

# Dementia Friendly Transportation Project - Drive Happiness Seniors Association - Final Report

## Executive Summary

The Dementia Friendly Transportation Project (DFTP) addressed the need for older adults living with dementia to access safe and affordable transportation options. The DFTP aimed to increase volunteer knowledge through education, creating safer transportation options for older adults who live with dementia in Alberta, and improving quality of life for those individuals by facilitating access to social, emotional, and medical needs. This project built upon the already existing Seniors Assisted Transportation program by addressing the gaps with other accessible transit services before the project kick-off including increasing volunteers' knowledge-base around dementia through educational training sessions for dementia awareness, elder abuse information sessions, and mental health first aid.

The project was designed with the client's and care partner's feedback and needs in mind to ensure the best possible service for those living with dementia. The project was to address issues of traveling with a companion, the need for independence, safety when traveling alone, and facilitating care partners to make arrangements on behalf of the client living with dementia. To assist with these changes to providing service, volunteers completed training to equip them with the knowledge to better serve clients living with dementia through skilled professionals at the Alzheimer's Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories, the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, and Second Chance CPR and First Aid. Volunteer training was a key aspect of the project as a lack of knowledge often leads to the stigma around people living with dementia.

Through the educational component of training, volunteers were able to enhance their interactions with project participants who were using the service to participate in regular social activities and attend programming and also access basic needs like medical appointments and the grocery store. These project deliverables were able to create access or allow continuation of participation in physical activity and recreation, ensuring that the social and emotional needs of the project participants were being met and allowing for respite for care partners.

Learnings from the evaluation report outline that 78% of volunteer participants identified that they were able to utilize the training information in their regular lives which shows the need for more information about individuals living with dementia for the general public but especially for those who interact with individuals living with dementia regularly. This is why the training from the Alzheimer's Society will continue to be offered to all Drive Happiness volunteers during their onboarding process to allow for the continuation of carrying out the dementia-friendly transportation protocols. The final evaluation report will be shared with Drive Happiness stakeholders as well as individuals and organizations that work with individuals living with dementia.

## Objectives/Implementation

The objective of the DFTP was to address the need for safe, accessible, and affordable transportation options for individuals living with dementia and their care partners through increasing access to the Seniors Assisted Transportation Program and educating volunteers on dementia-friendly practices. The project aimed to meet the following outcomes:

1. Increase knowledge of volunteers through education and training opportunities
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- a) Volunteers will implement this knowledge into their volunteer duties.
  - Outcome: Approximately 149 individuals to complete three training sessions (Dementia education, elder abuse information sessions, mental health first aid)
2. Create a safer transportation option for older adults in Alberta who live with dementia.
  - a) Provide transportation to DFTP participants.
    - Outcome: Onboard 85 new clients who are living with dementia
3. Facilitate improved quality of life for seniors with dementia through:
  - a) Facilitating socialization
  - b) Reducing isolation
  - c) Supporting aging in place
  - d) Supporting seniors to stay active in communities
    - Outcome: provide transportation to project participants for a variety of reasons including health care appointments, socialization, programming, food security, etc.

The DFTP was intended to build upon Drive Happiness' Seniors Assisted Transportation program to specifically tailor practices to fit the needs of people living with symptoms of dementia. At the start of this project, there was not an affordable and accessible transportation option that had been developed with a person-centered approach available to individuals suffering from cognitive impairment, including those living with any form of dementia or Alzheimer's disease. There were gaps in service such as not allowing a care partner to accompany individuals and no door-through-door service. This project addressed these gaps. The DFTP provided the opportunity for volunteer training which resulted in trained individuals ready to provide safe transportation to individuals living with dementia and their care partners, while simultaneously facilitating socialization for these individuals and offering respite to caregivers.

The training was offered to volunteers through a variety of methods due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic including in-person classroom-based settings, and online virtual sessions. These training opportunities covered dementia education, elder abuse information presentations, and mental health first aid provided through the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories, the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, and Second Chance CPR and First Aid. Simultaneously, a portion of volunteer onboarding was dedicated to covering what would be considered a "red flag" and what to do in a situation where a volunteer was recognizing if a client was developing cognitive challenges.

## Impact

164 clients living with dementia, Alzheimer's disease, or experiencing early signs of dementia signed up during the project timeline. 69 clients signed up before the project start date that benefited from project activities. Over 3,000 trips were provided mostly for medical appointment, personal outings, and to attend programming.

Number of volunteers and staff trained:

- Dementia education: 50 volunteers; 12 staff
- Mental Health First Aid: 19 volunteers; 7 staff
- Elder abuse awareness information sessions: 25 volunteers; 4 staff

Volunteers were issued a survey to assess the usefulness of the training programs. Volunteers commented that:

- The interactive roleplay components ensured complete understanding.
- The topic was more relevant to the clients they engage with.
- Comprehensive session filled with important information.

56% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to utilize the information learned in these sessions while volunteering with Drive Happiness. 78% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed they were able to utilize the information learned in these sessions in their everyday life.

### **Informal feedback**

Volunteer learnings – the following are responses from volunteers when asked what they have learned through volunteering with Drive Happiness and participating in the DFTP:

- “You can enjoy life at any age.”
- “The importance of supporting others.”
- “Patience and understanding of others.”
- “There is a great need for this service (Senior Assisted Transportation Program).”
- “How important seniors are to our community and how challenging it is for someone to lose their independence.”

### Feedback from family members

- “I live in Calgary and my parents live in Edmonton. I could not help them get to appointments during the pandemic and was very anxious at the thought of them taking public transit or taxis.”
- “Drive Happiness took my parents to get both doses of the vaccine and they raved about the experience and the care your volunteers took. My mom even talked about a driver providing an umbrella for her in the rain.”
- “Many services leave people to fall through the cracks, but I am amazed at how caring, helpful, and attentive you all are. So many people are lucky to have Drive Happiness.”
- “My mother now feels so connected, so independent. I could cry I am so grateful to your drivers.”

### Feedback from clients

- “The drivers are so good to me, they are honest. They just talk to me. It is so nice to be able to talk to someone.”
- “I can get to the doctor now or go see people. I feel better.”
- “It feels so good to be among other people.”