



Devon Access to Services Project

Improving access to information, services and representation

Community Car Schemes

Report into the impact of NHS policies and practices on the ability of patients in Devon to access health appointments

Executive Summary



Tim Lamerton and Jo McDonald

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With thanks to all members of the Devon County Car Forum for their expertise, contributions and support

For more information

tim@ndvs.org.uk

jo@ndvs.org

01271 859261

<http://www.ndvs.org.uk/services/devon-access-to-services-project-dasp>

Executive Summary

During a single year (2015 -16) 96,252 journeys were made by people across Devon using local community car schemes to access health services. Volunteer drivers are providing this vital service to people who are unable to get the bus, have no access to a private vehicle and cannot afford a taxi.

People also really appreciate the 'helping hand' that volunteer drivers are able to give to passengers. Often acting as befriender and chaperone, drivers get to know the people who use their service, many of whom are frail or disabled, and it is the social kindness of the drivers that makes such a positive difference to their lives.

However, real challenges are presented to these patients when trying to arrange their transport to and from healthcare appointments, and these challenges also impact on the running of car schemes. These include the challenges presented by:

- Short notice appointments - many schemes are part time and unable to respond quickly.
- Cancelled appointments – car schemes may not get the information quickly enough to cancel the driver, resulting in wasted journeys that cost the schemes approximately £36,000 a year in wasted resources.
- Hospital discharge processes – short notice discharge and/or being discharged late at night. Booking 'out of hours' is beyond the means of most volunteer schemes.
- Car parking arrangements and congestion at hospitals.
- Running a service with volunteers – more drivers are always needed and more help and funding is needed to help schemes co-ordinate their services.

Following consultation with volunteer car drivers and scheme co-ordinators DASP are able to suggest various possible solutions in this paper that the NHS might find helpful. It is hoped that these ideas would result in a better experience for patients and help ease pressure on schemes and on the supply and demand for volunteer drivers.

Devon Access to Service Project (DASP) and the Community Car Schemes would like to make a heartfelt plea for hospital staff and health managers to read this paper to help give them a better understanding of the difficulties faced by patients in accessing their services and the role of volunteer drivers in helping to alleviate this.

Once at the hospital the extra assistance given to patients is helpful both to them and, indirectly, to the NHS, as a relaxed patient who is not worrying about getting to and from an appointment is likely to have a better result from the appointment itself.

Stress from hospital visits has been quoted by some drivers as a reason for giving up volunteering. Once DASP has been able to talk with car park managers, for example, about the issues their understanding and support to help ease driver's access to appropriate parking has been greatly appreciated.

The bigger picture is that our health and social care services are going through unprecedented change. Resources are scarce and everyone wants to make the most effective use of what is available. In the best interests of people who struggle, for whatever reason, to access essential treatment, we at Devon Access to Services Project hope that decision makers and the Community Car Schemes can get together to help prevent some of the setbacks that volunteer schemes are facing, which in turn will lead to happier healthier patients, happier drivers and happier hospitals.

Appendix 1: Key facts

Community Car Schemes Activity April 2015–March 2016

43 Schemes across Devon reporting by providing quarterly statistics:

Activity

- **144,360** Total Passenger journeys of which:
- **48,108** passenger journeys to social and welfare activities (**33%** of total journeys)
- **96,252** passenger journeys for health (**67%** of total journeys) of which:
- **45%** of Journeys are to and from primary care
- **55%** of Journeys are to and from secondary care
- **7,203** journeys for passengers travelling in wheelchairs
- **6093 journeys (6.3% of health journeys)** were made by patients who reclaimed the journey cost under the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)
- Over **9,200** cancellations, mostly health appointments, costing Schemes over **£36,000** in administration, over **6%** of their operating costs.
- At least **31,917** paid staff hours
- **137,188** volunteer hours with a notional contribution to society of nearly **£919,160** (at the national minimum wage in 2015-16 of £6.70 per hour),
- **1,391,699** miles travelled, by approximately 2,000 drivers.
- Of the **147,860** journey requests made, only **2.3% (3,500)** could not be met.
- Journeys cost just **£1.26 a mile**
- **19 miles** average return journey distance
- **£8.68** average journey cost

Costs

- **£1,100,827** to deliver Schemes including drivers' expenses
- **£538,763** reimbursed to drivers (49% of costs)
- **£562,064** operational/running costs (51% of costs)
- **£3.89** Average administration cost per journey excluding driver expenses.

Income

- Passengers provide **£683,661 (62%)** of total car scheme costs
- Schemes fund raise/receive in grants **£297,193 (27%)**
- Reported funding deficit, funded from organisations' reserves of **£119,973 (11%)** for 2015-16

Potential value to the NHS

In addition to enabling the NHS to provide its services by transporting patients to the point of delivery, it is possible that Community Car Schemes save the NHS a potential £2,330,000 a year across the region.

This is an estimate based on the cost of Did Not Attends (national average of £108 per missed appointment) if half of the 43,300 journeys to primary care were not able to be undertaken resulting in missed appointments.

Appendix 2 - Community Car Journeys to hospitals in Devon

Estimated Community Car Scheme vehicle visits to Devon Hospitals:

Hospital	Day	Week	Month	Year
North Devon District Hospital	10	49	212	2,550
Torbay	16	78	337	4,040

Further work will be done on this by DASP during 2016/17 to ascertain the number of Community Car vehicle visits to:

- Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Wonford
- Derriford Hospital, Plymouth