

Running head: Transportation

The Benefits and Burdens of Transportation for Youth with Disabilities

Youth Leadership Development Institute White Papers

A white paper written by youth leaders from the Youth Leadership Development Institute

2011

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Youth Leadership Development Institute

Introduction to the Youth Leadership Development Institute (YLDI):

The Youth Leadership Development Institute was established through support from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau's State Implementation Grant. This Institute worked to promote the development of advocacy and leadership skills in youth with disabilities. The developers of the curriculum believed in the importance of creating youth lead and youth focused programs, in order to develop a network of peer mentors. Youth who attended these events were between the ages of 16-28, had a disclosed disability, and were identified as emerging leaders.

Purpose of the YLDI:

The goal of the YLDI is to provide a safe, accepting environment to cultivate the growth of self-acceptance, confidence, and self-advocacy skills. Youth leaving the YLDI program should feel more accepting of themselves with a disability, more confident in their abilities and choices, and a connection to the other youth attending the YLDI, as well as to the disability community as a whole.

Youth Leadership Development Institute White Papers

Introduction to the White Papers

In recognition of the finite time that this group of youth leaders had together, the members of the YLDI decided that they wanted to leave a legacy of the work that they had done together. They recognized the devastating outcomes that can be a result of the unaddressed barriers that youth with disabilities commonly face. In an effort to address these issues, the youth decided to develop a set of twelve white papers, which identify the discrimination and barriers that youth endure.

Development of the White Papers

In November of 2009, the first YLDI was held in Cranberry Pennsylvania, approximately twenty youth with disabilities attended this event, from that group eight youth were

selected to take on leadership positions for future YLDI events. Throughout the following two years three additional YLDI trainings were held and from those three, twelve additional leaders were chosen to assist in creating training materials, leading sessions, speaking to officials about youth issues, and creating white papers. In the last year of the program these twenty leaders attended advanced leadership institutes where they assisted in developing the twelve white papers.

During this two-year endeavor, the twenty leaders (ages 16-29) met on four different occasions to identify the top issues faced by youth, define source of the problems, and create recommendations. These four weekend meetings produced the foundation of each of these documents. The twelve white papers developed include:

- Employment
- Education
- Self-Advocacy
- Healthcare
- Independent Living
- Youth Leadership Development
- Social Relationships
- Disability Stigma
- Transition
- Transportation
- Top Issues: Summary of Concerns

Youth then volunteered to further develop these documents into policy papers. Each paper was then edited by the other leaders. These papers are to be used to identify the barriers faced by youth and to recognize the importance of the youth voice in developing solutions.

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Introduction to Barriers in Transportation

Individuals may be limited in success by whether they can get to necessary locations within an appropriate time frame. For individuals with disabilities, accessible transportation may be difficult to locate and obtain, especially on a fixed income or in remote areas.

Public Transportation

Public transportation is often limited to highly residential or urban locations, with schedules that may not be conducive to the needs of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, with decreased funding, drivers are often more hesitant to pick up people with disabilities because of the extended amount of time that may be required and the additional amount of space that a wheelchair may take.

Availability of Travel Training

PROBLEM

Individuals with disabilities often cannot receive training about how to find and safely obtain transportation.

RESOLUTION 1

Advertise what is available- Currently there is a plethora of services and information about transportation supports, however, individuals are often unaware. Efforts need to be made to disseminate this information through cost effective and accessible media.

RESOLUTION 2

Designated public transportation support staff- Staff should be appointed to provide training to local organizations, schools, colleges, Intermediate Units, and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Staff should also be available to provide individualized training for users of public transportation. These trainings should include understanding bus schedules, paratransit, paying for transportation services, safety, and how to file complaints.

RESOLUTION 3

Online guide- There needs to be the further development of online tools that are made easily accessible to all individuals. These online tools should include instructional videos, user guides, and summaries of available accommodations.

RESOLUTION 4

Provide information to various support networks- Support service agencies should be trained and have the ability to make recommendations to transportation services. There should be the development of a strong working relationship between these agencies to provide the most effective and efficient supports.

What is Available

PROBLEM

There is a continued lack of availability of services and flexibility to support the needs of all individuals, specifically in rural areas.

RESOLUTION

Streamline elderly transportation services and accessibility transportation- There are many service providers that provide transportation to different groups or for different purposes, such as doctor's appointments or transportation provided specifically to the elderly population. These services need to collaborate to provide and encourage collaboration among agencies.

Unreliable Time

PROBLEM

Often accessible public transportation systems set a thirty minute to one hour window when they will pick up the consumer. This forces the individual to remain in often unsafe locations for long periods of time. Occasionally the transportation never arrives, leaving the person with no other options.

RESOLUTION 1

Sensitivity training for drivers and dispatchers- Drivers and dispatchers need to understand the needs of and problems faced by people with disabilities. To receive supportive services, professionals must be educated on how to work with this population, potential risks, ways of providing safe transportation, and disability etiquette.

RESOLUTION 2

Automated progress/check points- Transportation service consumers should be able to check the time estimate for a pick-up or have automated messages to inform the individual about when to expect the arrival of the transportation. This would prevent individuals from waiting in potentially unsafe locations, alone.

Hours of Service

PROBLEM

Generally transportation services are made available during normal business hours, limiting a person from having social and economic activities after 5pm or before 7am.

