

Minnesota STAR
Program
A System of
Technology to
Achieve Results



Minnesota's Assistive Technology
Act Program

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Constellations

Spring 2006

Assistive Technology (AT) Works!

Assistive Technology Reuse

What should we do with old or abandoned assistive technology?

That was the topic of a three-day conference held May 8-10 at Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Pass It On, the National Conference on Reuse of Assistive Technology was sponsored by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) with the assistance of the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) and DTI Associates, Inc.



This was the first national conference to address the barriers and solutions to recycling, refurbishing or exchanging all types of assistive technology (AT) and durable medical equipment (DME).

OSERS Assistant Secretary John H. Hager welcomed the 183 participants from 51 states and territories. He explained that the conference, "...offers the possibility of initiating a community of programs dedicated to improving the reuse of AT across the country." And he encouraged participants to, "Take what you learn at this conference to your communities and states and *pass it on.*"

(continued on page 8)

Accessible Hobbies - One Family's Story

Thirteen-year-old Tom Conaway wants to be a filmmaker when he grows up. He dreams of filming sporting events and wildlife. And he's off to a good start. For the past five years, Tom has been filming wildlife near his home in Sonoma, California. Getting up before dawn, he waits in the wetlands for the wildlife to come into view. So what sets Tom apart from other young filmmakers? He's a quadriplegic.

When he was four years old, Tom was in a car accident that injured his spinal cord. One year after the accident, he was using a joystick to operate an electric powered wheelchair. Two years later, life at the Conaway home was settling into a busy routine that included the after school activities of Tom's older brother and younger sister. It was around this time that Tom's dad, Doug, began searching for a meaningful hobby for Tom to pursue. Then one afternoon while filming his older son playing football, Doug walked away from the camera to talk to another parent. When he glanced back, he saw Tom touching a button on the camera. It was at that instant he realized that filming was a hobby the two of them could share. As Doug recalls, "Everything about the idea made sense. Filming is a meaningful mainstream activity. Filming secures involvement in action, and it is purposeful at any stage of development."



Doug Conaway is an electrical contractor who is good at problem solving and enjoys technology. During Tom's early venture into filming, Doug put a camera on a tripod and strapped it to his son's chair. Tom would then zoom up and down the sidelines filming his brother's football games. Once the football season was over, Tom and Doug headed to the wetlands to film birds. Because Tom's chair is tilted back 8-10 degrees, Doug mounted a camera to a helmet that allowed Tom to film at any angle. Camouflaged so he could shoot up close, Tom began filming birds in their natural habitat. Tom has the strength and head control to use a 2x telephoto converter on his camera but the added weight makes the helmet unsteady. One day when at a NASCAR race, Doug and Tom discovered a new approach to filming. The inspiration came from watching a photographer film the race remotely using a camera on a pan/tilt head.

A job worth doing is worth doing together. (Quoted from an unknown but wise source!)



Recently, Doug purchased an affordable pan/tilt head that allows Tom to control the camera using wired remotes. He sees the camera view on the screen of a DVD player placed on the tray of his wheelchair. This setup provides greater stability and magnification while allowing Tom to sit up to 50 feet from his camera. Once he's finished a shoot, Tom edits his footage with

iMovie on his iBook (www.apple.com). In March, Doug and Tom Conaway presented a session titled *Technology Enables Quadriplegic Child to Film Wildlife* at CSUN's 21st Annual International Technology & Persons with Disabilities Conference in Los Angeles. If you would like additional information regarding specific equipment or mounting options, you may contact Doug Conaway at dougconaway@sbcglobal.net.

Meet Minnesota's Microsoft Accessibility Resource Center

PACER Center is one of 46 Microsoft Accessibility Resource Centers (MARC) around the country designed to showcase the numerous accessible technology options available on today's computers. PACER offers video demonstrations and resource CDs that help individuals learn about Microsoft's accessibility options, as well as, free trainings on built-in accessibility features. The goal is to make computing easier, more convenient, and more comfortable. If you have questions about the accessibility of your computer, don't hesitate to call: 952-838-9000.



Online Resources

Portal: AT Product and News Portal: www.axistive.com

Podcast: It's About People, Not Technology <http://easi.cc/podcasts/people.xml>

Training: Assistive Technology Training Online Project (ATTO) <http://atto.buffalo.edu/>

New Products:

tango! is a new communication device by Blink Twice, a sister company of AbleNet, Inc. It comes with a built-in camera, voice-morphing technology and is ergonomically designed with a combination of hard and soft buttons. Other features include scanning, an SD card slot plus expansion slots for future use with features such as WiFi, Bluetooth and cell phone and incorporates state-of-the-art sound design that allows voices to be heard even in noisy environments.



