

Why do people use Age Connects Morgannwg for transport?

Summary

Age Connects Morgannwg (ACM) is a charity for older people living in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil. We work to get older people the help they want, when they want it.

Throughout February 2023, ACM hosted a survey to understand why people often asked them as a charity to support people with transport, and to identify any barriers that stop people using existing transport provision.

The survey opened on 1 Feb and closed on 28 Feb and received 75 responses.

The key themes from the responses are:

1. People have trouble getting out and about or getting to medical appointments due to transport accessibility, times and cost
2. People want to get out, and sometimes want to use public transport more than they do, but they experience barriers to be able to achieve this
3. Barriers to public transport include times (either not meeting need or changing due to delays) and lack of accessible provision for those with mobility issues or a disability
4. Sometimes people would like and need a trained volunteer or support worker to join them on their outing, evidencing that transport often isn't the only thing that people need support with

The key recommendations are:

1. For a transport service to be launched, either via ACM or another better fitted organisation
2. To share the survey responses with other interested parties, especially those who can use the results to make real change such as decision-makers and existing public transport providers

Background

In the last 5 years ACM has identified it has supported 1,609 people with transport support. We suspect this number is a lot higher, and our administration teams have also told us they receive at least one request per day for transport help that we do not have the funding nor resources to support. We are working hard to improve our record keeping of all requests for transport support.

We know from those we support that they need help with transport for a multitude of reasons. We have taken more than 800 people to their covid vaccination; 10% of our community referrals ask us to assist them with their shopping and we are asked for last minute transport assistance where an ambulance has failed to turn up to take someone to their hospital appointment as a few examples. We have been able to provide this support within existing funding envelopes, but this money is time-bound, and people need a long-term service that people can rely on.

As a charity we pride ourselves on listening to older people and ensuring the services we provide are wanted and meeting their needs. People clearly need a reliable and long-term transport service in our area. However, we need to scope whether this needs to include social interactions and more support. We suspect this is the case otherwise people would book taxis. We suspect people need drivers trained in supporting those with dementia; those with disability; those experiencing loneliness and isolation. But suspecting something isn't enough. We need to develop a deeper understanding, from older people, the reasons they need extra support with transport.

For those people that we can support, we know what they need support with (for example transport to a medical appointment, or to take them shopping). However, we want to know more about the 'why' such as

do people ask us for help because of barriers to public transport; are people lonely; do they trust ACM more than other transport providers.

ACM received £2,000 funding from Aberystwyth University via its 'Transport issues in the Community' award to complete this survey.

Case studies of those we have supported with transport:

1. In January 2022 we received some one-off funding to support older people with dementia and their carers. Originally the project did not have transport but funded the costs of an Activities Coordinator. By end of January and after speaking with potential clients, volunteers, caregivers, and care receivers it became apparent that transport was more of an issue, so we diverted the funding from the activities coordinator and instead funded a free minibus to take people to the coffee morning. Within 3 months the transport was full, and we could have possibly used another bus. The people that use the transport to attend the coffee morning have stated that they would have never been able to get out without the support of ACM providing a bus.



2. **Client background** – a gentleman in his 70's living alone with serious mobility issues, requiring wheelchair usage and carers four times a day.

Time of intervention – April 2022 to October 2022

Reason for intervention – isolation compounded by Covid and mobility issues

Intervention - Weekly meetings took place April to July then support was gradually reduced to fortnightly / as needed for activities.

