



OCCOA

OTSEGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING



Submitted by
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RESEARCH &
VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR

*We Help.
We Care*

120 Grandview Blvd., Gaylord, Michigan 49735

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OCCOA CLIENT LEEANNA VIGNOLLES AND RSVP VOLUNTEER MEDICAL TRANSPORTER, DICK HALE, ARE READY TO LEAVE FOR HER DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT IN PETOSKEY.

notes, "Through this partnership, a tremendous community need is addressed that would otherwise go unmet." He adds, "From a volunteer standpoint, the program offers volunteers a valued activity that gives them a sense of pride. The rewards are great, because they can see, firsthand, how their help is making a big difference in their clients' lives."

Leeanna Vignolles, who has no transportation options available to her outside of Otsego County, recently shared that she was worried sick when she first found out she needed to see a physician in Petoskey. How was she going to get there for that first appointment, let alone any follow-up appointments that needed to be scheduled? Thankfully, a couple of residents in her apartment complex were aware of the program and suggested she call the OCCOA to request a volunteer driver.

Vignolles contacted OCCOA Customer Service Representative Tracy Burley, who verified that she qualified for the program, explained how it worked, and contacted RSVP Program Coordinator Lisa Smith to arrange a volunteer driver for Vignolles's appointment in Petoskey.

"Once that first driver was lined up for me, I was very nervous," Vignolles recalls. "I didn't know what I would be able to talk about for the hour it was going to take to get to my appointment!" She continues, "But my driver made it so easy for me, and I was able to relax. Since then, I've received rides from four or five different drivers, and I've enjoyed talking with each one of them!"

Vignolles notes, "The drivers that have been arranged for me are all very nice, helpful people and good drivers. They are very knowledgeable about finding their way around and get me to my appointments on time!"

The Medical Transportation Program provides socialization!

Both the clients and volunteers in the Medical Transportation Program seem to agree that the Medical Transportation Program is more than a service - it's also a social program. Vignolles shares, "During the drives to my appointments, the drivers and I talk about all kinds of things. This has helped me to forget my troubles and keep my mind off my medical issues."

Dick Hale, an RSVP volunteer driver for many years, shared that he enjoys the social aspects the program offers. He explains, "I enjoy driving because I like talking with people, especially one-to-one." During his transports, he likes to interject humor. He confesses, "I'm a bit of a joker! I try to get my clients to laugh and to enjoy themselves, no matter what kinds of medical issues they're facing."

For Hale, being a volunteer driver has special meaning. He shares, "I had cancer a few years ago and drove myself to many appointments in Petoskey for my treatments. The people who cared for me during my illness were so kind and helpful. Luckily, I'm better now." He reflects, "When I look back on my life, I feel so blessed! I'm well again, live a good life, and have a good family."

Hale notes that being a volunteer medical transportation driver helps him to "pay forward" some of the blessings he has received in his life. He explains, "When I visit with a client who is feeling down, I share my story and say, 'Look at me now!'" He concludes, "When I'm volunteering, I want my clients to feel the same kind of kindness that I received during my illness and to not lose hope."

Additional RSVP Volunteers are needed!

RSVP Program Coordinator Lisa Smith, who trains and arranges most of the volunteer drivers for the transports, shares that RSVP is always looking for additional volunteers to assist with the program. Volunteers need to be age 55 or older to join RSVP and pass a background check. To be a medical transporter, volunteers need to have a good, working vehicle and sufficient insurance. She notes, "For this program, we are looking for people who are kind, caring, and compassionate." She adds, "Of course, they must have a good driving record, feel confident in their driving abilities, enjoy driving the longer distances that are needed outside of our county, and enjoy visiting with people." She reflects, "I've seen how our volunteer drivers enjoy the social aspects of the program and feel so rewarded when they see how grateful their clients are for the rides to their appointments." She concludes, "It truly is a 'feel-good' kind of volunteer activity!"



OLDER ADULTS CAN CONTACT OCCOA CUSTOMER SERVICE COORDINATOR TRACY BURLEY TO SCHEDULE A VOLUNTEER DRIVER OR TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM.

Medical Transportation Program fills an important need!

In our rural Northern Michigan county, transportation can present a challenge to older adults who no longer drive or who are without a personal vehicle. Luckily, there are options. More so than ever, older adults in Otsego County are discovering the convenience and continued independence that the Otsego County Bus System has to offer them. Complete with lifts for riders who have trouble navigating the bus steps, county buses are safely transporting older adults to medical appointments, grocery stores, and to social events, activities and programs.

Unfortunately transportation through the Bus System ends at the county lines. So what does an older adult do, if they need to see a specialist in Petoskey, Traverse City, Saginaw, Grand Rapids, or even Ann Arbor?

Thanks to a partnership formed many years ago between the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA) and RSVP, older adults are able to get to their out-of-county medical appointments with the help of RSVP volunteer drivers. RSVP Program Director Pete Amar



RSVP PROGRAM COORDINATOR LISA SMITH AND PROGRAM DIRECTOR PETE AMAR

IF YOU ARE AN OLDER ADULT IN NEED OF TRANSPORTATION TO MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS OUTSIDE OF OTSEGO COUNTY, PLEASE CONTACT TRACY BURLEY AT (989) 732-1122. TO ARRANGE FOR TRANSPORTATION WITHIN OTSEGO COUNTY, PLEASE CONTACT THE OTSEGO COUNTY BUS SYSTEM AT (989) 732-6224, EXT. 1. (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR BUS TOKENS IS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE OCCOA FOR QUALIFYING OLDER ADULTS.) IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A VOLUNTEER DRIVER FOR RSVP, PLEASE CONTACT LISA SMITH AT (989) 732-6232.

989.732.1122 • www.OtsegoCountyCOA.org • Advocacy 989.732.9977

IN-HOME SERVICE ~ 989.705.2574 • MEAL PROGRAM ~ 989.732.1746 • SPECIAL EVENTS ~ 989.732.4702 • VOLUNTEER ~ 989.705.2572 • WEATHER ~ 989.731.5652

Fax: 989-731-2739 • occoa@occoaonline.org • Weekdays 8:00 am to Noon and 1:00 to 4:00 pm

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