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Organizing A Transportation System For Senior Adults

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This is one of a series of leaflets based on experience gained in the Lincoln County, Oregon, Community Self-Help Program with Older Adults, along with study of similar programs in other areas.

Transportation is a problem for the senior adult. Many senior adults live far from shopping areas and business offices. Also, many do not drive or have access to a car and are not near a bus line. In Lincoln County, 84 percent of the 1,800 senior adults surveyed were able to get along physically but only 63 percent owned cars and only 58 percent were licensed drivers. Many repeatedly asked friends or neighbors for transportation to town for a doctor's appointment, to go to the bank, to visit friends, or to do their shopping.

Older people will often do without rather than constantly ask others to do for them. Even if there is a city bus it often does not take them close to where they want to go. Many older people cannot stand for a long period of time waiting for a bus. Those living in rural areas may be able to take a commercial bus to town, but first they need to get to a main road where the bus will pick them up. Often they have to spend a long day in town since these buses may run only in the morning and evening.

A transportation system geared especially to the senior adult is the one way to alleviate these problems. It can serve a community or an entire county.

Transportation Alternatives

City bus. Sometimes busses permit senior adults to ride at a reduced price, or even free at certain hours. Before investing in other means of transportation, consider making adjustments so that existing facilities will provide satisfactory transportation. For example: covered benches may be put at the bus stops most frequented by senior adults so that they will not have to stand while waiting for the bus.

The car pool. A private car pool is one way to provide transportation where there is a small area to cover, such as one or two neighborhoods, and when there are no funds to buy a bus. It is difficult to schedule a car pool in a large area because of the number of trips involved. If two or more cars and drivers are used, scheduling and routes become complicated and the up-keep costs may be high.

A bus. It may be possible to rent or buy a used bus. Good maintenance of the bus is required, including fire extinguishers and other equipment. Maintenance may be a bigger problem than initial cost.

The mini-bus. Several counties have found a mini-bus to be the most satisfactory investment. Mini-buses are available at used car lots and through federal and state used car sales.

However, a mini-bus may not hold all the senior citizens from a county or town. Remember, too, that the senior adult's packages and bundles collected after a morning in town will take up space.

Financing a Transportation Service

Various organizations and groups may be willing to help finance a transportation service. Later on, these groups may contribute toward the up-keep and repairs of the bus.

Check with local Councils on Aging. Often they have grants and funds not available to other organizations. Financing may be available at the federal level through a senior adults program.

Local county or state offices can open several paths to government funding. Several Oregon counties have received federal grants through the Office of Economic Opportunity. Grants are available for one or three years with a possible renewal.

It is wise to plan for a county-wide transportation service when applying for a federal grant, rather than for just one community. This presents a better picture to the government, because all of the county's senior adults can benefit from the service.

Visit senior adults groups such as the Senior Citizen Club. Talk with them and other members of community and civic organizations to interest them in contributing toward the purchase and the up-keep of the bus.

Drivers and Insurance

The decision to use a volunteer or paid driver may depend on finances and availability of dependable and capable drivers. Using volunteers will help keep more money in the budget for repairs or to use toward a second bus.

Be sure to check the need for a chauffeur's license and adequate insurance protection for the driver.

Bus Operation

When applying for a Federal grant to help purchase a bus, be sure to meet all requirements for Federal funding. Also consider asking for maintenance cost when applying for the grant. In one county, for example, the

grant pays gas and up-keep for one to three years.

Another possibility is to ask a community organization to help finance the operation of the bus. This may be the same organization that helped pay for the bus or it may be a different one. Finding another group would not put all the financial strain on one group. One county has a donation box in the bus so that the senior adults can build a reserve fund to use when the federal grant terminates.

Scheduling

Build flexibility into the schedule at the start because the scheduling will probably be changed several times before it works efficiently.

Scheduling will be most complex at the county level because of the number of routes involved. One way to schedule is to divide the county into areas and have the bus operate in each area one day a week.

Stabilize scheduling at the county level, then begin moving responsibility for the transportation service down to the community level.