

Fellrunner Village Bus is a charitable community organisation managed and operated entirely by volunteers. It provides scheduled bus services five days a week in addition to offering monthly community excursions and an availability for private hire by community groups.

Background

The first Fellrunner services were launched in December 1979 as a response from the local community in Langwathby, helped by Cumbria County Council and Voluntary Action Cumbria (now ACTion with Communities in Cumbria), to the withdrawal of commercial bus services from the rural villages of the East Fellside.

The first Fellrunner bus provided a feeder service from these villages to connect with the Ribble bus services from Langwathby to Penrith and Carlisle. Following the withdrawal of Ribble services, Fellrunner extended its scheduled services from the Fellside to both Penrith and Carlisle.

Since then as more rural communities have been isolated, Fellrunner has responded to the need by extending its activities to include villages in the Lyvenett valley, Lowther valley and villages to the north west of Penrith.

The Project

The project was set up to meet the needs of communities isolated by lack of transport. This need has continued to be identified in both Parish and County Council Local Transport Plans.

Our project addresses the mainly elderly villagers' problems of rural poverty and social exclusion, together with their need to remain living independently in their own home.

Our services allow access to health care, main line transport, shopping, financial services, civic facilities and leisure.



Fellrunner Bus

Our pro-active monthly excursions are aimed at the need to 'escape' from the perceived confines of home to enjoy both company and new experiences and to improve villagers' 'well being'.

What has been achieved?

From a small group of volunteers, with one leased bus, operating a limited feeder service into Langwathby, Fellrunner has become a sustainable organisation offering 13 scheduled services to over 40 villages and owning 3 modern minibuses.

The obstacles have always been securing community support, sufficient volunteers, sufficient funding and volunteers willing to take on 'management' responsibilities. In early days a system of village reps formed the liaison with the community although this has developed into liaison with parish councils as the number of villages we served grew.

Parish Councils generously donate annually from their precept on the basis of passenger journeys made and individual passengers also make regular donations.



The first Fellrunner bus in 1979



The current fleet in blue Fellrunner livery

What has been achieved? (cont.)

Fellrunner has continued to attract a steady stream of willing volunteers to serve their community and recruitment is largely through personal contact and use of parish magazine advertising.

Financially the aim has been to strive for self-funding but when the opportunity has arisen to access external funding to replace buses more frequently, or to extend our service with an accessible vehicle, then we have applied to appropriate funding such as the Parish Transport Grant and the Big Lottery. We also acknowledge the continuing generous support from Cumbria County Council.

The Learning

To be sustainable a voluntary organisation needs to be 'professional'. In particular it needs to set Quality Standards. We have learned to use the standards offered by professional organisations.

- Driver training is carried out under the MIDAS (minibus driver assessment scheme)
- Our finances are audited by a firm of local accountants

- Our policies and management structures are guided by quality checklists from the Charity Commission and the CTA (Community Transport Association)

In any voluntary organisation attention must be given to 'succession planning' to ensure new leaders emerge and that the needs of those we serve continue to be met.

The most important thing to learn is to always remember why you exist and to remain rooted and in contact with your community.

Fellrunner has been more than pleased to share the benefit of its experiences and systems with those trying to start similar services and have given input to both the newly formed Western Dales and Border Rambler services.

Contact Details

For more information about Fellrunner please contact Jill Hay, Chairman on Tel: 01768 88232, or Bill Mitchell, Company Secretary on Tel: 01768 881956

Or visit the website: www.fellrunnerbus.co.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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