

The Bus That Brings People **TOGETHER**

North Norfolk Community Transport celebrates 20 years of providing a lifeline to those who need it most

When Mollie Whitworth, now 83, from North Walsham, Norfolk, helped the Town and County Councils set up the charity North Norfolk Community Transport 20 years ago, she knew there was a desperate need to help people living in isolated areas in her county. However she didn't realise quite what an amazing change it would make to their lives. "There was absolutely no available transport for many rural areas around the town where I live," says former

services, particularly as many of the local residents were elderly. Younger family members who could perhaps have helped had often moved away to find employment. "We immediately discovered the benefits it brought," she says. "One widowed lady called Lilian hadn't left her house for two years before our minibus began making regular trips to her village. She had completely lost confidence." Lilian now goes shopping once or twice a week and enjoys many of the day trips

percent of the cost of a journey. Nevertheless, they run a fleet of nine buses which make trips round many of the villages. This has not only offered people a chance to get out when they otherwise wouldn't, but has more far-reaching benefits for their quality of life. "Many people in the area grew up in the home they still live in and don't want to leave," says Mollie. "A lady called Joan, who is in her 80s, had been under pressure from family members to move.

some of the first-hand accounts of the lifeline that North Norfolk Community Transport brings. "Helping people carry on being independent and combating loneliness makes the battle to find funding worthwhile," she says. "Having company is as important as being able to get out and buy supplies." Socialising has been shown to have many health benefits, which saves money for the NHS by reducing the scale of problems people suffer. "The accessible car we run and the electric one we are currently raising money for, also provide essential access to medical appointments when people often aren't eligible for free transport from the hospital," says Claire.

"Combating loneliness makes the battle to find funding worthwhile"

headteacher, Mollie. "Some, like the village of Eccles-on-Sea, have no properly made-up roads and people with mobility issues found it extremely hard." Mollie realised an affordable, friendly, door-to-door service would give people access to amenities like shops and medical

that NNCT organise. "She has made some great friends on the bus," says Mollie. North Norfolk Community Transport was set up in 2000 and has been funded by councils and various grants, including from the National Lottery, although finding new funding is a constant struggle as fares only make up to 25

She sent us a Christmas card to say that she was able to stay in her own home because of us, and how much that meant to her." Claire Abbs joined the charity in 2017 and now works as CEO, while Mollie is a Trustee having previously chaired for 12 years. Claire has been struck by

looking up at the stars," says Claire. "It was the first time she had seen them for years as she hadn't stepped outside her front door after dark for such a long time. She said she'd forgotten how beautiful they are, yet so many people just take them for granted." Mollie is still as interested as she was when, as a Town Councillor, she listened to the County Council representative ask if someone would help set up community transport in local areas. Sadly, Mollie's town council was the only one that



Mollie and Claire



Volunteer drivers keep the service

Social as well as practical benefits



Easy access...



...and chance for a chat

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL BUSES

There are wonderful community transport initiatives around the country and although all transport has been affected by coronavirus, they always need keen volunteers to help out. It's never been more important to ensure those in rural communities have the support they need. If you feel you can help, whether by volunteering or making a donation, just go online and search for your nearest community transport service.

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