

TANF Rural Initiative Rural Transportation Webinar January 15, 2009

Welcoming Remarks and Introduction of Speaker # 1 (James Butler, Office of Family Assistance)

Good afternoon. Hello everyone, and welcome to this Rural Communities Initiative Webinar. Today's discussion will be on the topic of rural transportation models serving TANF participants. By the way, we do apologize for the delay in getting started.

During the Rural Communities Academy this September, the challenges of providing reliable and cost effective transportation were identified by many Rural Communities Initiative sites as one of the most critical issues facing rural organizations serving TANF participants. As part of their technical assistance plans, sites expressed interest in learning more about current rural transportation models serving TANF participants, resources on forming partnerships with local transportation stakeholders, and direction on how they can receive funding for these types of projects.

Based on that interest, we have designed a series of technical assistance events that focus on the issues of rural transportation, the second of which is today's Webinar.

On today's Webinar, we have three very knowledgeable speakers from different programs, who will discuss their experiences in providing transportation options to TANF clients.

After all of the presentations have been completed, we will open the lines, as Linda mentioned earlier, for the participants to ask questions.

So without further adieu, our first speaker today will be Mr. Larry Aflen from the ZEE Inc. Public Transportation Program.

Larry is the Executive Director of ZEE Inc., which is a small rural nonprofit organization that serves people with disabilities on the Zuni Reservation in Northwestern New Mexico. He has served in this capacity for the past eighteen years. In 1994, he was responsible for the development of a rural transportation program to serve not only the needs of disabled consumers served by the organization but also the needs of the pueblo's general population. This program has grown and now serves over 25% of the total population and provides almost 50,000 one way trips each year. Larry has consulted with other communities in the region and has assisted in the development of transit programs in the Laguna Pueblo, the City of Gallup and most recently the City of Grants. Welcome Larry.

Presentation by Larry Aflen, Executive Director of ZEE Inc.

Thank you. First of all, I would like to introduce people to the state of New Mexico and give you a little background. New Mexico is, by and large, a rural state covering an excess of 121,000 square miles with a current population of 1.9 million persons. It is a culturally diverse state with significant Hispanic and American populations. The state has a square mile population of only 16 persons which is ranked 45th in the United States, ahead of only North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and Alaska. 9.8% of the population is American Indian, and this includes nineteen Pueblos, the Hickoria, and Mescalero Apache.

In New Mexico, there are really only three urban areas in the state, which includes Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces, all along the Rio Grande Corridor. These cities in total compromise almost one-third of the total state population. These urban centers accounted for over 10,800,000 rides in FY 2007, and 84% of all the rides that were provided in the state by public transportation.

There are currently 24 rural public transportation ladders operating in the state, primarily funded by Section 5311, the small urban and rural transit funding from FTA. Only three of these transit systems serve Tribal communities, this includes the Navajo Transit System, the Laguna Transit, and the transportation program: ZEE Inc.

During the period October 1, 2007 through September 2008, the rural transit programs in New Mexico were funded at the level of just a little under 13.5 million dollars. 8.5 million dollars was received from Section 5311 of the Federal Transit Administration and over 5 million dollars was in local matching funds.

These systems provided 814,000 passenger trips in FY 2007, which is just over 6% of the 12 million plus rides provided by all transit systems in New Mexico.

One of the issues within New Mexico is that these transit systems provide these services with no state funds provided to support public transportation. This places all of the requirement burden for transit systems on the communities served and that is only 37% of the total that I just mentioned.

The Pueblos Zuni is the largest of 19 Pueblos in the state of New Mexico with a population of a little over 12,000 persons. Our reservation area covers 453,000 acres or 724 square miles. The Pueblos remain removed and isolated from the mainstream culture of the state, located over 150 miles from Albuquerque, 200 miles from the state capital of Santa Fe, and 45 miles from the nearest city of Gallup.

There are some significant challenges in the community. The unemployment rate consistently exceeds 60% of the workforce each year. Fifty-two percent of the population of the Pueblos lives in poverty. Twenty-five percent of the citizens have no consistent access to dependable transportation. Over 50% of our residents live in sub-standard housing.

