Transportation Summit Highlights: Challenges and Opportunities for Change

By Maria Schaertel

Self-advocates, family members, agency representatives, government officials, and transportation officials gathered for the Finger Lakes and Western New York Transportation Summit in Batavia, NY on Nov. 5, 2016. The purpose of the meeting was to address transportation challenges and ultimately, make improvements statewide by:

- defining transportation challenges for individuals who have disabilities;
- learning about current developments and practices;
- engaging in conversation on the topic, and brainstorming solutions.

A white paper based on the day’s proceedings is forthcoming with the goal of sharing ideas and making appeals for support to policymakers and legislators.

Kirk Maurer, OPWDD Director, Region 1, began his introduction with a riddle: “How do you break up a very intense discussion of service delivery between policymakers with just one word? Say “Transportation.” As you all know, transportation is complicated, and it’s challenging.”

“Self-advocates... tell me their biggest fear is loneliness. How much greater must that fear be when you know that your transportation supports are few and far between?”

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Help Starbridge Light the Way!

People who reach out to us are often looking for hope—that their situations can change or improve, that there are possibilities for fulfillment and success.

Or they have hope but need to know how—what supports or services can help, what they have the right to expect, or who can partner with them to get them where they want to go.

The star in Starbridge represents possibility, the uniqueness of each person, and aspirations. The bridge represents connections, partnership, and resources. Put those two together and you have an organization—Starbridge—lighting the way to both the hope and the how.

We partner with people who have disabilities and families to realize fulfilling possibilities in education, employment, health, and community living. Support from donors goes to programs at greatest need, such as educational supports that lead to higher graduation rates, or job training programs for youth. Each individual success—like Marilyn’s—creates a ripple effect and leads to stronger, more inclusive communities. [To read Marilyn’s story, follow this link]

If your loved one has received support from Starbridge, if you have received information from us or attended a workshop, you know that Starbridge is committed to connecting you with the information, support and resources you need.

Your donation—of any size—to Starbridge will help to make sure that we can be there for the next person or family who needs us.

Please help us light the way for others in our community. Give today.

Matt Perdue, Board Chair

Colin Garwood, President/CEO

Ready to help Starbridge light the way to the HOPE and the HOW?

Click here to donate online.

Would you prefer to mail your gift? If so, please mail it to Starbridge Attn: Jean Sciacchitano 1650 South Avenue, Suite 200 Rochester, NY 14620

Starbridge is a not-for-profit agency. Your gift is 100% tax deductible.

Save the date!

Celebration of Champions | May 13, 2017

Join us for a festive and inspiring evening as we honor people and organizations creating positive change in the lives of people who have disabilities, and raise funds to support Starbridge programs.

For more information visit our website calendar.
Family Skill Building Series

January 28, 2017, 10:00am-1:30PM
Arc of Yates County, 240 North Avenue, Penn Yan, NY 14527
Join us for a Half-Day Series to Boost Your Educational Efforts!

School Avoidance Issues – 10:00-11:30am
Anxiety is a natural part of childhood, but when anxiety gets in the way of a child’s ability to learn, families may need support and services through the Committee on Special Education. Learn how to collaborate with your child’s school and what supports and services may be available through school for a child who has anxiety.

Your Child’s Life Organizer – 12:00-1:30pm
In this workshop, participants will learn how to organize their child’s educational and medical records to help them better advocate for their child, save time, and reduce stress. Each participant will leave with the materials they need to create an Educational Records Organizer and a Health Care Notebook for their child.

Registration is required. This series is FREE to family members. To register, please go to our website calendar or call the Registration line at (585) 224-7399. Lunch will be provided.

Presented by Starbridge and Parent to Parent of NYS in partnership with Arc of Yates County.

Friends Helping Friends

Monthly Meetings

Wednesdays, January 18, February 15, March 15, 4:30-7:00pm
Starbridge, 1650 South Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620
Friends Helping Friends is a group for self-advocates and their supporters. Friends believe all individuals have value, talents, and gifts. We will not be defined by a label or the limitations of disability. We believe that with determination, we can achieve anything we put our minds to. Join us on Facebook by liking the Friends Helping Friends page.

