

FEMA's USVI Disability Integration Team Takes an Inclusive Approach to Resilience in the U.S. Virgin Islands

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ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands — FEMA has applied an inclusive approach to supporting the U.S. Virgin Islands in its response and recovery efforts to hurricanes Irma and Maria which made landfall in September 2017. FEMA is committed to providing equitable services for people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Five years after the two Category 5 storms, FEMA's partnership with the territory to support people with disabilities and access and functional needs continues to strengthen. Two FEMA Disability Integration Advisors live and work on-island to continue its efforts to ensure FEMA programs and services reach everyone across the territory. This includes working with the Territorial Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator Julien Henley.

Collaboration with Henley, a longtime disability rights advocate, includes providing analytical support, technical assistance and sharing information at the regional and national level information.

"The collaboration between FEMA and the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands has increased the territories' capabilities to ensure equal access for individuals with disabilities and access and functional needs," said Henley. "The assistance of the FEMA Disability Integration team over the last several years has been invaluable and there is so much more to do. Through following ADA guiding principles, together, we can expand programs, advance initiatives and continue education on the importance of the ADA as we advocate for Virgin Islanders with disabilities."

Following the aftermath of the storms, FEMA's USVI Disability Integration team helped to provide qualified American Sign Language interpreters at nine Disaster Recovery Centers across the territory and collaborated with voluntary



organizations to deliver durable medical equipment (DME) to the territory.

The USVI Disability Integration team also collaborated with Friends of Disabled Adults and Children and the Pass It On Center, both nonprofit organizations, to distribute hundreds of donated DME and supplies. DME included wheelchairs, walkers, nebulizers, shower supports, hospital beds and hearing aids to the elderly and those with access and functional needs. Through this collaboration, local donors were matched with survivors to meet unique needs. Hundreds of survivors benefited from this initiative and received critical medical supplies to assist them in their journey to regain their independence.

According to the 2010 U.S. census, people over age 65 made up 13.5 % of the USVI population and people with disabilities made up 9.8%. FEMA's USVI Disability Integration team is taking measures to provide more equitable services to the territory's senior and disability communities by facilitating engagement and community capacity building on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John.

"Ensuring that projects are built to federal and industry standards increases accessibility to government services, programs and facilities," said U.S. Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien. "Through FEMA's Public Assistance Program with the support of the USVI Disability Integration Team, many recovery projects received much-needed funding to create inclusive and equitable facilities for residents and visitors. The Office of Disaster Recovery thanks FEMA and Territorial ADA Coordinator Julien Henley for their efforts to ensure a safer, better and stronger Territory for all Virgin Islanders."

FEMA's USVI Disability Integration team provided recommendations for ADA upgrades to public facilities that met FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) Program requirements. The team provided input on the following recovery projects:

The Christiansted Boardwalk on St. Croix:

- Collaborated with internal and external partners; the project was awarded PA funding to improve accessibility in the parking area.

The Adrian Senior Center at George Simmons Terrace in Estate Adrian on St. John:



- Provided recommendations to improve the accessibility of the kitchen and restroom which serves St. John's elderly population.

The Magens Bay Bathhouse on St. Thomas:

- Provided technical guidance to address accessibility needs and federal requirements; collaborated with local and federal partners.

Government House on St. Thomas:

- Provided support to improve physical access to Government House; the facility will include two platform lifts and an accessible elevator, providing whole community access.

FEMA Disability Integration will continue to play a key role in supporting the U.S. Virgin Islands in working to ensure equitable access to its programs and services. The USVI Disability Integration team remains committed to collaborating with the territory and other federal partners to repair and revitalize parks, libraries, public housing and healthcare facilities in support of building long-term resiliency.





FEMA Disability Integration provided recommendations to improve the accessibility of the kitchen and restroom of the Adrian Senior Center at George Simmons Terrace in Estate Adrian on St. John. The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Human Services provides community programs to St. John's elderly population at the senior center. *FEMA/Eric Adams*



FEMA



FEMA Disability Integration provided support for accessible elements to improve physical access to Government House on St. Thomas. This facility will include two platform lifts and an accessible elevator. *FEMA/Eric Adams*

