

Preparing Vulnerable Communities for Natural Disasters

CWS

During September, which is also National Preparedness Month, CWS' Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery (EPRR) team dedicated its time to equipping vulnerable communities in northern California with the knowledge and tools they need to survive a disaster. September is also a wildfire season, making the timing of these trainings ideal for those who participated. CWS' EPRR Senior Program Officer, Melissa Reece, recaps the trainings and their impacts.

There is no better time for the CWS EPRR team to offer disaster preparedness guidance to our staff, clients and partners. The team put a plan together to give training at our Northern and Southern California offices during National Preparedness Month with a focus on personal preparedness. On September 10, 2024, the EPRR team gave a four-hour disaster preparedness training to staff, which included case managers in our Garden Grove office and partner organizations who serve the communities and often interact or provide services to our clients.

One of the CWS staff members in attendance was currently on evacuation warning from a nearby wildfire. Others were very aware of the risks of the Line Fire, Bridge Fire and Airport Fire that were burning in the neighboring cities around the office. In the Walnut Creek office on September 25, two trainings were conducted: a one-hour training for staff and a 2.5-hour training for Ukrainian clients. The EPRR team brought in experts from the local Sheriff Office of Emergency Services, United Policy Holders and Sonoma Community Action Partnership Imagine You Program to give presentations on how to sign up for emergency alerts, personal preparedness resources and mental health stress relief during disasters. In all, more than 40 people received training.

The training topics covered addressed the following: understanding the potential disasters in the area; the effects that disasters have on a community, including the economy and vulnerable populations, including refugees, who are often most impacted; where to get vetted and real-time disaster information;

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participation in an earthquake drill; understanding emergency warning systems and alerts; and how to pack a 'go bag'. Our team was able to offer 100 'go bags' with \$50 worth of essential preparedness items, including weather radios, charging cables, blow up pillows, filtration straws, water pouches and more, to the clients the offices serve. In addition, we were able to offer printed disaster guides in common languages of the populations we serve, such as Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, English, Spanish and links to digital resources for dozens of other languages. The CWS EPRR team is the first to offer the LISTOS California Disaster Ready Guide in Dari and Pashto.

The trainings were well received and feedback and comments from attendees were positive. Several client attendees came to the team after the training to mention how useful the information was and that they were really happy to be included. Staff and partner agencies also had positive feedback. The EPRR team is looking forward to providing more trainings in the near future.