

Background & Objectives

What was the reason why you started with your training activities? What were the problems or needs that you wanted to address

Changes need to be made!

With more and more vehicles on our roads daily the council wanted to reduce the numbers of cars by **encouraging everyone to use public transport** when and where possible. Car sharing was encouraged and the use of bicycles, people were encouraged to walk more and gradually attitudes started to change. Essex was focusing on sustainable travel.

Historically people with additional needs had been placed on **contract transport** to allow them to access schools, further education and day centres. This was at a great cost to the council and did not promote any kind of independence for the individual; it created a culture of dependence! Following a trial project in 2004 it was believed that many people with difficulties would be able to access public transport with the help of travel training and in February 2006 **Essex Travel Training was launched**. The savings made to the transport budgets would easily fund the travel training team.

The travel training team wanted to ensure that Essex was a county that was **tackling mobility issues** and through membership with local groups and organisations many of the problems faced by people with disabilities have been highlighted and resolved. The bus and train companies are very supportive of our project and together we organise events where we take buses into the special schools to allow students to access public buses without any pressure or worries breaking down some of their fears. Many of these students go on to train with us.

Target group

Which target group(s) did your training initiative address? Why did you choose this target group? How did you recruit them?

Anyone with an Additional Need

We train people with limited mobility, learning difficulties and with sensory impairments. The age range is varied and the youngest people we have trained are eleven and we have trained people in their sixties.

Many people with additional needs felt that they had no **choice** when it came to transport. They had concerns about the accessibility of public transport and no confidence to try. They were unsure how to obtain the information to plan their journey and would rely on taxis and relatives to transport them. This would limit the number of times that people could go out and where they could go. Working to support and guide people by exploring their abilities rather than concentrating on their disabilities we are able to train many people to travel independently.

We visited all the Special Schools, Colleges and Day Centres throughout Essex and built a relationship with the staff. The establishments complete a **referral form** for students who they feel have the potential to travel independently. Referrals also come from Social Workers, employment advisers and many other organisations.

Implementation

What activities did your training initiative comprise?

No two people are the same

We train people on a one to one basis and as no two people are the same every journey will be tailored to the person. We will meet the person and discuss their abilities and the journey they need to make. The training will be taken at their pace gradually building over the weeks. Our training includes road safety, personal safety, money handling, route planning, timing, confidence building and above all what to do when things go wrong. There is no time limit to our training as long as we believe that the person will be able to make the journey independently we will continue training until they are able. Sessions will normally be once a week to ensure that the trainee has the ability to retain the information from one session to the next.

Results

What are the results of the implementation of the measure (e.g. number of students; impact on mobility behaviour, social life or job opportunities; evaluation of the training activities;...)?

Opening doors

Since February 2006 Essex Travel training has trained people on 1,455 journeys. This has opened doors to further education, training and work opportunities. Young people in schools have added confidence and their school work shows this with better results through wanting and believing they can do more. Students going on to further education often start their first day as independent travellers and do not have to wait outside at the end of the day for their transport to arrive which would set them aside from other students. They make new friends and can join them after for a coffee/soft drink in the town.

Once our learning disabled students have completed their course they often look for voluntary work which can lead to paid employment. Many of our past students have moved onto supported living accommodation and have the choice and control to live their lives the way they wish to.

We receive testimonials from the organisations that we work with telling us of the difference travel training makes. Parents write in to say thank you because it has changed the life of their young person.

The social benefits are numerous, students are now meeting for drinks, going to the cinema, attending gyms and swimming clubs and enabling them to do day to day activities such as shopping and visiting friends.

Brief case study

My student is a bubbly middle aged lady with learning difficulties and limited mobility living at home. She attends a training centre and was on contract transport. An opportunity came up for her to work one day a week in the coffee shop that was shortly due to open but she would need to access this independently. Although the journey to the coffee shop was not far it was something that she had never done before.

My student already had a reasonable knowledge of road safety which was a great help. It was not long before she was taking me to the coffee shop and back, she was ready to start her job. Then after a few weeks I contacted her to ask how she was doing. Her reply was, very well dear can I go on the bus now? What a great student. She was so keen to learn and really wanted her independence. With a little help she is now able to do so many things that she was unable to do before. She is also travelling independently to her training centre by bus, she has a paid job, and with a little help she is managing her own home.

Working with the target group

What challenges/problems did you encounter in recruiting and working with this target group?

Breaking down the barriers

Our trainees had for years been taken to and from their destination by car and for many of them the thought of travelling independently was frightening. Parents and carers along with the trainees had to be convinced of **the benefits of travel training**. Young people generally were more willing as they wanted to be able to do the same things as their friends. Older people were more set in their ways and generally more reluctant to try.

Accessibility for people with limited mobility and wheelchair users was a major concern. As trainers we understand that some routes will be easier than others and we will tailor the journey for the ease of the trainee.

Students with a learning difficulty will need to be trained using the most straightforward route even if it takes longer. They will find it easier to use a pass rather than money and they will need to be able to know where to go for help if things go wrong.

People with sensory impairments have concerns as it can be a hidden impairment. Whereas someone may offer to assist a wheelchair user for example because they can see their disability they are unlikely to offer any assistance to someone with a sensory impairment.

As a travel training team we **recognise the barriers** and constantly work to break them down. Our relationship with transport providers means we can quickly tackle any issues as they arise.

Essex is a very large County we have a city and many large towns; we also have vast rural areas. We train people all over Essex and believe that our results over the last seven years prove that there is a very definite need for us to continue training students across the county. We currently have approximately 250 people training or waiting to train, we never have a shortage of people being put forward for training. Although not every one of our trainees will be successful at least people have the opportunity to try, but for the 1,455 people who were successful it is **life changing**.

Thank you

I hope that you have enjoyed this short presentation and that it has helped to inspire and motivate you to look into the possibilities of travel training a little bit more.