**WELLESLEY COUNCIL ON AGING (COA)**

**VOLUNTEER DRIVERS PROGRAM (VDP)**



**HANDBOOK FOR DRIVERS**

**The VDP is a program of the COA’s Transportation Department**

**COA Transportation Coordinators**

**Jill Dube**

**Judy Siggins**

**Contact Information**

**Phone: 781-235-3046 (Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.)**

**Email: drive@wellesleyma.gov**

**Matters of an urgent nature:**

**Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

**Call the Transportation Department: 781-235-3046**

**or the main COA office: 781-235-3961**

**Evenings, Weekends and Holidays**

**Call Director of Senior Services Gayle Thieme (508-498-8424), unless otherwise instructed.**

**\*\*Volunteer Drivers should always use their discretion about driving in inclement weather or if, for other reasons, they feel the passenger’s or their own health or safety is at risk.\*\***

*This program was initiated from funds provided by The Fund for Wellesley and is made possible because of our volunteer drivers who provide the time, effort, and transportation to make this possible.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The Wellesley Council on Aging (COA) welcomes you to the Volunteer Drivers Program (VDP). The COA thanks you for dedicating your time and energy to provide transportation to Wellesley seniors.

**The Need**

Transportation is a link to independence, quality of life, and social interaction. Older adults who no longer drive are vulnerable to social isolation and depression. Availability of affordable and accessible transportation is frequently identified as a gap for older adults. Therefore, volunteer community-based transportation alternatives are very important. The Wellesley Council on Aging Volunteer Drivers Program is designed to help Wellesley seniors remain interactive with their community.

**Challenges for Caregivers**

Caring for a loved one can affect both work and family life. Transportation can be especially taxing and time consuming for relatives and friends who have stopped driving. Older adults often feel that they are a burden to family members and friends. They become reluctant to ask for assistance, which contributes to their social isolation.

**Who Does The VDP Serve?**

The VDP provides volunteer transportation services to Wellesley residents, age 60 or older, who want or need rides for both social and medical reasons, such as shopping and other errands, visiting friends, lunch, a movie, the beauty salon, programs at the COA, and health-related appointments. They may be temporarily or permanently unable to drive.

**Who Are Our Volunteers?**

The volunteer drivers are “neighbors helping neighbors” with a strong desire to reach out to seniors.

* Volunteer Drivers are compassionate, caring men and women who share a commitment to helping others.
* Volunteer Drivers want to make a positive contribution to someone else’s life.
* A CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) check is performed for all drivers.
* Volunteer Drivers have signed the Town’s indemnification statement.
* Volunteer Drivers agree to drive when their schedules allow.

**PROCEDURES**

**You are more than a driver. When you call your passenger and when you drive him/her, you may be the only person your passenger has had interaction with that day (or longer).**

1. **WHAT RIDES ARE AVAILABLE?**

Once per day, the VDP staff will email a *pending rides list* to drivers. The pending rides list includes all new ride requests as well as reminders of other rides that are still pending.

1. **SELECT A RIDE.**

The pending rides list will instruct you on how to enter the Assistedrides database to volunteer for a ride.

1. **KNOW YOU ARE CHOSEN/ASSIGNED TO THE RIDE YOU WANT.**

A *notification* is sent to you through the Assisted Rides database. A statement in the middle of the notification prompts you to *click on a link* to see your assignment in the database.

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU RECEIVED THE NOTIFICATION.**

The database gives you the opportunity to *confirm* that you accept that assignment. Click the box next to “*confirm”* after you enter the database through the *notification*.

1. **SEE TRIP DETAILS BY clicking on the “*Manifest*.”**
2. **CONTACT PASSENGER**

* The VDP scheduler will call the passenger to tell her/him that a driver has been assigned.
* Please call your passenger to confirm and work out logistics no later than one day before your scheduled trip.

**7. DURING THE RIDE**

If it seems appropriate, try to gently encourage passengers to use transportation services to get out more often. There is no reason for seniors to feel guilty about getting out to do things they enjoy. Participating in fun and social activities outside their homes is also essential to their health and wellbeing. Please let the Transportation Coordinator know if you think that the passenger can benefit from more information about transportation options.