RESOLUTION:

Collaboration- The Department of Transportation should collaborate with local service agencies to create waivers for personal concierge services or to privately hire drivers. These drivers could be hired on an individual or small group basis, in a similar method to hiring personal care attendants to serve a small number of individuals.

Reliability of Properly Functioning Equipment**PROBLEM**

With inadequate funding there is a lack of replacement and maintenance of accessibility equipment such as wheelchair lifts. These devices often do not operate correctly or break during use.

RESOLUTION 1

Regular scheduled maintenance- During regular maintenance, all accessibility equipment should also be checked and fixed as needed. This maintenance should also incorporate a reporting system for passengers to report any concerns or problems.

RESOLUTION 2

Require manual backup- All accessibility equipment should include manual backups in the case of equipment malfunction, such as cranks for lifts.

Travel- Airlines, Trains, Cruise lines

Traveling with a disability can be difficult for many individuals. These difficulties may arise from additional costs, inaccessibility, and the lack of knowledge and patience of staff.

Paying for Assistive Devices as Baggage-**PROBLEM**

With the increased charge often placed on additional luggage, assistive devices such as walkers and shower chairs are also often charged for.

RESOLUTION

Waive the expense- Luggage costs for all medical or disability equipment should be waived. For this to occur, staff must be educated on the necessity and variety of equipment that passengers may utilize.

Lack of Equal Travel Options

PROBLEM

Even when accessibility is available for people with disabilities, often there is a lack of options available in seating, rooms, and accessible activity.

RESOLUTION

Options- Accessibility options should be made available in a variety of ways and places, allowing for personal choice and options. These options can make travel possible for a larger population.

Handling of Assistive Devices

PROBLEM

Staff are often not educated about how to safely handle assistive devices such as power scooters, commonly causing damage to these devices without the capacity to alleviate the burden placed on the consumer.

RESOLUTION 1

Medical equipment trainings- Individuals moving, operating, or transporting medical equipment should have extensive training on the importance and use of the device, how to safely run/move it, and how to prevent damage. Some of this training could be firsthand knowledge based training from individuals with disabilities.

RESOLUTION 2

Reimbursement of undue expenses- when medical equipment is damaged, there is often an additional costs for the individual to obtain more supports or to change plans, such as changing the time of an accessible taxi. These expenses are a direct result of the error of the transportation service. These expenses must be reimbursed to provide travelers with disabilities with an equal playing field.

RESOLUTION 3

Quality equipment repairs or replacement-when assistive technology or medical equipment is damaged, often repairs or replacements are provided at a lower quality or cost of the original device. Repairs and replacements should be at an equal value.

Isle Chairs

PROBLEM

Even when isle chairs are available, staff are often unknowledgeable about how to appropriately transfer a person and use the chair safely.

RESOLUTION

Sensitivity training – Staff who are assisting in the use of isle chairs and mobility assistance to passengers should receive training on disability sensitivity, including how to address the dignity and needs of people with disabilities, beyond safety regulations. This would include the importance of asking the individual about how he or she would best be supported and following those instructions.

Service Dogs

PROBLEM

Transportation and travel services rarely have supports available for a service dog. Some of these limitations may include an adequate space on airplanes for a service dog, the lack of locations for a dog to relieve him or herself, and inadequate staff training

RESOLUTION 1

Service dog training- Staff need to be trained on the rights of service dog owners and be able to provide them with reasonable accommodations, such as offering water on flights or holding a leash during transfers.

RESOLUTION 2

Safe and spacious area- Transportation often was not created to accommodate the needs of a service dog. These dogs need extra space which is safe, to lay near the owners in order to be able to adequately provide their vital service.

Personal Transportation

Locating Funding for Making a Personal Automobile Accessible

PROBLEM

Vehicle accessibility modifications are often too expensive for families or people with disabilities to individually pay for. These modifications may include a lowered floor, wheelchair lift, docking systems, hand-controls, and modified seating. Unfortunately there are limited financial supports available for these modifications, leaving many individuals with disabilities without transportation or transportation that is unreliable or unsafe.

RESOLUTION

Improving pre-modified vehicle sales- A service needs to be established which posts and advertise new and used modified vehicles for sale. This would increase the availability of affordable pre-modified vehicles.

Training Facilities

PROBLEM

Currently there is a lack of modified vehicle driver training facilities, creating long waiting lists to receive evaluation, obtain modifications, and receive necessary training.

RESOLUTION

Collaboration between DOT and specialized facilities- driver training facilities should have at least one instructor who has been trained and certified in conducting modified vehicle driver training. After the individual has been fitted with the appropriate modifications, the local driver's training facilities can do the follow-up training. This would eliminate the long waiting lists and decrease the costs of the specialized facilities.

Repairs in a Timely and Cost Efficient Manner

PROBLEM

When accessibility equipment malfunctions or breaks, repairs are often expensive and time consuming. Without the availability of accessible rental vehicles, individuals are often left without transportation for long periods of time.

RESOLUTION 1

Equipment Training- Mechanical programs should include adaptive equipment training so that all mechanics have a basic understanding and education on vehicle modifications.

RESOLUTION 2

Guarantees- Adaptive equipment and modifications should come with guarantees, improving the quality of the products and supporting the needs of clients.