

**BREAKING NEW GROUND GRANTS 2011
King County Immigrant and Refugee Elders
Transportation Project**

FINAL REPORT

The King County Immigrant and Refugee Elders Transportation Project encompassed a multi-phased approach involving nine formal action steps and multiple informal preparatory activities conducted over a period of ten months beginning in March 2011 and continuing through the date of this report writing. Specifically, we identified key transportation needs assessment questions to be presented to ethnic elders at community conversation gatherings; developed transportation needs assessment surveys for ethnic elder service providers; convened nine county-wide ethnic elder groups representing seven languages and documented their responses to standardized focus group questions; analyzed ethnic elder group and service provider responses by language, compiling findings into a summary report; convened a well-attended, highly participatory Transportation Summit resulting in a transportation access improvement action plan including strategy recommendations and timelines; analyzed/prioritized summit recommendations; created a multi-lingual community travel instruction video as our project educational outreach tool, engaging the help of ethnic community elders and their trusted leaders as actors, translators and video narrators.

Biggest Accomplishment

The King County Mobility Coalition's (KCMC) biggest accomplishment was creating **sustainable, collaborative and successful relationships** as a by-product of our project. Six agencies working with refugee and immigrant elders committed to the project and were invested

in and instrumental in its successful implementation. The project focused on seven immigrant and refugee cultures representing all geographic areas of King County, including Bhutanese, Burmese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Russian, Somali and Ukrainian. Collaborating with community partners, we convened/facilitated nine focus groups and administered written surveys to identify language and cultural barriers that prevent or limit access to transportation services among these refugee and immigrant elders. These findings formed the basis for a Summary Report subsequently shared with stakeholders who attended a Transportation Summit and ultimately led to the creation of our 3-part transportation video series created in eight languages. The videos teach people How to Pay for Bus and Light Rail, How to Ride the Bus and about Other Community Travel Options. Leaders from ethnic communities narrated the videos, and peer elders from each community starred in them. Our community partners engaged fully in the project scope not only because they recognized a critical need for accessible transportation information within their communities but also because they valued the dual outcomes of forming equitable partnerships with mainstream resource organizations and the creation of a tangible, culturally relevant travel training product (multilingual instructional videos) that benefits all of us. From initial contacts with the ethnic communities through the duration of the project, cross-cultural learning occurred, and foundations for friendship and better understanding were laid. These new relationships now offer opportunities for long-term connection, service planning sustainability and building bridges to link mutual goals and share cross-sector support. KCMC members as well as staff and leaders from community organizations forged new friendships or strengthened existing relationships that will have positive impacts in King County in the future.

Other Major Accomplishments

- a) Sixty six participants, representing transit agencies, city planners, funders, human service agencies including refugee and immigrant service providers, rated the **Transportation**

Summit as a great success. The Summit created a collaborative dialogue opportunity and resulted in an action plan to develop/implement improved strategies for sharing transportation resource information with refugee and immigrant populations. It also offered opportunity for longer-term systematic change as planners and funders generated creative ideas to address transportation barriers and challenges.

- b) The project identified specific transportation access challenges and barriers faced by refugee and immigrant elders and brought these to the attention of the community at large. As a result, an ad hoc group of cross-sector stakeholders has self-identified and pledged **commitment to work together** to ameliorate these access barriers.
- c) We successfully created a **video series narrated in eight languages** responsive to common challenges identified through our focus groups, namely the lack of travel knowledge about existing King County transportation services among refugee and immigrant elders; language barriers and low literacy rates that prevent or limit ethnic elder access to existing service information formats; and the importance of involving refugee and immigrant communities in creating culturally and linguistically appropriate information and helping with its dissemination. To maximize informational access, we also uploaded these new travel instruction videos to the KCMC website and posted the series on YouTube.
- d) King County Metro developed **Special Assistance communication cards** for bus riders with limited proficiency in English who need help recognizing which bus to board and when to de-board. Metro already offers these assistance cards to blind, deaf-blind and those with verbal disabilities as a way to facilitate communication with drivers, and used these as the template for the new cards for Limited English riders.

