

A.J. with Q2 for Rashmi – Rashmi, your organization saw how this weather event impacted the residents who lived near the Brandywine. What were some of the challenges they faced, and how did your organization respond? (5 mins)

Thank you, AJ, for this opportunity to speak to the challenges our community faces.

Thank you, Jill, for this pictorial before and after presentation that so vividly shows us Ida's devastating impact.

Ida prompted plenty of emergency responses, as it should. But we saw a huge gap in how higher- and lower-wealth households were able to begin recovering, and in the help they received.

That's not really due to malice so much as a lack of resources.

But with higher wealth typically comes greater choice, more knowledge, education, and resources. So, when disaster strikes like this, wealthier households tend to just be better prepared to cope. And I don't just mean in terms of cash on hand.

During crises, especially climate crises, individuals turn to agencies such as DEMA and FEMA and organizations that provide food, shelter, and clothing.

Think about homes that were deeply damaged in this flooding. Tragically, some homeowners couldn't prove ownership—meaning on top of being suddenly unhoused, they also couldn't secure available emergency funding to rebuild their lives.

Or let's say someone could secure funding but lacked a traditional bank account for it to be deposited into—so they got the payout in card form. That's the same money, but now it can be all-too-easily lost or stolen, without any real recourse.

Or in the worst-case scenarios, when a life is lost, and, without a will or an estate plan, the surviving family spends precious time and funds sorting out their loved one's possessions or lost property—on top of mourning and handling their own recoveries.

DCRAC doesn't provide emergency services, so our response to this crisis was necessarily limited.

But we exist to prevent exactly these types of challenges—to help every Delawarean achieve financial security, plan for an uncertain future, and prepare for as much of the havoc as they can.

We are rooted in the reality that institutions and support systems work well for some and either don't work at all for others or are harmful to them.

Our work happens long before a family is faced with a crisis.

Since DCRAC's founding in 1987, we've seen crisis after crisis unfold—from natural disasters to financial meltdowns to everyday tragedies. No matter what happens in the news, these inflict incredible and inequitable harm on the most vulnerable amongst us.

There's no question extreme weather events like this one are becoming more frequent and more devastating, with outsized effects on individuals who live in communities traditionally disinvested, neglected, and ignored.

The area flooded in Ida has a median household income of about \$25,000, 64% lower than the Delaware median of \$70,000. Of the households impacted, 48% are below the poverty line.

We provide access to institutions and services the affluent among us take for granted: education about consumer finance, regulated and insured banking, and an affordable attorney. Just last year, more than 2300 people attended 312 consumer-finance classes, and we represented 107 taxpayers, 5 small businesses, 30 homeowners, and 51 families.

If families take advantage of our federal credit union—which any Wilmingtonian with \$5 to deposit can—they have access to their savings and a means by which DEMA dollars can reach them.

If they take advantage of our estate planning practice, they'll have a will so the survivors will know what to do and of course, provide documentation.

And if they seek our help in untangling the Title to their home, they can ensure there's no ambiguity when it comes to their home's ownership, ever again.

Ida had a devastating toll. None of us individually can prevent flooding, or rising temperatures. But we can be a partner to any and every community member who needs guidance, a non-predatory financial service, or a good lawyer to be ready for something like this.

11:38 am *A.J. with Q5 to Rashmi – Rashmi, for nonprofits that serve vulnerable populations, what should they be thinking about to prepare for climate change? (8 minutes)*

It really is all about preparedness, isn't it?

What makes climate change such a hard thing to prepare for, though, is unpredictability. We have a pretty good sense of the big picture, but we don't know what's coming locally—when, where, or at what scale.

And preparedness isn't just a one-and-done thing—resilience requires maintenance, ongoing efforts. You also have to know what you're preparing for, how to be ready, and have the resources to put into preparation.

That's knowledge and resources that's not available to everyone. And the opportunity to be prepared isn't available to everyone, either.

Let's think through some of the potential havoc that climate change may wreck on individuals on our communities.

Loss of electricity or other utilities—can they afford a generator? What about solar panels?

Actual destruction—can they afford renter’s insurance? Does their homeowner’s insurance cover this? If not, could it have? Do they qualify for state or federal aid—and do they have the needed proof?

Flooding, heat, cold, or whatever else—how can you build resilience into a home you don’t own, or can’t afford to move away from? What if you can’t afford to raise the foundation, seal windows, or fix ductwork?

Or food security. Even if you grow your own, what do you do if your garden floods?

The list goes on and on.

But the point is, preparedness is expensive, often difficult, and frequently not easy or obvious.

