiered system can be put in place through partnerships between schools, public service agencies, and local businesses. Such public-private partnership would in effect create a recruiting pipeline by teaching needed skills through service activities, thus providing an ongoing talent pool to fill needed roles at several levels, including those for which local youth and disabled individuals can be trained.

- **Internships:** Working with schools and colleges, public agencies can offer internships which carry academic credit and include co-curricular activities in service roles to which students can be trained.
- **Apprenticeships:** Apprenticeships can be at any level and need not be school-based. Apprenticeships would include room and board as compensation for carrying out service roles to which they have been trained, which can include training itself. In long-term planning, co-location of services and living facilities for people with functional needs, and including apprenticeships in staffing patterns are other ways to achieve synergies in providing services, expanding the labor pool, and hardening community resilience.
- **Entry-level positions:** Ideally recruited from the pipeline of internships and apprenticeships, temporary but regularly scheduled positions can be created in anticipation of peak demand. Permanent jobs, either part-time or full-time, depending on funding, can recruit from the temporary pool, thereby capitalizing on the investment in training and experience thus gained, and providing the first steps in ongoing career ladders and entrepreneurial ventures.

Ample precedents demonstrate the potential of this strategically inclusive approach to human capital, and specifically services to and opportunities for people with disabilities. Microsoft has launched a pilot program at its Redmond, Washington, plant to hire people with autism, working in partnership with a non-profit organization that assists people with developmental disorders. Microsoft justifies this pilot program by noting that “Microsoft is stronger when we expand opportunity and we have a diverse workforce that represents our customers.” This sentiment reflects the fundamental business proposition for diversity in the workplace, the mutual benefits of which are increasingly clear, especially in tight labor markets. Seen from this perspective, disability is a barrier that can be overcome by training and education, and there are good business reasons for providing that training, as well as needed improvements in accessibility in order to take advantage of scarce talent and better serve a diverse customer base.
There is continuing job growth in occupations in which computer use is important and in which many disabilities are irrelevant. Combined with improvements in technology and corporate policy, additional possibilities for fully utilizing the talents among the disabled population are emerging. In March 2015 people with disabilities were 3.1% of the total U.S. workforce. In 2010-2012 the employment rate for people with disabilities was 32%, as compared with 72.7% for people without disabilities. Labor force participation rate increased 5.4% from 29.5% to 31.1% from March 2014-2015, while the participation rate for those without disabilities declined slightly. Although the employment gap (the difference in employment to population ratio) for people with disabilities is still 44.5% when compared with the non-disabled population, there are indications that people with disabilities are increasingly finding lasting careers on the basis of their job skills. Education and training make a difference. A recent report in Financial Times featured a strategy director at Glanbia Performance Nutrition in London who was able to continue working after a debilitating spinal injury which left him wheelchair bound, but still did not blight his career. “My brain still worked, I could sit at a desk and I could use a PC.” With a supportive employer, he was able to devise workarounds to enable him not only to continue his work, but to resume international travel.

Business Disability International is a recently-established business forum which supports disability-friendly hiring practices, advocating for integrating accessibility considerations into procurement processes, and encouraging disability networks and listening groups to collaborate on policy modifications. BDI lists amongst its founding membership Glaxo-Smith-Kline, Barclays, British Telecom and Infosys, all adhering to the mission statement, “Through action research, business & disability systems expertise, and collaborative action we will enable global business leaders to understand and address the systemic impact of disability on their business and on the societies in which they operate, to the mutual benefit of people with disabilities, business and the global economy.”

Businesses serving local communities benefit as employers from skills development in their communities and opportunities for civic engagement and mutual-aid with their customers, employees and neighbors created through such “whole community efforts”. Communities can benefit by enhanced skills, broader employment, and strengthened relationships among business, government and the public through collaboration in emergency management education and programming—all factors in community resilience. In itself, the process of engaging various constituencies and working together to identify needs and develop an emergency response plan for their town can serve as the basis for future collaborations, expanding civic capabilities and creating positive conditions for entrepreneurial ventures—and in the process strengthening hardy, resilient communities.

Finally, the most vulnerable citizens in these communities—the elderly and disabled—will benefit from expanded education and enhanced public services. Engaging the “whole community” in emergency planning helps public officials serve the population by providing ongoing connections and channels of communication. This is beneficial in any community, but critical in remote and rural communities forced by circumstance to care for their own needs. Strengthening the civic engagement of our youth and their involvement with governmental
processes and services to their neighbors can help to demystify the public service bureaucracy and demonstrate ways in which the community can work together to solve pressing problems in health and safety, especially by serving those in most need of assistance—the elderly and people with disabilities.

Conclusion:

There are clear synergies and mutual benefits to be achieved by coupling our emerging societal needs to improve emergency preparedness and response while aligning skills and capabilities with jobs through training and public service.

Recent disasters have demonstrated the harsh realities that a community’s economic development can be damaged or even destroyed by a major emergency, highlighting the need for better preparedness at all levels. Insurance is insufficient to fully cover losses incurred in major emergencies, while the realities of response often leave citizens to fend for themselves in the immediate aftermath of an emergency, perhaps for extended periods of time. In these situations, the elderly and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable.

Waves of downsizing and budgetary cutbacks have left public agencies and many businesses scrambling to meet every-day needs, and often overwhelmed in emergencies. There is broad evidence that the majority of households are not well-prepared in the event of an emergency, while families with disabled individuals are even more at risk, thus adding to the burden on public safety providers. At the same time, human assets are present in our communities that could be called upon to provide assistance to short-staffed public services, and contribute to mutual aid within their neighborhoods. What is needed is a plan or platform to facilitate productive engagement in preparedness planning amongst all stakeholders, and a way to train and deploy our youth, elderly and disabled citizens to take a role in extending the capabilities—and therefore resilience—of their communities.

We have proposed such a platform in UMD’s Resilience Project, which is a pragmatic approach to better informing and preparing the public—and especially our most vulnerable citizens—based upon targeted, facilitated collaboration between students and schools, public safety officials and the general public in emergency planning and training. Engaging youth, the elderly and disabled citizens with public officials and business leaders in emergency planning and training can be a “value multiplier” in community-based disaster management and economic development, providing needed services and developing skills while enhancing the resilience of individuals and communities.

The first Pop-up Resilience Summit was held on Maryland Day, April 25, 2015, at the University of Maryland, welcoming over 75,000+ visitors. Students provided information on emergency preparedness and fire safety and conducted “man-on-the-street” interviews with passersby throughout the day. Students also conducted longer “StoryCorps” interviews with fellow students with disabilities, and shared information on efforts ongoing across campus to create a minor in disability studies as well as a new committee of the student government association.
References:


19 Wolf-Fordham et al, Ibid.


