

Reauthorization of the Assistive Technology Act Action Needed

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

There has been some confusion and questions as to the funding status and actual expiration of the Assistive Technology Act and what it means to IPAT in North Dakota. In order to clarify this and provide accurate information, the national Association of Tech Act Projects obtained confirmation of the following information from the Department of Education's Grant Office.

The President eliminated FY04 funding for the Title I AT State grant program and its accompanying technical assistance program. Federal funding for IPAT in North Dakota will end on September 30, 2004, if nothing changes. For the last three years, the state projects have been kept alive via an amendment to the appropriations bills that have waived the "sunset provision" in the statute. Now it is time to reauthorize the law to ensure the continuation of a state grant program in every state. If no action is taken by September 30, 2003, all state projects funded under Title I of the Assistive Technology Act will be eliminated. If these projects are eliminated, a federal investment that has built a national state-by-state infrastructure will be eliminated. People with disabilities in North Dakota will have less access to assistive technology.

Without funding for IPAT the following services would be lost in North Dakota:

- Statewide Equipment Loan Library
- Technical Assistance from trained AT professionals via phone, e-mail, on-site
- AT Evaluation and Training Center
- Statewide used Equipment Swap and Shop
- Statewide AT Newsletter
- IPAT website
- AT Publications specific to the needs of North Dakotans
- Training (statewide, regionally and locally) on a variety of AT topics
- Interagency coordination of AT services

What is needed:

- Reauthorize the Assistive Technology Act (P.L.105-394) and fix the law to ensure ongoing funding for the North Dakota Assistive Technology Program. This needs to occur before September 30, 2003.
- Amend the Appropriation Bill to provide the same funding level as FY '03 for State Assistive Technology Programs. \$26,824,000 was the final FY '03 appropriation amount for Title I of the Assistive Technology Act. North Dakota's portion of this is \$305,000 annually.

In the Senate, the committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) holds jurisdiction over the AT Act. In the House, the Subcommittee on 21st

Century Competitiveness of the Committee on Education and the Workforce holds jurisdiction over the Assistive Technology Act. In order for reauthorization of the AT Act or inclusion of AT within the Appropriation Bill to become a reality, Senators and Representatives need to understand its importance to you.

Generic Software Terms Defined

As computer technology evolves so do software products. For persons with disabilities knowing about and using the right software alternative to meet their needs can be the deciding factor between failure and success at school, work, and home. In an effort to build your software vocabulary, frequently used software solutions are defined below.

What is an on screen keyboard? It is a software program that places an image of your keyboard on the monitor; allowing you to use a mouse, touch screen or switch to enter all the keyboard characters and functions. Examples of specific products are: Madentec's ScreenDoors 2000(tm), Origin Instruments KeyStrokes and IMG's OnScreen.

What is a mouse emulator and dwelling? A mouse emulator imitates and takes the place of a mouse; dwelling is a software feature that allows you to move the cursor with a mouse over an item you want to "click", and the cursor automatically activates the mouse click for you. You can perform left and right clicks, double click and drag lock. The activation time is adjustable. Examples of specific products are: Origin Instruments Dragger(tm), Gus! Dwell Cursor and IMG's Joystick to Mouse(tm).

What is word prediction? It is a software program that cuts down the number of strokes needed to type words. Each time you type a letter the program predicts what the word will be based on letters typed, your personal performance and frequency. Examples of specific products are: Don Johnston's Co:Writer(r), Applied Human Factor's SoothSayer(tm) and WordQ.

What is a graphic organizer? It is a software program that organizes writing tasks through outlining, illustration and note taking. These drafts can then be turned into papers, essays or reports. Examples of specific products are: Inspiration(r) and Don Johnston's Draftbuilder(tm).

What is a screen reader? It is a software program that translates what is on a computer screen into speech or Braille. It reads text within documents, dialog boxes, menu selections and icons. Examples of specific products are: TextHelp! ScreenReader and Freedom Scientific's JAWS.

What is a screen magnifier? It is a software program that magnifies or enlarges the characters and graphics on a computer screen. Examples of specific products are: Ai Squared's BIGSHOT(r) and ZoomText.

The Olmstead Decision and North Dakota

What is the Olmstead Decision?

In June of 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of two Georgia women who wanted to be able to leave the institution where they were living and live in the community instead. The court ruled that the Americans with Disabilities Act gives people the right to live in the most integrated setting, so long as they don't oppose the move, the state's treatment professionals determine it is appropriate, and the placement can be reasonably accommodated, considering the resources available to the state and the needs of other people with disabilities.

Why is it important, who in ND is affected?

