

# Travel Training Newsletter

Spring 2010

NYC DOE District 75

Office of Travel Training

## “Loving His Independence”

By *Sonia Kennedy*

*Mother of a travel trained student*

When my son, Matthew, started high school the thought of him traveling to school on his own may have been the furthest thing from our minds. To us, it was very convenient to have him be picked up by the school bus and brought home.

It wasn't until about his third or fourth semester in school when I learned that there were students in his program that would come and go to school on their own. Even then I said to myself those kids abilities must be very different than my son's. But after meeting some of the kids during holiday programs, I realized Matthew was functioning the same as the guys who were traveling alone.

It was then when I began to feel that this is something Matthew could learn to do. I knew that during the summer months he learned some of the basics on traveling, but it wasn't taught everyday during the summer and it wasn't geared specifically towards him learning, but more so as a group effort.

I learned of the Travel Training Program and sought out Mr. Steve Garcia on several occasions to inquire about Matthew being a candidate for travel training. Many of the staff members were familiar with Matthew and knew he had a huge fear of birds, dogs, cats, etc., and because of this they always felt Matthew was not ready to be trained.



*Matthew boards the bus to school*

After a year or two, as Matthew matured more, my husband and I allowed him to start going to church by himself (which is about two blocks away from home). He was very excited to be given that trust and freedom and was very proud of his own accomplishments. We even started letting Matthew go to the supermarket to pick up a few items, which is a block away from the church. This too boosted his confidence.

Matthew had never shared with his teacher that he was traveling in the neighborhood alone. In passing I mentioned it and that is when we pushed forward to have him enrolled in the Travel Train-

ing Program.

Honestly, though I felt he would eventually be able to travel on his own, I personally could not see how they would be able to teach him. I could not wrap my brain around the steps it would take or where you really begin to teach someone how to travel.

We were all so excited. Desiree Pickens, the travel trainer assigned to Matthew was a gem. She contacted us the Friday before he was to start the program. She was very professional in her approach with Matthew. Letting him know when she would be arriving and also contacting him directly if she had run into any traffic and would not arrive at the exact time for their departure. This was great too, because it was giving him some independence at the same time, as there were days I had to leave for work before the scheduled time of departure.

The travel training program is fantastic. They give the child the route on a card. They teach them alternative routes coming and going in case there is a transportation issue. They reinforce not talking to strangers and to learn how to ask the bus driver for directions. I believe the whole process took about 2 - 3 weeks and before we knew it, Matthew had completed the course and was ready to go solo, but first the Travel Training Program had him

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*Office of Travel Training*

*District 75*

*Established 1970*

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## “Loving his Independence”

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go without Ms. Pickens, but with someone else watching him.

That was in September and it's now December and Matthew is loving his independence. He looks forward to getting on the MTA. There have been a few times when he has made other stops on his own coming home and it has increased his confidence in his

**Matthew learned to read a schedule and map while travel training**



abilities.

We are so grateful to the entire staff of the Travel Training Program. They made such an unimaginable feat become a great reality for Matthew and our family. Thank you for your dedication to our special children.

## Student Success Stories!

**By Alice G. Student J25R**

Although it takes me hours to arrive there, my weekly journey to the Bronx Botanical Gardens with my travel trainer Emma was completely worth it. My goal is to go to a trade school there. I learned and memorized different routes from Staten Island to there and I now feel confident that I'll be able to travel to and from the Bronx by myself. I thank my amazing travel trainer Emma, for her constant support and for being good company.

**These are Alice's words about her travel training experience. Alice graduated from P25R in January 2010 and begins her trade program shortly.. Good luck!!!**



**Travel Trainer Emma Hernandez and Alice G.**

**By Brian M. Student P 233Q @ CTEA**

My name is Brian M. I attend PS 233Q @ CTEA. I was driven to school everyday until I was given an opportunity to be travel trained. I was a little nervous because I was always driven everywhere by my mother. I was taught by Andrea Collins and Mr. Abrahams. They were kind and patient with me. They taught me so much. I learned how to take 3 buses to school, how to carefully cross streets and what to do if I am lost. I was also cautioned to never talk to strangers. I am excited to travel by myself. I feel just like my older brother and sister. It is going to be a great learning experience traveling myself everyday. I am going to enjoy thinking about my favorite things while traveling.

