

Call for drivers to forge vital link

SHORTAGE OF VOLUNTEERS

Natalie Savino

A VITAL community service keeping elderly and disabled people socially active and independent desperately needs volunteers to keep its wheels in motion.

LINK Community Transport, a not-for-profit organisation based in Campbellfield, helps frail and elderly people and those with disabilities attend social and recreational activities through its Out and About Program.

It covers nine municipalities, including Hume, and plans to expand.

The service is on the lookout for volunteer drivers to help its door-to-door transport service keep up with demand.

Volunteer co-ordinator Briony Hamilton said it was an important program, particularly for those who no longer had family nearby to drive them to shopping centres, senior citizens' clubs, cultural groups, holiday programs and outings.

Ms Hamilton said she needed at least 20 people to donate their time.

The organisation has a fleet of about 25 vehicles, ranging from sedans to minibuses with wheelchair hoists, and has been providing much-needed transport since 1995.

"We're starting to really notice a few gaps, which means

that we've got a few drivers who are taking on extra days to fill those gaps."

"Generally we tend to attract retirees but we're very, very open to and happy to take on drivers of any background, any age."

Helpers range in age from 20 to 82 and include students.

Ms Hamilton said it was a good way for people to upskill.

"Our volunteers absolutely adore the work that they're doing," she said.

"It's not just being out in the community and helping out clients—it's also, I find, really good for them in terms of forging new friendships and networking."

According to 2011 Census data, there were almost 14,000 people between the ages of 65 and 84 living in Hume, 1232 aged over 84 and 7625 with a disability.

Ms Hamilton said LINK's work fitted in with Home and Community Care's mission of helping people age independently, rather than prematurely sending them to nursing homes.

"The ageing population is obviously increasing and keeping them in their home is a goal we'd like to achieve."

Training and support is provided.

Details: 8358 8000 or email volunteering@lct.org.au

A rewarding experience, p11