

Information Age and Assistive Technology

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

E-mail! SnailMail! Voice mail! Internet! WebPages! Fax! Phone! Cell phone! Information Age! Many of us feel we are on information overload and yet, we continue to be information seekers. The IPAT offices received 3,879 calls last year requesting information on assistive technology, which indicates a need for AT information resources. Where can a person go to find information regarding their unique assistive technology need?

A telephone with a toll free number is a practical starting point for an information search. Toll free numbers are no longer just 800, some are 888 or 877. In North Dakota, the AT Info-line, 888-214-2780, can answer AT questions, search for further information, and link you to other sources. The North Dakota State Library is an excellent resource and can be accessed through local libraries or by calling 800-472-2104.

The world of assistive technology can also be accessed through the Internet. Using on-line resources that have links to other AT sites is a helpful way to locate sites quickly and reduce frustration. For example, The National Institute On Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) WebPage (www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/NIDRR/) links to all of their research and training centers, the "Tech Act" projects in each state and more. IPAT's website (www.ndipat.org) is a local information resource with links to national sites.

Equipment and service providers are another valuable source of information. They have literature on the equipment they sell and services they provide and can often provide technical assistance with funding issues. Their information can be obtained from catalogs, through regional sales representatives, telephones and on-line addresses.

The modality in which information is disseminated needs to be accessible to the user. Formats may include print, large print, tape, disk, Braille, video and closed caption. The information provider has a responsibility to provide information in alternative formats. The information seeker has the responsibility to let the provider know when their information is not accessible and why.

Although there may be a shortage of individuals with expertise in the area of assistive technology in North Dakota, there are ways to access assistive technology information. Information gives one the ability to act or

influence an outcome. Becoming and staying informed regarding assistive technology issues that are important to you can result in solutions in school, at work, at home, and in the community.

Sampling of Worksite Accommodations

Presenting Concern: A teacher with a hearing impairment had trouble hearing students' voices over the sounds of chairs and desks moving on the linoleum floor. Also, the teacher could not see some of the students' faces and therefore could not effectively lip read.

Accommodation: To eliminate noise, used tennis balls were cut and attached to the feet of the chairs and desks. The teacher rearranged the desks in a horse-shoe in order to see the faces of all students. COST: \$0 (the tennis balls were donated by an avid tennis player who would have thrown them away).

Presenting Concern: A company vice president with arthritis had difficulty maintaining stamina during the workday.

Accommodation: The employer provided flexibility in the vice president's work hours and a recliner for her office so she could change body positions to cut down on fatigue. COST \$750

Presenting Concern: A cashier with mild mental retardation had difficulty making change.

Accommodation: The worker used a talking calculator and a chart of bills and coins. COST: \$150

From- Job Accommodations Network

ATTORNEY'S FEES UNDER THE IDEA

by Corinne Hofman, P&A Staff Attorney

The IDEA requires that children with disabilities receive an education that meets their unique needs. Professionals and parents must work together to design an educational program. Sometimes they fail to agree. When this happens, parents may find that they need help from an attorney. This can be a drain on parents' resources.

Parents may be able to recover the cost of hiring an attorney. If parents have succeeded in getting what they want from the school district, parents can ask the school district to pay for the cost of their attorney. Unless the school district and parents reach an agreement on this issue, a federal

judge must decide whether parents are paid all or part of the costs. The judge considers a number of factors.

The judge considers whether parents have won on the disputed issues. Parents must have won on at least some of the issues. They must have received at least some of the requested relief. The school district must have changed its behavior in a way that directly benefits the child with a disability.

The judge also looks at whether the fees charged by the attorney are reasonable. The judge will look at the rates for attorneys in the community, the expertise and training of the lawyer, and the difficulty of the case. The judge may also look to see if the amount of time spent on the case is reasonable and whether the time spent contributed to the relief that was obtained.

Fees may be awarded even when a lawyer who works for a non-profit organization or state agency helps parents. Although there is no out-of-pocket cost to the parent for these services, payment to these attorneys ensures the non-profit organization or state agency can continue to help children with disabilities.

For more information, please call P&A at 1-800-472-2670.

