

Lauren Journot for La Crosse Tribune, July 29, 2026 -

For many of us, getting somewhere is as simple as grabbing our keys.

We drive to work, pick up groceries, take our children to appointments, stop at the pharmacy and head home without giving transportation much thought.

But for many people in La Crosse County, transportation isn't automatic. It's one of the biggest barriers to finding and keeping a job, accessing health care, continuing their education, or simply participating in everyday life.



Through our work at La Crosse Area Community Foundation, we've seen how transportation influences nearly every effort to strengthen our community. Whether the goal is employment, education, health, or family stability, having a reliable way to get where you need to go often determines whether opportunity is within reach.

When someone doesn't own a dependable vehicle, every trip becomes a puzzle. Can they catch the bus? Does the route go where they need to go? Will they arrive before work starts? How will they get home if their shift ends after bus service stops? If their child gets sick at school, who can pick them up?

No single transportation option works for everyone. Walking, bicycling, public transit, ridesharing, volunteer drivers and personal vehicles each play an important role in helping people stay connected to work, healthcare, education and one another.

Public transportation is an important resource, but it doesn't meet every transportation need. Depending on where someone lives, works, or needs to go, a trip may require multiple transfers, longer travel times, or schedules that don't align with work hours or family responsibilities. Those extra challenges are significant barriers for many in our community.

Lack of reliable and flexible transportation can quickly become a missed paycheck. A missed medical appointment can become a more serious health problem. A broken-down car can put someone's employment at risk.

Transportation also affects something harder to see: the relationships that create opportunities.

A reliable ride makes it possible to attend a child's school conference, participate in job training, meet with a mentor, volunteer, attend a community event, or simply spend time with family and friends. Researchers call these networks of relationships social capital, referring to the human connections that help people find jobs, solve problems and build more stable lives.

When transportation is limited, people don't just miss appointments. They can become isolated from the very relationships that help them find jobs, access support and contribute to their communities.

Reliable transportation doesn't eliminate poverty, but lacking it can make escaping poverty much more difficult.

Across La Crosse County, nonprofits, employers, volunteers, donors and community partners are working together to remove transportation barriers. They understand that connecting people to opportunity strengthens the entire community, and their efforts remind us that lasting change often begins with practical solutions that help people move forward.

If this issue resonates with you, La Crosse Community Foundation's online nonprofit directory at bit.ly/LaCrosseAreaNonprofits can help you discover local organizations working to expand opportunity through transportation assistance and other essential services. Whether you're looking to volunteer, donate, or simply learn more, it's a great place to connect with organizations making a difference throughout our community.

When we remove barriers to getting around, we open doors to work, education, health, and connection. Sometimes the shortest distance between hardship and opportunity is simply a reliable way to get there.

Lauren Journot