This environment creates a number of significant challenges to effectively serving the transportation needs of such a remote and rural Tribal community. These include remoteness from other areas of the state, distances required to travel to connect community members with employment opportunities, education, and healthcare outside of the reservation. Many Tribal residents travel daily to Gallup for education and employment, a round trip of almost 90 miles. Significant poverty limits level of access for services that we provide. Also, there is a limited availability of local match to support the program. The most significant match issue is the operating cost. Local agencies are required to match 50% of those costs.

There are increased numbers of people with disabilities and mobility impairments which requires specialized transportation. It is estimated that over 10% of the total population have disabilities and disabling conditions, or are impaired.

ZEE Inc. created our public transportation program in 1994 to address transportation needs, specifically for persons with disabilities that we were serving, and that has expanded to the

community as a whole. For this initiative, I received funding from 5311, a rural and small program from the Federal Transit Administration, the Joblinks initiative of the Community Transportation Association of America, and the Job Access Reverse Commute program of the FTA. This initial funding gave us capacity to meet transportation needs and identify other needs of the community.

As you know from the introduction, the ZEE program provides over 50,000 trips per year, and we travel almost 225,000 miles each year. We log 8,000 vehicle hours annually in providing this particular critical service. Our current operational costs show that the average cost per trip is \$2.75. We have .25 trips per vehicle mile and we have 5.7 trips per hour at a cost of \$15.80 per vehicle hour. Our capacity to serve transportation needs at the Pueblo include 15 vehicles, with over half the fleet equipped with wheelchair lifts and tie-downs to serve disabled passengers and seven drivers providing our daily transit services.

Coordinating services with other rural transit providers when possible is really necessary. There are no less than four rural transit systems in New Mexico, and it is critical that we determine how we can work together to eliminate duplication of services and coordinate our services when and where it is possible.

In order to meet the continuing and growing need for transportation, we are participating in research and development at a regional transit district that will provide full coordination of transit services, combining management, and other functions now that are completed independently by rural transit systems.

Public transportation is a critical component of the infrastructure of rural communities, including Native American communities in New Mexico and across the country. You have to develop a constant strategy to maintain and enhance services. That must be a part of a long term planning of rural communities. It is key to economic growth, community growth, and the quality of life in New Mexico and other places.

That concludes my presentation. My contact information is on the screen so if you need to reach me, please feel free to do so. Thank you.

Introduction of Speaker # 2 (James Butler)

Thank you so very much, Larry.

Our second speaker is Ms. Teri Robinson from Shore Transit.

Teri Robinson has 12 years of experience as a professional in the field of transportation. She is a Certified PASS Trainer; Customer Service Trainer and a Certified Community Transportation Manager with expertise in fixed route and demand response operations. Ms. Robinson is the Mobility Director for Shore Transit, the regional transportation system for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, and a Division of the Tri-County Council for the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome Teri.

Presentation by Teri Robinson, Mobility Director for Shore Transit

Good afternoon. To talk to you on what Larry was just saying about the regional transportation system, that is what we have developed on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. We do work with the different Departments of Health, as you will see from the slides. Shore Transit partners with the Departments of Social Services in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties.

How our system works with them for our TANF customers, the case managers from the Departments of Social Services develop the transportation plans with their clients and fax them to the Shore Transit Customer Service Center. The transportation plans state what type of transportation services are to be provided: curb to curb, fixed route, or taxi services.

Curb to curb services are generally requested when it is not feasible to connect with fixed route services. Taxi services are generally requested when clients have full-aged children who utilize the school bus services and/or children going to daycare facilities requiring one or more stops before reaching their destination. One or a combination of these services may be requested in the transportation plans.

In order to utilize fixed route services, clients must have a Shore Transit photo ID card. Case managers complete a Shore Transit photo ID request form indicating the length of time the card is to be active, and email it along with a photo of the client to the Shore Transit Customer Service Center. The case managers are notified when the ID cards are ready.

