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An Evaluation and Program Comparison of Transportation Services for Children

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An Evaluation and Program Comparison of Transportation Services for Children

**Graduate Capstone Project
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Focus

The focus of this paper will be the evaluation and comparison of two programs that have the same mission, to provide transportation services to children. However, the delivery methods along with operating procedures differ greatly.

Program 1

A program operated by a Bay Area City which operates only on a sliding scale basis. This program services all families in need with no regard to income level. 70% of the clients served by this program are single parent families.

Program 2

A program that is privately owned that operates using a fixed price, also serving all families with a need. However, 90% are two parent households largely due to the fixed cost. This means that many single family households do not have the ability to afford the fixed priced service. This program operates within 3 local Bay Area Cities.

This paper will detail an ideal program model as well as attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Is the lack of transportation services for children a barrier to parents obtaining or maintaining employment?
2. Is program 1 and program 2 meeting target goals?
3. Should program 1 and program 2 maintain current operating procedures?

Methodology

Primary Data for this paper comes from working directly with Program 2 for two years, from extensive interviews with the Executive Director of Program 1, and from interviews with childcare workers, social service administrators, teachers, and parents. Also, there was a survey that was given to 120 parents in order to assess the need and acceptance for a transportation service for children. Out of 120 original participants, feedback was gathered from 100 participants in the form of completed surveys. Secondary data was gathered by researching various articles, reports, and studies.

Background

Program 1 is a transportation program for children that is currently being operated through a city program. This program was started at the beginning of school year 2004 (9). Program 2 is a private transportation program for children and was started in 2002.

Both Program 1 and Program 2 have goals of helping to improve and bridge the economic and educational gap by providing transportation services within many neighborhoods.

In order for children to thrive and succeed, stability and a daily routine is very important. Therefore, these programs have been designed not only to assist children, but the family unit as a whole. Within many urban and rural neighborhoods (6) there are specialized needs that often go unmet leaving many families in a cycle of dependency. Transportation has been identified as one of these needs (2).

Both programs have taken a stand and have recognized the unmet transportation need and are quickly becoming a strong force within the community. The services provided help to ensure

children have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and to attend school safely and on time daily.

Both programs feel there is ample opportunity for expansion due to urgent unmet demand. This demand is based on extensive waiting lists for each program. The waiting list can sometimes have clients waiting for months depending on availability of routes and scheduling (3).

Literature Review

There are many articles that describe transportation for low income families as being a barrier to self dependency. However, throughout my search I found studies that directly impact the transportation services and companies that cater to children 3 months to 18 years of age to be severely limited. My research was also very restrictive in finding viable solutions to the issue of children transportation.

I have read articles on low income children and transportation, homeless children and transportation, single parents struggling with transportation (5), and also, the average working two parent, two income families that struggle with transportation (2). This tells me that the transportation problems for families with children cut across all socioeconomic sectors. It no longer belongs only to low income or single parent families.

Problem

There are many programs that offer preschool and after school activities, many children are unable to participate due to the lack of transportation, many school age children are unable to use public transportation due to age or safety issues.

Many individuals often acquire employment consisting of nontraditional work hours,

work hours that are before 6:00 am and after 6:pm and weekends. Employment that consists of nontraditional work hours can often be a serious hard ship for both parents and children (6).

A large number of clients for program 1 are of single parent households. However, program 2 works with mostly two parent families, they also face the challenge of balancing home and work life with one of the biggest dilemmas being safe transportation for their children.

The problem of transportation for children also increases when there are more than one child within a family and when the children are of different age groups which generally means that they are required to be at different places, most often at the same time (9).

Research and Comparison

Both programs realized that route expectations were highly unrealistic. With this in mind, adjustments have had to be made and extenuating circumstances accounted for. Program 1 realized that the cost of each student for the city program should have been 6.50, however, the actual cost was 22.00 per student per day. Program 2 estimated costs at 5.00 and actually cost 8.00 per day (9).

Program 2 has estimated that in any given week, there are only 2 days, 20 minutes on each of theses days that require two vehicles with the capacity to transport 12 children. Throughout the rest of the week, the typical van load is approximately 3-5 students at any given time, before as well as after school.

