

**How can Visionary members
help improve the experience
of public transport for people
with visual impairments?**

Case studies



REVEALING REALITY

About this document

The project sought to help Visionary better understand the challenges people with visual impairments (VI) experience when using and accessing public transport. Specifically, the research aimed to:

- Build on existing knowledge of challenges and understand them in greater depth
- Explore the impact of poor access to public transport on the wider lives of people experiencing sight loss
- Identify opportunities for supporting people with VI

In-depth interviews were carried out with 20 people with visual impairments.

This document includes 6 key case studies:

- **Kelly** (Page 3-6)
- **Pavel** (Page 7-10)
- **Hassan** (Page 11-14)
- **Kesi** (Page 15-18)
- **James** (Page 19-22)
- **Daniel** (Page 23-26)

These case studies outline people's experiences, challenges and strategies using public transport with a visual impairment. *All participants are referred to with pseudonyms.*

A summary report and film sits alongside these case studies.

KELLY

58, WOLVERHAMPTON

After a failed cornea graft, Kelly was diagnosed developed a **complex glaucoma**. She is blind in one eye and has approximately 10-12% vision in the other.

Kelly describes herself as having, “**more confidence than capability**”. This attitude means she decides what she wants to do first and then finds a solution to get there. Kelly has a busy social life and is supported by her **husband, children and friends**. Outside of this, she is a **magistrate and part time carer** for her father.



Travel Matters: Case studies

A TYPICAL WEEK FOR KELLY

Kelly normally travels using **taxis**, both local firms and Uber. She also feels fairly confident walking and has had positive experiences using the train or tram.

- **Spending time with her also retired husband.**
Kelly sees the quality time she gets to spend with her husband as an unexpected perk of losing her vision. They had always been quite independent in their marriage but now enjoy spending more time together such as starting every morning with a cup of tea in bed.
- **Sitting in court as a magistrate.**
Kelly has been a magistrate for 6 years, she sees it as a way to keep her mind active, meet new people and continue the fulfilment she used to get working as a social worker.
- **Caring for her elderly father.**
Kelly's father lives in supported housing a short drive from her home. Although caring for him can be challenging, she describes the confidence it gives her explaining, **"If I can deal with him, I can deal with anything"**
- **Attending her VI support group.**
The Tuesday group was set up by Beacon and has continued independently by the members. They share practical tips like new technology and also support each other when something goes wrong or someone needs help.
- **Going to the theatre and seeing concerts with friends.**
Kelly uses her free companion ticket to see a range of musicals, plays and tribute bands with friends. For example, she recently went to see Ocean at the End of the Lane using audio description during the show and touch tours of the stage before the play.



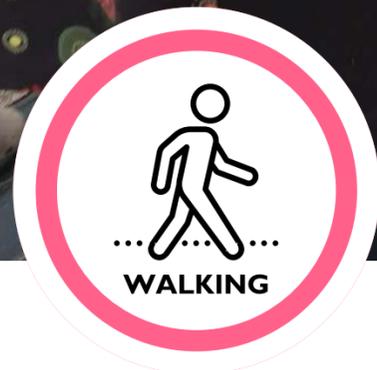


MOST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Kelly uses taxis as her primary form of transport.

A taxi driver ignored her and **dropped her in a different area** meaning she didn't know where she was and had to ask for help. She had a repeat issue with an Uber driver **changing the end point of the journeys** so he could overcharge. She also had an Uber driver get to her location but **cancel the journey** when he saw she was blind.



BARRIERS

Kelly feeling confident walking in familiar places but under lower lighting can **lose track of her reference landmarks** and become confused.



BARRIERS

Kelly has used the train to visit her daughter and has had positive experiences, especially using passenger assistance.

Kelly mentioned a **lack of consistent audio announcements** as an issue in navigating train stations and journeys.



LEAST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Kelly rarely uses buses and tries to avoid them when she can.

This is in part due to personal preference but she also mentioned buses being **inconsistent, not turning up on time or not turning up at all.**

WHAT DOES KELLY DO TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASIER?

TAXIS



Part of the reason Kelly feels so confident travelling is having **access to taxis**. Despite the higher cost compared to buses and trams, she feels financially secure with a good pension, enabling her to primarily use taxis for transportation.

Kelly particularly likes **Uber** because:

- The app is accessible.
- The service is generally quick and reliable.
- If she leaves anything on the uber, she's easily able to get it back through the app.
- She can quickly report problems and finds they are dealt with quickly.

TECHNOLOGY



Kelly uses a **range of technology** for example, she uses audio-description kitchen utensils has specialised screen readers so she can play piano and is working on adapting her home to her needs.

She gets **help from her children** to with keeping up to date with new technology.

When it comes to travelling she uses **Google Maps with her Amazon Alexa** to plan journeys and keep up to date with travel disruptions.

SUPPORT



Kelly is supported by her **husband, children and close friends**. They provide her with emotional support and social plans to encourage her to go out and travel independently.

For example, she describes going to theatre shows with her friends, visiting her daughter in Hertford and spending quality time each morning with her husband as they plan their day.

Kelly feels confident knowing that if she has to make **new and unfamiliar journeys a friend or family member will be available** to go with her until she feels able to do so on her own.

PAVEL

33, ABERDEEN

Pavel was diagnosed with **Retina Pigmentosa** in his early twenties. Within the last five years his eyesight has deteriorated leaving him with tunnel vision with approximately 10-15% vision.

