The Pas Handi Van - An Essential Service for our Community

Submitted by Denise Duncan, Make Shift Happen, September 25, 2020

Monday to Friday you will see The Pas Handi-Van moving about our community serving those who are mobility disadvantaged. Have you ever wondered what would happen if this service did not exist? The Handi-Van allows our mobility disadvantaged people the opportunity to get out of the house to shop, pick up their mail, socialize, receive medical treatment, live in our community, have a public transit system that is designed for them, and move about in the winter months when it is difficult in snowbanks and ice. The Handi-Van is an essential service for many people living in our community. Community users that use this service range in ages from young to elderly.

 All people who have mobility issues have access to the services of The Pas Handi-Van. School children who are mentally or physically challenged can access the service for attending school and recreation activities. Currently the largest users are our seniors using walkers, wheelchairs and canes and need the supports that the Handi Van is equipped with. The van is unique in structure as it is built with many supports: hand grabs, handrails, space for 4 wheelchair clients, and 6 bench seats for those requiring transportation services. In total the Van can accommodate 10 riders plus the driver. It is equipped with a wheelchair hydraulic lift, a large man door plus a three stairs access for those who have limited mobility.

 The need for a van service for wheelchairs was recognized by Mike Szadiak in 1980 when he privately purchased a van and had it equipped with wheelchair accessibility. Mike was instrumental in recognizing the challenges of mobility disadvantaged people. He created the service for himself and others requiring transportation for everyday activities such as shopping, medical, socializing, recreation, and appointments. He approached the Manitoba League for the Physically Disabled to purchase a Handi-Van and from there The Pas Handi-Van was created.

 The Pas Chapter of the Manitoba League for the Physically Disabled oversaw the operations but dissolved in 1990 leaving a void for those community members using the service. It was at this time that a volunteer board came together to oversee operations for The Pas Handi-Van. It is funded by The Town of The Pas through a grant that allocates $15,000.00 annually towards operation and $5,000.00 annually towards capital costs for van replacement. The Rural Municipality of Kelsey also provides an annual operating grant of $10,000.00. The Province of Manitoba through Mobility Disadvantaged Transportation Program have contributed a flat rate of $20,000.00 since 1980. The town also offers a gift in kind through free office space in the Town Municipal Building, free internet, printing, and mailing. The town mechanics maintain and repair the van costing back to the group parts and mechanic wages and benefits. The Handi-Van would not be operational without these supports from The Town of The Pas. The costs that are incurred to keep the van on the road are minimal and include staff wages, gas, and vehicle maintenance. The van operates on a shoestring budget and appreciates all sponsorship from the Town and donations from the community.

Val Miron, the office staff person explained that at one time there was a full-time person, which was cost reduced to a part time staffer and now is reduced to 12 hours per week. She fills this position as she believes that the Handi-Van is an essential service for our community. Along with the Board members, they have added the Annual Radio Pledge fundraiser which has been helpful in keeping the van on the road and services available at extremely reasonable rates. Bus passes are available for 2 to 10 rides at a cost of $5.00 each way within town limits. Many people are grateful for the services, but also many local contributors continue to support this service through sizable donations. Val mentioned that local service clubs, private individuals and local businesses are keeping the Handi-Van operating through their donations. In past years $14,000.00 to $16,000.00 have been generated through the Radio Pledge Show plus other donations. Without these dollars, this service would vanish, and this would affect our community dramatically.

The driver of the Handi-Van has been employed since 2012. Dean Zorn is not just a driver, he is a caring individual who builds trusting, loving relationships with his clients. He brings joy into their lives, through listening, sharing and uplifting clients with his cheerful disposition. He treats each person that enters his van like they are special to him and both the Board member and Val Miron spoke to their good fortune to have him employed as their driver. Dean goes above the call of service to ensure that his clients get into their homes safely. Dean dispatches calls for the Handi-Van service. He coordinates all the pick ups and drop offs and ensures that everyone gets to their appointments and back home safely. During the Christmas season, Dean volunteers his time and tries to fill the bus to tour his clients around town to see the many beautiful Christmas Lights and displays in the community. He is exceptional in filling a void in many of his client’s days by bringing a smile to their faces and providing a service that many of us take for granted.

The Handi-Van is currently looking for a casual driver; closer to a volunteer position to fill in when needed. A class 4 license is required with call in only when the regular driver is unavailable. The job requires the candidate to be physically able to assist those in wheelchairs with gentle safe assistance to clients getting on and off the vehicle. Along with the credential licensing requirement, the position requires a criminal records check, child abuse and vulnerable sector check. The Handi-Van will cover the costs of the checks, but applicants must have the appropriate driver license when applying. This work is designed for someone who loves helping others and enjoys interacting with people who may need additional assistance.

The next time you go to pick up your mail, grocery shop, go to an appointment, recreate or go to a social event, think how easy it is for you and think about how difficult it is for those who are mobility disadvantaged. We can support The Pas Handi-Van, through giving a donation, using the service if you are eligible, or by applying for the casual driver position. Let us give The Pas Handi-Van a big hug for the great services that they provide for our community.

To book a trip with the Handi-Van contact Dean Zorn at 204 620-2584.

If you have questions on The Pas Handi-Van service contact Val Miron at 204 623-2036.

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