**PRIDE Provider/Peer Mentor Module #5:**

**Transportation Options and Resources for Job-Seeking Refugees with Disabilities in Chicago**

Transcript

Hello everyone and welcome to PRIDE Provider Training Module 5. This module focuses on different transportation options and resources for job-seeking refugees with disabilities.

We’ll start with a fictional case of a refugee with a disability that is related to transportation. Let’s read it together.

“Abdi is a 55-year-old refugee from Somalia who uses a wheelchair as a result of a serious car accident in Chicago. He has experienced barriers to accessing transportation to get to work and to participate in community activities. He would like to explore transportation resources and services available to support people with disabilities in Chicago.”

This module will introduce available resources that a refugee with a disability such as Abdi could utilize.

Here’s an overview of what the rest of the module will cover: Accessible transportation; local transportation options for refugees with disabilities in Chicago and Illinois; available transportation-related trainings and supports; and driver rehabilitation. Alright! Let’s begin.

Transportation is often cited as a barrier to employment for people for disabilities. A person seeking employment or trying to maintain employment requires accessible transportation options for many reasons, such as attending job interviews, getting to work, and participating in work-related trainings. That being said, it can often be a challenge for people with disabilities, including refugees, to find accessible transportation. There is no one solution for these transportation barriers. As a service provider, you can connect your refugee clients with disabilities to local resources and investigate what is available and practical given each client’s individual needs.

People with disabilities have a right to accessible public transportation options. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), individuals cannot be denied public transportation services because of a disability. Supporting equal access to public and private transportation means more than ensuring physical accessibility. Someone with a disability who is seeking employment or who is working may need other supports to make transportation truly accessible. For example, people with cognitive disabilities or people who are Blind may benefit from travel or mobility training to support their use of transportation. Support can also involve coordination of transportation resources and education on the rights of people with disabilities with respect to public transportation under the ADA.

Paths of travel, or getting to and from a fixed route bus or train, also must be accessible. It is important to examine the walkways and sidewalks to make sure that they are free from barriers or obstacles that prevent easy passage. Sometimes natural weather conditions, such as snow, can impede travel and navigation on pathways. Also, there may be problems with pavement cracks or curb cuts, or no curb cuts. Manmade obstructions such as newspaper stands or garbage cans may also impede navigation. Local city highway or transportation departments can help with obstructions on sidewalks that inhibit access to fixed routes.

Transportation options for people with disabilities. Choosing among the many transportation options for people with disabilities can be confusing. This module will cover accessible public transportation and ride sharing options, as well as driver rehabilitation and/or vehicle modifications for people with disabilities. It is important both to be aware of available local services and to be able to find creative ways to address transportation barriers, keeping in my individual needs, preferences, and cost.

Considerations for selecting transportation options. The needs of individuals are important and take into account where people live, where they want to go, what type of supports or accommodations may be needed. Individual preferences such as sensory or social preferences are also important. If riders don’t like crowds, or have difficulties with loud noises, transportation modes that are quiet may be best suited for these individuals. Reliability and safety of a transportation mode is important including whether the service is on time, whether drivers/operators are responsive, and whether the vehicles are safe and secure. The cost for transportation can be paid exclusively by the rider or the transportation provider – or costs can be shared. Riders are encouraged to learn whether transportation programs have any reduced or half-fare options.

Accessible transportation services and supports. What kinds of accessible transportation services and supports exist in Illinois? Within our state, there are many services that refugees with disabilities can use to enable community participation, including participation in work. This module divides these services and supports into four categories: public transportation, travel and mobility training, rideshare, and driver rehabilitation.

Accessible transportation services and supports, continued. There are many accessible public transportation options in Chicago provided by CTA, Metra, and Pace. Pace in particular offers numerous services that people with disabilities may be able to use, including accessible buses, Paratransit, the Taxi Assistance Program, or TAP, Mobility Direct, and Vanpool. Each of these will be covered in the module. There are also free travel and mobility trainings offered by organizations such as the Regional Transit Authority, or RTA, J.J.’s List, which is an organization for people with disabilities, and Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind. Numerous online supports also exist, including instructional videos.

Accessible transportation services and supports, continued. The module will also feature Uber as a rideshare company that aims to provide accessible transportation. Last, we will highlight driver rehabilitation services, including evaluation, training, and vehicle modifications.

Public transportation systems: CTA, Metra, and Pace. The Chicagoland area offers public transportation options CTA, Metra, and Pace. CTA is a system of buses and trains that operates within Chicago. Metra is a train system for commuters who live outside Chicago. Pace is a bus system that also offers a variety of alternative transportation options for customers with disabilities. We’ll go into detail about each of these options, starting with CTA.

