**Transcript: FEMA’s STEP Program 2018**

**{Intro Music}**

**[Mark Peterson]** I’m Mark Peterson and this is the FEMA podcast. If you're a nineties kid like I was, you can probably remember some certain youth focused social marketing campaigns and school health and safety programs that were commonplace and for good reason. Here's a couple that you probably couldn't forget.

**{Commercial}** This is your brain. This is drugs. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?

**{Commercial}** You can learn a lot from a dummy. Buckle your safety belt.

**[Mark Peterson]** We know that influencing safe and smart behavior early in a child's life will likely instill life-long change. Whether it's never picking up the first cigarette, buckling your seatbelt every time you sit down in a car or even knowing what to do in the event of an emergency. Disaster researchers have identified children as one of the several groups considered more prone to damage, loss, suffering, injury, and death in the event of a disaster, and the impact can be disproportionately greater for children living in poverty who are approximately 22 percent of all children in the United States. Disasters can happen any time and without warning, so it's important that children know what to do to stay safe. Not only can they be armed with the knowledge of how to stay safe and be prepared, they can be messengers of preparedness information and advocates for action within their families.

**[Mark Peterson]** With these goals in mind, FEMA created the student tools for emergency planning or STEP program, a curriculum for fourth and fifth grade students. This program teaches them how to prepare for emergencies and disasters and trains them to become leaders in family preparedness. {Music} In this episode I asked Kim Hayward, Individual and Community Preparedness Officer in FEMA region five’s Chicago office, to sit down with me and delve a bit deeper into how this program works and discuss how these efforts are helping to move the needle of overall national disaster readiness.

**[Mark Peterson]** Kim Hayward, thanks so much for joining the FEMA podcast.

**[Kim Hayward]** Thanks for having me.

**[Mark Peterson]** Great. So you are stationed in the Chicago Office, region five, and your work is with the Individual and Community Preparedness group and your focused on, let's say a culture of preparedness within the region five states?

**[Kim Hayward]** Yes. I empower people with the information needed to become better prepared for disasters and emergencies.

**[Mark Peterson]** When I said culture of preparedness, you know, I'm sort of focusing back on Administrator Brock Long’s strategic priorities where he set forth three different priorities, but one of them is instilling a culture of preparedness or sort of changing that landscape when we talk to individuals across the country about what it means to prepare for disasters. And so your work here directly relates to that?

**[Kim Hayward]** Yeah. It's a really an integral part of building a culture of preparedness, because we want to have a systemic cultural shift in the way that people perceive so that people become intrinsically motivated to prepare for it. It's just part of the norms and values and way of everyday life. So we're trying to facilitate that change here at FEMA.

**[Mark Peterson]** It seems like when he talks about culture of preparedness, it’s more than just, hey, you know what? If I get x number of supplies and have them in my pantry than I’m, quote unquote, am prepared. It's really about changing the thought process of the people in the region and the country.

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. It's about changing cultural behaviors and norms and making that shift in your day to day life. So that it's not something that you do, you know, once or twice a year when you're updating your kit, but it's something that's always on your mind and you're always thinking about, you know, what could happen and what is the best way for me to prepare for an emergency or a disaster to occur.

**[Mark Peterson]** So you're not necessarily focused on the national, you know, culture change, but what you're looking at is the region five states and how can we advance that priority here in the region? How can we get our people, our residents in the six states that we serve in region five to be more prepared? So are there certain hazards that you're focused on more than others?

**[Kim Hayward]** Well, I focused on all hazards planning and really looking at building preparedness from the ground up and we do have certain hazards that are more prevalent in region five such as flooding and tornadoes and winter storms and things like that. But I'm really focused on the all hazards piece in terms of encouraging people to have emergency plans and just trying to build up awareness of preparedness in communities so that people take action to know what their risks are and then to prepare themselves and their families.

**[Mark Peterson]** So you can't do it alone. So who are some of the partners that you kind of work with on a day to day basis or quarterly basis to really kind of move that needle?

**[Kim Hayward]** Well, we're always working with the state counterparts, the emergency management agencies and through them the local emergency management entities as well. But a really big part of our focus is on community partners and thinking about something like putting preparedness information into schools. They are really active already in communities, they’re a pillar of people's day to day lives. So trying to partner with entities like that to get the preparedness message out there.

