
REMOVING BARRIERS TO WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Chapter 3

Connections Shuttle: Transportation for CalWORKs Participants

Debbie Downes
Michael J. Austin

The Santa Cruz County Connections Shuttle is a transportation option for California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Program (CalWORKs) welfare-to-work participants. The Connections Shuttle consists of a small fleet of vans with drivers and dispatchers who work together to bring people from their homes to work and work-related destinations, including child care and job training. The primary purpose of the Connections Shuttle is to respond to the great need for transportation among CalWORKs families whose jobs are often far from their homes. Public transportation in Santa Cruz and adjoining counties is often insufficient for travel to work, school, child care, and errands from outlying areas. The Connections Shuttle provides temporary aid in the transition from welfare to work. The secondary purpose of the Connections Shuttle is to train welfare-to-work participants to become drivers and dispatchers. They are hired for a seven-month training period, during which they receive a Class B license, allowing them to drive commercial, fifteen-passenger vehicles.

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Transportation is a major obstacle for welfare recipients seeking work. Harbaugh and Smith (1998) found that public transit does not serve many rural areas, which is where many low-income families choose to live because housing is more affordable than in urban areas. Twenty-six percent of families below the poverty level do not own cars and must rely on public transportation. They often make multiple transfers to travel a relatively short distance. Harbaugh and Smith (1998) concluded that innovative, collaborative transportation options are necessary to help CalWORKs participants find and maintain employment.

Blumenberg and Ong (1997) studied a random sample of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients who worked in Los Angeles in 1992. They found that those who travel the farthest from home earn the least amount of money because actual travel expenses and opportunity costs reduce their take-home earnings. The cost of private transportation and availability of public transportation make it more desirable for recipients to seek employment close to their homes. For some welfare recipients, it is cheaper to stay at home and receive aid than it is to travel to work. Creating jobs in poor areas benefits those who live there by reducing their job-related expenses. However, as Blumenberg and Ong (1997) point out, it is difficult to create an adequate supply of jobs in inner cities and rural areas. They concluded that accessible and affordable transportation is necessary to cut job-related expenses for welfare recipients.

Kaplan (1998) calls attention to the multiple transportation needs of CalWORKs participants. Often they need to travel to and from work, child care, health care, shopping, and an assortment of other services. She recommends that vehicles used to transport senior citizens, people with disabilities, Head Start participants, and schoolchildren be shared with CalWORKs recipients. Many organizations use their vehicles only at certain times of the day. CalWORKs programs could operate the vehicles when they are not in use.

In summary, transportation is a major barrier for CalWORKs participants seeking and maintaining employment. Many low-income families live in rural areas without access to a car, and public transportation routes do not provide adequate transport to work, home, child care, or a variety of other necessary errands. If CalWORKs participants are to find and maintain employment, they need a transportation option that provides for their needs.

HISTORY

CalWORKs legislation (Assembly Bill 1542) requires counties to assist CalWORKs welfare-to-work participants with transportation, child care, and job training. Assembly Bill 2454 requires county welfare departments and local and regional transportation agencies to work together to develop and implement a plan that identifies transportation options for CalWORKs participants. In 1997, the Transportation Task Force of the Santa Cruz County Coalition for Workforce Preparation was created to develop a plan that would meet CalWORKs' requirements. The Coalition for Workforce Preparation is an informal consortium consisting of representatives from local school districts, community colleges, transportation associations, child care organizations, environmental organizations, employers, business organizations, training providers, employment agencies, job seekers, and social services. The coalition works with the business community in Santa Cruz County to help CalWORKs participants find employment and to develop collaborative solutions for transportation problems that do not increase traffic or degrade air quality. Through the Transportation Task Force, the coalition helps to provide transportation for CalWORKs participants.

In 1997, there were over 6,000 adult CalWORKs recipients, with another 6,000 children in Santa Cruz County; the Transportation Task Force surveyed them. Box 3.1 provides some highlights of the findings. CalWORKs families indicated that transportation was the second most significant barrier in the search for employment, after child care. They were seeking safe, reliable, flexible, and affordable transportation. Many survey respondents noted that the fixed route system of public transportation did not work for them because they needed to make multiple stops on the way to and from work to pick up and drop off their children. In addition, many CalWORKs recipients live in rural areas, where public transportation is often inadequate for low-income families. In order to help them become self-sufficient, CalWORKs families in Santa Cruz County needed a supplement to public transportation. Many of the available jobs are in adjoining counties and the bus system within Santa Cruz County and between counties was often insufficient for regional job search or employment.

