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CONTACT:

Richard Smith 951-653-0740 rsmith@ILP-TRIP.org
Ivet Woolridge 951-653-0740, x11 IWoolridge@ILP-TRIP.org

Pandemic Doesn't Stop Volunteer Driver Service

**Not a perfect solution, but proven to be an effective service
for elderly and disabled**

Riverside CA – August 10, 2020 – 83% of the seven hundred elderly and disabled clients of the TRIP volunteer driver transportation service for Riverside County California were able to continue to access stores and get to scheduled medical appointments each month in March and April, according to Richard Smith, CEO of the nonprofit Independent Living Partnership (ILP).

With public transit ridership crashing, Smith says “We were surprised that only 17% of the TRIP riders had stopped using the service in spite of the rise of infections and awareness of the dangers of exposure, so we conducted follow-up interviews to find out why.” TRIP riders do not drive for themselves, are unable to use public alternatives, even when they are operating, but have a need for frequent medical services and need groceries like everyone. We have been calling riders and interviewing them about why they did or didn't continue to use the volunteer driver service.

In May we conducted a survey which inquired about the effectiveness of the volunteer service during the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic. 94.3% of the 417 riders participating in the survey indicated that being enrolled in the TRIP Program, and having an established relationship with a volunteer driver, had helped them deal with the impacts of stay-at-home guidelines and apprehension about the threats and dangers of the disease.

When asked how safe they felt using TRIP during the pandemic, only 2% of the riders who continued to use the service in March and April said they did not feel safe. The most cited reason for believing that being a TRIP participant helped them deal with the Pandemic, and accounted for their feeling “safe”, was having a relationship with a reliable, caring and trusted volunteer driver.

According to Ivet Woolridge, ILP's Chief Operating Officer, TRIP is a unique relationship form of transportation assistance in which TRIP clients, "riders", bond with caregivers, friends and neighbors who have volunteered to drive them to access needed resources. The closeness of the relationships between TRIP transportation riders and drivers has persisted under the stress and anxiety caused by living with the threat of a highly contagious and dangerous disease. Despite of, or because of, the life

uncertainties brought about by COVID-19, TRIP riders said that they like having the service because it is "very relaxing and reliable".

While 83% of TRIP's riders continued to utilize stable and reliable transportation service for essential purposes, the impact of stay-at-home orders and closures caused a self-imposed reduction in the number of trips taken and the miles of assisted transportation received by each of the riders. The *Pandemic Use of TRIP* report is available in the news section of www.ILPconnect.org.

Although most TRIP volunteer drivers continued to provide needed rides arranged with their riders, some volunteers became unwilling to provide rides as they had before the Pandemic. Woolridge said some riders stopped using the service because their doctors had ordered them to stay home and the use of telehealth phone appointments gained in popularity. Woolridge adds, "One woman specifically told us that she, as a result of independent living complications caused by the virus, is not using the service anymore and has moved to stay with her daughter's family out of the area."

Smith concludes, "TRIP, obviously, is not the perfect answer to the social disruption of a Pandemic, but it has been very effective in helping TRIP clients to continue to get needed resources.

The TRIP Program is a "rider-centered" volunteer driver service, anchored in strong relationships between riders and volunteers, that has operated in Riverside County California since 1993. TRIP has provided thousands of elderly and disabled residents, who do not drive, have no family to drive for them and are unable to use public alternatives, with transportation to needed health care or other life sustaining services that they would not otherwise have been able to access. Volunteer drivers receive mileage reimbursement payments to help cover their vehicle expenses, according to Woolridge.

The Independent Living Partnership (ILP) was organized in 1989 to actively advocate for the Americans with Disabilities Act and worked hard to gain support for the bill prior to its passage into law. ILP was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization in 1991. ILP has been operating the TRIP volunteer driver service since 1993 and now averages a monthly ridership of about 700 people across the county.

ILP, 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 TRIP style volunteer driver mileage reimbursement service is available at ILPconnect.org.

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