



Event Report

Ross Ct Disaster Popup

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Summary

On Nov 22, 2017 a neighborhood event took place on Ross Ct in Palo Alto CA. The goal was to improve individual and collective resiliency to disaster at the block level, and to test an event model that incorporates an experiential learning experience with a traditional block party.

This report offers an overview and evaluation of the event.

Event Overview

The goal of the Ross Ct Disaster Popup was to improve individual and collective resilience to disaster at the block level. It comprised a 2-hour experiential learning experience preceded by an informal breakfast, and followed by lunch. This was a pilot of the event format and learning materials undertaken in collaboration with Creative Crisis Leadership¹, whose mission is to prime the grassroots response to crisis by spreading spontaneous leadership skills in the general population. This was the second pilot event².

Carrie, a resident of the block, organized the party. The experiential learning experience was designed and supported by Creative Crisis Leadership. The event was supported by a grant from Palo Alto's Know Your Neighbors Grant Program³, and was developed in cooperation with City of Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services⁴.

Objectives

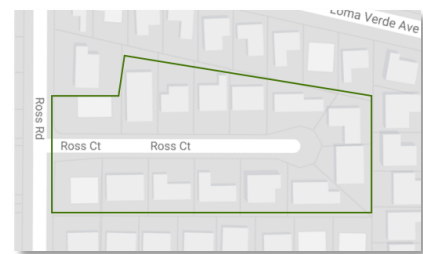
The specific goal of the event was to strengthen the resilience of the Ross Ct block. This was defined in terms of three subgoals:

1. Increase and strengthen personal relationships among residents
2. Increase practical preparedness knowledge of individual participants
3. Provide participants with opportunities and coaching for practicing mental flexibility and agility in the face of the unknown, with a particular focus on improving group coalescence and collective action

A larger goal was to refine experiential learning game format to increase community resiliency at the block level.

Ross Ct

The block targeted was Ross Ct in Palo Alto California. This cul-de-sac comprises 14 single-family residences. 13 of these are single-story homes with 2-4 bedrooms. One has two stories. Two additional households were invited to participate, one from Ross Rd (facing Ross Ct), and one from Richardson Ct (backing up to Ross Ct).



Promotion & Registration

The event was promoted through personal contact and word of mouth. 3 weeks before the event, flyers were hand-delivered to every household. 5 days before, households that had not confirmed their participation were contacted personally, or a reminder flyer left on their door.

Participants were asked to sign up through EventBrite⁵, however only 3 households did so. The remaining households responded directly to the party organizer.

¹ www.CreativeCrisisLeadership.org

² See <http://www.creativecrisisleadership.org/2017/06/18/popup-report-7-reasons-pleased-delighted-grateful> for information about the first pilot.

³ <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/mgr/neighborhoodgrant/>

⁴ http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/services/public_safety/office_of_emergency_services/

⁵ RossCtPopup.eventbrite.com

Format

The learning experience combined techniques from live action roleplay and disaster exercising. Although two rounds of play were planned, technical difficulties resulted in only one. Participants were asked to imagine that a catastrophic earthquake had occurred, and were given a set of challenges they might be facing. They were asked to “solve” these challenges by developing a plan and locating necessary resources. As the experience progressed, unsolved problems and consequences of solutions (e.g., having turned off a gas main) would accumulate and need to be taken into account during further action.



The first third of each round simulated the onset of the earthquake, followed by a “time jump” to 24 hours later, and then a jump to 72 hours later. Participants were asked to imagine that everything was happening in the present time and place. So, initial onset was on Saturday morning, anyone present or absent was or was not there, cabinets were open or closed as they stood, etc.

Group activities took place in the driveway of 844 Ross Ct. The event began at 9:30 with sign-in and an informal breakfast. Participants were then given an introductory briefing to the learning experience and its goals.



Then each household was given an envelope, and asked to return to their home. Text messages and verbal indications signaled the onset of the earthquake, at which time participants opened their envelopes to read a description of the circumstances in which they found themselves, along with the challenges they were facing.