Ask the Advocate

Have questions about special education or disability supports and services?

January 25, 2017 6:00-7:30pm
Southwest Area Neighborhood Association
275 Dr. Samuel McCree Way
Rochester, NY 14611

This workshop provides a unique opportunity to hear a Starbridge advocate’s perspective on the special education process, disability services, or other related topics. Get tips on partnering with your child’s school in any situation. This is designed to be an open forum in which participants ask questions in a group setting.

Registration is required. This workshop is FREE to family members.

To register, please go to our website calendar or call Registration at (585) 224-7399.

Please request special accommodations at least two weeks before the event.

Taking Care of You

January 11, 2017
12:00-1:00pm
Starbridge
1650 South Ave.
Suite 200
Rochester, NY 14620

Working hard to care for others? Don’t forget to take care of you, too!
Caregivers can benefit from real, honest conversations about the personal impacts of providing care and support to a person who has a disability. Learn to recognize and reduce stressors, as well as increase self-awareness about your role and responsibilities. The goal is to create more balance and resilience so we can continue to give our best to those we love and support.

Registration is required. This series is FREE to family members.
To register, please go to our website calendar or call the Registration line at (585) 224-7399.
Bus Drivers Are the Gatekeepers to a Child’s Day

Who is the first person your child encounters upon leaving for school? It could be a bus driver or a transportation aide. It is important for the bus driver or aide to know some basic information about your child in order to start the day off on a positive note and to keep your child safe, especially if your child has difficulty communicating or has special transportation needs.

Julie Buick, Starbridge Parent Education Specialist and Trainer, introduced her children to the new bus driver each school year with a simple, one-page fact sheet per child. She now shares her idea with other parents whose children may benefit from this simple, effective tool.

Here are some items that can be included on the fact sheet.

- Child’s name
- Child’s age
- Photo of child
- Things to be aware of. List several sentences or phrases that describe areas of need and include ways to respond or support the child.
- Parents’ or guardians’ contact information

One last suggestion: Keep the fact sheet to just one page.

Example of Fact Sheet

NHTSA Training Guidelines for Transportation Personnel

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has a training module for Transportation of Children with Special Needs.

The module advises bus drivers and attendants to “know your students and what they need.”

Guidelines

- Have transportation personnel who work with a student at the IEP meeting to learn more about a child’s transportation needs.
- The school bus driver/attendant should know the characteristics of the disability and the equipment the student needs and uses.
- Check each student’s ITP (Individual Transportation Plan) for special instructions or precautions.
- The IEP should provide the necessary specificity so the driver, school, parent and student know what services to expect.

NHTSA also has a training module on Emergency Situations when transporting children with special needs. Parents should:

- Check your state regulations and any school policies about transporting children with special needs
- Discuss your child’s transportation safety needs with the IEP Team
- Document in writing any transportation issues and concerns
- If your child has transportation needs, ask the school bus driver to join the IEP team.
- Any support and training for teachers and other school personnel (i.e., bus drivers and aides) must be written in your child’s IEP.

Find more Transportation topics, along with a variety of other special education topics, on the Wrightslaw website Helpline page: http://www.wrightslaw.com/blog/helpline-topics-t/
Accessible Parking Etiquette

1. As per the New York Accessible Signage and Logo Act of 2014, NYS uses a new version of the International Symbol for the Disabled, which shows someone active.

2. Do not make quick judgments. Many people with accessible parking permits have an “invisible” disability that qualifies them for a hang tag or license plate. A person does not have to be using a wheelchair to qualify. Examples of invisible disabilities: brain injury, back injury, heart condition, muscular disease, mobility disability, oxygen impairment, neurological impairment, etc.

3. Use the term “Accessible Parking” instead of “Handicapped Parking”.

4. Not every accessible spot is the same. There are spots for cars that are standard width and spots for vans that are 96” wide, to allow for maneuvering a wheelchair lift. Don’t park in an access aisle which is marked with stripes.