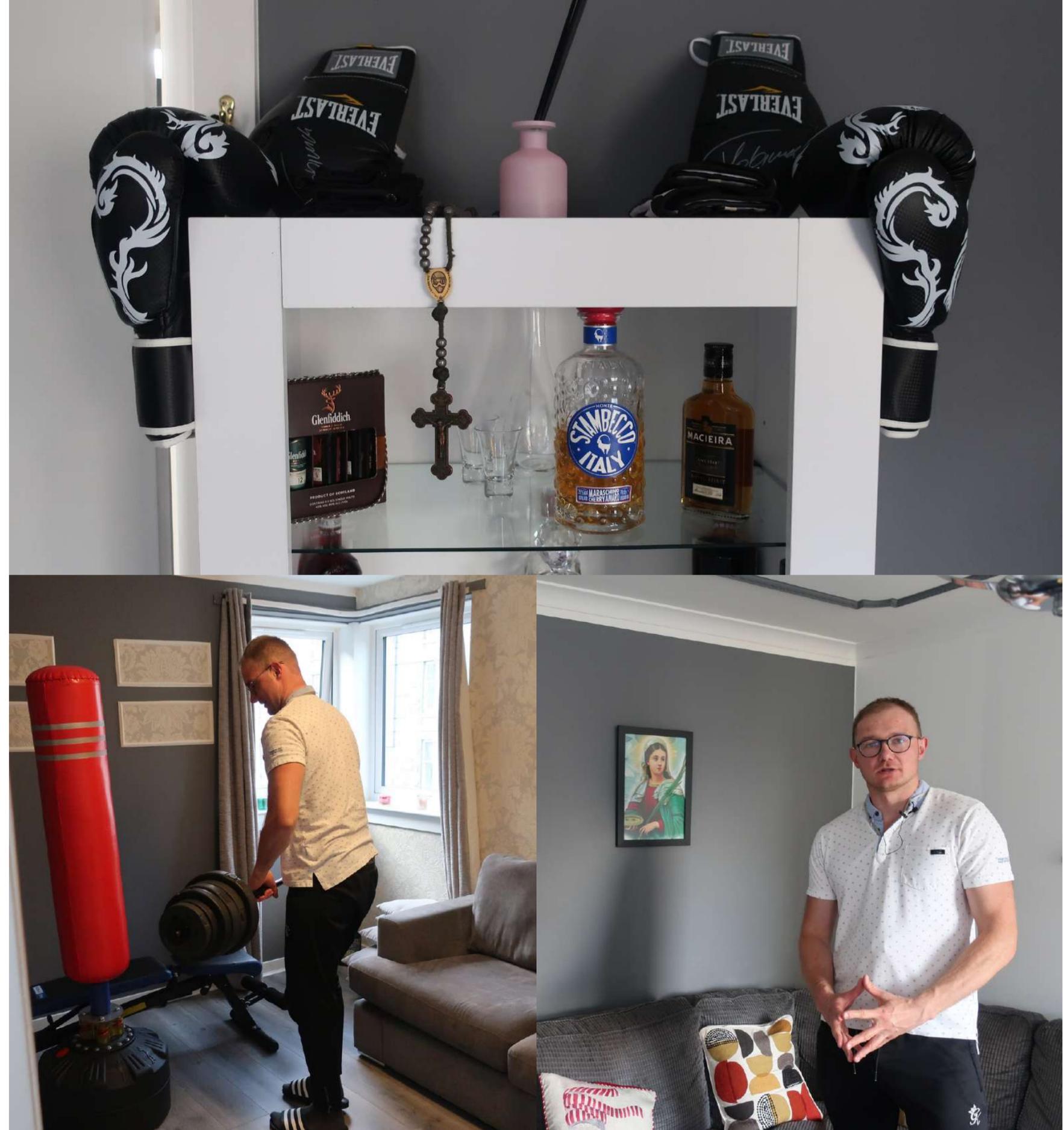
Pavel's biggest barriers to getting out is his self-consciousness, as he explains, "**I have in my mind that everyone's watching me like I'm an alien**". Although he is fairly confident travelling, taking the buses regularly on his own, Pavel prefers to stay indoors in fear of embarrassing himself in public. Pavel has goals to start working again as a masseuse and find a partner, however, his **low self-confidence holds him back**.



A TYPICAL WEEK FOR PAVEL

Pavel typically relies on buses or walking. However, when taking new or unfamiliar journeys he uses taxis. He'll also use the train but only when accompanied by a friend or relative.

- **Looking after his nephews.**
His sister, brother in law and their 2 sons live a 10 minute bus ride away. He visits them around 3-4 times a week and helps look after kids. He describes how his nephews have adjusted to his visual impairment explaining, **"In the street they hold my hand and I say, look you are my vision"**.
- **Working out at home**
Pavel has a small set of gym equipment in his flat working out around 2-3 hours a day. He would love to go to a gym and have access to a wider variety of equipment, however, his low confidence holds him back. He knows he would need help from the staff to understand the layout of the gym and how to use the equipment but feels too self-conscious to ask.
- **Meeting with his friends**
Sometimes Pavel meets a group of close friends he knew from school. They either go to each other's houses, go to the pub or even clubbing. When he's out with his friends he feels more confident explaining, **"whenever I go with them, they know how I see, so we can even dance and have fun"**.
- **Seeing his parents**
Pavel and his sister moved to the UK twelve years ago, but his parents are still based in Poland. A couple times a year they'll meet up, either Pavel and his sister flying home or his Dad coming to visit them in the UK.





MOST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Pavel uses the busses around 3-4 times a week. Often there is **not enough contrast** meaning he finds it hard to find seats. This is also true for **the First Bus app**, which he finds hard to use due to the lack of contrast.

The **inconsistency and changing design of buses and bus stops** causes Pavel confusion, for example, the notice board changed position in his local bus stop and he was unable to locate the sign.



BARRIERS

Pavel normally walks to the bus stop and within the centre of town. He explains his difficulty with walking as a matter of "**not knowing what he doesn't know.**"

For example, until recently he was unaware of a crossing just outside his house as no one had told him it was there. This is amplified by street **layouts and design being frequently changed** without him being updated.



