Transportation Among Families Involved in the Whole Family Approach

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The Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) at Rutgers University - Camden produces and highlights research leading to sound public policy and practice, and with that as a foundation, aims to convene and engage stakeholders in making the connections across research, policy, and practice in support of Southern New Jersey residents. From 2013 to 2022, WRI has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the Pascale Sykes Foundation's Whole Family Approach initiative across 12 nonprofit collaboratives in Southern New Jersey,. The Whole Family Approach is a preventative, family-led strategy that provides adults and children tools to set, plan for, and achieve goals together. Collaborating agencies work together with families with two adult caregivers to develop long- and short-term goals to thrive. WRI's evaluation of the Whole Family Approach includes:

- A longitudinal, quasi-experimental evaluation of families' changes in forming healthy relationships, child wellbeing, and financial stability,
- A process evaluation to understand how the Whole Family Approach was implemented across collaboratives, including observations, interviews, focus groups, and document review, and
- Multiple focused evaluations that examine the impact of the Whole Family Approach in areas of interest including student social, emotional, and behavioral growth, service model delivery, family-community partner relationship development, and the cultural responsiveness of the Whole Family Approach.

Access to reliable transportation can affect families' access to work, healthcare, and education, and is increasingly important in rural areas where public transportation can be sparse. In 2019, 70.9% of New Jersey residents relied on their own vehicle to get to work, 8.2% relying on a carpool, and 11.7% on public transportation (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2018). Lack of access to transportation is a problem for many in New Jersey, especially those in rural areas more common across Southern New Jersey. In New Jersey in 2019, the average travel time to work was about 33 minutes, making access to transportation an important driver of a family's economic stability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). However, the number of people who have access to a car has gradually decreased over the past decade. 11% of families residing in New Jersey do not have access to a car (National Equity Atlas, 2019). When considering the breakdown of race and those who have access to a vehicle, 7% of people who are white do not have access to a car, which is significantly lower than 19% of people of color who do not have access to a car (National Equity Atlas, 2019).

Reliable and affordable transportation is necessary for daily activities, and for those without a vehicle (who are also often low-income families), there is an increased reliance on public transportation (National Equity Atlas, 2019). However, transportation deserts still exist across New Jersey which creates significant

barriers to those in need of public transportation to access food, medical care, education, and more (Peters, Gordon & Flanagan, 2021). For example, many New Jersey rail transit deserts exist in the southern counties of New Jersey, including Cumberland County, Gloucester County, and Salem County (Peters, Gordon & Flanagan, 2021).

Accessibility to public transportation across Southern New Jersey remains disparate, while many residents do not have access to their own vehicle. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed day-to-day travel and accessibility across a variety of economic and public service areas, which has shifted the transportation and access landscape for many families. This report examines transportation among low-income families across Southern New Jersey both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify changes in transportation trends and needs among families across eight different nonprofit collaboratives in Southern New Jersey.

METHODS

Data were collected between February 2018 to October 2021 from families working with the eight nonprofit collaboratives in Southern New Jersey implementing the Whole Family Approach. Families were surveyed at the beginning of their involvement with collaboratives and then surveyed again at 6, 12, 18, and 24 months to determine the ways in which the Whole Family Approach impacts the development of healthy relationships, financial stability, and child wellbeing.

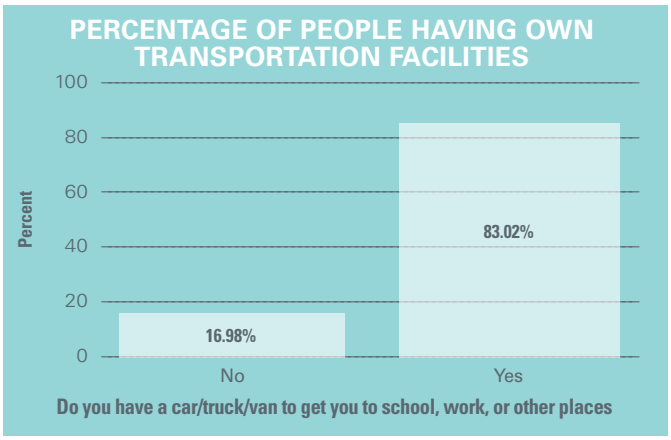
The survey also includes questions regarding access to different types of transportation, frequency and types of transportation used by families, the use of publicly available shuttles funded by the Pascale Sykes Foundation, and neighborhood satisfaction. This analysis describes changes in participant scores before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-COVID-19 data includes data from 2018 to February 2020, while within-COVID data includes data from March 2020 to April 2021.

