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Going Places Network focusing on transportation solution in Presque Isle

PRESQUE ISLE – People who live in or visit Presque Isle will soon have a new option for getting around town to work, school, shopping, or appointments thanks to more than a year of collaborative effort by a network that has recently adopted the name “Going Places.”

“We chose ‘Going Places’ as a name for our network because we felt it could have a double meaning. Going actual places – because our first project was working on a transportation solution, and going places as a network with our collaborative ideas to help move our community into the future, wherever that may take us,” said Going Places Network co-chair Jamie Chandler, Service Delivery Coordinator and Interim Workforce Development Director at Aroostook County Action Program, Inc.

ACAP was the original convener of the Going Places Network. Long before the group had an official name, in May of 2018, ACAP received a grant from Maine Community Foundation to develop a community profile and identify a community solution that impacted families of young children. The grant requirements called for bringing together community partners to work as a team overcoming barriers families with young children experienced in the city. Early on in the initial discussions, transportation quickly rose to the top of the list as the most pressing issue facing young families in the community. With that revelation, the network grew to include the local transportation provider, Aroostook Regional Transportation System (ARTS), and the concept of offering a fixed bus route in Presque Isle was presented.

Months later, and after much research and planning around initial funding and building a sustainable model, Going Places Network is preparing to launch The PI Loop – a continuous bus loop with multiple strategic stops around the city of Presque Isle to connect riders with opportunity in the community.

“A fixed bus route is going to revolutionize our city,” says Going Places co-chair LeRae Kinney, Director of MSAD #1 Adult and Community Education. “Transportation is one of the major barriers in our community. By creating The PI Loop, we are not only assisting those without a driver’s license or vehicle, we are creating opportunities for employers, employees, students, and families that simply did not exist before. This bus route will change lives. It allows for parents to better care for their children and allow students to be more involved in after school and community activities that were not an option before, especially in the cold winter months. I am excited to be part of a group of community members that have the passion, the vision and the grit to do the hard work to make this dream a reality.”

As the Maine Department of Transportation's recognized regional provider of public transportation, ARTS will play a vital role in the success of this initiative. As such, Going Places Network developed a comprehensive business plan, outlining a pilot, and three phases of implementation, and sustainability with ARTS as the deliverer of service. Going Places Network are initially supporting the project with initial marketing and branding, ad sales, infrastructure development, conducting of a formal needs assessment, funding support for the initial phase of a four-month pilot, state-of-the-art technology, the purchase of a new bus through a designated donor gift and more. Beyond this, Going Places Network will continue to advocate for, advise and champion this project in the community in support of ARTS incorporating this into its ongoing and growing organizational operations by 2021.

"The work of the Going Places Network and the collaborative efforts of the group to launch a fixed loop bus service pilot in Presque Isle this fall are very exciting. We consistently hear from community members about the need for more transportation services in our region. In fact, the lack of transportation services was cited in our most recent comprehensive community assessment, as the top concern of the nearly 1,000 County residents who participated – ranking ahead of substance use challenges. The energy of the network is palpable and the response of community partners concerning this project is overwhelmingly positive," said ACAP Executive Director/CEO Jason Parent.

The Network's efforts have garnered support from local civic organizations, the business community, and private funders, all of which should contribute to the success of the project. In fact, the Presque Isle Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs have chosen Going Places' PI Loop as their Annual Community Project this year. As a Community Project partner, Going Places Network will work with the two organizations leading up to their Annual Auction event to promote the PI Loop project and garner additional community support.

The PI Loop is projected to begin its route in October, 2019. Going Places Network will release additional information on the progress of the project as that time nears.

Collaborators on Going Places Network include: ACAP, MSAD #1, Northern Light Health, Public Health Nursing, Aroostook Council for Healthy Families, United Way of Aroostook, ARTS, Northern Maine Community College, Katahdin Trust Company, Presque Isle Housing Authority, City of Presque Isle, Aroostook Area Agency on Aging, Aroostook Band of Micmacs, and parents/grandparents/guardians of children under the age of 5.