Project Impact

- a) Our project involved sequential activities designed to build trust, demonstrate mainstream interest in an ethnic elder issue and create a culturally relevant educational tool that would enable refugee and immigrant elders to learn about local senior transportation services and resources. From initial contact through the viewing of the finished video in the native language, participating ethnic communities seemed pleased to have their voice engaged and surprised at the care and quality with which the project was implemented. The use of local, well-known, trusted community advocates as video narrators has drawn positive response and comment from our elder viewing audience. Involving elders as “actors” in the videos was another aspect of the project from which elders seem to draw comfort and pride when viewing the video series with their peers. But most significantly, the receipt of transportation information in their native language appears to greatly aid understanding of how to negotiate our local bus, light rail travel and other community transportation systems. The video series was favorably received by all the peer elders who viewed it; 99% expressed enthusiasm and satisfaction with the end product. They also shared their belief that this video series represents a valuable new tool for spreading travel information throughout their communities, especially among elders who struggle with lower literacy abilities and those newly arrived to the United States. In addition, 100% of focus group participants expressed pride of ownership as a result of participating in our community transportation project.
- b) While it is too soon to evaluate the project’s impact in King County in terms of measured improvements to service access, increased elder knowledge of existing transportation resources and increased ridership, a Ukrainian focus group elder who also “starred” in our video series represents the positive impact we hope to have on lives of future newly

arrived refugee and immigrant populations. Genia's case exemplifies how the inability to use public transportation limits quality of life among refugee and immigrant elders. Genia is a 67 year old divorced, former engineer from the Ukraine, who came to the United States almost two years ago. Upon arrival in King County, she lived with her son & his family until she qualified for subsidized housing. Although in good physical shape, Genia was literally homebound because she didn't know how to use a bus and was afraid of getting lost. Her limited proficiency in English rendered her unable to explain her travel needs on a bus or at a bus stop and she didn't know where to find the specific, detailed information she needed to use public transportation effectively. Genia felt forced to depend on her son for getting to doctors' appointments, social life, purchasing groceries, medications, etc. She couldn't attend ESL classes because in order to get to them she would have to use a bus. Since participating in our project and viewing the video series, Genia is excited and optimistic that she will be better able to fully participate in community life with independence. As Genia's case illustrates, lack of transportation can be a huge barrier for social interaction in general. Because elders will be able to view these videos soon after their arrival and hear travel instruction information in their native language, they will likely be able to travel more easily within their communities with less stress, thus curbing the social isolation and depression that often accompanies lack of mobility/mobility access. When refugee and immigrant elders master the ability to travel independently, they will have a new, reliable source of self confidence and less dependent on family members for meeting their transportation needs. A second example of improved service access involves Mohamed, a Somali senior who attended a transportation focus group in spring. He told the facilitator that his problem

with riding the bus was an economic one. During discussion in the focus group, he learned about Orca Regional Reduced Fare cards and how to apply for this senior discount program. At the time of the video viewing in December, he had applied for and received his Orca card and was using it successfully.

c) While Senior Services was fiscal agent and lead partner for the NCST project, it served in its capacity as a member of the King County Mobility Coalition (KCMC), whose members include special needs transportation service providers, clients and funders from governmental, non-profit and for-profit sectors and from rural, suburban and urban areas throughout King County. All KCMC members benefit in the long-term from the NCST project, and certainly relationships between project committee members were strengthened as a result of the project. Transportation planners/funders and community stakeholders who attended the Transportation Summit reported appreciation for the cross-cultural education provided about who our local refugee groups are, what countries they currently are coming from, how they come to live in our communities, and how language, literacy and culture often serves to isolate them within our midst. This cross-sector group convened by the summit to discuss transportation barriers, pledged commitment to work on service improvements for diverse cultural groups, demonstrating both political will and creativity in developing potential solutions to identified mobility barriers. Notable follow-up developments from the Transportation Summit include:

- King County Metro Transit provided supplemental funding to create Spanish language version of the videos as well as purchase additional copies of the video series beyond what our NCST grant could finance, increasing outreach capacity.

- Major local resettlement agencies have agreed to partner with the King County Mobility Coalition, planning to use this instructional video series for transportation training with new arrival refugee groups.
- The *Washington State Services to Refugee Elders* grant provided the new training video to all King County partners for elder travel training workshops, using the video as the teaching tool. The NCST grant-funded video provides linguistically accessible travel information to six of nine language groups targeted in the Refugee Elder grant. The grant coordinator is seeking a cost bid for replicating the video in the three missing languages (Hmong, Lao and Mien).
- The Puget Sound Regional Mobility Council, our local transportation, economic development and growth management planning organization, cited our project as a successful example of the type of transportation equity project they wished to fund through their Equity Grant Program.

