

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness, get all the latest tips from experts in the field, and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes. From the emergency management department in the city that never sleeps. Here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Omar Bourne ([00:27](#)):

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I am Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi ([00:31](#)):

And I'm Allison Pennisi, and you are our listeners. And as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can, so feel free to listen to "Prep Talk" on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on our social media, on our Twitter @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, and much more. As the nation continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we at Prep Talk are continuing to practice social distancing, and are coming to you from our respective homes and offices. We hope you, our listeners, are staying healthy and safe.

Omar Bourne ([01:02](#)):

That's right, Allison, even though we're practicing social distancing, community organizations have found ways to help those in need during COVID-19. We're going to be exploring that today by talking to two representatives from two organizations that have been active in their communities during this pandemic.

Allison Pennisi ([01:20](#)):

Please welcome to "Prep Talk" Reverend Karen Jackson, who is the director of recovery and community initiatives for Project Hospitality based on Staten Island.

Karen Jackson ([01:30](#)):

Thank you so much.

Allison Pennisi ([01:32](#)):

And we also welcome to the show Erum Hanif, who is chief executive officer of APNA Community Center in Brooklyn.

Erum Hanif ([01:40](#)):

Thank you so much, Allison.

Omar Bourne ([01:42](#)):

And we want to thank you both for being here to discuss the differences your organizations are making in the community. So let us get right into it. Reverend Jackson, I want to start with you. Project Hospitality is an interfaith effort committed to serving food to those who are in need. Tell us about your organization's mission and the people you are dedicated to serving.

Karen Jackson ([02:07](#)):

Oh, I'm so proud to work for Project Hospitality. Our nonprofit is the largest comprehensive social service provider on Staten Island. We meet hunger needs in our community through our pantries, our soup kitchens, and a mobile pantry that was formed in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. We run the borough's homeless drop-in center for adults and a homeless drop-in center for youth, supportive housing for people with HIV and AIDS, and a wellness center that provides mental health counseling and substance abuse treatment. My programs help people to apply for public benefits and we help people with immigration legal services, domestic violence intervention, and health insurance navigation. Our nonprofit helps tens of thousands of vulnerable Staten Islanders every year by providing them with all the different kinds of supports that they need in order to achieve their self-sufficiency.

Allison Pennisi ([03:06](#)):

Thank you so much for sharing. Now, Erum, APNA's mission aims to provide a safe, appropriate environment for adults of different ages through social and development opportunities. Can you share more with our listeners about your organization?

Erum Hanif ([03:20](#)):

Sure, Allison. So APNA Brooklyn Community Center is located in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, with the mission of helping our community through community engagement, education and development initiative. Since the inception of APNA in 2017, APNA already jumped into projects to meet the needs of low income immigrant New Yorkers. Majority of them are South Asians, people from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and APNA provide them help in applying for entitlement services, like whether it's food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, social security, disability. Along with that, APNA helped them in getting civically engaged. We have hosted various civic engagement and voter registration events. Apart from that, APNA also partnered with other community based organizations and city agencies. In terms of better serving our community members, we provide legal help, free legal consultancy. We partnered with other organizations in terms of providing food assistance and providing them food, groceries, as well as after also provide them assistance in applying for income tax. And we also hosted various community engagement events like family days or Eid Mela, movie night, and the whole purpose of APNA's work is to bridge the gap between the community and the needs and the resources.

Omar Bourne ([04:53](#)):

Thank you both for sharing that information. A lot of great work that you're both doing in the communities. And I wanted to get to the impact of COVID-19 because as you know, for the past few months, we've been dealing with the pandemic here in the city. So what impact did COVID-19 have on your ability to connect with your community and how were you able to adapt to continue providing resources and services? Erum, let's start with you.

Erum Hanif ([05:24](#)):

Okay. So the COVID-19 situation have completely change many setups, many processes, many structures, but APNA took the situation as an opportunity rather than just taking it as a challenge. For us, we jumped into a new projects in terms of helping our community members. So we started, we were working with the city and we were one of the city's grab and go sites for halal meals, distribution, and pantry boxes distribution. And since the start off April 24th, I would say, we started distribution three days in a week from our center more than 2,000 pantry boxes, more than 5,000 individuals used to get food from our center. Until now, this food distribution is continued and we are serving our community

three meals, hot halal meals, four days in a week. Along with that, we distribute other things like milk and meat and other stuff, which is the basic need of the community.

