

BUS ROUTE TO CARE is a community level intervention that aims to remove a common barrier to health care in the United States: a lack of transportation. The key characteristics of the Bus Route to Care are: the collaboration among area service providers; the helpful and friendly demeanor of the caseworkers staffing the bus; and the emphasis placed on allowing people to make their own decisions about the care they receive.

CURRENT ACTIVITY SETTING

Health Service Organization for Homeless Individuals, General Program

- ✓ Directly links the client to medical care
- ✓ Gets the client in a conversation about starting medical care
- ✓ Brings the agency closer to where HIV+ people are so that the conversation can begin

I. DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES

- ▶▶ To provide clients with transportation to health and social services
- ▶▶ To maximize opportunities for people to exit homelessness and increase their access to community services

POPULATION SERVED

- ▶▶ HIV+ and HIV- homeless individuals
- ▶▶ African American, Latino, and Caucasian populations

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Bus Route to Care uses community collaboration to provide homeless individuals with free transportation to social service organizations and health clinics.



QUICK NOTES:

Needs Assessment and Development

- ▶▶ The agency conducts a survey of area residents who are homeless to learn which service providers they would be interested in using if they had transportation.
- ▶▶ Survey responses are reviewed and the locations of the selected service providers are plotted on a map.
- ▶▶ The agency narrows the selections to a corridor of 18 service organizations that could be easily reached on a single bus route. Agencies with HIV specific services are included on the route.
- ▶▶ The agency surveys the 18 organizations and learns their hours of operation to ensure the route’s practicality and feasibility.
- ▶▶ It determines the bus stops and timetable.
- ▶▶ Next, it submits the bus-route schedule to transportation companies and requests their bids for operating a bus along the route.
- ▶▶ The agency consults with its consumer advisory board (consisting of homeless individuals and service providers) on the types of behavior to expect from clients and the best ways to monitor people’s seating and belongings on the bus. The agency also asks about the best way to market the activity.
- ▶▶ The agency determines the staffing needs for the bus.
- ▶▶ Approaching “friendly” members first, the agency appeals to the city council for funding. It provides data on homeless people and their needs and outlines the ways Bus Route to Care will benefit the city.
- ▶▶ After securing funding for the activity, the agency contracts staff for the bus route using the human resources of participating organizations. The agency selects two caseworkers every six months to rotate staffing on the bus.
- ▶▶ The agency attorney reviews the bus-route activity to identify legal liabilities and possible risks, and to assess the agency’s need for insurance coverage.
- ▶▶ It develops a policy for the distribution and use of bus passes. Under this policy, the participating service providers distribute single-use ride passes to eligible clients.
- ▶▶ The agency establishes a secure Web page with a database that enables participating service organizations to:
 - Register new clients electronically,
 - Review a list of “banned” clients (see Bus Policy below), and
 - Prepare and print bus passes for on-site distribution to clients. (The agency codes the bus passes by client name in order to track the number of clients served, providers used, and rides given.)
- ▶▶ The agency trains staff from all of the participating service organizations to use the Web-based database.
- ▶▶ Caseworkers who wish to provide passes to clients must take a ride on the bus beforehand.
- ▶▶ The agency trains the bus staff to collect passes and documentation of homelessness for the service and to record in the database who has ridden the bus. The agency also trains the caseworkers, who are assigned to ride the bus, to give clients service-provider information and referrals.
- ▶▶ The caseworkers meet weekly with their supervisor. In these meetings, caseworkers receive support, supervision, and further training.

Bus Route

- ▶▶ The bus runs from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- ▶▶ The bus route begins at the largest of three homeless shelters.
- ▶▶ As clients board the bus, the caseworkers greet them. If it is a client’s first time riding the bus, a caseworker will approach them and ask if they’d like to talk about available services.
- ▶▶ When filled to capacity, the bus heads to the first service organization on its route.
- ▶▶ It then continues on to the 17 other provider stops.
- ▶▶ After completing this first loop, the bus returns to the homeless shelters, fills, and delivers clients along the same provider loop.
- ▶▶ The bus route repeats until clients from all three homeless shelters have been delivered to their providers.
- ▶▶ The bus route then shifts to a more narrow loop around the social and health service providers to take clients from agency to agency.
- ▶▶ As 5:30 approaches, the bus repeats its first loop, transporting clients from the provider stops to their respective homeless shelters.

