

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Southeast Michigan Solves Access to Care, Isolation and Mental Health Challenge with Volunteer Driver Service**

#### **Research beginning in 2003 culminated in 2008 nonprofit Freedom Road Transportation start-up**

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**Orion, MI – October 9, 2018** – "A group of involved citizens, representatives from a variety of human service agencies and community stakeholders formed a 'Focus Group' to explore options to provide transportation specifically for those living with a low income who did not have access to public transportation", according to Michael Daley, Customer Services Manager at Oakland Community Health Network.

The 2003 study found uneven public transportation availability in the communities north of Detroit. Karen Boice, Executive Director of the nonprofit Freedom Road Transportation agency says that service gaps resulted because independent communities could opt out of the public SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) bus service and busses were not able to cross county and city boundaries.

Boice recounts "Many people in Southeast Michigan were unable to access care or basic needs and were socially isolated because of the transportation challenges." She says, "Isolation precedes the onset of depression, which community mental health agencies work to alleviate." Following findings that there was a transportation problem for mental health clients, the group of volunteers began researching effective and economical ways to supplement SMART services for area residents who were unable to use existing transit options.

The process to develop the needed transportation service was deliberate and methodical according to Boice. Research continued for four additional years after Freedom Road incorporated as a nonprofit in 2008. Boice says, "For the next four years we monitored several different programs and their quality and effectiveness." Boice continues, "We looked at obtaining vans, hiring drivers and all that was thought to go with a transportation system." "During our research we found the TRIP model in California to be the most unique, efficient and economical program." TRIP does not hire drivers or use vans but pays mileage reimbursement incentives for volunteer drivers.

About TRIP she says, "We decided to implement a TRIP-base program because its service design allowed us to use one hundred percent of donations to support riders with little overhead and administration cost." With the help of Grant Funding from

Oakland Community Health Network and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Freedom Road was able to start a volunteer driver mileage reimbursement service and provide a transportation option in Oakland County. Freedom Road Transportation's first riders began to apply for needed service in 2012.

The continuing service has been funded by matches from SMART, Federal grants, donations and partnerships with other organizations, hospitals and churches. According to Boice, the "Partner Program" modification to the basic TRIP model maintains a small pool of volunteer drivers who transport partner clients to and from appointments for an agreed upon service fee.

Originally serving people in Oakland County, Freedom Road now also serves people in Macomb, Wayne and Monroe Counties. Boice says, "Our ridership and support from other organizations is growing and we are looking for additional funding to expand."

Read more about Freedom Road Transportation at <http://freedomroadtransportation.org/>.

The Independent Living Partnership, creator of the rider focused TRIP volunteer driver model, assists agencies and organizations across the country to start and operate similar services based on TRIP's experience. Information about how to start a volunteer driver mileage reimbursement service is available at [ILPconnect.org](http://ILPconnect.org).

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