

1995

Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Project

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Recommended Citation

Seekins, Tom Ph.D. and Rural Institute, University of Montana, "Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Project" (1995). *Independent Living and Community Participation*. Paper 25.

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Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Project

Case managers and agencies who serve people with disabilities want a system that makes individual responsibility for transportation possible. People with disabilities who live independently need better coordination of vital transportation services. **Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation (SVRT) Programs** offer a straightforward mechanism that uses trip vouchers or reimbursement of volunteers to provide rides. Liability coverage for volunteers can be provided in a variety of ways. Using volunteers reduces administrative and operating costs. Vouchers increase use and coordination of existing transportation providers.

Resolving the issue of providing transportation to people with disabilities in rural areas seems complex. Long distances often force people with disabilities to choose between dependence on agencies close to town or on family members and friends. Agencies are limited in the scope and availability of services, case managers that work directly with consumers are prevented by law from providing transportation services. Relying on natural supports is tenuous. Day-to-day schedules are unreliable, parents must work, not everyone has a brother or sister, friends leave, disability may affect more than one family member, parents age. Although per capita ownership of personal vehicles is much higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Kidder, 1989), this is true only for those who can afford it, as

57% of rural poor families do not own a car (Gillis, 1989). The underlying assumption is that people who choose to live in rural areas accept personal responsibility for transportation.

In counties where there are transportation services, like fixed route buses and taxis, providers of an SVRT Program distribute vouchers directly to people with disabilities. In counties where no accessible transportation exists, SVRT providers can coordinate liability coverage, recruit, train and reimburse volunteer drivers like friends, neighbors or co-workers who can provide rides.

For two years the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RTC: Rural) has drawn on the experiences of national transportation experts, three demonstration sites, and over 25 agencies that use voucher programs. From these they have written a detailed procedure manual and other materials that describe how a local agency (i.e., independent living center, area agency on aging, sheltered workshop) can develop and operate a voucher-driven transportation system.

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Produced by the Research and Training Center on Rural Rehabilitation with the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Rehabilitation Research Grant #H133B20002-94.