

## Department Standard Operating Procedure



DATE: June 12, 2015

TO: Family Services Department

RE: **Transportation Program Policies and Procedures**

### **Introduction:**

This document provides an overview of Opportunities' Transportation Program. As part of the application process, each applicant will receive a copy of the program policies.

The main focus of our Transportation Program is to remove the transportation barrier that often prevents individuals from maintaining their employment. A program worker is responsible for the day to day running of the program, with supervisory oversight provided by the Family Services Manager.

In providing services under our Transportation program, we feel it is important to use the "Family Development Philosophy," which includes the following principles:

1. All people, and all families, have strengths;
2. All families need and deserve support, which can vary throughout time;
3. Most successful families are not dependent on long-term public support, nor are they isolated;
4. Diversity is an important reality in our society, and is valuable.
5. Families and family development workers are equally important partners in the empowerment process, with each contributing important knowledge;
6. Families must choose their own goals and methods of achieving them. Family development worker's roles include assisting families in setting reachable goals for their own self-reliance, providing access to services needed to reach these goals, and offering encouragement;
7. Services are provided in order for families to reach their goals, and are not themselves a measure of success;
8. In order for families to move out of dependency, helping systems must shift from a "power over" to a "power with" paradigm. In short, family development workers can use that power to work *with* families rather than use power *over* them.

### **The referral process:**

Recipients can be referred to Opportunities from:

1. Lewis County Department of Social Services / Employment and Training;
2. Other programs here at Opportunities;
3. Service Workers, advocates, and other individuals within the community;
4. Self-referrals.

## **The role of the program worker:**

The program worker meets with the applicant to discuss the program particulars, assist with the application process and determines eligibility. In addition, the program worker arranges payable services, and provides non-payable services to the participant (more about this is explained under the "Services Provided" section in this document).

## **Priority for Transportation Services:**

It is the policy of Opportunities to provide Transportation services on a non-discriminatory basis consistent with Federal and State laws. Priority for Transportation services will be established according to the following criteria, in order: (In all cases, verification will be required to substantiate priority.)

1. Imminent job loss due to the lack of reliable transportation;
2. Inability to start an available job due to lack of reliable transportation;
3. Inability to increase wages due to the lack of reliable transportation;
4. If there is a waiting list, and the circumstances of participants are similar, then the participant who has met all eligibility criteria and program prerequisites *first* will be placed at the top of the list, in the order in which the participant met all criteria.

## **Applicant Eligibility Determination:**

To participate in Opportunities' Transportation Program, the applicant must meet the following criteria:

1. The gross income of the household does not exceed the income level set by the funding source.
2. If seeking a repair, the applicant has a valid NYS driver's license.
3. The applicant is a resident of Lewis County, New York.
4. The applicant must be employed on a regular basis, or in some cases have written documentation that indicates the "promise" of a job.
5. Please note that prior authorization by the agency CEO as well as the funding source will be required for participants who:
  - a. are officers or employees of Opportunities; or
  - b. are close relatives of an employee of Opportunities; or
  - c. may create the appearance of a conflict of interest through their participation the program;

## **Intake Process:**

### Case Files:

The Program Worker will maintain a case file for each applicant and/or participant. The file will contain relevant information required by the program and funding source. Information from case files will not be shared with third parties outside of the agency or funding source, unless required by law or by other obligations set forth by the funding source.

### Interested applicants are required to:

1. Complete an agency intake form that provides household demographics, employment history, transportation needs, etc.
2. If seeking a repair, provide proof of valid NYS driver's license. A copy will be placed in the applicant's case file.
3. Provide a statement of need as to why the applicant needs to utilize the Transportation program. The statement of need will need to include current work/travel patterns and transportation options available, as well as other places help has been sought.

4. Provide proof of employment. Examples of proof include a current month's worth of paystubs or a letter from the employer verifying the job or job offer.
5. During the intake process, work with the program worker to create a Family Development Plan, based on the applicant's identified goals and needs. Each plan will include an assessment of the applicant's strengths and resources, concerns, and services available. We recognize each applicant is a unique individual that will have unique needs, which may have a bearing on the depth of each plan. At minimum, all applicants must indicate in their plan how they will work toward sustaining reliable transportation while participating in the program.

### **An overview of services offered through the program:**

Our Transportation program provides both non-payable and payable services which are described in this section. The program worker facilitates these services. Non-payable services may include:

1. Information and Referrals that help connect the participant to services available within the community (including Opportunities). The program worker also provides referrals to help link the participant to the requested service.
2. Advocacy to the participant in a variety of areas, based on information identified in his or her family development plan. This could include assisting the participant in accessing services within the community such as our local DSS, WIC clinic, North Country Prenatal-Perinatal Council for Child Health Plus health insurance, or the Community Action Planning Council for food stamp enrollment. Or, the program worker could help the participant access services right here within our own agency for housing assistance, emergency food, emergency utility assistance, services associated with domestic violence / rape crisis, income tax preparation, holiday gifts, or car seats with installation training.
3. Instruction in areas such as budgeting, basic car care, proper car seat installation, how to research vehicles with reliable histories, and/or other needs jointly determined by the program worker and participant. The program worker also offers instruction to each participant on how to research available services within their community, to help empower participants at becoming their own self-advocate.
4. Assistance in obtaining the identified payable services. We should note the program worker's emphasis will be to help the participant accomplish the task, rather than "doing the task for the participant".
5. Follow-up the recipient will be contacted three months after service to see if the service helped them to maintain employment.

