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Travel Training For Older Adults: Case Studies & Local Programs July, 2015

This information brief discusses five travel training program case studies drawn from community programs featured in TCRP Report 168 Parts I and II with a focus on the components contributing to the effectiveness of the programs. The case studies are from different regions of the United States, including smaller, suburban communities such as Meridian, Idaho, to highly populated, dense cities including Chicago, Illinois, and Sacramento, California. In each region, travel training programs are pursued in different manners; however, consistent themes emerge regarding the fundamental infrastructure needed to implement and uphold the integrity of the travel training services.

Introduction

Mobility is crucial. It provides us with the very foundations to move about in the world; to travel, to transport, and to conduct everyday activities. Older adults are often most affected as age and decreasing mobility contributes to limited access to formal modes of transit. As older adults become more dependent on others on others for transportation, they lose the very ability that allows them to participate in their own community. To restore mobility to many older adults, organizations around the nation conduct travel training programs—teaching individuals routes and transportation modes to facilitate their mobility around the area.

Travel training programs are designed to help individuals regain their mobility and develop an understanding of the public transportation system to increase independence. Studies have shown that an increased understanding of public transit reduces the dependence on others and contributes to greater community involvement, since individuals are now able to get from place to place more easily.

It is projected that by 2030, the older adult population in the United States will grow to be 70 million people.¹ Without knowledge of public transportation, many people will restrict the trips they take. However, through travel training, and a greater understanding of the public transit system, individuals will be able to travel with an understanding of how to get from one place another—combating the overall loss of mobility.

¹ Burkhardt, Jon E., David J. Berstein, David W. Eby, Lisa J. Molnar, Charles A. Nelson, James M. McLary, and Kathryn Kulbicki. *Travel Training for Older Adults Part I: A Handbook. Transit Cooperative Research Program*. Rep. no. 168. Federal Transit Administration, n.d. Web. 7 July 2015.

Travel training is not exclusive to older adults and is used to help people with disabilities learn how to travel independently. Currently, many people with disabilities travel using an ADA complementary paratransit system. Although paratransit is able to provide transportation to individual's desired location, per-person costs are much greater than those for fixed-route bus or rail. By completing travel training programs, individuals will be able to dissolve costs of ADA paratransit systems as they will now understand how to use the public transportation system.¹

Successful travel training programs are cost-efficient and must offer individuals enough knowledge and training to provide them with the confidence of traveling independently using the public transportation system. To do so, agencies must ensure that key traits are implemented within the program to ensure success, including:

- Tailoring a travel program to the client
- Establishing and maintaining partnerships
- Adapting to community environment
- Retaining funding sources
- Ensuring strong management
- Evaluating outcomes

By incorporating these fundamental aspects, agencies will be able to provide efficient and effective training to older adults and people with disabilities. Tailoring the program to the client ensures that the client's needs will be met, so that the trainees are more inclined to use the public transportation system after training. Furthermore, maintaining strong fiscal and management administration will facilitate the implementation of the programs and allow for greater access to the services. One of the most important building blocks involved in maintaining travel training program is evaluating outcome; this allows the agency to determine areas to improve as well as areas already effective.² Through implementation, travel training programs will be able to provide effective services to clients to assist them with regaining their mobility.

NCST Survey of Travel Training Programs

In an effort to better understand how travel training programs are administered, the National Center on Senior Transportation conducted a survey in April and May 2015 of agencies that offer travel training programs for older adults. By conducting this survey, the NCST wished to determine the current state of practice of travel training programs, to gauge providers' need for additional support services. The survey accrued 72 responses, 50 of them from 20 states across the United States. From the responses received, the NCST concluded that the majority of agencies had full-time travel trainers providing instruction to clients. A majority of agencies reported that staffers all had extensive hands-on experience, as well as education training in the subject area in order to qualify to instruct travel training services. In addition, trainers also receive support from the agency to make certain that trainers are familiar with transportation routes, and are able to disseminate the information. Through this survey, the NCST concluded that a large percentage of travel training programs have qualified trainers,

program supports for trainers, as well as extensive follow-ups to understand the effectiveness of travel training programs. In addition to those elements, this brief will examine other details that contribute to the success of travel training programs.