Erum Hanif ([06:25](#)):

Along with that, APNA also started providing them assistance in terms of getting financial assistance, whether it is unemployment insurance, whether it is stimulus checks, or whether it is any other sort of financial relief or how they can get directly from any city agency, from federal unemployment insurance and other benefits because the community we serve, are majority of them are not native English speakers, and they cannot navigate all these online applications and systems. So they need somebody to help them out to complete all these applications. So that is one of the project which APNA took over. And we are very proud to say that we help more than 200 families in getting some sort of financial help, ask for their eligibility. So these are the two major things. And even during the pandemic, as we were working with income tax filing and preparation, and all of a sudden it got stopped, but we had our constituents in continuously applying for their income tax report, income tax returns digitally in partnership with Grow Brooklyn, which is a partner organization.

Erum Hanif ([07:36](#)):

So these are a couple of things which APNA have continued during the pandemic. And we are continuously helping our constituents and applying for all these benefits and resources. And APNA also what we did another thing was we have done Eid celebration because during the month of Ramadan, the Muslim population celebrate one of the largest event of the year, which is Eid holiday and people who are home bound, there was so much depression going on. Kids were not able to come out. So soon after the Eid, we have a really organized Eid festival in which we have distributed to hundreds of hundreds of toys to our children by maintaining social distancing and by having appropriate PPEs. We have also organized a spring celebration in Brighton Beach, in partnership with other organizations. So these are a couple of things which we have done so far during the pandemic in terms of engaging and maintaining an environment where yes, we have to deal with the challenge. But along with that, we have to live with this. We have to learn how to live in this new norm.

Omar Bourne ([08:47](#)):

Erum, I'm glad that you mentioned halal meals. And before we get to Karen, the halal meals are important because I think people don't realize that we're going through a pandemic, yes. And there are certain people that have dietary needs that need the help. So mentioning the fact that you're not only providing food, but you're providing the food that people need is a great point.

Erum Hanif ([09:15](#)):

Yes, absolutely.

Omar Bourne ([09:18](#)):

Karen, what about you?

Karen Jackson ([09:19](#)):

Well, COVID-19 has really devastated the lives of people on Staten Island, either because they were sick, or they cared for, or they lost someone who was sick, or haven't been able to work and are experiencing really serious financial hardship that has led to a real hunger and real suffering. Our food pantries have been utilized by community members in need more than ever before. While a lot of our longtime

volunteers who are seniors have needed to stay at home. So we are stretched thin with fewer people and fewer resources, but we are super committed to meeting the hunger need in our community week after week. We're also able to provide homeless Staten Islanders who are so vulnerable to contracting the virus with safe and sanitary places to sleep at night and access to medical care. People grieving the loss of loved ones to COVID-19 are able to receive tele-health counseling through Project Hospitality's Wellness Center, and our benefits and rollers have assisted so many Staten Islanders with applying for snap benefits for the first time, enrolling in Medicaid, and applying for unemployment.

Karen Jackson ([10:36](#)):

I've particularly seen a lot of need among immigrant Staten Islanders who were unable to receive an economic impact payment or unemployment benefits and who have accrued maybe several months worth of rent arrears while waiting to be able to return to work. And I'm proud that my organization has been able to distribute \$220,000 in direct emergency relief to these households since the start of the COVID-19 crisis.

Allison Pennisi ([11:06](#)):

Both of you are incredibly noble work to help fellow new Yorkers. And we sincerely appreciate everything you've done, especially during this pandemic. You both also work closely with New York City Emergency Management as Community Organizations Active in Disaster, or COADs, although no one likes for a disaster to occur. And obviously the city is currently responding to one. We all know what's important for individuals and communities to be prepared. So can you talk about the importance of emergency preparedness and the work you are doing to prepare your communities, in addition to responding to this current emergency? Erum, let's start with you.

