

# Gloucester Dial-a-Ride consults

WHEN GLOUCESTER Dial-a-Ride started nearly 20 years ago it had just one bus, a part-time driver and one part-time employee staffing its office. Since then the organisation, which offers a high-quality, door-to-door minibus service for disabled, frail or elderly people in Gloucester, has grown phenomenally.

In its first year, it made 4,500 journeys for 80 members; today the scheme has 2,400 members, with 600 making around 26,000 passenger journeys each year. These journeys are carried out by a fleet of 6 minibuses, supported by 10 drivers and 5 office staff.

But despite its success, Gloucester Dial-a-Ride felt it was time to look at whether it was still meeting the needs of those unable to use public transport, after 20 years of service. Funding support from The Big Lottery Fund helped pay for a Development Worker with a particular goal of helping the organisation to better understand its 'market'.

And significant progress has since been made following in-depth passenger consultation and marketing activity. This includes the launches of:

- A weekend service, with over 100 users and 750 trips in its first year
- A 'Carers for Free' scheme, with the number of carers travelling up by 40 per cent
- Extending the service area, with regular trips being run beyond the Gloucester City boundary



- Service diversification, with the appointment of a loan coordinator for the Gloucestershire Minibus Scheme
- Member and community communication, through a quarterly newsletter to 800 recipients
- Its new website ([www.gloucesterdialaride.org.uk](http://www.gloucesterdialaride.org.uk)). At the same time, the service has been working hard reaching out to new sections of the local community and developing the management and administrative functions.

The service has broadened access to those who need it, increased the number of new members significantly (more than 250 joined in 2004/05), and improved the service's public profile by reaching new sections of the Gloucester community. 12 per cent of its active membership is now aged under 60, in 2003/04 it was 6 per cent.

But one of its remaining challenges

is to increase access for younger disabled people.

"Historically, it has been perceived as a service only for older people," says Development Worker Malcolm Dunn. "Managing to engage with younger disabled people is a key challenge for not only Gloucester Dial-a-Ride but for also for many other CT operators in the UK."

One group of younger adults from Gloucester who have been taking advantage of the service now visit the Hop, Skip and Jump adult social club at Seven Springs near Cheltenham every week thanks to a pilot project between Dial-a-Ride and the Seven Springs support centre for people with special needs.

Julia Walkley, Manager at Hop, Skip & Jump, said: "The whole adult social club experience has improved due to the fact that specialised staff are now always available and the centre is open much earlier. This partnership is saving us considerable time and resource transporting club members to and from the centre. In financial terms this is worth around £1,100 a year. It is also giving members more time at the club."

To further improve its service, Gloucester Dial-a-Ride has just launched its own website, where people can now register online and is working closely with many local disability organisations to encourage more people to use the service. ■

*Further information:*

[www.gloucesterdialaride.org.uk](http://www.gloucesterdialaride.org.uk)

**Left:**  
Henry, one of Gloucester Dial-a-Ride's drivers.

**Far bottom left:**  
Starting out in 1986, with what looks just like a bread van.

**Below:**  
Gloucester Dial-a-Ride has consulted its users, introducing successful operational changes as a result.

