

## Driving Miss Daisy providing companion driving services to the elderly: More than your average 'Drive'.

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Recently 103 year old Bill Mitchell celebrated his 90th year behind the wheel (NZ Herald, Thursday 12 May, 2016). As the oldest driver in New Zealand, Mr Mitchell emphasized the value of having a license and a car. However, those who have lost their ability to drive are becoming increasingly reliant on companies like Driving Miss Daisy. Three students from the University of Otago were given the opportunity to ride along with North Dunedin Driving Miss Daisy as they ferried clients to and from meetings, appointments, shopping and outings. What we found was Driving Miss Daisy shares few similarities with a taxi service.

Whilst the majority of the observed clients had mobility issues, there were a variety of reasons why clients chose to use this service. These included cessation of driver's license, recent surgeries, parking concerns and aging concerns. What makes this service invaluable to the mostly female passengers aged between sixty- five and ninety was how it created independence for those clients living with chronic health problems, the loss of friends, and the loss of mobility. One client was grateful to Driving Miss Daisy as she had been diagnosed with progressive sight impairment within the last 4 or 5 years meaning she could no longer drive.

Many of the clients we observed experienced some form of social isolation. One client was extremely appreciative on her journey that the driver took her via the main street through town. So she could observe the city and appreciate simple things such as the changing autumn leaves. It appeared to us that the

client did not get out often. The drivers appeared to have a satisfaction knowing they were making a difference to the client's day. For example, on one observation the driver played the role of a grief counsellor. After picking up the client, the driver enquired about his well-being on hearing a loved one had passed away, the driver consoled the client as they reminisced together. The driver's ability to give uplifting and encouraging comments was not only observed in this instance, but also in the other observations. In sociology this is what we call emotional-labour.

The drivers seemed to know the clients very well and were part of their lives. One driver asked a client if they would be receiving a regularly scheduled phone call over the weekend. This recognition excited the client, and the conversation for the majority of the journey focused on the joy that the client got from these phone calls. While, the drivers listened to the clients' intimate details, the clients would also make enquiries about the well-being of the driver and other members of the Driving Miss Daisy 'family'. From the eight hours of observation it was evident that two-way emotional labour was occurring - where both the driver and the client would listen to and empathize with one another. Terms used such as 'my client' or 'regular client' represented the personalized relationship that the driver had with each of the clients. Driving Miss Daisy clients had a 'my driver' relationship. Clients have the opportunity to pick a particular driver. This was based on the relationship they had with their favourite driver.

Drivers treat clients as an individual finding ways to enhance their independence. The Drivers gauge the level of support needed to assist the clients on their journeys with Driving Miss Daisy. This personalized care ensured there was never any unnecessary help given, allowing the clients to keep their freedom. For example, a client had his courtship independence

enhanced. After picking him up Driving Miss Daisy drove to his wife's rest home allowing him to take his wife on a date. This was touching. On this journey 'the driver' played nothing more than the assigned driver role.

The greatest difference between this Driving Miss Daisy service to a taxi service was the relationships between the driver and the client. This was evident through the opening of car doors, courteously fastening seat belts and the door to door service offered. Unlike a taxi service, there was no meter used that could potentially pressure the client, instead a private log book was kept recording the distance driven. A feature of the service was the adequate time allowed.

Established in 2012 the Driving Miss Daisy North Dunedin franchise strives to uphold customer service for their client base. The efforts made by the drivers in fulfilling the needs of their clientele reiterates their motto 'we're there for you'. From our observations, Driving Miss Daisy provided clients an opportunity to be part of their community and overcame the common issue of isolation among elderly. The service also maintained the independence of clients and established physical and emotional support between drivers and clients. For example, one client was quite chatty on his ride. We came to the conclusion that this was his only social interaction for the day. Driving Miss Daisy is an invaluable service that provides affordable transportation, and most importantly companionship, becoming a surrogate family for the clients.