

Sensory Bags

Funding: Avanti West Coast Project Fund

Budget: £5,000

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AIMS:

- To encourage confidence in rail travel for neurodivergent passengers and those with sensory needs
- To provide practical support to help manage sensory overwhelm during journeys
- To develop a co-produced resource shaped by people with lived experience

SUMMARY:

For many people, rail travel can feel overwhelming—particularly for those who are neurodivergent or experience sensory sensitivities.

Community Rail Lancashire and Avanti West Coast worked together to develop sensory bags designed to make journeys more comfortable and accessible. Each bag contains simple, practical items to help reduce sensory overwhelm and support passengers to travel with greater confidence.

The project was shaped through co-production with a SEND group from Bury College, ensuring the contents reflected real experiences and needs.

In total, 500 sensory bags have been produced and are now being introduced across the Avanti West Coast network.



OUTCOMES

The project has developed and produced 500 sensory bags designed to support passengers who are neurodivergent or experience sensory sensitivities, providing practical tools to improve comfort and confidence when travelling by rail.

A key strength of the project was its co-production approach. A workshop with a SEND group from Bury College, involving approximately 10 students, enabled participants to share their experiences of rail travel and directly influence the design and contents of the sensory bags. This ensured the final resource was shaped by lived experience and reflects real needs.

The sensory bags include items such as ear defenders, fidget tools, a soft toy, colouring materials, sunglasses and a chew necklace. These items were carefully selected to offer practical, in-the-moment support during journeys, while also being quiet and non-disruptive in a shared travel environment.

The project also benefited from strong partnership working between Community Rail Lancashire and Avanti West Coast, combining community insight with operational knowledge. Engagement at accessibility events further informed the development of the packs.

In total, the project has:

- Produced 500 sensory bags ready for distribution
- Engaged approximately 10 SEND participants through co-production activity
- Developed a resource shaped by lived experience and real travel needs

Sensory bags are being introduced across Avanti West Coast services, with distribution through stations, Passenger Assistance and onboard teams to ensure they are accessible to passengers who may benefit.

FEEDBACK:

Students from the Bury College SEND group were enthusiastic about being involved and welcomed the chance to share their ideas. Their input helped shape the contents of the sensory bags, highlighting what items would be most useful.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- Involving people with lived experience helped make the sensory bags more relevant and useful
- It's important to design resources that are easy to store, hand out and use on trains
- Early conversations with partners and suppliers helped shape what was possible
- Building in enough time for development and testing is important, especially for more complex ideas such as the sensory book



Sensory Bag

- Ear defenders
- Fidget spinner
- Teddy
- Colour sheets
- Sunglasses