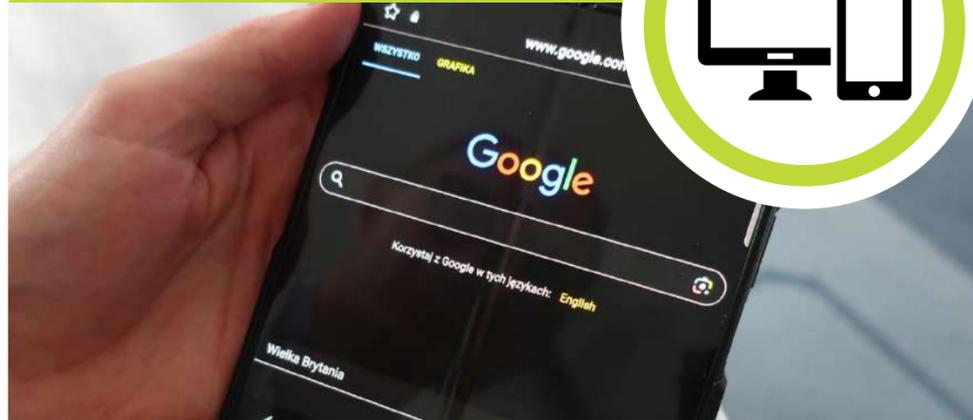
LEAST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

He's only used trains on a few occasions and only with friends and family able to guide him through the journey.

WHAT DOES PAVEL DO TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASIER?

TECHNOLOGY



Pavel has a **range of technology** which he uses in his daily life. For example, he uses a screen reader, has installed LED lights in his kitchen and living room to increase the contrast and has audio-description kitchen utensils.

In particular he likes his **Samsung foldable phone** for its large screen and font size. On this he uses his apps and browser with **black background and white text**. Although, he's able to adjust most of his apps to be high contrast, the First Bus app doesn't offer that meaning it's harder to use and he has to rely on his screen reader.

PLANNING



Pavel makes travelling easier by **planning each journey before leaving the house**.

For example, although he's able to see Google Maps on his phone inside, when outside in brighter light it's harder to see. To help with this he plans his journey on Google Maps whilst inside, takes note of the journeys and uses his screen reader to speak it to him when travelling.

ASKING FOR HELP



Pavel also finds it useful to **ask other passengers, drivers and staff for help**. For example, when he's using taxis he will ask the driver to describe where he's been dropped off, point out any pathways and entrance points to buildings.

However, whilst Pavel feels confident asking for help to strangers, **he's nervous asking for help if he thinks he'll see the person again**. For example, part of the reason he's hesitant to join a public gym is he would feel embarrassed asking the staff for help knowing he would then subsequently see them throughout the week.

HASSAN

32, BEDFORDSHIRE

In January last year, Hassan was playing football when he suddenly lost vision in one of his eyes and then in August the same happened to his other eye. He has since been diagnosed with **Diabetic Retinopathy and Macular Oedema.**