Program 2 has experienced 90% of its children travel more than a mile to and from school on a daily basis opposed to the 58% that travel less than a mile for Program 1 (9). This is due largely in part to Program 2 not having specific city boundaries. Program 1 is specifically a city program.

Program 1 has a client base that is 70% single parents. Program 2 has a client base that is 10% single parents. Program 1 suggested that the majority of nonprofits surveyed for the program exaggerated their true need for the program (9). Program 2 has found that approximately 90% of those interested actually use the service.

Program 1 estimated that it would have the ability to serve 200 children per day. However, because of route restrictions it was found that Program 1 is now only capable of serving 70 children per day (9). Program 2 had estimated it would serve 50 children per day, however, Program 2 also fell short of its goals by having the capacity to serve only 25 children at this time.

Program 1 receives 15.00 per month from the majority of clients it serves (9). Program 2 does not offer subsidies at this time, therefore, receives 360.00 per month from the majority of clients it serves.

Program 1 experienced a high turnover rate with their children. The Executive Director felt this was due in part to serving many children in transition (9). Program 2 on the other hand, found that once their clients signed up, they usually remained with the service for the duration of the school year.

Recommendations

In order to achieve long term growth and development, transportation programs for children must find the balance between private and public operation while keeping the focus on customer service, as well as operating cost and continued growth(4).

Transportation programs for children should not be operated solely by city or government agencies. It has been proven that these agencies require a large bureaucracy in order to be maintained. Therefore, many of the program's resources are used inefficiently. With this

in mind, it has been found that services and resources must be shared across the board to include government agencies, faith based agencies, and other nonprofit programs (8).

The ideal situation for a successful program would be for nonprofits and government agencies to work in a collaborative manner. These partnerships would not only allow for governmental assistance but also for the opportunity to qualify for additional grants, donations and sponsorships to act as a financial baseline. In the form of donations, the vehicles, office equipment and perhaps location should be gifted to the program through fundraiser efforts.

Parents that are considered to have middle or upper income levels should not be subsidized in regards to paying monthly fees for transportation services (9). In turn, it should be the fees from these parents that actually act as program subsidies.

Because the programs would also be operated by nonprofits, local business communities as well as large faith based organizations should sponsor a certain number of children per school year. This would also be seen as marketing for them because it would be noted on the vehicles as well as in marketing materials.

This service could also be seen as a perk to lure or reward employees without companies being liable. This service should be added to a company's benefit package giving an employee the option to list as one of its benefits and given the option to pay for this service with pre taxed dollars. If not, at the very least, this service should be listed in employees hr resource package at the start of hire. This is an important element due to a large number of employees facing the work/life balance challenge (3).

The transportation system should not only use the door to door approach but when feasible (older kids) also implement the route based approach. There is no reason to implement only one segment of the program.

Employees are what make a program successful. The organization should be designed to operate as a training program, employing its trainees from local low income individuals (parents) when possible, while also acting as a feeder to larger transit agencies after a length of service. The transportation program should also utilize volunteers whenever possible to meet the growing demand for services.

Proposed Start Up Plan **(Program Model)**

Services

The purpose is to offer safe and on-time door-to-door service to children (infant to 18 years of age). Every effort will be made to serve in a prompt and courteous manner. The goal of this service is to be number one in community transportation with customer safety and satisfaction as the number one priority.

Service Hours

The high demand time for services for children's program will be 6:00 am to 9:00 am for children getting to school/before care programs. The early afternoon time schedule will consist of 11:00 am to 1:00 pm which will involve younger school children (preschoolers, kindergarteners). The late afternoon timeframe will be 3:00 pm to 6:00, getting the children home from school and after school activities. The service will be daily if needed and door to door.

The routes/schedules will be developed according to time and location. The program should ensure to maximize service hours to best utilized resources by carefully planning routes and assigning vehicles to a service area, with this in mind, last minute changes/additions may be incorporated promptly.

