

MERCY APERAAMO

Advocate, Senior Independent Living and Peer Support Specialist
American Samoa Center for Independent Living

LIVED EXPERIENCE AND BACKGROUND

I have paralysis and scoliosis and am a primary wheelchair-user. I was with full physical capabilities, but then I became paralyzed when I was four years old. I have been living as a disabled individual since then.

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ABOUT ME

My Story

In elementary and high school, we rarely had any emergency drills. But in the Smes we did, I remember the staff often struggling to come up with the proper response plan for students like me in such situations. Everyone knew the first thing to do during an earthquake was to stop, drop, and roll. During a tsunami, you get to high ground (or the safe zone). For a person with a disability, often using some sort of assistive device, such procedures are not feasible. I hope that having this conversation can lead to adequate solutions in place for this issue.

My Work/Education

I graduated from Tafuna High School. I am currently attending Arizona State University online, pursuing a degree in accounting. Now, I am also part of an upcoming organization called the American Samoa Center for Independent Living.

Why this Matters to Me

The American Samoa Center for Independent Living is important to me since we are working to advocate for and serve individuals with disabilities within our American Samoa community. The most important thing we strive to do is empower these individuals to lead independent, resilient lives. My hope is that having and participating in conversations like that of disability and resilience in emergencies can help to provide awareness to the community and practical ways for us to be more supportive and include individuals with disabilities.