When the Power Goes Out

by Donalyn Sjostrand, TCIL Executive Director

Here on the isolated North Coast, many people are used to the power going out when a tree falls or a car hits a pole. That happens occasionally and usually lasts a few hours, not days. When the events PG&E refers to as Public Safety Power Shutoffs or “PSPS” events began in the fall of last year, most people were not prepared to make it through 3 or more days without power. For some, it was an inconvenience, like camping indoors, some may have experienced it as an adventure, but for others, those that rely on electrical power to operate life-sustaining medical equipment or heaters, it was literally life-threatening.

On Friday, October 25, 2019, at 11:30 a.m., around 22 hours before a PSPS event was scheduled by PG&E which would shut off power to Humboldt County, TCIL was notified that PG&E had agreed to reimburse TCIL for costs TCIL would incur up to a certain ceiling, to provide emergency services during the upcoming PSPS event. This included services such as transporting people with disabilities to PG&E resource centers or moving people with disabilities who depended on electrical power to operate their durable medical equipment, charge their power wheelchairs or to heat their homes to prevent life-threatening conditions, to locations where power was available.

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Peer Profile - How PSPS Events Affected One Couple with Disabilities

By Tammy and Mark Newcomb

Our experience with the power outage started on October 8th when a DHHS representative called my home at 10 p.m. She said she was aware that my husband had medical equipment that required electricity in order to function. She told me there were no charging stations in Eureka, I would need to go to Blue Lake if we wanted to charge up his medical equipment. We lived through the two day and one overnight outage in a cold house. No one else contacted us during the time the power was out.

When the power went out the night of October 26th, we had not been contacted by any county service regarding the matter. We slept through the cold night. When we heard the newscasts saying the power would be out for several days, we became worried as to how my husband would survive sleeping in a cold house. He is very susceptible to Pneumonia. To have hot food to eat, we used the outside propane BBQ to cook up some bacon in the cast iron fry pan.

Two ladies from IHSS came by the house in person. They talked to us about our needs and we expressed our concerns about how vulnerable my husband is if he gets too cold in his fragile condition. We told the ladies we had spent the night in the cold. The ladies asked us to call Tri-County Independent Living and gave us the number. They told us they might have a way to provide a safe place for my husband to be in his condition.

We followed up with a call to Donalyn Sjostrand, TCIL Executive Director, who answered the phone herself and offered to assist us in our most vulnerable time. She told us she would be able to pick us up in an hour and drive us two hours away to Crescent City. It sounded like a long ways to go. Lucky for us we had a good friend watching over our house
Peer Profile

and our cats while we were gone.

We needed to determine if my husband could handle a two hour trip. Neither of us had ever been to Crescent City before. My husband goes through epileptic-like spells. Changes in the environment, weather, elevation can set his condition off. We ultimately decided it was worth the possibility because the power was going to be out for days and leaving him in the cold for days was not an option.

We pulled out the electric wheelchair then packed two six hour cans of oxygen onto the back. We grabbed some socks and medications then we were on our way in no time.

Tammy Newcomb

I knew we were in trouble as I continued to hear and read reports online of the upcoming weather. In my opinion, PG&E overstepped their authority and put the public into a panic. I watched the gas lines of 1978 come back, stations run out of gas and generators disappear off shelves. I watched and I prayed for the public to bring Peace to their fears. When the power went out I wasn't worried about myself but for my wife who was so lovingly keeping everything going since our son moved away to San Francisco, leaving his wheelchair bound father and blind wife to care for themselves.

I was quite surprised and relieved to hear we were being evacuated. I had begun to search through my old records to find my friend Charlie's phone number and other numbers. I don't remember when I last talked with everyone as everything, including time, goes by so quickly.

When the transportation arrived I was loaded in securely and driven to Crescent City, about two hours north of Eureka in the accessible van. It was a beautiful day and quite a scenic ride. I also noted a lot of scrub brush along the road and in the forest which should be addressed.

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When we arrived everything was ready and we settled in. This time I got to watch television. We watched and prayed as over 185,000 people were being evacuated down south in Sonoma County.