Staff

Executive Director will set the standards for the program overall, fostering a collaborative and encouraging work place environment, safety standards, setting and meeting goals, will institute employee reward and recognition programs, will oversee and participate in training programs, hiring procedures, will monitor staff in the field, will research and institute

ways to help employees and program run efficiently, will work closely with the project manager to resolve any and all issues, will ensure fiscal fitness by working closely with company's CPA, bookkeeping, and payroll firms, will ensure compliance with all state and county regulatory agencies, will monitor and evaluate weekly, monthly incident, activity logs, customer satisfaction surveys, and maintenance reports, will handle all accident and insurance issues.

Project Manager responsibilities will include being the first point of contact for staff, supervision of all employees, schedules, routes, checking background of all potential employees (drug test, finger prints, etc.) will ensure that all employees are comfortable and familiar with duties and expectations, will monitor employee performance levels, will assign vehicles, will work closely with maintenance to ensure proper vehicle maintenance,

Program Assistant will be lead customer service agent and will assist in monitoring staff, employee timesheets, will be responsible for supplies and office equipment, first point of contact for all complaints or issues that can not be solved by customer service staff, will be responsible for running and compiling weekly reports

Office Personnel will be full time for both programs, will answer phones, work with clients to schedule transportation, will handle paper work, filing, typing, will work as a team with drivers, both office personnel will be bilingual.

Drivers will have a commercial license as well as first aid and safety certified, with a clean driving record, and must have enough patience to work around children, all drivers are responsible for their vehicle, they must complete a log every morning before they leave the yard and at the end of their shift with the maintenance supervisor or program manager signing off on it.

Driver Aides must pass all background checks, safety and first aid classes, must be good with children, it is their responsibility to place children in or take out of van, to make sure that all seat belts and child safety seats are secure, to sign children in or out of their program when necessary, to assist drivers with completing basic vehicle maintenance.

Maintenance Manager will have the qualifications to service 10 passenger vehicles with lifts, will routinely inspect all vehicles, will advise the project manager of any issues or concerns, to work with drivers regarding their vehicle issues or concerns.

Program Areas

Recruitment: there should be extensive outreach efforts geared toward local schools, after school programs, and other community organizations that offer services to children, including social service agencies. Outreach efforts should also include employees of local businesses.

Training Programs: should be implemented that will train staff on computer software, on customer service skills, safety programs, basic vehicle maintenance skills, and how to obtain a commercial drivers license. The training program should also include educational mentoring (assist with additional educational goals) and should develop employee surveys regarding interest in additional subject areas (parenting skills, personal finance).

Maintenance: drivers are responsible for checking any and all visible signs of vehicle wear as well as basic steps to ensure vehicle safety (tire pressure, tire wear and tear, oil and transmission levels, flashers, break lights). The maintenance supervisor will be responsible for overall vehicle maintenance (brakes, tune-up, oil changes, hoses, tire rotations) as well as cleaning vehicles inside and out, will also recommend to program manager when vehicles need to be sent out for more extensive work (engine/transmission). All vehicles will be checked

everyday, in the morning by the driver when he takes it out and by the driver and maintenance supervisor when it is brought back in. Our computerized dispatch system will aide in providing Efficient Vehicle Maintenance the system will easily schedule equipment service in advance to avoid parts shortages, Define service types for preventive maintenance scheduling, Create and maintain complete service histories, Monitor repairs and maintenance, identify repetitive problems, Store and track vehicle data including serial numbers, license numbers. Store and track vehicle data including serial numbers, license numbers and odometer readings, includes many user-defined reports for analyzing and optimizing fuel usage, cost-per-mile equipment, inventory service types and vendors, Quickly generate lists of equipment, inventory and vendors, Easily create billing reports, including repair and fuel costs, for outside agencies and other departments. We will contract with a towing company to assist us in the event we have a roadside emergency.

Evaluation

The best way to evaluate a program, to ensure a high level of customer satisfaction we will do this with our "Please rate us" surveys, and by setting goals and continually meeting and exceeding those goals. We will also allow our employees to fill out job satisfaction surveys monthly, we know we are only as good as our employees. All surveys will ask for feedback in order to improve our service.

