

## Seniors and Transportation in Guelph & Wellington County

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### ***Seniors in Guelph & Wellington need access to transportation services and supports...***

- During the first four months of 2008, 5,136 rides were provided to seniors and other clients through Wellington Transportation Service; these rides covered 365,356 KM in distance.

#### ***Volunteers play a crucial role in increasing access to transportation for seniors in Guelph and Wellington...***

- Volunteer drivers provide rides to people who need them in both Guelph and Wellington County.
- In the first four months of 2008, Wellington Transportation Service volunteers provided 6,956 hours of service.

#### ***Increased gas prices impact the ability to provide transportation services to those who need them...***

- Over the course of 2008, volunteer shortages related to gas prices, were reported by transportation services located in the City of Guelph and Wellington County.

Several researchers suggest that access to transportation is essential to seniors' quality of life and their sense of freedom and independence to come and go from places at their leisure<sup>1</sup>. In 2005, Statistics Canada reported that 94% of seniors across Canada had access to either a vehicle owned by someone in their household or public transit<sup>2</sup>. Access to private and public transportation declines as seniors age; 86% of individuals over the age of 85 have access to a vehicle<sup>3</sup>. Seniors without access to transportation must rely on friends or family members for rides. Taxis are an option for seniors with the financial means to access this service. For individuals who reside in rural areas taxis

are not likely an option and if they are available, the service fee would be very high.

With the implementation of the new Aging at Home Initiatives funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) has acquired seven vans to provide approximately 10,000 rides annually to those who require this service<sup>4</sup>. Three of the seven vans provide service in Guelph and Wellington. These vans are not wheelchair accessible and they are presently used to transport individuals solely to medically-related appointments.

The City of Guelph currently offers a mobility service to individuals who are physically unable to transport themselves. To be eligible for this service, individuals must be unable to climb or descend stairs, be unable to walk 175 meters, and be unable to utilize the regular transit system. Those who require rides must be picked up from an accessible point and be dropped off at an accessible location; drivers are not able to assist individuals up or down more than one stair or through a second set of doors. If individuals are in wheelchairs, drivers will assist them up and down ramps. Those who require further assistance will need to ensure that they have a companion with them to fulfill these duties<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, only individuals who are able to be left unattended in the vehicle and at their drop off locations are able to independently access the City of Guelph mobility service. Those who require further care are required to have an attendant with them. This limits access to the service to individuals without cognitive impairment or significant physical disabilities. Those who suffer from dementia may not qualify for the service because their disability is not physical<sup>6</sup>. If caregivers want their loved ones to attend day programs, for example, it is their responsibility to arrange transportation.

There are other community organizations, such as the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) that provide

transportation for seniors to essential places including medical appointments, banks, or grocery stores. Additionally, they provide transportation for social visiting. For various reasons, including the current price of gasoline, the VON is experiencing a shortage of volunteer drivers. In July 2008, the VON indicated that they have had to deny on average approximately 75 drives per month because of a lack of volunteers to provide the service<sup>7</sup>. For those individuals who continue to provide volunteer transportation however, they do so in both Guelph and Wellington County. In an attempt to save gas, drivers are asked to transport individuals from their own geographic area. If however, there is no volunteer driver in a specific area, the VON will send a volunteer to pick up the individual if they have a medical appointment to attend.

St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph also provides a transportation service to disabled elderly, either physically or cognitively, who are unable to drive themselves. The hospital has two minivans that transport individuals in Guelph and volunteer drivers who escort those who live in Guelph and rural Wellington. In July 2008, St. Joseph's Health Centre also reported a shortage of volunteer drivers in the area. There are no restrictions on the reasons why individuals require rides; the transportation is provided for social or medical appointments or necessary trips<sup>8</sup>.

Free bus transportation is offered from the Evergreen Seniors' Centre to the Stone Road Mall and back on the first Tuesday of every month and to Willow West Mall and back to the Evergreen Senior's Centre every Wednesday. Additionally, a free bus service is offered every Tuesday to transport individuals from Riverside Residence to Ultra Food Mart and back.

Wellington Transportation Services is a newly formed network of service providers that has improved access to transportation in Wellington County. Clients include anyone in need of transportation assistance (not only seniors). First time clients phone a central access number and are referred to one of six transportation services depending on their needs. Repeat clients directly phone the transportation service that they were referred to after their initial phone calls. The new service has expanded the types of transportation

requests people can make to include necessary appointments, social and health living visits and daily living tasks. When there is a shortage of volunteers, people in need of transportation to essential appointments may be given priority over people making other requests<sup>9</sup>.

The Wellington Transportation Services recorded the following usage numbers for three major transportation providers, the Community Resource Centre (CRC), the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON), and East Wellington Advisory Group for Family Services (EWAG):

**Wellington Transportation Service Usage Numbers Jan. 1, 2008 – April 30, 2008<sup>10</sup>**

Number of requests for service	5,444
Number of completions of service	5,136
Number of volunteer hours	6,956
Number of kilometers driven by volunteers	365,356
Number of clients served	1,428 <i>(may be the same clients but with repeated usage of services)</i>
Number of new clients	152

Representative from local organizations said that the Wellington Transportation Service is a very positive addition for the community; however some seniors may still struggle to access transportation services when they require more assistance than what drivers are able to provide and when they do not have access to another individual to assist them. Service providers suggested that training drivers to assist elderly clients out of their homes would be beneficial and subsequently allow more seniors to make use of transportation services.

Several transportation providers have made note that the climbing gas prices have led to a loss of volunteers, cutbacks and a subsequent increase in the need to deny rides to clients who request them.

Rising costs of fuel is something that needs to be taken into consideration by agencies, governments and

fundere when they look at maintaining and/or expanding existing transportation services. All seniors deserve access to transportation to attend necessary appointments and outings, as well as social engagements. For clients on fixed incomes, with physical or cognitive disabilities or without family support and assistance, access to transportation services is even more crucial.

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<sup>1</sup> Rudman, D.L., Friedland, J.F., Chipman, M., & Sciortino, P. (2006). Holding on and letting go: The perspectives of pre-seniors and seniors on driving self-regulation in later life. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 25(1), 65-76.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. (2006). *Seniors' Access to Transportation*, Canadian Social Trends, cat. no. 11-008-XWE. Retrieved July 21, 2008, from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-008-XIE/2006005/tables/table1.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Rudman, D.L., Friedland, J.F., Chipman, M., & Sciortino, P. (2006). Holding on and letting go: The perspectives of pre-seniors and seniors on driving self-regulation in later life. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 25(1), 65-76.

<sup>4</sup> WWLHIN. (2008, June). Landmark provincial aging at home strategy launches in Waterloo Wellington.

<sup>5</sup> City of Guelph. (2008). Mobility Service. Retrieved July 9, 2008, from <http://guelph.ca/living.cfm?itemid=46292&smocid=1803>

<sup>6</sup> City of Guelph. (2008, July 9). Mobility Service. Personal Communication

<sup>7</sup> Victorian Order of Nurses (2008, July 20). Personal Communication

<sup>8</sup> St. Joseph's Health Centre. (2008, July 28). Community Outreach Services. Personal Communication.

<sup>9</sup> Wellington Transportation Services (2008, July 15) Transportation Coordinator. Personal Communication

<sup>10</sup> Wellington Transportation Services (2008, July 25) Transportation Coordinator. Personal Communication