

**The Digital Divide**

**Judie Lee, IPAT Director**

Information technology (IT) is a huge, new industry that seems to have mushroomed overnight, impacting all areas of our lives. According to the 1999 National Telecommunications and Information Administration report, *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*, more Americans than ever have access to IT through personal computers and the Internet, yet there remains a significant "digital divide" between "IT haves" and "IT have-nots." One group of "IT have-nots" is individuals with disabilities.

The primary reason for the exclusion of this population from the digital movement is the lack of 'fit' between the technology product and the end-user. To increase IT access, creators of technology products need to employ the principles of universal design throughout the design process. Universal design is nothing more than an approach to design that incorporates features and elements which, to the greatest extent possible, can be used by everyone. Ways to accomplish this are to build-in features that allow the technology product to be used by a variety of users and/or build in compatibility with add-on adaptive devices to provide the needed alternative inputs and outputs.

Examples of built-in features could include: screen magnification software for individuals with limited vision, a numerical keypad that can be altered at the control panel to function as a mouse for those with motor control needs, or the ability to turn off the repeat key for those with a slow and heavy keyboard touch. Examples of add-on devices could include: an in-line telephone amplifier for those with hearing loss, a mini-keyboard for a one-handed typist, or a Braille printer for a Braille reader.

To promote IT access for the greatest number of Americans, there are state and federal activities underway. The U.S. Access Board is establishing standards to provide technical and functional performance criteria to determine whether a technology product or system is "accessible." Federal agencies must comply with these technology accessibility standards for all electronic and information technology acquired on or after August 7, 2000.

The key to IT for all is in assuring accessibility at the level of technology product procurement. It is more cost effective to consider accessibility features and elements while planning purchases rather than attempting to retro-fit later. A few states have adopted limited standards in reference to

IT access. However, most states have not identified a uniform set of standards for IT access. Therefore, it benefits us all to work with and educate those responsible for purchasing decisions within our systems to assure accessibility. Let's not let the very technology products that have the potential to lessen the educational, employment, and independent living gaps, create a digital divide.

### **Higher Education Manual Available**

The North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project has published a manual entitled *"Higher Education in North Dakota: A Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities."* Topics covered include; preparing an application, legal rights under state and federal law, vocational rehabilitation, assistive technology, problem solving and student resources.

Many individuals, agencies and organizations contributed to the development and printing of this publication. It is now available for students with disabilities interested in pursuing higher education and those who assist students in the planning process. If you would like a copy, contact the ND Protection & Advocacy Project 1-800-472-2670 or e-mail [panda@state.nd.us](mailto:panda@state.nd.us). Alternate formats are available on request.

### **Attention Attorneys**

3.25 CLE's now available via video and book - \$20

If interested, take advantage of a CLE packet approved by the North Dakota Bar Association - "Legal Issues Related to Assistive Technology and Special Education." Packet includes a video, book and CLE certificate. To order: Call the AT Help-Line 1-800-472-2911. CLE packet sponsored by IPAT.

### **Assistive Technology Kits Available**

Attention care givers, individuals with disabilities and interested others in North Dakota! Could you or people you know use a variety of low-end assistive technology devices to increase independence, promote AT awareness or add a hands-on component to training? If so, the IPAT program has 4 low-tech kits available for long term loan. A sample of kit contents includes:

1. Loop scissors, dycem, box openers
2. Adaptive gardening tools, magnifier, playing card holder
3. Pill alarm, key adapter, dressing aids

4. Big Mack switch, touch light adapter, AC adapter and jelly bean switch
5. Communication books, communication wallet

IPAT invites you to submit a proposal (not to exceed 500 words) describing:

1. How you would put the kit contents to use,
2. Identifying barriers the kit items help overcome, and
3. Listing the potential users.

A selection committee will review the proposals and the kits will be awarded August 1, 2000. Submit your proposal by July 15, 2000 to IPAT - Atten: Kits Committee - PO Box 743 - Cavalier, ND 58220. For further information call 1-800-265-4728 (V/TTY)

### **Consumer Connection**

#### **ND Hear-O & Quota International**

Bismarck and Mandan residents now have the opportunity to become "North Dakota Hear-O's" by donating hearing aids for recycling. The ND Hear-O project is sponsored locally by the Quota International Club and the ND Assistive Technology Help-Line.

