



L-R Jeremy Cripps, Wayne Lowery, Stephen King and Kieran Lowery

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## **Kieran's in the driving seat thanks to Bus Buddies and Go North East**

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities are being helped to live more independently thanks to the charity, Children North East and the region's largest bus operator, Go North East.

Bus Buddies is a successful project pioneered by Children North East in the Gateshead area that has enabled 27 young people to use public transport in order to get to school, college, work or access leisure activities.

Award-winning bus operator Go North East got on board by awarding free bus passes to some of those taking part and their support workers.

Kieran Lowery is a graduate of the Bus Buddies scheme. He was partnered with a Children North East support worker or 'bus buddy', who helped Kieran feel confident about travelling the 12-mile round trip from his home in Sunnyside to Hill Top Specialist Arts College.

Sixteen-year-old Kieran, who has autism, has to take two different buses and his bus buddy travelled the whole journey, then parts of the journey with him, until he felt comfortable doing the whole route by himself.

The travel was proving costly, until Go North East offered to give Kieran – and seven others on the Bus Buddies scheme – a free pass.

Kieran's father, Wayne Lowery, said the move had saved the family around £100 a month in bus fares. He said: "I've been really impressed with the Bus Buddies scheme. I thought Kieran might struggle to travel by himself, but he's fine and that's all down to his bus buddy, Rachel Wright, who worked with him over three months."

Stephen King, Commercial Director at Go North East said: "We want all our passengers to have a happy and safe experience on the bus, so we're really pleased to hear how partnering with Children North East's Bus Buddies scheme has allowed people like Kieran, to realise their independence.

"We take our role in the local community very seriously and over the years have invested heavily in training and technological advancements, such as audio-visual next stop announcements and contactless payments, to make bus travel on our services as easy as possible."

Sean Soulsby, Lead Practitioner at Children North East's Young People's Service added:

"We're very proud of our Bus Buddies project, supported by Gateshead Council and players of the People's Postcode Lottery, which gives young people the chance to travel independently for the first time to and from school. It supports their independence, confidence and life skills and enables them to have greater choice and access around future college, employment,

training and social opportunities.

“Sixty seven per cent of those on the Bus Buddies programme are now, like Kieran, successfully travelling to and from school. And even though, because of their disability, some have remained unable to make the two or three bus trips each way alone, one hundred per cent of those who have had a bus buddy report being more independent and confident as a result of that support.”

More information on Go North East can be found online at [www.gonortheast.co.uk](http://www.gonortheast.co.uk).

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[Go North East website](http://www.gonortheast.co.uk)