

## Way to Work: Helping People with Employment Transportation

*This brief highlights Way to Work, a program dedicated to enhancing the availability of transportation information, education, and resources for low-income job seekers in Woonsocket/Northern Rhode Island. The information contained within can assist workforce development professionals in providing low-wage earners access to safe and available transportation to work related activities. Way to Work's innovative responses to meeting transportation challenges include a late night shuttle, encouraging local employers to support biking, and a partnership with Good News garage that makes affordable vehicles available to community residents who would otherwise not be able to purchase them.*

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Unemployment in Rhode Island in the first half of 2010 has averaged over 12.5%. The Family Resources Community Action (FRCA) agency in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, is trying to put a dent in those numbers through its Way to Work program by ensuring that job seekers and low-wage workers have reliable, affordable transportation to jobs. Over 80% of the families the FRCA serves live at or below the poverty line and do not have a private vehicle to use for travel to work.

Staff at Way to Work disseminate information on public and private transportation options and provide resources and referrals to meet short- and long-term employment transportation needs of FRCA clients and other community residents. In addition, the staff actively engage various stakeholders (local residents, employers, community organizations, and city officials) in the development of solutions to meet employment transportation needs.

### New Shuttle Serve Expands Employment Options for Area Residents

In April 2010, Way to Work introduced a pilot Woonsocket employment shuttle service that provides evening service when the local bus service no longer runs. Shuttle riders are required to pre-register for the service and call ahead to schedule rides. FRCA hopes that the \$2.00 one-way fare, payable by each passenger at pick-up, will assist the service in becoming self-sustaining.

The route served by the shuttle has increased since service began. Initially limited to the Diamond Hill area, home to a number of retail stores and restaurants, the service now includes the entire Woonsocket community. The service has been a boon to both employees and employers. For example, a local Subway restaurant had difficulties hiring workers, many of who relied on public transportation, for its second shift as the restaurant was not served by transit after 7:30 pm. Once the shuttle began its new route, the restaurant manager had more flexibility with hiring and shift assignments because employees who previously could not work later shifts now could do so. In one case, the shuttle enabled an employee to increase his hours, which led to the opportunity to expand his job skills and increase his salary. Shuttle access has also expanded employment opportunities for area youth, many of whom work to contribute to family income.

New routing has included two local health care facilities, in response to a survey of health care workers indicating they would use the service if it was available. Further discussions are underway to include a third facility, and Way to Work is exploring the possibility of extending

shuttle service across state lines to job sites in neighboring Massachusetts. The ability to provide access to jobs across state lines will significantly improve employment prospects for Rhode Island residents. FRCA is also collaborating with Quality Partners of Rhode Island, which is addressing health care worker training through its Healthcare Industry Partnership's readiness, training, and jobs network. The group has identified transportation as one of the barriers to employment for certified nursing assistants and other healthcare workers who work second and third shifts.

### Individualized Transportation Solutions

Way to Work's transportation coordinator, Dawn Camara, has incorporated individualized transportation assessment and planning tools, provided through the Community Transportation Association's Transportation Solutions training, into FRCA's client intake process. Camara adapted the assessment tool to analyze clients' awareness of transportation options in the community and trained FRCA case managers in its use. FRCA staff are now better able identify the information and resources needed by individuals served to improve their commuting options. Case managers also develop individualized transportation plans for each client.

Way to Work promotes biking through the "Our Neighborhood" program, with funding from its partners the Local Initiative Support Corporation and NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley. Recently, with additional support from local businesses, the group installed customized art bicycle racks throughout Woonsocket. The City of Woonsocket provides ongoing maintenance to the bike racks.

To make car ownership more available to low-income individuals and families, Way to Work partnered with Good News Garage, an organization that repairs and donates vehicles to low-wage families. Way to Work's transportation coordinator is a member of the screening committee that reviews applications for vehicles and matches donated vehicles to eligible recipients needing them to commute to full-time employment. Way to Work is also a partner in transMISSIONS, a vehicle donation alliance of charitable organizations coordinated by Good News Garage, and as such, is eligible to receive donated vehicles for its clients.

### Marketing

Information about the Way to Work program is posted on FRCA's website, with periodic updates also included in its e-newsletter. In addition, Way to Work shares information with local media (newspapers, radio) and encourages employers to share shuttle service information with their employees. Information about the shuttle service has also been distributed at three of the health care facilities currently on the service route.

Way to Work recently partnered with the transportation advisory committee to sponsor its first transportation fair, an event that provided community members with transportation information, resources and money-saving tips for commuting to work, job training and school. Nearly 20 local vendors, including AAA of Southern New England, Hunter Insurance, RIPTA, and Valley Transportation Corporation participated. Vendors generously donated a variety of transportation related raffle prizes including bikes and gas cards. Local students were encouraged to participate in a Green Solutions for Transportation poster and essay contest. Winning posters and essay contributors received a variety of transportation prizes which included refurbished bikes contributed by the local police department. The feedback from the

estimated 130 attendees was extremely positive. Way to Work is planning another fair in the spring of 2011.

### Funding

Way to Work is an initiative of the Woonsocket Transportation Advisory Committee, which FRCA convened in 2007 in response to the areas' employment transportation challenges. Other members include the City of Woonsocket Planning Office, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA), NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley, Northwest Transportation Service/Valley Transportation Corp. (a local community development corporation), and the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce.

Way to Work began operations with a three-year strategy grant from the Rhode Island Foundation in 2007. It received additional funding in October 2009 from RIPTA through the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program. In 2010, FRCA has applied for another JARC grant and staff has met with other service providers in the community to research and strategize around other funding options. Way to Work's participation with the Quality Partners of Rhode Island could create an additional funding opportunity through United Way and the Governor's Workforce Board.

### Additional information

FRCA assists community members with basic needs support (food, utilities, prescription, and rental assistance), early childhood programs, counseling, parenting support, employment and training for adults and youth, child welfare, housing assistance, and support for HIV-positive individuals. For additional information about Way to Work, visit <http://www.famresri.org/ProgramsServices/EmploymentTrainingEducationTransportation/WaytoWorkTransportationCenter/tabid/231/Default.aspx> or contact the Way to Work program coordinator at [waytowork@famresri.org](mailto:waytowork@famresri.org) or 401-235-6082.

To learn more about the Transportation Solutions training, visit [www.ctaa.org/transportation\\_solutions](http://www.ctaa.org/transportation_solutions).

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This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the federal government.