Areas of focus in this report include:

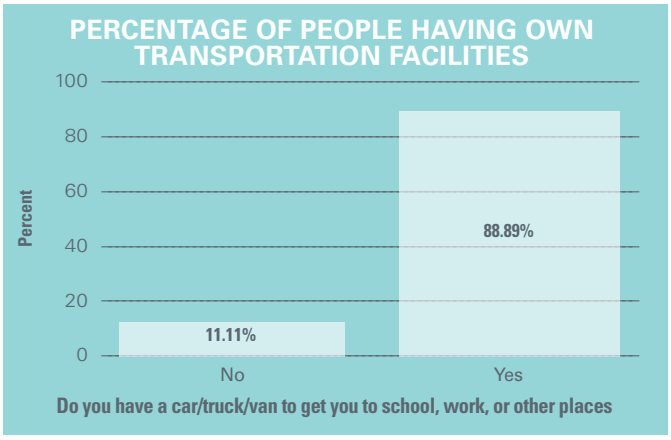
1. Participants who have their own transportation
2. Participants in need of transportation
3. Mode of transportation used frequently

RESULTS

Before COVID

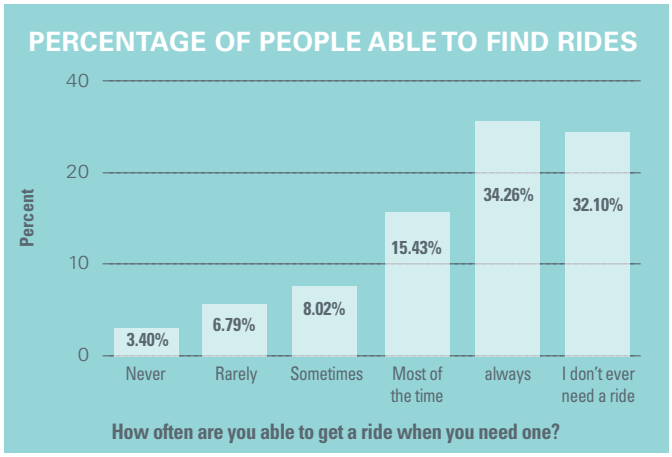


During COVID



Our data shows that before the pandemic, 83% of participants had their own transportation to get to school, work, and other places, whereas 17% of participants did not. During the pandemic, however, only 11% of participants did not possess their own vehicles, thus having to rely on getting a ride when they needed one.

