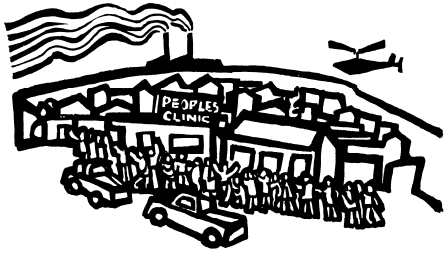


A Place at the Table: SUBSIDIZED CHILDCARE



Background

We are all responsible to make every effort to provide for ourselves and our families. In many cases, wages can cover the cost of necessities such as housing, food, medical care and transportation. For some low-income workers, though, their hourly wage is not enough to meet the basic needs of their families.

Every county in our diocese has a public transportation system. These are essential services that make efficient use of both public dollars and energy. These systems do not meet the needs of all workers, though. Routes usually focus on population centers, leaving out those who live or work in very rural areas. Additionally, it is impossible to depend on these systems for transport to weekend and evening shifts.

Yet the cost of purchasing and maintaining a car can be prohibitive. Several Catholic Charities agencies in our diocese operate a Wheels for Work program, which provide low-income families with either a used car or a low interest loan to purchase a used car. These programs use a small investment of NYS dollars in staffing costs and loan funds to leverage a large benefit in terms of workers who are able to maintain employment, support their families, and pay taxes. Catholic Charities agencies without a Wheels to Work program partner with other community agencies that do offer the program in order to help low-income working clients get to work.

Whether funding public transportation or Wheels for Work, this investment of public dollars is worthwhile because workers with access to reliable transportation enjoy higher wages and more stable employment. This is especially true of workers at the lower end of the pay scale. Yet these programs have been severely cut and may be eliminated from the New York State budget.

In addition to the benefits to families and taxpayers, businesses and corporations gain when workers have access to reliable transportation. Businesses benefit from a low turnover rate among their labor force. When they can maintain a stable group of employees, they save on costs of recruitment and training.

A Place at the Table

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2002 document, *A Place at the Table*, uses the image of a table supported by four legs to illustrate the essential roles we all play in helping low income workers get to work..

On the back of this document are some ideas on how we all can work together to facilitate reliable transportation for low income workers. Is there one or more thing on the list that you, your parish or place of business can work towards? What are your ideas?

First table leg: *what families and individuals are called to do*

- Donate funds or used cars to Wheels for Work
- Offer to carpool or rideshare with someone in your neighborhood or workplace
- Ride public transportation whenever possible! This provides financial support to the public transportation system and sends the message that there is a demand for it (plus you are helping the environment!).

Second table leg: *what community organizations and religious institutions can do*

- Maintain a bulletin board or similar space so people in need of transportation can link up with people who are able to provide rides.
- Provide bus passes to parishioners who are struggling financially and could use them to get back and forth to work.
- Form a group of volunteers who are willing to provide rides for individuals who may need temporary help in getting back and forth to work, perhaps because of a car repair or because they are new to work and need some time to save up money for a car.

Third table leg: *what business, commerce, and labor can do*

- Maintain a ride board so people in need of transportation can link up with people who may be able to give them rides.
- Provide subsidies for low income earners to help cover the costs of transportation.
- Provide incentives for carpoolers such as premium parking spots.
- Incorporate flexibility in scheduling to accommodate transportation needs.
- Work with local transportation authorities to encourage routes that meet workers needs.



Fourth table leg: *the role and responsibilities of government*

- Our government has a long-standing tradition of subsidizing transportation through funding for highway and road construction and repair. It should also support other modes of transportation such as buses, trains, bicycles and carpoolers.
- Continued support for existing public transportation systems.
- Financial support for programs such as Wheels for Work, which address transportation issues through two methods: 1) linking people who have a used car they no longer need with an individual who needs a used car; 2) providing a rotating pool of funds to be loaned out to individuals who need several thousand dollars to purchase a used car.
- Maintain a public transportation system that is affordable and meets the transportation needs of as many people as possible.
- Encourage cooperation among transportation authorities to ensure seamless transitions between counties.