

Press Release – For Immediate Release

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Community First launches campaign to find new volunteers for local transport groups



Devizes based charity Community First has launched a new, digital campaign to recruit new volunteers to support local Link Schemes and Community Minibus groups in Wiltshire and Swindon.

There are 42 Link (volunteer car) Schemes and 21 Community Minibus groups across the county, who offer door-to-door or group transport for people who need help to get out, visit local facilities and access medical care. These vital, volunteer-led community groups offer a lifeline for local people, including the elderly, people with limited mobility and people who live in rural areas which do not have a regular bus or train service. Some Link Schemes also offer a 'Good Neighbour' service which can include collecting prescriptions, befriending and helping with small tasks in the home or garden.

In 2021 Link Schemes played an important role in supporting the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out locally, by offering transport to and from vaccine appointments. A call-out for volunteers to support the vaccine roll-out led to over 300 people coming forward to offer help with

transport. Community First hopes for a repeat of this success by recruiting up to 30 new volunteers through the campaign, which kicks off on 17th October 2022.

There are over 1,500 volunteers in Wiltshire and Swindon who are involved in supporting Link Schemes locally, either as volunteer drivers, coordinators or committee members. Last year volunteer drivers travelled over 750,000 miles, taking people to local hospitals, doctors appointments, shops and lunch clubs. Without the transport offered by Link Schemes and Community Minibus Groups, many of the people who use these services would find it hard to leave their home, leading to isolation and declining mental or physical health. The service offered by volunteer transport groups can be truly life-changing, offering peace of mind, dignity and the opportunity to lead a normal, independent life.

Community First Link Development Officer Jane Williams said:

"We are excited to launch this campaign to help volunteer-led transport groups find new volunteers. Volunteering with your local Link Scheme or Community Minibus Group is a fantastic way to give something back to your community, meet new people, stay active and help those most in need. All volunteers are reimbursed for mileage and any reasonable expenses incurred through their role."

A Link Scheme volunteer said:

"I am fortunate to have some flexibility in my day and decided to volunteer. I see this as a great opportunity to meet new people and help the community. Joining the [Link] scheme is straightforward and it's great to be able to assist others. You can give as little or as much of your time as you wish and a mileage allowance is offered."

Demand for support for volunteer-led transport offered by Link Schemes and Community Minibus Groups has increased in recent years, which may in part be due to Wiltshire's ageing population. New volunteers are vital in order to ensure transport groups can continue to meet this growing demand. Prospective volunteer drivers can offer their time on a flexible basis which works around their existing commitments and mileage rate is paid to all volunteer drivers using their own vehicle. In addition to volunteer drivers, we are also looking for people to volunteer as Link Coordinators and committee members.

Please note: Volunteer roles are subject to a Disclosure and Barring (DBS) check. Volunteer drivers should have a valid UK driving license.

For more information about volunteering with your local Link Scheme or Community Minibus Group, please visit: www.communityfirst.org.uk/transport-campaign or email linkproject@communityfirst.org.uk

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