**[Mark Peterson]** So you talked about schools. That’s what we really want to talk about here is the STEP program, the FEMA STEP program. We have a lot of programs that are focused on different aspects of preparedness, but the STEP program which stands for student tools for emergency planning is kind of a unique program. It's also a lot of fun. Um, it's pretty interesting and it's one that has seen quite a bit of success in the past.

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. The STEP program is a curriculum that was developed by FEMA for fourth and fifth grade students and it's just one hour of base curriculum and it's been very successful in region five states, such as Wisconsin and Michigan, and we are working on expanding it to all the states within region five, because of that multiplier effect and really the high opportunity for success with the step program.

**[Mark Peterson]** You know when I think of curriculum, I think a semester long course or something like that. But you're saying like the curriculum for the STEP program that we've developed is just an hour long.

**[Kim Hayward]** That's right. It's an hour long and it focuses on a few key points. So it introduces the concept of emergency planning and it focuses on a number one, building a family communication plan, and number two, building an emergency supply kit. The most important thing is familiarizing kids with, you know, the difference between an emergency and disaster and what types of hazards could happen in their areas.

**[Mark Peterson]** Every class that STEP is being brought to its tailored to those hazards.

**[Kim Hayward]** That's right. The STEP program is meant to be taught by teachers and we encourage the teachers to modify and customize the program to reflect local hazards and curriculum requirement and things like that. So the STEP program is aligned with several curriculum content standards for science and reading comprehension and geography and things like that. So it's really mix and match and customizable so that teachers can make it interactive and informative at the same time.

**[Mark Peterson]** We provide the content for the curriculum, FEMA does through its partners, like the state emergency management agencies and we're providing it to the teachers who are using it as part of, or supplementing, what they’re already doing and teaching each of these different curriculums. So they can choose to say, well, you know, I'm a science teacher, I really liked this and I want to incorporate the STEP program into my science curriculum.

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. And that's a very natural fit for the STEP program to place it in an area where you're already talking about natural hazards in science and things like that. And it's a good activity to latch on to that and expand, you know, on the natural hazards curriculum by encouraging kids to think about, you know, what kind of natural hazards can actually happen, where we live and how can we take steps to protect ourselves for disasters.

**[Mark Peterson]** I mean, I can think back to grade school and you know, maybe before a tornado drill we talked about severe storms, tornadoes, weather and things like that, and we incorporated it into the science. Does that seem like a natural fit where you would plug an hour's worth of STEP curriculum?

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. The drill piece of emergency preparedness is so important, because it's not only important to teach kids about emergency preparedness and disasters that could happen in their areas, but the drill piece, and having those tornado drills and those fire drills, we have those for reason. It’s because psychologically when you're experiencing a disaster, your decision making capabilities are significantly impaired. So having that drill in addition to the curriculum, having those go together is really important to reinforce those learnings.

**[Mark Peterson]** In the past you've gone out and participating in these classes, you know, at schools. Are you teaching them or are you helping the teachers? How does that work?

**[Kim Hayward]** Well, sometimes I will teach the curriculum myself if the school wants to bring all the classrooms into an assembly or something like that and I'll do an interactive discussion and incorporate some activities. But other times, if it's a state rollout of the STEP curriculum, then it's typically the teacher that's delivering the presentation. And really that's the most effective way to do it, because it's better to teach the kids in small groups because there's a lot of fun interactive activities that they can do to enhance their learning.

**[Mark Peterson]** So walk me through an hour. What is it like?

**[Kim Hayward]** So with the STEP program, we’ll start off by some discussion questions and asking kids, you know, do they know what the difference is between an emergency and a disaster? Asking some kids, you know, who's had experience here, you know, with natural hazards. I'll just say something like, who's had their basement flooded or who's had their soccer game canceled due to severe weather and almost every kid has had some experience like that. And usually one or two have experienced a tornado or flooding, something that's more serious and could qualify as a disaster. So it's good way to get the conversation going. And then with the STEP program, there's a series of videos that go along with it. There's a diverse group of kids in the video that introduce the different concepts of emergency planning in a fun and interactive way for the kids that's age appropriate.

And then we continue the conversation and usually we'll do one or two activities as well, such as splitting the kids up into groups and having them do emergency role playing where there's different scenarios and they can act through, you know, what if the fire alarm goes off and they're at a sleepover or something like that. And that's really, you know, that one hour we pack a lot of information into that, but we try to make it fun and engaging for the kids and then they get a certificate of completion at the end of the hour as well as typically a starter emergency supply kit that has a few of the basic items that they can then go home and make it an exercise with their parents to fill that bag up with everything else that they might need to prepare for disaster.

