

# South Western Railway and Southampton charity team up to make railway more accessible

March 28, 2022



The Rose Road Association has teamed up with South Western Railway in ground breaking work to make rail travel more accessible for young people with disabilities.

The Southampton charity provides direct care services for more than 300 children and young adults with severe physical disabilities, learning difficulties, and/or autism. These services include respite breaks, community outreach, holiday activities and advice.

In 2020 SWR teamed up with Rose Road through their Customer and Community Improvement Fund to deliver 'All Aboard', a two-year, £120K project which would answer a growing demand for travel opportunities for young people with severe or multiple disabilities.

The COVID pandemic and subsequent lockdowns meant that Rose Road had to re-think how the project could continue. After consultation with SWR, they started to develop solutions and new resources to ensure that the project would progress throughout the pandemic while still meeting its aims.

In a particularly innovative move, Rose Road were able to use some of the SWR funding to research local destination accessibility. With pro-bono support from Ordnance Survey (OS) – one of their corporate partners, Rose Road embarked on a first of its kind mapping project. This exciting venture involves OS mapping detailed accessible routes to and from stations. The knowledge gained from this exercise could benefit many more travellers as OS would be able to introduce additional elements of accessibility into their mapping.

The more practical resources that Rose Road developed for use by their service users included a board game highlighting some of the issues that disabled rail users face with an accompanying online version that families could play at home. In addition, a sensory story sack – “Going on a Train Trip” – uses pictures, sounds and sensory experiences to engage Rose Road’s service users who have more profound disabilities.

As restrictions have lifted and people have started to return to the railway, Rose Road have been able to resume their original plans to provide experience and enrichment for many of the young people who are their service users, helping to break down barriers for them and their families and increasing confidence in using the train to access local destinations. These plans include the publication of new, accessible rail guides for many local stations in the Southampton and Hampshire area and taking parties of disabled young people out on day trips using the railway. The first of these trips took place recently when a group of young people, their families and carers travelled from Southampton to Romsey to visit the Signalbox Museum.

Steve Swift, Rose Road’s CEO said: “Rose Road are very grateful to SWR for their support – as well as their patience and willingness to be flexible when we had to adapt our project to allow us to make progress during the pandemic. I really don’t think we could have achieved what we have thus far without that support. We look forward to working with them in the future to help make rail travel more accessible to even more young people with disabilities.”

Veronika Krcalova, SWR’s Customer and Communities Improvement Fund Manager, added: “We are always looking for new and innovative ways to support the communities that our network serves. Rose Road have worked very hard over the last two years to continue to deliver the All Aboard project, despite being faced with the myriad of challenges posed by the pandemic. Our partnership is a great opportunity to engage with young people with severe disabilities and show them how the railway can be more accessible to them.”

*Photo credit: South Western Railway*