

MEMBER PROFILE

HOLDERNESS AREA RURAL TRANSPORT

Caroline Wegrzyn from HART talks to *Together* about the importance of community transport in their community and how they try to reach people of all ages.

Community transport has always been built from the ground up with local communities coming together to ensure a provision of accessible and inclusive transport that otherwise wouldn't be met. Holderness Area Rural Transport (HART) is an excellent example of this, having been formed in 2003 when a community of five rural villages came together to address the lack of accessible transport to hospital in their area. After applying for a parish transport grant to purchase a minibus, they put on a service to local hospitals that ran for three days a week. Since 2003 HART has grown, using their now 10 minibuses to provide much needed shopper services; work with local community groups; provide day trips for their service users; as well as taking over a non-commercially viable local bus route.

Caroline Wegrzyn is HART's Business Manager having started at the organisation as their treasurer in 2003 before getting involved in writing bids and taking on more responsibility for the running of the organisation. "Every day is different," said Caroline, "and you know you're doing something that really matters."

Like many community transport

providers, HART's primary service users tend to be older people and people with disabilities. "It's so important for people to have an accessible transport network in our community," said Caroline. "They get out and about; they see people on the bus, and make friends. They manage to get their shopping by themselves and they feel independent. It really means a lot to them."

Caring for passengers

One aspect of community transport that Caroline is particularly proud of is how everyone involved in the journey really care for their passengers. She told the story of an older couple who frequently used HART's shopper service, not just to get to the shops but also to make friends and socialise. "Unfortunately the wife recently passed away," said Caroline "which led to the husband retreating back inside his home and not feeling confident enough to travel anymore." Having noted his absence, they managed to convince the husband to come back on the bus and to use the shopper service again, starting to re-build his confidence and reconnecting him with the friends that he and his wife had shared.

"Community transport cares," said Caroline. "It's something that you can see across the country whoever the provider is.



When someone doesn't turn up, we try to find out why and we really try to look after our passengers. They look after each other as well."

As another example of how important community transport is to so many people, Caroline pointed to a recent piece on BBC Radio Humberside about the potential impacts that the Department for Transport's 31 July letter on section 19/22 permits and driver licensing could have on community transport. In the interview, a reporter



HART provides accessible and inclusive transport services in their community.

talked to one of HART's first ever users, Sheila, who told the story of how her and her late husband's lives had been positively impacted by their services.

"I started using the service because my husband was in a wheelchair," Sheila said. "My husband was completely paralysed, he'd lost his speech, he couldn't get in a car, he couldn't get in a taxi, or anything." She explained that for two years they had little to no access to transport outside of their immediate surroundings. When the reporter asked Sheila how it felt knowing there was transport available, for both her and her husband, her voice lit up: "Oh it was marvellous! You couldn't believe my husband's face! It made his life so different, he was so happy, it was so marvellous for him!"

Transport for families

As well as providing accessible travel to older people, HART are also part of a network of community transport providers called East Yorkshire Community Transport. Pooling their resources, they recently employed a community development worker who has been concentrating on working with children's centres and young families.

The services are valued by so many parents and children who are in need of a good day out.

Amongst other services, they currently partner with 15 Sure Start centres in East Yorkshire to provide day trips to over 458 parents and children to date.

"Services like our day trips have a really big impact on families," said Caroline. "We recently had a mum and her child, for example, who both had English as an additional language and who had lived in their area for three years but had very limited friendships and support networks. She took her daughter on a day trip and they both had a chance to engage with other local families and made some long lasting friendships. We've had numerous other families who wouldn't otherwise be able to access these sorts of trips and who have

been able to give their children experiences that they've never had before. The services are really valued by so many parents and children who are in need of a good day out!"

Telling their story

"It's really important for us to tell the story of what we do," said Caroline, "and increasingly we've found that social media is a really good tool to do that."

For those who keep up to date with community transport on Twitter, HART is likely to be a familiar feature on their timelines. With a mixture of photographs, stories, insights into the day to day running of their organisation (and frequent use of emojis!), HART are effective in using the platform to promote the work they do.

"I had initially thought that there wasn't any point in using Twitter," said Caroline. "We used Facebook but I didn't think we had the time for anything else. I also didn't think that there would be an audience for us on Twitter." Despite this, Caroline and the team at HART undertook some social media training and, as a result, started using their Twitter account more purposefully, building it up to be a regular and effective form of communication.

"It's a useful tool," she said, "and I'd definitely recommend it to other people working in community transport." One of her recommendations for community transport operators wanting to get into Twitter is to build up a library of photographs which can then form the basis for their activity. "That's how you tell your story," said Caroline, "photos connect with people and they help you understand the sort of things you want to talk about. It takes some work, but it helps to have a plan of what you want to tweet each week."

Since it was set up in 2003, HART has worked to make a real difference in its community. Through providing accessible and inclusive transport, putting their passengers at the heart of their organisation and working in partnership with a variety of organisations, they've made, and continue to make, an enormous impact.

 You can follow HART on Twitter @HartTransport.