

**AT for Persons with Cognitive Disabilities**

by Judie Lee

Assistive technology (AT) has proven to be a valuable tool for individuals with disabilities in achieving personal goals relating to independence, employment, education, and recreation. However, people with cognitive disabilities are often overlooked as potential AT users. Therefore, they are frequently unaware of AT devices and services that could assist them in being more independent and productive.

People of all ages with cognitive disabilities need to be considered for AT. For example, the young child with developmental delays can participate with peers by using adaptive computers. Software can be regulated to run at a slower pace or offer drill and practice as a non-judgmental and patient tutor for a slower learner. Older persons with cognitive disabilities living with family members may use AT devices such as medication dispensers, automatic shut-offs on stoves, or auto-dial phones to prevent or postpone institutionalization.

The process for determining the appropriate device for an individual with cognitive disabilities is the same as for everyone else, beginning with identifying the task the individual wants or needs to do that is impeded by the disability. The challenge at this stage may be the limited experience of AT professionals and other service providers in applying AT to users with cognitive disabilities. As well, the instructional strategies will need to be simplified and/or customized based on user need to increase understanding and device use. Otherwise, insufficient or inadequate instructions may result in the individual being considered "unable" to use the device, whereas, the reality was improper instruction. However, the outcome is the same, the device has limited usefulness and the individual does not have a method to compensate for a functional limitation.

The AT funding options for persons with cognitive disabilities are similar to those available to people with other types of disabilities. Typical considerations in determining the appropriate AT funding source are age, type of disability, eligibility for state or federal benefit programs, insurance coverage, and the type of equipment needed and the intended use of the equipment. The most used AT funding sources are education, vocational rehabilitation, and Medicaid.

AT practitioners and other service providers have an ethical responsibility to consider AT for and become skilled in applying AT to users with

cognitive disabilities. Consumers, family members, and caretakers need to let their voices be heard regarding their need for AT.

### **and the winners are . . .**

Congratulations go to the University of Mary and the Kenmare 'Wheels & Meals' for their submission of successful letters of application for long-term use of the IPAT low-tech outreach kits. IPAT staff will deliver the kits, and we look forward to the increased opportunities for AT networking and hands-on experiences for North Dakota citizens.

### **The ABC's of Computer Comfort**

Courtesy of Southwest Physical Therapy, Dickinson, ND

- A. The top of your computer screen should be at your eye level.
- B. You should be an arm's length away from the screen.
- C. Your work surface should be at your elbow level.
- D. Your chair should have adjustable armrests that support your arms at elbow level. If your back arches away from the back of the seat, you may want to put a cushion or rolled up towel there.
- E. Your knees should be raised slightly above your hips.
- F. Your chair must have a seat that you can adjust to allow your feet to rest flat on the floor. Your knees should stick out a hand's width from the edge of the chair.
- G. A five-pronged chair with casters is best.
- H. If your feet cannot reach the floor, be sure to get a footrest.

### **IPAT Welcomes Jeannie Krull**

IPAT extends a warm welcome to Jeannie Krull as the NE IPAT Regional Coordinator. Jeannie holds an MS degree from Moorhead State University and has spent the past 9 years in the rehabilitation field as a speech/language pathologist. She has a specific interest and concentration in the area of augmentative communication. Jeannie has experience presenting workshops and in-services on assistive technology topics to parent groups, schools, hospitals, and facilities that serve adults with developmental disabilities.

She will provide technical assistance, training, and public awareness activities for the NE IPAT Region. Her responsibilities will also include reviewing and monitoring current state and federal policies governing AT and developing AT funding and policy resources. Jeannie's office will be located in Fargo, 118 Black Building, Suite #300. She can be reached by calling 1-800-265-4728.

Jeannie resides in Moorhead with her husband and 2 sons. IPAT is pleased to have Jeannie on board and know her skills, expertise, and enthusiasm will be an asset to the people and IPAT.

### **Consumer Connection**

Dickinson AT Room Up & Running!

By Kari Lyon

Last November, a group of people from various agencies around Dickinson got together and decided they would like to have a place where people could try out a range of assistive technology devices. Of particular interest were alternative keyboards, pointing devices and voice input/output, along with communication devices and software programs to help individuals with learning disabilities. We named ourselves the 'Dickinson Assistive Technology Focus Group' and set out to submit a grant to IPAT to turn our 'vision' into a reality.

