



"You never fail  
until you stop  
trying."

The  
**Leader in Me**  
great happens here

-Albert Einstein  
5th Grade Teachers

Mageen Caines

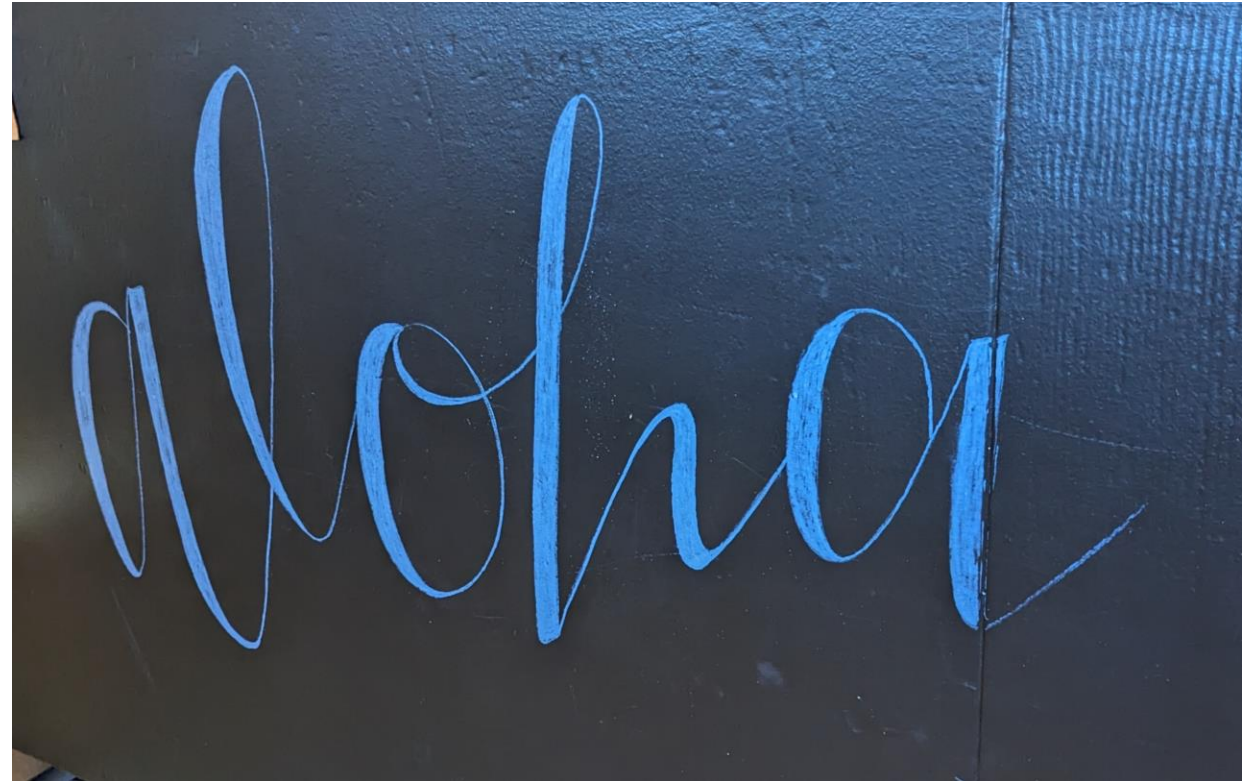
Toni Hauser

Bianca Virnig



# Discussion overview

- What is the background on Maui fires?
- How did we get involved?
- How can you use these lessons learned to plan for recovery operations?
- Reflections on lessons learned



**We love questions!**

**Please feel free to ask for clarification as we go or ask questions at the end of the session**

# 2018 Lahaina fire

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## 2018:

No sirens were sounded, fire hydrants ran dry, and people were left to fend for themselves, receiving pre-recorded messages, inaccurate information, and no evacuation plan.

No one died in the 2018 fire, but it destroyed 21 houses, 27 cars and more than 2,100 acres, causing an estimated \$4.3 million in damage.

