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Profiles of Successful Volunteer Driver Programs in Massachusetts

This brief showcases successful volunteer driver programs currently operating in Massachusetts. These programs represent different program structures, including one where volunteers drive agency vehicles, one where passengers recruit their own volunteers, and two more traditional programs where volunteers drive their own vehicles. For information about how to start a volunteer driver program, please see *What to Consider When Establishing a Volunteer Driver Program*.¹

TRIP Metro North – Malden, MA

Hosted by Mystic Valley Elder Services (MVES), [TRIP Metro North](#)² is a program where the drivers are recruited by seniors themselves. The program is based in Malden. TRIP stands for “Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project.” When MVES was first looking for a model for their volunteer driver program, they found the TRIP model, a successful program that originated in Riverside, California and has been replicated in other parts of the country. MVES chose this model because it fit with the value of person-centered care by putting the person who needs transportation in control of finding a volunteer. Participants in TRIP Metro North are given the mileage reimbursements for the trips they take. They then personally reimburse the drivers for the rides.

All rides are negotiated between the rider and the driver. There are no limits on what kinds of destinations are allowed or when the trip occurs; they can range from medical appointments to evening social engagements to weekend church services. Each participant in the program has a maximum amount of mileage per month that will be reimbursed, but these restrictions can sometimes be flexible if an individual has an emergency that creates a need for extra trips in a given month.

TRIP Metro North is currently grant-funded. So far, TRIP Metro North has served more than 120 people who have taken close to 23,000 trips, ranging from medical appointments, shopping and errands to visiting friends, family and for other recreational purposes. The [TRIP program](#)³ is available for replication – you can use the manual at no cost, but there is a yearly fee to access the online database that tracks trips and mileage (see Trip Trak in *What to Consider When Establishing a Volunteer Driver Program*)

¹ <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/transit/MobilityManagementCenter/Resources/VolunteerDriving.aspx>

² www.mves.org/trip

³ <http://ilpconnect.org/>

Millbury Council on Aging – Millbury, MA

The Millbury Council on Aging, located in Central MA, runs a transportation program⁴ that takes seniors and individuals with disabilities anywhere within a one-town radius of Millbury. The Millbury COA operates some vans with paid drivers through the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, but is unable to meet the demand for all ride requests and augments its service with a volunteer driver program. The volunteers drive vehicles that are owned by the Friends of the Millbury Seniors, which is a nonprofit group affiliated with the COA. Because volunteers drive the same agency vehicles as paid drivers, all volunteers must go through mandatory training and be part of the drug and alcohol testing pool.

Volunteer drivers are recruited from residents in the area; they are often retired police and fire personnel. The Friends group purchases an inexpensive supplemental liability insurance policy in addition to its commercial vehicle policy to ensure that all volunteers and passengers are covered in case of an accident. The volunteer program also enables the COA to expand services outside normal working hours of the paid drivers. Volunteers have provided rides for groups to social outings in the evenings, and to religious services at area churches on Sunday mornings.

Road to Recovery

The American Cancer Society hosts the Road to Recovery⁵ program, which gives ambulatory cancer patients rides to and from medical treatment appointments when patients have no other means of transportation. It is a national program with chapters in every state.

Trained Road to Recovery volunteer drivers donate their time and the use of their personal vehicles to help individuals get to and from treatment sites. Volunteers get to keep a flexible schedule by choosing the day and time they are available to help. Volunteers do not receive mileage reimbursement. Currently, about 13,000 volunteer drivers help more than 15,000 patients across the country. In 2015, the program provided 6,209 rides for 384 patients in Massachusetts. Road to Recovery currently has more than 250 volunteer drivers in the Commonwealth.

FISH

FISH stands for either “Friends in Service Helping” or “Friends in Service Here.” There are many FISH programs in Massachusetts, most of which do not have an online presence. FISH is a network of loosely organized, all-volunteer groups both in the United

⁴ http://www.millbury-ma.org/Public_Documents/MillburyMA_COA/Brochure.jpg

⁵ <http://www.cancer.org/treatment/supportprogramsservices/road-to-recovery>

States and internationally. A FISH program is de-centralized and has little structure; each chapter organizes itself and decides what its charitable purpose will be. Chapters vary widely in their focus, with some providing Meals on Wheels, establishing food banks, offering emergency assistance, running homeless shelters, or providing volunteer driver services.

In Massachusetts, volunteer driving, particularly to medical appointments, is the main focus of FISH groups. Many towns have FISH groups that partner with local COAs to provide medical transportation to facilities in town and occasionally to long-distance destinations. FISH volunteers do not get reimbursed for mileage. The approach to scheduling differs among various FISH-COA partnerships; some COAs try to fill the transportation request with their own vans before turning to volunteers, and others try to find a volunteer before scheduling the trip with a COA van. The first FISH chapter in the United States was organized in 1964 in West Springfield, MA where the group still operates.

RESOURCES

Resource Guide for Volunteer Driver Programs provides you helpful tools for everything from driver training, volunteer screening, liability protection, to launching a new program. It also provides you links to local best practice models and national organizations focusing on volunteer transportation.

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact rachel.fichtenbaum@state.ma.us with any further questions about volunteer driver programs, or if you would like to join the statewide email list for volunteer driver program staff.

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Reference: Theadora Fisher. (2016) *Profiles of Successful Volunteer Driver Programs in Massachusetts*. Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Human Service Transportation Office, Quincy, MA