

GETTING THERE SAFELY!

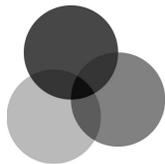
TRANSPORTATION ISSUES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS

Helping Survivors of Domestic Violence Get Where They Need to Go

Prepared by Nancy Flanakin, NCDSV Librarian

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Helping Survivors of Domestic Violence Get Where They Need to Go

Prepared by Nancy Flanakin, Librarian, National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence

The goal of this information packet is to help domestic violence service providers and communities expand and improve their transportation assistance to assist women and children to achieve safety and to maintain their independence.

The Need for Transportation Assistance

Lack of transportation is a major problem for victims of domestic violence.

In *A Blueprint for Domestic Violence Intervention in Texas*, the Texas Council on Family Violence lists transportation as a major issue for victims of domestic violence. Evidence is mounting that the only effective transportation for single working parents is the use of a car. Access to a car is a major factor in being able to obtain and sustain employment, a major factor in caring for children, and important in being able to maintain independence and safety.

This is certainly true in rural areas, where no or limited public transit services make it impossible to use these services for regular work commutes, especially for parents needing to drop children off at day care, or women trying to gain access to domestic violence service providers or the legal system.

Recent research has shown that this problem is the same in metropolitan areas. Even in areas with extensive mass-transit systems, studies have shown that less than half of entry-level jobs are accessible by public transit — two-thirds of new jobs are in the suburbs.¹ A major new study (attached) on the effect of improved access to mass transit on the employment of TANF recipients in six metropolitan areas (including Dallas, Texas) showed that access to fixed-route transit to employment locations was not positively associated with employment outcomes.² Low-income workers are in fact not less in need of cars than higher-income workers – many have children who must be delivered to day care, and many entry-level jobs require evening or weekend hours when buses do not run regularly or are not located on mass transit routes.

It is not hard to prove that access to transportation is an important need; in fact, it is critical to helping battered women maintain their independence and safety. However, providing effective

¹ Office of Family Assistance. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Policy Announcement No. TANF-ACT-PA-00-2, May 26, 2000, p. 1.

² Sanchez, Thomas W., et al. "Transit Mobility, Jobs Access, and Low-Income Labor Participation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas." Alexandria, VA: Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, 2003. This article is available online at: <http://www.mi.vt.edu/Files/TanfMI.pdf>

transportation assistance requires considerable effort. It is possible at times for people with low incomes to obtain an undependable old car, but it is far too difficult to obtain a car in good condition and still be able to afford car repairs and the requisite registration, inspection and insurance. Many community organizations operate car donation programs to raise money, but effective transportation assistance programs are rare enough to qualify as innovative anti-poverty programs according to the standards of many foundations and federal and local government programs. Both innovative transportation programs and car donation programs just for fundraising are presented in this packet.

Types of Transportation Assistance

Many shelters provide crisis-related transportation services for victims of domestic violence. They use a variety of methods to transport victims to the shelter, to the police station or sheriff's office, to court, to hospitals. They may contract with mass transit agencies for these services or provide cash, tokens, or vouchers for bus or taxi fares. They also may help their clients to obtain and start jobs, making transportation arrangements with job training programs or major employers near transitional housing.

This immediate service is invaluable for many women. Some wouldn't be able to get to safety without this type of assistance. While this type of service is critical in the short-term, creating a transportation program that will assist survivors to achieve long-term independence and ongoing safety is essential as well.

Charity Cars, Inc.

One option for securing cars is Charity Cars, Inc., the first national charitable organization to provide cars through local nonprofit organizations. It is now possible for domestic violence shelters and other community organizations nationwide to affiliate with Charity Cars. (Until recently, organizations had to be located in Florida to affiliate with the agency.) The affiliated organization is responsible for screening the clients to make sure that they meet the requirements. Charity Cars requires that clients receiving cars have a clean driving record and are able to maintain insurance on the vehicle. The Charity Cars Web site provides information about registering as an affiliate: <http://www.charity.com/index.shtml>. In addition, the Charity Cars Affiliate Manual is attached. Though it is the usual practice of Charity Cars to require applicants for cars to sign media release forms, victims of domestic violence are excluded from this requirement.³

³ Telephone interview with Nisa Wheeler of Charity Cars, Inc., July 17, 2003.

The Good News Mountaineer Garage

This is a car donation program in West Virginia that provides cars to low-income people. Attached is an article about the Garage in *Breakthrough*, the newsletter of the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and information from the Garage's website at: <http://www.goodnewsmountaineergarage.com>. While this program is only available in West Virginia, it is certainly a long-term strategy for which private funding could be sought.

