



Office of Travel Training

District 75

Established 1970

Winter 2010

Travel Training Newsletter

40th Anniversary Edition

THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

Peggy Groce

Director Office of Travel Training

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced. Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward. Alan Cohen

Dear Friends:

December is one of my favorite months of the year. Not only is it a time when so many of us look forward to holidays, festivities, and good food with friends and family, it is a time to look back on the year that is coming to an end, and to think about what we have done or have not done. Another reason for December being one of my favorite months is that I started the Travel Training Program in the New York City public schools in December 1970, and travel training is one of my favorite things.

So, this year, our extended "travel training" family celebrates our 40th Anniversary of joining together with young people with disabilities and their families in overcoming barriers to independent travel and the use of public transportation. For many of the young people, independent travel was the first time they experienced doing something "alone", without anyone overseeing what they were doing and how they were doing it. And, for their families, it was also the first time of really "letting go"; gathering the courage to take a calculated risk, trusting that their sons and daughters were competent and could handle being out in the community by themselves. For the families, "courage," as Dan Rather once said, "is being afraid but going on anyhow."

Now, I'd like all of us to take some time to look back and recall some of the memories of courage, love, learning, and doing. But, first, let's consider what we mean by memories and the role memories play in our lives. If we look inside ourselves, we all have memories of the "first time" we did something that we thought was really special. We may not actively think of, or remember, these events, but they are embedded in who and what we are. For example, deep in my memory bank is the experience of the first time I was trusted to take the train from our home to the shore without an adult, and how "grown-up", and a little bit nervous, I felt. Another special memory is when I convinced my parents to allow me to not change schools when we moved, but to let me take the bus by myself when I was in the fourth grade. It turned out that my elementary school afforded me the opportunity to love school, with its experience of learning and thinking and doing and believing that I could do anything I really tried to do. Experiences such as these, and the memories created by the experiences, have been part of my choice and decision-making processes throughout my life.

Memory is power. It allows us to navigate our way through the world, learning, storing, and retrieving bits of information that will allow us to safely differentiate friend from foe, tonic from poison. Memory helps us plot a safe course from point A to point B, and to and from all points in between, if we so desire. Moreover, our memories define who we are. Philosophers and scientists alike have long recognized that our memories and our selves are interwoven; perhaps they are even one and the same. Memories link us with the things that make us happy and those that make us sad, the things we've accomplished and the things we hope to accomplish in the future. (Johns Hopkins News Alert)

So, let us think about the memories we help our young people with disabilities create. Will the memories inspire them to go forward and seek additional opportunities? Will they look back and know their parents and teachers had enough confidence in them to face their own fears and let their son/daughter/student do something? Will they smile to themselves about how they were nervous about going somewhere but didn't want anyone to know? Will we provide them with the opportunities to construct the memories that will help guide their future choices and decision-making in a positive way?

(Continued page 2)

THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

(continued from Page 1)

Do we believe in their right to create meaningful and positive memories and in our responsibility to help them do so?

It seems that learning to travel independently creates positive and useful memories for our students; memories that they can look back on for help in moving forward to confront new or additional challenges. I believe this is so because our students have been very forceful in stating why they want to learn to travel and what it means to them. We learn this during training and, later, when we send surveys to the families, or see our former students as adults going about their community and the city, just like other New Yorkers.

Years ago, one young man, when asked why he was working so hard to learn to travel independently, told me "It's the only time I'm treated just like everybody else." This young man did not want special treatment or services. He just wanted to live his life as an ordinary human being. His statement created a powerful memory for me, and has influenced my actions and thinking about the freedom and dignity independent travel can mean to individuals and of the value of an ordinary life.

Current and former travel trainers all have stories of students, coming into the building the first time they traveled "solo", smiling and saying, "I did it myself." Over and over again, teachers and families comment on the way the newly independent traveler walks and talks in a different manner, showing more self-confidence and determination in their decision-making and self-advocacy skills.

