

Getting there is half the battle

**A Rideshare program for North Bay
(Pilot Version)**

Prepared by:

The North Bay Parent Advisory Committee

With support from:

The North Bay Social Planning Council's Kids and Community Project

INTRODUCTION

A large body of research has indicated that the social determinants of health, including the availability, accessibility and convenience of transportation can impose serious risks on the health of Canadians. Children want to have friends and freedom to know that they belong. Inclusion, for it to be meaningful for children means that their families have to belong as well. Parental barriers become children's barriers. Specifically, transportation barriers can lead to social isolation and a lack of community interaction, which leads to poorer health for family units as a whole (World Health Organization).

For example, many of us may take for granted that we can put the kids in the mini-van in order to attend a doctor's appointment, or take the pick-up truck to go grocery shopping in order to make it more convenient to load up the groceries. Unfortunately, it is not nearly as straightforward to take part in these essential tasks for families who are living on a low or fixed income.

In order to address this important social determinant of health, and to develop a meaningful solution for North Bay's families, a pilot version of a transportation program, entitled Rideshare has been proposed. Due to the complexity of the transportation issue in North Bay and the importance of cross-sectoral input, the proposal has been developed with the broad participation of our community's members, including consumer groups and service providers.

OBJECTIVE

To implement a Pilot version of the Rideshare program to be sustained for a period of 3 months. This program will assist in addressing the needs of North Bay's families on their quest to accessing food banks, grocery stores, and medical and agency-based appointments.

Throughout the Pilot Rideshare Program, specific feedback will be sought from riders and volunteers in terms of modifications and improvements to the program design.

RESEARCH – TRANSPORTATION IN NORTH BAY

How was the data collected?

Throughout the first six months of 2006, thirteen focus groups, each consisting of six to twenty-two parents were conducted throughout the community in order to identify the most pressing challenges confronting low-income families. Participants from those focus groups were then involved in a second focus group in order to review the previous focus group findings, and to continue to work on reducing barriers through action planning.

In order add further insight into this research, the findings were then presented for further clarification and elaboration at the Kids and Community Visioning Day in late June of 2006. The Visioning Day provided the opportunity for both service providers and consumers of services to provide input regarding action plan ideas that would improve the quality of life for children in our community.

A very dedicated group of concerned parents called the Parent Advisory Committee has since formed and has been meeting at least twice per month over the past year. This group engages and works collaboratively with community members in order to minimize some of the challenges that low-income parents face. Specifically, the Parent Advisory Committee has focused its efforts on the lack of

affordable and accessible transportation in our community, and has played a pivotal role in the development of the Rideshare Pilot Program.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – TRANSPORTATION

- Low-income families are 100% dependent on the local bus service and taxis for virtually all of their needs
- The transit fare of \$2.25 each way is much too expensive for families to afford on any regular basis. Also, the cost can add up quickly for a round trip with one or more children over the age of 5, who must pay full price.
- Taxis are a convenient, but not an affordable option for families who regularly require transportation. As soon as one enters the taxi, the meter starts at close to \$4.00.
- During times when transit is not running, it is not affordable to bring children to the hospital. For example, for a family who lives in the Ferris area of North Bay, they would have to pay \$15.00 one-way in taxi fare just to take a sick child to the hospital. That would cost \$30.00 for a round-trip, which is simply not an option for families living on a low-income.
- A substantial gap exists in North Bay as it relates to safe and affordable transportation for children. Several parents stated that they had no other option but to stay at home and sometimes even miss important doctor's appointments if they had no money left for transportation expenses.
- Families living on a low or fixed income are probably the most active citizens in our community because they have no choice. Unfortunately, due to temperature and the geographical dispersion of our city, it is just not an option when young children are involved.
- Families are often able to receive subsidies to register their children in recreational activities, but have no way of getting there. Many focus group participants stated that a community transportation program would make it much easier for families to participate in recreational activities and to feel as though they truly belong.
- Although certainly a desirable alternative, it is not possible for many families to own their own vehicle. It is much too expensive for a family who lives paycheck to paycheck to purchase, maintain and pay insurance on a vehicle. There is not enough money left at the end of the month to make this a viable option.
- Taxi companies are not mandated to have car seats available in their vehicles, which put the safety of our children at risk.
- The transit is often inconvenient, especially for parents who have several young children, and must use a stroller. This is compounded by the fact that children and parents are often not securely seated before the bus begins to move. In fact, one participant spoke about a sprain that her 2 year-old son endured due to this circumstance.
- Parents have an especially difficult time going grocery shopping or to food banks when using public transportation. It is nearly impossible to carry more than one bag of groceries when two or more children are in tow. There is also a bag limit imposed on buses.
- Travelling by bus takes much longer than crossing the city by car. Depending on the destination, it can take up to 90 minutes. In the winter, waiting at the bus stop with children can be debilitating.
- Because of the limited hours of the transit system in North Bay, it is not a viable mode of transportation for those who work night shifts.
- Many service providers in North Bay expressed frustration at having to transport their own clients to appointments because no other service is available. They stated that driving clients could be very time-consuming and onerous, especially when already managing inflated

