

# A Customized Transportation Intervention

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## Key Points

1. A transportation coordinator was found to be helpful by participants.
2. Problem solving and confidence were high among participating consumers.
3. Several gaps in transportation knowledge were identified.
4. Lack of transportation was more likely to limit participation in other life activities than in employment.

## Research Summary

An intervention, "Customized Transportation," was developed to assist consumers referred from the AL Department of Rehabilitation Services who are blind or visually impaired in locating transportation to/from work. The intervention was implemented by a transportation coordinator and was based on concepts from customized employment, case management, and problem solving skills. Consumers were assigned to an intervention group or a comparison group based on their zip codes. Those in the comparison group received a resource guide with information concerning transportation. Persons in the intervention group developed a customized transportation plan and received individual services from a Transportation Coordinator.

All participants were referred by their vocational rehabilitation counselor and completed pretests via telephone. Pretests included an orientation and mobility screening, the *Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised* short form, a measure of transportation self-efficacy, and a measure of transportation knowledge. The three latter items were completed as posttests after approximately one year. Participants also granted access to their state vocational rehabilitation case file. Additional data sources for the intervention group included their transportation plans, transportation coordinator logs of activities, and a satisfaction survey administered approximately 60 days after referral receiving services. Comparison group participants received a \$25 gift card for completing pretests. All participants received a \$25 gift card for completing posttests.

Referral numbers were lower than anticipated, making it difficult to compare the intervention and comparison groups, and there was some mortality. Of 54 referrals, 48 persons participated, including 16 in the intervention group. Twelve intervention participants completed satisfaction surveys. Posttests were completed by 32 persons; only five of those were in the intervention group.

Eleven of the 12 participants were satisfied with the customized intervention services and all recommended that a transportation coordinator be assigned to work with consumers in locating transportation to and from work. Participants indicated receiving information and support from the coordinators.

Based on results of the *Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised*, participants were likely to face problems with less emotional distress and be effective and efficient problem solvers. These results were stable from pre to posttest. The measure of transportation self-efficacy found participants confident about their ability to perform most transportation related tasks with no difference from pre to posttest. The transportation knowledge measure found participants generally knowledgeable about transportation issues but participants were significantly more knowledgeable at posttest.

Overall results indicate that consumers are in need of additional information about: (a) negotiating carpool arrangements, (b) screening and hiring drivers, (c) maximizing their transportation independence, (d) keeping current about costs and reasonable compensation for drivers, and (e) identifying transportation options.

*Clicker Question:* (This is an example of one of the knowledge questions on the transportation knowledge instrument.) What is the average cost of owning a medium size car for one year, this would include all cost associated with the car such as: car payment, insurance, gas, maintenance, oil change, tires, etc.?

Less than \$5,000 (4%)

Between \$5,000-\$7,500 (54%)

More than \$7,500 (40%)

Don't know (2%)

Two transportation surveys were conducted to supplement the intervention study data. The first survey targeted persons on the NRTC Participant Registry, a pool of persons who have volunteered to participate in blindness related research projects. A useable pool of 144 persons was achieved. Respondents received gift cards for \$25. The survey was modified and disseminated via the NRTC National Advisory Board, Facebook, discussion lists, and consumer groups. That snowball sample approach generated over 300 participants and three \$100 gift cards were awarded to randomly selected respondents.

Data from the first survey that included persons from the NRTC Participant Registry is not representative of persons with visual disabilities. Participants were more likely to be White (78%, with 9.7% African American) and highly educated (with 58% have undergraduate or graduate degrees). Of those responding, 44.4% were employed, 26.4% unemployed (n=38), 20.1% retired or volunteers, and 6.9% self-employed. Limitations were also associated with technology issues that may have resulted in participants dropping out or entering data incorrectly.

*Clicker Question:* This is another example of a question from the survey. How do you typically get to work?

Drive myself (47 %)

Public transportation/para transit/taxi (31%)

Spouse or other family member drives (16%)

Walk (2%)  
Other (5%)

The survey found that employed persons were most likely to use public transportation, followed by walking, use of paratransit, and being driven by a spouse or family member or a volunteer driver; only a small number (n=7) reported using a carpool. Participants were generally satisfied with their transportation to and from work but less satisfied persons may have stopped working due to transportation issues. When asked if they had ever turned down a job because of transportation concerns, 78% said no. Transportation concerns were more likely to occur surrounding entertaining/leisure activities, visiting friends, and shopping.

Of 131 persons responding, 74.8% had received state vocational rehabilitation services. Of that number, 91.8% said those services did not include assistance in locating transportation to and from work. When assistance was received, it included orientation and mobility training, referrals to public and paratransit, and reimbursement or vouchers. Most (80.5%) received orientation and mobility training and for 77.6% of those, that training included using public transportation. Public transportation was available to 75% of the respondents. Of the employed persons, 87% could give directions to their work site.

*Clicker Question:* Whose responsibility is it to assist consumers in locating transportation to and from work?

Rehabilitation counselor (36%)

Orientation and mobility specialist (23%)

Job placement specialist (3%)

Job coach (3%)

It's not the responsibility of anyone in the agency (34%)

Products generated from this project include a consumer guide to transportation available on the NRTC website and a Transportation Plan, a tool to assist counselors in identifying and evaluating transportation options with consumers. A transportation focused webinar is being developed and successful completion will generate continuing education units for CRC credit. Checklists to assist in transportation planning for both consumers and counselors are in development. Manuscripts for submission to professional journals are also in process.