Barriers and Challenges

The King County Mobility encountered the following barriers/challenges in implementation:

1. The *Breaking New Ground* grants had a short time frame, and we required a month extension to finalize contracted marketing media services. Our scope of work was overly ambitious in focusing on seven language groups given the short implementation timeline. In retrospect it might have been preferable to narrow our focus to just one or two refugee and immigrant populations. On the other hand, we recognized the critical need for this transportation access information among diverse populations living in our county and decided to push ourselves in spite of the time and funding challenges.

2. Working with so many refugee and immigrant populations and community agencies presented challenges throughout the project, including the logistics, time and labor of arranging for community-based focus groups and their facilitators, identifying video narrators, recruiting elders to appear in the video, ensuring translations of video scripts were accurate and keeping everybody informed of our progress.
3. It was also logistically challenging to get buy off from Sound Transit and King County Metro, the local transit agencies, regarding both script content and use of their vehicles for filming the videos. It was necessary for Senior Services to issue a certificate of insurance naming Sound Transit as additional insured, and a Sound Transit representative needed to be present the day of filming just to gain us needed access. Although we arranged to use a KC Metro bus the day of the shoot, we needed to pay for its use, an unanticipated expense that one of our committee members has subsequently offered to cover. It was also challenging to find a place for the video shoot that could accommodate the bus, elders, narrators and videographers needed to complete the shoots.
4. While our community partners facilitated the focus groups and collected elder surveys, members of the King County Mobility Coalition Outreach Subcommittee took actual summary notes. If we were to repeat the project, we would plan and budget for an independent bi-lingual note-taker so as to capture more richness and depth of the community conversations which may have been lost in our process.

Replicability and Sustainability

- a) Project replication is definitely possible in other places and/or by other programs but anyone wishing to undertake such a project needs to realize the extensive commitment to planning, time/financial resource investment, community inclusion, and above all, the

need to develop successful, collaborative, mutually respectful relationships with refugee and immigrant communities. Project replication will require concise communications, continuous, proactive partnership building and detailed logistical coordination to address language, cultural, geographic and transportation challenges, while simultaneously establishing dialogue with diverse communities and earning their trust. We were fortunate to have the involvement of Washington State Refugee Elder Grant Coordinator who already had long-standing ethnic relationships in place, as well as Senior Services Transportation Program Director who had also worked with many ethnic senior lunch programs. Our outreach committee learned perceived transportation challenges among ethnic elderly communities. We also became aware of a knowledge gap between existing transportation resources and ethnic elder knowledge of those resources. We learned to be more accurate in estimating adequate time for coordination and effective communication when working with multi-lingual/cultural groups who have different experiential exposures to urban transportation service and language literacy levels. We successfully learned to navigate incompatibilities between mainstream and ethnic concepts of time and different scheduling needs of these two groups. Perhaps the most important learning was the community's cherished belief that in order to gain maximum cooperation and efficiency, it is beneficial to locate project activities at the community-based site and involve community members. Lastly, once we chose a travel instructional video as our outreach tool, it was essential to keep the instructional messaging simple, clear and culturally appropriate; a DVD video series in eight languages that could be uploaded to YouTube would maximize dissemination capacity.

- b) Some significant commitments resulted from the Transportation Summit which KCMC intends to pursue systematically. These commitments represent new partnerships/collaborations that will generate new human/financial resources to be applied to the achievement of greater transportation access equity in King County. Senior Services is committed to implementing an Ethnic Senior Advisory Council which is the one NCST grant outcome that we were unable to complete within the time frame and limited project budget. The goal of advisory council formation is to enhance/improve access to the broad range of human service agencies, resources and services available in King County for refugee and immigrant elders by providing elders with leadership training to support them in helping their peers. We envision a three to five year implementation process as the Advisory Council builds relationships and encourages trust and understanding between and among the various immigrant and refugee communities and the larger King County community.
- c) The King County Mobility Coalition is committed to equity and social justice and plans on continuing our work of improving access to transportation resource information for refugee and immigrant elders at the local, regional, state and federal level. We are more than willing to continue to work with the NCST to **educate others** about our project and experience, and in fact are co-presenters at the “Breaking New Ground: Aging, Diversity and Mobility” workshop at the ASA 2012 Aging in America Conference in Washington DC, scheduled for March 28-April 1.