At the end of the round, participants reassembled for a discussion of best practices for handling the challenges they had faced, basic home preparedness recommendations, and spontaneous leadership.

During the experience, participants communicated their “solutions” to organizers and field coordinators by sending photos and text messages, and receiving text messages in return. Organizers and field coordinators stayed in touch with each other via hand-held radios.

The event concluded with lunch and social interaction.



Evaluation

Strengthening Connections



There is ample evidence that the event met the goal of increasing and strengthening relationships across the neighborhood.

Of the 16 households invited, 12 participated—a 75% turnout rate! A total of 21 individuals participated in the learning experience, and 2 additional individuals attended the lunch.

Of the 5 individuals who completed a survey after the learning experience, 2 said that they had spoken with 3-5 people with whom they had never spoken before, and 1 reported having spoken to 1-2 new individuals. 1 said that they had renewed dormant

acquaintances with 6-9 people, 2 with 3-5 and, 1 with 1-2 people. This suggests that many participants initiated or renewed a significant number of relationships with neighbors.

6 volunteers supported the event. 4 of these were Palo Alto residents. While their interactions with neighborhood residents do not strengthen neighborhood bonds, their participation may serve to increase sense of identity and cohesion across the city.

2 of the volunteers were Emergency Services Volunteers (CERT and NPC) with the Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services. They provided helpful insight into the offerings and recommendations from the planned response system, and also increased neighborhood residents' understanding and sense of connection with the city.



1 volunteer was from the local live-action gaming community. His participation offers the possibility of future collaboration between the Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services and the gaming community to support experiential learning events for disaster preparedness.

1 participant was the Neighborhood Preparedness Coordinator for an adjacent neighborhood. His participation created a valuable social connection between residents and the Office of Emergency Services.

Increasing Practical Preparedness Knowledge

About half of the challenges presented during the learning experience were centered on practical home and family preparedness, such as locating gas shutoffs, marshaling water and other critical resources, and practicing “duck, cover, hold.” This resulted in a steady stream of texts and photos related to supplies and resources as people “solved” their challenges, indicating that they were developing their knowledge.



All survey respondents reported learning outcomes related to practical preparedness, for instance, “Need to have prep supplies. Need to make sure all members of family are on board.” One respondent reported being surprised by, “Yes, not enough prepare.” Another reported, “I thought I knew where some supplies were but I didn’t.” This discovery of unexpected gaps in preparedness was also a common comment in informal verbal feedback, “I was surprised at how underprepared I am.”

Practicing Mental Flexibility and Agility



About half of the challenges presented during the learning experience were designed to encourage people to think more broadly about the difficulties they were facing, and to focus not only on their own situations but also on those of the people around them. Participants were given time and opportunity to think creatively about solutions, and to think about resources that neighbors might have or need. This resulted in a number of texts and photos of creatively solved problems, as well as of a number of joint neighbor efforts.

One survey respondent reported feeling more prepared because, “More awareness of necessity to cooperate with neighbors & what that might look like.”

Event Model

Of the 5 individuals who completed the survey, all indicated that they would wish to repeat the experience and would recommend it to others.

People cited different reasons for enjoying the experience, including “there are things that need to be refreshed in the mind. Plus practice makes perfect,” “getting conversations about disaster prep happening among neighbors,” and “simulation allows for stability when confronted w/an emergency.”



Improvements

This event confirms the impression from the first pilot that the event model—a live action roleplay simulation combined with a social interaction, set in participants' own context—is very appealing to participants, and successful in achieving the desired learning and preparedness outcomes. Improvements are needed in three areas: event organization, game coordination, and learning content.



Event organization

The high turnout can be attributed, in part, to the high number recent disasters, including the massive wildfires in Napa and Sonoma counties. Combined with the extensive hurricanes in the southeastern US, the general population has a high awareness and interest in disaster preparedness at present.