The tango! also offers a new approach to communication, called Language Streams, developed in conjunction with many of the field's leading speech professionals, including Pati King-DeBaun, Dr. Karen Erickson, Dr. Caroline Musselwhite, and Linda Burkhart. This innovative structure allows users to have efficient access to thousands of useful phrases, while still allowing for word-by-word sentence generation and spelling for times when more specific language is required.

Using a special sales team, AbleNet (www.ablenetinc.com) will serve as the exclusive marketer of Blink Twice products. To learn more about the tango! visit Blink Twice at www.blink-twice.com. To learn the inspiration behind tango! be sure to read the June issue of EP magazine (www.eparent.com).

FLASH

AbleNet, Inc. recently announced its newest Augmentative and Alternative Communication device, FLASH.



Using static display technology, this four-location voice output communication device teaches scanning to users through a systematic approach to language. Its exclusive frame lighting feature provides motivational visual feedback for direct selectors and scanners alike.

FLASH includes activities specifically created for educators and students who are beginning to explore the process of communication and motor planning necessary for successful scanning. By participating in these activities, students have the opportunity to experience choice making, gain understanding of symbols, and increase motor response. For additional information visit AbleNet, Inc. at www.ablenetinc.com

Technology for Transition - Memory Aids

We've all occasionally experienced challenges caused by memory loss:

- Being late because we couldn't remember where we put our car keys.
- Walking into a room then forgetting why we went there.
- Forgetting someone's name.

Millions of Americans face the challenges caused by memory loss on a daily basis. Chronic memory loss may interfere with the ability to live a productive life and threatens independence.

Memory loss may be temporary or it may last a lifetime. Causes include:

- Stress/fatigue
- Depression
- Mild cognitive impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Age
- Dementia caused by
 - Medication side effect
 - Medical condition

Memory is a critical consideration during transition planning. When a person routinely forgets important tasks such as taking medication or making meals, transitioning to a home environment may be problematic. When a person can't remember the tasks necessary to perform a job, transitioning to or maintaining employment becomes a challenge. When a person cannot remember the names of family and friends, communication becomes strained.

Today individuals with memory loss can turn to technology for help in remembering important information and steps necessary to perform basic tasks independently. This independence may be all it takes to help the individual transition to a home or work setting. Memory aids may be inexpensive and used for a specific task such as taking medication or they may be cutting edge devices that can be used in a variety of settings. On page 6 you will find a small sampling of assistive technology for individuals with memory loss. Before purchasing a device consider contacting an AT professional to determine if an assessment or device trial is needed. A listing of AT professionals in Minnesota is available on STAR's Web site.

Memory Aids -

Medication reminder with automatic timer may help an individual take their medication on time.

Talking calendar and clock helps individuals keep track of the date and time.

Talking timer can be programmed with your own voice recording. Timer in picture on the right can be set with 5 alarms and personal recordings.

Appliance timer eliminates the need to remember to turn appliances on or off.

Talking picture frames and albums help individuals remember family and friends.

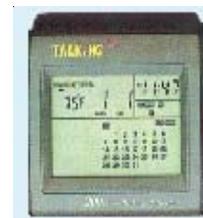
Pocket PC with specialized software from AbleLink Technologies (available for loan from STAR) provides mobile solutions for use in a variety of settings. Software applications include:

Schedule Assistant a multimedia scheduling application for individuals with cognitive barriers to reading.

Appointments or events can be entered by recording an audio message and designating the day(s) and time for the message to activate. A picture or icon can also be displayed when the message displays. Create audio reminders with picture cues to remind users to catch a bus, take medication, or how to perform morning routines. (continued on next page)



Medication Reminder



Talking Clock/Calendar



Talking Timer



AbleLink - Pocket PC solutions

Pocket Coach can be used with a Pocket PC to record a series of personalized step-by-step audio instructions explaining how to perform educational, vocational or independent living tasks.

Visual Assistant provides task-prompting support using digital pictures with custom recorded audio messages on a Pocket PC to provide step-by-step instructional support. Visual Assistant is ideal for more complex or detailed tasks where the addition of digital pictures of each step of the task can increase accuracy.

