

AT KEY NEWSLETTER

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The 4th Annual AT Expo in Review

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

The 4th Annual Assistive Technology Expo was held in Fargo on April 5, 2007, at the Ramada Plaza Suites. It was an exciting and eventful day for people with an interest in assistive technology. There were vendors and presenters from North Dakota and many other states. The 50 vendors highlighted AT devices and services for people of any age and ability to help them work, learn, recreate, and live independently. The presenter's covered topics such as: technology for literacy and learning; augmentative and alternative communication strategies; AT for autism; computer access; equipment for low vision and blindness; low tech applications; and specialized telephones.

The event gave people of North Dakota and surrounding regions an opportunity to visit with vendors of AT devices and services, see and try their devices, and take part in presentations on various AT topics. Parents of a child with autism, a person needing accommodations for work after an accident, the daughter with a parent experiencing memory loss, and a service provider seeking information on specific communication devices were conference attendees and all found it very worthwhile. In addition to the presentations, clinics, awards, and vendor show, this event gave many people an opportunity to network. New resources were discovered, sometimes within each others backyard, and connections made. This type of networking leads to expanding resources and improved services for everyone.

The AT Expo was a huge collaborative effort. In conjunction with the Expo, the Shriners held a free Children's Orthopedic Care Clinic, Gillette Children's Hospital brought their Mobile Van to tour, and the FM Area Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities held their annual awards luncheon. The agencies that planned and carried out the event included: the Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT); Connections of Moorhead, Inc.; Protection & Advocacy; Fraser, Ltd.; SEHSC Regional Aging Services, Fargo; Catholic Charities ND-AASK Program; Regional Assistive Technology Center (RATC); Job Service ND; Easter Seals Goodwill ND, Inc; Freedom, Inc.; West Fargo Public Schools; Fargo Public Schools FEET; Rural Cass Public Schools FEET; and Moorhead Public Schools. Sponsors for the Expo included: the Technology Access Foundation, FM Area Mayor's Committee, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Connections of Moorhead, and IPAT.

Mark your calendar for next year's AT Expo! It will take place on April 10th, at the Ramada Plaza Suites in Fargo. Thank you to all of the AT Expo partners and attendees for making the Expo a reality. We hope to see all of you back (with

friends ☺) next year as this event continues to grow. Watch for further announcements on IPAT's website, www.ndipat.org.

Assistive Technology (AT) for Illnesses Related to Aging

Information concerning assistive technology solutions for those with chronic illnesses associated with aging is not readily available, especially for those who wish to care for a spouse, elderly parent, or relative in their home. There are challenges involved in making homes accessible, safe, and comfortable for people with debilitating diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes. IPAT offers the following AT devices for consideration:

AT devices for memory loss may include:

- Alarms with sensors for water overflow protection of sinks and tubs
- Lockable medication dispensers and reminders
- Sensors with automatic shutoffs for the stove and gas
- Schedule reminders with alarms and recorded voice for those who do not understand the printed word or who need to hear their loved one's voice.

AT devices for safety may include:

- Anti-scalding devices in the sinks, showers and tubs.
- Security monitoring devices with and without a monthly fee that can notify a service or loved one that help is needed.
- A fall prevention system for a person who gets up from a bed or chair frequently with a voice alert that tells them to sit or lay back down.
- A smoke alarm with voice that not only alerts them to a fire but announces in a familiar voice where and how to get out safely.

AT devices for wandering may include:

- Door alarms and alert systems for all access points in a home. Some alert systems, not only alert you to a person leaving, but tell you which door the person is exiting from.
- Tracking devices such as Global Positioning System (GPS) devices for long distances for a monthly fee and shorter range tracking devices (up to 300 feet) with no fees. These shorter range devices can be used for outdoor activities, shopping trips, visits to the park, etc.
- Easy to install devices that prevent your car from starting when it is unsafe for the person to drive.
- A car seatbelt alarm that alerts the driver to an unlocked seatbelt and gives the driver peace of mind knowing the passenger with an illness will not exit the moving car.

