Freedom to Ride: Measuring the Effectiveness of Michigan’s Transportation Voucher Program

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Project ACTION: Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation

Purpose of this funding: To support research that addresses issues related to transportation challenges.

Research question: How did Michigan’s Transportation Voucher Program effect the quality of life and community connectivity of its participants?
MDDC Funded Transportation Voucher Projects
Project Timeline & Work Plan

April 1, 2009 – September 30, 2009

1. Conduct a literature review
2. Create and distribute a survey
3. Collect and analyze survey data
4. Produce final report
Reliable and accessible public transportation is the key to community inclusion and QOL.

An evaluation of the Traveler’s Cheque Voucher Program reported improved QOL and community participation.

The relationship between access to transportation and QOL has been examined infrequently.
## Key Informant Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background information on MDDC transportation activities</td>
<td>Diane Kempen and Glenn Ashley</td>
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Transportation Voucher Programs

- Augment existing services
- Rural communities
- Vouchers
- Volunteers
- Individual responsibility
# Impact of Transportation Vouchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost effective</td>
<td>Potential for misuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer oriented</td>
<td>Agencies’ reluctance to collaborate</td>
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<td>Choice</td>
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<td>Freedom</td>
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Current Research on Quality of Life (QOL)

- Wasfi, Levinson, and El-Geneidy: Transportation is related to QOL
- Schalock and Alonso: Social and community inclusion = higher QOL
- We know that access to transportation =
  - more community participation
  - higher QOL
- Where is the evidence that voucher programs help reach this goal?
Survey (27 questions)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Community participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher program experience</td>
<td>Voucher program experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation needs</td>
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<td>Quality of life</td>
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Data Collection Process

- Received IRB approval from WSU
- Contacted MDDC Voucher Project Directors
- 4 directors agreed to assist: Baraga, Jackson, Newaygo, and Wayne
- MDDC voucher project directors distributed survey packets via mail
- 311 survey packets were distributed
Survey Packets & Response

- Survey packet included:
  a. Survey
  b. Letter of invitation to participate in survey
  c. Information sheet about the survey
  d. Self-addressed, stamped envelope

- Incentive for participation: $10 Target gift card

- 73 surveys (24% response rate)
  - 3 respondents completed online
  - 52% were completed by a person with a disability
Impact of the transportation voucher program on quality of life

- Better with a voucher
- Better without a voucher
- The same with or without a voucher
Voucher Impact on Core Indicators of QOL

- Less stress (61%)
- More time in the community (61%)
- More time to relax (50%)
- Education/training (43%)
- Feeling respected (47%)
- Better relationships (43%)
- Maintaining a job (29%)
Where did you go with your voucher?

- School
- Travel outside local community
- Employment
- Visiting family and friends
- Medical appointments
- Errands
- Recreational community activities
What did you do with your voucher that you could not do before?

- School
- Employment
- Recreational community activities
- Visit family and friends
- Errands
- Travel outside local community
- Medical appointments
What were some things you disliked about the voucher program?

- Obtaining and returning voucher forms was difficult
- There were a limited amount of miles to use
- The program was too short
- Other
Findings: Existing Challenges and Areas of Improvement

- Lack of transportation options
  - 61% missed out on a social event
  - More than one quarter lost a job or missed out on getting a job

- Problems with voucher project
  - Tallying up the miles with each use
  - Unable to use public transportation
  - Difficulty locating volunteers
Qualitative Responses
Where did you go with your voucher?

- “I went to Wisconsin to visit my family.”

- “Traveled to see son graduate from college.”

- “I went to visit my mother who lives 90 miles away.”

- “I used the vouchers to pay for gas to get me to a medical billing class in Muskegon. I went to class 5 days per week.”

- “I attended church, I went bowling, I went shopping, I went for rides, I visited others, and I took short trips out of town.”
Where did you go with your voucher?

- “Everywhere: visit with family and friends, go to school, social events, volunteer at non-profit, went on trips.”

- “I attended high school sporting events around the Jackson area, went to the malls, had dinner with friends, visited local family, hit sporting events at MSU and U of M, attended the MHSAA basketball and baseball finals, and went to Pride Day twice.”
What did you do that you could not do before?

- “Get out of the house.”
- “Travel to the town 5 miles away.”
- “Help with the cost to my family. Feel better about getting rides.”
- “I could go on my own out of town doctors’ appointments, which I had been missing for months because I didn’t have anyone to take me.”
- “Was able to go places where and when I wanted because I could pay someone.”
What did you do that you could not do before?

- “Go out of the house. I can’t drive and it was nice to feel normal and not trapped inside.”
- “It allowed me to job seek farther out than what my previous area of job potential was.”
- “Go shopping, go visiting, go out for dinner, go to church.”
- “It allowed me to extend the places that I wanted to go to beyond the places where I had to go, like doctors and shopping. It gave me freedom to go beyond the required places.”
What were some problems you had with the voucher?

- “Getting reimbursed, getting and returning the voucher forms.”
- “Hard time getting to the site to turn in voucher forms.”
- “Getting the voucher and returning it.”
- “Keeping track daily.”
- “Availability of rides, volunteer trying to use as money making venture, hard to find willing drivers with lifts.”
What were some things you did not like about the voucher program?

- “Not enough miles.”
- “Having to tally up the amount with each use of the voucher.”
- “Only having a limited amount of miles to use.”
- “I couldn’t use public transportation because I wouldn’t in a wheelchair.”
- “Distance to pick up/return voucher forms.”
- “Wish voucher was in a coupon book format/short length.”
What were some things you did not like about the voucher program?

• “Voucher did not include any option such as funds to use a cab.”

• “No public transportation in my area.”

• “I did not have transportation to get out of my house at all during the day. I had to give up a summer internship. Finally 2 weeks before it expired, my supports coordinator gave me the name of a company 45 minutes away but it was too late.”
Other Comments

- “I relied on the voucher for everything. It really changed my life. Now I’m cooped up in the house again!”
- “I liked and enjoyed everything about the program. I miss it very much.”
- “It didn’t last very long. I wish it would come back.”
- “When the services were cut off, transportation became limited.”
- “It was a very good program. It helped me.”
Access to transportation → community participation → higher quality of life

Transportation barriers prevent people from maintaining relationships and having access to the community.
Limits of Findings

- Limited transportation resources, especially for people with developmental disabilities
- Data is not comprehensive
- Modify research approach
  - Field test survey instrument
  - Conduct focus groups
  - Direct interviews
- Brief project: 6 month study
Recommendations for Future Research

- A comprehensive study examining the effectiveness of transportation voucher programs
- More quantitative data
- Explore impact of vouchers in urban communities
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