

Rutgers-NJTransit partnership gets riders with disabilities where they need to go

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*NJTIP instructor Shaquillah McMillan (right) explains using NJ Transit ticket machines to Charles Masker at the New Brunswick train station.
/ Photo courtesy of Nick Romanenko*

Take action

For more information about NJTIP@Rutgers, call 848-932-4499 or email njtip_info@njtip.rutgers.edu.

The distance from Charles Masker's Morristown apartment to his job in Cedar Knolls is negligible — 4, maybe 5 miles, tops.

But it might as well be 1,000 miles for someone with a disability, especially one who grew up in a remote corner of northern New Jersey and who has no familiarity with the state's transit system.

Today, Masker, a 53-year-old diagnosed with schizophrenia, navigates two buses three days a week, allowing him to make a living at Employment Horizons, where he tests and packages remote control devices, and to function as an independent adult.

He can't say enough for the people and the program responsible for the breakthrough: NJTIP@Rutgers. The one-on-one program, a collaboration between Rutgers and NJ Transit, trains people with disabilities to use trains, buses and light rail in seven North Jersey counties: Essex, Union, Morris, Somerset, Bergen, Passaic and Hudson.

"It was a miracle what they did for me — a godsend," Masker said.

Larry Lindstrom, a senior travel instructor, provided Masker the tools to master the complexities of public transport, from reading a bus schedule to organizing his money to pay the fare.

Based at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers' Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, NJTIP offers travel instruction, individually or in small group settings. With a referral from NJ Transit's Access Link Program, people on the autism spectrum, people with Down syndrome, and people with mobility impairments and other disabilities can take advantage of the services.

Group training for older adults and people with disabilities — as well as the professionals who serve them — is available through other funding sources.

Getting there

A public-transit commuter calls on as many as 27 different skills to get from Point A to Point B, research indicates. Among them are telling time, counting money, reading a bus/train schedule, recognizing landmarks, interacting with the driver — even knowing how to signal for a stop at the proper time.