

TOP STORIES

The gift of 72,000 bus rides

NICE foundation helps ease burdens

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A charitable foundation started by Nassau's transit provider has helped give away 72,000 free bus rides to low-income county residents over the last year, officials said Friday.

Twelve months after it was launched in February 2017, Everyone Rides NICE — a non-

profit created by NICE's parent company, Transdev — has partnered with the United Way of Long Island to provide some 36,000 round-trip MetroCards to about 2,000 residents.

"In many cases, they have to choose between transportation and filling a prescription, or transportation and buying food," said Michael Setzer, chief executive officer of the Nassau Inter-County Express, or NICE. "Think about a single mom who has to pay for herself and two kids to get to a doctor. The [\$2.75 bus fare] might make the

difference between being able to see the doctor or not."

United Way works with more than a dozen charitable groups, businesses and community organizations throughout the county to get the MetroCards into the hands of those who could use them, including low-income college students, people looking for jobs and military veterans, organizers said.

Theresa Regnante, United Way of Long Island president and chief executive officer, said the average recipient of the free rides has a monthly household

income of \$650.

"A lot of people are using it to get to and from school and work, to search for a job, to go on an interview, to get to medical appointments," Regnante said. "Overall we've had a really fantastic year, and a lot of people who are grateful."

Transdev started Everyone Rides NICE with an infusion of \$1.2 million — enough to fund the program for five years. Organizers said they plan to take on fundraising campaigns to keep the program going in the future.

Among those who have benefited from the effort is David Pais-Torres, 18, a sophomore at Nassau Community College who has relied on the free transit to get to and from school, afford textbooks, and have enough money left over "so I can buy some lunch for the day."

"We don't have too much money, so I take a bus to school. Nobody in my family has a car," said Pais-Torres, of Rockville Centre. "It's really helped us save money. It's helped us in a lot of ways."