

Tools of the Trade:

Human Services Transportation Providers

April 1, 2021 Workshop Summary

"Cockpit Sign"

- The day's necessities kept within arm's length
- May reflect impairment of mobility, poor stamina, frailty, depression
- May hold clues to lifestyle factors impacting health



FLEX Service



- 8 -10 passenger vans operated by trained CDTA bus operators
- Accessible vehicle available
- Monday – Friday 6AM – 10:45PM
- Saturday/Sunday 10AM – 6PM
- \$3 per ride
- \$25 for 10-trip pass
- Operated Fare free until October



Developing Mobility-as-a-Service

Serving Small Urban & Rural Communities

Tompkins County, NY



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Background

CDTC held a half day workshop for human service agency transportation providers on April 1, 2021. Postponed from 2020, the workshop was held as a virtual webinar due to the ongoing pandemic. Over 20 people attended to hear presentations about the health impacts of isolation, recruiting and retaining volunteers, the “Mobility as a Service” program underway in Ithaca, and CDTA’s new FLEX service.

Session 1: Isolation and Health

Dr. Kevin Costello, Albany Medical Center, discussed adverse health effects of social isolation and loneliness. These can lead to increased risk of heart disease and stroke as well as dementia, depression, anxiety, and chronic diseases. Social isolation and loneliness have a similar degree of effect on mortality as smoking, obesity, and excess alcohol. He explained the overlap and difference between social isolation and loneliness. He discussed physical health factors like sensory impairment and frailty. Lack of engagement in different types of activities of daily living can both indicate new health problems before they become severe, and lead to additional negative impacts.

Psychiatric, psychological, and cognitive factors such as anxiety, depression, and cognitive decline contribute to, and are worsened by, isolation and loneliness. Dr. Costello discussed ways to recognize depression as well as ways to help people at risk of suicide. There are many social and cultural factors that can protect people from isolation, such as relationships, pets, and religious or spiritual organizations. Social environmental factors such as transportation and housing type or location can greatly impact peoples’ ability to meet their needs and engage with the community. Stairs in the home or apartment building can cause people to be isolated. Finally, Dr. Costello noted that immigrants tend

to suffer disproportionately from social isolation, and LGBTQ people experience loneliness disproportionately.

Finally, Dr. Costello noted that disasters such as the COVID pandemic lay bare disparities in the health care system and society in general. Upstream determinants at the interpersonal, institutional or community, and policy levels had an oversized influence on the impact of the pandemic, and the full extent of the impact is yet to be understood. However, disruptive events such as a retirement or death of a significant other can cut long-term social supports and lead to health impacts.

Session 2: Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Presenters at this session discussed their various email and hardcopy mailing lists for distribution of newsletters, events, and opportunities. If you would like to be added to their lists, please contact Carrie at CDTC at cward@cdtcmpo.org.

Diane Conroy-LaCivita, Colonie Senior Service Centers

Diane discussed the agency's administration of the Albany-Rensselaer-Schenectady RSVP program. There are 83 stations at other nonprofits where people can volunteer. Between the RSVP program and CSSC volunteers who didn't sign up through RSVP, they work with about 300 volunteers. When new volunteers arrive, staff collects information about their interests and tries to match them with one of the volunteer sites. The pandemic did disrupt some of the volunteer based work.

Colonie Seniors has also been conducting more zoom meetings, and helping people sign up for vaccines and get to the vaccine sites. They received a grant for 15 laptops to help people attend virtual events – these are available for loan to community members. Once a month they receive a food delivery from the Food Pantries and volunteers deliver food packages to seniors in the community – if you work with seniors in Albany County who have food insecurity, Diane can add them to the list.

Billie Jo McConkey, Saratoga RSVP

Billie Jo also works with the RSVP program, for Saratoga County. She works for the Saratoga County Office for the Aging, which has many programs to help seniors stay independent in their own homes. Saratoga RSVP has about 30 different volunteer stations and also tries to match volunteer interest with community need. Volunteer positions include receptionists, food pantry assistants, hospice type caregivers, gardeners, maintenance workers, bloodmobile assistants, museum docents, home delivered meal drivers, health insurance counselors, exercise leaders, and medical transport drivers. They have a volunteer roster of about 210 people, although the pandemic decreased the number of volunteers who are active. They created new programs to be able to use volunteers, including the telecare senior care call program, and are back up to about 75 active volunteers. They use facebook, press releases, and mass emails with new positions to recruit volunteers.

To keep volunteers engaged, RSVP normally engages in person for meetings, distributes newsletters and mass emails, and recognition events. With COVID they still distributed the newsletters, as well as topic-

based mass emails. A few weeks ago they held a drive-through recognition event, for which the volunteers who attended were very appreciative.