Local Program Case Studies

Via Mobility Services Boulder, Colorado

Via Mobility Training Program is served under the larger nonprofit Via Mobility Services.² Via Mobility Services, like most travel training organizations, promotes self-sufficiency and independence with mobility. When the program first started in 2003, it received funding from the federal government. As time has passed, program funding has diversified, and funders have included the Rose Foundation, Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council, United Way, the City of Boulder and Boulder County. Via Mobility Services has two travel trainer conducting trainings, and a program coordinator. This service largely relies on volunteers to devote their time and assist senior with travel training; however, there are two full-time travel trainers providing more intensive travel training services. In order for the instructors to gauge the needs of their client, travel



Figure 1—Via Mobility Services
Via rider arriving at her destination.
Photo credit: <http://www.commfound.org/content/millennium-trust-strengthens-mobility-services>

trainers complete an assessment form in the participant's home. On the basis of the assessment, instructors derive a progress checklist to assure that client's requirements and needs are being met through their training. In order for trainers to feel comfortable instructing the client, trainers plan trips and scout routes, which will overall assist in the client's understanding of the routes.

Via Mobility services offers multiple programs to familiarize seniors with the transportation system; they include:

- One-on-one travel training
- Group training
- Volunteer bus buddy program
- Train the trainer program

² Burkhardt, Jon E., David J. Berstein, David W. Eby, Lisa J. Molnar, Charles A. Nelson, James M. McLary, and Kathryn Kulbicki. *Travel Training for Older Adults Part II: Research Report and Case Studies. Transit Cooperative Research Program.* Rep. no. 168. Federal Transit Administration, n.d. Web. 7 July 2015.

Via Mobility Services targets services towards older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with low income. Recently, Via expanded its travel training services to reach older adults in Boulder's Latino community. As of 2012, Via Mobility Training Program continues to operate but has limited its outreach efforts due to both funding and staffing. In the same year, Via spent \$145,037 to fund their program. With its current funding, Via is able to provide travel training to approximately 168 senior annually. Through its various travel training services, Via Mobility Services reported that of those that reported that they learned more, 60% reported less dependence on family and friends, 67% reported more travel options, and 80% reported greater flexibility with times of travel. Via Mobility is able to provide services whilst upholding integrity to its mission statement of providing self-sufficiency, independence and greater flexibility through travel training.

RTA Travel Training Program

Chicago, Illinois

The Regional Transportation Authority is a travel training program established by the state of Illinois division of Chicago Transit Authority, Metra, and Pace transit agencies.² The program was initially created to serve clients who are blind or who have visual impairments; however, today, the RTA's services have expanded to include non-ADA complementary paratransit applicants. This expansion will allow RTA to provide travel training services to a greater number of individuals. Within 2012 alone RTA was able to train 2,074 individuals.

In order to execute these programs, RTA hosts a manager, travel training coordinator, five travel trainers, and orientation and mobility instructors provided on behalf of the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind. The larger staff body allows RTA to extend its services to many individuals in need, without the concern of restricting services due to limited staffing. In addition, the RTA program receives support from the Regional Transportation Authority Operational Fund; in 2012 RTA's travel training program received \$855,334. Relative to Via Mobility Services, RTA is able to develop its programs and services on a larger scale as result of the excess resources the travel training program receives. With large funding sources available on a contract for more than one year, RTA has shifted attention towards outreach and travel training. Currently, RTA Travel Training program conducts outreach efforts to more than 500 different private nonprofit organizations to extend services to those in need. RTA's outreach efforts have proven to be strong, as it was able to attract many individuals that there is a waiting list of one to four months for individualized trainings.

The programs RTA offers include:

- One-on-one training programs
- Group training program

The one-on-one programs involve a trip training program which teaches



Figure 2—RTA Transit Illinois
Photo credit: <http://rtachicago.org/rider-resources/reduced-fare/ride-free-permits>

participants specific trips that they often travel as well as an orientation to the transportation system. Multiple trips are conducted to facilitate the client's familiarization with the route. To conduct these programs, travel trainers most often will practice using the system until they are comfortable teaching the route to the participant. RTA evaluates the benefits of the programs through follow-up survey every six to twelve months, to assess the participants' continued involvement with the transit system. Other than participant self-assessment, RTA lacks the data to quantify effectiveness of travel training, although the overall feedback has been supportive and positive. Regardless, RTA has trained many individuals over the years, and continues to outreach and train individuals across Illinois State, including rural and urban settings.

NJTIP @ Rutgers

New Brunswick, New Jersey

New Jersey's Rutgers State University provides travel training programs, in order to teach individuals easy transit, and encourage independence of participants. The travel training program was first initiated through a pilot program overseen by New Jersey Transit.² Through the pilot, NJ TRANSIT assessed the demand for travel training programs, and tested the effectiveness of the program. Upon completion of the pilot program, NJTIP (New Jersey Travel Independence Program), a non-profit organization, officially established the travel training program.



