

# A lifeline for seniors or the infirm

By [Larry Copeland](#), USA TODAY

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Pat Wright was used to coming and going as she chose. She lived and worked in New York, and options for getting around were plentiful: She walked, took the bus or subway, or hailed a cab.

In 2007, she suffered disabling injuries to her knee and back. She moved to Laurel, Md., to live with her daughter, Tuwana Reid. Suddenly, her world shrank to a fraction of its earlier size. She didn't know anyone except her daughter and had no way to get around.

Most of the time, she stayed indoors.

**STORY:** [Helping seniors stay mobile](#)

"I started feeling sad and down," says Wright, 60. "I was a very active person, so I felt I would be OK when I moved here. I started feeling really lonely in the house."

She started looking for a program that would help her get around. Partners in Care Maryland came to her aid.

It's a non-profit organization founded in 1993 on the principle that life and community begin with reciprocity. "We do the kinds of things neighbors would do for each other," President and CEO Barbara Huston says. "We found that if we could encourage the community to help

with transportation, handyman repairs, insurance forms and so on, we could help (older) people stay in their homes longer."

The group's volunteers drive seniors to appointments — or do other things such as repairs or making telephone calls — and "bank" the time they spend doing so. Later in life, they can draw on that time to get help themselves from other volunteers. "It gives (people) a dignified way to ask for help when they need it." Huston says.

By H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

Pat Wright waves to Partners in Care driver Mary Lou McKenna as she gets into the car for a ride to the chiropractor.

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Partners in Care volunteer driver Mary Lou McKenna, right, picks up Pat Wright for a chiropractor appointment. Drivers "bank" time to get help themselves later in life.

In addition to getting rides, Wright gives back to Partners in Care Maryland by speaking to other groups about the program and making phone calls. Such programs are vital, says Richard Smith, executive director of the Independent Living Partnership in Riverside, Calif., operator of the Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project (TRIP), which has served about 5,000 people since 1993 and provided 1.3 million free escorted trips.

"Being able to get out and have transportation restored to them allows them to beat the depression they otherwise would suffer if they were left alone in their homes," Smith says. "The issue of senior transportation is a huge issue, whether you're in Davenport, Iowa, or a little town in Maine. Wherever you are, there are seniors who can't get to where they need to go."

Wright's story is not unusual for PIC Maryland, Huston says. People who no longer drive "feel like they're cut off. ... There will never be adequate transportation to get people where they want to go in a suburban area."

Wright is just glad to be mobile again. "It has helped me so much with all the sadness and depression I had when I found them," she says of the program. "One of the best things are the conversations with the drivers. We talk about their grandchildren, how long they've been there, how they found this. I have met so many people."

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