

Who will be your volunteer driver?

Volunteer Drivers Talk about How They Were Asked to Be a TRIP Driver

When **new people are enrolled in TRIP they are expected to recruit a volunteer driver** to assist them with getting to the doctor, or shopping or with other transportation needs. Sometimes people tell us that they aren't able to recruit a volunteer to help them. With coaching from TRIP staff, **most are successful if they really try.**

We asked some real volunteer drivers what their rider said to them that convinced them to become a volunteer? Here are some of the typical things the volunteers told us:

- "I need help since I no longer drive. It would be of benefit to us both, and TRIP will help with the gas money."
- "She told me that she needed help with going to the doctors and other trips."
- "She asked if I could help her. She said she is on the TRIP the program that she can help pay for the gas, so I decided to help."
- "She said I would be helping her in a tremendous way - she wouldn't feel so home bound."

The common thread is that the rider asked for help. Sometimes in not such a direct way, like this one:

"She asked if I knew anyone who lived in her area, and could pick her up for Church and sometimes other errands. I decided that I could be that 'someone'"

Then we asked the volunteer drivers, "If things were different and you wanted to ask a neighbor or friend to volunteer to be your TRIP driver, what would you say to them?" Here are some of the things that volunteer drivers told us they would say if they needed a driver:

- "Could you help me by giving me a lift to where I need to go?"
- "If they could drive me for my errands they would be reimbursed for the miles."
- "I would tell them that I can help with gas."
- "I can no longer drive - can you help me? You will be helping someone remain part of the community."



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- “That it’s a wonderful feeling to help someone get the basic needs, and to open your heart to love and help someone who is alone.”

People are very willing to help if they are asked. The mileage reimbursement may help, but people volunteer because they care about their friends and neighbors. It is clear that the real spirit of community is pretty basic and very profound—it is people wanting to help each other.

To Recruit Your Volunteer Drivers. You Need to Start the Conversation

Volunteer drivers for others also on the TRIP program include:

- A friend they have known a long time
- The sons, daughters or grandchildren of friends
- Friends of their own son or daughter
- People their son or daughter work with
- People they used to work with themselves
- Neighbors
- People who live in the same retirement community or mobile home park
- People they met in a club or at church
- People recommended by their priest, pastor or rabbi or people in administration at a church or synagogue or mosque
- Their caregiver
- Someone recommended by their caregiver
- People who are already volunteers at the hospital
- People who are already volunteers for other community programs or services
- Members of service clubs, like Rotary or Elks
- People who are active in a senior or community center
- Seniors they met eating at a local restaurant or cafe
- People they met and talked with at the beauty salon
- Who else do you think you could talk with?



How to Start a Conversation with (Just about) Anyone.....

Life is lonely if we don't have others to talk with and many studies have shown that being isolated is actually dangerous to our health and well-being. Talking with people increases our feelings of belonging and provides us with mental stimulation, and sometimes great entertainment. Having people to talk with is also a resource for thinking through the challenges of life and getting help when it is needed.

Everyday there are opportunities for us to talk with people we do not know. We see people at the store or the doctor's office. We sit next to them on the bus or in church. Did you see your neighbor today? Did you say hi and strike up a conversation?

For some talking to strangers or people they don't know well has become easy, but for most of us it can be a rather frightening challenge. What should I say? Will I be thought of as too forward? Will I say something embarrassing? Is anything I have to say interesting?

Following are some tips about getting ready to talk with people you do not know:

- Understand that everyone is unique and has a rich history of experiences to share
- Think about things that interest you and about what you would like to know that others might know about them too
- Practice smiling and saying "hi" to yourself in the mirror—always greet people you encounter with a smile and a hello—Using the mirror, practice looking yourself in the eye —maintaining eye contact shows that you are interested in what people are saying
- Practice questions that will get others to talk about themselves—simple, friendly questions will almost always get a conversation started.



There are two real "don'ts" that can stop a first conversation right away or may cause the conversation to become heated and uncomfortable. Don't complain about personal circumstances, including health. Don't strongly assert religious beliefs or political views

To start a conversation, the first thing we say should always be positive and a friendly question is best: Isn't this a beautiful day? I see you bought such and such an item too—isn't it really good? You seem to be very busy today—is this usual for a Wednesday—are some days busier than others? This is my first time here—do you come here often? That is such a lovely coat—it looks like it is nice and warm—did you get it around here?

Other opening subjects might include family, friends, pets, or an experience you are sharing. Once the conversation has started, pay close attention to what the person says and the way they say it. Listening is, in fact, more important to advancing a conversation than what you say. Adding appropriate comments will help the conversation flow naturally. It is important to remember to be positive, good natured and smile. Ask questions about things you would like to know and that can be useful to you in the future.

A good rule to follow is to try to talk with someone everyday—talk with someone new or continue conversations you have already started. Soon it will become easy and something to look forward to.

Maintaining Your Social Network

Most of us can think of many events or activities that we can participate in—for example, friend's and family's birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, etc. We wonder where we are going for the weekend, who we are visiting next, where we are going for the holidays and the list goes on and on.

It's wonderful to have things to look forward to and to plan upcoming events, but as we age we tend to slowly lose the excitement of all these activities because we lose friends or because we just have a hard time getting out of our home.

In order to maintain our social involvement, we need to be consciously working to maintain and expand our social network. We need to have an open mind about meeting new people everyday. Many of us have family that we rely on for social activities, but what happens when family is not available? We need to think about options that will expand our social connection options.

Talking with neighbors, talking with people at our churches, talking with people in the stores, volunteering to help in the community, taking a class at the community college, attending community events, attending church services, are all ways that will strengthen our social network—getting to know people and making new friends.

According to the American Geriatrics Society, some of the benefits of Social Networks are:

- Less risk of early death
- Better physical and mental health
- Less risk of disability or decline in activities of daily living
- Better chance of recovering our ability to perform activities of daily living
- Buffered impact of major life events
- Greater feeling of personal control.

Your social network can help you in a time of crisis and in different circumstances you might be the one helping. It becomes your support system—of course the bigger and stronger the better.

It's very easy to lose our social network. When we retire we can lose touch with co-workers. If we move we don't keep in touch with our good neighbors. If we are diagnosed with a health condition we isolate ourselves. **It takes determination to keep our social network growing.**

Having the ability to ask for help and receive help is an overlooked strength. It is okay to ask friends and family for a helping hand. We would surely help them if they asked us.