AT Resources:

AbleLink Technologies
www.ablelinktech.com

Independent Living
www.independentliving.com

Dynamic-Living
www.dynamic-living.com



Life Home
www.lifehome.com

Maxi Aids
www.maxiaids.com

SmartHome
www.smarthome.com

Events

“What is Assistive Technology?” (PACTT)

On Thursday, June 29, 2006 People Achieving Change Through Technology (PACTT) will be hosting “What is Assistive Technology?” from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. This introduction to assistive technology workshop will introduce attendees to a range of assistive technology from simple low tech devices to high tech equipment. PACTT services will also be discussed. This event will take place in PACTT’s assistive technology center located at Ability Building Center, 1911 14th Street NW, Rochester, Minnesota. Admission is free but pre-registration is required. For additional information or to reserve a seat contact Rachel Weitzel at 507-535-7101.

Aware Fair 2006 (DHHS)

On Saturday, September 16, 2006 the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (Metro Office) is sponsoring an educational and social event from 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. This event will be held at the Brookdale Center in Brooklyn Center, MN. Admission is free and all are welcome. For additional information visit www.dhhsd.org (click on “What’s New”) or contact Marie Koehler 651-297-3640 (voice); 1-888-206-6513 (TTY); or send an e-mail to marie.koehler@state.mn.us.

AT Reuse *(continued from page 1)*

During the three day conference speakers from successful AT reuse programs shared their stories and gave tips on how to maximize resources by collaborating with others.

Programs spotlighted during the conference included:

- ReBoot (www.gatfl.org/reboot) a nonprofit, statewide, collaborative effort of many groups and organizations committed to recycling computers for people with disabilities.
- Kansas Equipment Exchange, (www.atk.ku.edu/atkequipment.htm) which has 5 AT access sites that serve as distribution centers.
- The New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) Marketplace (www.neatmarketplace.org) that serves as a demonstration and equipment restoration center.

Participants also spent time meeting in regional groups to discuss their concerns, experiences and needs that impact AT reuse.

The *Assistive Technology Act of 1998*, as amended in 2004 (P.L. 108-364) identifies reutilization of assistive technology as one of the major activities that AT Act programs must focus on over the next few years.

As part of Minnesota's assistive technology plan, STAR is planning a state AT Reuse Conference. This conference will be open to anyone in Minnesota who recycles, refurbishes or exchanges assistive technology or durable medical equipment or has an interest in joining this discussion. If you would like to receive more information about the conference, please contact STAR at 651-201-2640, 888-234-1267 (toll free) or 800-627-2527 (TDD).

STAR is also putting the final touches on its new online device exchange site. This site will be linked to STAR's Web site and utilize a classified ad format to connect buyers and sellers of used assistive technology and durable medical equipment. Minnesotans who do not have access to the Internet may contact STAR for assistance in posting items for sale or to request help in searching the site for items needed. STAR hopes to launch this site by late summer or early fall.

In the meantime, why not take a look at atmatch.com!



Atmatch.com, is an online eBay-style marketplace where donors and sellers can locate buyers for a wide range of assistive technology and durable medical products. This site also provides users with links to regional and national resources in a variety of related fields.

Does your ATM talk?

Most of us take for granted the ability to use ATMs when we need cash. Until recently, using an ATM if you are blind or have a visual impairment was difficult or impossible without assistance. Fortunately access to ATMs is becoming easier as more and more banks switch to talking ATMs. These new ATMs come equipped with an audio jack for private listening to your financial information.

To begin using a talking ATM, customers must first plug in their own personal headset. Once a headset or ear buds are plugged in to the audio jack, verbal instructions and a description of the ATM's layout will play automatically and assist with the transaction. To locate a talking ATM use the contact information listed below.

Wells Fargo 1-800-956-4442

<https://www.wellsfargo.com>

Bank of America 1-800-432-1000

www.bankofamerica.com

Chase 1-877-241-8665

www.chase.com

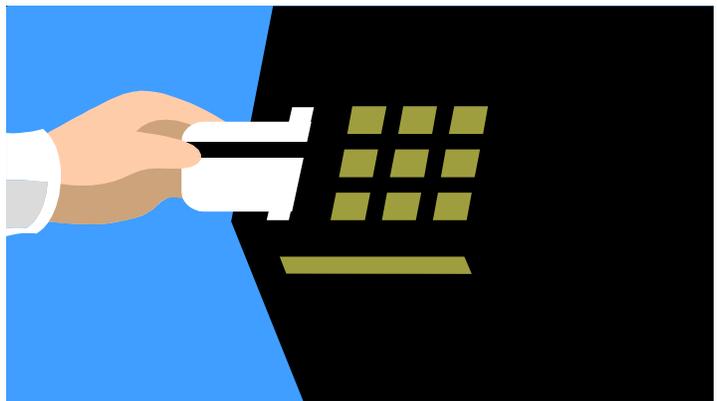
Citibank www.citibank.com

LaSalle Bank 1-866-904-7222

www.lasallebank.com

US Bank (contact local branch)