I am really looking forward to walking through the main entrance of the school everyday.



**Brian M. Student from P 233Q, trained to High School Construction Trade Engineering and Architecture (CTEA)**

**By Michael L. Student P 77K**

Travel training is about teaching a student like me how to travel by myself so sometimes I won't have to take the school bus. In travel training I can only go to school and home by myself. I do like travel training, it is kind of fun traveling by myself. It is fun because of the things I have to do to travel by myself, like take the train, take the city bus, and use a metrocard. Sometimes there are challenges like strangers staring at me, and trains that are sometimes delayed.



**Michael L. P 77K**

**“On the other hand I miss taking naps on the school bus because I was so bored...”**

When strangers stare at me I always have to ignore them. I have to keep waiting patiently for the next train even though I'm late for school. There are many reasons why I like travel training; but what I like best is taking the train independently. On the other hand I miss taking naps on the school bus because I was so bored on that bus. I kind of like using a metrocard when I get in the station and go on the city bus.

## Thank You P721M

**By Florence Tuchman Shomer**  
*Travel Training Teacher*

The D75 Office of Travel Training is proud of its success stories of the students who complete the Travel Training Program and begin independent travel.

When other schools or agencies throughout the country (or world) want to begin a travel training program, they will often request a visit with us to learn about a program that is embarking on its 40<sup>th</sup> year.



*P 721M students who participated in panel discussion*

On December 4, 2009, six travel training students from P721M participated in a panel discussion with three people from Medicaid Transportation Management in Washington DC, as well as two teachers from Travel Training and the Travel Training Director, Peggy Groce.

The students who participated were Sean C, Nicola W, Stephanie A, Neil S, Elizabeth D. and Sonia P. The students were enthusiastic, articulate and quite knowledgeable in sharing their own personal travel experiences. In addition, they were able to give suggestions to assist our visitors in how to motivate students or help alleviate their fear in beginning travel training.

Some of the comments we heard that day were:

**Sean:** "I get to school on the M21 bus. It takes about 15 minutes. If buses don't work, I can take the F train. I do take the F train in the afternoon."

**Elizabeth:** "I take the train from Brooklyn to W 4<sup>th</sup> Street and walk 3 blocks to school. I stand where the conductor is at. Look out the window to see if it's your stop."

**Stephanie:** "I live on 10<sup>th</sup> street. My neighborhood is quiet. I take the first bus at 7:13. When I was in travel training I gave my mother a note every day."

**Sonia:** "I take the #2 or #3 train. I also can take 2 busses; the M7 to Columbus Circle and M20 to school. The train gets you here on time and you can hang out with your friends."

**Nicola:** "My neighborhood is noisy and crossing streets can be tricky."

**Neil:** I live on 140<sup>th</sup> street. I take the #2 or #3 at 135<sup>th</sup> Street to 14<sup>th</sup> street and #1 train to school. I also go out other places."

Thank you so much to the parents, the principal Ms. Bello and especially the students for making us so proud of the job we do.

## A Collaborative Effort At P25R

**By Florence Tuchman Shomer**  
*Travel Training Teacher*

It always amazes me how our students who begin Travel Training never worry about the length of their trip, as long as they achieve independence in their travel skills. The travel training of a student at P25R, Alice G. exemplifies this. Alice's training was a combined cooperative effort between the Travel Training Staff, the school administration, her teachers, her counselors, her parents, herself, and her travel trainer Emma's family.



Alice is graduating at the end of January 2010. She will begin a training program in Floral Arranging at the Bronx Botanical Gardens. She will attend the program in late afternoon/evening and on the weekends. Her route consists of the S40/S44 bus to St George

Ferry, the Staten Island Ferry to Manhattan, the #4 train to Bedford Park and BX26 bus to the Botanical Gardens (2 1/2 hours). Her alternate route is the S40/S44 to St George Terminal; Staten Island Ferry to Manhattan; #4 train to Grand Central Station; Metro North to Bronx Botanical Gardens (2 hours). Included in Alice's training were reinforcement of her street crossing skills, dealing with crowds at St George terminal and on trains and Grand Central, problem solving skills, map skills to help navigate through the three boroughs, and social/safety skills.