AAR recommendations included numerous ways to improve public communication and to coordinate agencies to make informed decisions, but it appears no action was taken.

e.g., Staff working for local's state partner, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, weren't familiar with Maui, leading to "confusion in ordering resources and difficulty in providing accurate information."

Some team members felt they needed additional emergency operations training.

## Other results:

Serious mistrust of outside agencies by community (specifically Red Cross)

Serious mistrust of local government leaders

*In 2023, emergency managers in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) couldn't answer if an AAR was done, where it was, or if the public could review it. The mayor of Lahaina famously said in 2023 that he didn't know who was in charge during the fires, underscoring some of the findings of the AAR.*



Kauaula Valley fire, Lahaina, Maui 8.24.18.

PC: Gaylord Paul Garcia

# 2023 Lahaina fire

- Early morning August 8, a straight-line wind event downed a power pole next to Lahaina Intermediate School and caused minor damage to homes and businesses.
- The downed power line sparked flames in drought-dried grass spreading to about three acres by 637a.
- Evacuations were ordered minutes later and by 9a, fire was announced as fully contained.
- Wind continued and at 330p, fire had flared up again, closing major roads and evacuation orders given to nearby areas.
- Residents to the west were told to shelter in place, Lahaina children were sent home from school.



Damaged buildings in the Lahaina area



# 2023 Lahaina fire

## Over the next hour...(330p – 445p)

- Hundreds of homes were burned in a matter of minutes
- Residents attempted to flee in vehicles while surrounded by flames
- Firefighting failed as water pressure failed in hydrants, melting pipes in burning homes leaked leading to loss of network pressure

## Over the hour after that...(445p – 545p)

- The fire crossed the highway into the main part of Lahaina, forcing residents to self-evacuate with no notice (e.g. firefighter fleeing the fire by running down the road yelling)
- Bumper to bumper traffic held everyone in place as cars caught fire or exploded, some cars tried to drive off road to flee
- People jumped into the ocean to escape the fire – due to strong winds, water conditions were extremely hazardous and fatal to swimmers and boaters

# How did we get involved?

Bianca, whose day job was working with schools on accessibility through an Educational Co-Op, was on vacation in Maui as this was happening.

Bianca immediately coordinated donations and supplies right away as part of a school-based response, connecting her network with those on the ground responding.

Bianca received calls and requests from Lahaina school parents while there, asking about what to do about the trauma. This led to her having conversations with the schools' social workers, psychologists, and counselors.

Bianca and Mageen knew each other from COVID Health Department responses and both serving on school boards at the same time.

Bianca reached out Mageen for support on putting together a thoughtful response to the asks.

Mageen has a boss from the Army days who was at the EOC running things.

Mageen coordinated with him and relayed the school's requests for help, resulting in an invitation to do the recovery work on the ground with the school.

Mageen introduced Bianca and Toni based on her connection to Toni through Minneapolis Health Department's Emergency Preparedness program.

Toni has deep academic and on the ground experience and interest in children's well-being when recovering from a disaster.

# What did it look like?

*Note about how we show and share our stories:*

*“Disaster porn” is the idea that the media and movies show people tragedy for entertainment value.*

*While considering others’ suffering is important political space, we did not suffer, and we are not going to tell other people’s stories.*

*We’re going to share **our** experiences with you, but no pictures of school personnel or children or burned-out neighborhoods.*

*Many people have shared their stories online – please do witness their stories and their own words.*

# Before we went...

We texted and emailed. A LOT.

- With schools, to identify and clarify needs and wants. With potential donors. With EOC people. With each other. With banks and legal people. With other people doing work. With lodging and transportation people.
- We needed to be clear on our plan, clear on our goals and limitations, and have permissions squared away to be allowed into closed off areas.
- We needed to work as a team and connect so that we could be effective.

## **Lessons learned:**

Know your story – who are you?

Know their story – who are they, when not in the midst of disaster?

Don't go and be a burden

Kids are not miniature adults – recovery looks completely different for them

Adults who care for kids also need recovery operations



# Who are we?

“3 middle class white ladies from the Midwest”

Be open and candid about who you are.