Erum Hanif ([11:49](#)):

Okay. Why not? Yes. As you mentioned, Allison, that nobody wanted to have any emergency to occur or any disaster to occur, but we have to be ready. And we as a community organization have a duty in terms of making our community aware about what's coming next and how to get ready and prepared. So that's the one step APNA has taken as we are a member of South Brooklyn CO-AD. From the CO-AD and from the New York City Emergency Management team we are continuously updating, getting all the information and resources, not only in English language, but in their culturally competent languages, like in our South Asian community, we have materials available in Urdu and in Punjabi and Bengali languages, which we distribute to our constituents in terms of making them more aware about how to get prepared, how to get themselves ready about any emergency situation. So that's, I think it's a very good blessing of joining the CO-AD or the [inaudible 00:12:50] team in terms of getting all the resources and information and delivering it to the constituent directly. Because as a grassroots organization, still, we are able to have a one on one interaction certain times when they are coming to our food pantry or getting any food assistance from us. So we are continuously doing this and that's a, I think, a great way of working together.

Omar Bourne ([13:17](#)):

Erum, that's a salient point that you make in terms of language access. Here at Emergency Management, we work closely with communities to ensure that we're providing the materials that people need in the languages that they need them. We have our material and information in 13 different languages. And so it is key, it is important, it is integral that during preparedness, recovery, response, we have to meet people where they are, and we have to be able to provide the information for them in the ways that

they can understand. So an important point that you made in terms of language access. Karen, let's turn to you.

Karen Jackson ([13:59](#)):

Well, in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, Project Hospitality worked very closely with our FEMA veils to create the Staten Island Longterm Recovery Organization, which is a coalition of more than 50 Staten Island nonprofits, houses of worship, and civic organizations. After Sandy, our coalition conducted these large scale needs assessment, canvases of impacted community members, and we coordinated volunteers to muck and gut and rebuild people's homes, and connected people in need to disaster case management. And we distributed more than \$1.4 million worth of grants, volunteer, labor and supplies. So I think creating this coalition of nonprofit and community leaders ready to work together to help our neighbors in the aftermath of a disaster is one of the most important emergency preparedness measures we've been able to take as a borough. Our coalition has also hosted many workshops to train households on how to pack a go bag and make an emergency plan.

Karen Jackson ([15:04](#)):

And we've partnered with New York City Emergency Management to host a train the trainer workshop for Staten Island faith leaders, to be able to train their congregants in emergency preparedness. Now in response to COVID-19 our longterm recovery organization has been conducting city wide needs assessment canvases to get a sense of what the predominant unmet needs are among general community members, food access and rent assistance being the top two. And we've called thousands of people to do wellness checks in English and Spanish and connect people to resources. We're also very active in New York City VOAD, which is the citywide coalition of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.

Omar Bourne ([15:52](#)):

Karen, I am happy that you brought up VOADs and the volunteers. How can people sign up to volunteer with your organization and the same question for Erum?

Erum Hanif ([16:03](#)):

Project Hospitality loves our volunteers. And so we welcome people to come and serve in our food pantries or in any other ways that you're able to contribute. New volunteers can call our main office at (718) 448-1544, or just fill out a volunteer application through our website, projecthospitality.org

Erum Hanif ([16:23](#)):

APNA also relies a lot on our volunteers and anyone who is willing to volunteer can call us at (718) 648-4300. Or they can also email us at info@apnabrooklyn.com. They can join us for our efforts in food distribution, and as well as because APNA is also partner of 2020 Census. And during this pandemic, we were encouraging our constituents to not to forget about census because all our resources, all our infrastructure, all our schools, hospitals, and education system, everything, all the resources and funding depends about our census numbers. So just a reminder for everybody, we are dealing with a pandemic situation. It's an unprecedented time, but not do not forget about the importance of census because the next 10 years of lives in New York City are depending upon our numbers.

Omar Bourne ([17:23](#)):

Thank you very much for that information. I want to switch gears a little to your message that you have for your community. You guys are both engaged within your communities. As we know, this is an unprecedented time, as you said, Erum, I want to ask what message do you have for the people in your community? What message of hope can you give them during this time? Erum, let's start with you.