Bus Policy

- ▶ No weapons are permitted aboard the bus.
- ▶ Physical altercations and heated verbal arguments are prohibited.
- ▶ Caseworkers on the bus have discretion to ban a client from the bus for policy violations. Ban duration depends on the severity of the offense.

How Clients Obtain Bus Passes

- ▶ There are four ways for a client to obtain a bus pass:
 - Placing a request at one of the 18 participating agencies.
 - Participating in a meeting with agency outreach workers anywhere in the community. If an outreach worker determines in conversation with a client that the bus would be useful in helping the client reach his/her goals, the outreach worker may give the client a bus pass with a provider referral. Later, the outreach worker registers the client in the Web-based database.
 - Placing a request with staff while staying at a homeless shelter in the city.
 - Visiting one of 30 to 40 non-participating agencies throughout the city—including health, social, and HIV specific organizations, agencies of the federal and local governments, and non-profit organizations.

PROMOTION OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ Word of mouth from the clients and staff of other service organizations
- ▶ Monthly presentations by a national homeless coalition include promotion of Bus Route to Care.
- ▶ Agency newsletters and service brochures
- ▶ Agency case worker referrals

II. LOGISTICS

STAFF REQUIRED

- ▶ Caseworkers (2) to provide service information, referrals, and a welcoming presence on the bus
- ▶ Bus driver
- ▶ Caseworker supervisor to oversee the caseworkers and other Bus Route to Care staff
- ▶ Administrative support

TRAINING & SKILLS

- ▶ Bus driver should have or receive basic training in the prevention and management of conflict, aggressive behavior, substance abuse, mental disorders, and other conditions associated with homelessness.
- ▶ Staff members (bus driver excluded) must learn to use the Web-based database.

PLACE OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ Inner-city homeless shelters and health and social service organizations
- ▶ 40-passenger bus

FREQUENCY OF ACTIVITY

Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS

The agency contracts the bus driver through a private transportation company.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Caseworkers on the bus call the agency via a cell phone to request a translator or signer when necessary.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ▶▶ The local political environment must be receptive to implementation of this activity.
- ▶▶ Funding for the activity must be secured at the onset.
- ▶▶ Travel corridor must be compact for route to be viable.
- ▶▶ Riders with persistent coughs must wear a mask as a TB prevention measure.

III. STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES

STRENGTHS

- ▶▶ Addresses one of the top barriers to care: the lack of transportation
- ▶▶ Uses client-driven care planning
- ▶▶ Fosters true collaboration among service providers
- ▶▶ Offers an entry portal into a larger system of care

WEAKNESSES

None

DIFFICULTIES FOR CLIENTS

- ▶▶ The bus doesn't stop at each and every service organization that clients would like to use.
- ▶▶ On occasion, clients must be turned away because the bus has reached its capacity.

DIFFICULTIES FOR STAFF

- ▶▶ Caseworkers rotate every six months, necessitating periodic training.
- ▶▶ The forms collected to verify clients' homelessness are cumbersome for staff.

OBSTACLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Street detours due to road construction may result in frequent alterations to the bus route.

ACTIVITY NOT SUITED FOR

- ▶▶ Individuals who exhibit violent or threatening behavior
- ▶▶ People who are uncomfortable wearing a mask when they have a persistent cough

IV. OUTCOMES

EVALUATION

- ▶ The agency conducts quarterly, client-satisfaction surveys and semi-annual focus groups to assess the activity.
- ▶ There is an annual review of the route through satisfaction surveys given to clients (30% of whom are formerly incarcerated).

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Clients report they feel "very good" about the activity.
- ▶ Clients report that the activity makes it easier to keep appointments.
- ▶ Ridership is high, and the bus often fills to capacity.

UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS

- ▶ Clients' self-esteem improves when they know that people want them to receive care.
- ▶ A sense of camaraderie develops on the bus.
- ▶ Bus Route to Care has been a financially efficient way for the agency to meet its goal of bringing people into care. As a result, the agency saves money.

"CONNECTING TO CARE" ELEMENTS OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ The caseworkers aboard the bus are warm and gracious and create a welcoming environment for clients.
- ▶ The caseworkers provide information and referrals to any client who asks.
- ▶ It is the clients who make the decisions about their care.
- ▶ With transportation assured, clients have easier access to the care they choose.
- ▶ The bus stops are marked by signs bearing the same logo, which is well recognized by the target population.

KEEP IN MIND...

- ▶ The selection of stops has to be client-driven in order to avoid backlash from service providers that have not been selected.
- ▶ The activity is a good way to identify service providers that clients feel are truly useful to them.

