

Volunteer Driving for First and Last Mile **By Andy and Les Swarbrick**

We've now entered our third week of driving for First & Last Mile buses. It would be wrong to say we didn't have teething problems, but it's proving to be a solid service. We have even more challenges ahead, one of those is more volunteer drivers, so we thought we'd give our reasons for becoming volunteers and our thoughts to date.

Pride is what first hits us. As Eynsham residents we have been involved in Green Tea to try to better our shared world. Part of that has been projects to improve homes using thermal imaging, part in helping shape the new Salt Cross village, part has been trying to help improve shared car services. Nothing we have been involved with to date has provided us with the satisfaction of driving this bus. Picking students up from local villages and delivering them safely to Bartholomew School is incredibly satisfying. Knowing that one bus can deliver up to 16 students, possibly saving 16 car journeys! Remember these are local journeys, when vehicles are at their most inefficient.

Fun is another aspect. Driving when it's a frosty day on country roads one minute then in glorious winter sunshine the next. We don't want to create a picture of being out on a jolly. There's a lot of responsibility involved driving local citizens around and we take that responsibility seriously. But that doesn't mean we can't have a laugh and a smile. And we enjoy meeting people.

So, what does our day look like? We volunteered for the early shift. We wake up early (for us!) with an alarm set for 6am. By 6.30am we're out of the door and into our car driving to the bus depot. Once there, start the engine to help defrost windows etc. We check the vehicle over to make sure it's roadworthy & clean windscreen, lights and so forth. Then we check we have everything we need to drive the bus for our duty. Finally, we liaise with colleagues to make sure we're aware of any last-minute information. Then we're off!

It's all new to us! We have never driven minibuses as a service like this. Yes, we have driven school buses, and vans of various sorts. But getting to grips with a scheduled service (this service runs every two hours) is a wholly new experience. The two Daves and Amanda have been amazing and very patient trainers. They have been with us all the way, reassuring us that we can only do what we can, that we have enough time and generally to make sure we can concentrate on doing the job to the best of our ability. Thus our confidence has grown and grown. From nervous beginnings we have extended ourselves to more shifts, and generally dealt with all the issues pretty well. It has been a steep but satisfying learning curve, including using the ticket machines and payments by card.

We started driving together as a couple. That has helped to really boost our confidence as we have resolved inevitable questions by talking it over with each other. We're now even at the point of driving on our own. Some of the other drivers have been used to driving buses and so much of this is not new - but for us this is a new world.

Finally, can we say our five-year-old grandson is completely wowed by the fact that his grandparents are now bus drivers? He cannot wait to be a passenger - not living locally means he'll have to wait a while!

We hope you consider becoming a volunteer driver. If you have any questions, please ask.

Andy & Les Swarbrick, Eynsham