

AT and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act

Judie Lee, Director

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act was signed into law on December 17, 1999. This new law removes barriers that require people with disabilities to choose between health care coverage and work; assures that more Americans with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in the workforce and lessen their dependence on public benefits; and increases beneficiary choice in obtaining rehabilitation and vocational services.

One of the largest untapped labor pools in North Dakota is persons with disabilities. AT can and will work hand in hand with legislation to increase the employment rate of individuals with disabilities. However, for this vision to be realized, employers and employees must be able to envision job results being accomplished in different ways. For many, this may require an attitudinal shift. It means focusing on people's abilities rather than their disabilities.

A rancher is effective if she or he feeds the cattle and mends the fences; that the rancher with paraplegia operates the cattle feeder system in the bed of a truck via a rod from within the cab is immaterial. A lawyer is effective if he or she has a solid grasp of law and can present a convincing case before a jury or judge; that the lawyer accesses law books through a Kurzweil reader because she or he is blind is immaterial to the job skill. A stocker in a factory is effective if he or she packages the proper number of items in each bin; that the stocker, because of a developmental disability that limits attention span, uses a counting device is not only immaterial to the job skill, but can make-and has made-that person the most accurate stocker on the factory floor. A dispatcher is effective if he or she can provide accurate directions and information to the drivers; that the dispatcher relays this information through a voice synthesizer within a laptop computer is immaterial.

Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to pursue meaningful careers. AT opens the door to employment for many individuals. It is the conduit to higher paying jobs, equal pay, equal benefits, and equal opportunity.

Attitudes can not be legislated. They are changed through awareness, education, and life experiences. Each of us has the responsibility to share our experiences, information and knowledge with potential employers and

employees to insure the intent of the Act is realized and that more persons with disabilities experience opportunities to enter the workforce.

Fond Farewell

As of March 24, 2000, , IPAT's Northeast Regional Coordinator resigned her position to invest in other interests. We extend a heartfelt thank you to Beth for her dedication, commitment and vision in helping to pioneer assistive technology services in North Dakota. Everyone wishes her all good things in whatever adventures lie ahead.

The Person is Going Home Now What?

If you are a hospital social worker, discharge planner, home health worker, or other medical staff, you are invited to attend a workshop sponsored by IPAT. "*Assistive Technology - The Forgotten Piece*" will be held in Fargo at the Doublewood Inn on May 12, 2000. Linda Fraas, an occupational therapist out of the Rehabilitation Research Center on Aging in Buffalo, New York will train participants on how to incorporate assistive technology into their services. Topics covered will include: assessment of the need for assistive devices, successful approaches for promoting independence, an assistive device display, case studies and resource information. The conference fee is \$20. For more details, or to register by phone, please call the ND AT Help-Line 1-800-472-2911. Space is limited.

Alternative Telephones

People with hearing loss often find it difficult if not impossible to communicate with others via the phone since the typical voice telephone does not provide the user with visual cues. For people who cannot use voice telephones, there are visual telephones available which allow users to type conversations. These alternative telephones are referred to under three different monikers; Telecom-munications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs), Teletext (TT) devices, or teletypewriters (TTYs). They offer a variety of options, including printers, large print displays, announcers, and voice carry over or hearing carry over capability.

Voice and hearing carry over allows the caller to use the telephone and the TT features during the same call. For example, a person could speak for him or herself on the phone and then use the TT features to receive the other person's typed response (voice carry over). Or, a person could use the TT to express him or herself by typing and then pick up the handset to listen to the other person (hearing carry over). Understanding which part of phone use is difficult for an individual is critical in selecting the right alternative phone.

Interstate and intrastate relay systems enable TDD users to communicate with others through a relay systems operator in their area. The operators simply use a standard TDD machine and a telephone to relay messages back and forth between people with hearing and/or speech difficulties and people without them. Relay systems allow alternative phone users the freedom to communicate with users not having alternative phones for business or personal conversation.

