

Executive Summary

A Multi-Method Evaluation
of the
Phoenixville Community Health Foundation’s

Ride for Health Initiative

Conducted by

The Human Organization Science Institute
Villanova University

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This Executive Summary synthesizes a comprehensive evaluation report submitted to the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation (PCHF) by Villanova University’s Human Organization Science Institute (HOSI).

The Ride for Health Initiative: A Brief Overview of the Program

One of the Phoenixville Community Health Foundation’s “over-riding” goals is to “achieve access to and awareness of needed prevention and treatment services for all Phoenixville area citizens.” In November of 2006, working hand in hand with the Transportation Management Association of Chester County (TMACC), the PCHF initiated a new and innovative program, Ride for Health. The program is aimed at facilitating access to medical/dental treatment and prevention to economically needy persons in the Greater Phoenixville, PA area, persons who because of time and expense might otherwise forego such medical intervention. The program is indeed innovative. A literature search by the evaluators and efforts by TMACC revealed very few similar programs that used private cabs, and none that had been rigorously evaluated. As Ride for Health has matured, transport to ancillary services was added – services that contribute to quality of life and healthier lifestyles such as job training and access to housing shelters. Core support such as visiting a welfare office is also permissible. However, Ride for Health is not to be used for transportation to/from work, shopping, or recreation.

Essential features of the program include:

- Local human service agencies determining client eligibility and scheduling rides
- A local cab company (Pottstown Cab) providing rides at a somewhat lower than market rate
- TMACC maintaining program and fiscal oversight including reimbursing the cab company

Since its inception, continuous quality improvement has remained a hallmark of the program featuring quarterly discussion sessions among PCHF, TMACC, provider and cab company representatives wherein problems and best practices are identified and process analysis is applied to solving issues and ironing out programmatic wrinkles.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

A multi-method evaluation design was utilized featuring: a statistical profile, client survey and focus groups, a cost-benefit analysis, and individual interviews and typical client profiles. Here we summarize key findings. Please note that the full report not only amplifies these but also offers a series of observations for key stakeholders to discuss and consider.

Key Findings

- The number of annual current riders (n=307) has increased 700% since the initial year, 2006-2007; this constitutes about one ride per day (rides are not available on Sundays). The number of rides (n=926) has increased 500% over the same period.
- Partner agencies seem diligent in maintaining the eligibility criteria of the Ride for Health Initiative. Among the 35 cases analyzed, only one ride seemed to have a reasonable public transportation option, and this single ride is without insight as to possible special circumstances relating to the client.
- Among the rides analyzed, over 70% were theoretically possible through public transportation. However, the time and effort they required presented serious barriers to treatment for clients. Indeed, on average, Ride for Health saved a rider almost one-half a day time (3 hours and 44 minutes) compared to taking public transportation.
- For every dollar spent on the program (not including administrative costs) at least 61 cents of benefit is returned in the form of transportation time and cost savings to the rider. An additional 88 cents are realized as net social benefits to the transportation companies. When summed the return on a dollar is \$1.49. The inclusion of TMAACC administrative costs reduces these figures to 44 cents and 67 cents respectively, and reduces the overall total benefit to \$1.11 per dollar expended.
- The cost-benefit estimates above are probably low. A sensitivity table provides estimates of potential dollars saved to society because clients avoid negative health and social consequences. For example, the cost to society of someone in jail for a year is approximately \$27,740. Agency staff reported several clients who have been kept out of jail because of Ride for Health. While impossible to estimate an exact figure, such savings to society are real and present.
- More than 95% of riders responding to the survey judged the cab drivers to be careful with their driving and courteous and respectful; the cabs were clean inside; they would recommend Ride for Health to others.
- More than nine in ten agreed that they were able to get rides on the day they needed them.
- The area of punctuality did not fare as well. One in four riders disagreed that they were picked up on time. This was reinforced in the focus groups where the issue of punctuality related to several other issues such as waiting time and communication.
- Focus group and survey findings converged as overall, clients are extremely satisfied with and grateful for the cab service, and the drivers' interaction with them.
- Riders in the focus groups (as well as partner agency staff) confirmed that they do not have other reasonable means of transportation.

The Focus Group with agency staff yielded the following:

- Agency staff give the program special praise asserting that transportation is a critical issue that is often overlooked, or the “elephant in the room” that no one wants to deal with.
- Because of the program, partner agencies no longer have to divert their limited resources to providing and/or arranging travel for their clients.
- Overall management of the program was judged to be extremely effective, with TMAACC, PCHF, the Pottstown Cab Company and the partner agencies consistently communicating with one another. The

quarterly partners meetings play a vital role in promoting the flow of information and analyzing program performance.

- Partner agencies commended TMACC as being especially receptive and responsive towards feedback (good and bad).
- The rapport among the partner agencies, clients, Cab Company owners, and the cab drivers is extremely positive.
- The partner agencies note that Cab Company owners go out of their way to accommodate requests from the partner agencies, often accepting last minute requests or communicating with partner agencies after office hours.

Recommendations

The following recommendations proffered by the evaluators are described and analyzed in more detail in the full report.

Recommendation 1: Assist the Cab Company access Spanish speaking capacity. A significant portion of the riders are Spanish speaking and often struggle to communicate with the Cab Company and cab drivers.

Recommendation 2: Program administrators should embark on a process together with the partner agencies and Cab Company in order to analyze communication flow and channels, identifying blockages and strengths, with an eye towards enhancing and/or reengineering the system.

Recommendation 3: Review thoroughly the voucher record keeping with an eye towards maximizing accuracy and including how the data are recorded and utilized for program quality improvement and decision making.

Recommendation 4: Create an external identification for the exterior of the cabs (perhaps some type of magnetic sign), as well as a Ride for Health identification for both drivers and clients.

Summary

The evaluators are very grateful for the opportunity to assess Ride for Health. The program was found to be innovative, well-run, continuously improving via effective structures, cost efficient, highly utilized and meeting a basic health access need.

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