Travel training also creates memories for the families. From our surveys and interviews with parents we have learned of their thoughts and remembrances. Independent travel sometimes causes parents a few moments of feeling almost a loss. One parent made the comment, "She doesn't need me anymore." She was referring to her daughter's ability to cross streets, use mass transit, and navigate through the community independently. The parent was proud of her daughter's achievements while recognizing a change in the dependency nature of their relationship. This young woman now lives in a supported apartment, works as a self-advocate, and rejects the use of paratransit for her daily activities. She's just another New Yorker who takes the city buses to go to work, to shop, to visit friends, or to do whatever else is part of her busy schedule. Another parent commented on the fact that "it has made our lives much easier because we don't have to drive him anymore."

It is not that families ignore or forget the fear and anxiety that preceded travel training. Over and over again, parents comment on the fears and concerns they had to confront to give their loved ones the opportunity to learn to travel. However, their overriding theme is to encourage other parents to give their sons and daughters a chance; to recognize that dealing with "your own anxieties and fears" is worth the independence, self-confidence, and opportunities their sons and daughters gain from learning to use public transportation independently. To quote a few parents from our fall 2010 survey:

I had delayed putting my daughter's name on the list because I thought the commute was too long and involved...so she didn't get training until her senior year. In retrospect, I would have started earlier - the time was no obstacle to her and the increase in self-esteem was so great.

Let your children take a chance. You will be surprised at what they can do and so will they.

To all of you who have made this possible, we will never forget those days...We are very happy!

As previously mentioned, the 2010-2011 school year is the 40th Anniversary of Travel Training in the New York City Department of Education. We are planning a celebration sponsored by the AHRC and the Department of Education but we do not have a date at this time. Please check our website for the date as it will be posted there.

AHRC is invested in travel training as it was the first agency to believe independent travel and use of public transportation was a possibility for adults with significant intellectual disabilities. The AHRC travel training pilot, from 1960-1963, demonstrated that independent travel was a reasonable goal for individuals with intellectual disabilities. That AHRC pilot program was the foundation on which the NYC Department of Education program was built.

We would like all of you who have been involved with Travel Training to share your memories with us. Please contribute to the history of Travel Training as it was developed here in New York City. No other school system has such a long and proud tradition of teaching young people with significant disabilities how to travel independently, and we want to encourage other school districts to give their students and families "a chance". You can send your memories or comments to pegal3839@gmail.com and we will try to compile them for distribution.

Big Relief with Success

I was very worried when Xi began his travel training at the beginning of the year. He never went out by himself prior to that, let alone travel by bus between school and home. In spite of all the concerns that I had, I was anxious to see Xi start the training program once his teachers recommended it. When his kind and dedicated trainer arrived timely, and waited for him every morning in front of our apartment, I was very hopeful. As I watched both of them disappearing in front of my eyes for the first time, I was reminded of the

I had never let him out of my sight because he is, after all, a child with special needs.

numerous conversations between my son and me about safety on the bus when we used to walk together. I had never let him out of my sight because he is, after all, a child with special needs. Xi's busy day started early every morning. He would get up really early and review the travel information from his trainer repeatedly before leaving home. The trainer even made a photo album including bus route, road signs and landmarks at bus stops along with detailed descriptions, and directions on

how he should handle the situation in case he got lost. With the trainer's hard work, we are extremely happy that Xi can finally travel to school by bus independently. He has become more confident with himself, which is significant to his working and living in the future. Our family felt a big relief with his success in travel training. We are extremely grateful to all the teachers who encouraged him to participate in such a successful program. We hope more students like Xi will succeed in this great program so that they can make contributions to their community.

Parent of Xi T.
Ms. Xu

"Safety Comes First"

Christina, student P 721K

When I started travel training I was nervous at first but as the day went by I got comfortable and it became easy. The first thing to learn before starting is safety, the things that should be done, the things that should not be done. For example, before crossing the road, look both ways. Be sure that no cars are moving before you go across. Never cross on that green light, wait until you see that little man. That is the only time to go unless there is a crossing guard.

Do not talk to anyone that you don't know, if someone talks to you just walk away. My experience was good and bad, but mostly good. Ms. Walker was very good, also Mr. Gus. I felt safe knowing that they were supporting me. Whoever is going to be travel trained next, just believe in yourself and know that the trainers are there for you, and remember safety comes first. While you are crossing do not talk on your phone or listen to music.

Good Luck!