- April focused on getting to know each other and considering what support was required. I supported R with accessing information about charging his wheelchair, via a visit to a local mobility centre. I researched places that R could visit to socialise and find a purpose. We found a coffee morning locally that he can access independently, and he now goes weekly.
- May involved a trip to Café 50 in Pontyclun for lunch. This involved a bus journey, something that R had not done for a long time. R required support to speak to carers about altering visit times to him, planning the bus journey and where to go. I arranged for the organiser of Café 50 to speak to R and explain activities that he could become involved in. During the planning for this trip, we discovered R's bus pass was out of date.
- June involved considerable work in applying for a new bus pass and accessing required documents. We also researched Llantrisant and district 50+ forum which R is interested in supporting. We also attended a quiz at Café 50, with another bus trip (trying to develop R's independence in using the buses). R attempted to attend the following week on his own but got confused with where to get off the bus.
- July we had planned to visit a social event at café 50 but the extreme heat made it not sensible to go. We planned a trip to the Llantrisant district 50+ forum (a possible trip to an evening concert was shelved due to the complexity of arrangements). We also researched and booked carpet cleaners for R. and managed to get new lino laid for the hallway.
- August involved a trip by bus to Llantrisant and District 50+ forum which was very interesting.
- September we went out for dinner at a local restaurant.
- October involved another trip to Llantrisant and District 50+ forum where R offered his help to work on the committee.

Main achievements

- increased confidence in organising outings and going out to places to socialise
- confidence to use the buses to widen the area R can access
- obtaining a bus pass
- engagement with a worthwhile committee

3. Vaxi taxi

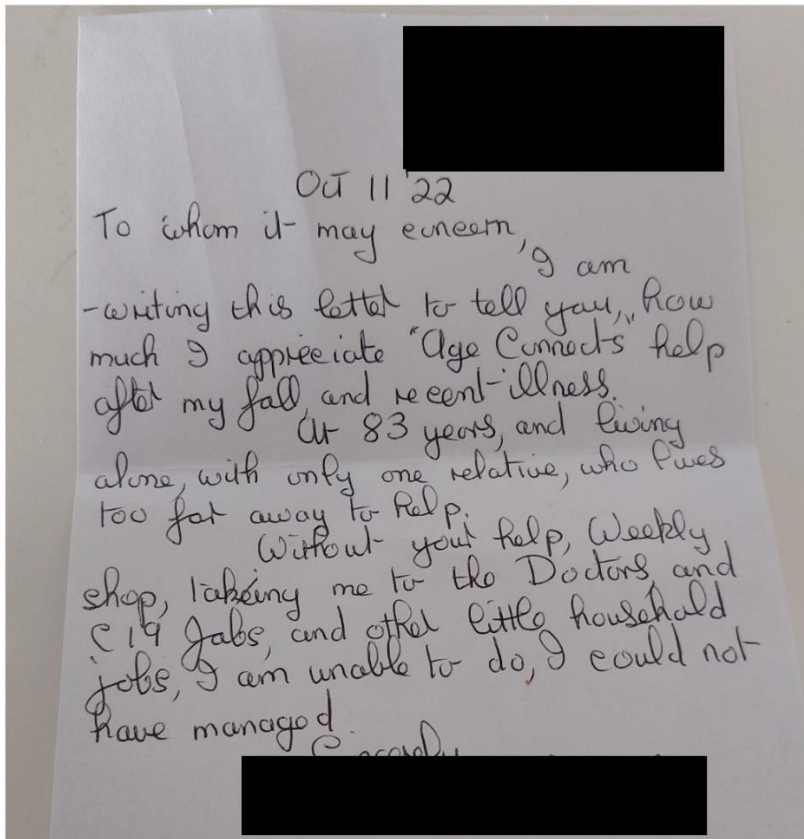
One of our volunteers received the call to escort a man from a remote area of Merthyr Tydfil to have his vaccination for COVID. When the volunteer arrived Mr S was in a state saying he was on the phone to the police. The volunteer noticed immediately that Mr S had memory issues and was quite confused. After reassuring the client and having a chat and helping Mr S ready himself to go out for the vaccination, they left for Keir Hardie Health Parc. Mr S would not have been able to have his vaccination if Age Connects had not provided a volunteer to escort him.



After the vaccination Mr S was thirsty and asked the volunteer if he could go for a drink so they both went into a local café. Mr S drank his first cup very quickly as he was so thirsty and hungry. The volunteer bought another coffee and scone for Mr S and he ate that. The volunteer then took Mr S food shopping where he bought mainly ready meals. It became apparent that Mr S needed more support than he was receiving so a referral was made to support him via outreach services and urgent shopping calls put in place to cover Mr S over the Christmas period.

