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Building Relationships Between Mobility Managers & Centers for Independent Living: Strategies from the Mobility Management Independent Living Coaches Program

Information Brief

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Introduction

Since 2010, the Mobility Management Independent Living Coaches (MMILC) program, a joint demonstration program of Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA), the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), has worked to better connect and increase the flow of information between the independent living and transportation communities. This information brief contains a compilation of the strategies and activities used in the program by representatives from Centers for Independent Living, or IL coaches, to inform mobility managers and other transportation professionals about disability issues.

CIL representatives can use these strategies and activities to connect with mobility managers and enhance the latter's knowledge of disability issues related to accessible transportation. In turn, mobility managers may also use information from the MMILC program to reach out to CIL representatives in tangible ways. Following are an overview of the MMILC program, descriptions of the

training and supports IL coaches received, and a summary of the role that the IL coaches assumed. With this information and much perseverance, CIL representatives and mobility managers can develop beneficial relationships with one another that help ensure that accessible transportation options are available to people with disabilities.

MMILC Program Background

ESPA's mission is to promote accessible transportation for people with disabilities, and ESPA supports person-directed mobility management as an innovative approach for furthering accessible transportation.

Mobility management helps coordinate and maximize the efficiency of transportation service delivery for people with disabilities, making communities more livable for all.

As a member of the Partnership for Mobility Management (PFMM), Easter Seals leverages the work of ESPA with other national organizations that seek to improve transportation options for everyone. The MMILC program, funded by the Federal Transit Administration, is another way that ESPA supports mobility management on a national level.

In the development of the MMILC program, ESPA recognized the need for mobility managers to better understand transportation issues for people with disabilities and information regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). CILs have this knowledge,

Mobility management can be described as a strategic approach to service coordination and customer service which enhances the ease of use and accessibility of transportation networks. - *United We Ride website*



and connecting CIL representatives with mobility managers creates a conduit for information that can help both mobility managers and transit agencies increase their understanding of disability issues. The connection also helps CILs to better support accessible transportation services for the people they serve. Overall, the goals of the MMILC program include:

- Create a national volunteer network of mobility management/IL coaches
- Develop a train-the-trainer program for mobility managers/IL coaches to teach others how to become a mobility manager/IL coach
- Foster education and awareness within the independent living community about mobility management and transportation issues
- Develop effective transportation strategies that embrace independent living philosophy for people with disabilities

IL Coach Training and Support

Each IL coach received an orientation that included an overview of accessible transportation issues and mobility management. The coaches also received useful resources (e.g., materials related to performance measurement generated through the program's participation in PFMM and announcements about ESPA events, online communities and products) and ongoing support.

The Partnership for Mobility Management is a joint effort of national organizations that work with national, local, state and regional leaders and organizations to realize the possibilities of improving transportation options for all Americans wherever they live and to assist those especially in need of alternative transportation options.

To facilitate communication, ESPA, APRIL and NCIL created forums through which the IL coaches can communicate among themselves, and IL coaches and mobility managers can communicate with each other. The forums include an online community, monthly teleconferences, email communications, and hardcopy

communications, as needed. This communication structure allowed ESPA, APRIL and NCIL to create feedback groups and gather much of the strategies and information in this information brief.

IL Coach Roles

Creating change is a process, and people seeking to transform or improve a system may accomplish this task through different methods. The Elementary and Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center (EMSTAC), a project of the American Institutes for Research and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs from 1997 to 2001, developed a training program for people to become Linking Agents —“a vital human connection between the most up-to-date research and the thousands of educators who can translate this research into practice every day” (<http://www.emstac.org>). EMSTAC identified the following four key roles that Linking Agents can take on to facilitate change and noted that people can play more than one role:

- Catalysts – empower others to bring about change
- Solutionists – build awareness of the impact new ideas
- Facilitators – support the process and procedures that effect change
- Linkers – link to resources and help others receive the support, information and expertise they need for long-term, sustainable change

Similar to the connection that Linking Agents made between educators and research, IL coaches have helped inform mobility managers about disability issues that they could then apply to their work. In their effort to create change and improve the accessible transportation options available to individuals with disabilities, the IL coaches have reported that they have acted in many capacities as well:

- Information purveyor – communicates information to the other person
- Resource linker – connects others to information
- Trainer and technical assistance provider – addresses specific questions
- Presenter – gives information to an audience
- Advisor – offers recommendations and guidance

Strategies and Activities

After reviewing stories about IL coaches' work, ESPA and its partners compiled the following specific activities completed by the coaches and organized them under the roles identified by the coaches: 2

Information Purveyor

- Participated in content development that facilitated the passing of a transportation act
- Participated in an ongoing series of public forums and meetings with providers
- Helped write and carry out a grant to raise awareness of public transportation services
- Used knowledge to help the community receive a grant for rural areas
- Communicated information about non-profit transportation options in the community
- Held face-to-face meetings
- Hosted a consumer panel made up of two consumer self-advocates that shared their experience with accessing public transportation



Acting as an information purveyor, a CIL representative can set up focus groups for mobility managers to collect information from riders with disabilities.

