

**County** Gaston County Department of Social Services  
**Department of Social Services**

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**Project Title** Veterans Transportation Service

**Category** Innovations in Services to Customers  
(Please select one)

### **Project Description and Summary**

**What did you do?**

**Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?**

According to a report authored by the United Health Foundation veterans are more likely to have heart disease, heart attacks and cancer compared to civilians. These physical health risks accompanied with mental health issues associated with trauma make it imperative for veterans to be able to access health care efficiently. Removing the transportation barrier to access services may potentially save lives and regardless helps with assuring veterans are able to access services they may need to live an

overall healthier life.

In 2016, our agency found that more and more veterans were relying on public transportation to travel to their out-of-county medical appointments at VA hospitals. This often resulted in long arduous trips to and from appointments. One of the primary barriers for veterans to access healthcare services is the travel distance to the nearest Veterans Affairs health facility, discouraging obtainment of crucial medical services. Additionally, feedback from clients demonstrated that many felt undervalued and unappreciated as they were looped into general transit and many Veterans were not using available services, creating a barrier to healthcare. Concern about the health of local veterans and access to services led to a collaboration between our agency and the local Department of Veterans Services. In the fall of 2016, the Veterans Transportation Service was created with the goal of addressing a multitude of issues and to better meet the unique needs of this client base.

Veterans Transportation Service program was initiated to assist the estimated 14,544 veterans living in our community with their healthcare needs in the least stigmatic way. Along with the launch of the program, two special “wrapped” vans with patriotic artwork were created to distinguish the Veterans Transportation Vehicles from others in the Public Transportation Fleet. Our agency was able to accomplish this through the economical use of available resources. We were able to reallocate two fleet vehicles (vans) scheduled to be sold at auction that had reached their serviceable mileage limit. There were no costs associated with reallocating the vans. The approximate value of the vans is \$15,000.00/each. A total of \$3,671.44 was invested into the vans for the patriotic vehicle wrap. The wrap is used to promote veterans services within the community and provide consumers with an intrinsic sense of being valued. Our agency was able to utilize already existing staff to drive the vans, eliminating the cost of additional labor. The cost associated with purchasing the resources to implement this program would be approximately \$33,671.44, which was able to be avoided by using already existing resources.

The vehicles were formally unveiled during a special Veterans Day Eve event in front of the county courthouse. This event was attended by many local veterans and elected officials. Additionally, the vans appeared on Veterans Day in the local Veterans Day parade and local media coverage helped raise awareness about this new service.

The program now serves 38 veterans, completing an average of 121 one way trips a month to VA Hospitals in both Salisbury and Charlotte North Carolina. Since the implementation of our Veterans Transportation Service program there has been a noticeable reduction in reported complaints to Veterans Services and an overwhelming improvement in consumer morale. In addition, the wrapped vans provide a visual representation to local citizens of how their tax dollars are being utilized to provide local veterans with indispensable services.

### **Project Success and Impact**

**What was the outcome?**

**Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?**

The Veteran's Transportation Program is an innovative solution to address a variety of inadequacies associated with transporting local veterans to vital medical services. By all accounts, it has been a tremendous success. The program has been operational since November 2016, averaging 121 one way routes and serving 38 veterans monthly. The initial objective of increasing access to medical care for veterans by initiating a new service has very clearly been achieved and our agency will continue monitoring and measuring the program to ensure its ongoing success. By connecting Veterans to care, we suspect this program will have additional positive outcomes in the improved health – and even lives saved – of individuals using the service.

By reallocating already available resources, we were able to provide an additional service to the community without accruing any additional costs. The program has the potential for long term sustainability due to the fiscally responsible use of existing resources and integration of the

program within existing services. Our agency anticipates being able to continually repurpose high mileage fleet vehicles for Veterans Transportation. The vehicles' maintenance is supported through the county motor pool and existing staff are used to provide chauffer services.

Another very positive outcome was the ability to add a new and better service with nominal funding. When the program was conceptualized there were many initial barriers. First, there was very limited funding available to the project. The acquisition of vehicles and staff had to come from a more efficient use of already existing resources. We have been able to overcome these major obstacles by more efficiently scheduling Medicaid Transportation routes and working with County Administration to reallocate fleet vehicles to Veterans Services. While overcoming these challenges may seem simplistic, the reality was far from perception. The overall startup cost for a program such as this would have been approximately \$100,000.00, however it was accomplished by spending less than \$4,000.00. The maximization of available resources took considerable logistical maneuvering from multiple county departments. The objectives of this program were able to be met through innovative resource management and invested staff. While the cost savings to the county is undoubtedly one of the most tangible outcomes, the impact on the lives of local veterans is the most valuable aspect of this program.

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