Our stay at the hotel was a pleasant restful three days of which we greatly appreciated. The oxygen tanks, wheelchair and medical equipment all had power. The day before we left I had the strength to go outside and see the harbor and fishing vessels. I was quite impressed and recalled the days when my father was the chief on the U.S.S. Intrepid during WWII & the story he told me of the Battle of Midway which he was in. Yet as I was rolling around, I met a lady who had worked at the Del Norte County Courthouse and since I’m on the California Grand Jury, we chatted about law and the courts. Oh my. The Lord works in mysterious ways. The next day we were taken back to our home in Eureka. All was well again and handled in a professional manner every step of the journey. - Mark Newcomb

**Editor’s Note:** Not to diminish the urgency of the situation we all faced, the part of the Newcomb’s story that struck me as unexpected and moving was how part of the experience opened up an appreciated opportunity for them. Other wheelchair users TCIL relocated during the PSPS event had similar experiences. One had not been out of her immediate residential area for 2 years and one had not been out of her home for 6 years. Once relocated, settled in and rested, they too found respite and enjoyment in the experience. This was a completely unexpected side benefit they all were grateful for in spite of the dangerous and frightening circumstance of being left powerless with no apparent assistance.

**Two New Staff Members Coming Soon to TCIL**

TCIL is in the process of interviewing applicants for the position of Community Advocate and Youth Coordinator. If you are interested in either position, to see if recruitment is still open and for more information, position descriptions, the application process and applications, go to TCIL’s website at www.tilinet.org/jobs.
TCIL is delighted to welcome Carolyn Webb as our first ever Office Manager. Carolyn has extensive Human Resources experience and brings her expertise to improve training, systems and operations here at TCIL and to support TCIL’s Executive Director. Her calm, cool and collected demeanor is already doing its magic. Welcome Carolyn!

With the expansion of TCIL’s services in Del Norte County, Trish Cottrell, former HSU Bachelor’s of Social Work Intern at TCIL, who coincidentally recently moved to Crescent City following completing her BSW Program, has joined the TCIL staff as an Independent Living Specialist and begun to provide Independent Living Services in TCIL’s new office at the Del Norte Senior Center. TCIL is happy not to lose her after all and to be able to use her move to provide direct services in Del Norte County.

Taking the reins from Caroline is Vincent Leavell. Vincent comes with over 16 years experience in customer service. Some of you may recognize him from serving you in his former job as a Eureka Coop clerk. He has already proven to be a natural fit in this position.

Anisa Escobedo was recently promoted to Advocacy and Outreach Specialist. She had previously served as TCIL’s Outreach/Volunteer/Youth Coordinator. In her new capacity she will work on Systematic Changes, Community Organizing, and outreach efforts in our community. Anisa was recently elected President of the North Coast Kiwanis.

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You Count - Be Counted! 2020 U.S. Census  By Charlie Bean

Being counted is very important! Participating in the US Census brings federal dollars to the area for hospitals, fire departments, schools, roads and other resources based on the census data. It’s also in the Constitution which states the country must conduct a count of its population once every 10 years, which it has been doing since 1790.

The results of the Census also determine the number of seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives and to draw congressional and state legislative districts. Although the Census will not be collecting information on disability status, it is still vital that people with disabilities are counted as the funding for the services they use and depend on are based on Census population results.

The census is for everyone, whether you are a U.S. citizen or not and regardless of what your primary language is. Translated Census web pages and guides are available in 59 languages including ASL and braille and large print.

Your answers to the Census are private. The U. S. Census website states, “When you respond to the census, your answers are kept anonymous. They are used only to produce statistics. The U.S. Census Bureau is bound by law to protect your answers and keep them strictly confidential. ”

TCIL is actively involved in local US Census planning to ensure that all people with disabilities are included in the count. TCIL is partnering with other organizations including the Humboldt County Complete Count Committee to inform, educate and reach disability community members about the Census.

On April 1, 2020, Census Day will be observed nationwide. By this date, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 Census. Once the invitation arrives, you should respond for the people in your home in one of three ways: online, by phone, or by mail. The invitation will tell you how to do that. When you respond to the Census, you should tell the Census Bureau
where you are living as of April 1, 2020. Census takers will be visiting homes during April to conduct quality check interviews, and, in mid-May, to help collect responses from people that have not yet participated in the Census. “If someone visits your home to collect information for the 2020 Census, check to make sure that they have a valid ID badge, with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date.” - quotation from the U.S. Census website.

