

The only staff many SWITA riders have direct contact with are logically drivers. But behind the frontline are the schedulers setting that ride up and ensuring it happens. When someone calls in for a ride with SWITA it is answered by a team of five SWITA staff members in our Atlantic office. One of those staff members is the Transit Coordinator and the other four are Transit Schedulers.

Those schedulers' duties include inputting rider information, scheduling rides into our software system, creating manifests and routes for drivers to follow, helping with accounts and payments, communicating with drivers as changes or challenges arise, tracking ride information, and much more.

It can be a challenge to accomplish everything, especially during busy times of the day. The call volume the office handles is impressive to say the least. An average day can consist of 350 to 500 calls handled by transit staff. That doesn't even include other direct communication with drivers throughout the day.

Kersten Abild has been a scheduler with SWITA for four years and has an area of focus with organizing Atlantic student transportation and Special Transit Service rides, which is a paratransit service in Council Bluffs. She says it's a challenging job but a rewarding one, "I feel like SWITA and STS are very helpful services. They allow people with disabilities to remain independent and get where they need to. It's rewarding because people are so appreciative that we are around."

She said she has developed a good relationship with the drivers that she works with regularly and it helps that she has driven to understand their side of the equation. "I know what they are going through and what makes driving difficult. And having some knowledge of the buses allows me to help them with problems," she said.

She said some of the challenges can be language and communication barriers along with helping guide some riders through the eligibility process when it comes to things like STS or insurance rides.

Coordinating student transportation has required more attention from SWITA transit schedulers each year with continued growth. Abild says the team takes great pride in providing safe rides for students, "Students always come first. If we have an issue the whole office makes sure it gets taken care of immediately. It means something that parents trust us to deliver their children safely to school."

Tracy Clark has been a scheduler with SWITA for over 5 years. She helps to verify routes and bus assignments each day, along with compiling DOT reporting information. She says it's great to help those that rely on SWITA services, "A lot of people don't have access to other transportation, so it's nice to know we are helping them get where they need to go."

Clark said she also thinks it's great that SWITA can help with a variety of transportation, "It helps some in harsh weather months that can't or don't want to drive, and our workroutes give people the opportunity to get to employment they may not be able to otherwise."

Providing around 550,000 rides a year to Southwest Iowa residents is certainly a team effort. It takes many layers of staff to make those rides happen and schedulers are a vital cog in the wheel.