Figure 3—NJTIP @ Rutgers
Group instruction

Photo credit: <http://vtc.rutgers.edu/>

The services NJTIP offered include:

- One-on-one training
- Small group travel
- Transit seminars
- In-school travel training classes

The goal of one-on-one training is to teach participants how to travel using the public bus and rail system. This allows for greater mobility, as well as improved rates of employment, increased community involvement and educational opportunities on a broader spectrum. Furthermore, NJTIP

provides a specialized small group training to supplement the one-on-one travel training program. In order to conduct this service, NJTIP outreaches to other agencies, such as a senior center, to provide an orientation on utilization of the public transportation with hands-on experience taking trips. NJTIP also has services to support professionals and volunteers with their understanding of the local transportation system. Through the Connect to Transit Training Program, NJTIP extends services to those assisting seniors and providing social services by providing a seminar that reviews the public transit system.

NJTIP staffs one instructor for its travel training services. Despite the limited staff

providing travel training, NJTIP was able to expand its services from five counties as provided for by the pilot program to seven counties. In order to meet the needs of the growing eligible population, NJTIP partnered with NJ TRANSIT as well as Voorhees Center at Rutgers University to establish outreach efforts that would reach all seven counties. Within a six year period, NJTIP successfully trained 223 individuals, approximating 23 individuals annually; of these 23 individuals, 10% are seniors. NJTIP is able to provide consistent services through its relationship with Rutgers University, for it provides stable funding to travel training programs.

To assess the effectiveness of the programs offered, NJTIP conducts follow-up calls in three month intervals to identify whether there is a need for additional support. With \$82,500 dedicated specifically to seniors, NJTIP reports that its program is successful as it “has a positive return of 17%,” accounting for all costs and expenses. With an increase in revenue and an increase of transit trips per capita by more than 400%, NJTIP’s programs have proven successful.

Paratransit Mobility Training Sacramento, California

Paratransit, Inc. provides travel training through its Paratransit Mobility Training in Sacramento County. Paratransit Inc. serves as a “state-designated agency for administering transportation funds and coordinating transportation in locality.”² The private non-profit is rooted in the idea of increasing mobility of older adults, and individuals with disabilities. From its beginning in 1981, Sacramento’s Paratransit Inc. has provided services to over 12,000 individuals, assisting individuals with moving away from using the paratransit system and towards public transportation. Since fixed-route transit is cost efficient, Paratransit, Inc. has been able to produce a cost avoidance of \$20,588,488 over its 17 years in operation.

The travel training program is offered throughout Sacramento County and reaches surrounding communities. With an annual budget of \$534,000, Paratransit Inc. opens the program to all individuals, non-restrictive of disabilities or age, free of charge. This service intends to provide safe and sufficient knowledge of travel methods in order for individuals to reach their designated destination. Since its services are used by a wide array of individuals, the organization provides primarily one-on-one programs. Paratransit Inc. currently has three full-time travel trainers who staff and conduct the one-on-one and small group travel training programs. It is important to note that over



Figure 5—Sacramento Map
Map of public transportation, including bus and rails, in Sacramento County

Photo credit:

<http://www.sacrt.com/schedules/current/maps/R056.gif>

the past years the number of staff has changed due to budgetary fluctuations.

One-on-one programs involve training the individual on riding the public transportation system to specific destinations. Clients learn how to get to and from specific locations through bus or rails lines. This will result in an increase in mobility, as individuals will now have full access to locations which may not have previously been accessible. Furthermore, Paratransit, Inc. attempts to train a broad population of adults without travel independence, and, thus, extends outreach to senior centers. Paratransit reported that outreach to senior complexes yields high rates of success when recruiting for one-on-one programs.

Through its travel training program, Paratransit Inc. averages 400 trained individuals per year. In addition to training hundreds of adults annually, Paratransit Inc. conducts follow-up self-assessments to gauge the effectiveness of the travel training service it provides. After three to six months, Paratransit reported that approximately 80% to 92% of clients continued to successfully use public transit. The retention of individuals using the transit system shows that the \$825.00 per trainee expenses build returns on investments over time.

Valley Regional Transit Training

Meridian, Idaho

The transit travel program offered by Valley Regional Transit Training in Idaho is a free service available for anyone of any age and ability.² The programs assist individuals to travel more independently through trainings on how to plan trips and ride to desired destinations. Prior to trainings, instructors conduct an assessment to understand the client's needs, and personalize the program based on the information reported in the assessment. Valley Regional Transit Training primarily offers one-on-one trainings, but also provides group training and presentation upon request.