The cooperation of all parties was necessary to begin Travel Training and make it a successful venture for Alice. It involved all persons handling a flexible academic and travel schedule in order to accommodate the length of the trip to and from home and the Bronx Botanical Gardens; especially

for Emma and her family. Most of Alice's training was done after her school day was completed or in lieu of attending P25R.

The saying "It takes a village to raise a child" can be amended in this scenario; but it is this concept that allowed Alice to participate fully in the Travel Training program.



*"It always amazes me how our students...never worry about the length of their trip, as long as they achieve independence..."*

## Edwin Spreads His Wings

**By Beata Nowak MS OTR, P71K Juan Morel Campos**

This is a story of a young man who was receiving occupational therapy services for over four years. Edwin H., a quiet student at IS 71K, would keep to himself and rarely initiate any conversations only replying with short answers and limited eye contact. When confronted with a novel task he demonstrated difficulties figuring out strategies. In his classes, he needed to be called on to participate. Despite his challenges, Edwin was motivated and had potential to improve in all aspects of daily life. He always was punctual and actively participated in each of his sessions.

When I began working with Edwin he was 15 years old and continued to rely on the school bus to get to and from the school. I contacted the Travel Training Program and spoke with Steve Garcia, a Travel Training Teacher/Coordinator. We began discussing and educating Edwin about Travel Training. Edwin was reluctant and unsure about this new idea but, with encouragement, we filled out the application (Pupil Profile). The Pupil Profile was used as a guide to select some of the pre-requisite travel skills I could begin working on with Edwin. As time progressed, we started to work on community mobility skills indoors and outdoors and various problem solving strategies. He needed repetition of instructions and practice to follow through.



**Beata Nowak, Travel Trainer Maria Rodriguez, Edwin H. with his award and Travel Training Teacher Phillipe Jean Louis**

We worked on skills to use for crossing streets, attending to the environment by locating details like a street sign and an address, using a pay phone, and studying the subway map. These small steps encouraged Edwin to

continue and aim to go through with the travel training program. Edwin reported many fears about independent travel including fear of getting lost, being hurt by someone, and fear of seeking help. In 2007 Edwin got separated from his mother in Union Square subway station and being somewhat familiar with the area he figured out his way home by walking through the streets and over the Williamsburg Bridge.

The Travel Training coordinator, Steve Garcia, came to interview Edwin in 2007. Edwin was not sure he wanted to go through with the program given his prior experience of getting lost. Mr. Garcia gave Edwin a book on Travel Training written by a student. Each session Edwin would read a portion and we would go over the scenarios. This book encouraged Edwin to go through with the travel training. In September 2009 Edwin was encouraged to make a phone call to the Brooklyn Travel Training teacher, Phillipe JeanLouis, and inform him he was ready to begin travel training. Edwin started Travel training on November 16, 2009. After the first day of travel training Edwin said "It wasn't that bad". He smiled and appeared to look forward to the coming days of travel training.

Each day in the morning when he came to sign in for attendance he would appear to be more confident. I saw him transform from a meek student to a more confident young man. His only concern throughout the process was that the bus was crowded and he felt anxious. I suggested breathing techniques which he used daily and he reported that it made it easier being on the bus. Travel Training also taught Edwin two alternate routes on trains and gave him a choice as to which route he preferred. Mr. JeanLouis also video taped Edwin traveling. Edwin's confidence grew when he saw himself on video, initiating actions and making independent decisions while traveling. Edwin, although initially shy about seeing himself on video, enjoyed looking at the video and seeing the things he did correctly and the things he needed to improve. One day while travel training Ms. Grace, the physical therapist, saw Edwin crossing the street. She noted that he didn't look down as he normally would. He kept his head up maintained eye contact and with a smile greeted her by saying hello. Edwin successfully completed the travel training program on December 8, 2009. He confidently reported that he doesn't want to be on the "cheese bus," anymore and has been traveling independently to and from the school on public transportation. I want to thank the Travel Training Coordinators Steve Garcia, Phillipe JeanLouis, and the Travel Trainer Ms. Maria Rodriguez for their dedication to teaching our students to travel. All the effort allowed Edwin to realize his potential by making him independent in the use of public transportation. Edwin, now 18 years old and a senior in IS 71K, Juan Morel Campos Secondary School, is planning to go to the VESID Program after graduation and plans on taking public transportation while working to meet his other life goals.