Chicago Transit Authority, or CTA. Let’s move on to the CTA system, which serves the city of Chicago. More than 2/3 of CTA is accessible, which includes all buses and trains. However, not all train stations are accessible. You can check out this link to see which stations are accessible. CTA’s accessibility features include bus ramps and lowering buses, wheelchair securement, priority seating, lighted LED signs and audio announcements, Braille signage, and tactile platform edging. Passengers with disabilities must have a permit to get reduced fares and free rides on CTA. More information on reduced fare and free ride permits and how to apply for them will come later in the module.

Metra. Metra’s commuter train system has 11 lines, all of which are accessible to people with hearing, visual, and mobility disabilities. Each train has accessible cars identified with the international access symbol. These cars have roll-on bridge plates between vestibules and high-level platforms or lifts from low-level platforms, and 3 wheelchair areas. However, not all Metra stations are accessible. This slide has a link to the list of 173 fully accessible and 22 partially accessible stations. Metra offers a shuttle service called “P-8” to transport passengers from “qualifying origins” to the next accessible station at no additional charge. The origin must be one-half mile or less from a non-accessible station. There is no formal certification of disability required to use a P-8 shuttle, but it does require a reservation. Reservations must be made 3 hours in advance.

Pace Bus. Similar to CTA, the Pace bus system’s fixed routes are all accessible. This includes “kneeling” or lowering buses, ramps, priority seating, and wheelchair securement. People with disabilities can apply for Reduced Fare or Free Ride permits, for which there are eligibility requirements. These permits can be used on CTA, Metra, and Pace. This slide contains a link to information on Pace Bus regular and reduced fares.

Reduced Fare and Ride Free permits. Reduced Fare and Ride Free permits for people with disabilities can be used for both Pace and CTA. The reduced fare is about half of the regular fare for CTA trains and buses and Pace buses. Ride Free is for people 65 and over and people between the ages of 18 and 64 who have disabilities and who have income below a certain amount. More information can be found through the link to the Department of Aging’s website under Benefit Access. People with disabilities can apply for these permits in person or by mail. The Reduced Fare and Ride Free permit application can be found on the RTA website. To be eligible for a Ride Free permit, applicants must apply online for the Department of Aging’s Benefit Access Program, which requires proof of income. Included in this slide is a link to Reduced Fare and Ride Free permit applications.

Pace Paratransit. Another Pace option exists for people with disabilities who cannot use a fixed bus or train service. It is called Pace ADA Paratransit service. Pace Paratransit only operates in areas served by buses and CTA trains. Pick-up and drop-off locations must be within three-quarters of a mile of a bus or CTA train route. Rides must be reserved at least 1 day in advance. The cost is $3.00 per trip even for Reduced Fare and Ride Free permit holders.

Pace Paratransit, continued. In order to use this service, customers must be ADA Paratransit-certified with the Regional Transportation Authority, or RTA. The first step is to call 312-663-HELP between 8:30 AM to 5 PM, Monday to Friday, to request an application. After completing the application, they should call the same number to schedule an in-person interview. An eligibility determination will be made within 21 days after the interview. The RTA website contains a Paratransit guide and service guidelines, for which the links are provided here.

Pace Vanpool. Pace offers another option called Vanpool, which is similar to a carpool except that the van is provided by Pace. A workday vanpool arrangement must include a designated driver and a backup driver. A person can join an existing vanpool or start a new one. Pace will supply the van, fuel, insurance, tolls, and maintenance. The monthly cost varies, depending on the number of people in the vanpool and the distance driven. This option is available for people living in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. A link for Pace Vanpool is provided on the slide.

Pace Taxi Access Program, or TAP. Pace also administers a Taxi Access Program, also known as TAP. This allows riders who are ADA-Paratransit certified to use accessible taxis at a lower cost. TAP is only for same-day trips that start within Chicago. The cost is $3 for trips up to $20. Users can purchase rides online, by mail, or in person. Each user must have a TAP card, which can be requested by mailing an order form or by calling 800-606-1282. This slide contains a link to the TAP User Guide.

Pace Mobility Direct. Pace also administers Mobility Direct. It is a subscription taxi service for ADA Paratransit-certified riders, but it is limited to trips of up to 10 miles and to repetitive origin-to-destination trips such as home to work and/or work to home within Chicago city limits. The fare is $2.25 cash for each one-way trip. A companion or personal care assistant can ride with a Paratransit-certified passenger for free. The Pace Bus website provides a Mobility Direct customer guide with more information.

Travel and mobility training.

RTA Travel Training. If a person with a disability needs training to use the public transportation system, there is free face-to-face training available through the Regional Transit Authority, or RTA. Participants pay only the cost of fares. The training covers how to use CTA, Metra, and Pace. There are three types of trainings offered. Trip training is one-on-one training on buses and trains to practice specific routes. The individual transit orientation provides a general introduction to bus and train accessibility. And the group transit orientation provides a general introduction for groups of participants as well as staff of agencies that serve people with disabilities. This slide contains a link the RTA Travel Training brochure, which contains more information about the program.

