



SARTAC Fellows:

Advancing
Self Advocacy
through
Leadership and
Policy

About the Fellow

Melissa Southall

West Virginia

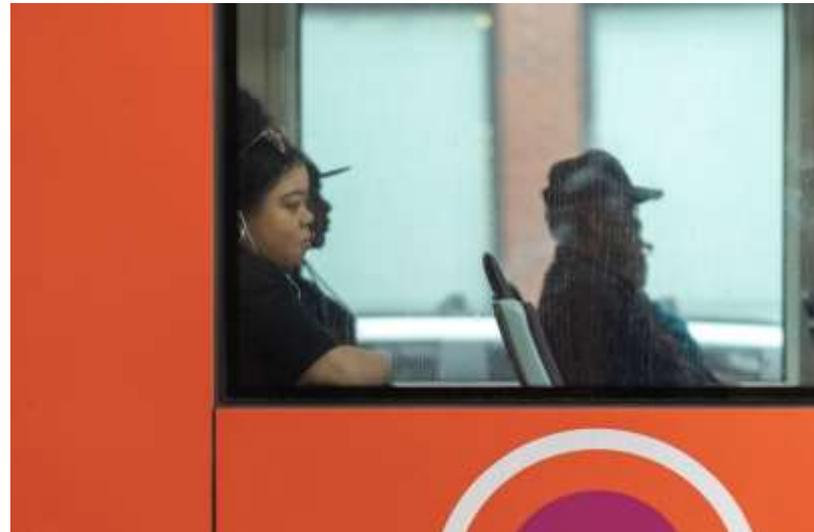
Transportation for people with disabilities is a great need and this fellowship will help fill that need.

My host was Community Resources, Inc. which is an organization that helps people in the community by establishing resources for families to become self-sustainable



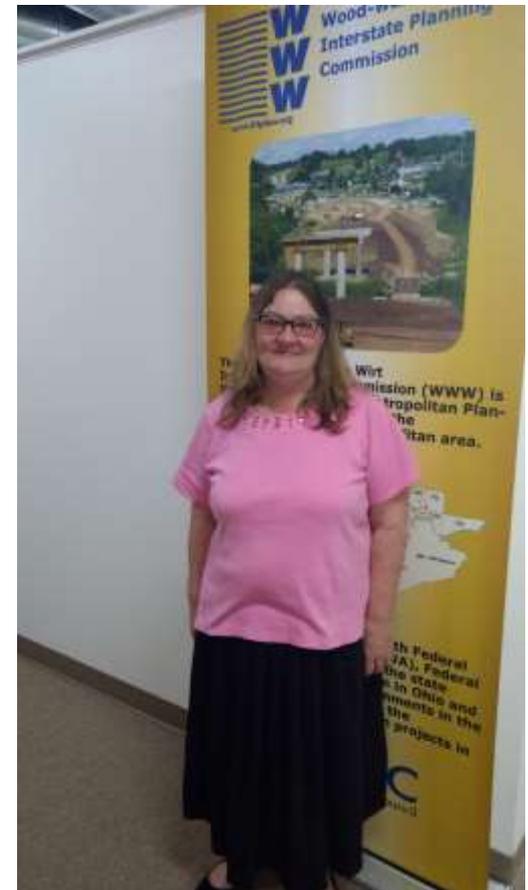
Overcoming Transportation Barriers in Rural West Virginia

The overall goal of my project was to find the existing transportation opportunities in West Virginia and create a printed resource guide to help connect that transportation to people who need it. Especially people with disabilities.



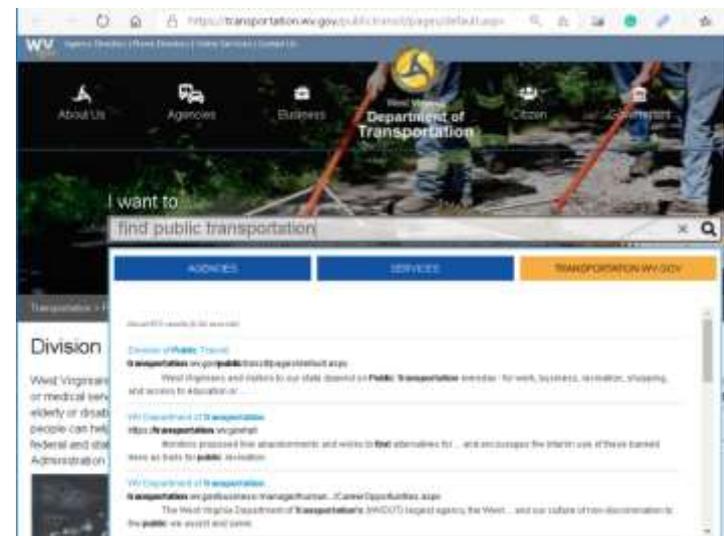
Overcoming Transportation Barriers in Rural West Virginia

I first began contacting the local public bus service and local transportation planning officials to see if they could provide the information I was looking for.



