

# Giving Back to the Community

*A Partnership between the City of Cedar Park and Faith in Action Caregivers - Northwest*

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Faith In Action Caregivers - Northwest is one of the City of Cedar Park's community partners. It provides invaluable services to our senior citizens in an effort to enhance their independence and quality of life. They provide such things as: transportation; information and referrals; errands; social contact and community involvement, handyman services; and a medical equipment closet.

In 2006, a group of local senior citizens approached the Cedar Park City Council and asked for assistance getting around town for necessary trips like going to the grocery store and medical appointments. Because the City of Cedar Park was not included in service area for Capital Metro, the public transportation provider for the Austin Area, there was no public transportation assistance readily available to them.

Staff began researching viable solutions to this problem and came across a non-profit organization in the Northwest Austin/Cedar Park area that was providing rides to senior citizens. This organization was called Faith in Action Caregivers – Northwest.

The organization started back in 1986 when according to Carla Young, the Executive Director of the Northwest Branch, "A group of local churches and community groups realized some senior neighbors still lived independently, but just couldn't drive and that was the main focus... getting them where they needed to be. Many clients cannot stand and wait for a bus. They cannot use special transit because they cannot maneuver with bags of groceries. We provide that door through door service for seniors."

As City staff and Faith in Action Caregivers started talking, it became obvious that a partnership would benefit both entities. The City of Cedar Park needed a reliable form of transportation for senior citizens in their community. Faith in Action Caregivers – Northwest needed funding to keep up with their demand and ensure they would be able to continue to provide their transportation service. Under these circumstances, a partnership was born.



*Carla Young, Exec.  
Director of FIA-  
Caregivers Northwest  
speaking to a  
volunteer.*

That was three years ago and today it is still in full swing. In 2009 alone, Faith in Action assisted 335 seniors, ages 60 and older. In three years Faith in Action Caregivers has provided over 2,300 rides benefiting approximately 1,000 seniors in Cedar Park. Jose Madrigal, Assistant City Manager says it's these kinds of services, which has helped the City build a sustainable community. "Now this demographic of resident is no longer left behind. They are able to do the day to day errands that most of us take for granted."

Elvira Becker has been a client for over six years. She knows firsthand how invaluable these services are to her generation. "I don't know what I would do without them. They have been a lifesaver for me. I was hit by an 18 wheeler and I have not been able to drive since." She says that if not for this service, she most likely would have to move into an assisted living facility. With her injuries, she has numerous doctor appointments but thanks to volunteers like

Judy True she is able to get the assistance she needs. Judy says the rewards of this program go both ways. “I was a girl scout years ago and I feel like it is my job to help people. It gives me a sense of purpose.”



*A FIA client gets assistance out of the car from volunteer.*

For Elvira, this program has not only kept her mobile, but it has also kept her social. She says spending so much time with Judy has created a very special bond. “She’s been my driver for quite awhile and I just love her. That’s what I like... getting to meet all these wonderful people.”

This program has gained in popularity, as the result of the recent economic downturn. “A lot of our families that used to be able to handle all the transportation needs for their moms and dads have had to go back to work or are currently looking for jobs“, reports Carla Young. Assistant City Manager Jose Madrigal says, “Obviously the bottom line of success is that our Council has continued to fund the organization even during tough economic times because of the benefit that is received by our citizens.”

Cedar Park’s contribution to this program is based on ridership. As the number of rides in the city increases, so does the funding. For the fiscal year 2007-2008, the city funded \$17,000. In FY 2008-2009, the amount went up to \$17,500, and in FY 2009-2010, Faith in

Action Caregivers – Northwest will receive a total of \$18,915. These funds are instrumental in helping the volunteers carry out their duties, namely purchasing gas.

The volunteers appreciate the assistance but say they would still do it even without financial assistance because they love what they do. “It’s my passion. I’ve been doing it for more than 15 years and it is something that is very near and dear to my heart,” says Mary Duggar. “It’s a mutual thing. It’s a grand thing. You always get more out of it than you give.”

But for every person touched by this program, there are many more who are not even aware of its existence, and that is the real challenge according to Carla Young. “Being a non-profit there is not a lot of money for advertising but we try to do it by word of mouth. “

One way they are trying to spread the word is through technology, primarily social media. Carla Young says “We have a cause page on Facebook and we have a twitter feed so I tweet every now and then about what’s going on.” And with more and more seniors using computers, Carla says the goal is keeping them connected. “Our clients vary in age from 96 to 60 but a lot of our 60 to 70 year olds have computers or they’re buying them so they can keep up with what’s going on.”

This program has taught both the organization and the City some important lessons. “I believe sometimes as administrators we try to ‘reinvent the wheel’ when it is not necessary. If there is another organization providing the service you need, it is always much easier to partner with them and work together,” points out Jose Madrigal. Carla Young says for her, the lesson lies in the generosity of others. “It’s amazing to me how people who are very, very busy can find time to help a neighbor.”

Faith in Action Caregivers – Northwest provides an invaluable transportation service to the senior citizens of Cedar Park. “This program truly reflect ICMA’s core beliefs of providing citizenry with professional, courteous, diverse and ethical services and programs in the governments that we manage,” says Jose Madrigal.

Carla Young points out the City of Cedar Park’s support is instrumental to their success. “We really appreciate the City because we have grown so much and we’re adding so many new clients in Cedar Park and this area. It’s a challenge to keep up with the numbers but it’s a big help having the city’s support.”

A great part about this program, according to Carla, is that it can easily be replicated in other communities. “This is about neighbors coming to help seniors. It is an easy program to follow. We started with just three groups and have now grown to ten in Central Texas.” Volunteer Mary Duggar says their success is simple, “It’s door to door, hands on, caring transportation.”



*Volunteers get  
recognized at a  
Volunteer Appreciation  
Breakfast.*

It’s a basic recipe for success that Faith in Action Caregivers – Northwest has seemed to master, and it’s a partnership that both the City of Cedar Park and the organization say they’ll continue as long as the need exists.