

# Beacon Centre for the Blind

## Case Study

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### Our TL Story

The Beacon Centre's involvement in the CTA Tackling Loneliness Project has seen us transport more people to a broader range of activities enabling them to build social connections, increase their confidence and improve their independence, while reducing feelings of loneliness.



### Project highlights



325 trips were completed during the project



More than 100 people including project participants and those on group bookings taking trips



More than 200 occasions when transport was used to access a community-based activity

### Project overview

We entered this project wanting to maximise the funding to provide a service to people feeling lonely and isolated. Our transport service acted as a catalyst for change, offering them access to venues that better connected them with their communities and enabling us to build a more sustainable, worthwhile service.



In July 2022, when we started the project, we had 46 service users and as of May 2023 we currently have 95 registered service users and have also completed around 10 group bookings which had around eight to 10 people on each trip.

*“Beacon Transport is a lifeline for me, without the transport team I would be isolated and wouldn’t have the opportunity to get out of the house independently.”*

One of the main driving forces behind the increase has been the introduction of our community activity programme that has seen us run up to a dozen sessions in our local area each month.

However, we have also reviewed the service, creating criteria to help us assess people’s needs, that has focused on building independence, which we knew would in turn reduce the risk of or any feelings of loneliness.

We have also introduced new marketing, redesigning our transport service webpage, promoting the service on social media and producing new sight friendly information sheets about the service.

## Community Activities

Across the duration of our project people have accessed our community transport service more than 200 times to attend a range of activity sessions from trips out to local landmarks such as the Black Country Living Museum, to exercise classes such as swimming, tandem biking, bowling and community walks.

One of our biggest successes has been our swimming sessions which started as a monthly activity in September 2022 with five people attending. We are now running two sessions a month and have had up to 14 people attend on our busiest days.

Our team have reported that members are becoming more confident in participating in different activities and we have found that we’re starting to welcome a younger demographic who didn’t feel our more traditional health and wellbeing activities were for them.

Our members have told us that they would not have been able to access community venues and activities without our transport service and the support we offer, and we’re delighted to continue with the expansion of this service moving forward.



In April we were able to transport members of a new social group to a pub meal and also launch a new course at a local petting zoo that again participants were able to access through our transport service.



We've also recently been able to restart our tandem bike sessions with our first class in April fully booked.

You can click on the QR code to listen to one of our participants who tried it for the first time.

## Taking a strategic approach to our transport service and the benefits it brings

Our project also had a strategic element to raise awareness of the impact of transport issues on people with sight loss and other long-term health conditions.

Transport is now a key element of our Sight Loss MOT, our assessment tool which we complete with anyone coming to us for support.

Our Sight Loss Advisor team have been working with people to help them better understand how using an accessible transport service can have multiple benefits for them and they have been able to refer people every month through to services which can be accessed via our community transport.

Having now improved our own understanding around the issue of transport, we hope to expand the strategic work in the future and are currently looking at how we can capitalise and better establish its social value.

## Volunteers

One of the more challenging areas of our project has been signing up volunteer bus buddies to go out with our drivers on our trips to accompany passengers. Despite advertising the roles, we had available, we have been impacted by the reduction in volunteer sign-ups that has been seen nationally across the voluntary sector.

However, we have been able to bring in volunteers to support with the activities themselves, including one of our transport service drivers, which has meant that we've still been able to offer befriending support to people.

We are also pleased to report that we have had a volunteer bus buddy driver start with us in May 2023 who is doing very well so far.



## Next steps

Being able to grow our transport service so significantly during the duration of the project means it is more cost effective for us to run, but most importantly it has enabled more people to connect with their communities by taking part in activities. We've reduced loneliness and isolation, but we've also increased people's confidence, independence and even helped them find new friends, all as a result of just getting out of the house.



From the moment they step on the bus they are socialising with like-minded people and staff who are empathetic and understanding their needs.

We're committed as a charity to continuing this growth in our transport service, we'll of course look for other funding opportunities, but we'll also continue to market the service and the benefits it brings to help us to increase the access to people who are lonely and isolated to be able to utilise our services.

