

Youth Employment Transportation Briefs



Brief #1: Overcoming Transportation Challenges for Youth

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Effective youth employment programs—whether based in a school or training center—integrate vocational and job training skills with life skills and employment-related values. These programs offer youth the opportunity for career exploration, community service, mentoring, and internships through collaborations with government, local businesses, community-based organizations, social service agencies, and schools.

The one area in which these programs' resources can be helpful is in ensuring youth have reliable transportation to and from the programs and, following completion of the program, to their jobs. Youth with transportation barriers are at a disadvantage in their ability to successfully operate and participate in their programs. The ultimate challenge for training and mentoring programs is ensuring that young people who graduate from these programs can translate the skills they have learned into a job or further education; often this can be a difficult task to accomplish because the youth lack transportation.

Youth transit needs are quite similar to those of their adult counterparts. Research indicates that the spatial mismatch between where low-income youth reside and where jobs are is a barrier to youth as well as their parents in obtaining and maintaining a job. The majority of low-income workers and youth are urban or rural residents, whereas most new jobs are available in the outlying suburbs. Many entry-level jobs require working evening or weekend hours when public transportation is often unavailable. Youth also lack personal vehicles, often cannot afford the upkeep of cars, and have difficulties obtaining a driver's license.

Many programs have ensured participants have access to transportation through various mechanisms such as

- Partnering with employers to purchase bus passes or collaborating with transit authorities to provide bus passes
- Providing vouchers and taxi reimbursements
- Contracting for shuttles and buses
- Facilitating participation in carpools
- Purchasing vans, shuttles, and minibuses
- Facilitating the donation and repairs of older vehicles
- Providing loans to eligible individuals to lease or purchase vehicles
- Making one-time or short-term payments for car repairs or insurance
- Accessing other existing transportation systems for older adults, people with disabilities, Head Start participants, and school children

Some programs help young people obtain a driver's licenses and clean up driving records. Others give gas cards to young people or create incentives for them to earn them. Still others help youth develop savings accounts, where they set aside a percentage of their stipend and

the program matches what the participant has saved, with the idea that the savings would be available for transportation expenses.

Program Examples

The Home Builder's Institute offers a comprehensive curriculum to teach skills related to the home building industry; the target populations for the curriculum range from youth to veterans to older workers. The apprenticeship-based curriculum includes a 25–75 percent split between class time and hands-on training and practice. The Institute uses funding from the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, and Education to provide transportation—a critical issue for those in the program. Most of the work in the home building industry is in the suburbs, where transit is not easily accessible. Therefore, some sites have leased vehicles that are paid for by the companies that contract with the Home Builder's Institute. For example, in Mississippi and Florida, the Department of Juvenile Justice helps lease vehicles. In other sites, members receive stipends for participating in the programs and are encouraged to use the stipend for transportation. Other programs place more than one person at the same job site so that these new workers can share travel expenses. The Home Builder's Institute has also reached out to employers to pay for transportation by emphasizing the benefit to these companies of providing reliable transportation for work-ready employees. Contact: Dennis Torbett, vice president, (800) 795-7955, <http://www.hbi.org>.

Positive Achievement for Learning Success (PALS) in Louisiana is one of the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE's) 21st Century Learning Center Program awardees. The DOE has awarded grants to support the creation of community schools in more than 3,600 schools in over 900 communities. The grants were established to help working families with school-age children by providing safe and enjoyable activities after school and during summer breaks, while improving their academic performance.

PALS has partnered with a variety of community-based organizations to accomplish its mission. For example, PALS provides tutoring services for the Sabine Parish School Board prior to its state testing. PALS' ability to pay salaries for bus drivers and operations costs for the transportation from the program enables more children to be involved. The local school board, which allows PALS to use the school system's buses after school, thus spends little additional money on the buses, insurance, and maintenance. PALS has also furthered its mission by partnering with the state parks. The state parks provide PALS participants with free use of facilities, such as swimming pools, while PALS pays for the transportation. Had PALS not paid for transportation, many students would not otherwise be able to participate. Contact: Eric Lord, lorde@sabine.k12.la.us.

Intercity Transit Village Vans Program in Olympia, WA, provides on-demand, free, door-to-door transportation to community members who have limited income and are searching for work. Riders include youth ages 16–18 years who are enrolled in the Thurston County Community Youth Services Career and Training Program.

The Village Vans Program grew out of research by a large group of local human services agencies to identify gaps in transportation for county residents. The research highlighted the lack of transportation options for low-income families making the transition from government aid to economic independence. Intercity Transit took the leadership in developing the program, which began service in 2002. Initial funding came from the Federal Transit Administration's Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program and the Washington State Office of Trade and Economic Development's WorkFirst Transportation Initiative Program. Services are sustained

by continued funding from FTA and local matching funds. Contact: Ann Bridges, (360) 705-583, abridges@intercitytransit.com.

The *Living Classrooms Foundation* is a nonprofit organization that provides hands-on education and job skills training for students from diverse backgrounds. The foundation's Workforce Development Center acts as the facilitator of the United Parcel Service (UPS) School-to-Career Partnership. This partnership allows youth to obtain employment at the UPS site in Laurel, Maryland (26 miles south of Baltimore) and provides transportation for the youths to and from work. The program is funded through an \$80,000 Job Access and Reverse Commute grant matched 100 percent by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Workforce Transportation and Referral Center is the broker that coordinates transportation. The foundation also sponsors incentive programs that can lead to auto purchases, including assistance in obtaining drivers' licenses and all the other items associated with purchasing a car for the first time. Contact: Rochelle McGee, (410) 685-0295, Rochelle@livingclassrooms.org.

The *Serve Alaska Youth Corps* (SAGA) in Juneau, Alaska, provides a year-round work experience, training, and education program for young adults. SAGA has an arrangement with the city through which once a week a SAGA crew cleans up the city bus stops; in return, the city gives bus passes to SAGA members who need them. To organize this arrangement, SAGA approached the City Transit Authority Director and also sought support from Assembly/Council members, the mayor, and the city manager. Eventually the idea was approved by the Assembly. Contact: Joe Parrish, (907) 790-6403, sagajp@servealaska.org, www.servealaska.org.

Next Steps

Although many sites have succeeded in getting program participants to and from programs and employment, many still struggle with transportation. The Community Transportation Association of America, a national nonprofit organization with federal dollars to provide technical assistance, is available to work with communities and youth programs to help solve transportation barriers for youth and others. For information, contact Amy Conrick at conrick@ctaa.org, (800) 891-0590 ext. 734, or visit the Employment Transportation site at: www.ctaa.org/ntrc/

The Joblinks Employment Transportation Initiative is a partnership of the Community Transportation Association, the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration. Joblinks assists communities in addressing challenges associated with accessing affordable and reliable transportation to work and related destinations. For more information, visit www.ctaa.org/ntrc/.

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