The most challenging people to count are people who do not have a residential address. It is essential they be counted too. The Census Bureau will be counting people who are experiencing homelessness on March 30, March 31 and April 1, by counting people in shelters, at free meal locations, mobile food vans, on the streets, and at non-sheltered, outdoor locations such as tent encampments. Census takers will also visit college students living on campus, residents of senior living centers, health care facilities, correctional facilities and others who live in large groups.

TCIL will be serving as a Census Questionnaire Assistance Center (QAC) from March 1, 2020, through June 30, 2020. QACs are physical locations that provide the public with information about the 2020 Census and have staff who can answer Census questions and assist with completing the Census questionnaire online or by phone, privately and confidentially.

Watch your mail for your invitation to participate in the 2020 Census and complete it and return it! More information about the 2020 Census can be found at: https://2020census.gov/en.html, or for Frequently Asked Questions at https://2020census.gov/en/help.html. You can call the U.S. Census Information line at 301-763-INFO (4636) or toll-free 800-923-8282, or call TCIL at (707) 445-8404 or toll-free at (833) 866-8444. For information on services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing: Call the U.S. Census TTY (800) 877-8339 to reach the Federal Relay Service.

Don’t be left out. You Count - Be Counted!
Legislative Update

On October 2, 2019, Governor Newsome signed the following into law:

California AB-426 (Maienschein): Fees Cannot Be Charged to Certify IHSS Need

Under the In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program, if an individual needs personal assistance in their home to live independently, they must have a licensed health care professional certify that 1) they are disabled and 2) need that service. In some cases, health care professionals charge to complete these certifications. AB-426 prevents a licensed health care professional from charging a fee for the completion of the certification form. This bill was introduced by Brian Maienschein, Assemblymember District 77, San Diego. For more information on this bill visit: http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billCompareClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB426

California AB-1088 (Wood): Fixes the Medi-Cal Yo-Yo Rule

This legislation will benefit many people who have disabilities, are covered by Medicare and who are not receiving assistance to stay in their homes because of the continuous, expensive share-of-costs they must pay.

Background: When a Medicare enrollee applies for Medi-Cal, income counting rules deduct the cost of their Part B premium. Once they are on Medi-Cal, the state pays their Part B premium as a benefit of free Medi-Cal. Because the beneficiary is no longer paying out of pocket, they no longer receive the income deduction. If their income is close to the cap, the “increased” income causes them to yo-yo from free Medi-Cal to a Share-of-Cost Program. Those affected end up not only with high-cost Medi-Cal, but they must also pay their own Part B premiums again, despite no change in their actual income.

A person with a disability or senior with an income even $1 above the income cap is only eligible for Medi-Cal with a
Legislative Update

This bill provides for recipients to keep deducting the cost of their Part B premium once they are enrolled in free Medi-Cal. Those who are eligible for free Medi-Cal when they enroll, will stay eligible when the state starts paying their Part B premiums if their income doesn’t otherwise increase. This ensures that our low-income population can access medical care without spending their limited income on supplemental insurance they don’t need. This bill was introduced by Assembly member Jim Woods, District 2, representing Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Sonoma, and Trinity Counties. For more information on this bill visit:

http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1088

Federal Budget for 2021:
The proposed federal budget for 2021 includes a $2 million cut in funding for Independent Living nationwide.

Out of an abundance of caution, Tri-County Independent Living is actively responding to the presence of Coronavirus in Humboldt County. We are putting processes in place to support the health and safety of our staff and our clients.

We ask that anyone paying a visit to TCIL please assure you are healthy and not currently experiencing any symptoms. We will gladly reschedule your appointment or make a telephone appointment for you. Do not be surprised or alarmed to see staff wearing masks as part of our precautionary measures.
PG&E’s Medical Baseline Program

You may have heard about programs that PG&E offers for income qualified customers, but did you know that its Medical Baseline Program does not require a customer to have a qualifying income? Anyone who meets the qualifications for the program, regardless of income, can participate.