Before COVID



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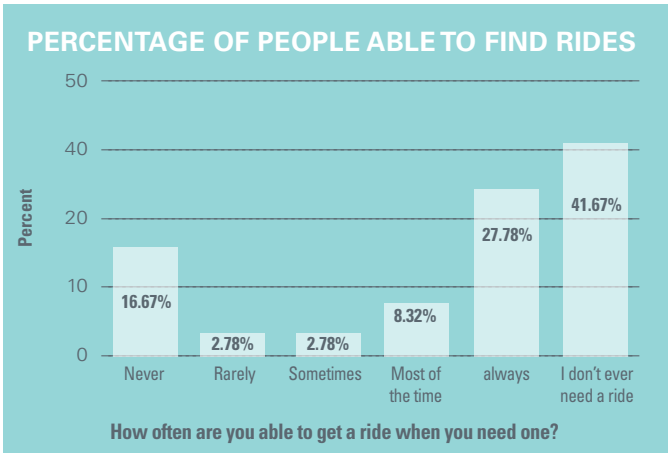
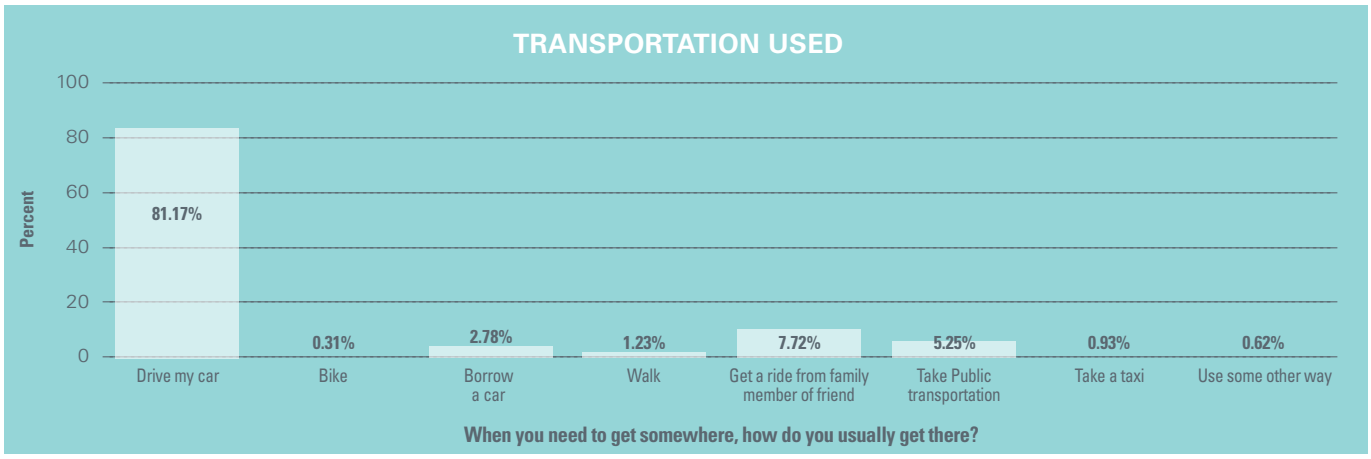
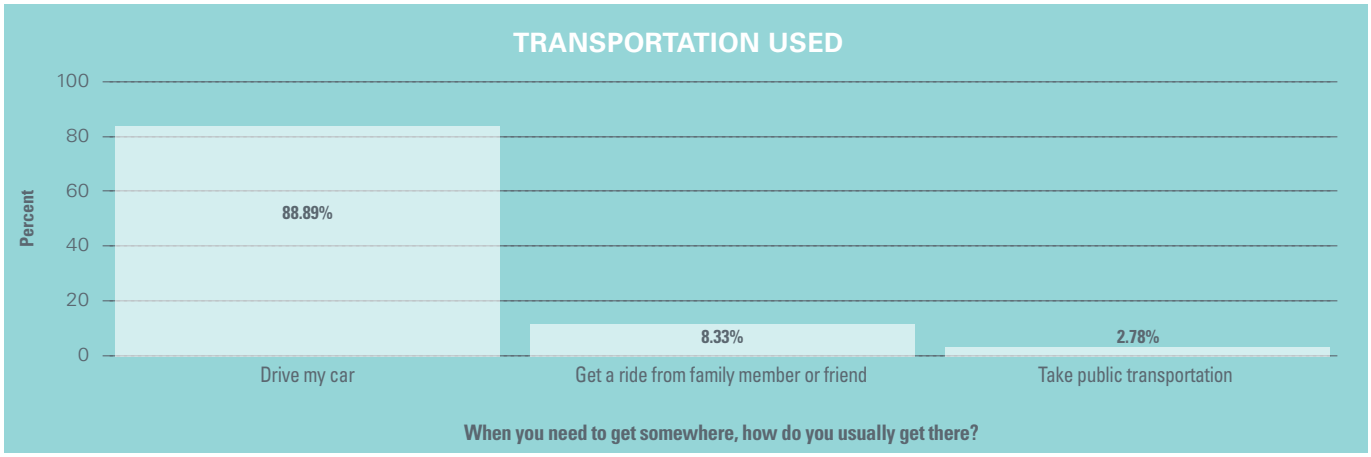


When surveyed "how often are you able to get a ride when you need one?" Before the pandemic, 3.4% of participants answered "never" but this number more than quadrupled to 16.7% during the pandemic. Besides, 34.3% of participants said they were always able to get a ride when needed before the pandemic, but during the pandemic only 27.8% of them managed to do so, marking a 6.5% decrease.

Before COVID



During COVID



at the mode of transportation used before the pandemic, 81.1% of participants drive their own vehicles, and this number rose to 89% during the pandemic. Contrarily, 5.25% of participants took public transportation before the pandemic but only 2.78% did so during the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Our data show a slight increase (6%) in the amount of people who have access to a car, truck or van during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, need for transportation increased during pandemic: there was a 14% decrease in the percentage of people who could find a ride most of the time or were always able to find a ride, and a 13% increase in people who were never able to find a ride, indicating a shift in the availability of transportation in peoples' lives. There was also a 9% increase in the percentage of people who reported never needing a ride from before to within the COVID-19 pandemic, which may be a result of the need to attend fewer in-person activities. Types of transportation used also shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic, while nearly 8% more people reported using their own car, which is nearly consistent with the people who had an increase in access to a car, truck, or van during COVID-19. The number of participants who reported riding with family or friends stayed consistent before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, while there was a ~3% reduction in the percentage of people using public transportation. However, no people reporting biking, borrowing a car, walking, taking a taxi, or using some other kind of transportation not listed in our survey during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was a shift in the way people used transportation, and the availability of transportation from being to during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most notably, far fewer people reported being able to get a ride where they wanted to go during COVID-19 than before the onset of the pandemic, and there was a slight reduction in the use of public transportation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This might suggest an increased need for expanded transportation in Southern New Jersey, and possibly, a lack of awareness of the availability of public transportation within those areas.

REFERENCE

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RUTGERS
UNIVERSITY | CAMDEN
Senator Walter Rand Institute
for Public Affairs

411 Cooper Street | Camden, NJ 08102
(856) 225- | wrand@camden.rutgers.edu
rand.camden.rutgers.edu

Officialwri
@walterrandinstitute