

Improving your mobility

Suzy McDonald, Mobility Officer with Birmingham City Council, makes some suggestions about developing mobility skills in young adulthood.

Mobility training - talk the talk then walk the walk.

As a teenager with a vision impairment, it's likely that you will have been offered mobility training at some point in your life. It might have covered:

- how to use a long cane effectively
- how to plan and follow a route within school or in your local area
- how to catch the bus from home to school
- lessons suggesting strategies for staying safe when crossing roads and when out and about.

You might also have covered some independent living skills, such as making hot drinks and snacks.

Taking things into your own hands (and feet)

Whilst you might have your mobility lessons in school time, they're not the same as learning a subject to pass a GCSE or an A level. There isn't a set curriculum that you need to learn that's the same for every student.

Instead a successful programme of mobility training should be personal to you. It should take into account your age, your family background, where you live, your previous life experience, what your friends are doing and so much more.

The key to a good working relationship with your mobility specialist is communication, and the more articulate you are about your desires for what you want to get out of mobility training, the better.

Think about some new mobility goals

It might be that:

- Your friends have started meeting in town on a Saturday and you want to meet up with them too, but you're not sure of the best route into town.
- You no longer want to rely on a sighted adult to walk to the local shop, but want to use your cane to find the way yourself.
- You want to start catching the bus to school rather than your mum dropping you off.

- Your mum's stressy in the kitchen and you just want to make tea and toast when you get in from school without her hanging around!
- You're starting college and need to catch the train there but need to know how to look up timetables online.

A mobility specialist's role is to enable you to achieve your goals by working together with you and your family to find ways you can walk to the shop or meet your friends. He or she can talk to you about a whole range of strategies for safe travel, such as:

- Using your hearing and vision to identify the best places to cross roads when walking into town.
- Staying safe when out and about.
- Using a GPS system to learn a route.
- Setting up a buddy system so a friend sighted guides you around school instead of an adult.
- Which equipment, specialist or otherwise, enables you to be independent yet safe when pouring hot water or chopping food.

The end goal for you and your mobility specialist is that you become a young adult who is capable of travelling around your environment safely and to the best of your ability. Even if you do not receive regular mobility training any more, and are confident in your school and home environments, you can request mobility training if you are preparing new skills for leaving home. You can discuss this with your VI teacher or Mobility Officer.