Alternative phone users have direct access to 9-1-1 operators where 9-1-1 dialing is available and should program 9-1-1 into their phone separately from the typical seven-digit fire or police numbers. Receiving a TDD call at a dispatch center can be confusing for operators as one of three things happen: the operator will hear a tone, a synthesized voice, or silence. To save time, confusion and possibly your life it is best to let your 9-1-1 center know you are an alternative phone user and they will identify you accordingly. Once you are identified they can respond to your call correctly and quickly.

CONSUMER CONNECTION

IPAT Program Bismarck, ND 58501

I am writing to thank you for two separate reasons. The first is to thank you for the vast amount of information and knowledge that is shared by your project regarding assistive technology. As individuals specializing in assistive technology, you are a terrific resource to tap into for those of us not as familiar with the field. With an ever-growing emphasis being placed on assistive technology as an avenue for accommodation within school settings and special needs students, it is great to know I can call you to trouble-shoot a student's particular learning difficulty. I have never ended a conversation without receiving several AT suggestions that I can then take back to teachers, administrators, students and parents. Based on team input, we can then choose the assistive technology we feel will be most appropriate for the student and team. The expertise IPAT shares helps to keep us informed and allows us to make better decisions for students while building our own AT awareness and skills.

The second reason I would like to thank you is for the hands-on, on-site usage of AT devices through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library. This service allows school teams to take what was selected as an AT solution to the next step - we obtain the device through the loan library and are able to try it out without purchase or rental costs. I am able to check out devices to use for six weeks simply by calling 1-800-421-1181. When the six weeks are up, the student, family and staff know if the AT device made

a difference or not. This service helps everyone make a more informed choice and a better financial decision when making purchases.

The IPAT project is a wonderful resource for schools to use. It is easy and beneficial for all involved.

Sincerely,
Kelly Mabry
SLD Consultant
Burleigh County Multi-district Special Education

FUNDING NEWS

Self-Employment Your Goal?

Darrell Farland

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), in collaboration with the Lewis and Clark Regional Council in Bismarck, has established a Revolving Loan Fund for Self-employment and Home-based Business. The program is designed to assist individuals with disabilities who are self-motivated and have a strong desire to start their own business. This loan fund may serve as an assistive technology funding source if assistive technology is part of the business plan and is required for self-employment or in development of a home-based business.

A VR counselor will assist an interested client in beginning the application process. First, a Business Assessment Scale will be completed to measure your business readiness. Next, business plans, marketing plans, and financial data will need to be prepared. The client and counselor will review the gathered data, discuss options available to each client and a review committee will approve or disapprove the application.

In 1999, 4% of VR clients were assisted in starting their own businesses and the revolving loan fund was able to assist three individuals in becoming self-employed.

For more information, contact a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor at one of the Regional Human Service Centers, or call Darrell Farland at 701-328-8954.

EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT

The **Personal Communicator** creates a common ground for communicating in American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Using Hypermedia technology, this program brings ASL communication

capabilities to desktop and notebook computers. With more than 2500 digital video signs and 4500+ English words, it is designed to enhance social interactions among the deaf and hearing students.

If interested, Version 2 for Macintosh, Windows 3.1 and Windows 95 with a CD ROM and optional sound card are available through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library. It can be purchased from Instructional Media Center, Michigan State University - PO Box 710, East Lansing, MI 48826-0710 or call 517-432-9229. Base cost \$60.

Mark Your Calendar!

April 25, 2000

Wellness Fair
9am - 3pm
Bismarck Senior Center
Susan 255-4648

April 26, 2000

AT and Legal Issues
ND Interactive Video Network Sites
Sharon 800-472-2911

May 3-5, 2000

NDACF & NDAPSE Conference
Doublewood Inn, Bismarck
Mary 701-858-3483

May 12, 2000

AT the Forgotten Piece
8am - 4pm
Doublewood Inn, Fargo
Sharon 800-472-2911

June 7 & 8, 2000

Teaching & Technology Conference
AT in Education Defined
The AT Assessment Process
Bismarck High School
Jennifer 800-328-9848

June 22-24, 2000

Independent Living Conference
Radisson Inn, Bismarck
Bob 800-489-5013