

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia contribution to the Accessible Transport Consultative Groups awareness training group

Introduction

The needs of people with Spinal cord injuries (SCI) differ greatly from those of many other disabilities. Typically a person with an SCI will only be disabled by bodily limitations, these can present themselves ranging from incomplete Paraplegia (can walk with assistance) through to high level Quadriplegia (may only have functionality through neck and head). A person with an SCI will not have any cognitive deficiencies (unless a secondary disability was acquired at point of injury) and thus can interpret signs, understand language, communicate and think as effectively as a person without a disability. The only real impact that a developing accessible transport network will have on them is through wheelchair access.

Transport providers SCI training background

A few core issues need to be addressed when looking at what elements of training are required for transport operators to assist them in better working with people with SCI's. This can be addressed by exposure and conversation with people with SCI's.

- 1) A person with an SCI is not stupid; they do not require that the transport worker speaks to their carer.
- 2) People with SCI's were not born with an SCI and so existed as people without disabilities for a number of years and so can feel more acute annoyance when accessibility is an issue as previously it was easy to move about NSW.
- 3) SCI affected people like to be as independent as possible.

Training delivery

There are few specific requirements for a person with an SCI that a transport provider needs to understand as opposed to other disabilities, for example escorting a person with a visual disability requires specific handling techniques and dialogue to reassure the person being assisted.

A person with an SCI only requires courtesy, to know what's happening and to be asked how they would like to be assisted.

Summary

As the Ministry of Transport is looking at staff training needs in terms of a cross disability awareness program many of the specific needs of other groups will also show benefit to a person with an SCI. Although our discussion around SCI awareness appears light on the ground the elements mentioned are essential to a positive experience on the NSW accessible network.

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