



OCCOA

OTSEGO COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING



Submitted by
Eileen Godek
RESEARCH &
VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR

*We Help.
We Care*

120 Grandview Blvd., Gaylord, Michigan 49735

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RSVP VOLUNTEER MEDICAL TRANSPORTER AL HANJE ASSISTS CLIENT RICHEL BUSSA INTO HIS VEHICLE

Funding is provided through the OCCOA's local millage, as well as through client and private donations.

When clients need a ride to a medical appointment, they contact the OCCOA Customer Service Department. Customer Service screens the clients for eligibility and collects the details of the request. The request is next forwarded to RSVP, where every attempt is made to find a volunteer to provide the transport. Once a volunteer is scheduled, this information is communicated back to the OCCOA, which, in turn, notifies the client. Clients are asked to provide at least one week's notice of their need for a ride and are cautioned that rides cannot be guaranteed, since volunteers may not always be available when needed.

Bussa, who has been utilizing the program over the past several months, shares, "The Volunteer Medical Transportation Program has helped me a great deal." She notes, "The drivers are also very friendly and helpful in making sure I get safely in and out of their vehicles." She adds, "I feel safe with them. They are all very careful drivers."

Al Hanje, age 76, is one of the many RSVP volunteers who has been transporting Bussa to her numerous appointments over the past several months. He recalls, "I got my start with this kind of volunteer work, years ago, by driving people from my church, and I still do." Hanje continues, "I also used to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, hanging drywall." Laughing softly, he jokes, "It seemed to me, that there should be some easier way to volunteer my time – hanging drywall is hard and dirty work!" Pausing, he reflects more seriously, "Somehow, I just started driving for the Volunteer Medical Transportation Program sponsored by the OCCOA and RSVP and have been driving ever since!"

The OCCOA has been keeping formal records on volunteer hours for the program since January of 2001. In over ten year's time, for this program, alone, Hanje has touched the lives of 73 different older adults, volunteering for a total of 251 medical transports that required a total of 534 hours his time! Hanje explains that his Christian faith has been the motivator behind his volunteer work. He notes, "We believe we are called to help each other. It's a privilege and a blessing for me to serve other people." He adds, "The people I transport really appreciate the help. It makes me feel good to know I'm helping them and doing something worthwhile." In addition to volunteering for the Medical Transportation Program, Hanje also drives the Cancer Van once a month.

OCCOA Customer Service Coordinator Tracy Burley is responsible for screening clients for the Volunteer Medical Transportation Program and processing their requests. She shares, "When an older adult has a medical appointment and no means to get to it, they can contact me at the OCCOA." She explains, "All first-time clients are screened for program eligibility, which means they must be age 60 or older and reside in Otsego County." Reflecting on the program, she observes, "The clients are so appreciative of it." She shares, "Many of them stress over their medical appointments. When a volunteer is available to drive them to their appointments, finding a ride is one less stressor for them to deal with."



RSVP PROGRAM COORDINATOR AND MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION SPECIALIST LISA SMITH

Lisa Smith, the program coordinator and medical transportation specialist for RSVP, is responsible for filling the transport requests that are forwarded to her by Burley. She notes, "We have a great group of dedicated volunteers, many of whom have been transporters for a long time." She explains that people volunteer for the program for various reasons. "Some volunteer for this program because it makes them feel really worthwhile." She continues, "Many of the volunteers develop close relationships with their clients, especially if they drive them regularly; for the volunteers and clients, alike, it's also very much a social program." Smith adds, "Many of our volunteers have been blessed in their lives and see their volunteer work for this program as a way of giving back to our community."

Smith notes, "As our population continues to age, requests for rides are increasing. We are continually in need of additional volunteer transporters to keep up with the requests." She details, "We are looking for people who are caring and compassionate, as well as good listeners." Because the transporters need to use their own vehicle to transport clients, volunteers need to have an insured, dependable vehicle and safe driving record. RSVP program parameters also require that volunteers be age 55 or older. Mileage reimbursement is available for those in need.

"Thank You" RSVP Medical Transporters!

Since January 2011, Richel Bussa, an older adult living in Otsego County, has undergone four surgeries, three of which have affected her ability to drive. "I had surgeries done on both of my hands and right knee," she relates. "I have a car and used to drive until I had my surgeries." She pauses and sighs, "But since then, I don't feel very comfortable behind the wheel and have been afraid to drive." Not being able to drive herself to her numerous appointments, and not having nearby family members to help her with rides, has been a challenge for her.

Luckily for Bussa and other Otsego County older adults facing similar circumstances, the Otsego County Commission on Aging (OCCOA) and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) teamed up years ago to create a program that would provide Otsego County older adults (age 60 and older) without other means of transportation, with rides to medical appointments. Known as the OCCOA/RSVP Volunteer Medical Transportation Program, it is entirely staffed by volunteers and administered, jointly, by both agencies.



OCCOA CUSTOMER SERVICE COORDINATOR TRACY BURLEY

IF YOU WOULD LIKE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE VOLUNTEER MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM, PLEASE CALL THE OCCOA AT 732-1122, OR LOG ONTO OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.OTSEGOCOUNTYCOA.ORG.

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