

Case Study - Travel Training – the long road

Travel training for our son started at a young age and has taken many years of small steps when the necessity has arisen and when he was ready. On reflection many people and organisations such as Portage and TITAN have helped in the journey, but the momentum has always been his desire to be independent of us, his parents.

We live in a rural village and we walked together to his primary school, making this the norm, to walk to school whether it was raining or beautiful sunshine. When he went to high school, all the children were collected from the village and taken to high school by a bus/coach company. He went on the bus, he was going to the same school as his friends and again this was the norm and not a barrier. We know that using buses and public transport would be the way he would need to travel as he gained independence and this was just another step along the road. He did this route from Yr.7 all the way through to finishing high school in Yr.12. While attending high school he also took part in the TITAN Scheme, working his way through the red and amber levels but at this stage not quite achieving green.

When he got to Yr.10, as part of his options, he started attending college 2 days a week with college starting at 9am. We could have taken him by car but there was a public bus that came through the village and stopped near the college. Planning ahead and knowing that he would probably continue to attend college after high school; we wanted to make this another step towards his long-term goal.

We started thinking of all the other things that would need to be in place, having and using his own mobile phone, having the correct change for the bus fare and therefore we started working on these. We also worked with the high school resulting in our son walking (independently) to the bus stop in the village and getting on the same bus as the Teaching Assistant (TA), who had got on the bus at the high school location. Gradually, the TA supported less and less during the journey and was only there for emergencies.

When he left high school, he continued at the college, another step was necessary, TOTALLY independent travel! It was a difficult decision but one that ultimately would achieve so much for him. We asked for the assistance of TITAN during the summer holidays to work on this. The training was intense and at times involved 4 people (2 Titan and both of us, his parents) but the sense of achievement for our son was huge. This was the motivator to continue the travel training with him. He learnt new routes as and when needed: - a trip to the cinema, a volunteer job and going to see a friend.

Learning one journey has snowballed and allowed him to grow in confidence about using public transport. There have been some hiccups along the way, but he has his mobile phone and if ever in doubt he calls us – I have spoken to a few bus drivers on our son's phone over the years and most are helpful and kind, as are other members of the bus riding community.

We continue to support him to learn new routes and plan for timetable and bus route changes. He has a laminated prompt card about what time to leave the house to catch the correct bus to where he needs to be. The sense of pride for him and us is immense and ultimately his future is brighter and more achievable because of the many steps along the long road to independence.