**[Mark Peterson]** So that bag. I know the kids love to get that at the end. So what specifically is in there?

**[Kim Hayward]** So the bag typically has a flashlight and an emergency blanket, and a whistle. It could have other things as well, depending on the school, and the kind of resources that they have to procure kits, because kids do cost money of course, and some states, such as Wisconsin, have gotten private sector sponsorship for their kits. So they incorporate a, just one or two items typically. So it really varies, but it's meant to be a starter kit to be built upon at home.

**[Mark Peterson]** So you touched on the states, so talk to me about the partnerships between FEMA and the state as we, you know, work to sort of spread this, the STEP concept.

**[Kim Hayward]** Well, the partnership with the states is really critical, because as you know, the education system in this country is very locally driven, so it's not standardized across the board and it's very difficult to get curriculum into schools, because each school district does things differently. So having that state as a partner is really critical, because they can work with the Department of Education and their states, to drive awareness for this program and ensure that people are opting into the program and signing up for it. And you know, they're managing the day to day registrations and setting up the materials to the schools and everything like that. So they're really a critical component of this.

**[Mark Peterson]** Talking about those costs where we’re going out and seeking private sector support. What are the costs that are associated with this program?

**[Kim Hayward]** Well, the curriculum was already developed by FEMA and all of the materials can be printed by FEMA free of and ordered free of charge and the videos are available on YouTube for free. So the base part of the program is completely free. The only costs associated with the program is the optional emergency supply kit. Those starter kits and those can run anywhere from, you know, a $2 to $5 per kit.

**[Mark Peterson]** Talk to me about some of the successes the states have had.

**[Kim Hayward]** So the state of Wisconsin launched the STEP program in 2010 and they started with a small group of schools and kids. But that has steadily expanded each year and they've done surveys every year, to both the teachers and the students, and the STEP program and how effective it's been. And they found that the teachers, even though it's one hour minimum curriculum, they have been teaching on average about six hours of curriculum because there's so many additional hours of optional curriculum as well. And there are some great examples from Wisconsin as well about, you know, a young girl who took the STEP program and then she ended up saving her family from a fire that happened at her family's home. So it has had some really beneficial impacts. It's been very successful in the state of Wisconsin and their training over 10,000 students a year at this point and Michigan isn't far behind them training about over eight thousand students last year in the STEP program as well.

**[Mark Peterson]** So does Michigan also find a private sector partner? Is it state funds?

**[Kim Hayward]** They are using state grant funds to provide the kids to the schools and they do provide a virtual a curriculum and things like that. They don't ship out the kits to each individual school. They contract with a company and use their grant funding to purchase the kits who then deliver them to the schools.

**[Mark Peterson]** Um, so back to Wisconsin, they've expanded this idea of reaching out to students beyond just the STEP program. Do they have some other kind of big initiatives like their Wisconsin severe weather day where they partner with the Milwaukee Brewers.

**[Kim Hayward]** Yeah, that's a fantastic event and one of our most successful youth preparedness initiatives in our region. It's a huge annual event that they put on with the Milwaukee Brewers and it gives the kids an opportunity to learn about the science behind natural hazards while also learning about preparedness and participating in a fun and interactive day, you know, that really creates a great memory for them.

**[Mark Peterson]** So FEMA goes up and actually helps out with a Wisconsin emergency management and the booths that they run and talking with students.

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. We try to support Wisconsin emergency management in any way that we can since it's a really great program and we want to see it continue in the future and I think they had a well over 12,000 students participate in the last event. So it does get pretty crazy at the event, but it's a lot of fun and we’re there handing out materials. And I'm there talking about the STEP program and things like that and trying to encourage schools to implement STEP in their communities.

**[Mark Peterson]** That is an example of where, you know, states have taken the STEP program, built onto a, you know, additional curriculum hours onto the base hours and then maybe taking it even further and trying to engage students with a similar age to join in that conversation.