Clients are responsible for contacting the Shore Transit Customer Service Center on a weekly basis to confirm their transportation plans. The calls for transportation services from the clients are billed to the Departments of Social Services on a monthly basis by Shore Transit.

In conclusion of what I have just said on the PowerPoint, in dealing with the rural customers that we have, we combine all populations, meaning that we could have ADA, general public, all riding on the same vehicle coming from the rural areas into the ADA service area. This has worked for us very well when you talk about connecting and making a regional transportation system.

If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

Introduction of Speaker # 3 (James Butler)

Thank you, Teri. We are going to hold all questions until the end.

Our next and final speaker is Ms. Joyce Underwood from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources.

Joyce Underwood is the Family Support Supervisor for Calhoun, Gilmer, and Wirt Counties in West Virginia and has been with the West Virginia Works program since 1998. She has over 20 years experience working with State agencies.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome Joyce.

Presentation by Joyce Underwood, Family Support Supervisor from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

Good afternoon. Our program is really just a very, very simple program that costs nothing. We try to utilize the existing resources that we have. One specific process we use for our clients when we can't find transportation available in any other private sector or any other possible way, is to contact the school system. We get our clients approved the ride the bus to the work site.

We have always had a really good relationship with school system because we are really a small community and of course, everyone knows everyone. They do try to work together with us very well and that is the key to making the program work.

When we first started using this process we did not complete background checks. But, after we had a problem with one of our clients we now complete this process with everyone that rides the bus. We complete a background check; if it checks out okay we call the Director of Transportation and tell him that we have a client that needs to ride the bus either to the work site or to the vocational technical school. We give him their name and he gives his approval to ride.

We usually have the client contact the bus driver since this gives the client a way of making them a little more self-sufficient. They let the bus driver know they need to start riding the bus. Usually the bus driver doesn't need to make an extra stop because the parents usually have school-aged children that are catching the bus there anyway.

We do only use this process if there is no other means. We only use the process if the client completes their community service work participation at one of the schools or at the Vo. Tech. school. The schools benefit from this program also because they get free labor. Of course WVDHHR benefits by having an increased work participation rate. Most of all the clients benefit because the schools provide them on the job training, this gives them job skills, and actually could lead to employment if they do a good job. We place them as cooks, janitors, and office assistants in the schools.

This program is one from which everyone benefits. It is a real simple process and we have found that it is very, very useful. It does not cost anything and everyone benefits. We have found that it is a win-win situation for everyone. That is the end of my presentation.

Introduction of Q&A Session (James Butler)

Thank you Joyce.

Are there any additional comments from any of our speakers before we move onto questions?

Q&A Session

Alison: We do have a question for Larry. This question is from Marsha. She asks, where do the 50% local match for operating costs for the ZEE public transportation program come from?

Larry: We have a business that we operate as part of the agency. We have unrestricted funds of our earnings above our costs. So we were able to pump money back into the transit system. We

have also done some cheaper service kinds of things with the state of New Mexico Division of Rehabilitation, the Department of Health, and some other agencies. Part of the match we were able to do from the Tribal government as far as buildings and storage areas, that type of thing.

Marsha Lindsey: I have a question for Joyce. You talked about your background checks. Can you tell us how comprehensive those are? Are they just local, state, do you go all the way to federal to do your background checks?

Joyce: They are from NCIC. It is a nationwide background check. We do have to pay for those but it is well worth the money. They are a regular NCIC fee which is a nation-wide check.

Operator: There are no additional questions at this time.

Closing Remarks (James Butler)

Thank you Linda.

This concludes our Webinar today. I would like to thank all of the participants who joined us today, and thank you especially to our speakers, Larry, Teri, and Joyce, for sharing your experience working with rural transportation initiatives that serve TANF populations, and thank you to the staff at ICF International.

As mentioned earlier, the PowerPoint presentations and an audio recording from today's Webinar will be made available for everyone within the coming weeks.

Also, feel free to e-mail anyone on the Rural Communities Initiative team if you have any further questions.

On behalf of the Rural Initiative Team, we thank you all very much and have a great day!