For questions on these devices and other AT ideas, contact IPAT at 1-800-265-4728 or ipatinfo@integra.net.

Alternative Computer Input Devices

Alternative input devices allow individuals to control their computers through a means other than a standard keyboard and mouse. These assistive technology (AT) products are designed to provide access to individuals who have physical or cognitive difficulties, impairments, and/or disabilities that make standard input devices hard if not impossible to use. When selecting AT products for computer access, it is crucial to find products that meet the individual's needs, and are compatible with the computer operating system and programs on the particular computer being used. Some alternative input device examples include:

Alternative keyboards – these may feature larger-than or smaller-than standard keys or keyboards, alternative key configurations, keyboard skins, keycaps, key guards and keyboard masks; they may include contour keyboards, chording keyboards, adjustable-split keyboards, ergonomic keyboards, portable keyboards, on-screen keyboards, and keyboards for use with one hand.

Alternative mice – these may feature electronic pointing devices that control the cursor without the use of the hands including devices using ultrasound, infrared beams, or eye movements; mouse alternatives may include sip-and-puff systems activated by inhaling or exhaling, joysticks manipulated by hand, feet, chin, etc., trackballs, track pads, a foot mouse, and/or touch screens, which allow direct selection or activation of the computer by touching the monitor.

The range of computer input devices is vast and ever-changing; many are plug-n-play, allowing people with differing abilities relatively easy access to computer use. If you have questions about alternative input devices, or would like to see or try-out a number of these devices, contact IPAT at 1-800-265-4728 or ipatinfo@integra.net.

EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT

A New Twist on a Communication Device

The **Tango** from Ablenet/Blink Twice is a communication device specifically designed for kids. With a dynamic computer touch screen, built-in keyguard, and pre-programmed language, Tango gives the users the ability to communicate right out of the box. This device has over “2000 intuitively organized and fully customizable phrases”, pop-up keyboard for spelling, and key phrase bank all accessed through a six button screen.

Now for some of the twists:

- **Built-in Camera:** allows the user, even if he/she uses switch scanning, to take pictures and put them in photo albums right in the device.

- Voice Morphing: They can record a person's voice to coincide with a photo or other picture in the library and then morph that recording into a different voice such as a woman's voice into a little girl's voice.
- Speak Your Feelings: Now you can whine, shout and whisper while you say just about anything with the push of a button. For example, if your child wants to whine while he says, "Why do I have to take a bath?", he just pushes the "Whine Once" button, and the next thing that he says will have a whining tone.
- Consumer Electronic Style: Looks like an everyday child's hand-held computer game with USB and media card inputs/outputs.

The Tango can be accessed directly with the touch screen or via switch scanning. The device is 12.5" wide X 4.4" high X 1.8" thick and weighs 2 pounds. This device is available to rent through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library-1-800-895-4728. More information on the Tango can be found on either of these websites: www.blink-twice.com or www.ablenetinc.com .

(use a photo of the device to set off the article, found on either website above)

MARK YOUR CLENDAR

ND Vision Services/School for the Blind "Uniting Our Families" Conference

May 4 & 5, 2007

Comfort Inn – Bismarck

Contact: 1-800-421-1181

3rd Annual Clinical Forum on Mental Health "Turning Knowledge Into Practice"

May 15-17, 2007

Seven Seas Inn & Convention Center

Mandan, ND

Contact: UND 866-579-2663

"Is it Sensory or Behavior"

June 4 & 5, 2007

Anne Carlson Center

Jamestown, ND

Contact: Dean Geidt 1-800-568-5175

Family Connections Conference

"The Power of One: Hearts & Minds Together"

June 13 – 16, 2007

Best Western Doublewood Inn

Fargo, ND

Contact: NDCPD 1-800-233-1727