

Voluntary car schemes

Giving Kent a Lift

If you do not have access to a car, and other means of travel are unavailable or inappropriate, getting from A to B is not always as simple as it should be in Kent.

The bus may pass close by your house, but if your arthritis turns the walk to the bus stop into the equivalent of a double-marathon, you need personal door-to-door transport. You might occasionally book a ride on a Kent Karrier minibus. You can take a taxi, but the cost is too high to do that every time.

So, getting access to a car can make all the difference for you. If you cannot get a lift from family members, neighbours or friends, you could be really stuck.

This is where Kent's voluntary car schemes come in. Every week, we organise hundreds of lifts for people unable to get out of the house under their own steam. These are provided by our volunteers, using their own cars.

The transport we provide has a unique combination of characteristics:

- ▶ It is a very flexible system.
- ▶ It is cost-effective.
- ▶ It covers a wide range of journey purposes.
- ▶ It provides direct benefits to health and social care organisations, relieving them of a transport burden and improving attendance rates.
- ▶ It offers the personal touch, with volunteers performing many other valuable tasks besides driving.
- ▶ It is an efficient service provider, operating without difficulty across traditional boundaries.
- ▶ It underpins the delivery of other voluntary sector personal social services.

In this briefing, we describe the work of Kent's 23 organised voluntary car schemes in more detail.



David is a volunteer co-ordinator with the Ashford Car Scheme. He is also a user of the service which enables him to get home after his morning in the office.

Inside:

- What is a car scheme?
- What does it cost to run?
- Where does it take people?
- How many people use it?
- How flexible is the service?
- What are the wider benefits?
- Securing the future...

Voluntary Car Schemes

What is a car scheme?

A volunteer car scheme matches a client in need of transport with a volunteer driver willing to take that person on their journey.

The car schemes in Kent reflect the needs of their local communities, so we are not identical. We may have slightly differing criteria for the types of client we transport and the types of trip we undertake. However, we all operate in similar ways and share similar aims.

Kent's car schemes:

- ▶ enable those who are unable to access other means of transport to reach their required destinations;
- ▶ use volunteers driving their own vehicles;
- ▶ are run for the benefit of the whole community, providing a non-commercial not-for-profit-service; and
- ▶ provide an essential service in each locality covered.

How is a car scheme organised?

In Kent, most car schemes operate from the office of a Volunteer Bureau or Volunteer Centre. The Scheme is organised by a designated co-ordinator, usually with the help of at least one other person. The co-ordinator takes calls from clients and then finds a driver who is prepared to carry out the journey.

But any similarity to a taxi service ends right there.

- ▶ Drivers are volunteers - they are free to decline any trip offered to them for whatever reason. They give as much or as little time as they choose.
- ▶ Drivers receive no payment for their time, only expenses to cover the cost of the use of their car.
- ▶ Drivers are much more than just drivers - volunteers help clients right to their destination, often waiting with clients if required,

offering support in stressful or difficult situations. Theirs is as much a befriending role as a driving one. The recruitment of the right drivers is important and the resources of each scheme are geared to ensuring there is a sufficiently large pool of available drivers.

Finding a driver for a particular trip may take many phone calls. The co-ordinator has to take many things into account when matching driver to client: the needs of the client (does he/she have a wheelchair that will fit in the car or a disability that may make communication difficult); the proximity of the driver to the client (the nearer the driver lives to the client the lower the costs to the

client); the logistics of the destination (how many steps to negotiate, if a wheelchair might be needed).

The local knowledge of the co-ordinator is vital for all these matters. Whether or not the scheme uses a computer, good administrative records of both client and driver are essential. Route maps are provided where necessary, since many trips are out of the immediate area, and the documents pertaining to the driver and his car must be kept up-to-date and regularly checked. Drivers also need to be supported in their volunteering, training offered and social events arranged so that they are fully included in the scheme. ■

How much does it cost to run a typical car scheme?

