



# How Centers for Independent Living (CIL) can Promote Transportation Options in Rural Areas: Developing a Transportation Program

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*A Technical Resource for CIL's*

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## Introduction

CILs can play an important role in advocating for and developing transportation options for persons with disabilities living in rural areas of the United States. Following the Olmstead decision in 1999 where the Supreme Court ruled that persons with disabilities have a right to have government funded supports and services provided in the community, challenges remain for persons with significant disabilities living in the community and outside of institutional settings. One of the barriers to being able to live in the community is access to transportation options so that persons can be employed, receive health care, access goods and services and be an active part of their community. Based on feedback from consumers of Center for Independent Living of Western Wisconsin (CILWW) services, it was evident that the lack of affordable and accessible transportation was a barrier in CILWW's ten county service area.

## Completing a Survey of Consumer Transportation Needs

To completely understand the nature of transportation in rural areas and identify gaps in services, CILWW began by conducting a ridership survey to better understand the nature of consumer's transportation use and needs. Surveys were mailed to consumers of Independent Living services at CILWW, County Aging Units, and those using other County funded transportation programs.

The survey asked the following questions:

- Demographic Information: Age, race, disability, type of residence, county/city of residence
- Rider Information: Assistance needed when transported (i.e. wheelchair accessible vehicle, escort, and door-to-door assistance).
- Current Transportation Use:
  - Work, school, medical, employment, shopping/nutrition, dining, social/recreational, other.
  - Days of the week and times currently using transportation.



- Transportation Provider Information: Transportation services used and provider of service.
- Rating of Transportation Services: Ease of use, timeliness, scheduling, and availability.
- Transportation Needs:
  - What transportation needs do you have that are unmet?
  - If you need more access to transportation, what would you use it for?

The results from the survey showed the following:

### Exhibit 1. Ridership Survey Results

**Note:** In Wisconsin persons receiving Medical Assistance are eligible for Medicaid funded transportation for medical and mental health visits. This is a brokered service, which provides Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation services and primarily contracts with a provider of Specialized Medical Vehicles (SMV) for transportation.

<b>Demographic Information</b>	<u>Age</u> 19 – 39 = 12% 40 – 59 = 20% 60 – 79 = 48% 85 + = 20%	<u>Race</u> White = 97% Black = 1% Hispanic = 1% Hmong = 1%	<u>Disability</u> Physical = 24% Hearing = 14% Vision = 50% Mental H = 12%	<u>Residence</u> Single Family = 50% Apartment = 38% Residential Fac. = 5% Other = 7%
<b>Transportation Use</b>	<u>Employment/Education</u> Work = 5% School = 3% Other = 1%	<u>Medical</u> Doctor Apt. =54% Dentist = 12% Mental Health = 5% Other = 1%	<u>Nutrition</u> Senior Dining = 15% Grocery Shop = 27% Dining Out = 1%	<u>Social/Recreational</u> Visiting Family/Friends = 13% Religious = 12% Good/Services = 29%
<b>Transportation Providers Used</b>	<u>Medicaid Funded</u> SMV = 42% Door to Door = 12% Taxi = 2%	<u>County Funded</u> Aging Services = 42% Share Ride Taxi = 12% Other = 3%	<u>City Funded</u> City Bus = 12% Paratransit = 45% Taxi = 2%	<u>Other Programs</u> Non-Profit = 4% Religious = 3% Other = 1%
<b>Rating of Services on a scale of 1 - 5</b>	<u>Medicaid Funded</u> SMV = 3.5 Door to Door = 4 Taxi = 3.5	<u>County Funded</u> Aging Services = 4 Share Ride Taxi = 4 Other = 4	<u>City Funded</u> City Bus = 3.5 Paratransit = 3.5 Taxi = 3	<u>Other Programs</u> Non-Profit = 4.5 Religious = 5 Other = 4
<b>Transportation Needs</b>	<u>Employment/Education</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mornings (6am)</li> <li>• Evenings (past 6pm)</li> </ul>	<u>Social/Recreational</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shopping</li> <li>• Visiting Friends</li> <li>• Hunting/Fishing</li> </ul>	<u>Weekend Service</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saturday/Sunday</li> <li>• Mornings &amp; Afternoon service</li> </ul>	<u>Use of Service</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier to schedule rides</li> <li>• Notification if late or cancelled trips</li> </ul>



Based on the survey results, there were barriers in transportation for persons with disabilities living in rural areas of Western Wisconsin. The primary barriers indicated were:

- **Limited hours of service:**
  - Most programs only operated from 7am – 5pm, with the majority only providing services between 9am – 4pm.
  - This created a significant barrier to persons using transportation services for employment, as number of employers begin the workday prior to 7am and ended the workday after 6pm.
- **Limited use of services:**
  - Majority of persons surveyed only had access to transportation for medical appointments and meal sites.
  - Lack of options for grocery shopping, personal care (barber, stylist), and accessing other goods and services in the community.
  - Lack of transportation options for employment.
- **Cost of transportation:**
  - Co-pays for transportation services (City Bus, Shared Ride Taxi's) not affordable.
  - Private pay cost, \$50 - \$100 per trip.
- **Lack of options in very rural areas:**
  - Rural areas requiring a specialized medical vehicle to travel over 50 “unloaded” miles to pick up consumers were predominantly underserved.

When consumers were asked about their unmet transportation needs and where they would go if they had access to additional transportation services, they indicated the following:

- Nutrition: grocery shopping, dining out
- Employment
- Social/Recreational Activities
- Other: Religious (Sunday service, bible study)

### ***Identifying Key Partners and Transportation Gaps***

The next step was to identify transportation partners and bring them to the table for a discussion on the current state of transportation and limitations. The reauthorization of the new federal transportation act (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, which mandated regional coordinated transportation, provided a perfect venue to bring transportation providers together. From regional planning committee meetings, CILWW worked to establish the Western Wisconsin Regional Transportation Collaborating Committee (WVRTCC) with the goal of identifying barriers and limitations to transportation and improving coordination of transportation services, especially in rural underserved areas of Western Wisconsin.



The following is a list of transportation partners to consider bringing together to discuss transportation needs, gaps in services, funding, and opportunities for collaboration.

### Exhibit 2. Potential Transportation Partners

Partner Agencies	Services Provided	Service Area	Funding
County Representative responsible for Disabled Transportation programs	Shared Ride, transportation to meal sites, volunteer drivers	County, city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County funds</li> <li>• State funds</li> <li>• Federal funds</li> </ul>
State DOT Regional Representative	Transportation funding	Entire state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal</li> <li>• State tax revenue</li> </ul>
Regional Planning Offices (RPO's)	Table Text	Counties served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State</li> <li>• Federal</li> </ul>
Private Transportation Providers	Medicaid, Paratransit,	Counties/cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicare</li> <li>• Medicaid</li> <li>• Private Pay</li> </ul>
Public Transportation Providers	City Bus, Paratransit	City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal</li> <li>• State</li> <li>• City tax revenue</li> </ul>
Managed Care Providers	Community Based Home Care services	Counties served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicaid</li> </ul>
Consumers of Transportation Services		County and city services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private Pay</li> </ul>
Agencies servicing older adults, persons with disabilities, low income, and the homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Living Center</li> <li>• Disability Specific agencies</li> <li>• Aging Services</li> <li>• Community Action Agencies</li> </ul>	Counties, Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State</li> <li>• Federal</li> <li>• County</li> <li>• Grants</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• United Way</li> <li>• Foundations</li> </ul>

### Host a Transportation Summit

In 2006, CILWW worked with the partners involved in the WWRTCC and hosted a Transportation Summit at UW-Stout in Menomonie. This was an effort to bring together State and County officials, Public and Private transportation providers, agencies that contract for transportation and consumers of transportation services to discuss barriers, funding, planning and coordination in our service area. The event was successful in bringing all the parties together and providing a forum to have a serious discussion on the lack of affordable and accessible transportation options, strategies to address the problem, funding issues, and collaboration to eliminate overlapped or duplication of services.

### How the “New Freedom” Transportation Program began

In 2004, the CILWW made addressing transportation barriers for persons with disabilities in their 10 county service area part of its new three-year strategic plan following input from staff and board members. To begin CILWW sought out funding to pilot a voucher program, where persons would find their own ride and be reimbursed at the federal mileage rate. With \$2,500 in funding for a pilot



provided by St. Croix Valley United Way, CILWW started the New Freedom (NF) Transportation program. We soon learned that many consumers were unable to find their rides from family or friends, and began recruiting volunteer drivers to meet that need. After receiving a \$10,000 grant from an Anderson Foundation, and additional funds from St. Croix County, the program began providing rides using volunteer drivers in four of the ten counties in CILWW's service area in Western Wisconsin. By conducting outreach and education on the NF program with the County Disabled Transportation Advisory Committees (DTAC's), Aging and Disability Resource Centers, and other programs that provided services to persons with disabilities and older adults, and with additional funding and the ability to contract for services, in 2007 the program began serving all 10 counties in CILWW's service area.