With the survey findings, the Transportation Task Force began to develop an array of ideas including multiple stops, midday service, transport in rural areas, and transport in emergency situations such as picking up a sick child from school. In January 1998, they produced a plan for what they called the Connections Shuttle. By Fall 1998 they had identified \$412,700 in funding from the county social services agency in the form of CalWORKs (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), a governor's discretionary 15 percent

BOX 3.1. Transportation Needs of CalWORKs Participants in Santa Cruz County

Currently, children travel to and from school and child care in the following ways:

- 43 percent get rides with a parent
- 37 percent take the bus
- 36 percent walk
- 15 percent get a ride with another relative
- 12 percent ride bicycles
- 11 percent get a ride with a neighbor

Once a CalWORKs recipient finds work, his or her children will travel to and from school and child care in the following ways:

- 41 percent will get rides with the parent
- 36 percent will take the bus
- 28 percent will walk
- 19 percent will get a ride with a relative
- 9 percent will ride bicycles
- 9 percent will get a ride with a neighbor
- 3 percent will receive transportation from their day care agency

CalWORKs parents run errands in the following ways:

- 53 percent drive themselves
- 37 percent take the bus
- 34 percent walk
- 27 percent get a ride with a relative
- 12 percent ride bicycles
- 12 percent get rides with neighbors
- 9 percent ask others to run errands for them

Of the CalWORKs recipients who responded:

- 76 percent would be very likely to use a shuttle service for themselves and their children if it were available
- 40 percent would be willing to pay \$1 to \$2 per ride
- 36 percent would pay less than \$1 per ride
- 17 percent would ride only if it were free
- 58 percent own a car

Among car owners, when their vehicles are not working:

- 50 percent walk to complete their errands
- 47 percent take the bus

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- 37 percent ride with a relative
- 26 percent borrow a car
- 24 percent ride with a neighbor
- 18 percent ride a bicycle
- 15 percent ask someone else to run the errand for them

When traveling to work:

- 71 percent of participants must stop one to two times to drop off children or run other errands

On the way home from work:

- 80 percent of participants must stop one to three times to pick up children or run other errands

If conveniently available, respondents preferred the following travel alternatives:

- 55 percent bus
- 48 percent carpooling
- 45 percent walking
- 34 percent bicycling
- 28 percent telecommuting
- 23 percent vanpooling
- 16 percent train

The following factors would encourage participants to use a travel alternative:

- emergency ride home (67 percent of participants)
- extra compensation for using an alternative (62 percent)
- child care at the work site (59 percent)
- discounted bus passes (58 percent)
- convenient bus routes (54 percent)
- fast bus routes (54 percent)
- employers subsidizing commute costs (51 percent)

welfare-to-work grant, and Job Access/Reverse Commute organization funds from the Federal Transit Administration.

Job trainers, job seekers, and employers take an active part in transportation planning so that the shuttle responds to the changing needs of its clients. Planning for transportation, child care, and workforce preparation involved consideration of transportation issues for low-income job seekers, trainees, and their children.

PROGRAM OPERATIONS

The first goal of the Connections Shuttle is to meet the immediate transportation needs of CalWORKs participants in order to help them make the transition from welfare to work. The shuttle is not meant to be a permanent source of transportation for low-income workers but a temporary aid to help welfare-to-work participants find and retain jobs. The primary goal of the shuttle program is to remove transportation as a barrier to employment, workforce preparation, and/or child care programs by making transportation available to job seekers, students, workers, and their children.

The second goal of the Connections Shuttle is to provide job training for CalWORKs participants, qualifying them to receive the Class B license needed to operate commercial, fifteen-passenger vehicles. CalWORKs recipients are trained for seven months as dispatchers and drivers for the Connections Shuttle. Topics covered in training include employee policies, workplace conduct, licensing requirements, driving skills, emergency procedures and protocol, passenger assistance, passenger policies, and dispatch and scheduling procedures. Box 3.2 reproduces the table of contents of the training manual. Trainees are also given the opportunity to be trained as mechanics or school bus drivers.

Food and Nutrition Services, Incorporated (now known as Community Bridges), a community-based organization, operates the Connections Shuttle. The following list shows the partners that support the Connections Shuttle and their roles:

- Food and Nutrition Services: Consolidated Transportation Services Agency, service provider for shuttle service
- Human Resources Agency/CareerWorks: CalWORKs provider and welfare-to-work formula and competitive grant recipient; operates Job Training Partnership Act program
- Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission: planning
- Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments: planning
- Private Industry Council: oversees welfare-to-work services
- Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District: coordinates bus routes
- Employment Development Department: provides labor market information
- Santa Cruz Area/Pajaro Valley Transportation Management Associations: educate business owners and managers about shuttle services and transportation subsidy programs; train welfare agency and human resources agency staff

- Service Workers International Union Local 415: support for the program
- United Transportation Union Local 23: support for the program

Since 1979, this agency has contracted with multiple county, state, and local jurisdictions and the local transit district to provide child care, child food programs, adult day care, meals-on-wheels, and paratransit services to residents of Santa Cruz County. In 1982, the State of California required each county to designate a Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA) to oversee specialized transportation to county residents. Santa Cruz County designated Food and Nutrition Services as the local CTSA. They focus mainly on serving elderly and disabled county residents, although the Connections Shuttle qualifies as a CTSA program. In the fiscal year 1998-1999, they provided over 165,000 rides to county residents.

