Sunshine Service Inc – Profile

The Sunshine Service Inc is a not for profit voluntary Community Trust set up in 1982 in response to findings by the Aged Peoples’ Welfare Council relating to the absence of appropriate transport for older and disabled persons living in Gisborne and needing to attend medical appointments, or participate in community activities etc.

The Service, run by a volunteer committee of eight, began with one vehicle in June 1984, with a hydraulic hoist for wheelchairs and persons with walking frames and now there are three specially adapted (to be more user friendly) vehicles operating each weekday, providing a door to door service.

Fifty volunteer drivers and assistants are involved in running the service. At the rate of the minimum wage, the value of their voluntary contribution to our community is over $190,000 per year. The drivers are chosen for their special qualities and up to fifteen volunteer drivers are rostered to drive the vehicles each week. Many of the drivers are retired persons, who wish to give something back to the community, and these persons provide a highly specialised service as many of our clients will confirm, nothing is too much trouble for them. Drivers undergo a period of training and are required to pass a competency-driving test before driving a vehicle. Ongoing training sessions for the drivers ensure they remain competent to provide the service. Volunteer assistants are also present on the vehicles each day.

The Service places a major emphasis on safety and has an excellent record in this area. The vehicles are serviced regularly and comply with all the safety requirements. Each vehicle is equipped with a radiotelephone to enable the Manager to maintain contact with each driver and the drivers to communicate with each other through the inter-vehicle link up.

A part time Manager, funded through grants and donations, is employed five mornings each week to receive bookings, organise the driving rosters and maintain contact with clients and drivers.

Statistics to the year ended 31.03.21 show the three vehicles:

* Carried a total of 6678 single passengers over a forty nine week period
* These figures included 1634 wheelchair and walking frame passengers
* Travelled a total of 37,878 kms
* These figures are vastly reduced from the previous years because of Covid lockdowns where our service was suspended 24th March and 15th June 2020 and from 13th August to 23rd September 2020.
* Current total client register shows 1,809 persons using the vehicles, of which about 1,400 are regular passengers.
* This service is unique to Gisborne, and with 250-300 passenger trips per week it enables up to 120 persons in any one week to go to their medical, dental, optician etc appointments, attend Day Care, recreational or social activities. Some use it daily, others two or three times a week and others once a week or fortnight or occasionally to get to appointments. For the majority of those persons, their disabilities and/or the cost would preclude them from leaving their homes if they were dependent on the other forms of transport available in the community. A modest $3 one way or $5 return fare is charged to help cover running costs.

Voluntary Support groups such as Gisborne Hospital & clinics, Age Concern, Alzheimers Gisborne Inc, Arohaina Resource Centre, Foundation for the Blind, Crippled Children Society, Idea Services, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Parkinsonian Society, Presbyterian Support Group, St. Marys Catholic Church, Senior Citizens, Strive Rehabilitation Tairawhiti, Stroke Support Group, Vanessa Lowndes Centre and the local Rest Homes i.e. Dunblane Elder Care, Leighton House, Te Wiremu House, Kiri Te Kanawa Retirement Village, Beetham Retirement Village, and various Day Cares, Care and Craft etc are dependent on the service to transport their members to and from meetings, activities etc. Without the service, participation in their activities would drop because no other appropriate form of transport is available.