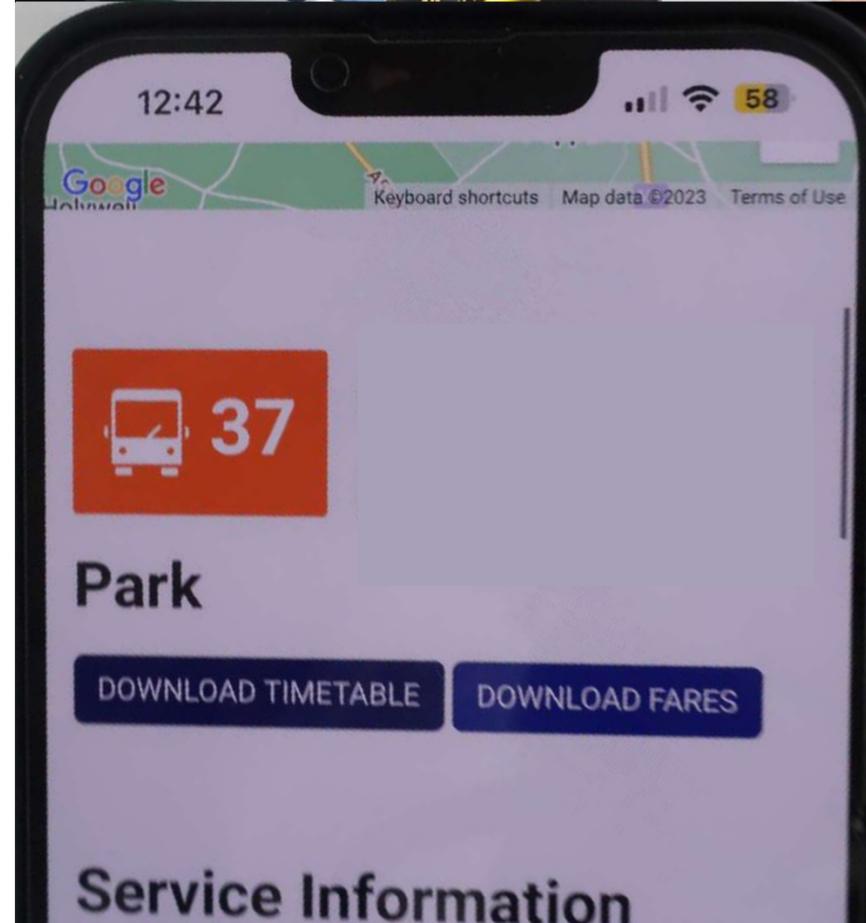
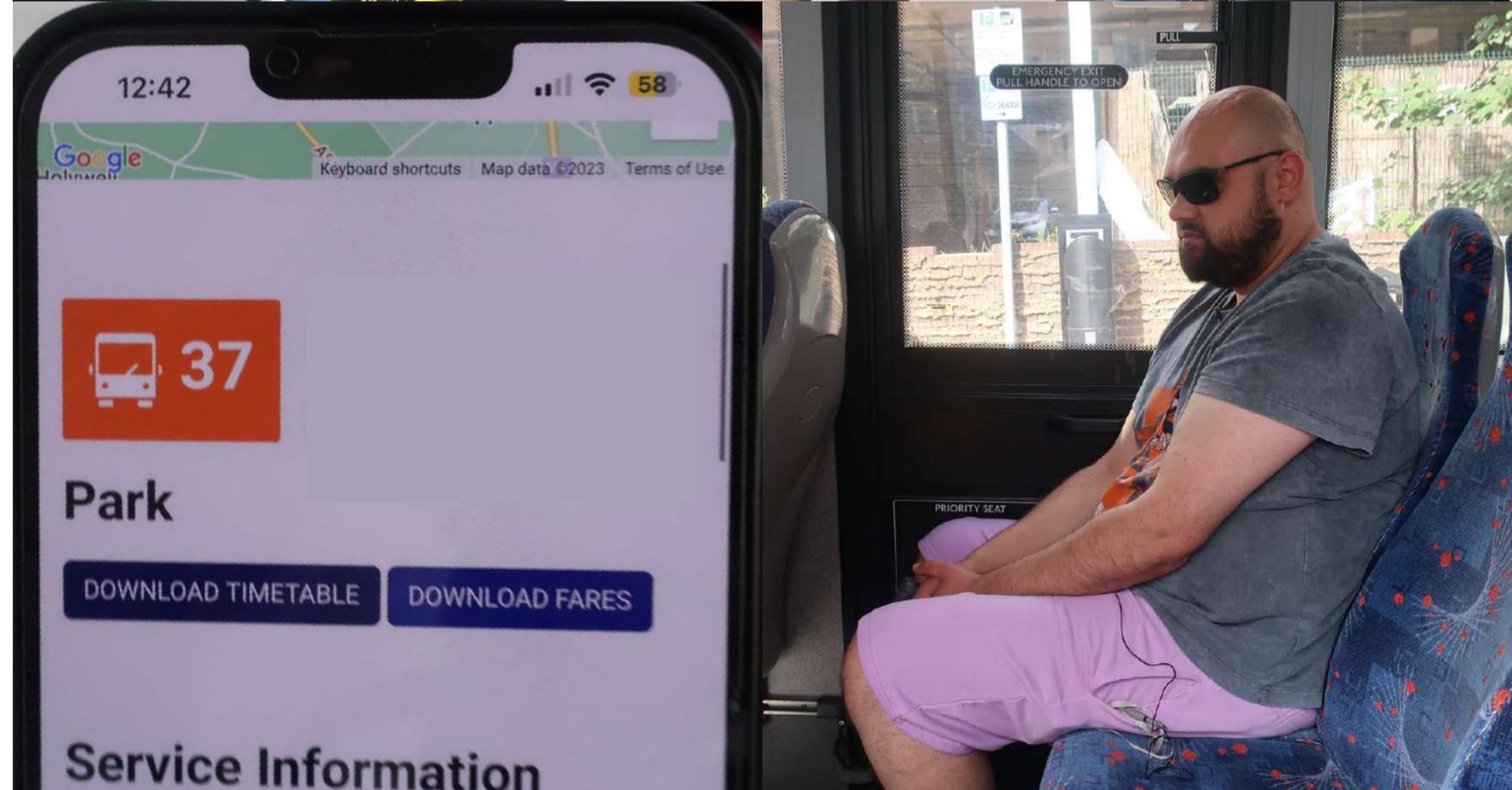
Hassan is struggling to accept his condition and find ways to work his life around his new needs. He describes feeling isolated, lonely and depressed explaining, **"I just sit in the darkness... my typical day would just be doing nothing sitting around waiting for somebody to ring me, pick me up".**

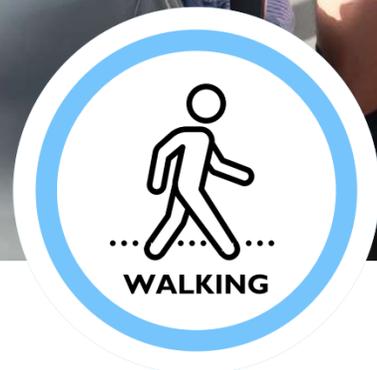


A TYPICAL WEEK FOR HASSAN

Hassan mostly relies on his **wife, family and friends to drive him** but does take the **bus** sometimes to health appointments.

- **Going to the town centre for health appointments**
Hassan is currently receiving laser treatment for his eye sight, these appointments normally happen once or twice a month a short bus journey away. He normally takes the bus there himself, as it is a journey he knows well. However, he does need his wife to check the bus schedule for him as he does not know how to use a screen reader yet.
- **Working as a data analyst**
Hassan used to work as a data analyst. Before losing his sight, Hassan had an ambition to progress his work in IT but now he feels that is no longer possible. His company have been supportive since his sight loss, offering aids and adaptations for him to keep working, however he is now at a stage where he has taken sick leave to receive treatment for his VI. He worries that he will not be able to return to work, or if he is able to that he will struggle compared to his colleagues. This has been difficult for Hassan, as he explains **“I did love my job it was awesome work.. I had massive ambitions, big dreams of doing stuff that have been wiped as soon as my vision went”**
- **Meeting friends**
Before losing his vision, Hassan would meet with his friends a few times a week at a local car park. However, now he sees his friends only a few times a month. He describes feeling embarrassed being seen as **“the disabled one”** and subsequently does not want to ask for lifts or get the bus.





