

SECTION: SHELTER

TOPIC TITLE: Transportation



Importance of Topic:

Depending on the resources available to survivors, access to transportation may be limited. Simply getting to the shelter may be a barrier to receiving services and the lack of transportation during a shelter stay can lead to isolation and make it more challenging to meet ongoing needs such as getting to and from jobs or appointments. When law enforcement is used for transporting survivors to the shelter, survivors who are Black, Latinx, immigrant, and from other communities who have historically been targets of aggressive policing may not seek your services. Some immigrant survivors may have had negative, violent experiences with law enforcement in their home countries. All of these survivors may not be willing/able to ride in a police vehicle and they may see this ride as a sign of agency collusion with law enforcement, even if your agency has a positive relationship with local law enforcement. Rural communities may not have robust public transportation options and private transportation services might be too costly to cover great distances. Access to reliable transportation during the shelter stay is necessary to ensure survivors have the ability to turn their choices into action.

Statutes/Professional Standards:

- Code of Virginia Reference: None
 - [Professional Standards Reference](#): Standard #11 - SDVAs will provide, or assist to secure, emergency safe shelter to survivors of sexual and domestic violence who are in imminent danger. Establish and maintain protocols for addressing shelter requests including those that cannot be met and those that originate outside your service area. These protocols must include collaborative efforts across agencies to directly connect survivors in imminent danger to appropriate resources.
 - Federal Code: McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act protects homeless children and their right to education including access to their school of origin by providing
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transportation to the homeless child if they move out of the zone or district ([Transporting Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#)).

- Funder Requirements: Funding for transportation related services is allowable for VDSS OFV grantees.

Terms Used or Needed to Understand this Topic:

Transportation: Vehicles used to move individuals or groups from one place to another. These can be owned by SDVAs, individual survivors, private companies (taxis, Uber, Lyft), or public entities (buses, subways). Friends and family members can also provide transportation for survivors.

Did You Know?

Survivors who will not be able to stay connected with family and friends or maintain employment due to losing access to transportation may choose to not access shelter services.

Some survivors may be eligible for Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation if they meet eligibility requirements and are traveling to a Medicaid paid service ([Source](#)).

Racial/Social Justice Focus:

Self-determination and choice mean nothing without resources. When survivors identify needs including maintaining relationships within the community or accessing work, not being able to do that due to a lack of transportation can be extremely frustrating and can feel like there are no choices to be made. Not everyone comes to shelter with the same resources; however, agencies have an opportunity to provide resources to help support individual choice.

Scenario 1: Lucia and her two children have just been accepted into their local domestic violence shelter. Her children attend a public school that is in a different zone than the shelter. They receive supportive services at their school that would not be available in the school zoned for the shelter. Lucia does not have a vehicle and is worried that she may not be able to get the children to school each day. Lucia works with her advocate who understands how important this is for Lucia and for her children. They are able to arrange

immediate transportation by providing free metro passes for the family. Lucia and her advocate work together with school officials to ensure the school will provide transportation for her children under the McKinney-Vento Act.

- How did the advocate provide trauma-informed services in this scenario?
- How does working together with Lucia to meet her identified needs reinforce notions of trust and collaboration in the advocate/survivor relationship?

Scenario 2: Sam has a history with law enforcement that she'd rather forget. She's been stopped while walking down the street more times than she can count. When she sees cops in her neighborhood, she worries that someone she knows and loves will die. Sam lives with an abusive partner who has begun using meth and becomes so out of it that he'll chase her around the house with a loaded gun. Sam never thought he'd physically hurt her but the drugs have changed him. Sam's partner even wrecked the family car last week and she is feeling more isolated and afraid than ever. Sam calls the local domestic violence program after her partner threatened to kill her in the hopes that she could get into their shelter without having to involve law enforcement. The advocate has a conversation with Sam and determines she should definitely come into shelter as soon as possible. She asks Sam if she is able to drive or get a ride to the shelter and Sam says no. The advocate offers Sam a ride with the local sheriff, but Sam refuses. She tells the advocate she doesn't want law enforcement involved in any way and doesn't feel safe getting into a cop car.

