

# Movin' On to Independence: Travel Training

Perhaps it would be helpful to step back and think about transportation a little differently. If travel is considered in terms of the core services of a center (advocacy, peer mentoring, skills training), it leads to innovative functional approaches that have lifetime implications. For example, research has shown that students with disabilities who can travel independently outside the home are more likely to be employed. The underlying challenge is supporting these students to travel as independently as possible within their communities. It is more than just getting them to a meeting. Independence in traveling allows young adults to be active members of their communities, not just occasional participants.

Travel training is an investment in the future independence of young adults. It may not address the immediate needs of how to get to a picnic at the community park next week, but a consistent commitment will result in individuals traveling independently for employment, recreation, and to a variety of community activities for many years. Travel training increases independent living skills, builds advocacy, and often provides peer mentoring opportunities that strengthen the core services of a center.

## **What Do We Mean by Travel Training?**

Travel instruction or travel training is intensive training for individuals or in small groups that provides people with disabilities with the skills and confidence to travel safely, primarily on fixed-route public transportation. Travel trainers are often associated with public transit authorities, human service organizations, public schools, and other community agencies. CILs may also have staff (peers) who have developed skills in travel training for IL consumers.

## **Important Components of Travel Training**

Travel instruction is best done with an individual who is learning to travel, but can also be conducted in small groups who have similar goals or needs. Regardless of whether the travel trainer has formal training or is an experienced peer, all travel trainers should have a toolbox of creative teaching methods to meet a variety of accommodation needs and learning styles.

### *Travel Trainers Should:*

- Have the knowledge and skills to assess and support each individual.
- Be able to individualize the methods of travel instruction to each person receiving the training. For example, is the individual most comfortable with maps or phone apps?
- Have the consumer choose their desired location. Is there a place in the community the individual would like to be able to go independently? Do they have a job, volunteer position, or school they need to get to regularly?
- Develop and provide a comprehensive travel instruction program including:
  - Instruction in essential travel skills
  - Making judgments about safety and danger

- Managing basic life skills
- Knowing how to handle travel disruptions
- Using appropriate social and communication skills
- Map out the route. Make sure that the consumer is included in every step of the process. When learning a new skill like planning the route, the travel trainer may initially map the route with the consumer as they watch and provide input, and then have them try it. Work with the consumer to determine their level of comfort in independently using the bus or train. The goal is to help the consumer build confidence to be able to continue using transportation without you there.
- Be sure to address the cost of the transportation with the consumer. The consumer may need to adjust their budget if they are using transportation on a daily basis.

### **A Special Note on Safety**

As an individual prepares to travel independently, safety discussions are imperative. Travel trainers should determine the individual's comfort level in traveling independently.

#### Practical Considerations include:

- Talking about who their support system/person may be when traveling. Have a support person's contact information in their phone or their wallet/purse.
- Wrong-turn plans. Make sure they have a plan if they get lost or get on the wrong bus. This could include bringing extra money to take an unplanned route or contacting their support person.
- Discuss options for payment. Do they need to purchase a bus pass? How do they do that? Does your local transportation only take exact change?

#### Personal Safety Tips:

- Discuss their surroundings, including which areas are safest and when not to travel.
- Talk about keeping their money hidden and personal items close to them while traveling.
- Talk about personal safety issues. Consider role playing some phrases/language they could use to avoid a conversation with someone they don't feel is safe.
- If they are being harassed or followed, they need to tell the driver.
- Teach them safe places they can go and who to call or what to do if they are in trouble.

### **Skills in Practice – Peer Support during Active Practice**

An important part of travel training is support provided, either by the travel trainer or an experienced peer. The first time the consumer puts their skills in action can be challenging!

- The key to peer support is to be with the consumer in case they need support or to brainstorm potential solutions for the barriers they encounter. Make sure they take the lead in every part of the process, with you playing supporting actor.
- Plan your route together, ride the bus together, talk about why you are doing things the way you are. Is there a reason you wait in a certain spot for the

transportation? Is there a reason you chose the seat you did? If you have to request your stop, when is the right time and way to do that?

- Teachable moments. If you encounter problems while riding together, such as a transportation line is closed, walk through the steps with them of how you are going to trouble shoot the barrier together.
- Some consumers may feel comfortable trying transportation independently after one time working with their travel trainer or peer, others may need more practice.

### **With a Group, You are Stronger**

Consider planning a group activity in the community with your youth group.

- Choose the location together, and walk through the steps of planning the route and preparing for the trip.
- Take public transportation all together as a way to incorporate IL Skills into a fun social opportunity with a group. This could help the young consumer create a community of caring friends or acquaintances that they may be able to take public transportation with until they are comfortable going alone.
- A fun activity at the end of the training may also be motivating and make the work leading up to it seem more worth the effort.

### **Travel Training and My Organization**

The [National Aging and Disability Transportation Center](#) and the [Easter Seals Project Action](#) have extensive resources. These websites provide relevant information ranging from possible solutions to meet transportation needs in rural and small urban areas to guidelines for travel trainers to curricula and online learning modules.

***To learn more about transportation, view the [Transportation factsheet](#).***



A publication of Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU), developed in collaboration with the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) and Utah State University Center for Persons with Disabilities, with input from CIL youth program staff and consumers. Support for development of this report was provided by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201 under grant number 90ILTA0001. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.

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