Erum Hanif ([17:56](#)):

Okay. So as you said, this is a challenging and unprecedented time for everyone. So the one message I would like to give to our community is that no matter how difficult the life is, no matter how difficult the challenges are, there's always a way to get through this and working together and moving together is the right approach to get to this pandemic. And we will get through this together.

Omar Bourne ([18:17](#)):

Karen, you're up next? What message of hope?

Karen Jackson ([18:20](#)):

I would want to let Staten Islanders who are struggling in response to COVID-19 know that Project Hospitality is here to serve and help, but really the purpose of life is to love one another and to love our neighbors. And Staten Island is a very diverse and unified community. And the more that we can do to step up and practice social distancing and volunteer our time and our resources to help our neighbors, the more quickly we will recover and the stronger we'll be as a community.

Allison Pennisi ([18:52](#)):

Yes, it goes back to something we say on Prep Talk that our communities are part of our everyday life. It's important for all of us to work together during all phases of a disaster. And it's very important for New Yorkers to know that their community and their community organizations are there for them. If you are a community organization looking to get involved in emergency preparedness and resiliency, you could visit NYC.gov/communitypreparedness or check out our partners information on their respective websites. I'm talking with Reverend Karen Jackson from Project Hospitality and Erum Hanif, chief executive officer of APNA Community Center in Brooklyn. Up next is rapid response.

Speaker 7 ([19:41](#)):

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Allison Pennisi ([19:47](#)):

All right. It's rapid response time. And if you are a first time listener, it's simple, Omar and I will ask questions and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind.

Speaker 7 ([19:58](#)):

It's time for Prep Talk rapid response.

Allison Pennisi ([20:04](#)):

Okay, what is the one emergency item you cannot live without? Reverend Jackson, let's start with you.

Karen Jackson ([20:10](#)):

Wifi access. The ability to communicate after a disaster is so important. And I'm really grateful to organizations like New America that have been building free public wifi networks across New York City as a disaster preparedness initiative.

Allison Pennisi ([20:26](#)):

Excellent. Erum, how about you?

Erum Hanif ([20:28](#)):

I was about to say the same thing. Internet is the most important thing right now. We cannot live with internet. We are completely dependent on internet right now, in any case of emergency or disaster, I think internet accessibility is the keys of connecting with each other and dealing with the disaster.

Omar Bourne ([20:47](#)):

Allison, I have to say, this is the first time I think that we've had both say wifi access.

Allison Pennisi ([20:54](#)):

I would agree with you on that. I think that this is... I was just about to say the same thing, [inaudible 00:20:58] for Prep Talk, wifi access, obviously something very critical people have said phones, people have said their computers, but wifi access, I think this is absolutely a Prep Talk first.

Omar Bourne ([21:09](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. But no, it's great. Let's move on to our second question. What is the one thing you want listeners to know about your community? Reverend Jackson, let's start with you.

Karen Jackson ([21:22](#)):

That Staten Island is a diverse community of people that we care about each other, and we're willing to work together in really creative and innovative ways to help our community prepare for and recover from disasters.

Erum Hanif ([21:36](#)):

Okay. So the Brighton Beach community is also a very diverse community. We have people from, I believe so more than 20 different countries and different niche, nationalities, different ethnic backgrounds, different language and cultural preferences. But the beauty of this community is that the all are living together and we are all getting ready and prepared together in terms of dealing any unforeseen situation or any disaster.

Allison Pennisi ([22:06](#)):

Last question, sum up the work you do in one word, Reverend Jackson, let's start with you.

Karen Jackson ([22:11](#)):

My word is care.

Erum Hanif ([22:14](#)):

My word is together.

Allison Pennisi ([22:17](#)):

Both great answers. And speaking with Reverend Karen Jackson and Erum Hanif, we sincerely appreciate you being on Prep Talk to talk about how you've helped your communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. To our listeners, it is important to know that we are all in this together, and it is important that we all work together before, during, and after a disaster.

Speaker 1 ([22:44](#)):

That's this episode of "Prep Talk." If you like, what you heard, you can listen any time online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.