- How could the advocate validate Sam's concern and come up with alternatives?
- What if they are in a rural locality with limited public/paid transportation options?
- How could the agency have a plan to get survivors to the shelter without using local law enforcement for rides?
- If your agency requires the use of law enforcement for transportation to the shelter, would there be any willingness to use another method for a survivor who requests it?

Trauma-informed Focus:

Working collaboratively with survivors to provide needed support as they navigate individual choices is an effective part of providing a trauma-informed response. When

survivors trust your agency to validate their experiences and their perspectives on safety, everyone will be better able to work together to solve problems. A trauma-informed organization ensures that survivors have real access to choices through providing different transportation options.

Promising Practices:

Overview of General Characteristics:

- Offer gas cards, bus tickets, or metro fare cards with no restrictions on use.
- Operate an agency van that can be available for daily trips to meet survivors' needs.
- Have bus/metro route maps available in print for people who are unfamiliar with public transit.
- Build relationships with local paid transportation services to offer reduced rates or free services to survivors.

Examples:

- Staff at **Avalon** (Williamsburg) believe that access to transportation is necessary for survivor independence. Noting that fewer than half of their Shelter clients have their own vehicle and many Outreach clients do not have reliable transportation, Avalon works to support survivors through public transportation tickets, gas cards, and the use of an agency van. Avalon does not depend on local law enforcement to transport survivors to the shelter. They partner with a local taxi service to provide a free ride to shelter or offer pickups with the agency van from designated locations.
- **Hope House of Scott County** primarily relies on staff for providing transportation support to shelter residents. There is a local AAA agency that provides transportation support to anyone at a very low rate and limited routes that typically need 24-48 hours notice. Additionally, as they are in a rural community, there is no local cab service or no Lyft/Uber options available. Fortunately, the shelter is located within a safe walking distance to a few stores, library, community ministry center, and thrift shops, and a school bus comes to pick up children directly from the shelter. The schools are also within a safe and manageable one mile walking distance to school, should any residents want to accompany their children directly.

It has been communicated that, if it weren't for staff being willing to help with transportation and picking up items from the food pantry, it would be incredibly challenging to meet programming needs. At this time, most staff have SUVs that can accommodate the needs of the shelter. The agency sets aside funding for client transportation needs within their budgets from DSS and DCJS for staff mileage reimbursement, with some flexibility in arranging for bus tickets as needed (Greyhound, etc.). Staff at Hope House of Scott County support survivor agency, by empowering them to set boundaries with other residents who may ask for rides, as well as empower them to plan ahead to set up their own transportation needs (asking a friend, etc.).

Program Focus:

