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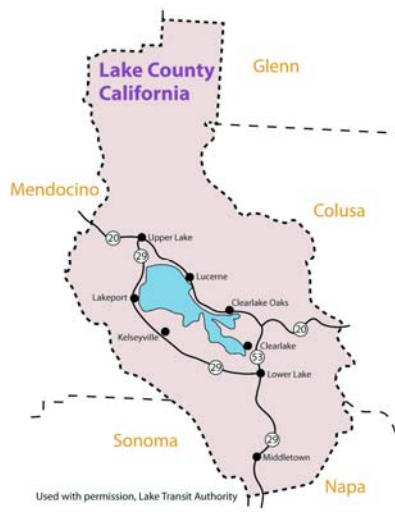
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Volunteer Driver Service is Successful in Rural County Ravaged by Wildfires

**People who do not drive or use public transportation
are now able to reliably access medical care when needed**

Lower Lake, CA – September 18, 2018 – Rural and isolated residents of Lake County California have been able to meet difficult transportation needs because of the Lake Links' Pay-Your-Pal Program, started in 2015 by the Lake County Consolidated Transportation Services Agency, according to Karl Parker, Mobility Programs Coordinator. He says, "The innovative program is meeting a critical need for access to medical care caused by extraordinary geographic and socio-economic factors."

Lake County's population of 64,000 lives in cities and towns surrounding the 68 square mile Clear Lake, which sits in a basin surrounded by mountains. These features present significant challenges for those needing transportation services. Healthcare and other essential services are often found on the other side of the lake from where people live, or over the mountains in more populous neighboring counties.



Travel from Lakeport on the west shore of the lake to services in the city of Clearlake takes about 50 minutes, and travel from Clearlake to medical providers in Santa Rosa, to which many Lake County residents are referred, takes about 1.5 hours by car, and 3.5 hours by bus. In addition to geographical challenges, transportation for county residents has been sometimes disrupted because five major wild fires hit the area, burning sixty-six percent of the county land in the last six years, according to Parker.

Federal transit law requires that projects selected for funding under the Enhanced Mobility for Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program be included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. The 2014-2015 Coordinated Plan for Lake County, completed with the assistance of AMMA Transit Planning consultants, specified that a critical top priority need for Lake County was the development of non-emergency medical transportation.

In 2015, with assistance from the Independent Living Partnership's TRIP Program, Lake County launched its own Pay-Your-Pal volunteer driver mileage reimbursement service. Almost immediately public transportation services in the county were confronted with the challenge of helping residents impacted by the massive Valley Fire that burned 76,067 acres, killed four people and destroyed nearly 2,000 buildings.

Parker says, "The Pay-Your-Pal Program started in 2015 has been successful getting elderly, disabled, low income people, who are not able to utilize regular Lake Transit bus services, to non-emergency medical appointments." He says that Pay-Your-Pal has been the flexible and low cost solution that was needed.

Parker reports that Pay-Your-Pal has now supported 6,000 escorted trips and more than 126,000 miles of transportation free to Lake County residents who would not have otherwise been able get to sustain and supportive resources. He says "The average cost to us of a trip we provided was only \$7.09, a fraction of the cost of taxi service or demand-response bus service." He concludes that "a plus of the program is the fact that clients select their own drivers and arrange their own trips, which sharply decreases overhead administrative costs."

Read more about the Lake Links Pay-Your-Pal Program at Lakelinks.org. The Independent Living Partnership is assisting other organizations in California and other states to establish TRIP model services. Read more about the TRIP Program at ILPconnect.org.

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