However, the high turnout may also, in part, be due to a very informal approach to invitations by the local organizer. This relied primarily on distribution of the event flyer, combined with word of mouth conversation and participant RSVP. This approach retained the feel of a casual neighbor get-together. However, the lack of advance information from/about participants complicated preparations for the learning experience. It is critical to find a balance between ease and informality for participants and local organizer on the one hand, and structure and reliable information for learning experience preparation on the other. This may involve a multi-step process comprising an initial informal “might come” response, a follow-up solicitation of information, and then confirmation of participation.

Game coordination

Coordination between game controllers and individual households during the learning experience was, in most cases, via a three-way MMS conversation using smartphones (participant, game controller, game monitor).



This was highly unsatisfactory for a number of reasons:

1. About half of the participants did not know how to start a group chat on their phone, and were initially disoriented by this requirement. This posed particular difficulties to users of Android phones.
2. Even when group chats were started successfully, some messages or entire conversations were significantly delayed. In some cases, they did not show up until after the event ended.
3. Several game controllers found it difficult to monitor and respond to multiple chats while monitoring physical activities. This was especially true for the one game controller who was monitoring two chats while interacting with one non-texting household.

Additionally, a substantial number of participants did not know how to send a photo via MMS. However, this was quickly addressed with just-in-time training.

Learning content

Although the current challenges serve to increase individuals' basic preparedness knowledge and generate some spontaneous group interaction, they need to be improved in a number of ways:

1. Preparedness as well as unpreparedness learning goals need to be made more specific to ensure that the learning experience meets the desired goals.
2. "Bad" confusion due to game instructions and coordination must be eliminated. This ranges from confusion around use of group chats to ambiguities in challenge specifics (e.g., "someone is injured").
3. Improve use of peer-to-peer learning. Present focus is on all individuals learning through solving challenges. There is added benefit in attending to group learning by differential learning across individuals, combined with opportunities for propagation.
4. The present game structure and instructions may inhibit spontaneous group interaction. First, the group is assembled immediately prior to starting the simulation onset, so participants have just seen each other. Second, the present game materials immediately focus individual attention on challenges in their own household. These two factors may suppress the natural urge to "check on neighbors" when an unexpected event occurs.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall, the event was a success. Participants got to know their neighbors, learned about disaster preparedness, and gained confidence in their ability to rely on themselves and their neighbors in an actual disaster. The event model was confirmed to be viable, attracting enthusiasm and a high turnout.



The next steps are to implement the recommended improvements, and then focus on making the event reproducible and cost-effective for implementation by local organizers and community-based organizations. This includes developing materials for game controller training and orientation, along with more rigorous evaluation measures and instruments.

Expenses

Event insurance	\$250
Game development services	\$300
Game master airfare	\$134
Photographer	\$100
Supplies (Paper, whistles)	\$66
Grand Total	\$850



APPENDIX Promotional Handouts

Flyer



RSVP before Nov 10!

RossCtPopup.eventbrite.com

OR contact Carrie, see below

Spend a morning having fun with your neighbors on Ross Court. In the course of this live game, we'll play our way through a simulated disaster. We'll practice how we want to react, learn how we can help each other, and take a serious look around our homes.

The goal is to discover how self-reliant we can be. How can we make do with what we have if basic services are down, stores are closed, and city and response agencies are busy taking care of those who are harder hit?

Let's find out over breakfast, and relax during lunch afterwards!

Saturday Nov 11 2017

9:30 am – noon

**We'll provide
breakfast and lunch!**

- ☐ Get to know your neighbors on Ross Ct.
- ☐ Get better prepared for disasters and emergencies.
- ☐ Eat, drink, be merry!

Have questions? Want to help?
Carrie

*In cooperation with Creative Crisis Leadership and Palo Alto Office of Emergency Services.
Supported by Palo Alto's Know Your Neighbors Grant Program.*

Reminder Card



Reminder RSVP

[RossCtPopup.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ross-ct-disaster-popup-tickets-35252522222)

OR Carrie

Saturday Nov 11, 2017

9:30 am – noon