

Chelmsford Community Transport does great work for the less able

Minibus service is a vital lifeline for elderly who need to get out



FREEDOM: Gladys Van Mellaerts helps Marjorie Daintree on board

By **Megan Tatum**
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“WITHOUT it, I couldn’t go out the house. It’s a real asset.”

After a game of bingo and a couple of hours “chin wagging” at Alexander Court in Springfield, Marjorie Daintree is being helped into the minibus that has just pulled up from Chelmsford Community Transport, which relies entirely on volunteer drivers.

The 93-year-old, who can only walk with the help of a frame, uses the vital service twice a week to meet up and socialise with friends – one of 1,000 elderly and disabled people in the city that rely on it.

Chat

“I used to be able to use normal buses but now I’m not walking well and they come to my house, and pick me up,” she said.

“If it weren’t for them I wouldn’t be able to get out, as I can’t wait for the buses, and I get to have a chat, and a cup of tea.”

The community transport service, which provides 170 trips a day with its six vans, is a lifeline for its members who may struggle to get out to do their shopping, attend hospital appointments, or simply meet up with friends.

“It gets us out the house and talking,” added Freda Howell, 83, who joined the group at afternoon bingo on Monday before heading home on the bus. “We all have husbands who have passed away and it’s good to get out when you’re by yourself. The drivers are all very helpful and understanding.”

Passengers using the service pay a small fee for most trips, although a recent partnership with Broomfield Hospital means



BINGO TIME: Violet Freeman, Freda Howell, Gladys Van Mellaerts, Marjorie Dree, Mary Bone on the minibus excited for their next trip

patients attending appointments can use bus passes on the vehicles and travel for free, as opposed to paying up to £30 for a taxi.

“When I arrived I went out on the bus and spoke to members to find out what they wanted and one of the biggest demands was that they didn’t have hospital transport,” said CEO Evelyn Mochrie.

“The service is for anybody who can’t access public transport. For many of them it’s a complete lifeline, they just wouldn’t be able to go out.”

The team have also recently introduced day trips into their schedule, with a visit to rural Maldon including a meal of scampi and chips.

“They’re absolutely loving it,” added Evelyn. “It’s taking them out as a group for a meal, for example, something they wouldn’t do on their own. We’re trying to

look at the whole picture, not just providing a service but helping these people generally.”

■ Chelmsford Community Transport are always looking for further funding opportunities, but also volunteer car drivers and those able to drive minibuses. To offer your services, please call 01245 477750.

■ Community transport schemes such as this are just one of many organisations that the Chronicle and Essex Community Foundation’s Surviving Winter appeal has awarded grants to in the past. With the £78,000 generously donated by readers over the last four years, we’ve been able to provide emergency help to pensioners to pay their heating bills, hot lunches at vital community groups, heating packs in the coldest months, and help to homeless people during winter.

HOW TO GIVE

- Text WINT77 to 70070 to donate £5
- Visit www.justgiving.com/Winter-Appeal-2014
- Send a cheque to Essex Community Foundation, 121 New London Road, Chelmsford, CM2 0QT – please complete and return the form above and remember to tick the Gift Aid box
- For people in the 60-plus age bracket, ECF is suggesting that those who do not need their government Winter Fuel Payment could consider donating it to the Surviving Winter Appeal

NO MATTER HOW MUCH IT’S ALL FOR THE CAUSE



IWE would like to support the Surviving Winter Appeal 2014.

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