If it was not for the volunteer and ACM providing support to Mr S for his Vaccination he would have been in a critical state without food or drink. This case study clearly demonstrates the additional support that is often identified when someone enters our services for other reasons.

4.



Marketing

We shared the survey with:

- Organisations across Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil
- Older people's organisations across Wales
- Older people who have previously used ACM for transport service over the last 5 years
- Volunteers who have previously provided transport support for ACM service users
- People who attended coffee mornings in Gilfach Goch day centre and Cynon Linc community hub
- Users of Cynon Linc community hub in Aberdare

We contacted previous or existing users of our transport services either through a face-to-face interaction with one of our support workers or a phone call from a member of Age Connects Morgannwg staff. We had also planned to hold a focus group; however, this didn't proceed due to a low uptake, despite the incentive of a free St David's Day afternoon tea.

We also hosted the survey online and encouraged people via our social media channels to take part in the survey.

- Twitter: 4 posts reaching 3,670 people
- Facebook: 5 posts reaching 11,654 people
- Facebook: 1 promoted post reaching 3,232 people
- Group Sharing: The survey post was shared to 9 community Facebook pages



On average the survey took 12 minutes for people to complete.

Results

75 people completed the survey. Of those, 47% had their own transport; 79% lived on a bus route; and 48% regularly used public transport. Of those who didn't use public transport, the most common reason was they needed assistance to travel. People told us that they had been refused a taxi because they had a guide dog with them as well as being refused a taxi as they could not accommodate their wheelchair. 57% of respondents were aged between 60 and 79 years of age.

We did not limit the distribution of the survey to our area of benefit - the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region (RCT, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil) – as although this is the area we are primarily interested in learning more about, we decided we could use any wider findings to highlight any specific regional differences. However, 97% of respondents lived in our area.

Key themes from the survey responses centred on:

1. People have trouble getting out and about or getting to medical appointments due to transport accessibility, times and cost.

For those who told us they don't use public transport regularly, they told us this was because they needed assistance to travel; bus/train stops were too far away from their home; times weren't convenient, and the service was too unreliable. In these instances, people told us they relied on a lift from friends or family members, but they often felt guilty for asking or a burden, and they did not like to feel this way.

2. People want to get out, and sometimes want to use public transport more than they do, but they experience barriers to be able to achieve this.

Respondents told us very loudly that getting out and about is important to them – not just to get to a medical appointment, but to get out of the house and connect with their communities. We asked them “What benefits does it bring to your life to use the transport in this way [a transport service provided by Age Connects Morgannwg using staff trained in supporting older people]?”. In a multiple choice option for answers, 55% answered ‘To get me out of the house’; 47% answered ‘To lift my spirits’; 47% answered ‘To socialise’ and 43% answered ‘To feel part of a community.’

3. Barriers to public transport include times (either not meeting need or changing due to delays) and lack of accessible provision for those with mobility issues or a disability.

People told us that public transport doesn't often meet their needs due to a variety of reasons, but often these centred on public transport, and private transport such as taxis, not meeting the needs of people with mobility issues or disability. For some people they struggle to stand outside in the cold waiting for a bus; some people cannot walk up a hill with shopping from the train/bus stop; we heard stories of taxi's refusing to take assistance dogs; people told us that often they experience difficulty with wheelchair access; we were told that often people can't rely on public transport to get to appointments as so frequently they are delayed or buses and trains don't turn up at all – sadly this can be the same with hospital provided transport.

4. Sometimes people would like and need a trained volunteer or support worker to join them on their outing, evidencing that transport often isn't the only thing that person needs support with

45 people told us they would be happy to pay for a transport service but importantly one with ACM trained staff or volunteers, and on average they said they would be happy to spend £9 an hour for this service.

We also met with Rail Future Wales who highlighted with the upcoming South Wales Metro that some of the trains on the valleys train lines will be swapped to trams in the upcoming future. We believe this will cause barriers for lots of people, including older people, as trams do not have toilets on board.