### Michelle's Sister Says "Thanks".

My name is Carrine L, Michelle L. is my sister. At first I was very concerned about the thought of my sister Michelle L. a student at P721K Roy Campanella OTC, riding on the train and bus alone. The first thing that came to mind was, Michelle is not capable of being alone without supervision.

We are living in a "crazy" world. I have always been overprotective of my sister. However, after talking to Mr. Gustavo Chaviano, from the travel-training program I felt a little bit at ease. Michelle is very friendly and kind. I was worried that strangers would take advantage of her as she tries to go to school and get home from school. Sometimes she cannot tell the difference between strangers and friends.

After travel training was over, Michelle had to prove herself to me. With each day she came home safe, my confidence grew. I am very proud that she is able to travel to and from worksite. I would like to thank the travel training staff for their help. They are doing an excellent job. The way they do their job shows that they study each student carefully and see what they are capable of doing.

Sincerely, Carrine L.



## Thoughts and Reflections

By Peggy Groce

Director, Office of Travel Training

*The farther back you look, the farther forward you are likely to see.*

Winston Churchill

We appreciate this opportunity to share our Travel Training story with you. Next school year, 2010-2011, is a special one for the Office of Travel Training – our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary teaching students with significant disabilities how to travel safely and independently. With such an event approaching, it is important to not only look back to when we began, but to think about what has occurred since that time, and to look forward to what we see ahead of us.

Have we been keeping true to the vision? What are we doing to prepare for the future? Let's begin by traveling backwards to place the NYC Department of Education's Travel Training in a proper perspective.

People often think travel training is an outgrowth of legislation, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In reality, travel training existed before these laws were considered. The idea of travel training was influenced by the philosophy of the dignity of risk, a belief that had come out of Scandinavia in the late 1950's and was adopted by many professionals here in the United States. Dignity of risk assumes that without taking a chance, a person cannot experience success. Of course, taking a risk also implies the possibility of failure. That is what makes us human. So this philosophy stresses the importance of community involvement by persons with significant developmental disabilities even with the possibility of rejection.

This is what all people face so why not individuals with disabilities? Shouldn't they be entitled to the same right of taking prudent risks as the rest of us?

This concept had been adopted by an AHRC adult day services program, where the "risk" of travel training adults with moderate and severe "mental retardation" was taken back in 1960. The risk proved to be a prudent one as the Occupational Day Center (ODC) travel training program demonstrated that even persons with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities could master the skills for safe and independent travel when provided appropriate instruction. While the ODC program was discontinued in the mid-1960s, it was the basis for the initiation of Travel Training in the NYC Department of Education in 1970.

At the same time that the disability rights movement was just emerging, educators in the NYC public schools demonstrated their belief in our students' ability to learn, set high expectations for performance, and worked with parents on prudent risk taking to make independent travel in the community a reality for our students. In reality, our Travel Training Program was in the forefront of the

movement. We are proud of this fact.

Passage of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973 was a great victory for the disability rights movement. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was the first federal law specifically prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities by any agency receiving federal funds. The idea of *reasonable accommodations* and *reasonable modifications* came from this law.

Another major milestone in disability rights occurred that same year, here in New York. In 1975, the *Willowbrook Consent Decree* was signed. This was the culmination of action

begun in 1972 against the conditions in the state institutions. The right to remain and live in the community was established. This Judgment had far-reaching implications in supporting the development of adult day service provider agencies and creating a system of supports and services for community living.

Also in 1975 another significant event for the rights of persons with disabilities occurred. Federal legislation mandating a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for all children with disabilities was passed, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. With subsequent reauthorizations, this law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1997 travel training was included in IDEA under the definition of special education. This inclusion was recognition of the importance of mobility and travel in an individual's life and the responsibility of schools to provide the appropriate instructional service.

Twenty years ago, July 1990, the ADA was signed by President George H.W. Bush. This act was the most sweeping civil rights legislation ever passed for persons with disabilities in the United States, and possibly the world. Early focus was on Title II, the section that deals with making public transportation and public accommodations accessible. Initial emphasis was on making public transportation accessible and available. There was a realization that without the means and ability to get someplace, it made little difference if the place was accessible.

But it was forty years ago, 20 years before the passage of the ADA, 5 years prior to IDEA and the Willowbrook Consent Decree, and 3 years before Section 504, that the New York City Department of Education initiated a unique educational program for students with significant disabilities - travel training. This was a bold step to take in 1970 as persons with significant cognitive impairments were still being placed in the state's institutional facilities, including Willowbrook, and many were still not welcomed into our public schools.