What is the Medical Baseline Program? According to PG&E, “It is an assistance program for residential customers who have special energy needs due to qualifying medical conditions.” This can include, for example, people who use electricity to run oxygen inhalation devices, respirators, hemodialysis equipment, power wheelchair or scooter, power lifting devices and even BIPAP, CPAP or IPPB machines. People who have paraplegic, hemiplegic or quadriplegic conditions, or have multiple sclerosis or scleroderma or a life-threatening illness or compromised immune system or extremely poor circulation that requires special heating and/or cooling needs to sustain life or prevent medical deterioration also may qualify for the program.

Participants receive a lower rate on their bill for their energy use. They also receive advance notifications of a Public Safety Power Shutoff “PSPS” via automated telephone calls, texts or emails depending on the customer’s preference. They may receive extra notifications from PG&E by being a Medical Baseline Program customer beyond what regular customers receive. PG&E is strongly encouraging ALL eligible customers to enroll in the Medical Baseline Program for a very important reason. The utility is using the

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information from this program to identify how many of its customers require energy for medical conditions and where those customers are, so, in the event of a PSPS, the utility says it will endeavor to get power restored first to those areas with the highest concentration of Medical Baseline Program participants, if possible. It also helps identify those customers’ specific power needs, and the medical conditions they experience that require energy to operate medical devices. PG&E states that, in the event of a PSPS, this information may be used to better assist those customers to stay safe.

If you have a medical condition that might qualify you for this program, we urge you to contact TCIL. We can help you apply for this program. Or, you can apply online at www.pge.com. Not only will you get lowered energy bills, but you will help both you and other members in your community who are on the Medical Baseline Program be visible, accounted for, and get the extra notice and help you may need in a PSPS.

### Did You Know?

**Older Americans are significantly more likely than younger Americans to have a disability,** according to the American Community Survey, about half of Americans aged 75 and older (49.8%) reported living with a disability in 2015. About a quarter (25.4%) of the respondents who stated they had a disability were age 65 to 74. 13% of those aged 35 to 64 and 6% of respondents ages 18 to 34 said they had a disability. In absolute numbers, those ages 35 to 64 accounted for more disabled Americans – nearly 16 million in 2015 – than any other age group.

### Upcoming Holidays at TCIL

The TCIL office will be closed on the following holidays:

- Caesar Chavez, Tuesday, March 31st
- Memorial Day, Monday, May 25th
- Independence Day, Friday, July 3rd
TCIL Receives Donations of Zoo Tickets and Pajamas for Clients

TCIL was recently given a generous donation of zoo admission tickets for TCIL clients from Sequoia Park Zoo and Foundation through their new program - Everyone's Zoo Program. This donation will provide 100 people with disabilities the chance to experience the zoo. TCIL staff member Anisa Escobedo learned of the opportunity to obtain the tickets while attending a presentation by Sequoia Park Zoo Executive Director Gretchen Ziegler about this new program offering zoo tickets to non-profit organizations.

If you are a client of TCIL and would like a free ticket to the zoo, contact your TCIL service provider for further information at (707) 445-8404.

TCIL also received a generous donation of 12 pairs of new, stylish women’s flannel pajamas from Humboldt Towing. These pajamas were distributed by TCIL’s Transition Coordinator Lisa Leon to TCIL clients in Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Facilities. Often times, physically unable to leave the facility to purchase their own clothing, oft times only having hospital gowns available to wear and usually living on a modest budget, clients were thrilled with these pajamas and the greater dignity, respect (and maybe even a little envy for their style!) that it will bring them.

TCIL thanks Humboldt Towing for its donation for people with disabilities. This in-kind donation valued at nearly $400 will make TCIL eligible to receive matching grant funds in the same amount through the Seymour grant.
College of the Redwoods Adult Education Living Skills Classes for People with Disabilities. Even if classes have already started, you can join at any time. Classes offered:

**Functional Money Skills**
March 24th - May 14th, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 - 11:00 am. Multi-Generational Center, 2280 Newburg Rd., Fortuna.