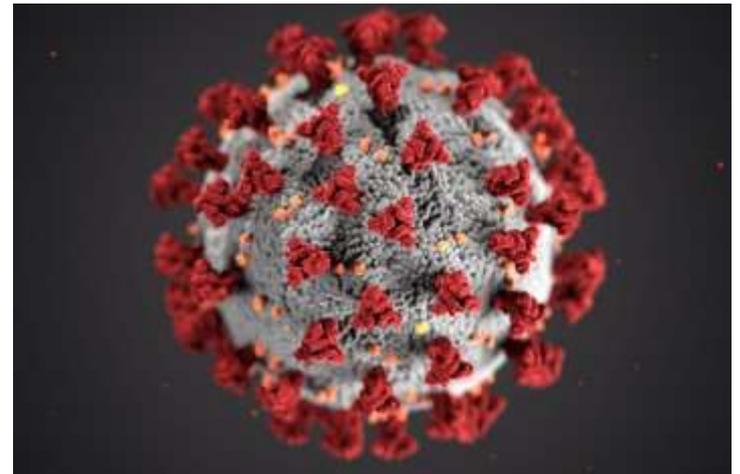
Guide or Website

- I was directed to the WV Department of Transportation's Division of Public Transit website.
- I quickly realized that the available information would likely change over time.
- My original idea was to create a printed guide.
- I created a website instead so everything would be more accessible and easier to keep current.



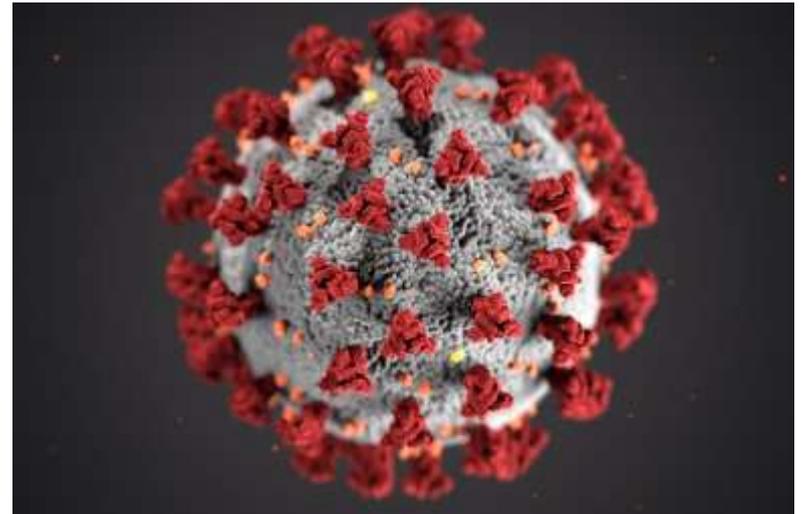
COVID-19

- The project was going well with the website and the community group I was leading to establish a pilot program that could be expanded statewide.
- The fellowship project was coming to an end just as the pilot program was just starting to gain momentum.
- COVID-19 came on the scene and brought it to a halt.



COVID-19

I continue to follow the state and federal plans for improving transportation for people with disabilities, as well as grant opportunities to fund the pilot project, but for now it is currently on hold.



WHAT I LEARNED AS A FELLOW



- ▶ I learned to do research.
- ▶ I learned to do presentations.
- ▶ I learned this would work better with a team.
- ▶ I improved my leadership skills organizing the meetings and keeping everyone on the team on task.

RESOURCES CREATED

I created two resources.

1. A survey to get information directly from people around West Virginia on their access to transportation. The results are on my second resource.

Survey Name: West Virginia Transportation Needs Survey

The information being collected is for statistical purposes only. Your name is not being requested, however, it is important that your age be marked which will help the data collected to be more useful.

The survey was anonymous. Of the 165 responses, 55 different cities in West Virginia representing all parts of the state responded. There were also two responses from Ohio and one from Kentucky. Out of state responses were welcome due to some people living along the borders may have had access to transportation in another state or they came to West Virginia from out of state to work.

Do you have a cognitive, intellectual, and/or developmental disability?

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes			110	66.6 %
No			53	32.1 %
No Response(s)			2	1.2 %
Totals			165	100%

Please indicate with best describes you:

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Self-Advocate			100	61.7 %
Family Member			24	14.8 %
Staff			30	18.5 %
Community Member			16	9.8 %
Other			1	<1 %
Totals			162	100%

The Survey

- ▶ The survey was posted online to be easy and accessible.
- ▶ Printed copies were provided by request.
- ▶ The survey was anonymous, although demographic information was collected which included county, age range, gender and race.

