

Literature Review: Community Supports Shuttle

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Definition: The Community Support Shuttle is a government funded transportation service developed to provide a bridge between individuals with economic and mental health challenges to social and medical support services. This service is intended to supplement existing public transportation for individuals who have difficulty accessing public transportation but need to access programs and services. The shuttle will be staffed by a Behavioral Health Case Manager who would be tasked with monitoring and assisting riders to navigate their planned destinations.

Target Population: Ridership priority would be given to individuals facing homelessness, behavioral health, mental health, food insecurity, and other issues affecting their self-sufficiency.

Description: This literature review summarizes the research on the importance of transportation and mobility for disadvantaged groups. The research suggests that access to transportation will improve educational and occupational outcomes, mental and physical health outcomes, and social emotional outcomes by increasing access to social and health services and programs. Models for community support transportation services are reviewed

Research Summary:

Difficulty in accessing health care and social service delivery systems has been identified as one factor that intensifies mental health and social disadvantage particularly for high need/high cost individuals who are the most likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged (Sherry et. al. 2016). Proximity to services and lack of transportation to reach these services has been cited by research as an important barrier to accessing services, treatment, and healthcare (Preister et.al. 2016, Adler, Pritchett, Kauth, & Mott, 2014; Rosen et al., 2004). This problem has been described by the Government accountability Office (GAO) as a problem of “transportation disadvantage” which is when individuals cannot provide their own transportation due to age, disability, or income constraints. (GAO 2015). This problem is particularly challenging in the US in terms of size and scope. Wallace and colleagues have researched this problem of transportation disadvantage and found that anywhere between 528,000 to 15.5 million individuals experience a problem of this kind, depending on the source of the data being reviewed (Wallace et.al. 2005). Research has suggested that structural barriers, like lack of transportation, should be dealt with first as they are the most common problem individuals face (Burt 2010).

There are services, community programs, government funding resources, and healthcare services provided by nonprofits and local and federal programs throughout Bernalillo County. Many of these services and programs are created specifically for low income/homeless individuals, people with mental health issues, substance abuse problems, or are otherwise socially disadvantaged. Unfortunately, the ability to access these types of programs and services can be limited or impossible without access to a personal vehicle. For individuals who are dependent on public transportation or have difficulty accessing reliable transportation access to transportation services can make the crucial difference in being able to utilize these services or not.

Difficulty in access can be connected to barriers that exist for individuals. These barriers can be described as the 5 A's

(Adapted from the Beverly Foundation, 2004):

- 1 . Affordability. In addition to their mental disability, many mental health consumers face the disabling effects of poverty. Those who rely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or other income supports often cannot afford to own a car or even to use public transportation regularly.
- 2 . Accessibility. Public transit is becoming more accessible to people with physical disabilities, but many people with mental and other hidden disorders continue to have a difficult time using transit systems. Even specialized transportation programs present difficulties, such as advance scheduling requirements, that limit users' ability to get where they need to go and the freedom to do so as they choose.
- 3 . Applicability. In many communities, programs abound for people with unmet transportation needs, but too often, mental health consumers are not eligible. Other programs, for which they are eligible, are available only for limited purposes.
- 4 . Availability. Some communities offer few if any transportation solutions; many rural communities have no public transit. In other communities, public transit schedules greatly limit when and where people can travel.
- 5 . Awareness. Many mental health consumers do not know about the transportation opportunities that are available or how to use them. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004)

One solution to addressing these barriers has been the development of different types of transportation programs and services. Transportation services developed to link individuals experiencing social, medical, and economic disadvantage have been shown to be effective in bridging the gap between isolated communities and social service agencies and delivery systems (Isham et. al. 2013, Gottlieb 2013, Sherry et al. 2016). We know for example that access to transportation is very important for individual's ability to receive health care services in a timely fashion. "Each year, 4% of children nationwide including 9% of children in low income households miss an appointment because transportation was not available. Lack of transportation is associated with missed appointments, problems filling prescriptions, poor management of chronic conditions, and preventable emergency room use (Grant et.al. 2016)." By developing transportation systems it may be possible to better address some of the most negative impacts for populations who cannot access health care and health services.

Furthermore, transportation issues also disproportionately impact low income and homeless individuals. Research has found that low income families spend the most per household on transportation, even in big cities like New York and Los Angeles where housing costs are very high as well (Grant et.al. 2016, Roberto 2015). Furthermore, households that earn less than 25,000 a year per household are 7 times less likely to own a vehicle than those who earn more than them (Department of Transportation 2015). Research has also found that homeless individuals cite transportation issues as important barriers to employment securement (Brooks and Buckner, 1996, Serge et al., 2006). The results from these studies suggest that more attention should be given to the transport needs of homeless individuals, as many rely on transportation to find appropriate jobs and housing.