Creating a Local Network for Assistance with Transportation

There are many services to assist survivors with the costly responsibility of car ownership after a car has been purchased, and domestic violence service providers should be on the lookout for individuals, businesses, and community organizations that may be able to provide some of these services or assist with funding. Service providers should determine what types of assistance they're able to provide and then develop a wish list. Share the wish list with local businesses such as car dealers, mechanic shops, and banks and ask for their support in implementing this effort. Providing one of these services could make it possible for a battered woman to get or keep a job or access safety for herself and her children! Some of these services include (this certainly isn't an exhaustive list):

- Donation of cars from car dealers
- Funding/loans for purchase of cars
- Credit arrangements for car repairs
- Funding for insurance, registration and inspection
- Repair services
- Auto parts
- Towing services
- Service warranties
- AAA memberships

The Bridge transitional housing project in Pasadena, Texas, has provided an example of what can be accomplished in seeking out car-related benefits for clients. Caseworkers have contacted local car dealerships and negotiated lower payments. They have also contacted local garages and negotiated discounts for their clients as well as having caseworkers go with clients to set up payment schedules. They have an agreement with the local high school auto body class to repair cars free except for the cost of parts. They have sold cars donated to them to clients for minimal fees.⁴

Jay Crowder (706/745-8906), owner of a mechanic shop in Blairsville, Georgia, home of S.A.F.E. – Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, a domestic violence organization directed by Marguerite Petersen (706/745-4832), helps S.A.F.E. clients with car storage needs and car repair discounts. When cars are brought in for repairs, he also advises clients on whether cars

⁴Email from Barb Brashear, Client Services Director, The Bridge, Pasadena, TX, August 4, 2003 (713/472-0753 and Bridge_counseling@sbcglobal.net).

are worth fixing. He is motivated to help S.A.F.E. because he knows the people who work there, “we don’t go along with the violence,” and “somebody needs to do it.” In addition to helping clients with their cars, he also raffles off a television or DVD player every year and donates the proceeds to S.A.F.E., and assists with S.A.F.E.’s motorcycle poker run. In this event, motorcycle riders pay \$25 for lunch and the opportunity to play a game where riders go to a list of locations and draw playing cards, and the winner wins a prize.⁵

Staffing a Car Donation Programs

Auto mechanic schools may volunteer to diagnose and repair donated cars.

“We wholesale the cars that are not in the condition to be repaired and use the money to buy parts for those that we can salvage.”⁶

An auto broker may volunteer to assess donated cars.

“He offers his expertise and time to maximize the outcome of every car donation we receive by assessing the best way to utilize each vehicle. Now, we match some cars with needy families, we auction some cars, and we sell some cars.”⁷

An employee already on staff may manage a car donation program. Safe Nest in Las Vegas, Nevada, operates an auto donation program for fundraising only that is managed by an employee at their Donation Center, Howard Reed (702/257-3800). Mr. Reed has negotiated arrangements with a company providing auction and towing services that allows the auction company to deduct auction fees and towing charges from the proceeds of the cars that are auctioned. Through this program Safe Nest raised \$25,000 in about six months.⁸

A new employee may be hired to manage the car donation program.

“...we [Strengthen Our Sisters – Cars for Success program – materials from this Web site are attached] have received over one hundred and fifty used vehicles and have hired a former client and welfare recipient to help manage the program.”⁹

⁵ Interview on August 15, 2003, with Jay Crower, owner of a mechanic shop and Marguerite Petersen, Executive Director, S.A.F.E. – Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, Blairsville, GA.

⁶ Holzman, Paula. “Cars for Careers: Lincoln Tech Helps Residents Get to Work,” p. 1. http://www.bizmonthly.com/10_1999/cars.html

⁷ Ghioto, Jeanette. “Flooded Gold Camry Carries Silver Lining.” *Catholic Charities Chronicles* [Jacksonville, FL], Summer 2001, p. 4.

⁸ Safe Nest newsletter, Spring 2003; interview with Mr. Howard Reed, July 2, 2003.

⁹ Strengthen Our Sisters [domestic violence organization in New Jersey]. About Strengthen Our Sisters’ Cars for Success – Web page at site of Strengthen Our Sisters: <http://www.strengthenoursisters.org/carinfo.html>.

Methods of Soliciting Car Donations

Many methods have been used to solicit car donations. Strengthen Our Sisters in New Jersey (<http://www.strengthenoursisters.org>) has directly asked people who have vehicles for sale to donate them and posted fliers on bulletin boards at vehicle registration offices, as well as using more conventional methods such as contacting newspapers and posting on their website.

Conclusion

From working with victims of domestic violence, service providers are intimately aware that transportation is a vital need of many of the women with whom they work. Research, such as the attached article, is now backing this anecdotal information. In addition, more and more communities are coordinating efforts in their responses to domestic violence. With this convergence, it is an opportune time for domestic violence service providers to consider developing a more comprehensive transportation program to address short- and long-term needs of survivors. There are numerous options for implementing transportation strategies. It is up to the service provider to consider them and the needs and resources of their community to develop the program that will best assist battered women in maintaining independence and safety for themselves and their children.