## Thoughts and Reflections (continued)

In these 40 years, we have learned quite a bit about teaching students with disabilities how to travel safely and independently. When we started there were no books or curricula for travel training; no lists of essential travel-related skills and behaviors; no assessment recommendations; no personnel preparation guidelines; no accessible public transportation. So, over this time span of four decades, the Office of Travel Training has developed a process for personnel preparation, created assessment tools, developed guidelines, procedures, and documentation for training, collected and analyzed data, conducted research, and collaborated with local, state, and federal agencies/organizations to develop tools for making travel training a reality for more individuals with disabilities. It's been quite an exciting journey, one made possible by the spirit and dedication of all our young people, their families, and the staff participating in Travel Training.



*“the Office of Travel Training is planning an anniversary event...join us in our celebration...”*



Now we are in the present and looking to the future. This year the Office of Travel Training has undertaken two major initiatives. The first initiative was the development of a **Route Training Institute** to train specially selected school-based personnel in the basic competencies for route training. In essence, route training is the practice of supporting an independent traveler's generalization of wayfinding skills from navigating one environment to traveling on other routes and/or new modes of transportation. We have developed materials and resources for the schools participating in this year's Institute. The purpose for designing the Institute was to be sure that students who had learned to use public transportation independently could expand their opportunities for travel to other destinations frequently visited.

It is our hope that route training will ensure that the young people continue to travel independently to adult service provider agencies and other post-school programs and activities without being placed or becoming dependent on agency provided transportation. Having gained their freedom and independence of travel in the community, it would be an injustice to simply take that away because door-to-door transportation might be available.

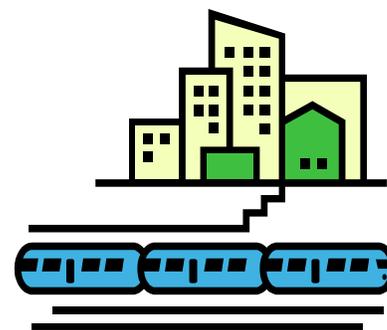
The other initiative was collaboration with the **Transit Museum** to develop a specific curriculum to include students with disabilities in their program related to exploring NYC subways to children. After an initial meeting, two schools, P77K and P226M, were selected to participate in the project. Travel Training teachers worked with the Museum

teacher/guide in developing materials and resources for the curriculum. Classes from the school visited the Transit Museum with their classroom teacher and a Travel Training teacher to “field test” the lessons and materials. It was a wonderful experience for all. Thanks to the folks in the Transit Museum for working to be sure that an interactive museum has a specially designed/adapted program for the inclusion of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The future always holds promise. More and more the concept of travel training is being discussed as an essential part of any young person's transition planning. Throughout the nation there is a focus on mobility management, assessing the needs of an individual's

mobility and transportation needs, and coordinating the resources available to meet those needs. Travel training is an essential component of mobility management. The Office of Travel Training plans to devise an individual mobility plan for students that can be incorporated into transition planning. An Individual Mobility Management Plan would consider a young person's travel and mobility needs and experiences, assess the options available for travel to desired or necessary destinations, and design steps to meet the needs. We believe that our young people with disabilities have the right to make decisions and take prudent risks that encourage their active participation in the community's activities.

So, almost 40 years later, the Office of Travel Training is planning an anniversary event in the 2010-2011 school year. We are asking you to join us in our celebration of the achievement of so many young people. Share your stories of Travel Training with us and when we have our “event,” please come. We will keep you informed of when, what, and where our celebration will be.



# A Special Celebration

By Florence Tuchman Shomer



(Dedicated to the New York City Office of Travel Training  
Department of Education)



2010 is a special year in many different ways,  
It's the year the Travel Training program celebrates 14,600 days.  
When we calculate the time in months, 480 is the number we say,  
But we can also tell you it's the year of our 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday!!

We haven't set a date yet for this celebration,  
However, we'll recognize our achievements and send out invitations.  
So keep your eyes and ears open as the plans become fine tuned,  
You'll be hearing more about this very, very soon!!!