MOST COMMONLY USED

LEAST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Before losing his eyesight, Hassan saw driving as a big part of his identity. However, he now relies on his **wife to drive him places** or to get lifts from other friends and family.

This is a problem as his **wife also isn't confident driving** and so he often is limited in where he can go and what he can do.

BARRIERS

Hassan walks to nearby places like the off-licence shop a few times a week. On a few occasions, he has tripped on **broken or uneven pavement**. He also struggles when the edge of the pavement **isn't contrasted enough** with the road.

BARRIERS

Hassan takes the bus a few times a month. He **only feels comfortable with familiar routes** and his **wife has to check the bus times** and route for him before he leaves.

He struggles sometimes to **hail the bus to get it to stop**. He also finds that the buses are **irregular** and often don't turn up. When on the bus, he **struggles to find key points** like the touch card point and priority seats. Sometimes the bus driver **starts driving before he's sat down**.

BARRIERS

He hasn't used the train yet, as he **assumed he wouldn't be able to navigate** the station or get any help getting on and off the train.

He **wasn't aware that passenger assistance existed** and didn't know how he could access it.

WHAT DOES HASSAN DO TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASIER?

SUPPORT FROM HIS WIFE



Hassan is dependent on his wife.

His main form of transport is his wife driving him, despite her being a nervous driver herself. When he is travelling alone, by bus, he relies on his wife to check the bus timetables and plan his route.

Outside of transport, his wife supports him, arranging appointments, reading information from the hospital, and providing practical help like giving eyedrops. She also has become the primary carer for their two children. Hassan can play with them whilst she cooks dinner, he said that he struggles to provide practical help like cleaning up after them or helping with homework.

Hassan's dependence on his wife has impacted their relationship, as he explains, **"it is a huge strain on her, I feel so bad, she's become my carer and she's not even compensated with anything like a carers allowance"**.

WHAT WOULD HELP HASSAN TRAVEL MORE?

Hassan **lacks awareness of the support available** to him and how to access this. For example, during the interview Hassan explained he would struggle to navigate train stations and get on and off the trains. When the researcher asked if he had used passenger assistance it became clear he didn't know it existed or how to access it.

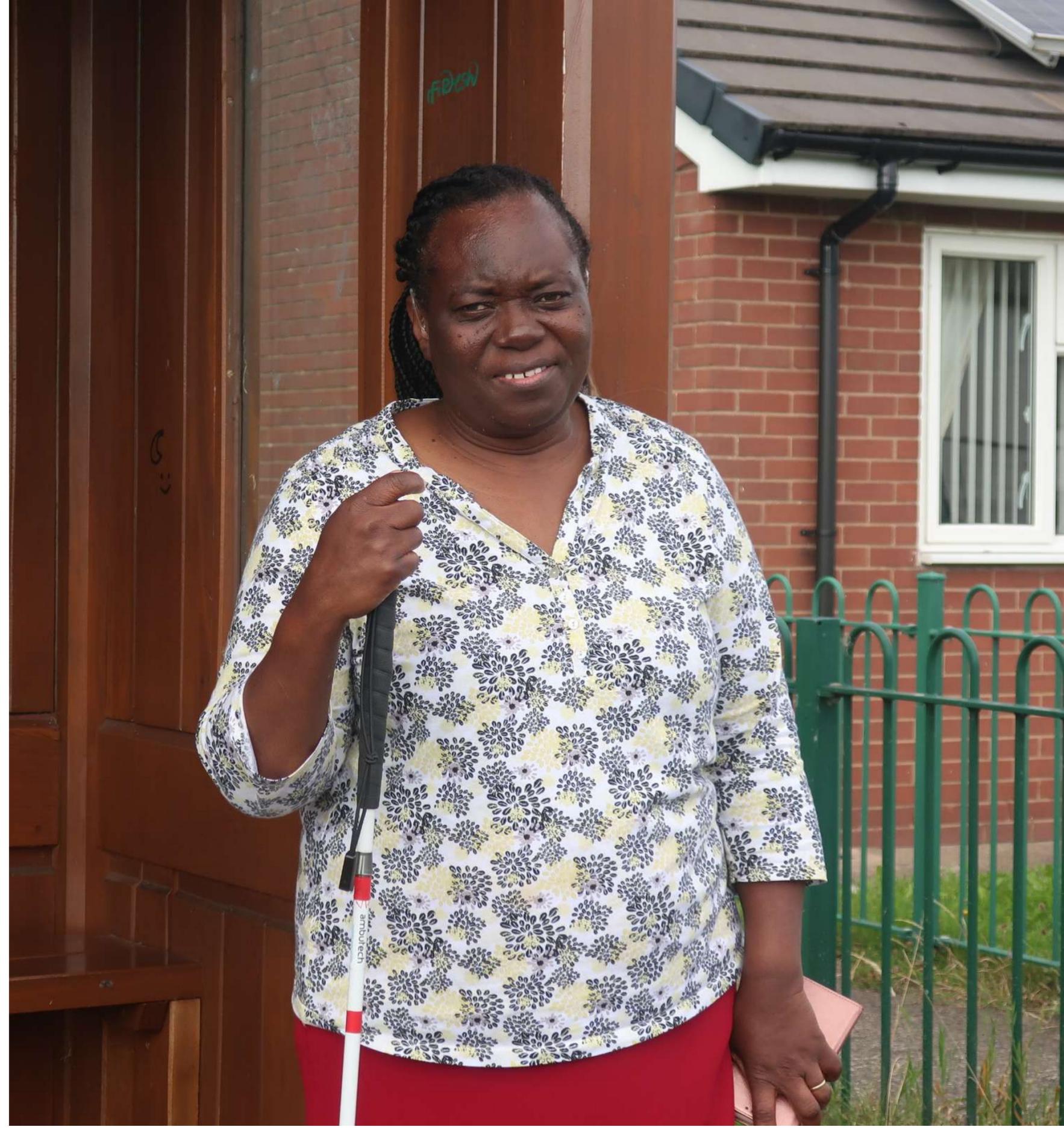
In particular, Hassan could be better connected to **technological support**. For example, having access to a screen reader could help him plan his own journeys and be less dependent on his wife.

