

'Truly brilliant' but in short supply.

Ever thought of becoming a volunteer driver?



We couldn't do anything without the drivers.

At 9 am on a Tuesday morning Antony Mayall picks up a Manor Community Transport minibus and sets out on his first pick up of members of the Age Well luncheon club in Harborough Avenue, Sheffield.

'The best bit of being a driver is seeing the smiles on their faces,' Antony told our reporter. 'It makes me happy to see them happy.'

The club, which is for older people, meets every Tuesday. It's popular with its members, who get a hot meal and the chance to socialise. 90% are reliant on someone to drive them. As one member put it: 'The club is brilliant, the drivers are truly brilliant. It's the one time a week I get out.'

'We couldn't do anything without the drivers,' Kathy Green, the luncheon club coordinator, explained. 'In the summer the club organises trips out and it is the drivers

who make this possible too.' Antony, who fits his volunteering around working in his own business, says he would not miss a Tuesday for the world. 'They all feel like my family now.'

Calling all Drivers!

Groups like this Agewell luncheon club simply cannot function without volunteer drivers. And yet many groups and organisations, including Agewell luncheon clubs, are struggling to attract volunteers who are willing to drive.

'There are never enough,' Sean Gamage, the Volunteer Coordinator at Sheffield Community Transport (SCT), confirmed. 'It means we cannot meet the needs of our service users. Often we have to turn down requests, which is really sad.'

Drivers for SCT agree what commitment they want to give. Some simply pick up passengers and take them to their destinations, others get more involved, for example taking groups on holiday to Blackpool or Cleethorpes. 'You have to like working with people,' Sean told us. 'And to be patient. A lot of our service users have additional needs so you need to be able to adjust to that and not be squeamish. You also have to be a little bit practical if you're helping people in wheelchairs, but there's no lifting involved and it's not difficult. If you want to help people then driving is a great way of doing that.'

Only 15% of the volunteer drivers at SCT are female. So if you are a woman reading this and like to drive then do consider giving it a go! 'The woman drivers we have are all very confident and capable,' Sean explained to us. 'They make great drivers – both in the minibuses and when they use their own car. Driving a minibuss isn't very different from driving a big car. You just need to develop your confidence and we help you do that through the training.'

Volunteering in your Own Car

Steven Ulley has been a driver for St Luke's Hospice for the last six years and he volunteers using his own car. He told us he wanted to give something back after the care his wife's son received from the Hospice. 'I do it for the feeling it gives me, knowing that you're making a difference to the people you help.'

A typical day for Steven involves picking up patients and getting them to the Hospice for 10 o'clock. Then he has a chat with the other drivers before heading off and returning to the Hospice at around three to take the patients he brought in that morning home. 'They are always so grateful and all have their own story to tell.'

Out and About in a Van

You can volunteer as a van driver - for Emmaus for example: a charity that works with people who have been homeless helping them move from dependency to self-reliance and self-respect.

Drivers for Emmaus deliver and fetch furniture that has been either bought by a customer or donated to Emmaus' shop.

Fancy Giving it a Go?

To be a volunteer driver you have to be over 21 and have held a full driving licence for 2 years. You will also have to undergo a CRB check. If you have a driving conviction discuss it with the organisation: minor speeding offences are usually not a problem. To be a minibuss driver, there is an extra licence to complete, but as Antony Mayall told us: 'The cost of the CRB and the licence are all paid for by the charity you work for and the licence is very easy - I passed mine first time.'

Your expenses will be covered. Organisations have their own rates for petrol usage if you're using your own car –



Photography by Vickie Crofts

Steve Ulley

ask for details when you contact them. If you use a minibuss the organisation covers the insurance, if you use your own car you need no extra cover because you are not driving for hire or reward.

There are driving opportunities in this Bulletin, or look at www.do-it.org.uk on line, or you are welcome to come into the Volunteer Centre and speak to an adviser (details of the drop-in inside the front cover).

As Sean from SCT told us: 'We're interested in anyone who has enthusiasm and driving skills and we welcome people from all ethnic communities and backgrounds'.

Might driving be something to interest **YOU?**

Volunteer Centre Sheffield

With very many thanks to Vickie Crofts for researching, interviewing and helping to shape this article.

