BEK’S VISION FOR CIEP

Rebekah “Bek” Moras grew up in Alaska (western Yupi’k and south-central Dena’ina lands), identifies as a survivor, with “hidden” disabilities, and a family member of people with disabilities. Bek uses she/they pronouns, has a PhD in Disability Studies, and has worked professionally with survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault with disabilities since 2002. She is excited to be involved in independent living, policy, and systems change. Bek lives with their family in Olympia and loves accessibility, libraries, rivers, fish and berries.

During Bek’s first few months at WASILC, she has learned so much about the work that CIEP has accomplished over the past few years and its influence on state and national policy. They share their vision here.

You have a doctorate in disability studies. How did you select this field?

Disability Studies and disability community saved my life, and continue to do so. There is a lot of disability in my family of origin – but I never thought of us as “disabled”. Yet even without the labels, impairment and disability affected our lives, and still does. For example, one sibling has reading and
learning disabilities, another had epilepsy, one parent has diabetes, and another parent had a genetic mutation leading to cancer. I myself have multiple “hidden disabilities” such as cracks in my lower vertebrae, and very little pigment in my eyes, leading to migraines, needing to lay down and wear sunglasses a lot, and sensory integration challenges. And that’s not even all of it! Overlaid on all of that has been poverty, trauma, mental illness, and substance misuse.

Have you personally experienced a disaster, and what was it like?

I have been in multiple large earthquakes where roads and buildings were damaged. I’ve also been cut off from food supplies and electricity both while living in rural, off road communities, and in urban settings. As a child I thought it was fun! We’d take out the candles, build blanket forts, make a fire, and eat canned food. Now as an adult I feel more overwhelmed by emergencies, because I am responsible for a toddler and partner with disabilities, and we don’t have family close by.

What Access and Functional Needs gaps you see in emergency planning?

I think the gap is: Centering accessibility in everyday life, policy, and practices during “blue skies”. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is just our minimal legal standard, not an accessibility culture standard! Everyday there are inaccessible things that do not meet ADA standards, and that’s NOT during an emergency. The same things happen during emergencies – but worse. During floods our Elders are unable to get into safe buildings; after earthquakes people can’t use ventilators without electricity, or get medications and properly store them; during fires people are unable and unwilling to leave service and emotional support...
animals. If our civilization was already built around accessibility for Elders and people with disabilities, it would be more possible to plug the accessibility gaps during emergencies.

What are some of the best practices have you noticed?

I’ve noticed: ASL and spoken language interpreting built into meetings, without needing to be individually requested; emergency numbers available by text, video, and voice; low fragrance and “fragrance free” physical spaces; electronic documents that are readable by multiple types of screen readers; printed materials in large font, large spacing, with high color contrast and plain language.

After several months with WASILC, what do you envision for CIEP’s future?

Like equity, I believe we need to think about inclusive emergency planning in everything we do. Natural and human made disasters are going to continue – earthquakes, fires, floods, unpredictable weather, housing crises, and care economy crises. Just as with COVID, it will be disabled people who are first to be hurt, and to die. My belief is if we put equity and disability at the center, it will be better for non-Disabled people as well. I am hopeful we can get all of the WASILC staff, centers for independent living (CIL) staff and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) staff ready together. For example having our emergency supply kits ready at home, in cars, and at work, and going through the steps listed as you Prepare in a Year.
The bipartisan Communication, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act (CVTA) was introduced in Congress by Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass) and Representative Anna G. Eshoo (CA-18) on November 17, 2022. This bill will update the 21st Century Communication and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA), which was considered at the time, the “ADA” for the Digital Age. For more than a decade, the CVAA has created avenues of innovation with accessible Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The CVTA bill, if passed as introduced, would increase availability and enhance the quality of captioning and audio description, ensure timely access in ASL to emergency notifications and other programming, bring many improvements to ICT that have become ubiquitous in our lives. Other highlights include requiring videoconferencing apps such as Zoom and MS Teams to support telecommunication relay services and reimbursing providers that use communication facilitators for DeafBlind callers who use relay services. CVTA will also expand Direct Video Calls for ASL users; require more support for Real-Time Text (RTT); and empower the FCC to update regulations when needed to address new gaps in emerging technologies.

Having personally worked on the front lines in the nation’s capital on the CVAA for three years, I can say “This is a giant leap for our community! Thanks to our national partners and advocates for continuing this work.”
ACCESS & FUNCTIONAL NEEDS RESOURCES

Back issues of CIEP ALERT and WASILC Newsletters
CIEP / WASILC Resource Library (wasilc.org)
WA State AFN Acronym List for Interpreters and Captioners
CIEP Cascadia Subduction Zone Tabletop Exercise Summary of Conclusions
Washington State / Regional AFN Resources
Disability Organizations | Washington State Department of Health
Emergency Management Division—Access & Functional Needs
Emergency Management Division—Alert & Notification Warnings by County
State Local Emergency Management Agencies by County
State Local Health Jurisdictions (LHJs) by City and/or County
State Department of Ecology – Emergency Planning Committees by County
Emergency and Disaster Response Lessons Learned | (nwadacenter.org)
Functional Assessment Service Teams (FAST) | Pierce County, WA - Official Website (piercecountywa.gov)
Nationwide AFN Resources
The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies
American Red Cross Inclusivity Preparedness Resources
An ADA Guide for Local Governments: Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities
CDC Disability and Health Emergency Preparedness
Disabilities or Access and Functional Needs | DisasterAssistance.gov
FEMA | PHE Functional Needs Support Services Guidance
HHS | TRACIE Topic Collection: Access and Functional Needs
Inclusive Emergency Lifelines | Wireless Inclusive RERC | Georgia Institute of Technology
Individuals with Disabilities | Ready.gov
WASILC Solidarity Statement

The Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) stands in solidarity with the Black Community and all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. We fully support the Black Lives Matter movement and condemn systemic racism, oppression, and injustice. Achieving our mission requires us to educate and advocate for systemic changes for all people with disabilities, which includes the intersectionality of race and disability. We recommit to this vital work and will hold ourselves accountable to become better allies. We know we cannot elevate the disability community without elevating the BIPOC communities we serve.

About CIEP

CIEP is a statewide advisory group that brings expertise into disaster planning based on access and functional needs (AFN) faced by people with disabilities in three areas: 1) Effective Communications, 2) Programmatic Access, and 3) Physical Access. We welcome any suggestions for future issues of the quarterly CIEP ALERT newsletter.

Jim House, Disability Integration Manager
Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP)
a program of the Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC)

Email: Jim.House@dshs.wa.gov  Website: Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP) (wasilc.org)

COMING EVENTS

CIEP Stakeholder Calls (AFN Response to Disasters)
WHEN: Monthly on first Wednesday at 10:00-11:00 am.
WHERE: Zoom link for monthly calls through June of 2023. Email Jim.House@dshs.wa.gov for details and agenda.

Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) Quarterly Meetings
WHEN: Thursday, January 19, 2023 10am to 2:45pm
WHERE: Quarterly Meetings are held virtually on Zoom. — Email us at WASILC@dshs.wa.gov for Zoom link, meeting agenda, and other details.

All CIEP Stakeholder Calls and WASILC Quarterly Meetings are open to everyone. ASL interpreters and CART will be provided. For other reasonable accommodation requests, please email us as early as possible.