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## **Pilot Project to Improve Senior Transportation Holds Informational Meetings in Ypsilanti**

Ypsilanti Residents to Learn about Transportation and Test Travel Vouchers

Ann Arbor, MI – The Blueprint for Aging Transportation Pilot Project will hold two informational meetings in Ypsilanti next week, on Wednesday, June 13, from 1:00-2:30 p.m. at Clark East Towers (1500 E. Clark Rd.), and on Thursday, June 14, from 10:00-11:30 a.m. at Carpenter Place (3400 Carpenter Rd.). Ypsilanti area seniors interested in learning about a project to improve senior transportation are invited to attend. The first part of the meeting will give seniors details about the project and educate them on transportation options currently available in and around Ypsilanti. An initial training session for those interested in participating in the project will follow. Participation is voluntary and free.

The Blueprint for Aging is a collaborative of seniors, family members, and government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations working together to build community and improve quality of life for older adults in Washtenaw County. The Blueprint is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its Community Partnerships for Older Adults national initiative (CPFOA). CPFOA helps communities develop leadership, innovative solutions, and options to meet the needs of older adults over the long term.

The Ypsilanti area transportation pilot will focus on the needs of seniors in urban areas. Christian Fisher of Ypsilanti recalls her decision to give up driving due to medical problems: "Anyone who knows me knows I'm a very independent person. To begin with, I felt like I was losing my independence. I had to rely on family and they were all out working." Fisher eventually moved to a senior complex that provides grocery trips and learned about an area agency that provides trips to medical appointments.

The Transportation Pilot Project hopes to learn about the experiences of seniors, like Fisher, who have managed to meet many of their transportation needs by pulling together various resources, but also about experiences of others with fewer travel options. "Transportation is noted consistently as one of the key unmet needs of older adults in our region," says Amy Smyth of the Area Agency on Aging 1-B. According to Smyth, attention to transportation is especially important now as the senior population is growing rapidly and funding for specialized transportation services is failing to keep pace.

Organizers of the Transportation Pilot Project hope to learn about the travel habits of seniors when cost and availability of transportation become less of a barrier. Participants

in the project will try out a new voucher, or coupon, system that will allow them to take some of their trips at no cost. Vouchers can be used to pay for a bus, a cab, a specialized transportation provider, or even a ride from a friend or family member. A second pilot in Dexter and Chelsea will study transportation for seniors in rural areas.

After studying where people want and need to go, how they get there, and the impact of the voucher system, organizers of the pilot aim to improve transportation options available to seniors in both urban and rural areas. In order to do so, however, they need seniors to get involved. "Participating in this pilot is a way to make a contribution to the community, as well as get short-term assistance with transportation needs," says Blueprint for Aging Pilot Project Coordinator Rachel Dewees. She hopes to see as many Ypsilanti area seniors as possible at the informational meetings at Clark East Towers and Carpenter Place.

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