Steps to Travel

Jake from P721R

When we are in travel training we learn how to take the city bus. I had to follow steps with cards that had what bus or train to take to Manhattan to have breakfast with Ms Florence. Me and Mike Lee and Florence went to the Staten Island mall to shop and to take pictures. We took pictures of me crossing the street. I feel a little happy

Jake successfully completed the Travel Training program on July 30, 2010

Stories from Our Parent's Page

Letters to Gerard Grillo, Travel Training Teacher, Manhattan and Joan Ross, Travel Training Teacher,

Dear Gerard;

I wanted to send this letter for sometime, but just like everything else in our busy lives , time had gotten away from me and I didn't get a chance to do it. But when I received the forms for Jawaan's new travel training for September, I was determined to sit and get this letter out to you.

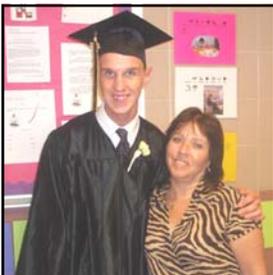
Firstly, I wanted to tell you, how grateful I am to your trainer, Ana (Carpio), who travel trained Jawaan earlier this year from our home to 226M @ 15th street. She was a delight to work with and Jawaan felt very comfortable with her as did I. I have to tell you in the beginning of this travel, I was hesitant, as other parents I'm sure are. But Ana's calls and the progress note everyday in Jawaan's book bag was my assurance that she was doing her job, and Jawaan was growing up and now traveling to school on his own.

Towards the end of the program, I wished that Ana could stay longer with Jawaan, not only for his safety but for my reassurance, lol. But by then Ana's last letter let me know that my son was ready to do it on his own and she was soon to leave us.

Ana was polite, very informative, and a very kind instructor. She always kept communications with me, whether it was by her daily notes or by a phone call in the evening to tell me of Jawaan's progress in the training or even if there was a problem during the training (which there wasn't).

I am asking for Jawaan's new training in September that Ana be assigned to him again. I hope that this request can be accommodated. I am sending this letter and request in a timely manner with hopes that this request can be approved.

Many thanks from both Jawaan and I. Sincerely, Tywana S.



Hi Ms. Ross

My thought and feelings on travel training:

I must say the day I got the phone call from Joan Ross informing me that it was Nick's turn to be travel trained., my heart sank. I was not ready to let Nick take such a big step in his life. I started to come up with all kinds of excuses as to why it wasn't a good idea. My husband on the other hand said "let him do it."

When Nick came home from school that day, he was VERY EXCITED! He handed me an envelope with the info about travel training. He said "Look it's my turn to be travel trained." Again my heart sank. I started giving Nick the same excuses I had given Ms. Ross as to why it might be a good idea to wait a little longer. Nick didn't want to hear any reasons why he shouldn't be travel trained. He said "I've been waiting a long time for this and now you won't let me do it. You are ruining my life." I went to the kitchen and Nick came after me and he could see the tears in my eyes and he said "Mom, are you mad at me?" I said, "No, Nick, we just worry about you." He said "Don't worry, I can do it." At that moment I knew we had to give him a chance.

I must tell you we are so GLAD we gave Nick that chance. Along with being travel trained, we bought Nick a cell phone for safety reasons. He calls when he gets to school and when he is leaving school. (Amazing how fast he learned to operate the cell phone).

Thanks to all the amazing hard work from Joan Ross and Oscar Martinez (Nick's Travel Trainer) all went well and Nick now travels to and from school independently. He also travels to his job site on his own.

We are very PROUD of Nick and most of all Nick is very PROUD of himself. Thanks again, Ms. Ross, Oscar everyone at OTC (P 721Q).

Stories From Our Student 's Page

By Myasia D. P



Myasia D.

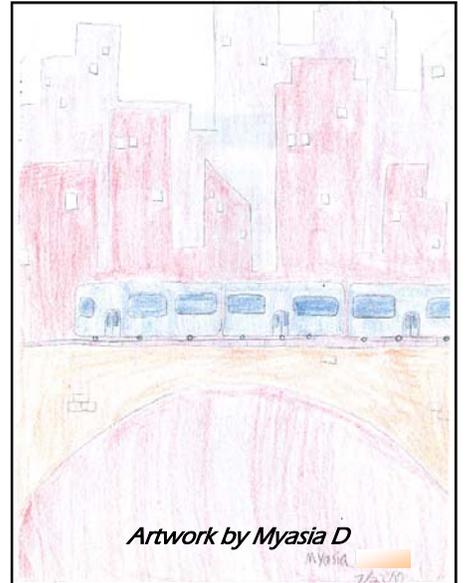
Ever since I cam to summer school I knew it would mean I have to go through the whole few months of traveling with my father. But now that I have successfully finished my travel training lessons I feel like a completely different person. The whole few weeks were really challenging.

