

## **Find-A-Ride-Waukesha (FARN) Update**

**Eras Senior Network, Inc.**

**November, 2019**

### **History**

Eras Senior Network has led efforts to understand Waukesha County's current and impending senior transportation challenge since 2010. Although Eras is not a transportation service, we are concerned about the impact that access to services has on our client population in Waukesha County and have devoted resources to improving conditions for seniors to find transportation. Eras provides mobility management programs to the community, transformation guides, convenes community meetings to develop partnerships, and provides a door through door volunteer driver program.

### **Understanding the Problem**

Starting in 2014, Eras (then Interfaith) and Thriving Waukesha County Alliance worked to research the specific challenges seniors were experiencing. Data were gathered from seniors, senior transportation providers, healthcare professionals, county government representatives, social service organizations, and other concerned individuals and organizations. Eras continued to invest significant agency resources to support this critical community initiative. Findings from these efforts in 2014 and 2015 resulted in a 2016 business plan to implement a one call one click transportation system. The goal of a one call one click system is to provide a central entry point for seniors and their caregivers, while providing administrative efficiencies to transportation providers.

### **Implementing the Solution**

Eras raised sufficient funds to employ a program manager and purchase and design the required computer systems for the program. A steering committee was convened to oversee the design and implementation of FARN in Waukesha County. As of 2019, Eras was ready to implement FARN in the greater Menomonee Falls area in partnership with Froedtert Health, American United Transportation Group, Village of Menomonee Falls, and with funding from United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County and the FTA Section 5310 program.

### **Challenges**

During 2019, Eras has been unable to solidify partnerships with enough transportation providers to implement the pilot of FARN.

- There is not agreement about the urgency of the current situation or the impending significant increase in demand for senior transportation facing Waukesha County. For example, currently nonprofit senior taxi transportation providers are able to fill their schedules with ongoing rides, therefore there is not a business reason to change their process and risk having less rides. Efforts to come to an agreement about compensation for time committed to FARN have been unsuccessful.
- There is a lack of agreement about the need to prioritize rides. Organizations have different philosophies about prioritizing rides for socialization, access to healthcare and nutrition, basic needs, employment, and other purposes. This has led to a system that provides rides to those who call first, often leaving behind individuals whose needs aren't able to be scheduled in advance.
- The community lacks sufficient data about unmet ride requests to understand the scope of the issue. Transportation requests that can't be accommodated are inconsistently documented. This has led to a perception that all ride requests are accommodated with the current system.
- Eras is unable to leverage sufficient leadership resources alone. Much has been written about nonprofit agencies being ill-suited to create system-level change alone, typically due to a lack of political leverage. Nonprofit agencies typically have no authority to make change, and without sufficient support from community leadership, cannot proceed alone.

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**What is the future for FARN?**

All new endeavors must balance risk and reward. Eras is unable to assume the full weight of risks for FARN. Eras has raised sufficient funding to subsidize rides for a short time, but without ongoing commitment from transportation providers, will not be able to continue the program. Starting a program without committed partners does not make sense. As a result, Find a Ride Network will not begin as expected with centralized access and scheduling for seniors.

Eras will retain the branding and business plan information for FARN, anticipating that at a future date there will be sufficient interest and community will to implement FARN.

Eras will implement a smaller, controlled pilot of a one call one click system using the FARN software and the accessible van purchased in 2019. Two new Eras program coordinators will be responsible for intake of transportation requests from Waukesha County seniors. Eras will continue to make referrals to other transportation providers and will now document the result of those referrals. This will develop the data needed to better understand the scope of the problem.

The Eras van will be used to provide rides to individuals whose needs cannot be met through paid services or through the agency's volunteer driver program. These individuals will first be screened and referred to paid services, as all Eras clients currently are, to ensure that individuals who are able to pay for services use other resources first.

This smaller pilot will begin by serving the greater Menomonee Falls area in collaboration with the work team at Froedtert Health. We look forward to starting this program in the next weeks.

Thank you for your support of this important work. The Eras Board believes that we have an appropriate solution for our county's senior transportation challenge, but the time may not be right for the community to provide needed support. We remain hopeful that we will still be able to implement FARN in the upcoming years and ensure that our community's seniors have access to needed services.

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