

NECC CATALYST, 2009-2015

Gertrude O'Sullivan

The story of NECC is the story of people who have a passion to help others and who won't take no for an answer. At NECC, those people may be volunteers, staff, or community residents with an urgent need or important idea.

They can also be funders who focus on directing donations to solve problems. Two of NECC's most important programs came about because one keen-eyed and determined funder, Gertrude O'Sullivan of the Foundation for Community Health, saw a need and thought the Community Center was best suited to address it.

Northeast Dutchess Transit Dial-a-Ride became a reality because of Gertrude's encouragement and advocacy. NECC had provided transportation since its inception: the Care Car is a volunteer-driven service that takes elderly people to the doctor's and other essential

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places. It was the Center's very first program when NECC was still a small council of concerned citizens. When Dutchess County cancelled public transportation in northeastern Dutchess County in 2009, Gertrude assembled a task force to discuss the issue and then initiated a study to determine how best to meet the need. Consequently, she encouraged NECC's Executive Director to apply for funding to launch a new service. When the transportation grant was obtained, the Foundation provided matching dollars.

Now, Dial-a-Ride serves six towns—North East/Millerton,

Amenia/Wassaic, Dover, Washington/Millbrook, Stanford and Pine Plains — five days a week, with on-demand, curb-to-curb service. "I saw that NECC had a great track record as a reliable and caring organization," Gertrude said, "Even though Dial-a-Ride was a larger program than they had undertaken before, I was confident that they'd do a great job."

Not long after Dial-a-Ride was underway, Gertrude had another idea. She had noticed that the Webutuck school district had an unusually high number of children who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch—over 60%, one of the highest rates in the county. To help provide food in the summer, New York State provides funding for a free summer food service program. Again, Gertrude brought together the right people



Gertrude O'Sullivan and Jenny Hansell at the launch of Dial-a-Ride in 2012

to discuss the issue and then encouraged, nudged, urged NECC to apply for the grant. The program was launched in 2012, and now the Summer Lunch Box serves more than 5,000 free meals in July and August to children in Millerton, Amenia and Wassaic.

To volunteer for the Lunch Box or Care Car, or learn more about how to get a ride, call (518) 789-4259.

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