In 2009, CILWW began a collaboration with North Country Independent Living Center, and expanded the NF to serve an additional eight counties in Northwestern Wisconsin, bringing the total number of counties served by the program to eighteen. The NF program has continued to grow, by demonstrating that using volunteer drivers to meet the transportation needs in rural areas is a cost effective solution. Volunteer drivers are reimbursed at the federal mileage rate compared to the cost of a specialized medical vehicle provider, which would be 3 – 4 times the cost for the same trip. Each phase of expansion by the program included the initial work of recruiting and training drivers to make sure there was the capacity to service consumers. Prior to entering into new contracts or expanding the program services area, careful consideration was given to ensure that the NF program could meet the capacity for new rides, and that additional transportation staff was in place to coordinate dispatching and tracking of rides. The vast majority of drivers are retired persons so there has always been an emphasis on doing recruitment by outreach through senior program or areas that older persons generally visit. One of the drawbacks in using volunteer drivers is that most persons do not have a lift-equipped vehicle to transport persons that use mobility devices. To address this, the NF program purchased two rear entry lift equipped vans in 2019 and 2021 to meet the need of persons using mobility devices with support from the Anderson Foundation.

By 2022, the NF program has grown to providing transportation in 42 counties in Wisconsin, over half the state. CILWW continues to work with other Independent Living Centers in Wisconsin and is in the process of working on a contract with Veyo to provide non-emergency Medicaid funded transportation in underserved rural areas of Western and Northern Wisconsin.

### ***How the New Freedom Program Operates***

The day-to-day operation of the NF program consists of a Lead Transportation Specialist (LTS) that handles all calls from consumers seeking rides and agencies arranging transportation for their consumers. One of the responsibilities of the LTS is to make sure each rider qualifies for the NF program. To qualify for the NF program, you must be a person with a disability, older adult or veteran that does not have access to transportation, or are temporarily disabled, and do not live near a bus stop. The LTS does the intake and enters the rider information into our computer system, then sends out the new rider information. If working with an agency such as a Managed Care Organization (MCO), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or Include, Respect, I, Self - Direct (IRIS), the LTS makes sure that all of the authorizations are in place to transport the agency riders. Once all the information has been collected and the rider meets qualifications the LTS then sends the rider to a Transportation Specialist (TS) to book the ride.



Each TS is assigned a geographic area, generally consisting of five to eight counties that they dispatch rides for. When a call or email is received, the LTS has the information as to where the rider wants to go; they look for a driver within a 45-mile radius, (a 65-mile radius for upper Northern Wisconsin counties). Once a driver is found, the rider's information is given to the driver along with the addresses of where the rider needs to go. The driver is then responsible to call the rider the night before and verify pickup time.

The NF program has a Transportation Support person. The responsibilities of this position is to keep all driver information current such as driver's licenses, insurance cards, addresses and phone numbers. The support position also checks annually to make sure all driving records are still clean. The main support duty is to process all logs coming in for the month. All logs are verified with the software program to make sure they were assigned to the drivers. Once that is complete, the logs are then sent to be paid out to drivers. It is not uncommon to process over 3,000 logs a month, many times more.

The NF program also consist of a Transportation Program Coordinator (PC). The PC is in charge of the daily running of the program, making sure the software program is working correctly and handling any issues that may arise. They are in charge of any disciplinary actions that need to be taken with riders and supervision of TS staff. As part of this position, the PC also completes the billing and provides information needed to complete reports by the Transportation Director or the Executive Director. The PC also helps to recruit drivers and coordinates with other agencies to make sure things are running smoothly in all 42 counties served by the NF program. The PC also does the initial driver training, which covers information on program policies and procedures, completing mileage logs, and policies/rules regarding transporting of consumers.

The Transportation Director of the NF program is responsible for writing grant proposals to support the program and collaborating and coordinating with agencies throughout the state to meet transportation needs. The Director also does a majority of driver recruitment and training as well. Recruitment generally consists of putting up flyers at local businesses, developing adds for newspapers and aging newsletters, and networking with other organizations. The director also oversees the annual driver training. Every year CILWW hosts a training to bring all the volunteer drivers together to discuss program changes and provide training on topics such as blood borne pathogens, disability etiquette, HIPAA rules, confidentiality, defensive driving and recently COVID safety protocols. Finally, the Director participates in a number of national, state and local committees that are working to provide safe and affordable transportation, especially in rural areas where there are limited transportation options and in some cases none at all.