Resource Linker

- Set up a focus group for a mobility manager to collect information from riders with disabilities
- Helped a mobility manager identify challenges and solutions regarding accessible transportation for individuals with disabilities that will be incorporated into a training video for the community's fixed-route bus drivers
- Provided posters or other resources on disability issues to agencies so that drivers understand the law

- Held a two-day workshop for mobility managers and transit providers regarding IL and disability topics
- Organized ongoing trainings with mobility managers from across the region
- Developed a PowerPoint Jeopardy game with a gift card that was donated to the center and given to the winner of the Jeopardy game

Trainer and Technical Assistance Provider

- Provided support to transit agencies and mobility managers and their launch of pilot programs for training new drivers
- Provided training to taxicab drivers regarding how to transport, treat and speak to people with any kind of disability
- Gave a training on disability etiquette for drivers and answered questions
- Helped mobility managers and transit providers identify funding sources
- Used the materials from the MMILC program to advocate for and provide training on mobility management issues

Advisor

- Helped the transit agency review training and communications materials to ensure the content was accurate and reflected IL philosophy
- Helped mobility managers and transit providers develop a media campaign around accessible transportation
- Helped facilitate development of a statewide transportation plan

Presenter

- Attended state-wide, regional and national mobility manager conferences for information sharing
- Participated on paratransit advisory councils and assumed leadership positions

Other

- Wrote letters of support for grant applications so that the transit provider could obtain additional funding to support transit projects
- Took time to get to know the transit company and learn about their operations
- Served as a catalyst and advocate for an elderly rider by helping facilitate the paperwork process related to transit services
- Attempted to reorganize the ILC's advisory council

Next Steps

The IL coaches reported that mobility managers better understood the IL community because of the relationships they established with them. An IL coach reported after a presentation she gave that, “All participants expressed that they were glad to have had the opportunity for this training and expressed a need for IL philosophy training as a regular part of their transit curriculum and/or staff trainings.” Another IL coach shared, “After presenting to [transit agency management], the drivers know they can call upon [the ILC] for clear information about the ADA law and disability etiquette.” An additional IL coach shared how tangible the reaction of mobility managers was at one presentation he gave, stating, “The really bright spot for some at the training was a ‘light bulb moment’; the realization that IL consumers—with support—do their own work. The mobility managers’ “aha” at what IL means was visible if not audible.”

Other mobility managers from across the nation can have their “aha” moments, too, with the help of CIL representatives. While the aforementioned strategies and activities were developed in the MMILC program, other professionals can use them and/or develop their own to better connect the independent living and transportation communities. Mobility managers, transportation professionals or representatives from CILs can use the strategies that work best in their specific situations and communities to lead all involved to a better understanding of the needs of each community and to improve the range of high-quality accessible transportation options for individuals with disabilities.

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ESPA Resources

For more information on the MMILC program, download the presentation and transcript from the February 2012 webinar *Connecting CILs and Mobility Managers for Accessible Transportation* free of charge from www.projectaction.org. Additional resources available online include:

- Noonan, P. (2012). *Scaling-Up Models that Connect Centers for Independent Living and Mobility Managers: Learning from the Mobility Management Independent Living Coaches Program*. Washington, DC: Easter Seals Project ACTION.
- Easter Seals Project ACTION. (2012). *Lessons Learned from the Mobility Management Independent Living Coaches Program*. Washington, DC: Author.

Other Organizations

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) – A national network of rural centers for independent living and other organizations and individuals concerned with the unique aspects of rural independent living. www.april-rural.org/

ILRU – A program of TIRR Memorial Hermann, a medical rehabilitation facility for people with disabilities, that has an online directory of contact information for CILs and their satellites or branches for each state, U.S. Territory and Canada. www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html

National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) – A cross-disability, grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities. www.ncil.org

United We Ride (UWR) – A federal interagency initiative that supports states and their localities in developing coordinated human service delivery systems. www.unitedweride.gov