I've learned what the difference is between going to a Brooklyn bound train and a Manhattan bound train. I've also learned how to go to the school by taking different routes. I even got to ride the Staten Island Ferry a few times.

One of my most favorite moments from travel training was when I used the pay phone to call the school. I was so happy I did it.

The hardest I had to do was figuring out the directions to my aunts house on Staten Island.

All in all it was a truly great experience.



Artwork by Myasia D

Roy's Travel Training and the Twister Aftermath

Roy September 20, 2010

This article is about me getting travel trained and explaining about the aftermath from the bad weather that causes a huge disaster.

When I was doing travel training for the first time with my travel trainer, Oscar, I felt a little nervous because I didn't know what was going to happen during my travel training.

After the past Wednesday, which was my first training, Thursday was going fine. But we were lucky that I made it home on time, because a little later something bad happened. When I went to the window I saw the rain, the winds and the thunder which was getting stronger. I felt that I had never seen weather anything

like this, and I didn't know what's going to happen on Friday's travel training.

On Friday morning, I was starting my third time of travel training, I went out and there is a tree knocked down in front of the walkway, so we have to turn left. There, a huge tree got knocked down, too,



Roy, on his way to school in the aftermath of tornados in Queens..

and is blocking the road. But we went 3 blocks away, and there a tree blocked the sidewalk. So there is a new thing about the travel training and we have to do a special circumstance to go to the other sidewalk when we have no choice but to cross the road while looking both ways.

The last thing I learned is what

happens if there is a wire in the middle of the road and there is a sidewalk that got blocked, so we have to cross the road carefully. Also, if the wire moves, I can't cross that road and I have to go another way, but lucky the wire didn't move and I crossed carefully.

When I went to the bus, there were trees torn apart and cars damaged from the street. I had in mind it was hot like a tour guide and it's like we're going on a safari, but luckily I went to school safely. In my travel training I've learned everything so far, but I have never experienced an event like that. But I never gave up and I move forward for what I need to learn about travel training. Someday I will achieve and go on my own on the bus after I pass travel training and they tell me I am ready.

(Not in Kansas anymore!)

Travel Training Surveys: Yesterday's Students Lead us into Tomorrow

Surveys are sent to former students and their families years after the students leave school to evaluate the long-term results of travel training. Respondents indicate that more than 80% continue to rely on public transportation to travel. Many have expanded their travel skills to new destinations and routes. A few respondents indicate that adult service providers prefer they use agency vans rather than public transit. The majority of those who fall into this category continue to travel independently to other places. Below are examples of responses to two of the questions on the 2008-2009 survey.

Do you think it is important for young people with disabilities to learn to use public transit and travel independently before leaving school?

- Yes. Once they leave school the supports associated with school are gone.
- Yes. This is their path to independence and consequently is a confidence builder and builds motivation to go out and lead fuller, more satisfying lives.
- Yes. From our experience he gained a lot of confidence in himself. We feel safer allowing him to go out. The great benefit is that he has more opportunities to participate in programs that do not have transportation. He's learned to deal with social aspects of traveling alone.
- Yes. One of the most important things – they use it. Gave him a lot of confidence, he feels so

good about himself.

- Yes. So that they can have some independence and freedom as well as responsibility.
- Yes. They will be well prepared in what to do if they get lost and they can take the knowledge they have after school and expand their horizons, as they stretch and grow.
- Yes. Because going to school is a learning experience and you should know how to travel by the time you leave school.
- Yes. Definitely yes! It gives them a sense of self. They are (my son is) more assertive and self-sufficient as a consequence.
- Yes. To be like everybody else – they don't want to be held back.
- Yes. It helped my son see he could do it on his own. I feel that it is very important.
- Yes. It gives them a sense of being like every body else.
- Yes. It boosts their morale and makes them feel better about themselves. He is less shy since being travel trained.