Monitoring

All departments will be responsible for completing daily/weekly/monthly reports. Management will be responsible for compiling that information into monthly/quarterly reports. We will be taking measures to follow the numbers closely to ensure goals are being meet or exceeded. All staff will be monitored by the program manager using timesheets and schedules.

Outcomes

There should be weekly meetings to discuss the prior weeks performance at all levels using weekly report logs as guides, we will then be able to measure where we are in comparison to our goals and deal with any unresolved issues.

The computerized dispatch/transportation software will aide management staff in the area of generating complete and accurate reports detailing dropped calls, call wait time, accidents/incidents, complaints, passengers per hour, driver/employee training, vehicle maintenance. From experience, it is known that the major aspect of maximizing all resources in a safe and timely manner is effective scheduling. We will treat our customers in a courteous and professional manner, as such we will let them know what they can expect from us and in turn what we expect from them. We strongly feel that this will minimize no shows and complaints.

We will have a policy for "no shows", if there are a certain number of "no shows" for a family we will suspend service. To keep complaints to a minimum we will institute an employee of the month, reward and recognition system for best customer service efforts. We are pleased that our staff is and will be such a diverse team with experience working with many different educational levels, cultures, and ideals. We will discuss cultural and societal differences and learn with each other the best methods for dealing with all of our backgrounds. We will promote an encouraging atmosphere that will be supportive of teamwork, group and individual accomplishments.

Cultural Sensitivity

Our managers will conduct initial training classes that will entail our program's philosophy on diversity in the work place and high customer service standards in regards to all clients. Sessions

will be given on such topics as team and self esteem building skills, verbal communication and active listening skills. Engage in self-assessment, identity, beliefs and biases. Study concepts relative to diversity, such as power prestige, privilege and prejudice.

Form relationships based on trust and caring, despite individual differences. Acquire knowledge about and be willing to listen to, other perspectives. Use inclusive language. Develop the ability and willingness to challenge prejudice. Practice life-long commitment to respecting the rights and dignity of all culture group members. Care about serving diverse populations. Develop specific professional competencies and ethical standards. Seek an inclusive learning/working environment that values multiple perspectives and provides individuals the sensitivity and skills to respond respectfully and appropriately to others. Develop the willingness and ability to deal with ambiguity and differing perspectives. Work cooperatively and take the opportunity to collaborate. Engage in the development of specific academic and workplace practices that reflect cultural concerns, priorities and competence. Contribute to the development of policies and procedures, professional development performance reviews, etc. that promote the creation of a safe, inclusive and respectful environment.

Fiscal Management Information Narrative

Several of the basic objectives inherent to internal control procedures are as follows:

Authorization – ensuring that all transactions are approved by management.

Validation – ensuring that recorded transactions represent real transactions.

Capture – ensuring that all transactions are recorded.

Valuation – ensuring that all amounts recorded for transactions are accurate.

Classification – ensuring that all transactions recorded are assigned to the proper categories (i.e., assets, liabilities, revenues, expenses) and subcategories (i.e., type of expenses).

Cut-off – ensuring that transactions are recorded in the appropriate accounting period.

Access – ensuring that only authorized individuals, consistent with their job responsibilities, have appropriate access to assets.

Duties are sufficiently segregated, divides the responsibility for a transaction or activity among different parties so that no one employee has complete control over the processing of transactions. This method of control increases the likelihood that if one person makes an error, another will discover it. Segregation of duties also reduces the risk that one person would perpetrate and/or conceal errors in the normal course of his or her duties.

Access to assets is limited in accordance with management's authorization.

The preparation of a monthly bank reconciliation by someone not responsible for disbursing checks or depositing cash. A comparison or check of recorded assets with existing assets is performed by staff independent of the financial area responsible for recording the amounts. It is mandatory that all levels of responsibility and authority operate within the environment of these internal controls.