KESI

58, WREXHAM

When Kesi was 25 she was diagnosed with **Retina Pigmentosa** after experiencing night blindness. She has limited vision in both eyes and also has a hearing impairment.

Kesi's main issue is **missed communications and opportunities**. Kesi often misses phone calls, struggles to read texts and can't access her email. She feels this is due to the combination of her hearing and visual impairment. This means that she misses communication from support groups, health services and charities.



A TYPICAL WEEK FOR KESI

Kesi's main form of transport is the **bus** and she also feels fairly confident **walking**.

- **Seeing family**
Kesi lives in a flat with her husband. She has a busy household, caring for her niece and nephew and having regular visits from her step-daughter. She also has other family across the UK in Oxford, Birmingham and Manchester and her husband will sometimes drive her to see them.
- **Attending support groups**
Kesi also engages in some support groups. For example, she goes to a bowling group every Wednesday in a nearby town. Kesi would like to get involved in more groups but has often missed communication about them. For example, she got invited to a craft group but missed the bus and didn't make it. She tried calling them, and they tried calling her, but she missed the calls and has been unable to get back in touch since.
- **Applying for jobs**
Before losing her vision, Kesi used to work as in rehabilitation at the disability department of a hospital. When she came to the UK her eyesight had deteriorated significantly and she felt unconfident applying for jobs. In COVID-19 lockdown, she reached out for support from Jobsense. However, when applying she often misses follow up communications like phone calls and emails.





MOST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Kesi gets the bus into Wrexham a few times a week. She **struggles to plan journeys** as she **cannot access bus apps**, for example, the Arriva app needs to be verified by email or phone both of which she struggles to use.

She has previously **fallen into the gap between the bus and the pavement**. She has also fallen when the bus driver has **started the bus before she has been able to sit down**.

There are **no audio announcements** on the busses that she uses, so she relies on passengers and the driver to let her know her stop and often they forget.



BARRIERS

Kesi often walks around her local area and to her bus stop.

She **limits the times in which she'll walk outside**. She lives near a school and is concerned to walk around when at the busiest times of the day.

She struggles with **changing layouts**. For example, she was not told when her local bus stop shut down. She went to the stop to wait for the bus and was only told by a passer by, who then walked her to another stop.



LEAST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Kesi used to regularly use trains. However, when at Chester train station the **gap wasn't announced she fell between the train and the platform**. Her husband and a member of staff helped her out of the gap and she was left with cuts and a knee injury from the fall.

She hasn't been on the train since as her **husband worries the same thing will happen again** and her own **confidence using trains has been knocked**.

WHAT DOES KESI DO TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASIER?

ASKING FOR HELP



Kesi often is reliant on passersby, other passengers and staff for travelling. She describes herself as, **"Very good at asking for help"**. People often provide help without her asking too. For example, walking her off the bus, telling her where the seats are and helping her find her way.

This is especially true for buses where there is **lack of audio announcements**. She **relies on bus drivers and passengers to let her know when her stop is**. She has previously had problems where the bus driver has forgotten to tell her when her stop is, leading to her getting lost.

SUPPORT GROUPS



Kesi engages with a few **support groups** e.g. the Vision Support group and her local bowling club. She's also used services like **Jobsense** for helping with job applications and has done a **mental toughness course** through lockdown to help tackle loneliness.

However, she often **struggles to make these connections and maintain contact**. For example, she wanted to go to a craft group but missed the train and wasn't able to make follow up contact.

TECHNOLOGY



Kesi does have some limited access to technology, such as using a **screen reader** on her phone and an app that can **read documents to her if she takes photographs of them**.

However, she **struggles to get help accessing technology and learning how to use it**. For example, she got a laptop but when it stopped working she struggled to get back in touch with the organisation to fix it.

JAMES

58, WREXHAM

When James was a baby he was diagnosed with **Retina Blastoma** and by the age of 10 he had both his eyes removed.

James describes how he has, "**learnt to do everything as a blind person**" without knowing any different. He has an active social life and channels his passion for music into playing in a band, running open mic nights and working as a sound technician.



Travel Matters: Case studies

A TYPICAL WEEK FOR JAMES

James **walks** most places as he lives a short walk from the centre of town.

However, he is also comfortable taking **buses and trains**.

- **Seeing family**
James lives with his wife and eldest daughter, he also has two other daughters and four grandchildren. They all live around Wrexham and they regularly do family trips like going swimming, out for food or trips to the park.
- **Working as a sound tech and accessibility tester**
For work, James does a combination of work as a sound technician and testing accessibility of webpages with screen readers. He doesn't enjoy accessibility testing but sees it as a way to fill up his day and create an extra income. He prefers his work as a sound technician, but he worries that he relies too heavily on personal contacts to hire him and won't be able to keep up with developments in technology as he explains, **"I need people to value what I do not how I do it"**
- **Music**
Outside of work, music is also a big part of James' social life. He runs open mic nights roughly once a month, plays drums in a band and is teaching himself guitar.
- **Going to church**
Christianity is a big part of James' life. He regularly goes to his local church and donates a portion of his income to them.
- **Doing DIY**
James also likes to work on DIY projects. He has set up a tool shed with adapted tools like a screwdriver and level measure that audio-announce what is happening.





MOST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

James normally walks to and from the town centre.

