MODULE SEVEN – Wheelchair and Low Mobility

Many members use the VCT transport due to isolation, and some members isolation is a result of lower mobility than others. This module helps us to stop and consider how we can help someone with lower mobility.

What is low or lower mobility? Quite simply, it is a reduced ability to move from one location to another. This may include stopping, waiting, for example at a bus stop. Please read through these lower mobility case studies:

"I am 45 years old, and was in a car accident ten years ago. My right leg was trapped for some time before rescuers cut me free, but the muscle wastage has never recovered fully. I walk with quite a hobble, but do not need sticks however I just cannot stand for more than 15 seconds, and also have difficulty on stairs – I do need a handrail. You can help me by giving me space when I walk, and to make sure that if I need to stop/stand, there is a seat, and any steps like into a bus, there is a grab rail to assist me. I do not like being held."

"I am 78 years young, and have arthritis in both legs. I can walk for a minute, maybe two on a good day, but I am in pain when I do. I always have my trusted wheelchair with me, but in vehicles will transfer to a more comfy ride bus seat when possible. I need someone to push my chair – it gives me freedom and unbinds me! Please make sure your bus has a ramp or lift, I just cannot climb those really high steps."

"I am 61 years old. My medical condition is no concern of yours, other than it has left me without use of my legs. I use a crane to get into my chair, with assistance, so do not transfer. My chair has power, so keep out of my way when I am on a mission. I have a catheter, so do not need toilets."

Please consider the different needs of the low mobility passengers above. We always recommend talking to your passenger about how you can help them. You will recognise a desire for independence from their comments, so try not to take over from that unless they are at risk, but then explain to them that risk and help them to a safer situation.

Remember the Little Britain comedy sketch, with a wheelchair user who keeps getting up out of the chair – that can be a real situation for a low mobility user; they may just use the chair to rest, sit, wait or for difficult ground surfaces.

Also, please remember that a wheelchair user does not consider their chair to bind them, rather the opposite it gives them independence. Please do not refer to them as wheelchair bound.

If your passenger transfers out of their wheelchair, then the chair requires to be secured for transit. In the event of a hard brake or incident, an unsecured chair could seriously hurt or even kill a passenger or driver.

If your passenger does not transfer out of their seat, then you must complete three tasks:

1. Tie Down Wheelchair – this uses a specialist kit to anchor the chair so that there is no movement whilst in transit, normally using four tie down straps.
2. Seat belt that is anchored to the vehicle – not the comfort lap-belt that chairs have!
3. Amend driving technique – it is not as comfortable to sit in a wheelchair at the back of the bus compared to a bus seat, so road humps and corners can be quite uncomfortable; also bear in mind that some wheelchair users may have a condition that makes their body sensitive to movement or jerks.

Operating a Tail Lift

Tail lifts and ramps are potentially dangerous machines that you should not attempt to use unless you have had training to do so. Numerous injuries are possible if not operated correctly including crushed hands or feet, and even amputation. However, this device is designed to make manual handling much easier.

Each tail lift can be a different model or make, with so many different operational techniques, however the following is a general operating guide. Each tail lift will be introduced during the vehicle familiarisation.

Generic Operating Rules for the Tail Lift

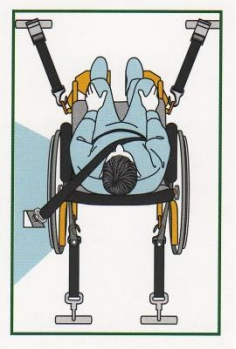
What	**Why**
• Park with rear doors uphill if on incline	…to prevent chair from rolling out
• Open rear doors fully and lock in position if possible	…to create safe operation zone
• Extend the control pad as far as it will go	…for operator to be away from operation zone
• Stand at the rear of the tail lift, with control in one hand and opposite arm extended	… to prevent other people from entering operation zone
• Check no one is off the tail lift in the operation zone	…to prevent crush risk
• Ensure passenger on lift is holding with both hands onto the handrails of the tail lift	…to give confidence and control for passenger
• Ensure brakes are engaged and for electric wheelchairs, the power is off (to lock the wheels)	…to stop wheelchair from rolling off lift
• Talk to the passenger on the lift, prepare them for movement and count down 3-2-1 to operation	…to prepare passenger for “jolt” into action
• Check toes of passenger are not forward of lift when lifting	…to stop toes being trapped between lift and minibus
• Do not allow passenger to operate the tail lift	…to prevent crush risk (going up, the passenger cannot see behind them!)

Wheelchair Tie Down

The Tie-Down of a wheelchair is a practical session completed during your familiarisation, however here are the elements of a successful tie-down:

1. Position the wheelchair forward facing
2. Centralise the wheelchair to the floor tracking being used
3. Anchor the front two tie down straps making sure they are the same length and set at the same location to avoid any twisting of the chair during transit. Do not anchor to removable parts, like the foot rest. It is best practice to position the front tie downs at wider locations to the front wheels to avoid twisting during transit

4. Anchor the rear two tie down straps making sure they are tight, and anchored at a strong point on the chair – some chairs have the best location marked with a carabiner logo
5. Put additional pressure onto the tie down straps to create a “guitar string” effect on the webbing



6. The seat belt system attaches to the floor on both sides of the passenger, slightly to their rear
7. The seat belt should feed close to the body – but remember to be respectful of the passenger who may not like you working in close proximity, so talk to them and keep hands and elbows away from personal areas. You can usually ask the passenger to assist with the positioning of the webbing part of the seat belt
8. Ensure the seat belt webbing tracks between gaps in the wheelchair and is not trapped anywhere

9. Ensure all webbing is straight and not twisting
10. When removing make sure the webbing of the seat belt does not fold or crease in the retractable housing as this weakens it over time. Store securely

Tie Down practical is compulsory for any driver who will have a wheelchair user passenger.