Disability Emergency Preparedness

How to prepare for an emergency when you have a disability

News about:
MERIL’s essential services
Legislative update

Coronavirus (COVID-19)
Resources for People with Disabilities

Part-time caregivers needed in all NW Missouri counties!
Essential Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic

We are living in interesting and strange times. With the COVID-19 pandemic upon us, MERIL continues to work with our participants and the community in providing safe and healthy options for living in the community.

Our programs are extremely essential to our participants, and we will continue to provide Consumer Directed Services (CDS), and In-Home Nursing and Personal Care Attendant (PCA) services. The Independent Living programs, while vital, are not considered “essential.” Yet, we are still providing these services through alternative means, such as via email, phone, and other platforms that do not involve person-to-person engagement.

We believe in the safety and wellbeing of our employees and the community we serve and have been implementing safety measures to this end. All outside meetings have been cancelled or postponed. The office is closed to the public at this time. In addition, many employees are telecommuting (working from home).

Legislative Update from Jefferson City

The Missouri General Assembly is on a COVID-19/Spring break hiatus. The situation is fluid and it is unknown when the General Assembly will reconvene. There have been some directives from Jefferson City regarding the relaxation of rules and regulations for our programs. For example, some training rules have been relaxed so that we can hire new personal care attendants to work for our participants.

At the time of this writing, the legislative process has been suspended until further notice. This means that there have been no votes (in either the House or Senate) on appropriations related to our services.

New Film “Crip Camp” on Netflix

For those of you that are interested in the history of disability rights and have access to Netflix, there is an excellent movie for you to view. “Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution” documents the disability rights movement in the United States by examining a camp for youth with disabilities in New York state in 1971, explaining how the first Centers for Independent Living began, reporting on the implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and finally providing a historical explanation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The documentary is rated “R” due to some strong language and sexual overtones, but it is a really powerful movie. I highly recommend it.

MERIL’s SPIL Forum was featured in the St. Joseph News-Press and on KNPG.

State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL)

MERIL hosted a SPIL public forum on February 13 to gather information for the 2021-2013 SPIL. The event was attended by nearly 30 people, and the gathering provided a great deal of input on the issues—such as housing, transportation, and employment—that should go into the next SPIL. All in all, it was a great turnout and I want to thank all those that were there, particularly United Healthcare for providing refreshments for the event.

- Rob Honan, MERIL CEO

Stay up to date with the latest news, events, and resources: Facebook.com/meril4u Twitter.com/meril4u
Below are some reliable resources for information about the pandemic, including how to protect yourself and others, the latest news and local orders, and what to do if you experience symptoms.

These government websites have a lot of information, as well as links to associated social media pages that you can follow to stay up to date with the latest news:

- [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)
- [www.coronavirus.gov](http://www.coronavirus.gov)
- [www.usa.gov/coronavirus](http://www.usa.gov/coronavirus)
- [www.dol.gov/odep/newsletter](http://www.dol.gov/odep/newsletter)
- [www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus)

Other resources address the specific needs of people with disabilities:

- [https://acl.gov/COVID-19](https://acl.gov/COVID-19)
- [https://askjan.org/topics/COVID-19.cfm](https://askjan.org/topics/COVID-19.cfm)
- [www.thenationalcouncil.org/covid19](http://www.thenationalcouncil.org/covid19)

And be sure to check with your local health departments for updates:

- Facebook.com/StJosephHealthDepartment
- Facebook.com/NodawayCountyHealthDepartment
- Facebook.com/CCHDMissouri
- Facebook.com/Andrew-County-Health-Department-347607032053194
MERIL provides information about emergency preparedness—specifically regarding issues related to disability—to members of the public, to emergency planners in workplaces, and to public service providers. We also work with our participants to create personalized, updated emergency plans.

Many people have found our “Vial of Life” emergency kits useful. These kits include a detailed emergency information form, an empty medication bottle, and stickers to alert medical professionals. These kits are available for free to anyone who needs one.

### Free “Vial of Life” Emergency Kit

Keep all of your important medical and emergency information in one place that is easy for first responders to locate.

### Instructions

1. Fill out this form legibly, and keep it updated.
2. Fold and place this form in the labeled vial.
3. Place the vial in your refrigerator, in a place where emergency personnel can quickly find it.
4. Place one sticker on your refrigerator door and the other on the front door to your home.

Questions? Call MERIL at 816-279-8558.

### Emergency Personnel

Medical information is located in a prescription bottle in the refrigerator.

