

Way Buddy is showing the way to safe travel for those with intellectual disabilities.



Sean uses the iPad to handle his personal schedule and complete his daily tasks.

## Take a bus? On his own? Edward's family was nervous.



As a young man in Dublin with an intellectual disability, the idea that Edward would be able to travel independently from home across town seemed implausible. Up until recently, it was taken for granted that Edward's life would always consist of a series of car rides, drop-offs or accompanied bus trips. His literacy and writing skills were limited. He didn't know how to use a phone or an iPad. But today, thanks to a new travel training program that uses a new travel app called Way Buddy, what once seemed impossible is a reality and Edward and others with intellectual disabilities are traveling independently from home with confidence and safety.

With support from The Ireland Funds, the app was developed by Sarah Gavra Boland whose idea was first recognized at The Ireland Funds Business Plan Competition in 2013. Tested and further developed with service users at St. John of God Menni Services, the app uses mobile devices to offer step-by-step travel instructions and the ability to contact family or friends for help. Each individual can customize their own routes with landmark photos that they take to support them to travel the route. Sarah found that while developing the app, the desire for independence among service-users was unanimous. "When we started sitting down with the service users and introducing the whole concept, to the Smartphones, the touch screens, and the iPad, we found the ability to touch and swipe was just intuitive," says Sarah. "They also wanted to be able to have the same devices as everybody else. Not an 'assistive technology device' but the same devices that their brothers and sisters, their friends and their parents, were using. So it was very important that we make it work on the iPad. The introduction of the smartphones was very quickly followed by iPads and exploring all the other apps available that could support independent living." Phil Seville, an instructor at St. John of God Menni Services explains, "With the Way Buddy app, the user can exercise their choices. Yet if they need assistance they can press an icon on-screen and we can see exactly where they are using the GPS and assist them by phone."

And so now thanks to the Way Buddy app, men and women from the St. John of God Menni services are walking to the market, taking the bus, crossing busy streets, and managing their own schedules in a manner previously thought impossible for them to do outside of a group setting or without family supervision. The newly-found independence and confidence is remarkable.

The introduction of the Way Buddy app, has opened the door for other technology to be used within the service. For users like Sean, they have started to use other apps like ChoiceWorks app to record and journal the activities of their day which improves their literacy and social skills. Sean shows off his iPad and proudly explains the tasks he has completed for that day: traveling to his classes, attending yoga, and helping his sister with a project. "All done," says Sean with an enormous smile. "It's just excellent."

**The Ireland Funds were the first organization to put financial support behind the Way Buddy app. And for users and their families it has made all the difference.**

*"Edward's family is no longer nervous. In fact, they're just blown away by this," reports Phil. "They're saying to me, 'Edward is coming home and his confidence is sky high. He refuses lifts into work and now proudly says, 'No thanks, today I'm traveling on my own.'"*