Hop on the Bus Workshop. Another travel training resource is the J.J.’s List Hop on the Bus Workshop. J.J.’s List has partnered with Pace Suburban Bus to offer this workshop. It is open to any school, agency, family, or service provider that works with people with disabilities age 14 or older in the 6-county area serviced by Pace Suburban Bus, which includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. The workshop is 90 minutes and includes three components. It begins with instruction in and practice with using the rtachicago.org online trip planner. Then participants have the opportunity to practice on a real Pace bus, learning how it works, how to pay fares, and how to reach their destinations safely. The training concludes with a review of the physical accessibility features of the bus.

The Chicago Lighthouse Orientation and Mobility Training. Another training option for people who are Blind or visually impaired in the Chicagoland area is offered by The Chicago Lighthouse. This organization has an orientation and mobility training program. This program supports clients to develop skills for safe, effective, and efficient travel. Professionals work with clients to enhance their environmental, body, and spatial awareness. They also provide training in using tools for independence such as white canes, dog guides, and electronic travel aids. The training can take place at any time and in any environment the client needs to navigate, such as routes to school or work or local neighborhoods.

Online training resources, including instructional videos.

Rideshare. Another transportation option for refugees with disabilities is the rideshare service Uber.

Uber. Uber is an on-demand rideshare service, similar to a taxi service. Uber users request rides using a smartphone app. Drivers use their own cars to transport passengers. The cost varies depending on the trip, demand, and time of day. There is no membership fee for Uber.

Uberpool is a more affordable option that allows a person to share their ride with one or more other riders.

Uber accessibility. Uber has accessible options and accessible features for people with various kinds of disabilities. For example, they offer features that promote access by people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people with mobility disabilities. UberWAV is one Uber option that has wheelchair-accessible vehicles. All Uber drivers are expected to accommodate users with assistive devices, including walkers and wheelchairs, as well as service animals. In addition to providing riders with accessible options, Uber hires drivers with disabilities. For example, Uber has thousands of deaf and hearing-impaired drivers. It also has drivers with physical disabilities who may use vehicle modifications such as hand controls. More information may be found at the link on the slide.

Driver rehabilitation. Driver rehabilitation refers to programs that train people with disabilities to drive their own vehicles if they are able to with the appropriate supports.

Driver rehabilitation evaluation. The Occupational Therapy Department at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago offers a driver rehabilitation evaluation for drivers who are referred by a physician. There are two parts to the evaluation: an assessment in the clinic and a behind-the-wheel evaluation.

Driver evaluation: Potential cost. In terms of cost, while insurance will usually cover the cost of the clinical portion, it does not cover the cost of the behind the wheel evaluation, additional training, or equipment. However, there may be alternative funding sources available through some of PRIDE’s partners.

Rush University Driver Rehabilitation Evaluation. To be eligible for the driver rehabilitation evaluation, a person must have not had a seizure for the past 6 months, must have a referral from a physician, and must have a valid driver’s license or permit. The contact number is 312-563-2454.

Driver rehabilitation and vehicle modifications. Many individuals do return to driving after acquiring a disability. If a driver rehabilitation evaluation determines that an individual is safe to return to driving, further training and vehicle modifications may be recommended. Examples of vehicle modifications include hand controls, adjustable seats and foot pedals, extra-wide doors, and support handles for entry and exit. More information on transportation options can be accessed online. For example, the Shirley Ryan Ability Lab website contains information about driver rehabilitation programs in Chicago. The link is included on this slide.

The Chicago Lighthouse Driving Rehabilitation Program. In addition to the orientation and mobility training that the Chicago Lighthouse offers, it has a driving rehabilitation program for drivers with vision loss. The program supports clients to comprehensively evaluate their driving skills, stay apprised of Illinois state laws, determine eligibility to continue driving, use assistive devices to optimize driving skills, and explore alternative transportation options. They may also prescribe assistive devices such as the ones already described.

The Chicago Lighthouse Driving Rehabilitation Program, continued. To contact the Chicago Lighthouse, you can call Laura Hayes at 312-447-3433. This slide contains a link to more information on the Chicago Lighthouse Driving Rehabilitation program.

Additional resources are available in the Chicagoland and Illinois area, including those from the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, or MOPD, and our city’s Independent Living Center, Access Living.

Transportation Case Example: Part 2.

“Since his injury, Abdi has faced barriers in getting to work. He has learned about the Rush University Driver Evaluation and driver rehabilitation programs in Chicago. Abdi is interested in returning to driving so that later he can start a transportation business to address the needs of others with disabilities.

Abdi’s business would be similar to Soma Transportation, a Minnesota-based service specializing in non-emergency medical transportation that offers door-to-door service. Abdi has gotten advice from Soma Transportation and the PRIDE program about how to start such a company in Illinois.”

Thank you for completing PRIDE Provider Module 5. This slide shows the sources used in the module. The PRIDE team would like to thank PRIDE partner Judy Shanley of Easter Seals, for narrating the module. Judy is an expert on accessible transportation and is currently working on a federal project with the National Center for Mobility Management.