5. Contact your local town hall for permit information.

6. Borrowing a family member or friend’s placard to get a closer parking spot is not only illegal, but disrespectful. The person who is qualified for the placard must be in the vehicle for it to be used. Do not allow others to misuse your plates or permit.

7. Do not confront someone who may be parked illegally. Let the authorities handle this.

- notes from Erie County Office for People with Disabilities brochure, Rev. April 2016

Bus Drivers Are the Gatekeepers to a Child’s Day continued

Maritza Cubi, Starbridge Bilingual Family Education Specialist, feels it is important to cultivate clear communication with the bus driver: “I believe it’s important to get to know the driver. I have even asked for consistency in drivers, and have shared my cell phone number with the drivers. Bus drivers are as important as teachers to me. They are transporting a precious cargo.”

Make your experience count as you learn to make an even bigger impact in the lives of people with diverse needs.

The Warner School of Education will prepare you to work with students and clients in school, community and counseling settings. Consider these exciting options:

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WALTER SCOTT KENNEDY MEMORIAL BRIDGE
Transportation Summit
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“Certainly today we’re here to respond to that fear. But we’re also here to help ensure a civil right, to ensure that the right to integration and to the life of the community is never denied for lack of accessible and affordable transportation.

“Three years ago when the Olmstead Cabinet released its recommendation on how New York should meet its obligation to community integration under the Supreme Court’s Olmstead decision, they clearly understood the challenge and the opportunity in coordinating disability transportation services and made a commitment to and investment in mobility management.”

Laura Gawel, DDWNY (Developmental Disability Alliance of Western New York) Transportation Committee Chairperson and organizer of the event, began the first session with an invitation to members of the large group to share their transportation challenges. She asked respondents to specify whether they lived in an urban, suburban, or rural area.

In response, many self-advocates described the challenges of transportation which affect all aspects of their lives: work, recreation, medical care, community involvement, family gatherings, and relationships. Just a few of the problems include:

- Limited to no weekend or evening service
- Long wait times after appointments
- Difficulty with transportation across county lines
- Safety on overcrowded buses
- Unwarranted suspensions of service
- No-shows

A panel of speakers followed the large group discussion.

Panel Comments

Russ Maxwell, President/Owner of Medical Answering Services, discussed his organization’s role in managing Medicaid transportation for NYS Department of Health.

“Medicaid’s philosophy is this: They’re the largest single payer of transportation services in NYS; They are the largest single largest payer of health care in NYS. They think, therefore, that their clients, people who have Medicaid, should be given the highest quality medical services and the highest quality transportation services, as befits the largest payer of those services…”

John Prospero, Transportation Director of The Arc of Livingston-Wyoming, expressed the value of sharing success stories across counties. He said that the three keys to success in the rural counties he serves are coordination, flexibility, and money. “One of the largest problems that people will encounter is that as [traditional, segregated] work centers close and the push is for community employment, what are we missing? We’re missing the funding to transport people to

Want to Get Involved?

RTS Access invites people with disabilities, and those who support and/or represent people with disabilities, to apply to join the Paratransit Advisory Committee.

The purpose of this committee is to provide RTS Access with a broad perspective from the paratransit customer’s point of view regarding issues related to paratransit services. The committee will provide input for provisions including paratransit services, RTS Access policies and procedures, public participation, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues, and the development of a community Mobility Management Plan.

Please Note: Selections will be made by committee. There are a limited number of positions available on the committee. Applications received but not selected will be maintained on file for 1 year.

For further information, please visit the RTS website http://www.myrts.com/RTS-Access/Paratransit-Advisory-Committee or contact Joy Pacheco, RTS Access, at jpacheco@myRTS.com
community employment. That’s going to be a huge issue.”