To our great delight, we were awarded the grant funding and went to work on equipping the AT Room. We found out quickly that there is more to set-up than ordering and opening the door! After nearly 3 months of waiting for back-orders, substituting discontinued items and getting peripherals to work with the operating system, we were finally ready to invite our first guests. On July 12, 2000, twenty individuals attended our first session provided by Jarod Erie from SW Physical Therapy, who did a wonderful job covering ergonomics and devices to assist in achieving ergonomically correct positions. Some of the corresponding equipment described and made available for trial-use included: an electrically adjustable computer table, ergonomically correct chairs, wrist rests, alternative keyboards (Microsoft Natural, Comfort Keys, Acer Future), alternative pointing devices (No Hands Mouse - foot operated, Gyropoint, CruiseCat Touchpad) and a demonstration of voice input (Voice Express).

In the near future, the focus group will be offering training on software programs to assist people with learning disabilities, limited mobility or speech difficulties produce and read documents more independently. We are also planning an open house for the community of Dickinson, and will invite all to come and try assistive technology alternatives. We are excited

with the response retailers have shown in this equipment and hope they use the 'AT Room' for customers wanting to try before they buy. If you are interested in assistive technology alternatives, we are the place for you.

## **FUNDING NEWS**

### Funding Resources

The way in which you plan to use assistive technology will dictate which potential funding sources you contact. Knowing the main function of the device you are asking for - is it a medical necessity, a tool for education, or a means of holding a job? - will tell you which source is most likely to provide funding.

For *example*: **Medicare** is the health care program available to people over age 65 and some people with disabilities under age 65. **Medical Assistance** is the joint federal/state program that provides medical and health care services to people with low incomes. Both of these programs can purchase certain types of assistive technology and both require that the technology be medically necessary. **Private Insurance** comes in many forms, and AT coverage varies. However, AT devices and services that are purchased through private insurance plans and policies must be medically necessary to be covered.

**School districts** may purchase assistive technology devices and services for students if it is written into the Individual Education Plan. If a school district purchases the equipment, then the district, not the user, owns it. Schools provide assistive technology devices and/or services when it is determined to be educationally necessary. Educational necessity is based on the following four questions:

- 1) is the AT device or service essential for the student to receive a free and appropriate public education?,
- 2) is the AT device or service necessary for the student to be educated in the least restrictive environment?,
- 3) are the AT devices and/or services a necessary related service?, and
- 4) given AT services and/or devices, will the student have access to school programs and activities? If the answer is yes to any of the above, then the AT device or service is legally required, and is the responsibility of the school district.

**Vocational Rehabilitation** can fund assistive devices that increase the chance of employment for a person with a disability. They also offer an

Independent Living program for people with disabilities, and may purchase assistive technology if the device or service will lead to increased independence.

As you can see, identifying the purpose of the AT device or service increases your chances of success in obtaining funding. Ask yourself, is it medical, educational, or work related? - and pursue existing funding avenues accordingly.

### **Equipment Spotlight**

#### Read & Write

Read & Write is a text to speech software program designed to help persons with learning disabilities. The program features a text window where text can be read back by word, sentence, or paragraph. It allows the user to find alternative suggestions for words and also provides an audible definition and a sample sentence for every selected word. It has homonym support, a word prediction panel (which follows the insertion point for ease of viewing), auto correction, and abbreviation expansion. .

Read & Write is produced by textHELP! Systems, 25 Randalstown Road, Antrim, BT41 4LJ, Northern Ireland. Telephone: +44 28 94428105, Fax: 44 28 94428574, E-mail: [info@texthelp.com](mailto:info@texthelp.com), web address: [www.texthelp.com](http://www.texthelp.com) Base Cost \$199.

### **Calendar of Events**

August 15, 2000

Understanding IDEA & 504  
Trinity Lutheran - Moorhead, MN  
6 - 8 pm

August 15 & 16, 2000

Employment & Supports for People with Disabilities  
8:30 am - 4:30 pm  
Dakota Inn - Jamestown, ND  
CTAT - (800) 682-120

September 14 & 15, 2000

Summit Meeting on Family Services  
for Children who Have Disabilities in ND

Doublewood Inn - Bismarck, ND  
DPI - (701) 328-2214

September 19, 2000

Community Activism  
Trinity Lutheran - Moorhead, MN  
6 - 8 pm

September 21 & 22, 2000

[AT-LTI Reunion](#)

Holiday Inn - Minot, ND  
IPAT - (800) 265-4728

October 5-7, 2000

Annual Meeting  
Mental Health Assoc. in ND  
Seven Seas - Mandan, ND  
Help-Line - (800) 472-2911

October 10, 2000

Community Services 101  
Trinity Lutheran - Moorhead, MN  
6 - 8 pm

October 19-21, 2000

Closing the Gap  
Computer Tech in Education  
Radisson - Bloomington, MN  
(507) 248-3294

November 1-3, 2000

GAND Annual Conference  
Doublewood Inn - Fargo, ND  
Jennifer - (701) 633-5253