

Carmarthenshire's Country Cars Scheme

Country Cars is Carmarthenshire's own voluntary social car service.

It consists of 12 independently organised and community based car sharing schemes wherein volunteer drivers give lifts to people who would otherwise be unable to make essential journeys.



Country Cars is designed to be a public transport 'safety net', providing links to bus and train, or door-to-door transport when needed, for individual and occasional needs.

As the name implies, the service was originally designed to fill transport gaps in rural areas where bus services are generally less available, but it caters for people who are physically unable to use public transport and this latter need exists in both town and country areas.

Every passenger trip is personally organised in the community to avoid hardship for the passenger. Apart from transport, the schemes often generate community spirit by bringing organisers, drivers and passengers into greater contact.

The scheme, which has been operating in Carmarthenshire since 1977, is a partnership with the County Council and RVS. Carmarthenshire pays volunteers' expenses and provides policy guidelines and administrative support. RVS recruits and trains local volunteers to provide the service.

The County Council pays most of the cost of the trip to ensure parity with other transport users and passengers pay only a little more than the bus fare for an equivalent journey; but without the time given freely by the organisers and drivers, such a service would not exist.

Can I Use It?

Have you ever been stuck for a lift? Perhaps you needed to go to the doctor and there was no car at home and only a very limited bus service. Or you wanted to visit a loved one in hospital. What about elderly people who need to go shopping but are unsteady on their feet, especially in winter?

There may be a group of people who need to visit the chiropodist every month, or a mother who must take a young child to clinic. Perhaps you are too ill to venture out but need a prescription?

You may even own your own car but it is out of action and you have to make an important journey? These are all trips that can be made by Country Cars.

You can use it provided that your trip is essential and you have no other reasonable means of transport. Country Cars cannot compete with other forms of transport, especially local buses, trains, taxis and transport provided by other bodies such as The Welsh Ambulance Services' non-emergency Patient Care Service. If you are able or eligible to use these services then you would not be eligible for a Country Car.

How Does It Work?

The system is simplicity itself. Somebody wanting a lift rings the advertised telephone number of the area organiser and gives details of when and where the transport is required. Twenty-four hours' notice is essential except in emergencies. If the trip is eligible, the area organiser asks around the area's pool of drivers until one is available to help. A driver then operates the trip using his or her own car, noting the total mileage involved so that expenses can be claimed from the County Council.

Passengers make a contribution based upon the mileage that they travel and receive a receipt from the driver acting as agent for the County Council. Concessionary Travel Passes may be used on Country Car journeys to obtain a discount on the standard fare. If part of the journey can be made by public transport then Country Cars takes the passenger to the nearest bus or train. If the driver cannot collect the passenger for the return journey then another driver is arranged for this part of the trip.

Advice and support is available from the Scheme Organiser, Carmarthenshire Hub Office and the County Council.

Can I Help?

As a volunteer for Carmarthenshire's Country Cars scheme you would be helping to provide an essential service to many isolated and vulnerable people. We are looking for drivers who are willing to use their own cars, or organisers who can work from home.

If you can drive and have a car available then your assistance would be very welcome. Some people run journeys several times a week during the day and others less than once a month, perhaps only in the evenings. You would be under no obligation to give more time than you wish and you would never be asked to drive with less than 24 hours notice except in emergencies.

If you don't wish to drive but would still like to help then you may be interested in becoming an area organiser. This can be done entirely from home. This role is perhaps the most challenging in the scheme, as you will need to assess whether a caller is eligible for a Country Car, which sometimes means that requests are declined.

If you are able to give your free time, the Council, in return will pay your expenses. You will be asked to join the RVS who will provide additional insurance cover for personal accidents, loss of no claims bonus and payment of excess when on Country Cars business. RVS is open to everyone and there are currently over 130 members in Carmarthenshire.

Who Organises It?

Country Cars is operated by volunteers from local communities and is paid for by Carmarthenshire County Council. The County Council also provides policy guidelines and administrative support for the scheme.

The organisation of volunteers is undertaken by RVS, who recruit new members especially to operate the schemes. RVS is a voluntary service of the Crown that consists of people who want to be of service to their local communities. It is a registered charity and costs nothing to join.

The involvement of RVS helps to ensure a permanent scheme able to maintain a pool of volunteers and to provide support and advice for members.

The existence of Country Cars, however, is only made possible as a result of the invaluable contribution made by each volunteer. Their dedication and commitment to the scheme over the years has provided a lifeline to many thousands of people and without their support, the service would not exist.

Eligibility

The following list is an initial guide to assist individuals to decide whether they may be eligible to use Country Cars:

- Is there any public transport that you could use for all or part of the journey?
- Do you have access to any private transport? (e.g. car available in the household)
- Could you change the time of the trip in order to use some other transport? e.g. public transport
- Could you use the ambulance car service?
- Are you a client of Carmarthenshire's Social Services Department and going to a Day Centre?
- Could you reasonably hire a taxi for the journey?
- Could you reasonably avoid making the journey?

The journey would not normally be eligible if the answer to any question was YES.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer for Country Cars please contact:



RVS Carmarthenshire Hub Office:

RVS Office
Memorial Hall
Carmarthen Road
Cross Hands
LLANELLI
SA14 6RN
Tel: 01269 843819

For all other enquiries contact:

Carmarthenshire County Council:

Passenger Transport Unit
Technical Services Department
Parc Myrddin
Carmarthen
SA31 1HQ
Tel: 01267 234567