**Neighbor Rides** is a multi-stakeholder effort that increases access to life-sustaining and life-enriching activities for transportation—disadvantaged older adults and persons with disabilities throughout Chittenden County.

**How Well Are We Doing?**

**Neighbor Rides Volunteers (July 2013-June 2014)**

- **Neighbor Rides retained 26 out of 29 volunteer drivers.**

Improve efficiencies of transportation system by utilizing volunteer drivers to lower the average cost per trip.

- **Between July 2013 and June 2014 (FY14), volunteers provided 3,157 rides for passengers in the Elderly and Disabled (E&D) and Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation Programs.**
- **From FY13 to FY14, Volunteer trips increased from 6% to 19% of all rides for E&D partners who rarely or never used volunteers before Neighbor Rides.**

Increase the overall number of trips by decreasing the average cost per ride.

- **E&D partners who rarely or never used volunteers before Neighbor Rides experienced a 6% decrease in average cost per trip leading to an 8% increase in total rides in FY14 compared with FY13 spending levels.**

**Neighbor Rides is modeled after Hinesburg Rides’ successful use of volunteer drivers.**
What Do We Want?
All Chittenden County seniors and people with disabilities have access to transportation so they can participate in the life-sustaining and life-enriching activities they need to achieve optimal health and well-being.

How Do Things Look In Chittenden County?

- Vermont is a rural state with a decentralized transportation system.
- University of Vermont medical students surveyed Chittenden County seniors about their access to transportation. Among those who have limited or no access to a personal vehicle:
  - 40% have difficulty getting to important daily activities
  - 69% sometimes or always delay medical appointments due to transportation challenges
  - 35% find it difficult to ask family or friends for rides
- UVM students’ findings support national level research: the inability to drive can lead to missed healthcare appointments, decreased community involvement and social isolation.
  - Over half of non-drivers stay home on any given day. Compared to their driving contemporaries, they take 15% fewer medical trips and 65% fewer social trips.\textsuperscript{1}
- Special Services Transportation Agency (SSTA) is contracted by a variety of agencies to meet the transportation needs for many seniors and persons with disabilities.
  - While passengers ride for free or have a nominal trip charge, a one-way ride can range from $18-57 in a contracted sedan or van.
  - Funding for these trips, which mostly comes from federal, state and local sources, has not increased substantially in recent years.
- Demand for rides will continue to grow as Chittenden County’s proportion of people aged 65 and older rises to an estimated 22% of the population by 2030.\textsuperscript{2}
  - Nationally, one in five elders aged 65 and older do not drive due to poor health, limited mobility, safety concerns or lack of access to a personal vehicle.\textsuperscript{3}
- Due to the high costs for contracted vehicles and increasing need, current efforts are unable to meet ridership demand.
  - Medical rides may be limited and many personal rides, like visits to love ones in hospice, may be denied.

\textsuperscript{1} Bailey, L. (.2004). *Aging Americans: Stranded without options*. Surface Transportation Policy Project, Washington, D.C.
What’s Our Role?
A multi-stakeholder group comprised of transportation and service providers began meeting in May 2012 to look for solutions to address the transportation challenges of seniors and persons with disabilities in Chittenden County. After evaluating current transportation options and demand and researching best practices from local programs (Hinesburg Rides and CIDER) and national efforts, the group decided to develop, implement and grow a robust volunteer driver program. To achieve maximum efficiency and scale, the group decided there needed to be one centralized program that worked with agencies, transportation providers, municipalities and communities.
Neighbor Rides is a community driven initiative that builds off the strengths of the existing system while reducing costs and increasing capacity to meet the transportation needs of seniors and persons with disabilities.

Who Are the Partners?
Neighbor Rides relies on the service of volunteers, who share their time and vehicle to help their neighbor. Neighbor Rides utilizes the coordinating and mobilizing power of United Way of Chittenden County, the scheduling and dispatching expertise of SSTA, and the willingness and relationships of community partners to share resources and work collaboratively to improve the transportation system. Neighbor Rides is governed by an Advisory Committee that provides expertise and guidance in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of program policies and practices. Members include representatives from:

- CVAA
- Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
- Chittenden County Transit Authority and its community partners
- Department of Vermont Health Access
- Fanny Allen Foundation
- Special Services Transportation Agency
- University of Vermont Center on Aging
- United Way of Chittenden County

Neighbor Rides is collaboratively funded by the University of Vermont Medical Center Community Benefit Fund and many of the members of the Advisory Committee through grants, contracts and in-kind contributions.

Volunteer Driver Adam showing off his support for Neighbor Rides at Burlington’s Electric Car Show in September.
Why Does This Matter?

Access to transportation affects one’s physical, mental and emotional health. For seniors, access issues, such as longer travel distances, driving cessation and lack of reliable transportation, can result in many adverse consequences. These include decreased access to health care, decreased participation in out-of-home activities, increased dependency on family and friends, social isolation and depression. The inability to access essential services also puts them at a greater risk for subsequent nursing home placement. In regards to health care, the delay of treatment due to transportation issues can aggravate health problems and lead to more expensive care when it is received. Moreover, better access to transportation produces net cost savings for the health care system and/or improvements in life expectancy or quality of life that justify increased net costs.  

Limited access to transportation can also result in higher levels of depression and social isolation for elders, which affects their physical health by contributing to a decline in functional status, quality of life and even mortality. Regardless of underlying health issues, social isolation increases likelihood of premature death. Those with adequate social relationships have a 50% greater survival rate than those who experience social isolation, demonstrating the need for access to transportation to both life-sustaining and life-enriching activities.

To learn more about Neighbor Rides, contact Alyson Platzer: alyson@unitedwaycc.org or (802)861-7833

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