

Case Study

Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern

Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern (DPVC) was established in 1972 to support voluntary groups and individuals who seek to improve the quality of life for older people, for people with disabilities, or those otherwise disadvantaged and living in communities in and around Dinas Powys; and to act as a first port of call for those seeking help or advice. A charity offering a wide range of community-based initiatives, they develop projects as needed by the groups and individuals they support, such as wellbeing and befriending schemes, a community club, advice services and community transport. The common thread that runs through all of their highly-valued services is a focus on reducing loneliness and isolation, and maintaining independence.

Working in partnership with the Vale of Glamorgan Council, DPVC deliver a range of community transport services which are essential for people with limited/no access to public transport due to lack of services or additional mobility needs. With just two vehicles and a team of volunteer drivers (some of them also volunteering in their own cars to support service users if needed), last year DPVC completed more than 5,100 passenger journeys covering nearly 6,600 miles. Increasingly they have seen transport to health become a bigger part of their service, particularly over the last four years since the development of the Dinas Powys Medical Centre.

Supporting Patients

DPVC are situated between two hospitals which are both poorly served by public transport. With no local buses to Barry Hospital and the main bus stop at Llandough Hospital some 10 minutes' walk away from the main entrance, patients used to rely on expensive taxis to get to their appointments. DPVC provide a fully accessible service to both hospitals, including regular transport for those with long standing conditions requiring regular treatment. They also support people to access appointments at the dentists, opticians, audiology clinic and physiotherapy – all in addition to their 'traditional' community transport services for clients going on day trips, heading to the shops or to visit day centres or family members.

Following a review of local GP provision in the area and an exhaustive search for sites which would be fit for purpose and able to better serve the community, four years ago the new Dinas Powys Medical Centre was opened. This state of the art, fully accessible building offers primary and secondary care appointments and is of great value to the community – unfortunately the site does not yet have a bus

stop or public transport services and is at the top of a large, steep hill. For those with access to a car this is no problem; for those unable to drive it presents a huge barrier which was preventing people from getting to the surgery for their appointments. DPVC, in partnership with Greenlinks Community Transport and the Vale of Glamorgan Council, developed a demand-responsive transport service which offers a door-to-door, return journey for anyone who needs it across Dinas Powys.

Using a fully accessible VW Caddy which is owned and maintained by Vale of Glamorgan Council, DPVC offer transport to patients every weekday to get to and from their appointments. This completely free service is open to anyone who needs it, and is mainly used by people with additional mobility needs. For example - **Mrs. C** has a condition which means she cannot bend her legs. Even if she was able to afford the taxi fare – more than £3 each way, sometimes several times a week – she physically can't get into a standard taxi and as a result would be forced to miss her appointments if an accessible vehicle wasn't available. The DPVC transport means she has been able to attend more of her appointments and manage her condition more effectively.

Wendy Lees, DPVC Coordinator says that “volunteers are at the centre of our organisation and they have stepped up once again this year with their support and generosity. We regularly support between 3 and 10 patients a day to get to the surgery, 5 days a week, which would not be possible without the team of volunteer drivers. On one Saturday, our volunteers gave up their leisure time to help 23 people get to the Medical Centre for their flu jabs – the local care home weren't offering their usual service, so our drivers stepped in to help everyone get the injections they needed.” When the morning's passengers have all been settled safely home again, the volunteers will then move on to taking patients and visitors to the local hospitals in the afternoons.

All the transport services offered by DPVC are flexible and supportive for those with additional needs, meaning they are suitable for all. They are free or very low cost, directly tackling transport poverty by creating accessible services for everyone in the community. They are also independently delivered by the charity – there is no formal agreement, contract or SLA in place with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, so often it can be hard to identify the benefit in terms of the cost of missed appointments vs. the value of a contracted service. It's clear that DPVC are highly valued by their clients and many refer to them as their 'lifeline' – for some customers, DPVC is their only transport option and without the community transport service, they would be unable to leave the house at all. Not only would this create a direct cost in terms of missed Health appointments, the increase in loneliness and isolation would be highly detrimental to their mental and physical health, which ultimately leads to an increased risk of deterioration and the need for crisis point clinical intervention by health and social care professionals.¹

¹ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true