He struggles when the **cycle lanes overlap or are not clearly separated from pavements.**

He also finds it difficult to avoid **bumping into pedestrians.** This is because some people, especially children, will be too quiet when they walk past for him to locate them using echolocation.



BARRIERS

James can easily take local buses when he doesn't want to walk into the centre of town.

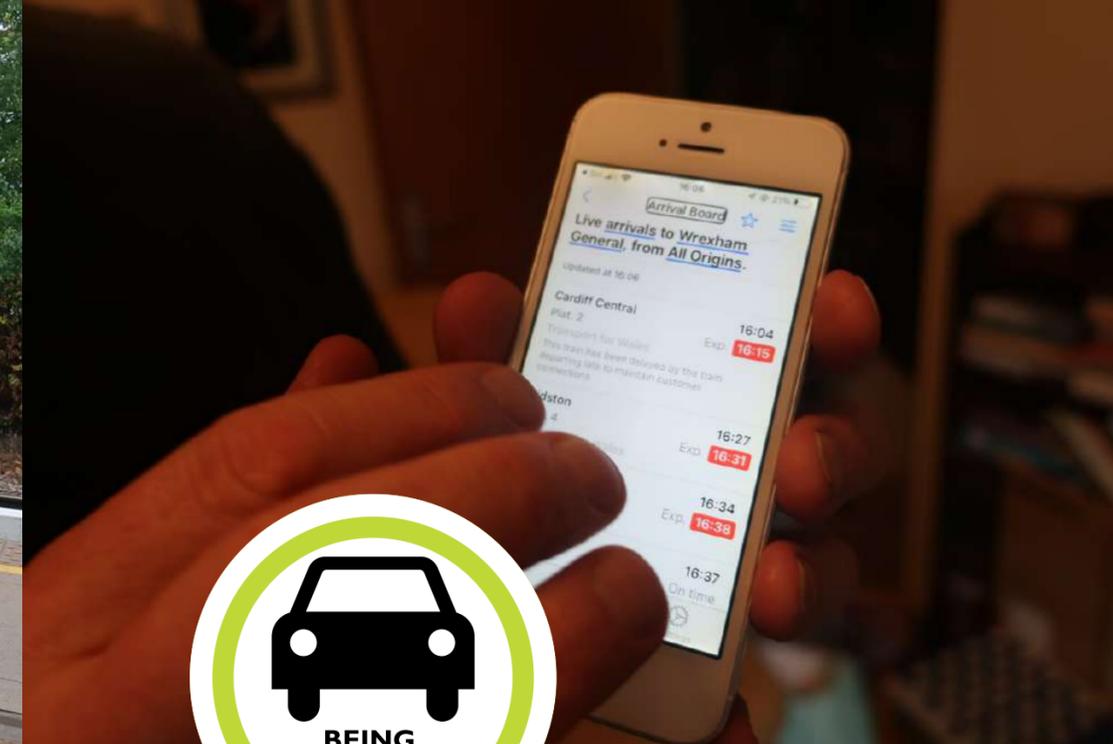
The main challenges he faces, is the **audio descriptions not working on the bus.** He has previously complained to Arriva buses about it. He often **relies on other passengers** or the driver to tell him when to get off.



BARRIERS

James takes the train when he needs to make longer journeys, regularly booking passenger assistance.

He struggles with **changing and confusing layouts** in the train stations. For example, he described Birmingham New Street train station "**like an airport**".



BARRIERS

James relies on his wife for lifts home when making journeys late at night, such as to and from gigs. However, he is conscious on relying too much on his wife explaining, "**I don't want to treat my wife as a driver**".

LEAST COMMONLY USED

WHAT DOES JAMES DO TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASIER?

TECHNOLOGY



James has access to a wide range of technology to make general life and travelling easier. He has a **phone and laptop with a screen reader and braille key board**. He finds the screen reader works well on travel apps like Trainline.

He also uses the **Soundscape app** to help him navigate and avoid bumping into obstacles, he uses this with his **bone conducting headphones** so he can hear his surroundings as well as the app talking.

SUPPORT



James is **close to his wife and family**, three daughters and four grandchildren, all of whom live close around Wrexham. He also has a large group of **friends** who he knows from the pubs where he gigs and hosts open mic nights and friends he's met from working as a sound technician.

He has an **active social life**, regularly going out for meals, having a drink at the pub and playing music together.

ASKING FOR HELP



James does **rely on asking other passengers or staff for help** on public transport. This is due to the **lack of audio-announcements** on his local buses and trains. He finds that people are usually helpful, however there have been **incidents where bus drivers in particular have forgotten to notify him of his stop** leading to him missing his stop and getting lost.

DANIEL

57, BEDFORD

Twenty years ago Daniel started to lose his sight at night and was diagnosed with **Retina Pigmentosa**. A few years later his peripheral sight deteriorated and now he has limited central vision and can only see a few metres in front of him

Daniel initially described feeling depressed when his vision deteriorated. However, through **getting involved with organisations** like Sight Concern and **developing new hobbies** like wine tasting, cooking and playing the saxophone, he is adapting his life and continuing to do the things he loves.



A TYPICAL WEEK FOR DANIEL

Daniel normally takes taxis and if they are not available he will walk or take the bus.