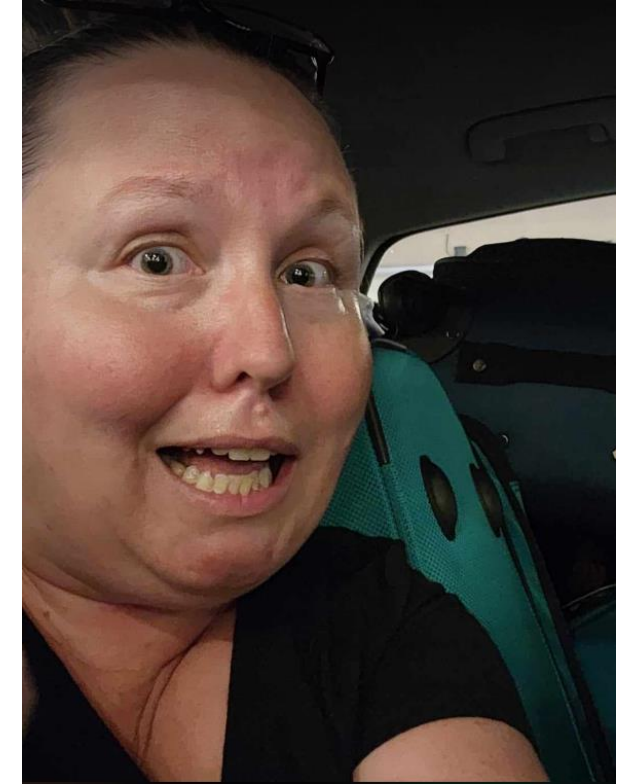
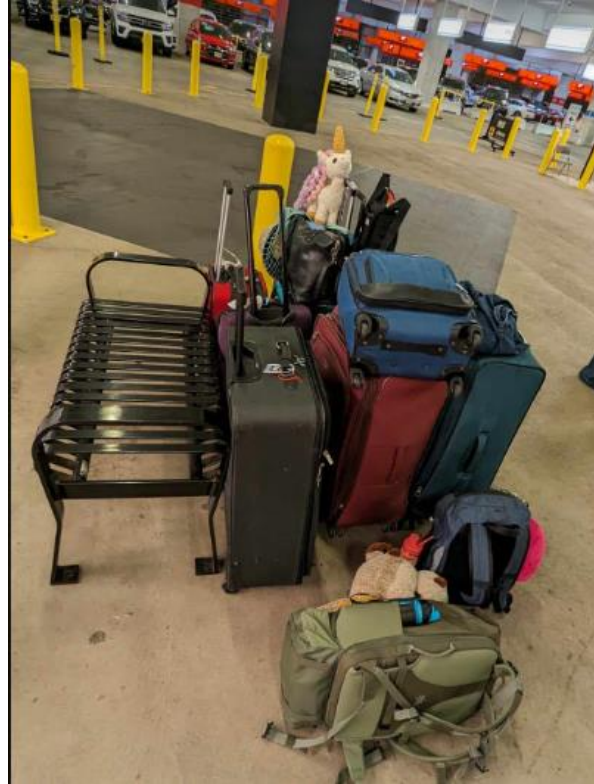
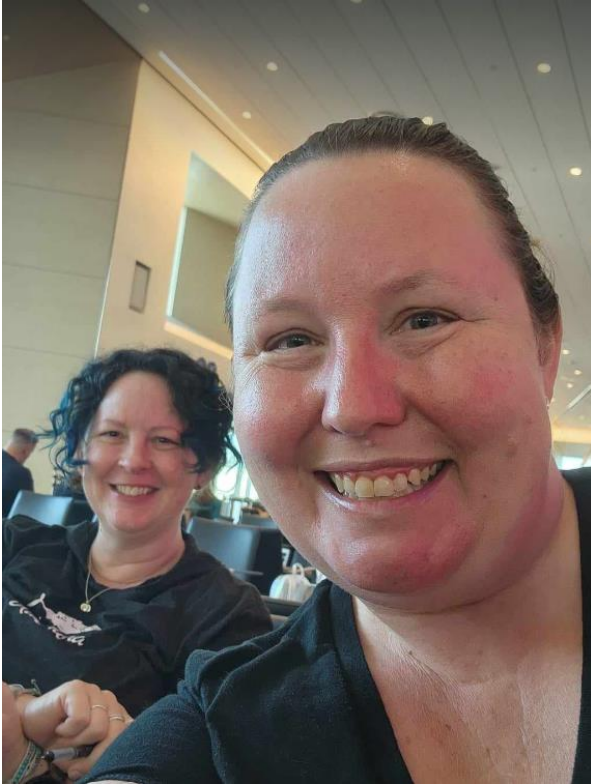
Practice curiosity about other people – moderate your desire to dig into painful experiences.