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Please indicate with best describes you:

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Self-Advocate			100	81.7 %
Family Member			24	14.8 %
Staff			30	18.5 %
Community Member			16	9.8 %
Other			1	<1 %
Totals			162	100%

9 Main Questions

- ▶ Do you own or have access to a car or other personal vehicle?
- ▶ Is public transportation available in your community?
- ▶ If public transportation is available in your community, are you able to use it? (Your home or and places you need to get to are on the bus route, etc.)

9 Main Questions

- ▶ What forms of transportation are needed to provide you better access in your community?
- ▶ Do you feel that the lack of transportation in your community is a barrier to inclusion?
- ▶ How does reduced or no public transportation service affect your daily activities (work, shopping, socialization, advocacy, medical appointments, etc.)?

9 Main Questions

- ▶ Do you need access to other areas of West Virginia?
- ▶ Are you able to use public transportation to access these areas?
- ▶ Are there any other comments you would like to make concerning the availability of transportation either in your own community or across West Virginia and how it could be improved?

Transportation: Access and Availability

A 2019 Survey of 165 Individuals with Disabilities
in West Virginia

THE FACTS



SURVEY RESULTS



Said they **do not have access** to a car or other personal vehicle



Said that transportation is **not available** in their community



Said they are **unable to use** the public transportation available in their community

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Transportation barriers interfere with a person's ability to be independent and to function in society



2019 Survey Responses

of 165 West Virginians with Disabilities

How does reduced or no transportation service affect your daily activities?

"If the bus ran on more days I could work more days."

"I'm at the mercy of others' availability to help me."

"Hard to visit family and friends."

"I could not get my food or clothes or go to church."

"To get my son out in the community I have to lift him into my car and he has to be in a push chair. He's 18 and weighs 185 lbs. It kills my back."



We really need buses that go across the state

-Theme of Survey Respondents

"Not without assistance"

"Not accessible for others with disabilities all the time"

"Yes and no. The public bus is unsafe for anyone not able to protect themselves."

If public transportation is available in your community, are you able to use it?

RESOURCES CREATED

2. A website that will be continually updated with information on the availability of transportation in each county of the state and links to ongoing transportation including the pilot project in Wood County that I hope will get off the ground.



My Host: Community Resources

- ▶ Aimee Fleak from Community Resources, Inc. provided guidance, expertise, and outreach on behalf of the project.
- ▶ Aimee helped with planning and organizing meetings, bringing new partners to the table, and keeping the project moving forward.



Aimee Fleak

My Host: Community Resources

- ▶ By being a host, we learned the power of collaboration in a community and that many people and organizations recognize and experience the same needs.
- ▶ We also learned that transportation is chief among the barriers faced by people with disabilities in our community, throughout the state, and nationwide.



Aimee Fleak

My Host: Community Resources

- ▶ Having a SARTAC Fellow has changed our organization because we now have a deeper understanding of the unique and valuable contributions and abilities of people with disabilities in our community.
- ▶ We also better recognize the challenges and systemic barriers faced by people with disabilities.



Aimee Fleak

My Host: Community Resources

As a Host, we have helped Melissa hone the skills needed to advocate for people with disabilities in West Virginia. We are confident she will use the skills she developed tackling the problem of lack of transportation in rural West Virginia to take on other challenges.



Aimee Fleak



LEADERSHIP & POLICY RESULTS

- 
- ▶ Because of this project, I now want to do more with the community leaders to help bring about more changes.
 - ▶ This was rewarding and I want to encourage others with disabilities to get involved and be at the table when decisions about important topics are being made



LEADERSHIP & POLICY RESULTS

- 
- ▶ I learned from the members of the group and they learned from me.
 - ▶ As a result their involvement, I believe they will be more inclusive of people with disabilities in their decision making.



Q&A

You have

Questions

We have

Answers



SARTAC

Self Advocacy and Beyond

This publication is supported in part by a cooperative agreement from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities policy.



The Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center (SARTAC) seeks to strengthen the self-advocacy movement by supporting self advocacy organizations to grow in diversity and leadership. The resource center is a project of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), the oldest national self-advocacy organization in the country. SARTAC is a Developmental Disabilities Project of National Significance, funded by the Administration For Community Living – Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD). The information in this product was written to provide guidance for self advocates and their allies to assist in understanding policy issues affecting their lives. It is not to be used to determine a person's legal rights or an organization's legal responsibilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; the Americans with Disability Act of 1990, as amended or any other federal, state or local laws written to protect the rights of people with disabilities.