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Transportation Solutions: Collaborating for the Community

Transportation is one of the keys to keeping people of all abilities connected to their community. And the Northwest Michigan Transportation Alliance (NMTA) is doing its part to keep them connected that way.

A collaboration of more than 20 health and human service agencies in Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and Benzie Counties, NMTA shares resources, personnel power, and the role of coordinating transportation services for people in the region.

Jim Moore, Executive Director of Disability Network/Northern Michigan, says, "Right now, we're focused on non-emergency medical rides, usually for seniors who are frail and cannot ride the bus." NMTA volunteers provide door-through-door service, a step up from traditional curbside service. "They'll come to your door, help you get your coat on, escort you to their car, drive you to your appointment, take you home again, and even stop at the pharmacy along the way," Moore explains.

According to NMTA Chair Bob Schlueter, who also serves as the Deputy Director for the Area Agency for Aging of Northwest Michigan, older people tend to appreciate the personal service offered by NMTA. "People enjoy getting to know a volunteer, chatting on the way to their appointments, and just having a friendly visitor who can check in on a regular basis," he says.

While health-related rides are NMTA's main focus, the Alliance is

also working on ways to coordinate job-related rides. "Every time we survey, we hear that transportation is one of the biggest barriers to employment," says Moore. "It's also a difficult issue in a rural area like this. Most of the jobs are in Traverse City, while the affordable housing is 20 miles away. So many people are traveling with great vulnerability, just one car breakdown away from losing their jobs. We're still trying to be creative and find more solutions." One solution that is already in place is NMRide.net, a ride share website where people can get or give a ride.

Also on the table are what Moore calls "quality of life rides," including grocery shopping, visiting friends or family, and making multiple stops a day. "It's one of those areas that's taken for granted," he says. "Imagine you couldn't drive for a month. What limits would that put on you? Moving people really does connect them to everything."

To learn more about NMTA or transportation options in Northwest Michigan, contact Jim Moore at jimmoore@chartermi.net or 231-922-0903.



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-Bob Schlueter

Also In Motion

Be Part of the Solution

Interested in volunteering as an NMTA driver or participating in the Alliance? Please contact NMTA Director Michelle Goetz Grahl at 231-933-5543 or goetzm@bata.net.

Share a Ride

Whether you need a ride to work or want some company to share your commute, the rideshare site is the place to start. Visit www.NMRide.net to link up with other workers in the community.

Find a BATA Buddy

Residents of Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties can sign up for a free BATA Buddy who will ride with you to and from your destination and teach you how to navigate the BATA Bus System. To learn more, please call Disability Network at 231-922-0903.