- **Spending time with his wife, family and friends**
Daniel lives with his wife, who works in a senior position in the finance industry. They have managed to adapt their home for Daniel and now regularly host friends at dinner parties and barbeques. He meets up with his friends regularly, however he does miss being able to make plans more spontaneously like he could when he could drive.
- **Being a board member for Sight Concern**
Before losing his vision Daniel worked as a Resource Manager for a computer company. Daniel is on the board for Sight Concern, enabling him to feel a sense of responsibility and purpose that his previous work gave him. He volunteers providing services to other people with VI and helps Sight Concern with project management too.
- **Running his wine club**
Outside of sitting on the Sight Concern board, Daniel also runs a community wine club. He took a wine tasting course before losing his vision and has now developed it into an official business. The wine club meets up every fortnight to taste and discuss the chosen wine for the week.
- **Driving**
Before losing his vision, Daniel really enjoyed driving, especially the freedom and spontaneity that it gave him. He is not currently able to drive in everyday life, however he has recently found an organisation that enables VI people to drive. The sessions allow him to drive luxury cars in an airfield, with a secondary driver who can step in if Daniel is struggling.





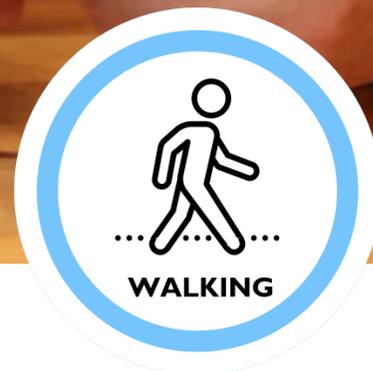
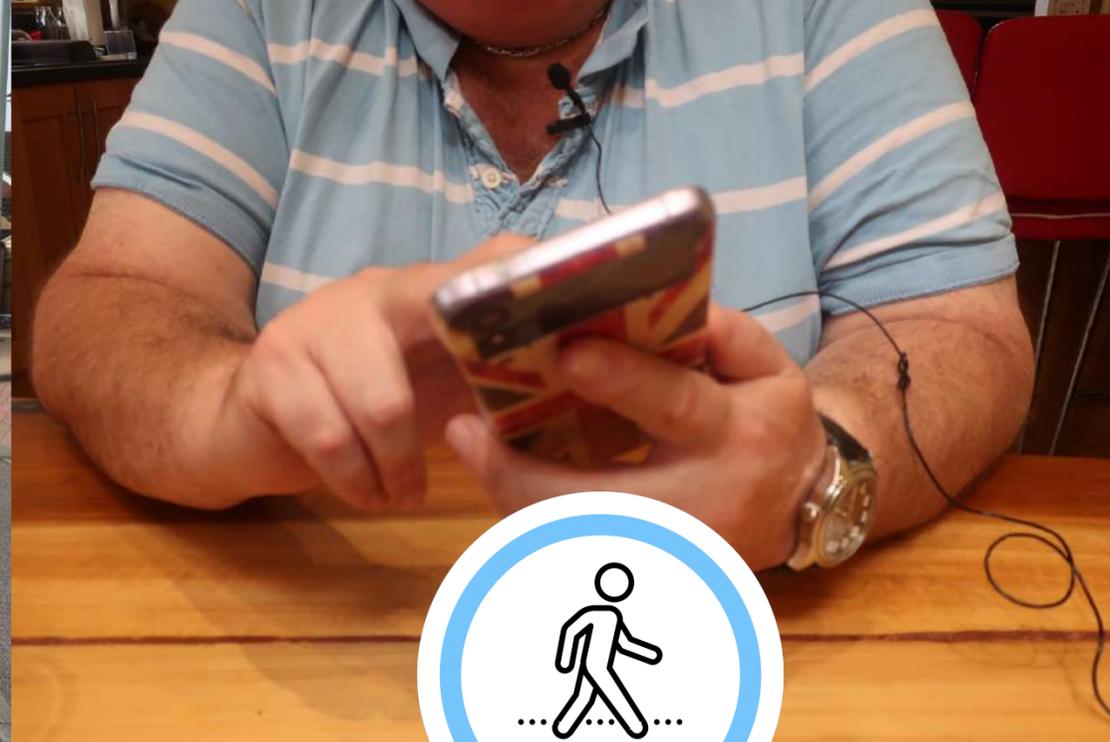
MOST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Daniel felt that there were too few buses running and that the service is unreliable. Therefore, he tends to primarily use taxis to get around.

However, he struggles to get taxis to **come and pick him up at his door.**

To get to the road where the taxis normally park, Daniel has to walk through an alleyway down the side of his house. He feels nervous using this pathway in the dark or under bright light when his eyesight is worse.



BARRIERS

Daniel often walks to the centre of town.

Daniel's **sight worsens when it is too bright or too dark**, so he struggles in these conditions to navigate and walk on his own.



LEAST COMMONLY USED

BARRIERS

Daniel will take the bus where he can and when there are no taxis available.

He often struggles with the **lack of buses.** Some bus services only come to his area every hour and the ones that come every 30 minutes **don't tend to be reliable or on time.**

He often finds it difficult to get **up to date information on bus timetables and services running.** For example, on a bus stop near him the digital display board wasn't regularly updated and displayed the wrong times and buses that were no longer running.

WHAT DOES DANIEL DO TO MAKE TRAVELLING EASIER?

TECHNOLOGY



Daniel uses a **range of technology and adaptations** to help with his daily life. For example, he's adapted his home with powerful lights and audio-description cooking utensils.

When it comes to travel, he is confident using **his phone with a screen reader** to plan and complete his journeys.

SUPPORT



Daniel is also supported by his **family and friends**. He lives with his **wife**. She provides emotional support but also practically helps him to plan journeys and to adapt the house to his needs.

He has a close circle of friends, especially through his **wine club**. His friends not only provide him with support but with social activities and plans to travel for.

TAXIS



Daniel feels confident travelling with taxis. He likes that the taxis take him to the **exact location he needs to get to, the journey takes less planning and the service is reliable**. He acknowledges that taxis are expensive and he can only afford them due to his access to a **comfortable pension alongside his compensation insurance**.

Although he finds taxis reliable he does **struggle to get the drivers to come directly outside his house** rather than a short walk away.

Thank you



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