



## Mobility for region's marginalized

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Mobility, upward, physical or otherwise, simply isn't an option for many of York Region's poor.

A pilot transportation project, championed by the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness in partnership with a dozen local organizations, including York Region Transit, may put at-risk residents on the road to a better life.

Take, for example, anecdotal recollections from Transit Georgina executive director Cathy Wilkinson whose agency was involved in the six-month program funded by the federal government.

People benefiting from the pilot project included a recently unemployed Georgina couple in danger of losing their home. They were driven to interviews and meetings and ultimately received rent assistance.

Or the single mother who needed to attend far away tribunals related to her extreme need to resolve geared-to-income housing issues.

"And there was the young couple who had two children under 18 months who needed transportation to the Ontario Works office," Ms. Wilkinson said. "They were able to get assistance with the first and last month of their new home."

These stories will be part of a progress report she and alliance community development coordinator Carolyn Mooi will present to the regional transit committee today.

Ms. Wilkinson may also relate how the program has fostered a new partnership with neighbouring Sandgate women's shelter.

"We saw many women and children benefit," she said. "They received help getting kids to school, help getting moved, getting into subsidized housing, to interviews, to jobs."

"The people we're helping are vulnerable and marginalized. People, particularly in Georgina, are starved for transport. It keeps them out of the mainstream. The need is huge."



Volunteers provided rides to about 500 people. Between October of last year until March, 3,132 individual rides were completed.

She hopes the project can become a full-time service.

The transportation initiative is essential to helping eradicate poverty, alliance executive director and strategist Jane Wedlock said.

"It has already demonstrated that transportation make an enormous difference in people's lives," she said. "Without it, they feel trapped."

"It's about increasing transportation supports to help those seeking access to housing, educational opportunities and employment."

The alliance kick started the project last year and received \$38,000 in government funding. Local social service agencies worked together in the hope of making a difference.

"It's a huge issue and it's nobody's mandate," Ms Wedlock said. "It's been an amazing collaboration."

Ms Mooi a said a comprehensive needs assessment was researched and four compelling themes impacting those with little or no mobility and money were identified; housing, education, employment and health care were essentially denied to those without transport, she said.

"Our goal is sustainable transportation for those at risk," Ms Mooi said.

York Region Transport was enlisted to partner and offered participants a 15 per cent fare discount during the pilot run, general manager Don Gordon said.

Regional politicians will decide if the partnership with York transit will continue, however.

The program has new life into this and next year, Ms Wedlock said, adding the government approved another \$40,000 to extend the project.

To donate services or funds to Transit Georgina, visit [www.transitgeorgina.com](http://www.transitgeorgina.com) or call 905-722-4616. Drivers use their own vehicles and are compensated for their mileage.