

## **Tap Into the Power of Assistive Technology**

Judie Lee, Program Director

People want to work and in today's world, tools and technology are the keys. For workers with disabilities or those experiencing a decrease in abilities due to aging, the use of assistive technology (AT) devices and services can maintain and/or increase productivity. This technology provides the employee with the right tools for the job, while providing the employer with the best person for the job. It expands the employee pool, accommodates aging employees, and is cost effective.

Employers and employees know what is needed to succeed at work, but with changes in abilities due to accident or aging, they are often unaware of the technologies available to maintain success. The Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) and Rehabilitation Counseling and Services (RCS) partnered to develop a video that would provide employers and employees with the information they need to better understand the role of assistive technology in the workplace. Funds were made available through a grant from the Rocky Mountain Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center (DBTAC) of Colorado to produce, Tap Into the Power of Assistive Technology.

This 10 minute video, Tap Into the Power of Assistive Technology (AT), provides an overview of AT in the workplace through narration, interviews, demonstrations, and visuals. The viewer is introduced to technology that accommodates vision, hearing, mobility, and memory losses. Some of the specific technologies highlighted are computer access, screen reading, ergonomics, speech production, magnification, keyboard/mouse alternatives, and telephone use. Employers tell of the cost benefits of retaining an employee with a disability in need of assistive technology and share their experiences. Assistive technology resources and a description of what AT providers can offer businesses are also discussed.

This videotape will increase awareness of assistive technology solutions; provide resources for assistive technology help; and give the viewer new ways to think about hiring, retaining, and/or maintaining quality workers. The Tap Into the Power of Assistive Technology video is available by calling 800-265-4728. It is also available in closed caption or descriptive video formats.

## **Assistance Dogs Defined**

Condensed version of Karen Farber's article "Fido Does More than Fetch"

Most people are familiar with guide dogs used by people who are blind or visually impaired; they've been in use for 50 years. However, more and more dogs are

assisting people with disabilities. There are four commonly used definitions of assistance dogs: service, guide, hearing, and social/therapy dogs.

Service dogs are those that assist people with physical disabilities – retrieving out of reach objects, pulling/pushing wheelchairs, opening and closing doors, turning light switches off and on, barking for alert, finding another person, assisting persons to walk by providing balance and counter-balance, and performing other individual tasks. Most service dogs are Golden Retrievers or Labrador Retrievers, and can be identified by either a backpack or harness.

Guide dogs assist blind and visually impaired people by maneuvering them around obstacles, stopping at curbs or steps, and negotiating traffic. The human's role is to provide directional commands, while the dog's role is to ensure the team's safety even if it means disobeying an unsafe command. Typically, guide dogs are Labradors, Golden Retrievers, German Shepards and other large breeds, and can be identified by the harness and U-shaped handle they wear.

Hearing dogs assist deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals by altering them to a variety of household sounds such as a door knock or doorbell, alarm clock, oven buzzer, telephone, baby cry, name call, or smoke alarm. They are trained to make physical contact and lead their deaf partners to the source of the sound. Hearing dogs are generally mixed breeds and are small to medium sized. They can be identified by an orange collar and leash and/or vest.

Social/therapy dogs are trained to assist children and adults who have an emotional, psychiatric, and/or developmental disability who can benefit from the therapeutic value of a dog, but are not able to assume total responsibility for its care and training. Third parties (parent, guardian) help with the dog's daily needs and learn to assist in public situations. Social dogs may also be trained to assist a therapist or counselor in settings such as nursing homes, halfway houses, and psychotherapy centers. In these cases the dogs are called therapy dogs.

Dogs are not the answer for everyone. However, a well-trained assistance dog helps increase the independence and self-confidence of its partner, adds privacy, and offers companionship. Matching the dog to the person, and providing training to both is a key to success.

### **Used Equipment Bulletin Board Update**

In an effort to serve North Dakota residents looking to list or purchase used assistive technology devices and/or equipment better, the IPAT staff has updated all listings on the IPAT Used Equipment Bulletin Board. Now when you call 1-800-265-IPAT (4728) or go to [www.ndipat.org](http://www.ndipat.org) and click on "Swap Shop," to check out available AT, all listings will be current. As in the past, IPAT looks to the party listing the equipment to notify us when a sale, swap or trade has been made. Items will remain on the list for no more than 6 months unless requested

otherwise, and the date of listing will be noted. At last count, there has been \$146,329 worth of AT obtained through this IPAT service.

### **Consumer Connection**

Inexpensive AT Helps Me Do My Job

By Shirley Brennan – (photo via e-mail to include here)

My name is Shirley Brennan, and I work as a Consumer Support Specialist at the North Dakota Center for People With Disabilities, located at Minot State University. My job entails updating the consumer board, taking pictures for articles, etc. – basically a “jack of all trades.”

