

Surrey Voluntary Car Schemes – Report on User Survey 2007/8

Voluntary Car Schemes and Good Neighbour Schemes provide transport for isolated or disadvantaged people to GP and Hospital Appointments, to local shops and hairdressers appointments, as well as offering home support to enable people to remain physically and mentally well, and independent. There are **81 schemes across Surrey** and they are supported by Surrey Community Action's Voluntary Car Scheme Adviser.

In November 2007 all Voluntary Car Schemes and Good Neighbour Schemes in Surrey were sent a short survey to get updated information on the service they provide to isolated people in Surrey. 57 groups responded, giving a response rate of 65%. In order to compare the results of this 2007 survey with the results of the 2005 survey, we have extrapolated the responses to show figures if 100% of groups had responded to each survey.

During this period there has been a **10.2% increase in demand for these services**. In 2005 requests for these services totalled an estimated 57,851 per annum, compared to the **2007 demand of 63, 748 requests per annum**. Subsequently, the mileage travelled by volunteers taking isolated people to health appointments or shopping, etc. has risen to over **1.2 million miles per annum**.

The increase in demand for Voluntary Car Schemes to transport people to appointments or provide home support, correlates with the increasing centralisation of services in urban centres and the decrease in public transport options particularly in rural Surrey. Surrey's Accessibility Strategy highlighted some of the key issues that have led to an increased demand for Voluntary Car Schemes:

“There has been a decline in the availability of rural services, largely due to the willingness of people with cars to travel more distance for services in exercising their choice to live in areas that are not accessible by public transport. Social exclusion in rural areas tends to be much more dispersed than in urban areas and could be harder to target with area-wide solutions. A lack of mobility can cause real hardship for people to access health care facilities, employment, education, social and leisure activities and confidential advice especially for young people. In general access in rural Surrey relies heavily on the voluntary sector through the various voluntary transport schemes. These successful schemes could not operate without meeting challenges, which include maintaining a continuous flow of volunteers and parking issues, especially at hospitals.” **Surrey's Local Transport Plan 2006/7 to 2010/11, Annex 2: Accessibility Planning Strategy – Surrey County Council**

As well as the increasing centralisation of services and the lack of public transport to many of these services, there are other key reasons that Voluntary Transport Schemes

continue to be needed by isolated people. Voluntary Transport Schemes are run by volunteers who provide door to door, direct transportation to facilities, at a time that is convenient or required by the client, and will ensure the client returns safely indoors and will even put the kettle on. This means that an elderly person needing to attend a hospital appointment does not have to wait many hours at the hospital either side of their appointment just because there is no public or patient transport available – the car scheme is flexible according to the needs of the user. The volunteers also provide company and a listening ear to users who may be unwell or in need of some emotional support whilst at the hospital.

Health-related requests made up 74% of the Voluntary Car Scheme demand in 2007, equalling over 47000 requests. However, as well as provided transport to health facilities, volunteers also provide home support: befriending and visiting services, shopping services and prescription collection. All of these additional services are enabling more isolated or elderly people to remain independent in their homes. As well as supporting physical well-being, the visiting and befriending aspect provided by volunteers of these schemes supports the NHS agenda for preventative services to ensure better mental health.

Interestingly, though demand for this service has risen, the number of volunteers has fallen from 4067 in 2005 to 3500 in 2007, a 14% drop. Additionally, though public funding from the county council has remained consistent for the one part-time Voluntary Car Schemes Adviser supporting these 81 schemes, there is no longer any funding from the NHS. The part time Adviser provides support to new groups to set up including offering CRB checks, existing groups to recruit and support volunteers, and all groups to continue to function well in a changing world and stay within legislation. In order to continue to meet the growing needs of isolated people through provision of this demand-responsive transport service, and through provision of the preventative services to ensure physical and mental health and independence, there is a need to increase public funding for the Voluntary Car Scheme Adviser to ensure consistent and needs-led services are delivered by the schemes.

Surrey CA's Voluntary Car Scheme Adviser, Vicki Turton, works alongside local CVS's to support these schemes.

For full statistical survey results please contact: Pari Dhillon on 01483 459292 ext 241 or email parid@surreyca.org.uk

Surrey Community Action: Engaging Communities, Working Together.

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