The Connections Shuttle contract was signed in February 1999, and Deana Davidson became the shuttle project supervisor. She immediately instituted the training program for shuttle drivers. In March 1999, the first

BOX 3.2. Components of the Connections Shuttle Training Manual

Section A—Orientation

- Part 1: Welcome
- Part 2: Employee Policies
- Part 3: Workplace Conduct
- Part 4: Training and Licensing Overview

Section B—Driver Training

- Part 1: Basic Driving Skills
- Part 2: Defensive Driving
- Part 3: Emergencies
- Part 4: Driver Procedures
- Part 5: Emergency Protocol
- Part 6: Accident Procedures
- Part 7: Passenger Assistance

Section C—Office Training

- Part 1: Passenger Policies
- Part 2: Office Staff
- Part 3: Dispatch Procedures
- Part 4: Scheduling Procedures

group of four were hired and trained to be drivers and dispatchers. During the seven-month training period, all trainees are paid and taught both driving and dispatching skills in order to qualify them for as many jobs as possible. The first group worked in pairs, one driver and one dispatcher for the morning and evening shifts. In April 1999, the shuttle began operation and recruited the next four trainees. After three months, the shuttle had fourteen drivers and dispatchers and six vans. Three vans were purchased with state welfare-to-work matching funds, and three were taken from the Food and Nutrition Services vanpool and reconditioned. Eventually, the Federal Transit District provided funds for four additional vans.

In July 1999, the Connections Shuttle hired a temporary CalWORKs trainee to work in the office, and in November of that year they hired a permanent assistant staff trainer to conduct the driver and dispatcher trainings. In February 2000, a trainee was hired as a permanent office assistant. The Connections Shuttle currently runs five routes. The most frequent routes are between Watsonville and Santa Cruz, with many stops to drop off and pick up children at various places. The initial goal was to provide 100 one-way rides to individuals per day. In the first week of service, the Connections Shuttle provided seventeen individual rides. They are now providing over 133 individual rides per day, and they have difficulties adding new passengers because the vans are full to capacity. Given the high demand, the shuttle staff plan to expand services and provide rides for everyone who requests the shuttle.

In Santa Cruz County, CareerWorks operates under the human resources agency, which is the county social service agency. CareerWorks encompasses both CalWORKs assistance and the work training and employment services. CareerWorks staff refer their clients to the Connections Shuttle driver training program. Every six weeks, the shuttle announces openings in a training class. CareerWorks staff are constantly searching their caseloads for qualified driving trainees. Trainees must be in the welfare-to-work formula grant program designed for people with special barriers to work. Some of the major barriers include receiving welfare for over thirty months, lack of a high school diploma, receiving low scores on reading and math competency tests, recovering from substance abuse, being homeless, and having a poor work history. Trainees are also required to have clean driving records and to have passed a drug test.

The Connections Shuttle provides low-income families with the transportation that they need to enter the workforce and become self-sufficient, as well as training for those who are seeking work. "When I started having something to look forward to, I started to feel good about myself and my life," says Anita, a former driver/dispatcher.

It's a job, but there's a lot of support. If you can't find the support you need from the other drivers, you can turn to the administration. Drivers and administration give a lot of emotional support so that no one feels intimidated in asking for help. . . . What you get out of the job is what you put into it. People who invest in the program tend to move on to bigger and better things.

PROGRAM SUCCESSES

One of the employment and training specialists for the Human Resources Agency, CareerWorks Division, who recommends clients to the Connections Shuttle training program, reports an increase in self-esteem through participation in the program. "They are part of a team, they're treated well, and they have an important job," she explains. "The drivers help others get to work as they themselves find work, and they feel good about that."

A state labor market analyst and member of the Childcare Task Force includes in his list of Connections Shuttle successes, "Raising the consciousness of the community and getting people from different agencies to work together." The Transportation Task Force pulled together people from many community and government organizations and encouraged them to find the best solution for the lack of transportation for CalWORKs recipients. In line with the temporary nature of the Connections Shuttle, only twenty of the original clients are still using the shuttle. Most of the riders have found other solutions for their transportation needs.

