

Final Report for Rural Leader Training Solutions for Community Transport



*Kirkconnel Parish
Heritage Society*

How was the idea for the project developed?

This project was developed as a result of a community consultation survey questionnaire that was compiled with help from Dumfries & Galloway Accessible Transport Forum. Almost 30% of the postal addresses responded to the survey. The D & G Leader grants programme met with the needs of training volunteer drivers which encouraged the Society to involve them with the project. Training of mini-bus drivers to gain the extra skills and knowledge aimed at the safety and comfort of passengers along with their legal responsibility when in charge of the vehicle.

Who was involved in the project? Individuals and Organisations?

Volunteer drivers, groups whose members covered all ages and interests. Details of these groups were previously supplied to Rural Leader. Organisations were/ Age concern, D & G Transport Forum, Kirkconnel Parish Heritage Society, Coalfields Community Transport from East Ayrshire.

What were the aims and objectives of the project?

To provide affordable accessible transport for community groups and individuals. Encourage groups and volunteer individuals to take part in training opportunities. This would advance community cohesion and benefit the DG4 area both culturally and educationally.

How was the funding package assembled?

Raising the funding for estimated costs of £36,315.40 for this project was very demanding and time consuming job for volunteers. Estimating costs for a project in an area where the Society volunteers had no previous experience was very difficult. Successful applications were made to the Robertson Trust £18,000, Help the Aged £1,000, Kirkconnel Coalfield Mineral Trust £5,543, Accessible Transport Forum £2,000.

How much money did LEADER provide?

The Leader programme approved a grant of £9,772.40.

When did the project take place?

The project took place from December 2008 until November 2010.

What actually happened?

The fact that the Leader project had provided the funding for training of the volunteers created a very successful project. The experience gained for the drivers and groups they represented through their involvement in the project over the 2 year period may have pointed to future development of community transport needs in the DG4 area. Many of the drivers participating in training were for the first time being asked to drive a larger vehicle than they normally used which was also carrying passengers. Training the drivers on what to do in emergency and Mini-bus evacuation procedures gave a lot of confidence to the drivers and the passengers. Training was also delivered on how to operate lifts and ramps for passengers who were travelling in a wheel chair. This section of the driver training covered how to secure the wheel chair inside the min-bus. The communities in Upper Nithsdale have witnessed the benefits of partnership Working.

How was the project delivered?

The management of the project was undertaken by the Board of Directors of Kirkconnel Parish Heritage Society. Every one of these members is a volunteer. A local person was employed to assist with the tasks linked to keeping records of groups who applied for membership to the project, bookings, Mileage and compiling of invoices.

What marketing was undertaken?

An official launch of the project took place which was open for every one in the village to attend. There was a better than average turnout to celebrate the achievement to help improve transport issues in the DG4 area. There can be no doubt that this launch also improved community cohesion in this area. A brochure was compiled and delivered to every house hold in Kirkconnel, Kelloholm and Sanquhar. The web site was updated to include the Project. All logos for the funding groups were placed on the vehicle. Attending meetings and conferences provided opportunities to inform groups in other areas of Scotland what can be done. "Word of mouth". At a "Hollyrood" conference in Glasgow the treasurer was approached by groups from Fife and Angus who were trying to start a similar scheme for regulations on community transport.

Who benefitted from the project?

No one could have foreseen that so many individuals and groups would have become involved in this project. At present there are now 51 volunteer trained drivers representing the 39 groups involved in the project. There are three main categories that relate to training for volunteer drivers to become qualified to drive a vehicle with up to 16 passengers. When the mini-bus is fully occupied the gross weight includes the kerbside weight of the vehicle plus the average weight of the passengers.

1) Theory training: This covers items such as speed limits. Stopping distances in relation to the speed of the bus. Awareness of other road users. **2)Standard training:** Legal responsibilities of a min-bus driver. The drivers duty of care of passengers. Passenger awareness. Vehicle checks and paperwork required for the project. **3)Accessibility:** The extra level of care required when working with vulnerable passengers. **Driving assessment:** It is expected that all volunteer drivers will have a good standard of driving skills. **The driving assessor looks for:** Good use of mirrors, especially side mirrors, awareness of other road users and conditions. Vehicle positioning on the road, Reversing, Parking and adherence to speed restrictions.

The group responsible for this training programme did their best to set times to enable the volunteer to participate. The whole of the training undertaken by the volunteers built up confidence in the individual being able to respond in the proper manner to any issues that arise. Another item is that each volunteer driver can assist any other group who have joined the project. There can be no doubt that the community groups in the DG4 area have benefitted a great deal through the training undertaken by the volunteer drivers. Over the 2 year period there were 270 bookings by member groups. Over 3,700 individuals who have to be a member of the booking group have been able to access venues selected by the groups.

How did the final budget turnout?

This project was the first time the Society had attempted to deliver solutions in developing rural transport issues clearly identified in the survey document that existed in this rural deprived area. The whole project was learning process for every one involved. Estimating costs on expenses was difficult. As a result of over estimating the possible expenditure on some items an under spend on the total estimated costs transpired. The original total eligible project expenditure was £36,315.40 but the final figure for total eligible project expenditure was £27,174.25with a grant of £7,312.59 being claimed.

What lessons have been learnt?

The conditions on training requirements for volunteer drivers who were willing to participate in the project revealed a lot of information on terms and conditions relating to extra skills and knowledge that had to be gained before a permit was issued. When working with volunteer community groups it is important to communicate at their level. By having a local person involved in the group communication element is certainly beneficial. Attempting to estimate the costs over a 2 year period is practically impossible in the present economic climate. No-one can predict what the weather will be. This can be a determining factor on the bookings.

Will the project be mainstreamed or transferred?

The Society gained a lot experience on how the needs for solutions to address community transport development could be addressed. Experience can not be purchased, volunteers have to get involved. If any other volunteer community group needed some guidance on procedures in development of transport items the Society would pass on information to the group.

Detail the sustainability of the project and/or the exit strategy.

Using the experience gained from this Leader this project the Society intend to continue to try and get more groups to join into the transport project and by doing so will contribute to long term sustainability. The generated funds obtained over the two years will be re-invested into assisting in the development reducing transport problems in the DG4 area.

Detail how the project has addressed the LEADER issue selected in the application.

This project has made a good contribution on how community cohesion with groups and Individuals can encourage the development of ideas on reducing transport problems in the DG4 area. Skills and knowledge gained by each participant through the training section within the project will possibly encourage other groups in other areas to try and develop transport solutions to help their community. Having a vehicle that can be used to suit the requirements of the groups in the community at times and venues of their choosing would not have been possible without the training and participation of volunteers. The fact that this has taken place could maybe be used by higher authorities to help rural areas