**Payable services:** The program worker helps to facilitate these services, and/or assists the participant with accessing an identified payable service based on need. As for how much in payable service our program can provide, it is important to note our Transportation Program is intended to be a stepping-stone to the participant's self-reliance, particularly with reliable transportation, cumulative caps may apply as set by the funding source. Our program is also designed to be flexible as possible in meeting the unique needs of each participant. Payable services may include:

1. Car Repairs: In order to remove the barrier of unreliable transportation to and from work, the program will consider providing repairs to the vehicle the participant already has partial or full title to. This will also include tire replacements if necessary. We will assess certain parameters to determine if the repair will likely remove the barrier of unreliable transportation to and from work. This will start by first assessing the make, model and year of the vehicle, and its value according to the Kelley Blue Book. If it makes economic sense to repair the vehicle, Opportunities will further investigate the repair option. If the vehicle problems are prohibitive in expense (i.e. the repairs exceed the value of the vehicle), Opportunities will exercise the option to disallow payment of repair work.

*Rules (Limitations) For Vehicle Repair Assistance:*

- The participant must provide proof of ownership of the vehicle through acceptable documentation (title, registration, and insurance).
  - Repairs will be considered on a case-by-case basis, based on a variety of factors including:
    - a. The repair is above and beyond normal day-to-day vehicle maintenance issues;
    - b. The repair is necessary for the continued safe operation of the vehicle;
    - c. The need for the repair is beyond the participant's control, and is not the result of vehicle abuse or neglect;
    - d. The participant is adhering to all program requirements;
    - e. The participant's ability to pay for the repair, based on his or her budget;
    - f. Other special circumstances if determined to be valid (documented in the participant's case file.)
    - g. If the need for the repair is due to an accident, insurance monies will be utilized first.
  - Depending on the scope and expense of the repair, the participant may be required to obtain more than one quote from a different service station or equivalent. The vendor chosen for the repair work must have a reputation for quality of work that is deemed acceptable to the agency.
  - If the vehicle repair is approved, the repair must be performed at the designated vendor, as determined by the agency; otherwise the participant will be responsible for the entire cost. It is important to note that all vehicle repairs must be prior approved by Opportunities; otherwise the participant will be responsible for the cost of the unauthorized repair(s).
  - If the agency is authorizing only a partial payment, the participant is responsible for payment of the balance, directly to the designated vendor. The participant is also responsible for any sales tax charged by the vendor.
  - The program will obtain a receipt from the vendor, a copy of which will be placed in the case file.
2. Insurance Payments: Available to participants on a justifiable basis (documented in the participant's case file.) The participant may be required to obtain up to three (3) quotes from different vendors in an effort to obtain the most favorable rates. Before Opportunities provides assistance with insurance, the participant will need to discuss a plan for future payments given they are ongoing costs.
  3. Other Transportation Related Expenses: Assistance may be provided for any issues that may hinder the availability of reliable transportation to and from work.

**Receipt of services:**

1. During participation in the program, participants will be expected to take an active role in following up with and referrals made in their Family Development Plan, obtaining insurance quotes, obtaining car registration, title, and inspection (as applicable.) The program worker will assist as necessary.
2. If the participant should become unemployed at any time while participating in the program, further payable transportation services will not be provided until the participant regains employment, and continues to meet all other eligibility requirements.
3. Before a payable service is rendered:
  - a. the participant will be required to present acceptable documentation that verifies employment, and;
  - b. the participant will be required to produce acceptable income verification.
4. If receiving a transportation service, the participant will be required to:
  - a. Follow through on his/her Family Development Plan to best of his/her ability.
  - b. If needed, make a good faith effort at keeping follow-up communication with the program worker.

- c. Participate in and completing basic vehicle care training provided by the program worker or other resource.
- d. Notify Opportunities of changes in address and/or phone number.

**Program feedback/completion:**

Throughout the participant's involvement with the program, feedback will be encouraged in order to assess the quality and effectiveness of our program

**Participant non-compliance:**

Program rules require that services under the program be immediately discontinued if it is discovered the participant knowingly provided false information during the certification process, or at any time during participation in the program. In addition, it is Opportunities' policy that if a participant does not comply with all program requirements, services under the Transportation program may be terminated at Opportunities' discretion. The participant will receive such notice in writing. A copy of this notification will be placed in the participant's case file.

**Other:**

**If Program Funds Should Become Exhausted:**

Opportunities' Transportation funding relies on grant funding to operate the program. Should funding suddenly end or become exhausted, Opportunities will assess the situation and make a determination if its Transportation program will end.

**Revisions to Opportunities' Transportation Policies and Procedures:**

Opportunities may revise its Transportation policies and procedures at its discretion. Each participant is expected to familiarize themselves with the revised policies and procedures.