

It's not about transportation, it's about society

The Regional Transportation Commission's Paratransit Task Force has summarized its findings, believing that the solution to providing available transportation for persons with disabilities is to

**EILEEN
PAVLIK**

overhaul our local public bus/transit system. Its lack of confidence in the ability and competence of existing service agencies and private and public-care facilities is evident in its final recommendations. There are 33 agencies the RTC lists in its "Guide to Specialized Transportation Services" as viable, need-specific, customized transportation services available to persons with disabilities. How many of those are included in the solution proposed by the RTC Task Force?

Metro provides access to its public transit by bringing the bus stop to the doorstep of those who, due to their disability, are unable to get to, board

or negotiate the bus system due to cognitive, physical or visual disabilities. Metro follows a federally mandated (though not federally funded), nationally accepted and legal process that ensures equal access rights for all eligible passengers.

My experience continues to confirm what began as an intuition — that the dilemma facing our disabled community is not the transportation issue but the larger, cultural and social dilemma of abandoning our fellow man. Instead of sitting still and owning our personal responsibility, we gather together in denial of it and focus our own human guilt (disguised as anger) on one entity (in this case Metro).

The breakdown of our confidence in the abilities of individuals, families, churches, friends and neighbors to care for one another — the need for social services to make available home health care, financial support, transportation out of county, medical

**AS AN INDIVIDUAL DOING MY JOB AS
A PARATRANSIT COORDINATOR,
I FOUND THE SOLUTION STARTS IN
PAYING ATTENTION.**

coverage, counseling, medications — is the core of the dilemma. Admitting it is the beginning of the solution.

The din and cry of "help me" that I hear daily is so much deeper than a transit service area or MediCal ID number or bus fare. My heart aches. As an individual doing my job as a paratransit coordinator, I found the solution starts in paying attention. I listen, glean from the human being who is in front of me what the core issue is, determine what Metro can do, assess according to the ADA, refer the other deeper issues with the limited information I have. I research procedures of other agencies so my referrals are specific

and outline the procedures and phone numbers and appropriately trained individuals, I trust that those referrals are received by people who will cull from the emotions of the caller what assistance they need and provide assistance.

The challenges we face as humans are not going to be solved by your local bus driver. I believe, however, that one person at a time, the community will realize that they too could look to their own gifts as employees, businesses, agencies and listen to the requests, make note of them, inventory what they are doing, what needs to be done and where they might be able to bring something to the potluck instead of being critics of the individual dishes being offered by others. And, above all, realize that you don't need anyone's permission to be kind.

Eileen Pavlik is a Santa Cruz resident.

Seattuel 3-6-05

ATTN: M M T-S

31-14