We hope this project will act as a steppingstone for us to set-up a transport service based on genuine need, and importantly one that meets the needs of older people too. The responses have shown us that what

people can afford to pay isn't enough to fund our costs as a charity. We will however try to bridge that gap by searching for relevant funding, include seed funding, to see if we can launch a service that meets need.

<p>I often have to go for cancer treatment and luckily Cancer Aid can help. But sometimes the treatment is at 8:30 and voluntary transport is not available at that time, so I always have to ask to change the appointment and its always for 3 or 4 weeks later!</p>	<p>Yes I am visually impaired with a guide dog. Coaches and minibuses these days are not really assistance dog friendly any more than trains are and trying to get people to move from disabled spaces on crowded buses and trains and safely accommodate my guide dog is usually a showstopper for me!</p>	<p>Hospital appointments are usually impossible for me to get to alone, due to distance, uneven, sloping access from the car parks into the buildings, using my self-propelled wheelchair. So many times I've driven to an appointment and had to go home again because I couldn't park close enough to access the building.</p>
<p>The scheduled bus timetable often changes without notice and causes problems for people who have arranged appointments or plans to use a connecting service</p>	<p>Today I wanted to go to visit a group but the bus didn't come and so I couldn't go. Its very bad. If I want to go somewhere when the schools are opening or closing, I can forget it as the bus does that.</p>	<p>I would love to be able to get out of the house and visit my local town with support, just to have a change of scenery and chat to different people.</p>
<p>Transport has been cut from where I live because of work on the A465. This means that I now have to walk to get a bus. Its not so bad on the way down but then I have to walk back up the hill, with heavy shopping and mu walking stick it's impossible. If I want a taxi I can only get one at certain times which is not always when I need one, if I have to go to the hospital or doctors for example</p>	<p>In my professional role, I often hear that older people, including people living with dementia and carers, are unable to attend community events because of a lack of reliable transport, including community-arranged or privately-arranged transport. Volunteer-led schemes can be unreliable or do not meet demand. Not having appropriate and sufficient travel options leaves people isolated and disadvantaged, which can have massive negative impacts on their health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>This is about people having the choice to make decisions that effect them - without easily-available transport, people do not have the option of experiencing the benefits and activities listed above, and are limited to what can come to them. The biggest benefit of readily-available and reliable transport for people in the community who needs this support is that they will be empowered to decide if and how they access the community.</p>
<p>Bus times, routes and cancellations are a real issue, I do catch the train from time to time, if I am going to Cardiff or somewhere else along the trainline</p>	<p>My wife is in a care home and I have to book a taxi to see her which costs me £40 every time so I can only go once a week to visit her.</p>	<p>My neighbours are very supportive but I don't like to ask them to take me shopping so I just give them a list to do it for me, I would love to go out and do it myself with support.</p>
<p>Shopping trips with a safe pick up and set down place would be marvellous .</p>	<p>The bus is once an hour and if it doesn't come then you have to wait another hour.</p>	<p>I need ambulance to get to medical appointments but not always available.</p>
<p>My neighbours find it difficult getting to Hospital appointments as they have to catch two buses</p>	<p>I cannot walk very far so I use a mobility scooter that folds up, but it's still awkward to get it onto the bus because it's quite heavy.</p>	<p>Not personally, my mother though ordered a taxi a few years ago and he refused to drive up the road because it is narrow</p>

Recommendations

- To look for funding to see if we can launch a transport service that meets need; crucially one that offers escorted transport with a trained volunteer or support worker
- To conduct a feasibility study into a transport service (funding dependant)
- To share the findings with other organisations who might be able to provide a transport service in our area that meets the needs of the people it will serve
- To share our findings to inform the work of the newly started RCT Local Community Transport Group Task and Finish Group
- To share the findings with elected officials and decision makers in our area of benefit
- To share the findings with public transport providers in our area of benefit
- ACM to make contact with PACTO to take learning from their Bus Buddies project
- ACM to properly log and calculate the number of requests it receives for transport support