## “Not Easy to Cut the Strings”

By Louise Masiello

Teacher, P 77K

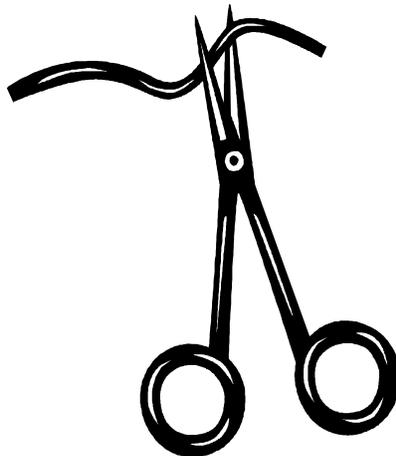
It's not easy to cut the strings when it comes to travel training students on the autism spectrum. We always worry that the autism will get in the way and our students will be too vulnerable to travel alone. Although we still worry about it, we've had to relax and cut the strings this year since Gerard Grillo and his team have moved into PS 77 to travel train a long list of anxious students.

I had no idea just how nervous I was until the day that the first student was “followed” for the first time. It has been a wonderful learning experience for us here at P 77. The trainers have made it possible for our students to be successful and have equipped them with the skills that they need to travel independently and be able to solve problems and

handle travel contingencies.

Any doubt or concern we had about the safety and well being of our students, had to be put aside once we saw the glowing smile of Alexander F. who is so proud of himself now that he has passed the training part and is now traveling independently.

As Gerard and the team spend time in our building working with various students they are enabling us to think differently about our students and their ability to live a more independent life!



Louise Masiello,  
Teacher, P 77K

“they are enabling us to think differently about our students and their ability to live a more independent life!”



## The “Freedom Riders” of P 77K

**By Don Daley, Teacher P 77K**

We headed out recently one hot day on our first field trip of spring: a visit to the New York Transit Museum. Ten students, several of whom had never been on a city bus, walked from our school, P77K in beautiful Park Slope, to a public bus stop, crossing several streets in the process, including Flatbush Avenue, a major thoroughfare, then got on the bus and rode it to downtown Brooklyn, where we hopped off. We walked a few blocks to the museum, crossing a few streets again, including Adams Street, another major thoroughfare, and then descended into the former Court Street subway station for a guided tour of the New York Transit Museum. After a guided tour of the museum and a quick visit to its gift shop, we headed back to school the way we’d come: walk, bus, walk. Sounds pretty simple, but it wasn’t. The Travel-Training teacher Gerard Grillo accompanied us that day, and used our trip to assess our students’ levels of knowledge and skills. As he did so, I observed, and peppered him with questions, and came to realize how much was involved in that seemingly simple walk/bus/walk scenario. What I took away from the experience was how much adults who commute take for granted.

Getting around NYC requires not only knowledge and skills that no one is born with; they must be learned. These include everything from how to cross a street safely to how to find a bus stop to how to let the driver know you want to get off to using street signs, reading maps, knowing how much transit costs and being able to work with money, how to operate a turnstile, use a token booth, figure out which side of the platform you want to get your train on.

Travel anywhere—but especially in New York City, with its multiple boroughs, constant construction and resulting detours, its numerous tunnels, bridges, pedicabs, subways, buses, horse-drawn carriages, food delivery cyclists, bike paths, inline-skaters, one-way streets, service roads, police cars, fire-trucks and ambulances whizzing around—travel is a complex thing, a tricky thing, an exciting

thing, and, at times, a potentially dangerous thing. As Gerard put it, “Crossing the street safely 99% of the time is NOT good enough!”

As an avid reader and former English teacher, I’ve long considered reading to be the most important skill taught in school.

Gerard’s comment stopped me in my tracks, and I’ve been doing a lot of thinking since that trip about how travel—the ability to go from one place to another, with all the movement, navigation, planning, flexibility, people skills, balance, money math, situational awareness, logistics, timing, diplomacy and judgment required—travel may rival reading, in terms of the potential return on investment.

If you can’t travel, you’re limited: limited work-wise, friend-wise, money-wise, limited in terms of experience and growth, limited in terms of options and opportunities.

Sure, you can read about another time and place, and, metaphorically, “travel” to that time and place. Reading opens your world up in a way that few other activities and skills can. It’s “virtual” travel.