Meredith Osta, Community Caregivers

Community Caregivers has been in the community just over 25 years, and normally provides transportation to medical and non-essential yet important locations, friendly visits, grocery shopping, and other services that help adults in the community to continue living independently in their home. The friendly visits were really important, so when restrictions related to COVID began, Community Caregivers focused on increasing their friendly phone calls program and bringing in new volunteers. Since phone calls are easier to fit into peoples' schedules, their volunteer base actually increased during COVID. Meredith noted that it is hard to recruit new volunteers, perhaps because Community Caregivers doesn't have a heavy presence in the community, but they try to maintain a strong social media presence. Community partners such as libraries and chambers of commerce have been helpful. They distribute a newsletter, and held a drive-through volunteer appreciation event last fall. They started a "lunchtime chats" phone-in program with information or entertaining presentations on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Terra Maddalone-Ristau, Care Links & Wellness Express

CareLinks is entering its 25th year. Terra has been visiting community locations such as doctor's offices and churches in person and educating people on CAPTAIN and Care Links. They have increased their phone reassurance calls, no-contact grocery shopping, running errands and picking up medications, outdoor chores, vaccine sign-up, and medical transportation. At the same time, they're sharing with new volunteers the activities that they intend to start again once COVID restrictions end. They distribute a fun printed newsletter with items both for the volunteers themselves and things that volunteers can share in their volunteer work. Terra has also been calling each volunteer to introduce herself and seek feedback on the program – this helped the volunteers to see the bigger picture and express interest in new opportunities. Mass emails have been a useful platform to send out new volunteer opportunities.

Session 3: Ithaca Mobility as a Service

Dwight Mengel, Tompkins County, began by defining "Mobility as a Service" in Ithaca. They received an "Integrated Mobility Innovation grant" from the Federal Transit Administration to provide Mobility as a Service, and specifically mobility information, a member organization, financial services, customer services, and an impetus for innovation. The grant supports their Phase I for multi-modal trip planning, rural transportation services, and multi-modal customer service.

The trip planning encompasses intercounty bus providers and the TCAT transit system as well as shared use services such as carshare, bikeshare, taxis, and paratransit. In order to increase the supply of rural transportation services, a number of providers are working with a technology company to determine how an on-demand service could connect people to buses. They will pilot an app connecting TCAT with the paratransit service Gadabout as well as the public. The app would also be available to a centralized call center for use by staff helping people who want to communicate by phone. They also seek to increase the number of volunteer service providers, and the number of people utilizing carpooling and

vanpooling. A program called Way2Go currently provides comprehensive educational information on how to use all of the mobility services in and surrounding the county, and will provide similar services on Mobility as a Service when it is up and running.

Phase 2 will focus on financial services, which may entail implementation of a “mobility menu” to provide multiple types of services on a subscription basis. This could be tailored for families of different sizes and incomes. He also discussed potential for a Guaranteed Ride Home program that would rescue people from trip failure.

Session 4: CDTA FLEX

Jonathan Scherzer introduced FLEX, CDTA’s on-demand transit product, which rolled out last year. It is similar to Uber Pool in that the rides are shareable, so there may be multiple stops on your journey. Most reservations are made on a mobile app but can also be made over a landline. About 20% of rides have come from calls and that number seems to be rising. Trips are curb-to-curb and include connections to transit hubs. The driver will not drive directly to the front door or escort riders to the door. FLEX is designed to provide services in areas that could be described as transit deserts or food deserts, and enables expanded hours over the less efficient fixed-route service that may otherwise be offered. The vehicles are slightly larger than a minivan, holding between 6-10 customers depending on wheelchair positions in use. Rides are scheduled real-time through the Transloc mobile app, and drivers see up-to-date turn-by-turn directions and a trip list on tablets in their vehicles.

The current service area generally encompasses the area between the Albany Airport, Route 155, Route 20 and the McKownville area, and Fuller and Wolf Roads, with touchpoints outside of that area being Guilderland Town Hall, University at Albany, Patroon Creek, the Harriman Campus, and Latham Farms. It operates 6AM-10:45PM Monday-Friday and 10AM-6PM on weekends. The cost is \$3/trip or \$25 for a 10-trip pass and is available at half-fare pricing for eligible riders. There are about 85-90 trips/day. Nursing homes in the area remain a challenge.

The next FLEX zone is planned for the Mechanicville/Route 146/the I-87 Exit 9 commercial area in Clifton Park and Halfmoon, with touchpoints at US Foods, County Waste, Sysco, and Walmart. Looking ahead, FLEX is useful for low ridership corridors, the Rensselaer Rail Station, and Downtown Saratoga Springs.