“Vial of Life” is a service of MERIL. www.meril.org • 816-279-8558

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**Emergency Planning for People with Access and Functional Needs**

If you or a loved one has access needs, such as needing services and communications with emergency service providers for someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, or functional needs, such as the need for assistance with personal care, this creates the need for extra planning in the event of an emergency.

There are things that you can do now to help assure that you will know what to do and how to address emergencies. Preparedness and planning are unique to each person because we all have unique living environments and needs. This can be overwhelming, but you can start with a basic plan that addresses the most common events and those which will affect you the most.

You can ask yourself how you can protect yourself or loved one in the event of a fire at home. Where will you shelter in the event of severe weather? What supplies are needed? How will personal care needs be addressed if the caregiver becomes unavailable?

Once basic plans are in place, then more detailed planning can be done to prepare for a wide variety of events. There are many pre-formatted plans available. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services offers a comprehensive plan entitled “Ready in 3.” You can download a copy or request a copy to be mailed to you at health.mo.gov/emergencies.

Some people may need assistance with planning and preparing. Family members are sometimes a good resource. There are also service providers, such as Independent Living Centers, who can assist. Additionally, centers can provide advocacy with regard to assuring emergency service providers and shelters understand the access and functional needs of those served.

If you would like additional information about this topic, or if you need assistance, you can contact us at 816-279-8558. If you are outside of our service area, we can direct you to a center or other resource in your area.

- Paul Bergonzoni, MERIL Director of Independent Living Services
Individuals with Disabilities

Get Informed
- Know what disasters could affect your area, which could call for an evacuation and when to shelter in place.

Plan Ahead

Disability and Health Emergency Preparedness

Emergencies and disasters can strike quickly and without warning, forcing people to quickly leave or be confined in their home unexpectedly. For the millions of Americans who have disabilities, emergencies, such as fires, floods and acts of terrorism, present a real challenge.

Resources from State Disability and Health Programs

The following resources were developed by CDC funded State Disability and Health Programs. Public health professionals, emergency personnel and communities can use them to create emergency preparedness and response plans that are inclusive of people with disabilities.

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/emergencypreparedness.html

Emergency Preparedness Resources for Persons with Disabilities

HHS Resources
- American Sign Language (ASL) Public Service Announcement Videos — To assist deaf and hard of hearing persons stay safe before, during, and after a hurricane (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Public Health Workbooks to Define, Locate & Reach Special Vulnerable & At-Risk Populations in an Emergency (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Other Federal Resources
- Chapter 7: Emergency Management Under Title II of the ADA — ADA Best Practices Toolkit for State and Local Governments (Department of Justice)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency Disability Page


www.dol.gov/odep/topics/EmergencyPreparedness.htm

www.hhs.gov/civilrights/for-individuals/special-topics/emergency-preparedness/resources-persons-disabilities/index.html
Our MERIL Community

Visit meril.org/resources to see the information shared during our networking luncheon in Fairfax.

Thank you to Pizza Ranch in St. Joseph for hosting a fundraiser for us!

MERIL donated 910 pounds of food for the Second Harvest Community Food Bank “Food Fight” drive!

MERIL staff members picked up trash along our dedicated stretch of highway in St. Joseph.

We attended the Health & Fitness Fair in Maryville.

We celebrated National Healthcare Quality Week with our In-Home Personal Care Attendants!
MERIL’s Halloween Bash resource fair was a huge success! Around 300 people attended the event. Treats were eaten, games were played, and community resources were shared. We hope to see you all again in the Fall!

Members of People First of St. Joseph attended the Partners in Policymaking conference.

Members of People First of St. Joseph celebrated at their Christmas party.

Persistent Help for Affordable Accessibility Remodeling

MERIL’s Information and Referral Communications Specialist, AJ Warner, received a call from a community member who was in need of remodeling her and her husband’s house to make it more accessible and safe.

They had been told that their Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant was canceled because they live too close to a noisy highway. AJ made several calls and spoke to several people, and eventually got the grant reinstated.

The community member expressed her appreciation in a letter: “We hope to stay in our home as long as possible. I’m 79 and my husband is 84. Without AJ’s help, none of this would have been possible, and I wanted you and AJ to know how very much we appreciate it.”

If you or someone you know needs assistance with an issue related to a disability or health condition, please call us at 816-279-8558. We’re here to help.
We help caregivers find part-time jobs!

MERIL accepts applications for caregivers to work for a Consumer Directed Services (CDS) participant, and/or to work for participants in MERIL’s In-Home Services program. Caregivers help people with disabilities with personal care tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and bathing. Caregivers do not need any prior experience and the hours are flexible. Visit meril.org/caregivers to learn more.

