



# TRUE Shelter

## Accessibility Guide



Portlight Strategies, Inc., is a [501\(c\)\(3\) tax exempt nonprofit organization](#) dedicated to meeting the specific needs of unserved, underserved and forgotten people.

In keeping with our mission, which includes providing for the needs of people with disabilities, especially in times of catastrophe, and through the generosity of our sponsors, [The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation](#) and [Wunderground.com](#), we are proud to announce the TRUE Shelter Accessibility program! TRUE stands for Training, Response, Understanding and Empowerment. The intent of this effort is to help emergency management departments provide better accessibility and services in temporary disaster shelters. It is our hope that we can become a touchstone not just for those we serve, but also for those who would provide for their communities when disaster strikes.

We are currently distributing our TRUE Shelter Accessibility guidelines to emergency management departments nationwide. We've established a toll-free number and dedicated email address for help requests not just from these agencies, but from those who encounter accessibility issues in rescue and shelter situations. We are prepared to quickly respond to needs for durable medical equipment, accessibility aids, medical supplies and volunteer teams. Portlight's dedicated volunteer network is also at the ready for clearing of debris, as well as minor repairs to and restoration of accessibility aids such as ramps and railings, and distribution of food, water, formula, diapers and other necessary items.

For help in providing **TRUE** shelter accessibility, contact

**[PORTLIGHT STRATEGIES, INC.](#)**

**866-757-1551 or [shelter@portlight.org](mailto:shelter@portlight.org)**

# T

## rain staff to:

- ◆ understand [the difference between the medical model and the social \(independent living\) model of disability](#); to not see the needs of a person with disabilities as strictly medical or “special”.
- ◆ know how to use your state’s [relay service](#) to make and receive calls with hearing- and speech-impaired individuals.
- ◆ know essential ASL (American Sign Language) signs. Contact local sign language interpreters for possible help with ASL training.
- ◆ establish contact with agencies for people with disabilities, such as those which provide personal care attendants, ASL interpreter services, and other types of support or assistance.
- ◆ post and consistently update information boards with announcements which disabled persons might not hear or be present for when they are broadcast.
- ◆ be aware, patient and creative.

# R

## espond to specific needs:

- ◆ Make certain there are [ADA-compliant](#) ramps into the shelter facility, and that all bathrooms are equipped with ADA-compliant stalls with handrails, as well as wheelchair-accessible sinks, soap dispensers and paper towels or dryers.
- ◆ Have cots available which are high enough to accommodate those with mobility impairment to use comfortably and safely.
- ◆ Be prepared to accommodate persons with service animals. Provide extra food and water. Designate an area for service animals to relieve themselves.
- ◆ Avoid using outdoor areas that are muddy, sandy or covered by thick grass.
- ◆ Permit people with mobility impairments the option of going to the head of long lines.
- ◆ At the accessible entrance to a shelter, have signage providing information about features of the shelter that are less than fully accessible.

# Understand issues:

- ◆ Some people are non-vocal but still capable of making their needs known.
- ◆ Some visually impaired people may need personal assistance to travel about in neighborhoods where familiar landmarks are altered or missing due to the disaster.
- ◆ Some people with intellectual or developmental disabilities may be too unsettled by the disaster to return to their safe residences unless accompanied by someone familiar with their particular needs. Staff should know how to locate family or support services.
- ◆ Some people with disabilities may need assistance to travel to and from points of emergency and recovery services, and to wait in line at points of service.
- ◆ Some people have the physical ability to ride buses, but do not have the cognitive ability to learn new routes established after a disaster.
- ◆ Some people with cognitive impairments may need assistance filling out emergency paperwork for assistance after a disaster.
- ◆ Some people with hearing impairments may have difficulty understanding spoken instructions and directions in the midst of even normal amounts of background noise.
- ◆ Some people with cognitive disabilities may exhibit disruptive behaviors in stressful situations. Make certain shelter staff are trained to respond appropriately when such behaviors occur.

# Empower independence in:

- ◆ mobility. Be prepared to obtain and provide portable ramps; folding white canes; durable medical equipment such as walkers, crutches, regular canes. Stock simple tools and patch kits for repairing flat tires on wheelchairs.
- ◆ communication. Provide access to portable TDDs; portable phones with volume controls; writing tablets and pencils; local phone directories, including braille and large-print versions; public phone stations near power outlets to supply power to portable assistive devices used by hearing- and speech-impaired individuals.
- ◆ everyday living. Be prepared to obtain and provide portable accessible commodes, shower chairs and manual wheelchairs. Stock disposable briefs; large-handled eating utensils; two-handled drinking mugs; flexible drinking straws; pet collars, leashes and bowls for service animals. Provide easily accessible information on community services: drugstores; medical supply stores; municipal bus and school bus systems; para-transit services and independent taxis; volunteers to do residence cleanup and/or minor home repairs and reconstruction.
- ◆ obtaining disaster assistance. Forms and explanations for FEMA, Red Cross and other post-disaster assistance should be available in braille, large print, and on audio tape.