Creative Training Opportunities

Vendors may be a source of training for schools and families. IntelliTools, Incorporated, for example, offers a free training program for schools or districts. To set up a **free** training in your area, you must recruit 20-30 potential IntelliTools users, provide a computer lab of no less than 11 computers of the same platform (Mac or Windows), a projection device and external speakers for use by the presenter. The computers must have microphones and speakers. IntelliTools will provide up to six IntelliKeys (an alternative keyboard), but the sponsor must provide five or more. Call IntelliTools at 800.899.6687 to set up a training or obtain further information.

Consumer Connection

By Karen Schelinder (picture provided)

Independence in the workplace no longer has to be just a dream. Today there are many devices and equipment solutions to assist in greater independence.

In 1986, I was diagnosed with scleroderma, a disease which involves the muscles and can effect internal organs. I had a kidney transplant in 1988 and had extensive physical therapy for a year to learn to walk again because the illness had weakened my muscles. When I was ready to continue working, there were adjustments I knew I would have to make.

One piece of equipment vital in today's workplace is a computer. After I had chosen a computer, I needed to find a mouse which would be more conducive to my needs. Thanks to the "try before you buy" loan program through IPAT, I was able to look at many different options and was able to try different mouse alternatives before buying. I now use a track-pad as my pointing device. Another piece of adaptive equipment that has allowed me continued independence at the workplace is Dragon Naturally Speaking a voice input program. Through the help of IPAT counselor Beth, I obtained information about different AT software programs to help in my search for the right device to best suit my needs. I can now dictate instead of keying in letters, etc., this speeds the process along and allows me to continue working independently at my workplace. Thanks to the Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT), anyone can be connected to the most up-to-date equipment to help live an independent life as well as be a successful peer in the workplace.

Also, remember to work with IPAT and your place of employment. For me, the crew at work designed and built a desk to fit my needs. The project did not cost as much as buying a new desk, in fact a lot less, and it fit my needs.

****Karen worked with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to obtain accommodations and maintain employment.***

Funding News

Disabled Children's Relief Fund

The Disabled Children's Relief Fund (DCRF) is a potential assistive technology funding source for individual children and non-profit organizations. The mission of the DCRF is to promote the growth and development of children with disabilities, to increase public awareness, and to support efforts that strengthen compliance with state and federal laws for the benefit of children with disabilities. To support this mission, DCRF provides equipment, prostheses, and rehabilitative services to children with disabilities throughout the United States.

In light of the growing cost of health insurance, and the large number of families with little or no coverage, DCRF focuses special attention on helping children (0-18 years of age) who do not have health insurance,

especially those with physical disabilities. Although there are no restrictions on the types of eligible disabilities, preference is given to applications that benefit children with physical challenges.

Applications may be submitted by families for an individual child, or by a non-profit organization for a small group of children. Grant requests are reviewed throughout the year, and awards are made at convenient intervals thereafter.

For more information, contact IPAT or the Disabled Children's Relief Fund at P.O. Box 7420, Freeport, NY 11520. Phone: (516) 377-1605.

Equipment Spotlight

If you are looking for a small, lightweight (13 ounces), and powerful communication device, the SideKick may be just what you need. It can be used as a stand-alone device or by a person who uses a more powerful system but occasionally needs something easy and light to carry for activities such as recess or shopping. The SideKick comes loaded with a sample vocabulary and new words, phrases and sentences can be easily added to the 24-key keyboard. This device uses recorded speech, can be activated by direct selection or scanning, and has auditory scanning and visual feedback features. The SideKick is available for loan through the IPAT Equipment Loan Library 800.421.1181 and/or can be purchased from the Prentke Romich Company at 330.263.1984. Base Cost: \$1295

Calendar of Events

Oct. 5 & Nov 16, 1999

- It's Never Too Early; It's Never Too Late
Planning for family members of persons with developmental disabilities
Fraser - Fargo, ND
NDCPD - 800.233.1737

Oct. 18, 1999

- Explore the Possibilities
Retirement planning for persons with developmental disabilities
Comfort Inn - Bismarck, ND
NDCPD - 800.233.1737

Oct. 21-23, 1999

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

IPAT's Annual Report Available - if interested call Connie at 1-800-265-IPAT or e-mail rawls@pioneer.state.nd.us and request your free copy today.

Can You Help?

Do you have a VGA or SVGA monitor, cable or power cord that you no longer need? Would you consider donating them? If so, please contact Mike Bishop at 1-800-265-IPAT or e-mail mikebishop@valleycity.net. Thank you.