COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ENQUIRY
WRVS
FORTH VALLEY
WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Community transport plays a crucial role in helping older people access essential amenities by providing services where public transport cannot or does not and can provide a vital lifeline for those most vulnerable to isolation and loneliness.

As a charity who promotes the independence of older people and delivers Community Transport Services for local older people to help to keep them active, independent, supported and socially engaged, we have been involved with and operating a Volunteer Community Transport Service for an excess of 5 years. The service originally, predominantly operated within the Western Rural villages of the Stirling Council area, (funded by RCTI before becoming part of core funding) where older people can experience a variety of community transport issues in later life. Latterly, the service has been able to expand to older people in the urban and wider Stirling area, as well as Falkirk and soon to be Clackmannanshire through RCOP, so recognition of the transport needs within Forth Valley, for older people, is now beginning to see more Community Transport Volunteer Services developed. For older people, being able to travel is vital to health and wellbeing, and contributes to prolonged independence and continued social inclusion; therefore, access to a suitable community transport service is crucial.

For all areas within our operations, there are the two main types of transport needs, the social, active and independent for getting out and about shopping, personal business or local appointments, which all fall neatly into a 45p per mile expense charge as they don't geographically travel too far. Then the medical related transport needs/requirements specifically for hospital appointments/visits, where particularly from rural areas, the 45p per mile expense cost to volunteer from Killearn to Forth Valley Royal Hospital for example and back can be quite costly, especially if it's not a one off appointment. It may be a visit to a husband who has been hospitalised, for example, so a daily visit may be required. Cost can be an issue versus a free bus pass, where mobility isn't an issue but convenience is. However, from the rurals especially, practicalities of such a journey by bus for anyone living in Killearn, for example, will involve a bus to Balfron, change of bus to a service to Stirling and change of bus service to Forth Valley Royal, covering approximately 27 miles and linking with 3 bus timetables and taking some time to complete to arrive at the nominated appointment time or visiting time. Appointments at 9am or earlier prove a challenge for everyone by use of public transport, regardless of age. However, suitability for older people to achieve this to and from the hospital, when perhaps experiencing mobility difficulties and anxiety around the nature of circumstances of the hospital visit,
be it for a visit for the individual, or relative, highlight the challenges faced by older people.

The Community Transport services we operate within Forth Valley are delivered by local volunteers, who not only provide the transport element but also the added and significant benefits of accompaniment, companionship and practical support also at the destination, from the volunteer, rather than a taxi type service from A-B.

Since December 2012 we have seen a rise in the number of older people contacting us for requiring transport to medical appointments to various hospitals within the Forth Valley area, living within Stirling, Falkirk & Clackmannanshire areas, who have been previously able to access the patient transport service but no longer able to do so. These calls come from a variety of age groups but with increasing frequency, from older people often in excess of 80 years old who are frequently distressed as they can no longer access the service or suitable for the service. If they are identified as being mobile enough to walk independently to a bus stop for example, then they are considered suitable to access public transport, which may involve more than one journey dependant on your geographical area. Often the reason for attendance to hospital for the older person is already causing a high level of anxiety and practicality – wise an older person being considered of “suitable” mobility may well have low confidence, anxiety, visual impairment and public transport is not a suitable option, especially if it involves more than one journey.

For this type of transport in particular but again not solely, the added benefit of using a Volunteer Community Transport service, is they also have a volunteer to accompany them, they are not just dropped at the door. They have some much needed support, at times when they are often in state of very high anxiety, where family support is not available. With an ageing population and the current economic climate, family support networks are frequently no longer available locally and often not within Scotland at all. The wider support requirements and individual needs of an older person need to be considered more when looking at access to transport. Presently, not enough emphasis is placed on the fact there are differing needs.

For the majority of older people who access our Community Transport services, whether for medical or social reasons, it simply isn't about just the transport element, the volunteer accompaniment and support and the benefit this brings, whether this is a hospital visit or building confidence shopping with assistance or attending a lunch club is the unrecognised and undervalued factor within Community Transport. There's a much wider picture here. It's vital we capture the whole picture rather than thinking it's all just about a journey from A to B. Those who are confident at getting from A to B will continue to do so, where suitable public transport options are provided and whilst they feel able. They will still be travelling and utilising their free bus passes. However, this will be until such time as either, reduced mobility or lack of confidence after a fall, for example, curtail this.

With an ageing population a high proportion of travellers to our Volunteer Community Transport Service are in excess of 80 years. If you are still lucky
enough to be able to utilise a bus service to shop for example, you will still need to be physically able to carry your goods on the return element of the journey.

The current provision for Community Transport Services has previously varied from area to area and in the past has often been a postcode lottery of access to a suitable service, dependant on how well your area has supported funding for the provision of this service. It’s encouraging to see this is now changing for older people.

For older people, accessing the Community Transport Services we provide means far more than a lift. They can continue to live an independent life, be socially active, be supported by local volunteers, build confidence, stay well and connected and be encouraged and supported when mobility has reduced. The access to suitable transport is key to maintaining the health and well being of older people and reducing isolation and ultimately underpins the links that can then be made within the community and the wider support services network.

In addition, for volunteers of the retired age group, delivering and supporting this type of service is also keeping them, active, independent, engaged and involved within their local community, so in the long term, will help to contribute to their overall health and well being as their age progresses.

Dependent on where you live, many older people continue to find transport problems are a barrier to becoming engaged and involved within their local community and the world outside of their home. Inaccessible transport can prevent them from forming social networks, accessing services or groups or taking part in other social activities or leisure opportunities; Community Transport needs to be recognised for the significant benefits it provides for an older person to access transport suitable to their individual need and not be continually looked at as a journey from A to B and back. It provides far more than a simple car journey and the significant value of this cannot be stressed enough. There’s work still to be done on achieving a consistent understanding of older people’s transport needs, the impacts of not having a suitable service and for greater understanding of the wider support and value a Community Transport Service provides.

WRVS
Forth Valley
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