Our computerized dispatch system will track parts data including part numbers, descriptions, categories, warranties, and costs, set and track automatic parts reorder levels, quantities on hand, parts on order and parts needed on hand, track reference parts for multiple vendor purchasing and cross-referencing during work order entry and inventory activities, project the life expectancy of parts, including preventive maintenance scheduling and parts replacement suggestions, use the audit trail to track inventory shrinkage and expansion, enter parts quickly with standard barcode readers, quickly generate work orders, track actual work performed and customer billing information, As work orders are entered, adjusts inventory, updates odometer readings and records costs for easier reporting, track vendor information including last order and lowest pricing compilations, maintain complete purchase histories, as parts need to be replaced, scans the purchase histories for parts still under warranty that match

the part number and inventory category, accurate Fuel Management, track daily fuel use and mileage per vehicle.

Payroll is prepared following appropriate State and Federal regulations and organizational policy. The Executive Director will be directly responsible for ensuring fiscal fitness within the organization, making sure that fiscal policies are in place and strictly adhered to. The Executive Director shall: Have charge and custody of, and be responsible for, all funds and securities of the corporation, and deposit all such funds in the name of the corporation in such banks, trust companies, or other depositories as shall be selected by the Board of Directors. Receive, and give receipt for, monies due and payable to the corporation from any source whatsoever. Disburse, or cause to be disbursed, the funds of the corporation as may be directed by the Board of Directors, taking proper vouchers for such disbursements.

Keep and maintain adequate and correct accounts of the corporation's properties and business transactions, including accounts of its assets, liabilities, receipts, disbursements, gains and losses. Exhibit at all reasonable times the books of account and financial records to any director of the corporation, or to his or her agent or attorney, on request. Render to directors, whenever requested, an account of any or all of his or her transactions, of the financial condition of the corporation. Prepare, or cause to be prepared, and certify, or cause to be certified, the financial statements to be included in any required reports. We will have in place an outside CPA and bookkeeping company firm to ensure fiscal and reporting accuracy.

Report quarterly to the financial position and financial operating results of Company activities. Pay all debts and file required reports in a timely manner. Plan and control organization operations so as to work within approved budget amounts, reporting to the Executive Committee any line-item expense variances in excess and the reason for these

variances. Require a minimum of three competitive bids before making purchases where appropriate. Limit Organization credit cards to prudent and necessary levels. Limit vendor credit accounts to prudent and necessary levels. Make no contractual commitment for bank loans or for real estate lease or purchase without the approval of the Board. Avoid conflicts of interest in purchases and in all other uses or disposition of organizations assets. Periodically assess the adequacy of reserves as they relate to current and long-range spending plans.

Areas for Further Research

I. The pros and cons of contracting out services to a private company.

A. Will customer service and efficiency increase if all services are provided in house?

II. Using smaller more efficient vehicles when possible.

A. Safety and insurance issues regarding smaller vehicles.

III. Finding alternative methods of presenting program directly to parents.

A. Through employers

B. Through social service agencies

C. Through schools and other programs

Conclusion

Quantifiably, both programs can be seen as a failure. Both programs fell short of intended goals. However, the success of most social programs is difficult to evaluate because success is often measured in a more qualitative manner. It is more difficult to measure the happiness of a child that can attend school on time daily or the value of more family together time because of less time spent traveling. However, it is relatively simple to measure the cost of a program along with counting the number of clients that were served opposed to the number that was estimated to be served (9).

In certain areas such as accountability and measurement, there is a need for public agencies to be operated using procedures that may mirror corporations. However, public agencies are not in the business of only being concerned with the bottom line, they are in the business of providing a service. There is always a demand that agencies and programs provide more services with less financial resources. This most often leads to programs that place more of a focus on the budget than on the services that are or are not provided (1).

Although each of these programs are somewhat successful, they are each operating at half or less than half of target goals and objectives. Each program within itself is the missing link of the other. Program 1 lacks the authority to charge middle income parents full price for services provided and change comes too slow because of governmental bureaucracy (9). Program 2 does not qualify for donations, grants, or other special subsidies/funding because it is a private company.

The lack of transportation services may be seen as a barrier to employment and self sufficiency. However, between program 1 and program 2, there is no indication that employment was obtained or retained due to service. Parents that began service unemployed remained unemployed as parents that were employed when service began, remained employed (9).