Have the conversations, create the connections

Inconvenient people are often the most efficient relationship to build

***Canoeing culture meets canning culture!***

# We got there. With so much stuff.

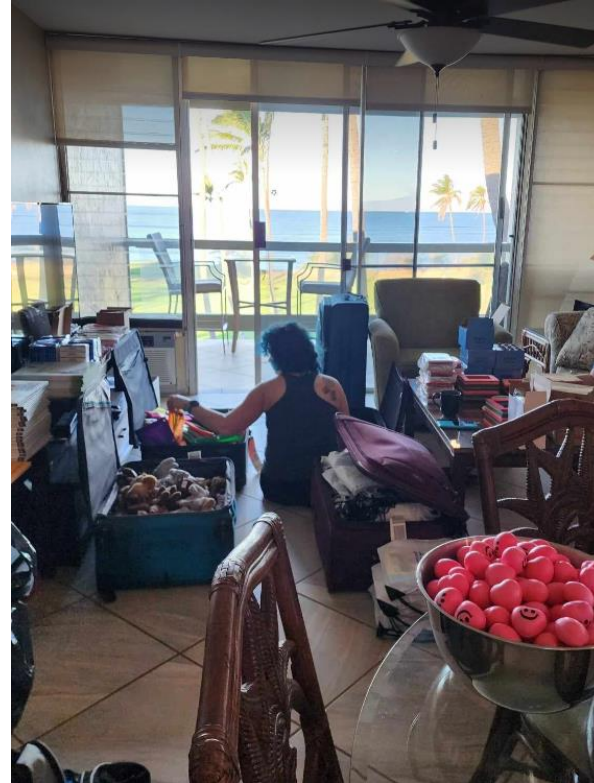


## Lessons learned:

- It was cheaper to send three people with the maximum allowable baggage than it was to ship items.
- The major space limitation was the car.



# We dealt with the stuff.



## Lessons learned:

- Working with the schools and preparing items to ensure there's no burden on the schools was important.
- We thought we needed one book for every kid – we didn't.
  - With not quite enough books donated, we pivoted to a caring lending library, which was a much better solution overall.
- We offered specific helps - our kids' standard of care that was tested and evaluated for useful and accessible, effective grief and coping materials
- We brought MN authors – we shared who we are
- Travel with people who don't sleep

# We were strategic.

***We owned who we are and who we aren't.***

Other practices we recommend:

- Take pace and tone cues from the community.
- Work together as a team to be very aware of white savior perceptions or realities, checking in with each other, being “accountabili-buddies”
- Trust your team.
- Keep your feelings in the appropriate places – you cannot insert yourself into the center of things.
- Don't insert yourself into the narrative.
- Find and cherish connections!
- Accept the “valentines” or “pebbles” that people offer you to connect.