**Basic Computer Skills**
April 21st - May 14th, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:55 - 2:20 pm. 333 6th St., Eureka.

**Life Management and Career Preparation**
April 20th - May 13th, Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:55 - 2:20 pm. 333 6th St., Eureka.

**Survival Vocabulary and Basic Literacy**
March 2nd - April 15th, Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:55 - 2:20 pm. 333 6th St., Eureka.

**Community Resources**
January 24th - May 15th, Fridays, 11:30 am - 2:30 pm, 333 6th St., Eureka.
Learn more about Adult Ed classes at: https://www.redwoods.edu/adulted/

**Ongoing Support Groups:**
For information on local support groups related to disability, or supporting persons with disabilities, please go to www.tilinet.org/resources/supportgroups

**SAVE THE DATE!**
October 8th TCIL’s 2020 Disability & Senior EXPO
10am - 3pm, Adorni Center, 1011 Waterfront Drive, Eureka. FREE.
Learn about the many services and programs of our community partners who will be exhibiting at the Expo, see their interactive displays and live demonstrations highlighting their services or products.
Writing Bird
by Elizabeth Stebbins
The Writing-Bird is a unique writing device for persons with limited hand coordination, dexterity or a weak grasp. It is an ideal writing device for persons with arthritis or neurological disorders and for individuals who lack thumb to fingertip pinch. The Writing-Bird securely holds a writing pen or pencil. The Writing-Bird slides easily along writing surfaces using upper arm strength. Only slight downward pressure is needed to write. The Writing Bird is made of durable frosted acrylic.

Designed to rest comfortably in either the right or left hand. TCIL has a Writing-Bird available from it’s AT Lending Library if you would like to try it and see if it works for you.

Contact: Elizabeth@tilinet.org for more information. Price: $23.00

Comings & Goings - Continued from Page 5

Caroline Cox, TCIL’s Administration and Program Support Specialist, who has been the first smile to greet people visiting TCIL for the past year, has moved onto to further develop her career. Best of luck, Caroline.

TCIL is sad to say goodbye to 2 additional highly valued and respected staff members – Cindy Calderon, and Charlie Bean. Each of them has contributed enormously to TCIL, expanded our reach and presence in the community and earned respected reputations in the community for themselves and TCIL. We will miss them all and do our best to carry on the work they have been engaged in. Thank you to the two of them for all they have given to TCIL in their time here.
When the Power Goes Out

Although TCIL provides services to people with disabilities, our funding (state and federal grants) had never included funding to provide emergency services. This was not an arena TCIL had ever worked in before and it was nothing TCIL had been able to provide before.

Within less than one hour of that notification from PG&E, TCIL staff dropped all other business and gathered to make an emergency services plan we could implement immediately. All staff that serve clients directly got on the phone and phoned every one of them to check on their welfare and see if there were services they would need in the absence of electricity. Among those they were able to reach, they identified all clients at risk. Other staff began contacting pharmacies, grocery stores, hotels, gas stations, compiling lists of who would be open and providing services during the shut off. TCIL posted emergency resources and updates on the PSPS status hourly on social media. TCIL transferred its main phone line to an agency cell phone so we could receive phone calls even without power.

Staff members volunteered to provide services over the weekend. Hotel rooms in Crescent City, the closest place that had accessible, available rooms with electricity, were located and then booked. Gift cards for meals and gasoline were purchased to provide to those who needed them that were relocating to emergency lodging out of county to access power.

Over 90 battery-operated lanterns, previously donated by PG&E to TCIL for our Disability and Senior Expo, were distributed in the community, mostly by TCIL volunteer Steve Coach at Silvercrest.

We notified other agencies including Dept of Health and Human Services that we would have an accessible van available to transport people over the weekend. We collaborated with the office of Emergency Services, the Red Cross and with the Dept of Public Health.

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When the Power Goes Out

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TCIL staff made arrangements for people to lodge in Del Norte County hotels and transported those that needed accessible transportation there and back, nearly a two hour drive each way when transporting people in their wheelchairs in the van.

