

Disaster exercise to safeguard children conducted in Putnam

Nearly 60 percent of Putnam households believe they would be reunited with their children within several hours of a major disaster. Yet history has proven otherwise: it took an astounding seven months to reunite the last child with his family after Hurricane Katrina.

This reality, and the fact that each day, nearly 20,000 children in Putnam County spend the majority of their day at a childcare facility or school, are the reasons behind the disaster preparedness exercise performed by Putnam County's Community Resilience Coalition on Wednesday, May 3. More than 50 attendees from 28 organizations and agencies participated in the event at the Centennial Golf Club in Carmel.

"This exercise brings a deeper understanding of how our Putnam organizations and agencies interact during an emergency," said County Executive MaryEllen Odell. "By providing an opportunity for our child-serving institutions to partner with local emergency responders, we improve communication and response to support and protect the children of our community."

To better address the unique needs of children, the local Community Resilience Coalition (CRC), an official subcommittee of the longstanding Disaster Preparedness Task Force of Putnam County, conducted a discussion-based, "tabletop" exercise to test the assumptions, protocols and resources of child-serving institutions and key community stakeholders who may interact with children before, during, and after an emergency.

"The purpose of the exercise was to envision all the possibilities that could happen and then to decide how we, as community or-

ganizations, would handle it," said Anthony Sutton, commissioner of the Bureau of Emergency Services of Putnam County. "By talking through the steps of a specified scenario, we identify where the gaps are and how best to fill them."

The scenario that was played out involved a major earthquake with direct damage in Putnam County, causing evacuation at some childcare and other essential facilities, and limiting availability of state and federal resources.

More than 65 percent of American households do not have an adequate emergency plan, and nearly half have none. Additionally, 45 percent of Putnam households believe help will arrive in under an hour in the event of a large-scale, unanticipated disaster, indicating a widespread sense of unrealistic expectations and false security. Furthermore, in Putnam County, 41 percent of households are not familiar with their child's daycare or school evacuation and emergency plan. These statistics collectively support the notion that if disaster were to strike, many communities would be underprepared to protect children.

This exercise is a component of the national Resilient Children/Resilient Communities Initiative (RCRC), a partnership between the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Earth Institute and Save the Children (STC) funded by a grant from GSK. Putnam County is one of two pilot communities in the U.S. working on the RCRC Initiative.

The players in the exercise included representatives from schools, child care and afterschool programs, law enforcement, public health and healthcare, emergency management and first responders,

and other various government and community organizations.

"Strengthening the link between emergency management and child-serving institutions ultimately improves all emergency plans, in addition to sharpening our response and recovery action," said Dr. Michael J. Nesheiwat, interim health commissioner.

The exercise scenario was collaboratively developed with input, advice, and assistance from a multi-agency exercise planning team. It followed the guidance set forth by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and was compliant with Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) protocols and standards.

Article provided by Putnam County Department of Health



PHOTO COURTESY OF PUTNAM COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
Robert Cuomo from the Bureau of Emergency Services and Yvonne Richards from the New York State Police were among the players representing a wide range of sectors from law enforcement to child-serving institutions.

We clear out nuisance invasives:

Poison Ivy
Grape Vines
Bittersweet
Wisteria
Knotweed
Wild Rose
Barberry
Stiltgrass
English Ivy
Sumac

& more

Poison Ivy Patrol

Specialty Landscaping

NEVER ANY CHEMICALS OR POISONS USED

•

Completely safe

•

non-toxic and effective

Reclaim Your Yard!

(845) 204-8274

www.poison-ivy-patrol.com

Fully Licensed & Insured

A MERIDIAN SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY

THE COUNTRY HOUSE

IN WESTCHESTER

Assisted Living

4th month FREE if moved-in by May 31st

EVERYONE DESERVES A GREAT LIFE!

Serving seniors for 40 years

Private Suites
Social Activities

Medication Management

Fine Dining
Daily Housekeeping

Transportation for Scheduled Appointments
24 Hour On-Site Health Office
Licensed by the State of New York
Qualified to Accept Long-Term Care Insurance
Short-Term Stay Available

The Country House in Westchester
2000 Baldwin Road • Yorktown Heights, New York 10598
914-962-3625

www.meridiansenior.com/community/the-country-house-in-westchester

www.facebook.com/Country-House-in-Westchester-1349815361696141/