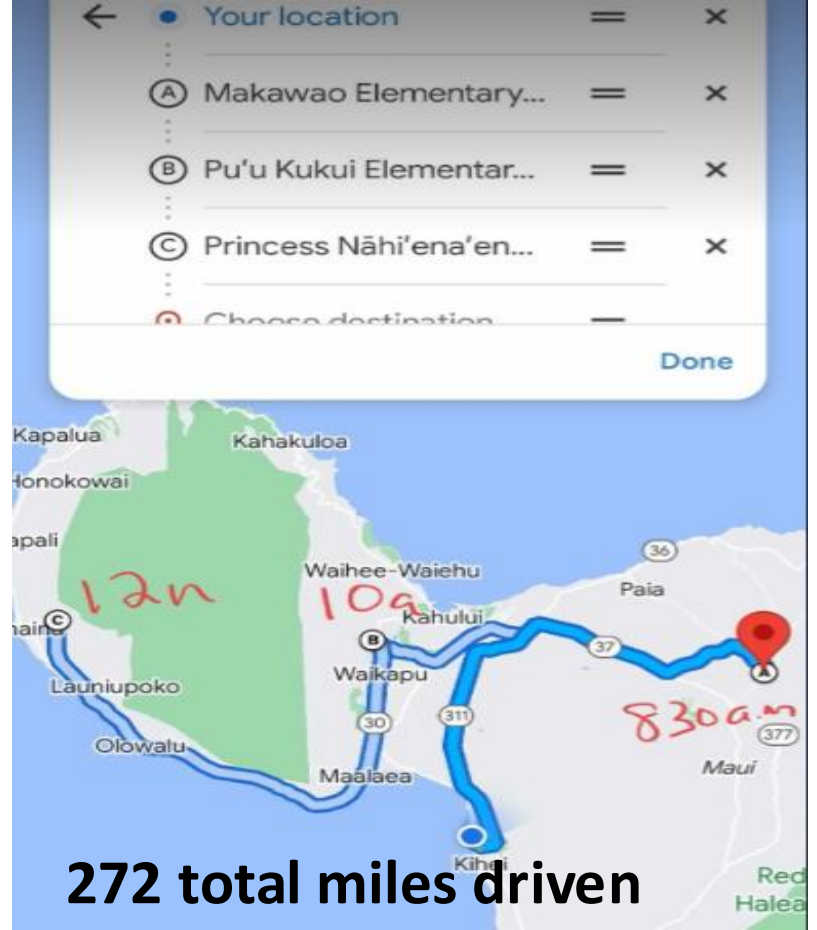






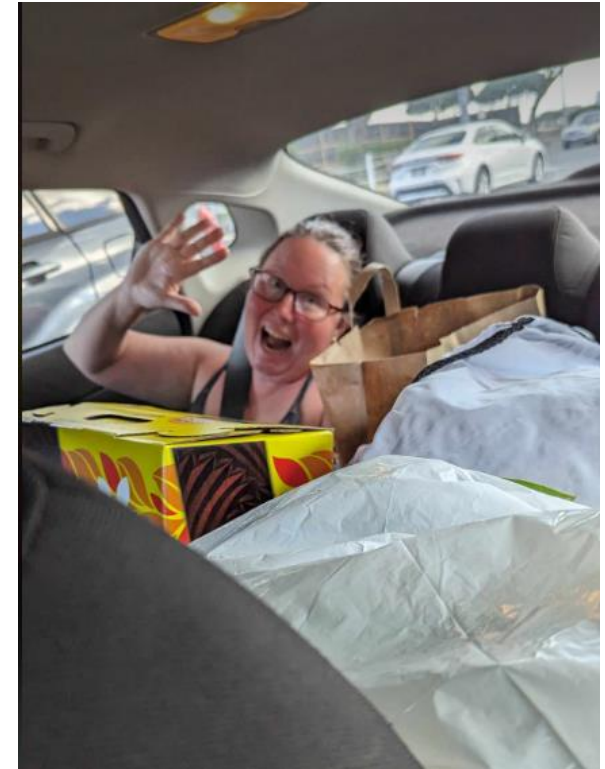
Take the tour if it is offered – get to know people





Things we thought would be bigger problems, weren't.  
And things we thought would go smoothly, didn't.





Lessons learned: Don't underestimate logistics.

