Effects of the built environment on mobility for the dual-sensory impaired.

The built environment affects the ways in which we interact with and move throughout our surroundings. Most people are dependent on vision to move through the built environment. However, people with severe visual impairments move through the built environment using senses other than sight. The most important variable that affects the ease of mobility for visually impaired people is the quality of the environment in which the individual functions (Aiello, Steinfeld, 1979 p. 3). Improving environmental design to enhance usability is key (Aiello, Steinfeld, 1979 p. 4). Characteristics within the built environment influence how easily these individuals move around. The characteristics needed to ease the mobility for a visually impaired person include definition, safety, and consistency. Definition is achieved by maintaining clarity of circulation with no confusion, irregular spaces, or unnecessary level changes (Aiello, Steinfeld, 1979 p. 33). Traveler disorientation, indecision and confusion because of area configuration can be a major problem. Restricting large, undefined areas and irregular route paths provide clarity for the user (Aiello, Steinfeld, 1979 p. 15). Safety provides efficient mobility. Removing obstacles allows the user to move more efficiently through the space. Hazardous and difficult to negotiate situations caused by intervening obstacles cause confusion and are unsafe. Tactile warnings provide a safe way to alert the user of any dangerous obstacles. Consistency in application of various design aspects within buildings is necessary and extremely important (Aiello, Steinfeld, 1979 p. 34). This helps maintain continuity for the person, knowing from previous instances what occurs in that space. By designing the environment with these characteristics in mind, visually impaired people will be able to interact and move throughout the built environment with greater ease. It would be an advantage to include design features that assist in the movement of people with severe visual impairments (Baynes, Francklin, 1971 p. 49).