This decision affirms the right of people in institutions to challenge their placement. Beyond that, it also has implications for preventing the placement of people in institutional settings who with appropriate supports could remain living in the community. Although ND has made significant progress in supporting lesser restrictive services through the ARC lawsuit of 1980, there are still people with developmental disabilities in nursing homes and group homes that could live in the community with supports. As well, some of our elderly residents and people with physical and psychiatric disabilities end up in nursing homes, residential care homes, or correctional facilities because of the lack of community supports. These supports could include home modifications, assistive technology use, personal care attendants, and access to transportation.

How will ND respond?

The Governor's Commission on the Olmstead Decision has requested funding to create a consumer-driven system of services for people with disabilities or long-term illnesses to develop a wider spectrum of long-term care and support services. This funding will be used to implement pilot projects through a request for proposal (RFP) process. The projects will focus on two distinct outcomes. The Person Centered Care Model will examine how the quality of life can be enhanced in residential facilities and whether some individuals can be transitioned into lesser restrictive settings; and the Living in Place Model will examine how a person in a non-healthcare environment can use products, services, and supports to continue to live in their residence as circumstances and conditions change. The RFP's will be available in late April and are due June 1, 2003.

Consumer Connection

Todd Miller, Bismarck

I was driving home from a weekend in Bismarck when my accident happened. I don't remember the details, but I rolled my Mustang and as a result ended up with a spinal cord injury, which has left me a quadriplegic.

The first time I met Peggy Shireley with IPAT was through Chuck Stebbins who was working at the Dakota Center for Independent Living. With the help of Chuck and Peggy I was introduced to the Head Mouse for my computer. Since I am unable to use my hands this device allows me to independently operate my computer through an infrared dot that is placed on my hat. With this I am able to keep in touch with all my buddies through e-mails, I also enjoy playing computer games and so on.

I also have an environmental control unit (ECU) that operates my television and telephone. I've had some ongoing problems with this, so my family thought I should look for other alternatives. Having worked with IPAT in the past, Peggy was the first person we called. Through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library, I was able to try out the INVOCA voice activated remote and Mini-Relax remote control for my television. I also borrowed the Dialogue RC 200 remote controlled telephone, which I am able to operate independently.

Again, using IPAT as a resource, Peggy referred me to the Dakota Center for Independent Living as a possible source to purchase the alternative phone. An application was made to DCIL and funding was approved! I recently received my own Dialogue RC 200 telephone, thanks to the DCIL and Peggy.

A HUGE Thank You to Peggy Shireley and the IPAT team for introducing me to these devices, which have helped me maintain my independence. I would strongly encourage others to do the same!

Funding News

Sorting out funding avenues for assistive technology devices and services is sometimes a challenge. To make it easier, IPAT offers a free funding manual, *Assistive Technology Funding Avenues in North Dakota*. This manual provides descriptions of North Dakota's major assistive technology funding sources. It was designed to help individuals with disabilities and their service providers search for and find assistive technology funding.

The manual is divided into seven sections; each contains a brief overview of the funding source, eligibility criteria which apply at this time, assistive technology funding potential, the appeals process, and contact information. The sections include: Vocational Rehabilitation, Education, Medicaid, Medicare and Other Health Insurance, Social Security, Veteran's Administration, and Alternative Funding Sources. If you have questions about where to go for assistive technology funding, IPAT invites you to call Connie at 1-800-265-4728 and request your manual today.

In addition to the manual, IPAT also has a real person you can contact with specific funding questions. Jeannie Krull, located in IPAT's Fargo office is our

funding/policy specialist and can provide technical assistance by calling (701) 239-7228 or 1-800-265-4728.

Equipment Spotlight

Step 'n Go Cycles - a biking alternative

STEP'N GO Cycles are three wheeled cycles designed to provide maximum stability by placing the rider within the "triangle of safety". Featuring wide non-slip treadles designed to offer secure footing, this bike is operated with a walking motion and allows the user to take any size step (short/long/uneven) in order to accommodate the users' natural range of motion and cadence without loss of power or balance.

The bike also features a parking brake to secure the it while mounting or dismounting; an easy grip shift that combines with a 6 speed sprocket for smooth, quiet shifting; chain shield; adjustable long shaft steering column; thick hand grips; and adjustable seat pads. Another unique option is the Quickstand that converts the Step'n Go into a stationary bicycle for year round indoor use.

Call the IPAT Equipment Loan Library to try out the Step'n Go by calling 1-800-895-4728. It is available for purchase (\$1299.00) from Treadle Power, Inc, 6 Linden Terrace, Burlington, VT 05410, 1-802-862-2980. Their website, www.stepngo.com, has more detailed information and a short video of this cycle in action.

Mark Your Calendar!

May 14, 2003

In the Home Specialists Conference
Assistive Technology Display
10:30 am - 1:00 pm
International Inn - Minot, ND

June 19-23, 2003

**RESNA 26th Annual Conference on Technology & Disability:
Research, Design, Practice & Policy**
Hyatt Regency - Atlanta Georgia
Contact: (703) 524-6686 or www.resna.org/conferences/