Program 1 has decided that they can no longer afford to operate the transportation program under the city because of the expense along with the expense of the liability. It was also felt that because this was a city program, the bureaucracy attached prevented the service from being as efficient as possible. Program 1 will soon be operating under nonprofit status (9).

Program 2 has also decided to change its private status to that of nonprofit. Program 2 found that it would greatly benefit from having nonprofit status. Program 2 had severely limited itself from benefiting from many social service and community agencies due to its private status.

Operating in collaboration, government and nonprofit agencies proves to provide greater benefits to transportation services for children. There is no longer the huge liability and bureaucracy held by the city when program is ran only by the city. There is now the opportunity to charge parents a sliding scale so that more families can be served, while charging parents that can afford to pay regular fare which also can be seen as a program subsidy. Having an income base is what makes this program different from many other nonprofits that usually do not offer services that may be of use to families that are not considered low income or do not qualify for service utilization. Furthermore, with nonprofit status there is now the opportunity to qualify for grants, donations, sponsorships, and fundraisers.

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Appendix A-G

Survey Results and Graphs

Survey Results

Would you like information on a transportation service for children?

YES 98%

If a transportation service just for children was available to you, would you use this service?

YES 89%

Would you like the convenience of having your child meet you at work/home or having your child picked up from you at work and taken to school/childcare?

YES 90%

Do you need to be at work before your child can be dropped off at school?

YES 65%

Is the distance between your place of employment and your child's school a big factor concerning time?

YES 94%

Do you get off work after the time your child needs to be picked up?

YES 71%

Does your child only have a half-day program?

YES 82%

Would your child like to participate in after-school activities, however, the lack of transportation is a major factor?

YES 85%

Do you feel apprehensive with your child taking public transportation or walking home after-school?

YES 91%

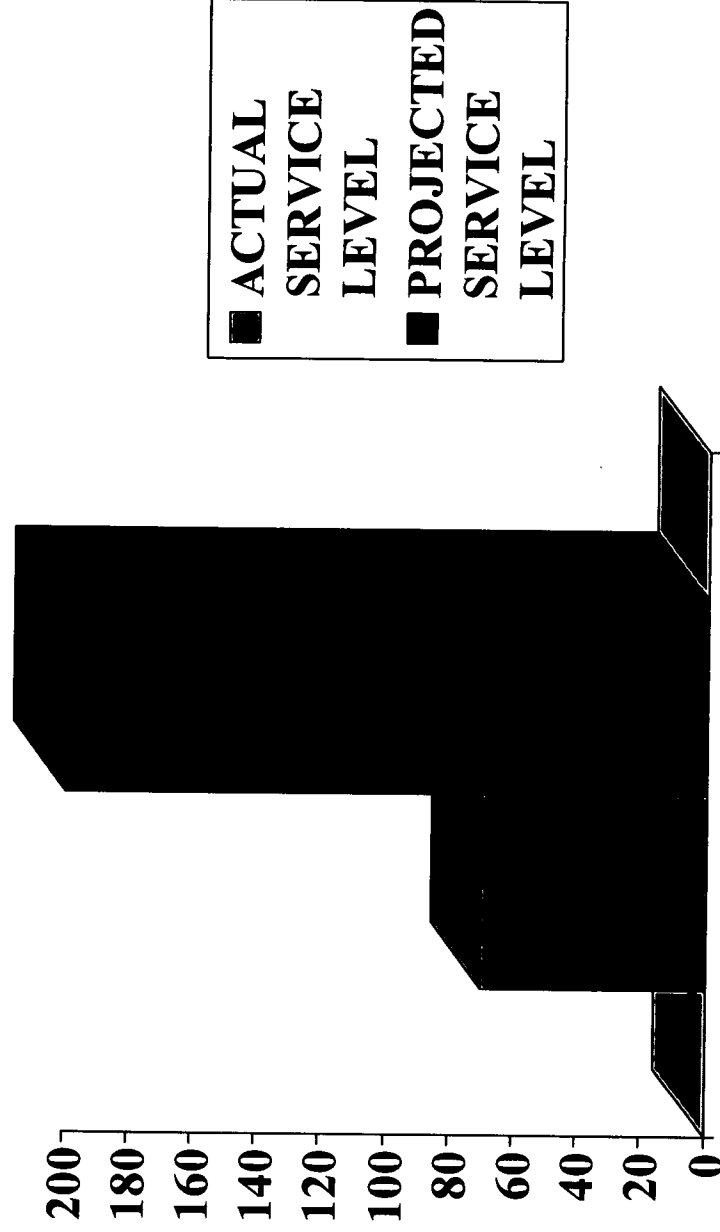
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SERVICE LEVELS