Quota Club members have placed collection boxes at nine Bismarck-Mandan locations including; Senior Centers, Cashwise Foods, Dan's Supermarkets, Econo Foods, Vocational Rehabilitation and One-hour Martinizing. "Collection boxes are critical to the success of this program and we wish to thank those providing the sites, donations from Capital City Construction, Friendly True Value and Dakota Screen Arts for labor and materials, and advice from the local Lions Clubs who have collected eyeglasses for recycling," said Gloria Olson, Quota President.

The donated hearing aids will be picked up by a local volunteer and sent to a national organization, "Hear-Now". This non-profit organization refurbishes and redistributes the aids. The number of hearing aids submitted by North Dakota residents is the number then made available at minimal cost to our residents in need of amplification devices. What a wonderful example of one man's trash becoming another's treasure!

For further information call the club president, Gloria Olson at 258-2929, pick up literature at any of the donation sites, or contact the AT Help-Line 1-800-472-2911. Receipt of donation will be provided for tax purposes if requested.

## Funding News

### **AT Funding within Medicare**

The assistive technology connection within Medicare is in the coverage of *durable medical equipment (DME) and prosthetic devices*. Part B of the Medicare program known as "supplemental medical insurance," covers physician's services, laboratory services, *durable medical equipment*, medical supplies, *prosthetic devices*, rehabilitation therapy services (including SLP services) and home health care for beneficiaries not covered by Part A.

Congress established the Medicare program in 1965 to provide government-subsidized health insurance for:

1. People age 65 and older that are entitled to Social Security retirement benefits.
2. "Disabled adult children" i.e., people whose disabilities arose during childhood and whose parents are disabled, retired or deceased.
3. People who have received Social Security Disability Insurance benefits for 24 months.
4. People with end-stage renal disease.

Medicare eligibility is not based on income. It is divided into two parts: Part A, known as "hospital insurance," and Part B known as "supplemental medical insurance." Remember that the key to AT funding under Medicare lies within Part B and falls under the broad categories of durable medical equipment (DME) and/or prosthetic devices. Contact your local Social Security Office for further information.

## Equipment Spotlight

### **WatchMinder**

The **WatchMinder** is a training and reminder system initially developed for adults and children with attention disorders, but has been found helpful for those with learning disabilities, hearing loss, physical disabilities and developmental delays as well.

The device is a sports wristwatch with a large, easy to read display with time, date, and messages. It can be worn on the wrist, clipped to hip or belt, or placed in a pocket. It features a vibrator that is easy to feel and privately alerts the individual to do a particular task. It is easy to



program, comes with pre-programmed messages, and does not require a computer or paging system.

The **WatchMinder** is available for trial-use for state residents through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library. Call 1-800-421-1181 to organize a loan. It can be purchased from WatchMinder, PMB #278-5405 Alton Pkwy #5A, Irvine, CA 92604, 800-961-0023. Introductory cost \$79.50 + \$9 s/h. For more details go to [www.watchminder.com](http://www.watchminder.com)

## **Calendar of Events**

### **Fishing with Pro's**

- *June 10, 2000*  
ND Sporting Chance Event  
Kimball Bottoms Boat Ramp  
Ron - 701-258-1865

### **The Total Concept**

- *June 22 - 24, 2000*  
Region VIII Ind. Living Conf.  
Radisson Inn - Bismarck, ND  
Madonna - 701-222-3636

### **Technology for the New Millennium**

- *June 28 - July 2, 2000*  
RESNA Annual Conference  
Omni Rosen Hotel - Orlando, FL  
Tony - 703-524-6866

### **Water Skiing - Lake Nelson**

- *July 15, 16, 2000*  
ND Sporting Chance Event  
Ron - 701-258-1865

### **Strengthening the Sacred Circle**

- *August 19-22, 2000*  
National Indian Council on Aging  
Duluth Entertainment Conf. Center  
Duluth, MN  
Kelsey - 505-292-2001

## **IPAT Equipment Expo!**

- *August 8 & 9, 2000*  
People First Conference  
International Inn - Minot  
Mike - 800-265-4728