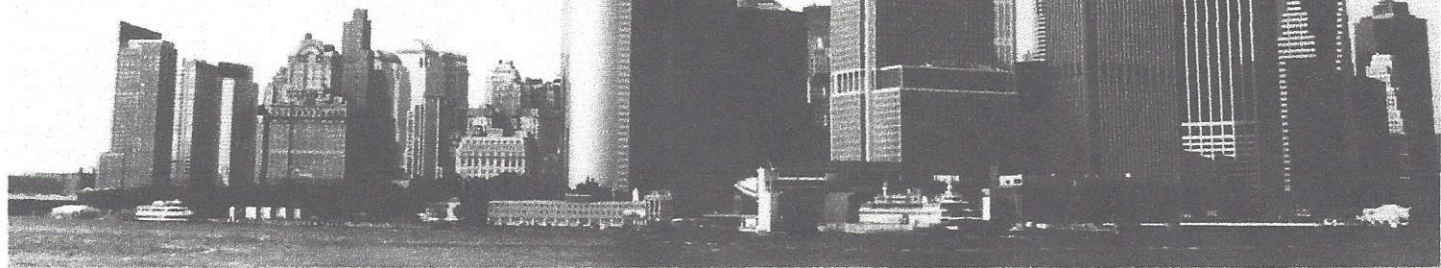


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JANUARY 20, 2013

NEMT Business Idea #7: Special Needs Chicago's "Companion Calls"

Special Needs Chicago is a non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) company that provides door-to-door wheelchair and ambulatory transport services throughout Chicago and it's suburbs. A key component of their business model includes taking extra measures such as confirmation calls and written correspondence with corporate and private clients to ensure a high quality of service. Taking these extra steps has reduced operational problems such as the number of "no shows", and increased the overall level of customer service.

It was from this particular emphasis on effective multilevel and personalized customer communication that **Special Needs Chicago** struck upon an innovative opportunity to diversify their NEMT business. They call this service: "Companion Calls". This service offers friendly, supportive telephone calls to homebound elders and disabled individuals in the community.

The idea for **Companion Calls** came about after **Special Needs Chicago** received a note of appreciation from a customer who was being transported for chemotherapy thanking them for one of their passenger agents who had been especially supportive. The employee, who worked part-time confirming rides, was herself a Cancer survivor. She had spent personal time on the phone with this customer, lending an ear and giving her support. Over the years of providing transportation, **Special Needs Chicago** had recognized an often unmet need among many customers and their families to talk, to share frustrations, to join in some friendly conversation, and to be listened to. Knowing this and inspired by their employee's initiative and kindness, they decided to establish the **Companion Calls** division.

The 10 minute phone conversations can be scheduled from 1 to 7 times per week, plus special occasions. An email summarizing the conversation is then sent to the designated contact person. So far, **Special Needs Chicago** has been able to provide this service utilizing existing staff, but as volume increases they expect to hire more companion callers. Because they do not give medical advice, there is no special training required, but a kind and compassionate personality is a must. **Companion Calls** is a natural extension of the **transportation service** and for anyone already an NEMT customer, staff continue to chat - at no additional cost.

The customer base of **Companion Calls** has come mostly through referrals, but some corporate clients such as healthcare facilities following-up on patient care have sought out their services. One area that **Special Needs Chicago** hopes to develop is in regard to hospital re-admissions. Their goal is to work with major healthcare organizations as part of their protocol for reducing re-admission rates by making **Companion Calls** to people they deem as high risk for re-admissions.

Labels: Chicago, Illinois, NEMT Business Ideas

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