### From the Audience

*Question:* This was very interesting because several years ago, the American Council of the Blind did a survey of members regarding perceived barriers to employment. The thing that we found fascinating was that transportation was the number one barrier that people cited. Is it correct that your survey participants all had ready access to public transportation? I guess if that's the case, are there plans to do further work with regard to people in areas where there isn't such ready access to public transportation or para transit?

*Answer:* In this particular survey, 75% of the people who responded had access to public transportation. But again, this is not a representative sample. One of the issues would be, how can we do further work on this, while we reach a broader sample? You see how many people, it was over 44% were employed. We need to reach some of these other people, get that information from them.

### Panel Discussion

*Panelists:*

*Donna Smith, Easter Seals, Project ACTION*

*Sean Whalen, National Association of Blind Students*

*Joey Richey, Alabama DRS*

*Joe Strechey, AFB*

### **The referrals to the transportation project from the state agency were lower than anticipated. Why do you think this was the case?**

I suspect that it may be related to the perception of whether or not transportation is a factor of rehabilitation services. Is this something counselors need to be involved in, and if the general perception is rather on the high side that counselors-- that it is not part of their job to assist in working out transportation, then perhaps that's why there was a low response.

I wonder about the buy in and engagement during the recruitment process and getting people to-- convince people to be referred to this project.

Yes. I was one of the people that did refer individuals. One of the problems initially was the narrow criteria, for someone being ready to go to work, to have a job identified, that really limited the people that we could refer. They did open that criteria up to a job-ready status, and that helped a little bit. But again, the individuals that were referred probably already had a good amount of intervention. It is something that we believe is very critical to employment success. We'd like to see very, very early intervention, right from the very beginning to have that transportation intervention planned for.

### **What is the best way to make sure that potential transportation issues are discussed and resolved with each consumer?**

I would suggest that there's bound to be some sort of a checklist or process list of things that counselors need to check off, in terms of providing services, and that it should be added to that list, perhaps with some sub points that help work through the process. Project ACTION is a national training and technical assistance center on accessible transportation concerns. We have some handouts or one sheet-- fact sheets that we've made around solutions for finding transportation. It really is just a check list of: Do this if you have public transportation, here's where you go to find out about that, here's what's required for para transit service, here's where else you can look at those things that

aren't available. It just kind of works you down through a list of potential transportation options. Some tool like that in the hands of counselors, would probably be helpful as well. Our products are free, so that's no problem for the agency.

Yes, from a personal note, I have a similar tool that I use, it's very much like a check sheet, and I call it my transportation work sheet, where I identified the public transportation options, the local cab companies, to identify friends and families, look for volunteer organizations. I give this to the consumer and ask them to participate in their own plan, to do some research, to get out there and to look at this. The survey mentioned whose responsibility. The counselor's responsible, the ONM's responsible, and the job coach is responsible. I think it's a team effort, along with the consumer. We should all work together, at different stages in the process, to help that consumer be as educated about transportation as possible.

**Do you have any other thoughts about what would be helpful for us to know about transportation issues?**

A couple of things, first of all -- I just finished the quarterly report for Project ACTION, and every quarter when we look at technical assistance questions that come in through our hotline and our e-mail, para transit questions are always queen. But second in line is how do I find a ride? Obviously, this isn't specific to people who are blind or visually impaired, but a wider issue for many disability groups; this is a huge piece. One of the pieces that this project - the NRTC project - has developed, was a Transportation Guide. It's a very good step by step piece of, how do we find a ride, and then what are those things that you need to know. The survey indicated things like: People didn't know how much to tip a cab driver, or they were unsure about how to screen and hire drivers, those sorts of things. This tip sheet really does help people to have that information right there. I think that's a real critical piece. I also agree with someone who said, "Early is better." One of the things that we do in Project ACTION is work with school programs, education programs. Mostly, we're working right now with public schools. We are trying to get a transportation education goal built into the curriculum. When you are talking to students, who-- you're pretty sure aren't going to ever drive, about transportation at an early age. As they learn, and by the time they reach transition age; they're looking to get out there into the world, come over to be our clients and be employed, that they'll have some of that background. I know that there's a collaboration between BR and the transition programs and special ed. Students get O&M services and that's great. 'That's kind of a leg-up already, compared to people with other disabilities, who are still struggling to get travel training services. If we can tag on to that, and "here's what you need to know about transportation", in school. I think it would be significant, if when you come into the employment arena where you're looking for work, if as you're considering here's what we know the cost of rent or mortgage might be. Here's what you can expect to budget and spend on food. There needs to be some reasonable expectation of what transportation costs. At that time, considering what the overall cost of owning and operating the vehicle, and how that might compare to what I might reasonably expect to spend on my own

transportation, we just didn't make that leap. We hear people all the time, complain about the cost of para transit, the cost of taking taxis. It does cost. There is a cost to it. But when you compare what I spend on public transportation, to what somebody spends on owning a vehicle, it's minimal.

I want to echo what we've been saying, but we also have to create a value on transportation in youth, so that they understand. That does come from experience. Also, that it's not just the VR counselor, not the O&M instructor. It is a team effort. But it is also the individual's responsibility too. We have to create that value at an early age that they want to live around transportation. I grew up not having the easiest access to transportation, but I made a goal for myself to plan my life around living in areas where I had good public transportation.

That was the same direction I was going. It's for the youth, our transition population, to make them aware, very early, thinking about those things. The possibility of relocating, where I'm going to live? How am I going to get back and forth to work? To plan on that, from a very early age, and to have an understanding of that.