But actual travel takes you literally out into the world. It’s supposed to be hot today: wanna go to Coney Island? The Cloisters? Maybe take the Staten Island Ferry, see the Statue of Liberty, walk the Brooklyn Bridge, check out the Bronx Zoo? Have dinner in the Village or Williamsburg, see a band in Greenpoint, grab a bite in Chinatown or Little Italy or Little India or head to Ikea in Red Hook? You gotta travel. Reading about Coney Island versus going to Coney Island? I’m sorry, you read, I’ll go! That’s why Travel Training is such a crucial component of District 75’s program: having the freedom to go where you want, when you want, without relying upon someone else to get you there, is a major step

on the road to independence. It’s a quality of life issue.

We’re fortunate to live in a special city during a time when it’s improving, a period in which the bike paths and green spaces are more and more connected, with what remains, whether we realize it or not, one of the great mass transit bargains ever, anywhere. Public transit in NYC is relatively fast, cheap, easy and—increasingly—green. High gas prices, gridlock and environmental consciousness have teamed up to make NOW more than ever the time to learn to use mass transit, and these students, heading out on the public bus to tour one of the historical landmarks of mass transit in our town, are a part of that wave of learning. They’re “freedom riders” in the sense that they’re expanding their universe, their personal travel radius, their life chances, their opportunities to work, and that makes Travel Training a liberation movement, enabling true power to the people.

I’ve been talking about the journey, what about the destination, the museum itself? The Transit Museum is great. If you haven’t been, check it out. Not only is it

close by and easy to get to but for many students, it taps into an existing interest. For some students, transit may someday be a career.

I’ve been to the Transit Museum a number of times already, and I plan to go back. The exhibits evolve and there’s always something new to see. I loved the token booth and seeing the old subway cars from the 1940s. But as good as the museum was, for me, the focal point was getting there and back, watching some of our students awaken to the independence that travel can afford them.



**Don Daley**



***“If you can’t travel, you’re limited: limited work-wise, friend-wise, money-wise...”***

## Stories from the Field

### By Ellyssa Z. Student P 373K

Travel Training was fun and exciting and it was a good experience for me. Now I don't have to take the stupid school bus anymore.

It was different to go by myself, with my teacher, Ms. Velky and now I don't have to depend on my parents at or the school bus.

And when I want to go places with my friends after school I let mom and dad know where I'm going.

Like the movies or getting my hair cut or to church, or out to eat with my friends. I will have more freedom outside this house.



*Ellyssa Z. and Travel Trainer  
Velky Montesdeorca*

### By C. Callender: Speech, PS 721Q

Travel Training is a program that gives self-esteem and confidence to the students. Males and females alike have blossomed as they have become independent. Realizing that they can come and go as they please, they become a part of the mainstream population.

This unique program has provided opportunities for the students such as better employment choices, after-school programs and the freedom to visit one another.

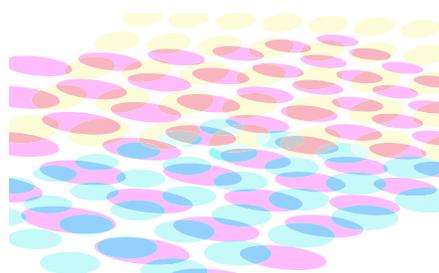
Watching the students transform from a dependent student to an independent consumer is what Queens Occupational Training Center is all about.

*“This unique program has provided opportunities for students such as better employment choices, after school programs...”*

## From My Own Perspective

### By Florence Tuchman Shomer Travel Training Teacher

In August 2009 I underwent a hip replacement surgery which necessitated my being in the hospital for 5 days and at a rehabilitation facility for 5 days. During this time I needed to learn to use a manual wheelchair (which was very difficult as I kept bumping into walls and trying hard to avoid people); Lofstram crutches, and a cane. In addition as I prepared for being more independent, I needed to learn to use a variety of mobility devices to make sure my surgery would heal properly and that I would keep my movements restricted. These devices were needed to help me get dressed, to use the bathroom, to sit in a chair, and to sleep in a proper position. I was taught how to use these by the occupational therapist and physical therapist. I also had many restrictions and needed to learn different and safer ways for me to sit down, stand up, use the stairs, sleep, bend and move around. I also wasn't able to drive for about six weeks, participate in sports or exercise in the way that I wanted. I continue to receive physical therapy services and need to



be conscious of the way I move around.