Increasing transportation and mobility opportunities will improve quality of life in a variety of ways for high risk disadvantage portions of our population. There has been a growing body of research interested in the ways in which transportation can decrease social exclusion and increase wellbeing for marginalized groups (Stanley and Vella-Brodrick, 2009, Hui & Eng 2016) Providing transportation to these types of groups can be one factor in helping individuals break out of the cycle of poverty or live stable and healthy lives with mental health diagnoses. The next section describes programs and services that provide transportation services to people with mental health issues or who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Models:

While it may not be impossible to meet all the needs of groups with behavioral health needs, some programs have been adopted to help address barriers to transportation. By summarizing the research and program development already completed to try to address and alleviate transportation problems we can understand how to develop a program that would be effective and appropriate for Bernalillo County. Transportation initiatives have taken many forms, “In areas not served by public transit, community transportation initiatives use a variety of methods to get people where they need to go. Some programs use their own vehicles; others rely on privately owned vehicles or taxis. Some employ consumers and some rely heavily on volunteer drivers. One innovative approach issues vouchers, reimbursed at a flat rate per mile, that allow people to arrange their own transportation (SAMSAH, 2004).” Because many states have already created programs that have identified approaches for successfully helping people with behavioral health issues it will be prudent to understand the work that has already been done in this area before developing a system for Bernalillo County. Many state and local governments have worked to address the needs of people with behavioral health needs by developing transportation that is designated for certain groups of people. Below are some descriptions of these types of programs.

Providing Specialized Transportation

Increasing access to public transportation is important but it can only be as good as the public transportation system that is available. Even when individuals live in cities sometimes there are barriers to using public transportation. To deal with this problem many specialized transportation programs have been developed for specific groups. These types of programs include consumer-Run Programs, Volunteer-Augmented Programs, and Travel Vouchers. Consumer run programs are services like self-help groups, drop-in centers, peer advocacy, employment supports, and crisis services that have proved to be helpful to individuals seeking mental health services. Either volunteer or paid peer programs have been developed to transport individuals to these services who might not otherwise be able to go. Volunteer augmented programs are often ones that are supported by volunteers, and paid staff in order to support individuals to get to services that might not be funded by certain transportation only specified for one need. These are vouchers individuals can use anywhere rather than just in one specific form of transportation. “Rather, participants are free to arrange their own rides and to present a voucher that is reimbursed by the sponsoring agency to the ride provider. Rides can be provided by taxi services, public transportation, and even friends and family—all of whom are reimbursed by the agency issuing the voucher (SAMSAH, 2004).”

Expanding Access to Public Transit

These programs include paratransit, Medicaid transportation, and half fare program. Paratransit is a program that picks people up at their residences if they have a disability that makes it difficult for them to use public transportation. Medicaid transportation ensures that people have access to medical appointments and services and finally, under the transportation Equity Act states must offer half fare precisely to individuals who fit the requirements of the program. (SAMSAH 2004). Unfortunately not all services that are needed are provided and this is the case particularly for individuals who utilize mental health services because they often do not qualify for programs that are intended for individuals with disabilities. A program like this one will allow for portions of the populations that would not qualify for something like paratransit to have a transportation program set up to connect them to services.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

According to the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center report called “Transportation Services for People with Disabilities in Rural and Small Urban Communities” there are a few overall strategies that have been successful when an agency or local government is seeking to develop a transportation service for a specific population. First they recommend that the agency or government entity identify a lead agency that can coordinate transportation services. Next they should encourage agencies in the area that are providing similar types of services to combine their services to work toward a “coordinated transportation service plan”. Finally, they should develop a relationship with the state administration to make them aware of the state needs and encourage them to play a role in the coordination of services (National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, pg. 40).

Despite a need for access to services and programming, new transportation systems bring hope that the significant need that some people face may be addressed through social and governmental intervention. This report summarizes the research that indicates the importance of and need for transportation services. Next, several programs and services that have improved the experience of individuals and their access to services were described. These types of programs are important because they, “can improve the accessibility of existing transportation services, broaden available transportation to include employment, social and personal travel needs rather than just medical or other “essential” needs, and ensure that all transportation dependent residents, rather than only a limited number of agency or program clients, have access to transportation (National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, pg. 39). By providing a service like the Community Supports Shuttle and relying on best practices to develop the program Bernalillo County can create a community service that will improve the lives of many individuals for years to come.

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