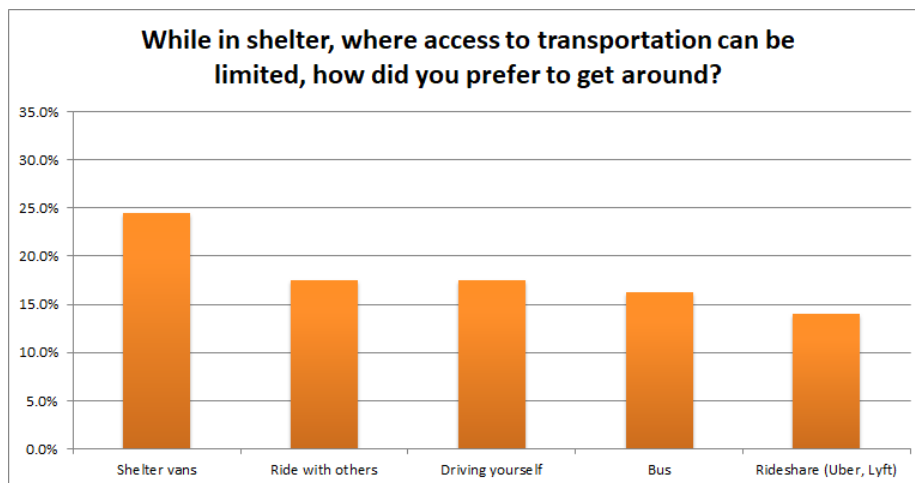
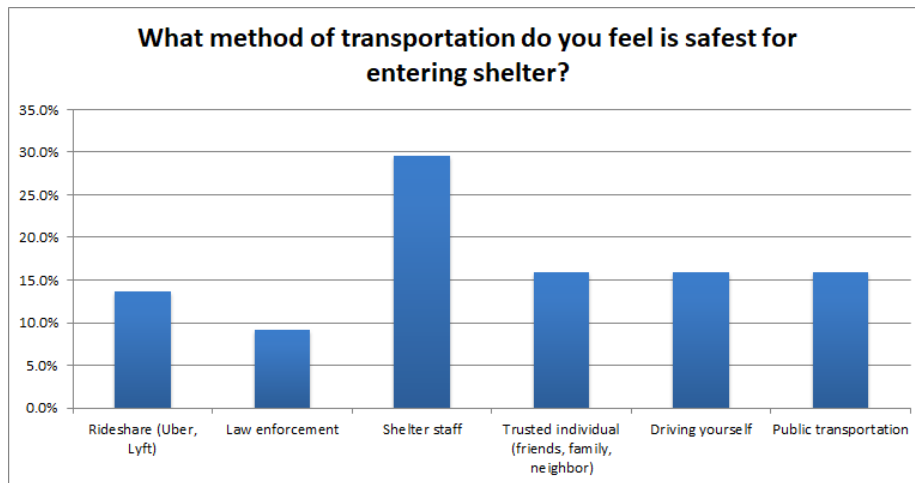
- Does your agency have more than one method of transportation available to bring individuals into shelter?
- Is public transportation easily accessible for individuals living at the shelter?
- Does your agency set aside funds specifically for client transportation needs?
- How can individuals accessing services receive funds or gas cards, bus tickets, or metro cards from your program?
- How does your agency view transportation as a support to self-determination and empowerment?

Survivor voice:

Documenting Our Work Evidence

- "The shelter needs a VAN to accomodate [sic] the residents in transportation to events, & grocery shopping. there is simply not enough room to accomodate [sic] the residents and their children in a staff members car."
- "It is very difficult to do things without any transportation. Bus tickets would be extremely helpful. I came here indigent, and with no way to get around town to accomplish certain things to improve my situation. It was impossible."

- “Offer transportation for those of us who need medical care or have important issues and things of that nature. Most women here DO NOT have transportation and are unfamiliar w/ where we are.”
- “My biggest obstacle at this time is transportation to do what I'm required to do for this program and pull myself/life together. I could accomplish [sic] more in a day w/ transportation.”



Data from Survivor Voice Survey, 2021

COVID-19 Focus:

Transportation could be limited during COVID-19 due to social distancing. While survivors who own their own cars may not be affected, those who require public transportation or shelter-provided transportation may face additional difficulties. This may be due to ride-share companies or bus services limiting their services or routes due to limited

capacity. Additionally, shelters will need to determine how to provide transportation for survivors in a safe way during the pandemic.

COVID-19 Example:

- During COVID-19, transportation accommodations at Hope House of Scott County have essentially remained the same, as a majority of their shelter residents have been at shelter during quarantine - thus creating a semi-pod with staff. Hope House of Scott county also works with the police department for transportation support, especially for folks arriving from TN and neighboring counties in VA. To address any additional transportation barriers, staff are hopeful in relying on support from volunteers, though that has been a challenge during COVID.

During COVID-19:

- How has transportation to emergency shelter services had to be altered due to social distancing and how can you ensure survivors have transportation into shelter?
- What solutions has your agency implemented to get around transportation barriers while survivors are in shelter?

Additional Resources + Links:

Publications:

- [Transportation Issues for Domestic Violence Programs](#): National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence - brief on challenges faced by survivors and programs related to transportation including ideas around car donation and fundraising opportunities.