Although the lion's share of the costs of the scheme - the driver's mileage expenses - are covered by the passenger, that still leaves the essential but hidden costs of co-ordination to be found. The table below outlines the costs of a typical Kent car scheme. These would be much higher if a scheme had to be run on a stand-alone basis without the support and back-up offered by the local Volunteer Bureau or Volunteer Centre. ■

Operating 9.00am - 1pm, Monday - Friday,	20 hours per week
Volunteer recruitment, training & support:	30 volunteers
Journeys completed:	18,000 journeys
Annual mileage:	210,000 miles
Drivers' travel expenses met by clients:	£84,000 p.a.
Office	
Co-ordinator - 25 hours per week	£10,192
Management	£2,060
Police checks	£300
Insurance	£150
Recruitment/training of volunteers	£500
Post/stationery/telephone	£1,700
Rent	£1,020
Sub-total:	£15,922
Administrative Support	
30 hours per week @ £5.50 per hour	£8,580
National Insurance, pension, cover	£1,716
Sub-total:	£10,296
TOTAL:	£26,218
Transaction cost per journey	£1.46p

Giving Kent a Lift

Where do people need to go?

No trip is typical, but to give an idea of where we go, here are some sample journeys:

- ▶ A wife and her daughter needed to visit a patient undergoing treatment for a terminal illness. Particularly compassionate drivers had to be found who would not be fazed by their passengers' uncontrollable grief.
- ▶ Taking a man to visit his 90-year old wife, without whom he was lost and bewildered. When arriving on the first visit they found that she had been moved to another hospital. The driver calmed the elderly man and took him on to the other hospital.
- ▶ Taking a lady to the crematorium on the anniversary of her husband's death. Helping her to walk to the place where his ashes were scattered.
- ▶ Taking a lady in the early stages of dementia to see horses in a field in order to stimulate her by showing her the animals that had always been her great passion.
- ▶ Taking a young woman who has ME to college once a week in order that she can continue her studies.
- ▶ Providing transport for 3 teenage mothers and their babies to a Playlink Scheme which provides them with valuable help in bringing up their children.

Approximately 90% of people using Kent's car schemes are over 60, a high proportion of whom live alone. Those who are younger often need extra support, due to mental health problems or impaired mobility. In some areas, a growing number of requests are received on behalf of young people who want to get to education and personal support services. ■

Kent Volunteer Bureaux operate 23 Social Car Schemes

Ashford
01233 633219

Canterbury
01277 452278

Dartford
01322 272476

Deal
01304 380513

Dover
01304 211696

Faversham
01795 591015

Gravesham
01474 322729

Gillingham
01634 338653

Herne Bay
01227 366992

Maidstone
01622 677337

Malling Area
01732 843346

New Ash Green
01474 879168

Rochester
01634 830371

Sevenoaks
01732 454785

Sheppey
01795 580847

Shepway
01303 253339

Sittingbourne
01795 473828

Swanley
01322 669292

Tenterden
01580 765819

Thanet
01843 590935/6

Tonbridge
01732 357978

Tunbridge Wells
01892 511627

Whitstable
01227 772248

Flexibility of car schemes

Transporting people is not the easiest of tasks. It requires people who have tact, patience, and sometimes compassion, and an ability to laugh at the ludicrous side of life.

Volunteers often witness great sadness, fear and suffering and they cope with it with kindness and sympathy. Volunteer drivers are willing to wait with people who may be anxious about seeing their doctor or consultant; they can help break through some of the barriers preventing their passenger from reaching the person who can best help them.

Those who use our service regularly see volunteers as friends as they can be the only contact they have outside their home. They also have the security of knowing our drivers will return them home when they are ready to go! ■

494,776 journeys provided in 2002-2003

Health 149,408 journeys

Health-related journeys includes: Hospitals, Doctors, Dentists, Chiropodists, Physiotherapists, Opticians, Hospices, collecting and delivering samples to hospitals and clinics.