PROGRAM 1 - CITY PROGRAM

SERVICE WITHIN ONE CITY

3 FULL TIME BUSES (MORE THAN 4 HOURS PER DAY)



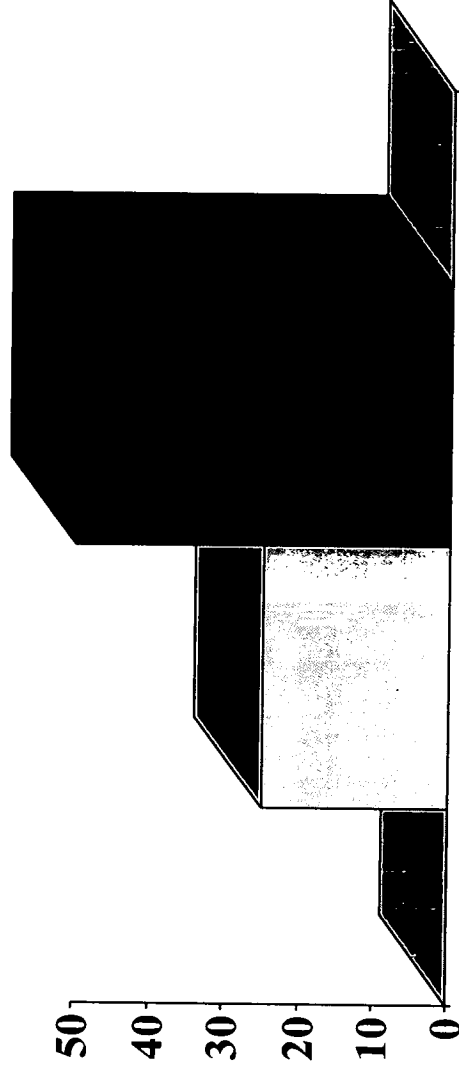
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SERVICE LEVELS

PROGRAM 2 - *PRIVATE PROGRAM*

SERVICE WITHIN 3 CITIES

2 - PART TIME VANS (LESS THAN 4 HOURS A DAY)