I use a manual wheelchair with the aid of my service dog, Annie, who has been with me for years and, with the help of IPAT, I have had the opportunity to utilize my work time and space much better than I had before.

Right now, I have access to a printer in my office space, rather than having to go down the hall, which saves me a lot of time. It was very difficult, after printing a job, to get back to my office without dropping my print job at least once – having the printer right beside me has eliminated that. Due to the use of a keyguard on my keyboard, my typing has improved a lot. The keyguard sits higher than the keys on my keyboard, so, when I type, I don't bump other keys with my hand, eliminating many mistakes. Also, with my disability, I find it very difficult to write with a regular pen or pencil because I can hold on to things easier when they are weighted. I now have a large, weighted pencil, which IPAT found for me that works just great.

Having these aids has helped me immensely in my job, and, all totaled; I don't think the cost of everything has come to more than \$100.00.

I would like to thank IPAT for all their assistance and support in helping me better myself in my job.

### **FUNDING NEWS**

AT Through Home & Community Based Services

Under Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers, there are four programs, two that may be an indirect avenue for the provision of assistive technology (AT) devices and services. These two programs are HCBS for Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury and HCBS for Aged and Disabled. A HCBS waiver is an agreement between the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) and the State's Medicaid Agency. The 1915 (c) waiver provides the eligible individual a choice between institutional care and if his/her needs can still be met, living in the community. The use of AT devices and services is one way

to help a person maintain independence.

In 1981, the federal government recognized that the Medicaid Program had a bias toward funding institutional care, such as nursing homes. HCBS waivers were developed as a means to counter that bias, with the stipulation that the cost of community supports cannot cost more than institutional care. The waiver provides federal matching funds for needed services otherwise not available under the State's Medicaid Program. The Aging Services Division of the North Dakota Department of Human Services administers these two waiver programs.

Eligible individuals for the Medicaid Waiver for TBI must be receiving Medicaid AND screened in need of nursing facility level-of-care, AND disabled by social security criteria, AND over 18 years of age (does not have an (IEP), AND a diagnosis, which is not congenital or degenerative, of traumatic brain injury or acquired brain injury (e.g., anoxia, infections, CVA, aneurysms, tumors which are not expected to result in death, toxic chemical reactions) resulting in significant emotional, behavioral, or cognitive impairments, AND be capable of directing care as determined by interdisciplinary team, or, if not, legal party to act in the recipient's behalf, AND must have had a neuropsychological evaluation.

Eligible individuals for the Medicaid Waiver for the Aged and Disabled must be a Medicaid recipient, AND screened at nursing facility level-of-care, AND at least 65 years of age OR disabled by Social Security Disability criteria, AND capable of directing his/her own care or legal authority, AND lives in own home/apartment (not dormitory or other group housing), AND has service/care need(s) that can be met within scope of this waiver.

## **EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT**

### Voice Activated Remote Control

Just say the words, and your TV, VCR, DVD, Cable, Satellite, and AUX will obey you! This voice activated remote control uses the sound of your voice to recognize up to 50 commands and is so automated it can perform even complex multi-step operations from a single spoken command. It includes a rechargeable cradle for total hands free operation. It requires 4 rechargeable batteries to operate; they are not included in the purchase.

This voice-activated remote control is now available for trial use through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library by calling 1-800-895-IPAT (4728), or it can be purchased from Enabling Devices 1-800-832-8697 or [www.enablingdevices.com](http://www.enablingdevices.com)

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

March 17-22, 2003

CSUN's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference  
Airport Hilton & Marriot Hotels

Los Angeles, CA  
Information: [www.csun.edu/cod](http://www.csun.edu/cod)

March 20 & 21, 2003

Teaching Literacy Strategies to Children with Disabilities  
Ramada Plaza Suites - Fargo, ND  
**Communications Departments – MSU/UND**  
Contact: LaRae (218) 236-2286

April 12, 2003

Great American Stationary Bike Race  
7<sup>th</sup> Annual Cerebral Palsy Fundraiser  
Women's Health Center – 9am – 2:15pm  
Bismarck, ND  
Contact: Medcenter One Foundation (701) 328-8450

April 13, 2003

Supporting Behavioral Growth in Inclusive Settings &  
Providing Support with Understanding  
1pm – 5pm  
Doublewood Inn – Bismarck  
Contact: Joyce (800) 489-5013

April 30, May 1 & 2, 2003

ND Association of Community Facilities 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
Believe . . . Achieve  
Doublewood Inn - Bismarck, ND  
Contact: Mary or Cheryl (800) 233-1737