caseloads and increasing amounts of responsibility on the job. For those agencies that do not transport, clients are simply unable to attend programs, stay home from work, or do not actively engage in community life.

WHAT IS THE PILOT RIDESHARE PROGRAM?

- The Pilot Rideshare Program will operate at 5% of what the fully expanded program would operate at, and will be operational for 3 months.
- This Pilot project has been created with local consumer groups and service providers through meetings and community action planning forums.
- Rideshare has not been designed to reinvent the wheel, or to replace existing services, but rather to complement and/or expand them.

AT A GLANCE...WHAT DOES THE RIDESHARE PILOT PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

- 1 part-time Volunteer Rideshare Co-ordinator will organize rides
- At least 50 rides per month will be given
- At least 6 families will make use of the Program
- 2-4 volunteer drivers will be recruited
- Riders will provide their own car seats
- The identification and implementation of an action plan to promote the Rideshare program and to encourage agencies and organizations to act as referral points for the program will be developed

HOW DOES THE RIDESHARED PILOT PROGRAM WORK?

- If a family has a medical or agency-based appointment or is going to get groceries and have no other means of transportation, the family will be referred by one of the agencies participating in the Rideshare Pilot program. The Rideshare Co-ordinator will then arrange a ride for the family from a volunteer driver.
- Riders must book their transportation at least **2 days in advance**. This program is about planning, organization and building parental capacity
- Those eligible to make use of the program are expected to pay a \$2.00 flat rate for each ride, and expected to pay their bill at the beginning of the month based on an estimation of number of rides required (up to 8 rides or \$16 per month).
- In the case of a cancellation, parents must inform (through telephone or email) the Rideshare Dispatcher at least 24 hours in advance of the scheduled pick-up in order to avoid incurring the \$2.00 service fee.
- The destination of travel must be at least 3 blocks from the departure point
- Drivers are not paid for their services, but are compensated for their kilometrage, and reimbursed at the end of the month.
- Riders are entitled to a maximum of 2 rides per family per week
- Riders must be attending medical, agency-based appointments, food banks, or grocery stores

GOVERNANCE OF THE RIDESHARE PILOT PROGRAM

- The Rideshare Advisory Council has been established in order to oversee the implementation of the Rideshare Pilot Program
 - The Advisory Council consists of consumers and stakeholders in the community
 - The Advisory Council will consist of no less than 6 members, and no more than 12 members are any given time
 - The Advisory Committee and Rideshare Coordinator will be meeting on a monthly basis for the duration of the Rideshare Pilot Program
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FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES ABOUT THE RIDESHARE PILOT PROGRAM, PLEASE CONTACT:

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FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE FAMILY REFERRAL PROCESS OR TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER DRIVER WITH THE RIDESHARE PILOT PROGRAM, PLEASE CONTACT:

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