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PROMISING PRACTICES



Orientation and Mobility trail offers safe training for people with blindness or low vision

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training teaches a person with blindness or low vision the skills needed to travel efficiently, effectively, and safely. It involves the use of common environments found in everyday travel. For someone experiencing vision loss, O&M training is the foundation for acquiring other skills that will allow that individual to be independent.

The O&M teachers at [Bosma Enterprises](#) faced a challenge when trying to replicate the many environmental obstructions clients might find in their home and community. Doing so often required driving across the city to find obstacles for use in training. For example, teachers would take their clients to locations twenty minutes away to experience travel in a neighborhood, ten minutes away to walk on gravel, or five minutes away to practice using a long cane on uneven surfaces. The commutes meant that clients were losing valuable training time.

The Bosma Center-Based Services staff members had to come up with a solution. After a brainstorming session, they decided to build a multi-surface training trail that would encircle the organization's 100,000-square-foot facility. It took eight years of fundraising and a generous contribution from an anonymous donor, one year of working with architects and contractors, and three months of construction, but Bosma opened its quarter-mile O&M Training Trail in October 2013. Clients are now able to spend more time outside with teachers learning valuable travel

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About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

skills.



Above: Bosma Enterprises instructor William Noll carefully watches a client, Leekshika Pinnamneni, navigate a bridge and stairs on the O&M Training Trail.

The trail is constructed of a variety of materials and fifteen types of surfaces, including concrete, wooden boards, mulch, gravel, and rubber. It includes a bridge, steps, cracks, low-lying objects, dead ends, and traffic crossings. Obstacles such as construction cones, trash cans, and other items one might encounter while walking on a sidewalk can be added and moved by instructors, and foam noodles can be attached to trees to simulate low branches. The lighting on the trail can even be adjusted to simulate poorly lit locations in dusk or nighttime conditions. This can assist individuals with peripheral field loss who may travel visually during the daytime, but rely on the long cane at night. Everything is designed to provide a safe and accessible environment for individuals to receive O&M instruction.

William Noll, an O&M instructor at Bosma, said, "The trail has been a great segue to the real world for many of our clients. This tool has reduced the anxiety that many of them feel while learning skills needed to travel." A recent [CARF International](#) survey report, which gave exemplary recognition to the trail for its response to a service need, agreed with Noll saying, "The trail provides a less-threatening environment as the individual gains confidence and skills."

The beautifully landscaped trail has also become a catalyst for new ideas and opportunities to serve clients. For example, the trail is now being used as a sensitivity training tool for clients' family and loved ones. Noll explained, "Many of our clients like to take their families on the trail. It helps them understand the skills that their family member has gained." Another example of an opportunity that has arisen since the trail was completed is a



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grant that Bosma recently received to work specifically with seniors who are losing their sight to help them navigate in and around their home. With the new benefits that the trail offers, it will serve Bosma's clients as a pathway to independence for years to come.

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The Bosma Enterprises website is www.bosma.org.

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