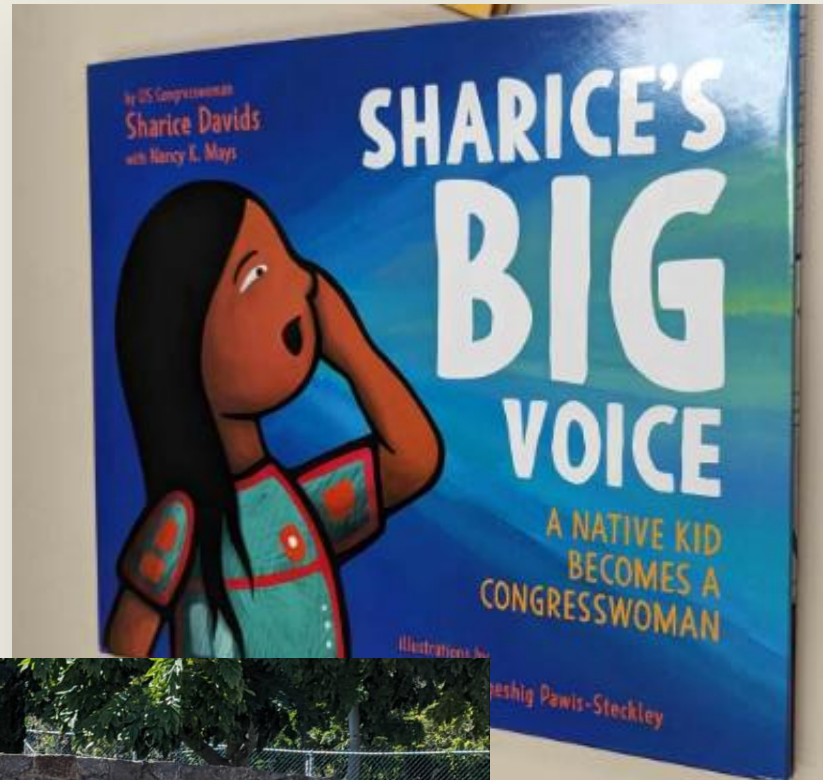
Logistics are really challenging everywhere, but especially islands.

...islands with recent infrastructure damage...

...among the damage, there people are just trying to get through the day.



Connect. That's what public health and local government does.  
It is part of our story.





# Be a human, mind your manners

Not pictured – former Minneapolis City Council member Ed Felien who had us to lunch and had A LOT OF THOUGHTS both about the state of the city and his organizing around infrastructure needs in Maui.

Not pictured – the Rabbi who we talked with and accepted donations from us to get to the schools and into her community.

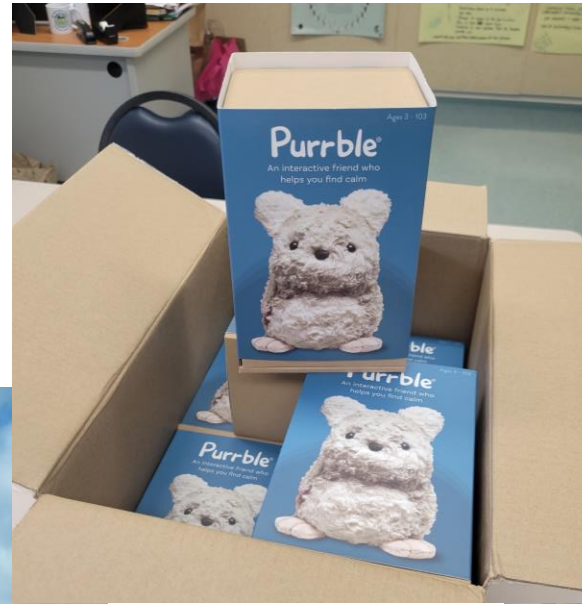
Ground game is everything. “Aren’t you going to see...?”

Mind. Your. Manners.

It is heartbreakingly offensive and common for responders to cheer a job well done while standing in front of traumatized people.

Figure out how you will intervene and then intervene.