Do you have any comments or suggestions that will help our Travel Training Office prepare our young people and their families for their lives after school?

- All in all, he has become very independent usually declining a ride from me for local travel because he prefers to travel on his own. Independent travel was by leaps and bounds the most valuable thing that he learned during his school years – it leads to self reliance and flexibility, and critical

thinking skills when he has had to adjust for suspended service.

- He continues to follow the rules of travel taught him by his trainer. With that "under his belt" he has been able to expand travel as his interests and daily activities have evolved He is employed at Home Depot and travels there and home on his own. He could not be employed and lead a life as independent as he is without the travel training he received while at school. The experience was invaluable.
- It's important to find the right teacher for the student. Loved the daily note and think it's important for the parents to also talk to the trainer. It's wonderful to know that your child travels independently. He is very happy and he's safe.
- The ability for my son to travel on his own also empowered him to be productive in the community and his self-esteem improved as a result.
- That you remain with your discipline; well-prepared staff; you knew what to do and how to explain it to him.
- As I look back it was very scary. And just about every day I wanted to put her back on the yellow school bus. But, I thank God today that I didn't for not only did she grow, but it took a lot of stress off me, with the running around.

(Continued on page 7)



Travel Training Surveys: (Continued from Page 6)

- By letting young people with disabilities travel you're helping them open a new world of opportunities they can do for themselves without their parents or caregivers always chauffeuring them around.
- Educate the parents early on in their child's life to follow this path. I am very happy I did it and will never regret it.
- He was very happy that he had the chance to experience travel training with his school. Thank you for giving my son a chance to reach his goal. I hope in the future you will be available.
- I was afraid to let go because of cruel kids but I did let go. It is amazing to what see what these kids can do on their own. We are the ones who hold them back.
- Promote greater public awareness of people with disabilities who are using public transportation so that the public does not mistreat them.

Our Students Know Best

By Florence Tuchman Shomer

I was having a conversation today with a friend who lives in Manhattan. We were discussing the various new transit changes, specifically the Select Bus Service that just began with the M15 bus. Part of the change included bus stops moving their locations, a different way of paying the fare, boarding and exiting the bus. She was quite frustrated with all the changes in her routine. My friend com-

mented to me how difficult it must be for the students we train to handle all the changes that are occurring. It was amazing to me how our students handle all the changes with a smile as opposed to a grunt; and "go with the flow". They may need some additional instruction to learn some of the changes, but once they do, there is no complaint! When you travel on a school bus, since you are four years old, and finally in high school you begin to travel independently on public transporta-

tion, there are very few things that daunt you.

I've begun to think how our society spends so much money on counseling, therapy, yoga, meditation, weekend retreats in order to help us handle the stresses of our daily lives (including transit changes). It might do us well to spend some time with a young adult with a disability who is learning and accomplishing the skills needed to be independent, and handling life just fine!!!

A Day in my Life of Travel Training: by Elvin @ P 721M

I am in Travel Training with Ms Judy and Ms Lola. I told them one morning this is what happened on my way to school:

Today I got on the #5 train but it was making the same stops as the #2 or #3

I couldn't get off at 14th Street

The train kept going to Brooklyn

I got off at Hoyt Street. I made a phone call to Ms Florence. I asked the Conductor what to do. She told me to get back on the train and get off at Atlantic Avenue.

I tried to leave the station. I was told I am not allowed to leave a station and go outside

I had to ask the conductor. She told me to get on the train and get off at Nevins.

I asked the next conductor at Nevins what to do and he said to go up and cross over.

I went up but there was nowhere to go. I went back down to the platform.

I asked the next conductor. She said to go downstairs to the Manhattan side.

I went downstairs. I followed the signs. I found the #2/#3 platform

I asked the next conductor. I told her I had to go to Houston St, 14th St, Chambers St. She told me I was confusing her and to get on the train. I did.

The conductor came into the car and explained to me what to do

I got off at Chambers Street. I waited for the #1 train. I got off at Houston Street. I walked to my school.

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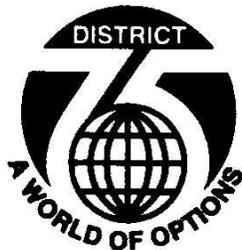
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Edit & layout by Steve Gallo, Office of Travel Training

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.

Above 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.