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Company offers kids a lift when parents can't

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By AMY DEIS adeis@pioneerlocal.com

Burr Ridge resident Beth Bassler found it exhausting trying to be a chauffeur to three kids with a plethora of activities while she and her husband both had full-time jobs. "I was lucky enough when I asked another parent at Kinder Care how do you be in two places at once and they told me about Kids Kab," she said.

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Donald Lyskanowski jumps up into Kids Kab on his way to school Monday.
(Curtis Lehmkuhl/Staff Photographer)

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Donald Lyskanowski of Hinsdale waits as Kids Kab driver Marge Pratt opens the door for him on Monday.
(Curtis Lehmkuhl/Staff Photographer)

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(Curtis Lehmkuhl/Staff Photographer)

For 15 years, Kids Kab, a children's transportation service started by Darien couple Dilip and Shilpee Desai, has helped busy families like the Basslers get their children to various activities while the parents are at work.

"It's a nice convenience that your kids can go someplace and not be home alone," Willowbrook resident Chris Gregor said.

Many of the Desais' clients live in Hinsdale and Clarendon Hills but they also cover Burr Ridge, Darien, Willowbrook, Oak Brook, Western Springs, Downers Grove, Lisle, Woodridge and even Naperville.

Desai used to work in the pharmaceutical industry but started the company when he and his wife had difficulty driving their two sons to sports practices, even when using carpools. "They were missing a lot of activities," he said. His company now has three 14-passenger vans and three mini vans, all with the name Kids Kab emblazoned on the side.

Seeing one of those vans is how Gregor found out about the service. She and her husband didn't want to find another babysitter closer to home. Instead she uses Kids Kab to get their children from Maercker School District 60 to Downers Grove where the babysitter lives.

Parents use the service for before and afterschool activities such as music lessons, sports practices or clubs.

Desai said Hinsdale Middle, Clarendon Hills Middle, Hinsdale Central, Pleasantdale Middle and Lyons Township High schools use his service to transport students who take advanced math and foreign language classes at the high school. CHMS Principal Griffin Sonntag said he has four students who go to the high school for advanced classes and it's cheaper to use Kids Kab than a school bus. He said Desai always comes in at the beginning of the year to get the list of students and their photos and information. "That's probably the biggest selling point because we know Dilip and his drivers and know they've had their background checks," Sonntag said.

Safety is an important issue because the drivers are transporting children. Desai set up his business so only authorized adults such as parents, babysitters or teachers receive the children. The drivers, many of whom have been with the company for years, all know the children and parents. Desai even calls parents if a substitute driver will pick up the children or if the driver will be late so there's no surprises. "The drivers are always on time and reliable," Oak Brook resident Heide Betman said. "They get along well with our children."

Each child wears an ID with their name and both parents' contact information in case the driver needs to call one of them.

"He's really taking a page from day-care security," Bassler said. This summer Bassler needed to get her children to College of DuPage for enriched classes at the campus. "(Dilip) drove out there with me and we walked the whole campus and found out where the kids needed to be and where they had to walk and if they had to cross a street," Bassler said. "Neither of us had been there."

Desai said he always puts children's safety first and will even go and wait with the children until their driver arrives. It's this kind of precaution that puts parents like Willow Springs resident Vickie Levitske at ease. "He's very personable and makes sure the kids get to where they need to be," she said. Levitske started using the service nine years ago for her three kids. Her oldest daughter, who is a senior at Nazareth Academy in LaGrange Park, doesn't drive yet and still uses it. "I would just die without it," she said, laughing.

Desai considers his business not a job but a community service to the area. He doesn't even complain about spending 12 hours a day making sure no child gets left behind. "I love children and feel kids should be involved," he said. "If it can help parents, I'm happy to do it."

"For more information on Kids Kab, call (630) 493-9543 or visit 6224 B Main St., Downers Grove.