At the time the TCRP report was prepared, one trainer was responsible for conducting the travel training program with Valley Regional Transit Training. With experience in developmental program management, elder care, emergency medicine, and vehicle fleet operations, the instructor is able to provide intensive and comprehensive trainings. Once clients complete trainings, the instructor leads a post-training follow-up in one to three month intervals in order to assess the effectiveness of the travel training program. In addition, the company also attains feedback through surveys completed by the clients.

Valley Regional Transit Travel Trainers improves its programs based on client feedback; however, it is a challenge to consistently enhance the program due to unstable funding sources. Annual training expenses for the company approximates to \$110,000 annually, which is acquired through grants and management programs. The organization holds partnerships with human service agencies within the community to help outreach and support the company as a whole. Through these partnering agencies, Valley Regional Transit is able to provide extensive community outreach to spread awareness and recruit for their travel training programs.



Figure 4—Omni Trans Travel Training
Travel training instructor assisting group older adults with public transit
Photo credit: <http://www.omnitrans.org/blog/category/travel-training-bus-2/>

Conclusion

The five travel training programs featured in this information brief share similarities despite being located in different communities across the U.S. The case studies show that travel training programs share basic fundamental features that make them effective. Common features among these programs include the following:

- **Travel Training encourages independence, self-sufficiency, mobility, and community integration.** The overarching goal, as discussed by the travel training providers, is to provide support for individuals to become more independent and have more flexibility in their travel options. Through the understanding of public transit routes, older adults and persons with disabilities can venture through the city without excessive reliance on others for transportation. With greater mobility, come greater opportunities to participate and engage in community activities.
- **Travel training defers costs of alternative transit.** With travel training, individuals may be able to shift from paratransit or alternate means of transportation to using public transit. Over the years, travel training programs have shown significant returns on investments, for a large majority of individuals continue using the public transit system once the training is complete.
- **Successful travel training programs involve the right combination of attributes.** There are many attributes of successful travel training programs. However, in order to truly have a successful program, organizations must find the right combination. These factors are dependent on a variety of different

mechanisms, including local community, environment, funding, and client participation. Via Mobility, RTA, and NJTIP are examples of agencies that commit to implementing various attributes within their travel training programs. Via Mobility staffs quality trainers who are able to adapt to environmental conditions and utilizes volunteers to respond to community needs. Regional Transportation Authority in Illinois houses its administration in one location, which allows for stronger and facilitated management since all tasks are conducted on-site. Furthermore, NJTIP partnered with Rutgers University to establish stable resources and funding to pursue travel training in the New Brunswick area. All these programs share success; however, the means to do so vary as agencies found the right combination suited to their organization and community.

- **Travel training programs and consistency are often dictated by funding.** Is there enough money to conduct this service? Will there be enough funding come next year? How much will the budget cover? These are fundamental questions that guide travel training services. Agencies must decide priority areas where funding should be allocated to ensure the successful establishment and maintenance of travel training services. Without a clear funding plan and identification of priorities, funding uncertainties can impede travel training programs from reaching their full potential. Funding is not always stable. Agencies may receive more or less funding each term; therefore, making it difficult to establish constant services. However, agencies can remain prepared by creating services that are easily adaptable to the market; therefore, if the program experiences cuts the agency is able to easily adjust.
- **Travel training requires extensive collaboration and outreach.** Whether it be communication with outside agencies or communication between the instructor and client, communication is vital in establishing relationships. With relationships, you develop trust and support. By partnering with outside agencies, travel training programs may attain funding and resources through their agencies who support the program for the greater good. In order to provide travel training services to older adults and individuals with disabilities, companies must also outreach in order to recruit clients for their programs. One of the challenges involved in this process is that there exists a negative stigma around public transit as well as the negative stigma around assistance. This can restrict the amount of individuals that will participate in the travel training program. Agencies must remain patient and outreach to a large population, not solely senior center since the group will not account for everyone requiring travel training.

Travel training expands travel options for older adults and people with disabilities who don't have stable transportation or simply don't have access to a car. Individuals can remain engaged in their community and can maintain the spontaneity and flexibility that daily living requires through travel training. By using the public transit system, individuals are able to attend to their various activities, without relying excessively on others for transportation. With travel training, individuals may again travel to their needs or desires.

Resources

Colorado

Via Mobility Services

Boulder, Colorado

<http://viacolorado.org/>

Illinois

Regional Transportation Authority

Chicago, Illinois

<http://www.rtachicago.com/>

New Jersey

NJTIP @ Rutgers

New Brunswick, New Jersey

<http://vtc.rutgers.edu/njtip/>

California

Paratransit, Inc.

Sacramento, California

<http://www.paratransit.org/>

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