### ***How the New Freedom Program is Funded***

Over the past, nearly 20 years the NF Transportation program has increased the number of funding sources and collaborating agencies. Currently the NF program is the largest recipient of 5310 funds in Wisconsin. This program (49 U.S.C. 5310) provides formula funding to states for the purpose of assisting private nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs. The program contracts with several counties to provide rides using Wisconsin State s85.21 funds. The purpose of the s85.21 program is to promote the general public health and welfare by providing financial assistance to counties providing transportation



services for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The NF program also contracts with Medicaid funded community service programs in Wisconsin such as the self-direct IRIS program, MCO's, and with the Department of VR to provide rides for persons accessing employment services. In 2021, the program also received an additional \$108,500 in funding from three area foundations, Anderson, Otto Bremer, Mayo Community, and United Way St. Croix Valley to support rides and purchase a new van. In 2021, the NF program had total revenues of \$559,325, which reflects how the program has grown since starting as a \$2,500 pilot project.

Below is a list of the top five contracted funding sources, which provide a majority of the funding for the NF program, listed by types of trips provided by funder.

**Exhibit 3. Transportation Funding Sources and Trips Funded**

	Medical	Nutrition	Employment	Educational	Social	Home
<b>Federal 5310</b>	8,073	951	2,521	81	1,054	164
<b>MCOs</b>	11,863	904	5,423	85	217	191
<b>County 85.21</b>	10,293	1,330	1,127	77	866	0
<b>IRIS</b>	134	141	2,357	98	77	3
<b>DVR</b>	46	0	216	123	29	0

***Transportation Provided, 2019 – 2021:***

The following information illustrates the number of trips provided by the NF transportation program and trip purposes. This chart shows how the program has expanded from providing 100 trips per year in only four counties to over 5,000 trips in over 30 counties. In 2019, the program provided the most rides in the history of the program, which was followed by a major decline in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the program limited rides to essential life services of medical, nutrition and employment. This was due to the number of volunteer drivers that had stopped driving during the pandemic. With the majority stating that they were not concerned with getting infected, but infecting riders with many having significant disabilities and/or vulnerable health conditions. However, as COVID-19 cases have dropped in Western and Central Wisconsin, the NF program is providing rides for all purposes once again. Many of the drivers that had stopped driving during the pandemic have returned along with the recruitment of new volunteer drivers.

**Exhibit 4. Transportation Trips and Purpose**

	Medical	Nutrition	Employment	Educational	Social	Home
<b>2019</b>	19,817	799	5,188	557	1,420	308
<b>2020</b>	15,585	1,033	4,016	218	308	174
<b>2021</b>	15,442	1,202	5,343	108	248	148

***Impact of the NF Transportation Program***

Here are two real life examples of the impact the NF program has had on the lives of persons with disabilities and their ability to access employment and visit family.



Elvis is a 21-year-old man with autism that is working with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. For the past three months, the NF program has been providing Elvis with transportation from his home to work at a grocery store in a neighboring town, where he works three days per week. Elvis and his family are grateful there is a program like NF that can assist with him with being more independent, increasing his socialization, and allow him to be an active part of his community.

An older blind person called and was looking for a ride to Rochester, MN. He was referred to CILWW by the Society for the Blind support group. His son had been fighting a long battle with cancer, and had come to the end of the battle. He was looking for a ride to go see him before he passed away so his son would know he was there, and was very broken up when speaking with the TS. He said he was not looking for people to feel sorry for him or for a hand out and would gladly pay just so he could see his son one more time. The NF program was able to arrange for a driver to take this man to see his son one last time despite the time and distance of the trip.

## Summary

Addressing transportation barriers for persons with disabilities can be an overwhelming task, especially in rural areas. There are many ways that Centers for Independent Living can get involved by advocating for expansion of transportation services, developing strategic partnerships with transportation funders and providers, and the development of unique transportation options such as volunteer driver programs to meet the needs of transit dependent persons. Following the Olmstead decision, persons with disabilities have a right to the supports and services needed to allow them to live in the community. However, access to affordable and accessible transportation strengthens the ability to be employed, access health care, purchase goods and services and be an active member of the community.

## Interested in Learning More?

If you are interested in learning more about CILWW's surveying of unmet transportation needs and development of the New Freedom Transportation program, please contact CILWW Executive Director, Kyle Kleist ([kleistk@cilww.com](mailto:kleistk@cilww.com)) or Transportation Director Bobbi Craig ([craigb@cilww.com](mailto:craigb@cilww.com)). We would be happy to share resources developed, funding opportunities and lessons learned.