During my recuperation period there were many things that I needed help with and wasn't allowed to do by myself. This means that I had to wait for someone (hospital staff, rehabilitation staff or family members) to have the time to assist me before my day could begin. I am a very independent person and it was very hard for me to be on someone else's schedule. This meant waiting to dress, shower, leave my room, and go up and down stairs in my home. At the Rehabilitation facility I couldn't get out of bed to shower without waiting for someone to take me there. This type of waiting period for me could get very frustrating.

Another feeling that was new for me was "fear" in moving around, and the extra caution I still continue to need. I am usually a fast paced person and do several things at a time. It was very hard for me to learn to do things differently and at a slower pace and being so much more afraid if I were to slip or fall. In the supermarket I am usually the one racing around; However when I used my cane and it

was crowded in the store, I was very nervous that someone would bump into me and made my cane very obvious so that people would avoid me.

Nevertheless with all the restrictions, limited mobility and frustration; I was very aware that my situation was for a limited time only. It made me really start to think of the students I work with and the numerous mobility and cognitive issues they have. I always thought I understood another person's limitation and empathized. However, being in the situation I was in, made me see things in a very different light. I realized how hard it is for the students and/or adults we work with to always have to wait for someone else to assist them and time isn't really their own. There is fear, frustration, anxiety and sometimes even anger. This can have such a strong effect on a person's self confidence and self worth. I began to realize more than ever how much courage our students/trainees and families have when they embark on Travel Training and make it their own. The type of independence this brings to someone has a tremendous impact. It also made me recognize so clearly how difficult it can be for a caregiver to let go. Kudos to all of the parents, guardians and all that have achieved the status of "Independent Traveler".

A Travel Trainer Near You!

There is a Travel Training Office in every borough in New York City. We accept referrals from any District 75 school and many High Schools. We work with students at various off-sites, worksites and often the agencies of facilities that students will attend after transitioning from school to adult programs and opportunities.

Below is a list of our offices with each address, telephone number and name of the Travel Training teacher.

We welcome your questions, comments, and /or requests for information about the program and its activities. We can arrange bus demonstrations, trips to Safety City, parent and staff development workshops, and of course explain our referral process for students you believe would benefit from our services. We look forward to hearing from you.

**The Bronx**

**Michele Buto**  
**PS 721X**  
**2697 Westchester Ave**  
**Bronx, NY 10461**  
**(718) 822-2881 ext. 3012**

**Steve Gallo**  
**PS 754X**  
**470 Jackson Ave**  
**Bronx, NY 10455**  
**(718) 993-5581 ext. 103**

**Brooklyn**

**Phillipe Jean Louis**  
**PS 373K**  
**185 Ellery Street**  
**Brooklyn, NY 11206**  
**(718) 782-6800**

**Gus Chaviano**  
**PS 721K**  
**64 Ave X**  
**Brooklyn, NY 11223**  
**(718) 266-0085**

**Queens**

**Joan Ross**  
**PS 721Q**  
**57-12 94th Street**  
**Elmhurst, NY 11373**  
**(718) 760-2931 ext. 1055**

**David Abrahams**  
**PS 752Q**  
**142-10 Linden Blvd**  
**Jamaica, NY 11436**  
**(718)322-3500 ext. 4293**

**Manhattan**

**Gerard Grillo**  
**PS 751M**  
**113 E. 4th Street**  
**New York, NY 10003**  
**(212) 477-2454**

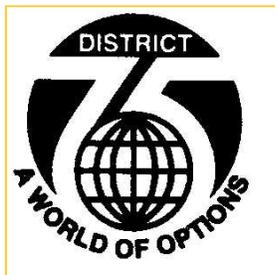
**Florence Tuchman**  
**PS 721M**  
**250 W. Houston Street**  
**New York, NY 10013**  
**(212) 924-8825**

**Staten Island**

**Florence Tuchman**  
**PS 721R**  
**155 Tompkins Street**  
**Staten Island, NY 10301**  
**(718) 727-4938**

**High Schools (all boroughs)**

**Steve Garcia**  
**113 E. 4th Street**  
**New York, NY 10003**  
**(718) 776-3140 ext. 1126**



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**District 75 Citywide Programs**

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**Bonnie Brown**

**Deputy Superintendent**

**Gary Hecht**

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**Office of Travel Training**

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