

OmniServ “Get(s) on Board” with new Whizz-Kidz campaign

OmniServ is delighted to be supporting a new initiative spearheaded by disabled children’s charity Whizz-Kidz. The launch of the ‘Get on Board’ campaign comes off the back of a new report released today by Whizz-Kidz, which highlighted that transport is not inclusive if you’re a young wheelchair user.

Three quarters of wheelchair users and their families and carers can’t travel as independently as they would like to and two in three do not feel confident enough to use public transport, according to a report released today by disabled children’s charity Whizz-Kidz.

Despite significant investment in accessibility improvements in recent years, Whizz-Kidz’s *Get on Board* report finds that three quarters of those surveyed experienced problems while travelling which mean they can’t travel as independently as they would like to.

Barriers in accessing public transport ranged from lack of accessible transport near where respondents live (67%), to being deterred by the attitude of staff (57%) or other passengers (61%).

“This is an issue which significantly impacts on the lives of many young wheelchair users. Because many can’t travel and use transport easily, they are being excluded from employment opportunities. They can find it harder to access health and education services and it’s not as easy for them to meet up with friends or family,” Whizz-Kidz CEO Ruth Owen OBE said.

“When people face these barriers to travel, it not only reduces their opportunities, it can change their aspirations. Our report makes it clear that despite substantial improvements made by a number of transport operators, who are leading the way in terms of disabled travel, we still have some way to go before travel and transport options are truly inclusive for young wheelchair users.

“We’re calling for the wider community, Government and other transport providers to Get on Board and make travel more inclusive. While accessibility has improved, this report highlights that change has not yet fully translated into equality and independence in young wheelchair users’ everyday lives.

“Improving accessibility is a shared responsibility which requires joined-up working with third parties and continued investment from Government to ensure that the network and infrastructure is in place to support operators in the delivery of their services.” Ruth Owen said.

The Whizz-Kidz campaign is calling for:

- Improvements to infrastructure, information and facilities so that the network is more accessible for wheelchair users.
- The general public to respect young wheelchair users’ right to travel so that they do not feel scared to travel alone.
- Regular and meaningful disability awareness training so that staff working in transport have a better understanding of the needs of young wheelchair users, which will support them to best assist young disabled travellers.
- Involvement of young disabled people in the planning, auditing and design of services and policies so that their voices are heard at all levels.
- Representation of young wheelchair users in travel marketing materials so that people can see what young wheelchair users can do, not what they can’t!

To spearhead change, Whizz-Kidz recently formed a national Accessible Travel Alliance – an industry leading group made up of forward-thinking travel operators, to make a real and lasting difference to disabled people’s experience of travel. Alliance partners who have signed up to the Get on Board campaign include Gatwick, Heathrow, National Express, OmniServ, Stagecoach and Transport for London.

“We are extremely proud to pledge our support to such a worthy cause,” said Ernie Patterson, Chairman, OmniServ. “Improving accessibility for passengers with reduced mobility is an ongoing effort and something that we, at OmniServ, are very passionate about. We are committed to driving positive change and look forward to supporting Whizz-Kidz in positively spreading the word and improving the travel experience of young disabled people and their families.”

“Our Alliance partners are setting the pace for the transport industry and are we’re excited to be collaborating with them on a number of accessible transport projects. Whizz-Kidz is providing them with tailored disability awareness training and input from our young wheelchair users who can’t wait to get stuck in and work together to drive positive change. We’re now challenging other transport and travel companies to follow the example of our Alliance partners,” Ruth Owen said.

You can get involved and pledge your support for more inclusive travel by visiting www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/getonboard.

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For further information contact Tamara Sperling at t.sperling@whizz-kidz.org.uk and 0207 798 6136.

Notes to Editors

About the report

The Whizz-Kidz Get on Board report includes survey results from 128 wheelchair users and their families and carers between June and September 2015. The survey looked at independent travel, trains, buses, taxis, planes, underground, metro, tram and light rail. Factors explored included the mode and frequency of transport most used. Insights were also drawn from focus groups, interviews and advice from young disabled people and their parents who are part of the Whizz-Kidz network.

Copies of the report can be accessed at www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/getonboard.

About Whizz-Kidz

- Whizz-Kidz is a national charity for disabled children and young people.
- As well as supporting young disabled people to access the right mobility equipment to fit their young lives, the charity also delivers wheelchair skills-training, work placements, residential camps and youth clubs to support a full and active childhood, and a bright future.
- The charity's young people's services in England are funded by The Big Lottery through a £5.3m grant to support Whizz-Kidz to provide 10,000 new opportunities to young disabled people over three years.
- Whizz-Kidz has offered over 25,000 opportunities to young disabled people throughout the UK since 1990.