# Emergency preparedness in action



## IN AN EMERGENCY TAKE ACTION

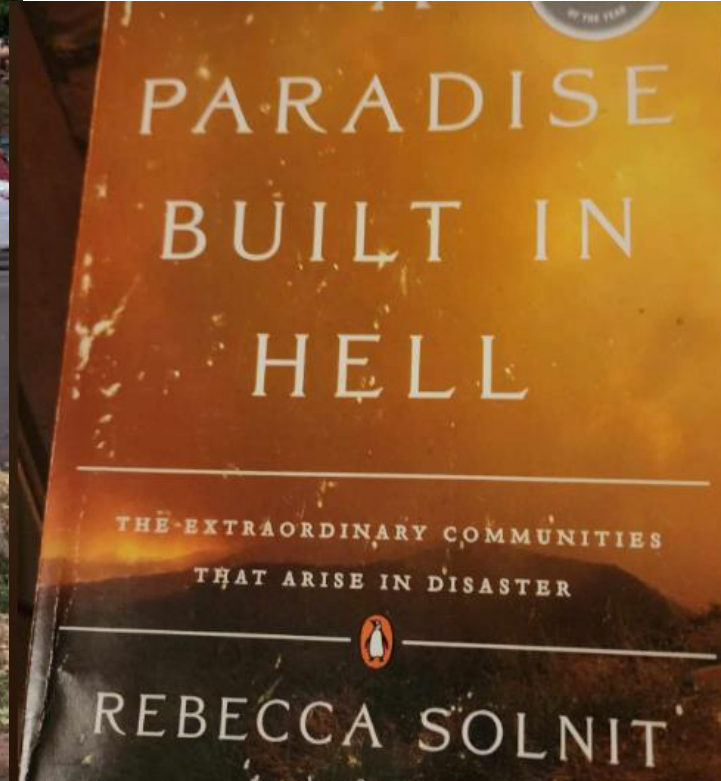
	<b>HOLD! In your room or area. Clear the halls.</b> <b>STUDENTS</b> Clear the hallways and remain in room or area until the "All Clear" is announced Do business as usual	<b>ADULTS</b> Close and lock the door Account for students and adults Do business as usual
<b>REPEATED SHORT BELLS</b>		
	<b>SECURE! Get inside. Lock outside doors.</b> <b>STUDENTS</b> Return to inside of building Do business as usual	<b>ADULTS</b> Bring everyone indoors Lock outside doors Increase situational awareness Account for students and adults Do business as usual
<b>REPEATED SHORT BELLS</b>		
	<b>LOCKDOWN! Locks, lights, out of sight.</b> <b>STUDENTS</b> Move away from sight Maintain silence Do not open the door	<b>ADULTS</b> Recover students from hallway if possible Lock the classroom door Turn out the lights Move away from sight Maintain silence Do not open the door Prepare to evade or defend
<b>CONTINUOUS BELL</b>		
	<b>EVACUATE! (A location may be specified)</b> <b>STUDENTS</b> Leave stuff behind if required to If possible, bring your phone Follow instructions	<b>ADULTS</b> Lead students to Evacuation location Account for students and adults Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults
<b>INTERCOM ANNOUNCEMENT</b>		
	<b>SHELTER! Hazard and safety strategy.</b> <b>STUDENTS</b> Use appropriate safety strategy for the hazard	<b>ADULTS</b> Lead safety strategy Account for students and adults Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults
<b>INTERCOM ANNOUNCEMENT</b>		
	<b>FIRE EVACUATION!</b> <b>STUDENTS</b> Leave stuff behind if required to Follow instructions	<b>ADULTS</b> Lead students to evacuation location Take safety backpacks and vests Account for students and adults Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults
<b>FIRE ALARM</b>		





It is okay to find it hard to be gracious and find the whole thing hard.

It is important to spend time with yourself and your team so that you can be clear and frank about your motivations in being there.