Bill MacDonald, representing Medical Motor Services, discussed a collaboration between several agencies and Medical Motors in which they “came together to look at the changing landscape of people moving into more inclusionary activities... The surprising thing is that non-profit agencies who provide transportation are actually doing a...good job of scheduling those vehicles. The perception is that they are inefficient and we need to make them more efficient. The reality is we that we’re moving to a new paradigm where people need individualized transportation. ‘How do we get a person home from work at 10:00 at night?’ is not the same thing as ‘how do we better organize group route trips?’”

Jennifer Blair, Chataqua County Mobility Manager, described the county’s efforts to create “a one-stop shop website for mobility management.” “All the things that Chataqua County is doing can be seen on the Department of Transportation’s Coordinated Transportation Plan. Any county that has a mobility manager...one of their job duties is to update this plan. And how they create this plan is by coordination and collaboration with everyone that’s involved in their county...” See Chataqua County’s transportation plan here: http://www.co.chautauqua.ny.us/DocumentCenter/View/1364

Joy Pacheco, Regional Transit Service, Community Outreach, described the RTS Transit Center in Rochester (opened Nov. 2014) which features monitors providing real-time departure information; ADA height accessible trip planner; ADA height accessible phones for RTS Customer Service and automatic schedule data; and translation services in over 140 languages. She announced the new Tap & Go RTS Fast Pass as a new payment option that aids the general ridership, including people with disabilities. See sidebar.

Maggie Brooks, VP, Regional Transit Services, Strategic Initiatives, described a future vision for “a more robust RTS.” Strategic Initiatives include a van pool pilot with the City of Rochester, a bike share program with the City of Rochester, smart card technology (See Tap and Go), mobile ticketing, U-Pass program linking area colleges with the community, electric buses, autonomous buses, and diversification of existing bus fleet. “We hope the end result will be to implement strategic changes and identify strategic connections county to county.” Brooks, formerly Monroe County Executive, referenced her “past life” in her last point, a call to action, appealing to the summit members to contact legislators and advocate for change.

“The most powerful thing we could present in Albany is the voice of the customer. They listen to you.”

The Tap & Go RTS Fast Pass is a new fare card that lets you tap on the fare box — rather than swipe — when boarding.

- Buy at a RTS Ticket Vending Machine or myRTS.com/buy-passes
- Easy to Use: just tap the Tap & Go! RTS Fast Pass on a fare box’s bullseye target, then take your seat
- Available as 5-Day, 31-Day, and Stored Value Passes
- Pass is activated with the first tap
- Check your pass’ balance at a RTS Ticket Vending Machine while waiting for your bus
- Tap & Go! RTS Fast Passes are not refillable
- Magnetic fare cards in other denominations still available
One hundred fifty energetic participants who packed the auditorium highlighted the strong interest in and critical need for transportation reform in NYS for people who have disabilities. I attended the Transportation Summit in November (see page one) and heard the witness of self-advocates whose frustration and passionate appeals for change was very moving.

Transporting people is a complex endeavor; I gained a greater appreciation for that by listening to the transportation officials whose task can be daunting.

But I also heard from individuals who are just trying to get to work, a doctor’s appointment, or a friend’s house. It is worth the time, money, and effort to provide safe and reliable transportation when we consider how profoundly people’s lives were affected by it.

The day ended with a self-advocate stating that a committee would be formed to visit legislators and present the day’s findings to be outlined in the forthcoming whitepaper (A whitepaper is “a persuasive, authoritative, in-depth report on a specific topic that presents a problem and provides a solution.”) I am encouraged that the summit was a spark in NYS to further develop and improve transportation. With self-advocates at the helm, I believe this task will be accomplished.

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Happy Holidays to all! May you enjoy time with family and friends this holiday season. And best wishes for a happy 2017!!

From the Editor:

Maria Schaertel

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Please visit: www.nyspip.org.

Congratulations goes out to the Fall 2016 Class of NYS Partners in Policymaking as they become graduates at the end of December. They are a welcome addition to the ever-growing Partners graduate network! We are currently recruiting for the 2017 class which will begin in March, 2017. If you are interested in applying or know someone that would make a great Partner, please visit www.nyspip.org and click on Apply Now.