□ ACTUAL SERVICE
LEVEL

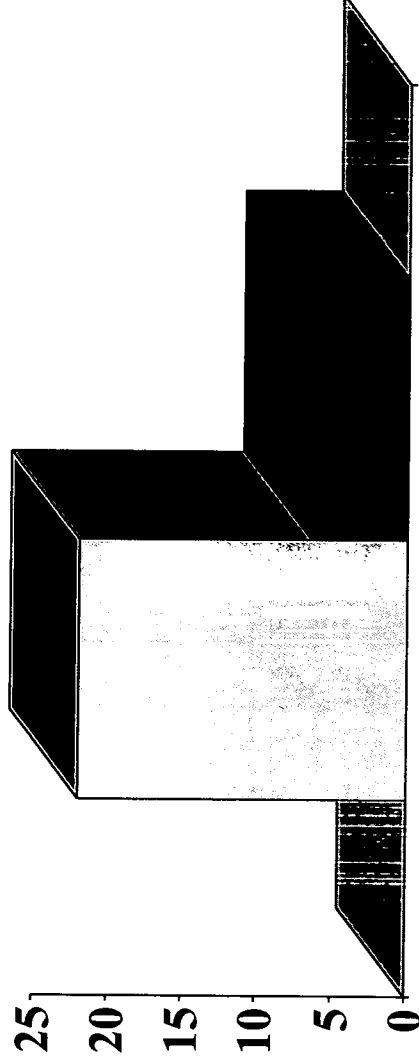
■ PROJECTED
SERVICE LEVEL

An Evaluation and Program Comparison of Transportation Services for Children

Estimated and actual cost
City program
per child , per day

□ Actual Cost
\$22.00

■ Estimated Cost
\$6.50

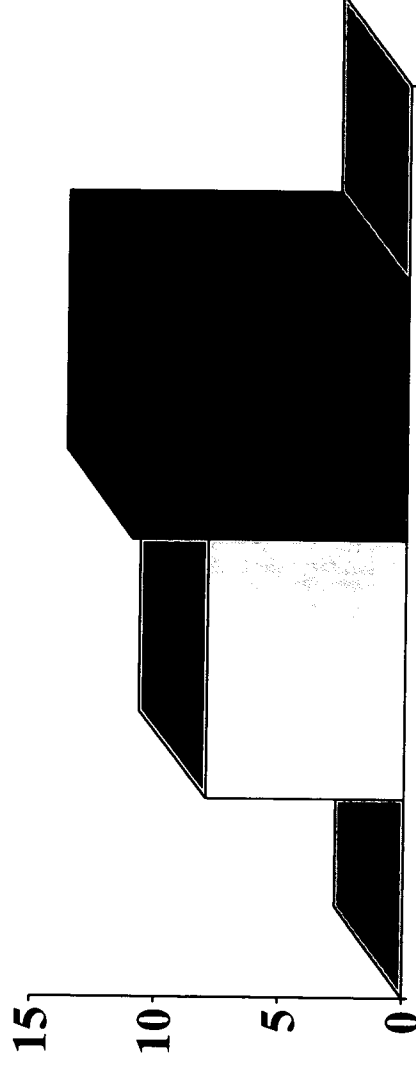


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Estimated and actual cost
Private program
per child , per day

□ Estimated \$5

■ Actual cost \$8



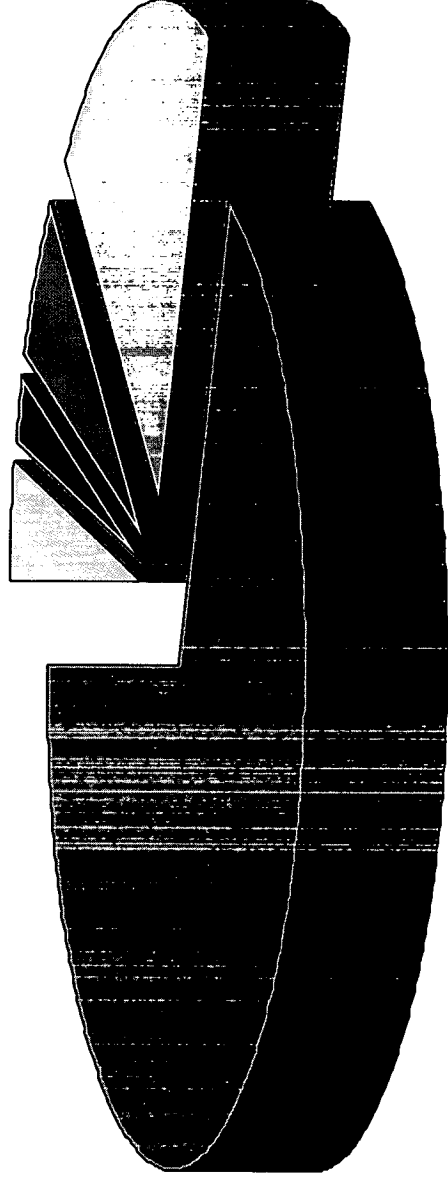
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Fee Scale, City Program
Transporting 70 children per day

□ \$200 ■ \$150

■ \$100 □ \$60

■ \$15



An Evaluation and Program Comparison of Transportation Services for Children

Fee Scale, Private Program
Transporting 25 children per day

☐ \$180 ☐ \$270

☐ \$360