Caregivers make a big difference in the lives of people with disabilities, making it possible for them to live independently in their own homes and communities. By working for a MERIL participant, caregivers also support all of the other Independent Living (IL) services MERIL provides.

For providing care to our participants and for supporting our services, we appreciate the caregivers who partner with us to fulfill our IL mission! Contact us if you know of an outstanding MERIL caregiver! We would like to feature them in our newsletter and on our website!

MERIL Caregivers Are Amazing!

TAP Phone Helps Participant with Hearing Loss

Julia Johnson, 85, recalled an incident that led to the police arriving at her home to check on her wellbeing.

The police officer told Julia that a family member had attempted to call her on the phone several times throughout the day. When Julia did not answer or call back, the family member became concerned and asked the police to make sure Julia was not in danger.

Julia was fine. She had simply not heard the phone ring.

Having discovered that her hearing loss had progressed to the point that she was no longer able to use a standard telephone, Julia sought out an assistive technology device.

MERIL’s Jean Boyer met with Julia and demonstrated several types of phones that have features—such as amplified volume—designed for people who experience hearing loss, low vision, and other types of disabilities.

Julia received a phone through the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP), and now has no problem hearing the phone ring or carrying on a conversation.

Assistive technology devices are important tools that allow people with disabilities to live independently in their homes. More information is available at www.meril.org/tech.

Caregivers are needed in all nine counties!

Apply in our St. Joseph or Maryville office to become a caregiver!

If you are responsible and have a passion for helping people with disabilities live independently in their homes, we want you to work for a MERIL participant! Visit www.meril.org/caregivers to learn more.
Your contribution will help change lives!

Donations to MERIL help fund programs that assist people with disabilities in their goal to live a full life in their homes and communities.

Please consider a financial gift to MERIL. You may mail a check or use the PayPal link on our website.

In addition to donating, you can help us immensely by spreading the word about our services. The more people who know about us, the more we can help.

Visit www.meril.org/help to read more about people who have benefited from our services.

Thank you to our recent donor:

◆ Susan Albaugh from Johnson Controls in St. Joseph donated two powered scooter batteries

We also want to thank the many others who donate equipment to us. We accept donations of assistive technology devices and durable medical equipment.

We thank Jaren Pippitt for donating a Stop the Bleed kit to us! This life-saving emergency kit is now available for our employees, the people attending our support groups, and the many other visitors at our office. Learn more at www.StopTheBleed.org.

Independence with Assistive Technology!

Missouri Assistive Technology provides a wide variety of assistive technology devices—including phones, magnifiers, and computer equipment—to MERIL so that we can demonstrate them to people with disabilities throughout Northwest Missouri.

MERIL provides informed demonstrations of the devices, either in our office or in people’s homes, so they are able to find out which device best fits their needs. And many people qualify for free devices!

The most popular devices are the telephones available through the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP). These telephones are designed for people who have hearing loss, low vision, and other types of disabilities.

Pictured here is a participant holding a cordless TAP phone with amplified volume. This participant is unable to use a standard telephone due to low vision and low hearing.

MERIL’s Lauren Lynch demonstrated different phone models for the participant so that she could select the one that would best allow her to communicate with her friends and family.

More information is available at www.meril.org/tech.
Helping people with disabilities and people who are aging live independently in Northwest Missouri.

Northwest Missouri’s Center for Independent Living
Since 1994, MERIL has provided five core services for people with disabilities in our nine-county service area:
- Information and referral
- Independent Living skills training
- Transition services (youth and nursing home)
- Peer support
- Advocacy

Our vision is: A Barrier-Free Northwest Missouri.

More than half of our board members and staff have a disability. We use our personal experiences to see the abilities that people have, and we respect people for who they are.

We believe people with disabilities should have control over their own lives, achieve their own goals, and fully participate in their communities.

Learn more about Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in Missouri at [www.mosilc.org](http://www.mosilc.org).

Call us. Tell us about your health condition or disability. We’ll help you get the resources you need to live independently.

MERIL offers a wide variety of services and resources for people with disabilities.

Our most popular service is our Consumer Directed Services (CDS) program, which allows a person to hire a caregiver of their choice to perform personal care tasks in their home.

We help caregivers find part-time jobs!

MERIL helps the CDS participant (the person with a disability) find a potential employee (caregiver). Anyone who is interested in becoming a caregiver should contact MERIL to fill out an application. The hours are flexible and no experience is required.