

Treating Transportation As A Community Issue

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In the state of New Hampshire 25% of the population are non drivers. Who are these non drivers? Many of the non drivers are people with disabilities and the elderly. If you are one of these non drivers you are going to have a tough time finding transportation. If you are in need of accessible transportation the challenge is nearly insurmountable.

There was a time when the standard practice was for the Home Healthcare workers who were already in the home, to provide transportation to their clients. Those days are no more. You might ask "Why is that?" When Home Healthcare Agencies across the state were interviewed by NH Leadership Series participants the response was..." high liability insurance costs coupled with low Medicaid reimbursements have made transporting their customers a thing of the past".

So what about Medicaid? The state plan does specify that the Medicaid program insures " necessary" transportation for it's recipients. In order to claim federal matching funds the state must cover "necessary" transportation. Here in lies the problem. What is the state of New Hampshire's definition of "necessary" transportation? In a nutshell "necessary" transportation as defined by the state is transportation to and from Medicaid covered services. No other transportation resources are provided by the state free of charge. Imagine not having access to accessible, affordable transportation. Imagine not being able to have a job, be a contributing member of your community or even stay in your home.

Galen Speigler is a young man who is dealing with limited accessible transportation, making the situation even tougher is the high cost of transportation, here is what Galen had to say when we asked about his issues with transportation.....

"What is a high school experience without going out and having fun with friends?" It is a bunch of work and no fun. High school is one of the most important times of life. How can I enjoy it if I am stuck at home? How can I make friends when I don't have a ride out? What good is the Americans with Disabilities Act if people can not get out to the movies, restaurants, and shopping centers? In the city of Keene we have a great public transportation system, but the latest bus ends at 5 pm. I don't know about you, but I have never seen a teenager with a curfew of 5pm. That is why we need to change something. We are in the 21st century but I feel like I am imprisoned in my four room house

Galen's mother Anne Branzell- Speigler tells of the latest setback in Galen's need for transportation....

We have known that this day was coming; we knew our van would die. We were actually looking forward to the day, as the wheelchair lift system and turny seat were a little cranky and not at all elegant to use. I usually gave my son a wedgie, or the opposite of one helping him into the seat that then lifted him into the van. This transfer was even more uncomfortable in the cold, which we have plenty of in NH. So when two mechanics said that the van was beyond repair and passing inspection, I said a quiet hurrah and my husband and I went about trying to buy a new van. A new van with a lowered floor conversion can easily cost \$ 50,000. I was shocked by these prices and then really disappointed to find that we did not qualify for the long term mobility loan package. We are working things out and getting ready to fundraise which is a fair amount of organizing, but it is very eye opening for me to be having this experience right now. We are grateful for warm weather that gives our son the opportunity to get himself out for social and school events. But, I hate to tell him we can not get him to his soccer practice; we can go somewhere but can't take the wheelchair that grants him independence and communication. I don't feel like much of a parent, putting my son in this position.

What is the answer to transportation for people in need? Many organizations are trying to answer that question, with programs that are trying to fill the gap not all agree on the best way to address the issue, but all agree on this: transportation is a community issue and our communities' needs are not being met.

To learn more about the Forum on Transportation please contact Lisa Dimartino at garylisa@metrocast.net

Resources: New Hampshire Speaks Out and NH Bureau of Transit