Social 194,580 journeys

Social journeys covers: going to the hair-dressers, shopping, viewing new accommodation, parties, church, resource centres, social groups, visiting family and friends, visiting graves, going on a drive to visit old 'haunts' and visits to the vets with pets.

Education 50,160 journeys

Education covers: all ages, including special schools, adult education and colleges.

Work 1,560 journeys

Journeys to work are provided for: people whose work may be outside normal hours, and people who require more support than may be provided by commercial companies.

Holidays 644 journeys

Holidays includes: taking people by the coastal route to their hotel in Eastbourne, an elderly nun to Gatwick, and a young family to Heathrow on a visit to see grandparents.

Refugees 260 journeys

In those towns where there are refugees: volunteer drivers are often on call for emergencies when residents have to move very quickly from one town to another, often outside the county - examples include to Newark and Milton Keynes.

Day Centres 98,164 journeys

Transport to Day Centres relates: mainly to older people, but there are examples of transport to mental health resource houses, children's day centres, and stroke clubs. ■

Voluntary Car Schemes – Giving Kent a Lift

The wider benefits

Kent's voluntary car schemes are providing 494,776 passenger journeys a year. These enable people to live an ordinary, but independent life, going about their business as they see fit. The reasons people are travelling are very wide-ranging, from health appointments to social occasions, from weekly shopping to holidays, from hospital visits to benefits advice sessions.

In turn, our transport is often ensuring that statutory agencies, such as hospitals, GPs, and social services, are able to meet their own objectives and obligations. If their clients do not get to and from the appointment easily and safely, these agencies' effectiveness is significantly impaired.

The non-statutory delivery of personal social care is also underpinned by our car schemes, with volunteer drivers taking the time to attend to their passengers' other needs besides transport, and also by ensuring volunteer carers get to their placement.

With the majority of the cost being met by the passenger, the overall cost to the public purse is being kept to a minimum. Efficient coordination of the volunteers cannot, however, be delivered at nil cost.

The cost to statutory agencies of providing this amount of door-to-door transport by other means would be significant. In 2001, the Audit Commission estimated that on average a single journey in a non-urgent ambulance cost £9. Replacing just 50% of Kent car scheme journeys with a fully paid service such as this would require a budget of £2.25 million.

Securing the future

Last September, we held a Car Schemes Conference in Ashford Civic Centre, chaired by Councillor Richard King, and about 50 delegates present. The findings of the East Kent NHS Rural Links to Health Study were discussed, including the need to secure the future of car schemes in the county.

It is widely accepted that the demand for our services will grow



Oliver is a severely autistic 21 year old. He travels daily from his home in Hothfield to South Kent College Folkestone, where he studies Mechanics.

over the coming years. The ageing of the population is having a double impact:

Increasing demand for car schemes when older people find they can no longer drive themselves (e.g. due to poor eyesight or lack of income to afford the car).

There are fewer 'younger' drivers available to volunteer (and, in any case, busier lives means that fewer have the time to spare anyway).

We have agreed to implement a package of measures (this Briefing is one of them) to make the future of Kent's voluntary car schemes more secure:

We are improving the organisation of car schemes, including such items as better parking arrangements at hospitals, and a common ID badge for volunteer drivers.

We are working together on area-based volunteer driver recruitment campaigns.

We are streamlining the Criminal Records Bureau checking process.

We have formally requested that Kent County Council Social Services and the NHS in Kent should agree common standards and funding arrangements to cover the coordination costs of our schemes.

We think there is a good prospect for an effective network of voluntary car schemes covering most, if not all, of Kent, for many years to come. However, this needs to be underwritten by a stable funding regime to cover the core costs of the local coordinator, based at the volunteer bureau. It is time for the funding process to be placed on a proper footing. ■

Further information: ring any one of the car schemes listed on page 3, or write to
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E-mail: suesawyer@ashfordvb.fsnet.co.uk