Let us see how the wealthy prepare for uncertainty.

- First, most are homeowners. Their homes are probably not on a 100-year flood plain. They can afford flood insurance, solar panels, generators, and more—possibly a second home to move into.
- Second, most have all planning documents in place.
- Third, they have liquidity.
- Fourth, they have emergency funds.
- Fifth, they know how to access needed resources to rebuild.

For our part, we focus on building resiliency by providing education and access, so our clients know what their options might be and how to manage their finances in a way that gets them what they need.

Through our federal credit union, for instance, we can connect a homeowner with safe, legitimate loans to weatherize their house.

We also offer over hundreds of classes through the Money School on consumer finance, with topics ranging from taxes to planning to banking, to budgeting.

So, we're doing our part as a nonprofit to help our communities prepare here.

But what we should really be talking about here isn't just what we are doing, or any other individual organization represented today.

We need to be thinking about how to truly build resilience across the non-profit sector, in the face of climate change and all the preparedness it demands.

And that just means money.

The sad truth is that we can't do anything here without funding, and most nonprofits just don't have enough to meaningfully prepare for everything that climate change is and will do to our communities.

Crisis after crisis, it is the nonprofit sector that comes to the rescue, doing what needs to be done. During the pandemic when the world shut down, our communities' needs did not. It was our sector that stood up. At DCRAC, we did not close for a single day.

That was also the only time in my 30 years at this job where donors told us, forget what you committed to using the money for, or what we dedicated funds to. Just put it where you need it!

30 years, and 2020 was the only time our biggest supporters trusted us enough to do our work properly. That trust disappeared right along with mask mandates.

As a result, those of us who serve vulnerable populations ourselves are vulnerable, as institutions as well as individuals.

We know that another crisis of some form will visit us soon enough. This panel recognizes that we must become resilient, aware, and prepared for inevitable change.

So how do we become resilient as a sector?

Just like DCRAC's clients, we need to build financial strength, security, and predictability. So: Invest in us. Trust us to do the right thing. Verify where needed—but don't let overzealous oversight get in the way of our actually doing the work.

Just like our clients, we need to prepare for and be adequately housed and insured against climate change events—which can be very expensive. ARPA funds could help boost that work, as could any number of other sources.

And, just like our clients, we must take advantage of all opportunities for ourselves—and to transfer those benefits we realize to them.

When we rebuild, to borrow a phrase, we have to build back better. And when we build resilience, it must be for everyone.

We can't leave our low-wealth tenants from enjoying the benefits of climate investments such as solar panels. How about a solar farm, where they own a piece so they enjoy reduced energy costs by way of boosted income.

We recognize that the social sector/non-profit sector/ or whatever we are called, will be needed for a very long time in the future, in a whole host of ways.

But we also recognize that philanthropy is not sustainable or resilient, by design.

So, if we really want to invest in this broadly defined preparedness, we also need to be working toward new funding models that strengthen our sector—rather than exhaust it.

A.J. to all panelists –climate change not only impacts our buildings and those we serve, but our employees. What suggestions do you offer to prepare them? (2 minutes each)

Honestly, it just comes back to money and education again.

First, in the nonprofit sector, as employers, we should not settle for poverty wages and no benefits for our employees. Unfortunately, that's our story at DCRAC.

We need to pay them more, and strengthen benefits, for all these reasons we've been discussing, and we need more dollars to do that.

Wages must rise in line with the economy for us to retain sector workers, recruit new workers—which is harder in this economy—I haven't seen in my 63 years!-- and get us all prepared for the work that lies ahead.

We should also be thinking about how best to educate and advise our teams, as individuals and as members of the communities we serve.

One way to do that is by supporting them in thinking through their own needs, and in finding responsible, sustainable ways to address those needs. For instance...

- Help them become sustainable homeowners in homes that are energy efficient and energy producing (solar panels)
- Educate them about the potential for damage to their home through floods or hurricanes or tornados or wildfires. And how to prepare and protect their home accordingly.
- Insure their home against foreseeable and unforeseeable climate impact. Cost of insurance will keep going up. Manage money accordingly.
- Electricity and water may become unreliable, unaffordable, or tainted. In addition to preparing financially think of ways to plan an emergency kit.
- Property taxes may go up—a huge pocket book issue—requires understanding about money management.

- Allergies and other health issues may become more common. Stay healthy. If employers can afford healthy life styles—do provide them—tread desk at work, counseling, and more.
- Food will become unhealthy or unpredictable. May be, teach people how to grow their own food.

None of this will be fast, cheap, or easy—but I think we can all agree it's absolutely necessary. Thank you.