1. **WHEN THE RIDE IS COMPLETE.**

* Go back into the database and change the *“Status” from “Assigned”* to *“Completed”* from the drop-down window.
* Select the number of minutes or hours you were involved in driving from the window labeled “*Hours”* on the same line as “Status.” Count the time from when you left your own home through the arrival at the destination. For a return trip count the time you picked the person up and got him/her HOME. Click UPDATE
* If you made extra stops, click on *Stops*, and check off the places where you stopped. Click UPDATE

***MAKE SURE THAT YOU CLICK ON UPDATE EVERY TIME YOU ENTER SOMETHING INTO THE DATABASE BEFORE YOU EXIT.***

**NOTE:** Passengers should call the COA Transportation Department (not drivers) to request rides. Please tell passengers who call you directly that they must call the Transportation Coordinator themselves. If you have concerns about this, please talk to Jill or Judy.

**GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER DRIVERS**

**First Line Reporter – Drivers are the ongoing eyes and ears for the program. Being a good listener, being patient, and being empathetic are important traits of VDP drivers!**

**Please alert the Transportation Coordinator by phone 781-235-3046 or email drive@wellesleyma.gov if:**

* **You believe a passenger can use some additional assistance.**
* **You note something about a passenger that was not accurately reflected in the database or that has changed over time. For example, someone is now using a walker, change in cognitive status, hard of hearing.**

**Safety**

It is of paramount importance that volunteers value safety and employ safe driving techniques.

* Allow time to drive and arrive safely.
* It is required that all passengers wear seat belts during the operation of the vehicle. Please help your passenger to buckle up.

**Unexpected situations**

* The notes in the VDP Pending Rides report will inform you of passengers that have special needs and what to expect. Nevertheless, unexpected situations may arise.
* If a passenger does not feel well, falls, or experiences some other adverse event, the drivers are instructed to err on the side of caution.
* If you suspect that the passenger may need medical assistance, call 911. Stay with the passenger until you know that he/she is being cared for. If you cannot stay, please call the COA office to let us know.
* Drivers are not allowed to make any medical decisions or to co-sign a refusal of treatment.
* Drivers will defer to decisions of the EMTs. If a passenger refuses to go with the EMTs, the driver is not responsible to continue the ride. You may tell the EMT that you are not required to take someone home who may need medical attention.
* Always report situations to the Transportation Coordinator—both minor and major concerns--so that there can be follow-up.
* Passengers who communicate distress should not be ignored.
* If you have any qualms about the ability of passengers to be safe walking, the VDP backs you up in requiring that you drop them off and pick them up at the door (rather than walking with you from/to a parking spot away from the door).
* If someone is late, the driver can call from their car or go to his/her door.
* It is preferable for drivers to walk passengers from doorway to car.

**Car accidents**

* Remain calm. Do not leave the scene of the crash.
* Report every minor or major situation (even fender benders) to the Transportation Coordinator, even if there is no apparent damage. Calling for a police report is recommended.
* In the event of a serious accident, call 911 and wait for an ambulance to arrive.
* Do not attempt to move the passenger.
* Reassure the passenger that you have called for help and he/she will be taken care of.

**Inclement Weather**

* Volunteers should never feel obligated to drive if roads are hazardous or foul weather threatens driver or passenger safety.
* Volunteers should never feel obligated to drive a passenger if his/her driveway seems unsafe for driving and/or walking.
* Volunteers are not expected to drive if Wellesley schools are closed. Call your passenger to tell her/him that you will not be driving.
* Please contact your passenger right away **and** call the Transportation Department or send an e-mail to drive@wellesleyma.gov if you decide not to drive.

**Please note:** As a courtesy to all of our passengers, when using perfumes or body lotions, please be mindful of those with allergies and sensitivities to fragrances.