**[Kim Hayward]** It all boils down to, you know, the proof is in the data behind engaging these youth populations and how beneficial it is for actually moving the needle on increasing preparedness in communities, because when you reach kids, you're not only reaching those kids but you're reaching their parents as well because studies show that parents are much more likely to act when they're kids bring home information on preparedness. But also, those kids grow up to be prepared adults. And we started this podcast talking about the culture of preparedness. And this is just an excellent way to ensure that these kids then become leaders and ambassadors for preparedness in the future. And we're working on creating a systemic cultural change in our country.

**[Mark Peterson]** Do we have any programs that highlight some of the leadership kids maybe of this age range or older have shown in their communities?

**[Kim Hayward]** We have a great program called the Youth Preparedness Council and we have 15 representatives from across the country that serve on this council and it's an opportunity for kids, who are wanting to be leaders in their communities, who are already doing work to help their communities be a better place. It's an opportunity for them to serve on a national council to even further develop their leadership skills and to conduct projects in their communities to help make them more prepared and more resilient.

**[Mark Peterson]** What age group is that?

**[Kim Hayward]** Oh, that's for high schoolers age in the eighth grade to 11th grade range.

**[Mark Peterson]** So the STEP program focuses in on the fifth grade age group. FEMA has got programs that sort of grow with the students and potentially can engage them in at older ages as well.

**[Kim Hayward]** That's right. And we start with the age group of the fourth to fifth graders with STEP because there was a lot of research that went into when is the most appropriate time just to start talking about preparedness so that kids are not scared by the concept, but they're empowered to take action in their families and be leaders in their families. So that's the appropriate age group to start, you know, that's why we chose that for the STEP program. The high school age program is when they're starting to need leadership experience and things like that for their college applications and when kids are really starting to develop those higher level critical thinking skills and, you know, starting to prepare for college. So it's a good opportunity to have this council where, you know, kids can become leaders in their communities for preparedness.

**[Mark Peterson]** I mean, it seems like there's a lot of great work being done in region five and likely across the entire country. You're speaking to the region five area, but, you know, are you familiar with any other successful state's implementation of STEP or you know, other highlights out there?

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. Region six, based in Texas, they have a regional Youth Preparedness Council and a regional Citizen Core working group where they have state representatives in each of their states. There's Youth Preparedness Council representative and now they just launched their first local council as well. So that has had a ripple effect in that region where they're having continuous meetings and bringing people together to exchange experiences and best practices and talk about how we can solve this challenge of preparedness together through empowering youth to make a difference.

**[Mark Peterson]** OK, I got it. So fifth grade, it seems like a logical place where we introduced this into the school curriculum, a high school age, you know, really we're engaging them on an individual level and bringing them into the conversation with FEMA about what moves the needle in terms of preparedness, both at home individually in the community with the Youth Preparedness Council. Are you working on any products for younger ages?

**[Kim Hayward]** Well, we have a coloring book that we're currently developing with the American Red Cross and that's going to be for kindergarten through fifth graders and that is instilling preparedness messaging down to its most simplest protective actions. So we want kids to learn, at an early age, how to stay safe during emergencies and disasters and it teaches kids about the different hazards around the country and it's all centered around a penguin named Pedro who is very cute and he travels around the country experiencing a different disasters and hazards. And then, you know, we teach kids the basic messages for how to stay safe as, for example, in a tornado to go to an interior room on the lowest level of the building and things like that. And to also have a family communication plan and emergency supply kit. So it's meant for kids to work through with their parents as well.

**[Mark Peterson]** If I'm a teacher, or school administrator, and I want to bring STEP to my community, whether or not a state is a partnering entity, how would I go about learning more?

**[Kim Hayward]** The STEP materials are all available on FEMA’s website. And there's the curriculum as well as the student activity book and the link to the free materials, and the videos on YouTube as well. And that's all available in one place.

**[Mark Peterson]** Fantastic. Well, Kim, thanks so much for joining us today. I think the STEP program is just a really neat opportunity to get kids involved in what makes them safe, what makes them feel safe in their community, and how they can prepare for disasters that you know throughout their life they're likely to experience, or have friends that experienced them.

**[Kim Hayward]** Absolutely. Thanks so much for having me.

**[Mark Peterson]** I appreciate it. Thanks {Music} We've linked to this episode on our FEMA Facebook page and we invite you to join the conversation in the comments. If you enjoyed this podcast, be sure to subscribe through Google play or the iTunes store. You can even download each episode on FEMA.gov. If you have topic ideas or want to let us know what you think, makes sure to follow us on our social media accounts. We're on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.