

Michael became a volunteer driver with **Age UK Cornwall and TAP (Transport Access People)** almost 6 years ago and he takes people to and from their medical appointments 5 to 6 days a week, every week of the year.

Tell us about yourself

I come from a professional background and have run my own business, I have worked for international firms and the University of Exeter. I have been on aid trips to Romania, set up and ran a community centre and I even been fortunate to have lived and worked in France for a number of years. **But, without any shadow of doubt, volunteer driving is the most rewarding activity that I have undertaken in my life.**

“I believe that the volunteering driving experience has made me a better person.”

Why do you Volunteer?

Quite simply, I absolutely love it! I feel privileged to be able to offer help to people who are less fortunate than me. I love driving, I love meeting people and I talk too much - so the office tell me.



“Becoming a volunteer driver has felt like the most natural thing in the world.”

As a volunteer driver I use my own vehicle to collect patients, Age UK Cornwall provide me with a mileage allowance to cover fuel and running costs, but vehicle maintenance is down to me. Using my own vehicle means that patients receive a person-centred service rather than just transport, and this, together with what I hope is my friendly support, **helps to relax patients who are understandably concerned about what their trip to hospital may involve.** No-one goes to hospital for fun, so I believe having a relaxed and engaging driver helps to take the patients mind off whatever they are going to face. **They also get to hear some terrible jokes!**



Can you tell us a little more about the transport service

Almost all our volunteer drivers are retired and from a huge variety of backgrounds. **We generally work in the locality in which we live, so there is a real sense of supporting your local community.**

As a volunteer you put in whatever hours you choose, there are no set times and you pick up work to suit your lifestyle. Some drivers work a couple of days a week, others avoid work in the evening. **This flexibility enables you to fit driving in with whatever else you want to do on a day by day, week by week basis.**

The transport service covers all of Cornwall and most of Devon. There are over 100 volunteer drivers spread throughout the 2 counties. I live in South East Cornwall, so patients in my area tend have appointments over in Plymouth, but **I have made trips to London, Bristol, Truro, Glastonbury, Exeter, Barnstaple, Penzance – we go where the patients need to be taken.**



One of the great attractions of being a volunteer driver is meeting new patients. I am offered drives 3 to 4 days in advance, and I never know what each new day will bring.

Of course, over the years we all tend to get our regular passengers. These are usually people who (unfortunately) have repeat visits for appointments. **Often people are reassured by seeing a familiar and friendly face turning up to collect them.** This is particularly the case for dialysis patients, who require treatment 3 times a week.

We get to know them and their families, we support them, whereas with new patients there is a new rapport to be built.

Could you tell us about some of your experiences?

As a volunteer driver I am often the first person that a patient will see after they have received the results of tests or a consultation. Usually, they want to talk about this, whether their results or news is good or bad. I feel this is an essential part of my role as a volunteer, supporting the patient as they talk through their situation and absorb what happens next.

I have shared tears and laughter on many return journeys, not as any kind of expert, but just as a caring human being. I have also heard some of the most medically graphic and intimate descriptions of symptoms and conditions that can be imagined – certainly far more that you would ever hear on Casualty or Holby City!

Volunteering has also put me in regular contact with health professionals and support staff – all of them are extraordinary people! Nurses who blend compassion with professionalism, ambulance crews who cope with all the great general public has to offer with humour and resilience, A&E doctors who are rushed off

their feet yet can still find time to explain and reassure. They surface day after day to help people in their time of health, and I am in awe of their fortitude and personal strength. This has never been more true than over the last few months as the medical profession has had to cope with COVID-19. They truly are exceptional people.

What does typical day look like?

I don't really have a typical day – I sometimes have to pick a patient up by 6 in the morning, other times I may have the morning free. I regularly work until 19.30 in the evening, principally, this is because of dialysis patients, but that is very much my choice.

In an average month I will drive between 2,000 and 2,500 miles for the driving service and I would estimate that this will involve some 125 trips.

Final thoughts

I could write a book on some of the human experiences that I have had, these range from the hilarious to the deeply sad, but the common factor is the astonishing courage that people show when facing up to what may be the most difficult time they have had to face.

I feel privileged to play a very small part in supporting and helping them. I no longer catch man flu, small aches and pains are nothing to grumble about, and money and possessions count for nothing when measured against health, family and friendship.

Working as a volunteer driver has opened my eyes to what is truly important, I am a better person for the experience. I truly hope that I can continue to support my local community in this way for many years to come.

Contact us:

If you would like to find out more about Volunteering, please call our Community Helpline on:

01872 266383