The Connections Shuttle has helped thirty-three drivers to obtain their Class B licenses. Of those, ten are still employed by the shuttle. Three were unable to complete the training due to illness or difficulties and three have moved to unknown locations. The other seventeen drivers successfully transitioned into outside jobs, using the skills they learned from the Connections Shuttle.

Morale among drivers and dispatchers is also an integral part of the shuttle's success. The shuttle drivers have formed a morale committee which focuses on managing conflicts and maintaining high morale. Each month, two volunteers serve along with the shuttle project supervisor on the committee. They address all recommendations from the suggestion box and plan staff parties.

Sammy, a former Connections Shuttle driver and dispatcher, finished his training and was hired as a driver at a nonprofit agency. He is grateful for the opportunity that the shuttle offered him:

Connections Shuttle gives you confidence. Working in the lettuce fields, I felt I was missing something, wasting away, not using my po-

tential. When I came to Connections, I found total support. I learned from my mistakes. I feel confident that I can compete in the job market now. . . . We [drivers] help others break out of the welfare cycle by driving them to work. We give them freedom.

Anita, another former Connections Shuttle driver and dispatcher, is the Connections Shuttle permanent office assistant. She says,

I'm living proof that the shuttle has a lot to offer. I got experience in all aspects of the company. I took advantage of every aspect so I would have a nice résumé when I left. I did most of the scheduling, stats, and office work in all of my spare time between dispatching and driving. There is a lot of incentive to come to work and do your paperwork on time. We reward drivers with "Driver of the Month" awards. It builds up their confidence.

In 1999, Deana, the shuttle project supervisor, and Joanne, who was one of the drivers, received the outstanding employer and outstanding employee awards from CareerWorks. One of the Connections Shuttle's biggest successes was making the case to improve existing public transportation to serve a wider range of people, especially low-income workers.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Some of the difficulties that the Connections Shuttle planners faced were related to the time frame for the project. For example, the program was designed to have five vehicles and one backup. The county had only enough money for three new vans, but the county money did not come through in time to purchase the three vans by the project start date. The shuttle then borrowed vans from other Food and Nutrition Services programs to start on time. Finally, the Federal Transit District came through with funds for four additional vans.

Transporting children posed another challenge for the Connections Shuttle. In order to transport children to and from school, drivers normally need a school bus driver's license. For six months, Scott Bugental, director of the Transportation Division for Food and Nutrition Services, searched for the legislation and laws related to school bus license requirements. He discovered that a driver must operate a large school bus in order to require a school bus license. However, an adult driver can transport children to and from school in a vehicle that carries less than ten people. So, the drivers modified their vans by removing seats so that the carrying capacity was less than ten in order to transport children.

The final hurdle that Connections Shuttle planners cleared was convincing the unionized public transit drivers that the shuttle drivers would not compete with them for passengers. It was important to secure the support of the public transit drivers for the Connections Shuttle so that it could operate. Although Transit District management was involved in the task force from the beginning, the unionized transit drivers were not involved in the planning meetings, so they did not understand the need for the shuttle. When the shuttle planners explained that the shuttle passengers would be allowed to ride only after proving that they could not use public transportation, the United Transportation Union signed off in support of the program.

The Connections Shuttle drivers face a challenge as trainees in searching for a permanent job. The drivers know that their training time is limited to seven months, and ideally they would like to secure a job that starts as the training period ends. However, they often end up with job offers with starting dates either before their training period ends or long after the training period is over. The shuttle program suffers when drivers leave prematurely to take permanent jobs. Drivers would like more coordination between the Connections Shuttle training and local companies who hire drivers so that the training dates are in accord with hiring periods.

LESSONS LEARNED

Connections Shuttle planners and implementers learned the following lessons:

1. It is important to invite all relevant participants to engage in the planning process, including local officials, public transit drivers, and affected union leaders, in order to identify potential sources of resistance and address all problems as soon as possible. It is also important to allow for enough planning time. As a member of the Santa Cruz Area Transportation Management Association notes, "Make sure everyone is at the table from the start. It prevents misunderstanding. Our short time frame made the process less than ideal. We focused on getting the program going, then addressing problems. Give your program enough time to plan it all out."
2. A clear and comprehensive protocol for the driver and dispatcher training is essential, along with the establishment of a morale committee for drivers.
3. The human resources workers who recommend CalWORKs participants to the Connections Shuttle training must continuously recruit and screen for appropriate participants in order to maintain a steady

stream of applicants while carefully screening out participants who should not be in the training program.

4. Although the Connections Shuttle staff let clients know from the beginning that the shuttle is a temporary solution, it is important to provide additional assistance to help riders find more permanent solutions as soon as they become more self-sufficient.

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