**SUGGESTIONS TO HELP MAKE YOUR RIDES**

**SAFE AND ENJOYABLE**

Older persons are not disabled because they are old. A passenger may be using the VDP because she fears driving in the snow, his car is in the shop, or she needs a ride home from a procedure.

However, the aging process may result in disabling conditions. These conditions may reduce physical strength and stamina, balance, and capacity to understand or make reasonable decisions, etc. so it is important to try to be understanding and patient. It helps to be aware of and sensitive to the changes associated with aging when caring for an older adult. Many of the human body’s functions are affected by aging, resulting in problems with vision, balance, and pain, and can create transportation challenges.

**Vision Impairment:** When transporting someone who is visually impaired, it is good to explain exactly what you are doing and why. If he/she uses a cane or guide dog, always lead by standing on the opposite side of the cane or the dog and stay one-half pace ahead. Ask if he/she would like assistance before providing it. If possible, have him exit from the non-traffic side of the car and try to be specific when giving directions (e.g., to your right/left, approximately 100 feet, etc.)

**Problems with Balance:** Loss of muscle strength and coordination, arthritis in the knees and ankles, and changes in the inner ear all hinder balance. This can make getting in and out of a car and positioning in the car difficult. Allow someone who has problems with balance plenty of time to enter and exit the car. It may take a few extra seconds for him to gain balance when moving from a sitting to standing position.

**Pain:** Older adults can experience pain from a multitude of conditions—some short term, some periodic, and some chronic or long term. For example, people with joint pain, such as arthritis, may find it painful to enter and exit a vehicle. To be sensitive to this, give your passenger extra time and provide assistance with a gentle touch.

**Communication**

Positive communication can make your trip much more enjoyable and reduce the potential for frustration.  Good communication goes hand in hand with listening and offering constructive feedback.  While the majority of passengers are active and healthy, there may be circumstances when they feel out of control or frustrated (e.g. recovering from an injury, visiting loved ones that are ill, etc.)  The following guidelines may help in these types of stressful situations.

* Use positive and helpful body language (be aware of what your facial expressions are telling them. Are you showing interest in what they say?)
* Speak directly and clearly.
* Be patient. Take your cues from the passenger’s behavior.
* Allow plenty of time for a response.
* Do not interrupt.
* Keep directions simple by explaining them one step at a time. Reintroduce steps when necessary.
* Use easy to understand language.
* Don’t overwhelm the person with too much information.
* Be calm, or at least attempt to appear calm (especially your tone of voice!).
* Empathize. Try to put yourself in his/her place, so that you can see their point of view.
* Avoid argument and criticism. This puts others on the defensive.
* Ask questions. Try to engage your passenger. Also respect your passenger’s right to be quiet if he/she is not easily engaged.

If your passenger has a hearing impairment:

* Face your passenger when you speak (when you do not need to keep your eyes on the road!).
* Lower the pitch of your voice.
* Do not over-articulate.
* Rephrase your statements for clarity.
* Allow enough time for a response.
* Don’t shout. Shouting raises the pitch of your voice. Older people more often lose the ability to hear higher pitches than lower pitches.

**Sensitivity**

For many older adults, transportation represents their independence and is a vital connection for their socialization and recreational interests. Making the transition to depending on others for their transportation is often difficult and a source of concern and frustration for them. Passengers would rather not be a burden or cause any hardship or inconvenience. Therefore, they may not always ask for rides for social purposes, or what may be considered less “essential” trips than for purposes such as medical appointments and grocery shopping. An incident of insensitivity may prevent her or him from asking for a ride again.

* Be sensitive to your passengers by not discussing unpleasant topics, gossip, or political opinions. Stay neutral as much as you can.
* We should be cognizant that some behaviors are cultural. We now drive many passengers who are relatively new to U.S., and may have behaviors that might be different from what we are used to.

**Thank you for being part of the VDP!**

**Don’t hesitate to call or e-mail the Transportation Coordinator if you have any concerns, comments or questions.**

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**Driver Agreement**

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the guidelines and procedures included in the COA VDP Driver Handbook.

Print Name

Signature

Date