www.usbank.com



Request for Proposals

This summer the Minnesota STAR Program will issue a request for proposal (RFP) to establish regional assistive technology demonstration and loan centers in Minnesota. If you would like to receive additional information or notification when the request for proposal is issued, please contact Joan Gillum 651-201-2640, 1-888-234-1267 (toll-free), or 1-800-627-2527 (TDD).

Events (continued from page 7)

Accessibility and Your Computer *(UCP, PEP & PACER)*

United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) and People Enhancing People (PEP) together with PACER are offering a free hands-on training: *Accessibility and Your Computer*. Parents, professionals, and consumers are invited to come and discover how to make their Windows computer easier to see, hear, and use by taking advantage of Microsoft's built-in accessibility features. Participants will learn how to adjust computer settings to:

- Improve the visibility of the computer screen
- Make the mouse and keyboard easier to control
- Display captions for speech and sounds
- Speak text out loud

Presenters will also demonstrate simple hardware adaptations, such as alternative keyboards and mice that can make it easier to access the computer. Community resources for assistive and accessible technology funding and support will be provided. Pre-registration is required. If you would like to attend please contact UCP at 651-646-7588. Space is limited to 30 participants. The workshop will be held in the PACER Center computer lab on August 12, 2006 from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

Provider Spotlight

Gillette's Mobile Outreach Clinics

Gillette's Mobile Outreach Clinics are designed to help people with disabilities gain access to assistive technology services in areas where those services are not readily available throughout Minnesota.

For more information visit:

<http://www.gillettechildrens.org>



How do you know?

How do you know which device or software program will meet your needs? The National Rehabilitation Hospital Research Center surveyed 227 adults with a wide range of disabilities and AT needs. The results of the survey showed that 29.3% of all devices purchased by this group were completely abandoned. Buying the wrong device consumes money, time, and effort and it leaves a need unfulfilled.



Here are a few tips to help you avoid purchasing a product that ends up in the closet!

- Connect with professionals** - Contact professionals with assistive technology (AT) experience to discuss your options. A listing of AT Professionals is located on STAR's Web site under AT Resources.
- Assessment** - Have a professional assessment of your needs if the assistive technology you are considering is complex, has the potential to impact your health (such as mobility products) or if you have any concerns about the appropriateness of the product.
- Device Demonstration** - See a demonstration of the device or software program.
- Device Trial** - Borrow the device or software from a loan program or vendor. (Many software vendors provide free trial versions of their programs.) During the trial period record any concerns or questions you may have and get answers from a professional and/or vendor BEFORE you purchase the device.
- Funding** - Determine your funding needs and options.
- Talk to Vendor** - Determine important information such as device warranty, technical support, training and the return policy. Inquire about future plans to upgrade or discontinue product line.
- Training/support** - Determine if you will need additional training and identify who is available to provide that training and what, if any, costs are involved.
- Integration plan** - Have a plan for integrating the use of your device. For example, if you purchase software to use at work you should first consult with your employer or IT person to make sure the software is compatible and can be loaded on the computer.



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Request a copy of the 2006 Assistive Technology Directory

Would you like a free copy of the 2006 Assistive Technology Directory of Funding Resources? Call 651-201-2640 or toll-free 888-234-1267 to request one or more copies of this popular directory.



All STAR materials are available in alternative formats

¡FOLLETOS EN ESPAÑOL! STAR ha empezado traducir folletos en Inglés a Español. Actualmente, STAR tiene dos folletos en Español: “Directorio de Recursos de Financiamiento para Tecnología Asistiva en Minnesota” y “El Programa STAR: Un Sistema de Tecnología para Lograr Resultados.

STAR does not endorse or recommend any particular product, individual or agency. The posting of information in this newsletter and on STAR’s Web site is educational in nature and does not imply endorsement by STAR’s funder, the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

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