During the power shut off, TCIL staff answered the cell phone which the main phone had been forwarded to, throughout the weekend - day and night. We were available to provide transportation to PG&E Resource Center charging stations or to our office to charge equipment. TCIL staff worked in excess of 40 hours over that weekend providing services while the power was out.

We had no generator, and stores were already sold out of generators, but we had earlier received one power station donated to TCIL from Yeti, a manufacturer of power stations. We heard a rumor that Costco was getting in 90 more generators on Monday morning. I went down early Monday morning, long before Costco opened, and there was already a long line. Costco employees were handing a slip to each person in line that had a number on it, up to the 90th person. My slip said #76. I gave thanks. While waiting in line, people naturally chatted and I told the people near me that I was with TCIL and we provide services to people with disabilities and I was trying to get a generator to keep the office open during the shutoff so we could provide emergency services. The lady in front of me said she had only come for ice, but she would be willing to accept a slip for a generator, buy it, deliver it to our office and then we could repay her when she delivered the generator to us. I delightedly agreed.

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Shortly after meeting in line at Costco on Monday, the lady delivered the generator to our office. When I went to pay her, she said “Just round the payment down” which amounted to a donation of over $130 from her! With the two generators from Costco and the Yeti power station, our AT and IT staff worked to make the office as functional as we could once the power went out. We managed makeshift lighting, set up a functioning printer and charged all our laptops and cell phones before the power went out.

It was too short of notice to be able to purchase any power stations to loan to clients – the city was already cleaned out of those before we got the notice.

Just as we were beginning to plan to bring people back from their hotels in Del Norte, PG&E announced a second PSPS on the heels of the first one. Instead of bringing them back, they stayed and we jumped in to move even more people out of the county for the second PSPS. Just as I was finishing up making my second roundtrip in a day moving more people to Del Norte for the second PSPS, after getting the latest evacuees settled in for the evening, news arrived that the second PSPS was canceled.

In the end, not counting those people that utilized TCIL’s posts on social media, TCIL served 690 community members answering their questions, referring them to resources, providing direct emergency services, etc., provided 35 nights total of hotel stays, provided 36 gift cards for meals and gasoline, distributed 90 pieces of durable medical equipment, advanced over $12,000 to pay for expenses related to the power shutoff such as lodging, meals and gasoline gift cards, generators, etc., and nearly another $6,000 in personnel costs. For that one PSPS event alone, TCIL staff spent over 254 hours combined working on the power shutoff. TCIL was only able to do this because it had savings in its general fund from donations, fund-raising and matching funds.

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I am proud of and grateful for the way TCIL staff members immediately rose to the challenge, found creative, innovative ways to serve our community with less than 24 hours’ notice, dropped their personal lives and were there for our community in its time of need.

As we look forward to future power shutoffs by PG&E, we will use what we have learned through our “trial-by-fire” experience last fall. Next time, we will be better prepared. What will next time look like? We don’t exactly know, but we have been in negotiations since the middle of last year to be a subcontractor to PG&E to provide emergency service during a PG&E power shutoff to people with disabilities. In fact, this issue of our newsletter has been held back for several months in hopes this article could announce that that contract had been secured and what it would mean for Humboldt County. Now, some 3 plus months after the last shutoff, those negotiations are still in progress.

What we expect is that TCIL will have power stations that it will be able to loan to its clients, to clients of other social services organizations who are referred to TCIL and to non-profit organizations that agree to remain open during a power shutoff to provide emergency services. If so, there will be a limited number of power stations of different types and capabilities that would be
loaned out on a first-come-first served basis. TCIL may or may not have enough power stations, or a power station available that will meet an applicant’s energy needs.

If you have a medically prescribed need for the use of electricity, and do not have the means to access electricity yourself in the event of a power shutoff, and would like to be on a waiting list to borrow a power station should they become available, and are a current TCIL client, contact TCIL at (707) 445-8404 and speak to your Independent Living Specialist about completing an Emergency/Power Outage Events Needs Supplemental Intake Form.

If you are not a current client of TCIL but are a current client of another local social services organization and are a person with a self-identified significant disability who would like to be on this waiting list, ask your service provider to contact TCIL at (707) 445-8404 about how you can apply to be on our waitlist.
If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, email aa@tilinet.org