



Mid-East Community Action Agency

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MECAA began a new initiative to assist in transportation needs for seniors.

The “Round About Roane” program is being nominated for the

“Sonny” Walker Self-Sufficiency Award.



Round About Roane

The ability to drive oneself around independently is an essential skill needed by almost everyone in today's technologically dependent society. Having the capabilities to operate a vehicle without assistance allows one much easier access to tend to health, food, and social needs. Unfortunately, many people lack the ability to drive for various reasons, especially within today's older generation. The commonality of this issue recently sparked an idea for Mid-East Community Action Agency in Roane County. The agency wanted to address this issue by helping to increase the self-sufficiency of these individuals who were not able to drive themselves around to complete basic tasks. The committee held a meeting to discuss establishing policies and procedures, procuring volunteers, and seeking grants and opportunities to produce the program. Thus, Mid-East Community Action Agency created their *Round About Roane* program.

Round About Roane is a new program in Roane County that provides senior friendly, volunteer-assisted, door-through-door transportation service for senior citizens in need. The program got its name, *Round About Roane*, because it allows individuals in Roane County to be provided with round trip transportation service to essential trips within the county, and to medical trips in surrounding counties. In order to qualify for the program, senior citizens must be at least 60 years of age, and lack the ability to drive themselves independently. *Round About Roane* is a membership program in which the rider pays an annual membership fee of \$25.00 and \$6.00 for each round trip. Scholarships are available for the annual membership fee for low-income seniors. The program uses background checked and trained volunteer drivers every Monday through Friday. The program currently has 17 volunteer drivers who utilize the online software program *Assisted Rides* to assign and completed rides they volunteer for. *Assisted*

Rides has the ability to track demographics of riders and drivers, manage trips, log miles and volunteer hours, and runs a host of reports for analysis. There is also an application for both iPhone and Android that volunteers can utilize remotely. Riders contact the agency and request their trip which is entered into the system. All rides requested are accepted based on volunteer availability.

Round About Roane seeks to increase the individual's self-sufficiency by allowing them to complete necessary tasks that they would otherwise be unable to complete. The program allows for qualifying senior citizens to make grocery shopping trips, medical doctor's appointments, bank visits, and any other essential to life trips. The program also allows for some social and recreational trips as well. For example, many *Round About Roane* users like to use the transportation service to visit beauty/barber shops, go to fitness centers, attend church services, or to visit family members. These types of trips allow riders to remain in community and decrease social isolation.

One of the program's riders, Nancy Carter, recently told her story about her experience with the *Round About Roane* program. Nancy was in need of transportation service and learned about the *Round About Roane* program through a friend. Intrigued by the program, Nancy decided to move to Roane County from a neighboring county so that she could receive services from *Round About Roane*. Nancy stated, "I was down at the bottom... Depressed. I felt like I could no longer take care of myself without the ability to drive." The Round About Roane program really boosted Nancy's confidence and made her feel almost as if she were driving herself again. Not only did the program help Nancy physically, but it also helped her socially as well. Nancy said she looked forward to going on rides so that she could interact with the drivers. The drivers became like friends to Nancy and even recommended things like hair and nail salons

to her. Nancy also mentioned that the drivers went above and beyond by doing things like helping her carry her groceries to and from the car. She said that this extra help was very beneficial to her by helping her speed up the process of coming and going.

The Round About Roane program has been very helpful to many senior citizens in Roane County in just a short amount of time. Though the program is new, *Round About Roane* has already acquired 54 regular riders and completed 1,296 location stops. The program currently has 17 volunteer drivers, who altogether have given 1,332 hours of service and have driven 17,939 miles. Mid-East Community Action Agency has seen great results of increased self-sufficiency in the local seniors using the program, and hopes to continue to see increased results over time.