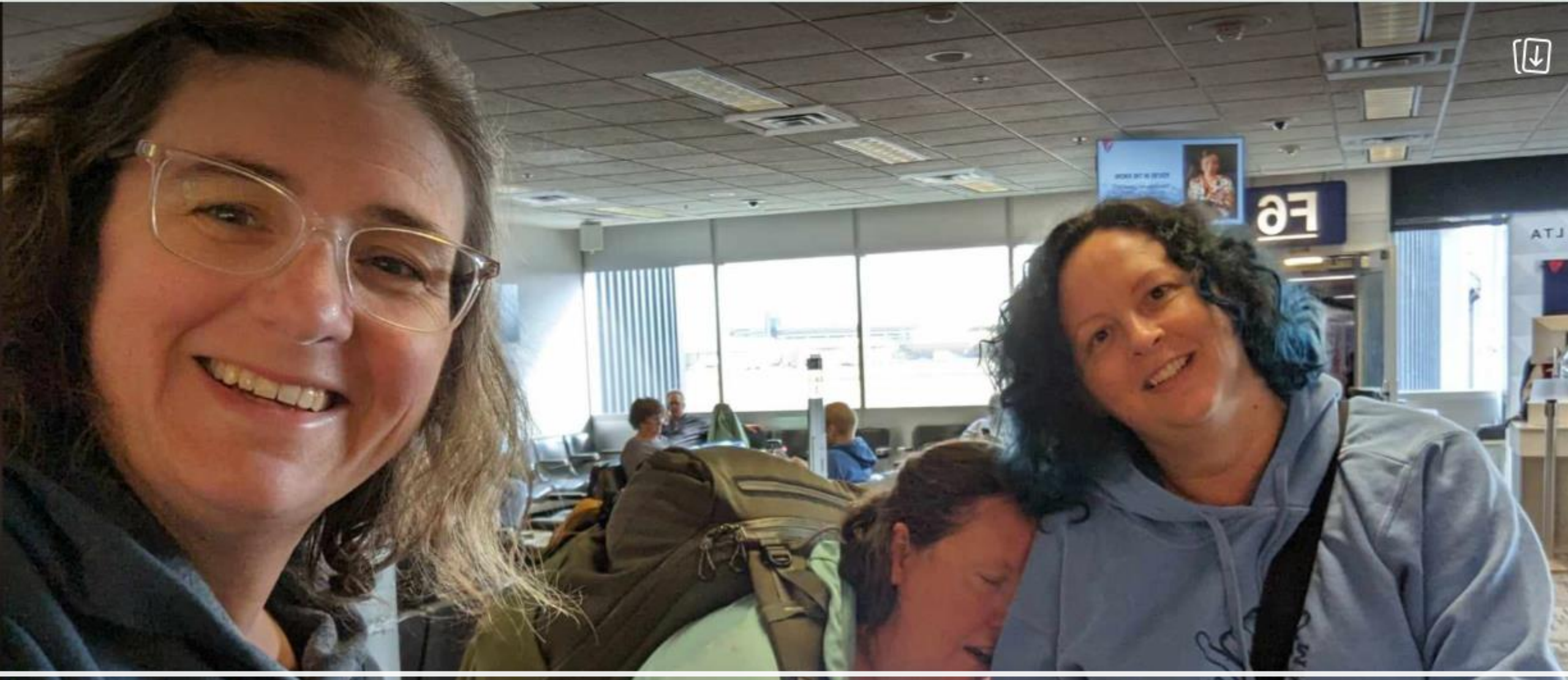
# Take care of each other.

This is hard space to be in and we're doing something that requires trust in each other.

And, it is okay to find beauty in the work and also, need to pull the car over to pet a plant or hug a tree.







You might be really exhausted after this work.

# Big themes

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Recovery isn't automatic – it takes planning and coordination and careful data validation on who you are serving when (kids, different ages of kids, adults, adults who parent, teach, or serve kids, etc)

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Know your story and connect your story – be a human as you do recovery operations – and be an expert

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Many people have a caring response that can overwhelm the population in recovery – create plans that address how you will figure out what is possible, what is wanted, what is unique or not met, how to do it aligned with best practices and values, and how to not make your colleagues or the community crazy

# Thank you!

Let's stay in touch – please don't hesitate to reach out

Mageen Caines – [mageen.caines@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:mageen.caines@minneapolismn.gov)

Toni Hauser – [toni.hauser@minneapolismn.gov](mailto:toni.hauser@minneapolismn.gov)

Bianca Virnig – [bianca.virnig@gmail.com](mailto:bianca.virnig@gmail.com)