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Communities Coming Together

How many of you can think of a local grocery store cashier, deli owner, café worker, or someone else in your community with whom you've developed rapport simply by sharing a zip code? This type of connection and understanding of your neighbors is hard to develop overnight – and even more difficult to try and train. However, a grassroots organization called **Cape Community Coalition (CCC)** has taken this challenge head on by partnering with **Delaware Emergency Management Association (DEMA)**,



proving just how valuable these types of efforts are in serving our local communities. That is why, in emergency management, the key to implementing **effective and meaningful solutions** is to incorporate local organizations and leaders in state level programs to fully capture the unique voice of a specific community.

The COVID-19 pandemic truly sparked the creation of the CCC in 2020, originally called CCC4COVID. Access to Wi-Fi, technology, and food insecurity were some of the main issues a specific school district in Southern Delaware was facing after the pandemic struck their resources, leading to a dedicated group of citizens coming together on their own to form the coalition. However, they didn't stop there, with their success in developing solutions for this school district enabling CCC4COVID to expand and look at the community as a whole – transitioning to aiding other vulnerable populations like the elderly and homeless.

After almost three years the COVID-19 pandemic is still hanging around, yet CCC4COVID has evolved by rebranding to CCC and working with DEMA to establish their **successful reach at a larger level**. This transition hasn't always been a smooth ride, however, with COVID-19 proving to be such a strong rallying point for membership in the beginning, that the coalition has found that both enthusiasm and participation began to wane among their voluntary membership in this next phase for implications past the pandemic. As a result, the coalition is focusing on identifying their new mission and direction – making it more of a state-wide effort and utilizing their vast partnership web to facilitate larger efforts.

Post-pandemic living creates a great need for these types of partnerships, and how the community needs to adapt to this version of a “new normal”. CCC has built their foundation from the ground up and now has an expansive group of community partners and now state agency partners, all stemming from one of their members, who works for Sea Grant in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, asking DEMA staff to start attending the organization's meetings to see if there was the potential for partnership. Without taking that initial step to reach out, who knows where the CCC would be today! Naturally, the puzzle pieces fit perfectly – allowing DEMA to tie into county level emergency management and really emphasize the importance of their local level work and where they fit within the overall structure.

The partnership between DEMA and CCC has been very productive for both sides as they united early in the process when CCC was a grassroots organization. Due to this early alignment, they have crafted a solid level of communication and a working relationship that has allowed them to produce very effective lines of communication.

Paige Fitzgerald, DEMA's Deputy Director, touched on one of the brilliant assets that was initiated through CCC—an interactive mapping tool that allows users to view county-wide food resources that are available to them in the case of an emergency. This tool was useful to DEMA in helping direct partners towards resources and for DEMA when writing narratives for some of the COVID-specific feeding programs supported through federal initiatives over the past few years. With all parties engaged in the conversation, they are able to establish what messages will be most beneficial and push those through state resources and local connections. DEMA also is able to help identify other partnerships, potential funding opportunities, provide CERT training, and encourage the adoption of Smart 9-1-1, among other resilience building efforts.

Fitzgerald emphasized the importance of this partnership and encouraged other states to follow in their footsteps. **“I recommend finding community groups that are champions for their own causes, even if they don't focus on emergency management, and find a way to make those zero-dollar connections. Help them sign up for Smart 9-1-1, provide CERT and other types of training, allow them to know that the emergency management world exists, where they fit in the structure, and the plethora of resources that are waiting to be utilized,” Fitzgerald said.** The beauty of this whole partnership is the example it sets for other state level agencies to follow in terms of technology and utilizing various methods to better their communities in remarkable and innovative ways.

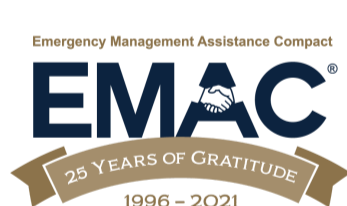
Families, friends and communities often find a source of courage rising up from within. Indeed, sadly, it seems that it is tragedy that often draws out the most and the best from the human spirit.

Queen Elizabeth II ♀
21 April 1926 – 8 September 2022

If you would like more information or have a state practice you'd like to highlight as part of this ongoing series, please contact [Jamie Logan](mailto:jlogan@nema.org)

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