

Announcing the AT KEY

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

Welcome to the first publication of the AT KEY. AT (Assistive Technology) is often the key that unlocks doors to employment, education, recreation, community, and independence at home for individuals with disabilities.

Assistive Technology (AT) includes a vast array of devices and services. AT includes devices to address mobility limitations (wheelchairs, adapted door handles, reachers), devices to address visual limitations (braille printers, magnifiers), devices to address hearing limitations (phone amplifiers, visual alarms), devices to address speech limitations (picture boards, electronic voice systems), devices to address learning disabilities (electronic spellers, customized software, pencil grips), and thousands more.

Assistive Technology includes a vast array of services. AT includes services to address questions such as: How do you select the appropriate technology? Where and how do you obtain funding for devices? Who can customize or adapt AT devices to meet my specific need? Will the use of AT be coordinated with other therapies, rehabilitation plans, or education programs? Who can provide the training when I receive the device? How are the professionals working with me receiving training in order to provide me with technical assistance needed for successfully implementing my new device in all my environments? Where can I get information about AT? These questions and many other issues surrounding AT will be addressed in this and upcoming issues of the AT KEY.

The use of AT has provided solutions for many individuals with disabilities to achieve outcomes previously thought impossible. Has AT impacted your life? Would you be willing to share your story? What issues are important to you? Are there topics you would like addressed in this format? The AT KEY is a statewide bi-monthly newsletter published by the Interagency Project for Assistive Technology (IPAT). We welcome your input and assistance in making the AT KEY a valuable resource for you. Call 1-800-265-IPAT to share your ideas.

(PILATS)

Partnerships to Increase Local Assistive Technology Services

The development of PILATS occurred as a result of information provided by special education directors. They indicated frustration with the lack of trained personnel in the area of assistive technology, lack of access to equipment for trial use, and discussed concerns regarding funding.

Applications to participate in this program were sent to all special education directors in the state. Grand Forks and Souris Valley Special Education Units were selected based on: 1) their willingness to commit resources of personnel and finances to implement AT, 2) their commitment to seek parent involvement in the AT process, 3) their willingness to collaborate with other agencies, and 4) the demographics of their unit.

Both units have formed AT Task Forces, completed an analysis of their current AT programs, and are working on writing a comprehensive assistive technology action plan. We will keep you posted on their activities as they build their capacity to provide exemplary assistive technology services for students.

Collaborative Efforts Meet Student Needs

Disability Research Encompassing American Indians in Math and Science (DREAMS) is a project to assist Native American children with disabilities enhance their chance of success in math, science and engineering.

One component of the math and science enhancement process is the selection and provision of appropriate assistive technology for use by Native American children with disabilities. Consequently, the Interagency Project for Assistive Technology (IPAT) staff collaborated with the DREAMS project staff to determine the assistive technology needs of 14 Native American children with disabilities located at eight different North Dakota elementary schools on or near reservations. The role of the IPAT staff was to assist the DREAMS project in making the "best match" in device, adaptation or assistive technology system in an effort to maximize student success. Initial assessments were completed and recommendations were provided by IPAT highlighting appropriate hardware, adaptations and software.

The IPAT staff looks forward to continued collaboration with the DREAMS project and hopes that the AT supports recommended do in fact increase the exploration of math and science for these children, ultimately leading to a career choice in one of those fields.

For further information on the DREAMS Project, contact Kim Greenwood, Program Director, at (701) 777-6218.

"AT" Users Network

Many times when a person becomes disabled there are many obstacles to overcome. Often these obstacles seem insurmountable especially when some type of technology has been introduced. Quite often the technology, which is to make things better for the person, becomes the area which causes the most stress. This can often lead to the person having a negative experience in dealing with assistive technology. The IPAT Project is looking for ways to help the consumers of North Dakota achieve success in using assistive technology. One way is find volunteers who now use AT and would be willing to share their expertise with others who are just beginning to use similar assistive technology. If you would be willing to have your name placed on a list for persons to call for support, please contact the AT Info-Line at 1-800-451-8693 and inform the staff person of the type of AT you are using and how someone could be linked to you.

Consumer Connection

Dear Judy,

Greetings from Fargo, or to be more specific, Command Center One. I have a new headset for my tv/radio so I can listen or watch as I dictate a letter into my new voice activated computer system. We finally got the computer table situation on the right track. Jeff's original design wasn't at all functional, so we sent it back, and started over again. He put new wheels on it, and Mike Bishop saved the whole program by designing a complete new top, which works beautifully, but which he is going to make even better later today.

I can't help thinking back to when I first met you. Here was this woman telling me about all this new equipment, and I'm thinking "yes, maybe when pigs fly?" Well I'm proud to announce, pigs are flying?? I expect my rebuilt scanning director any day now and my computer system is working beautifully, and my only real complaint is that I can't learn fast enough. My tutor seems to think we're making good progress, and maybe we are, but when I think of all the time I've wasted in the last 8 years, its a little frustrating.

Well, I guess what I'm trying to say is "Thank You." Thank you Judy, thank you Mike, and thank you IPAT. Keep up the good work, and stop in when you have time in Fargo.

Respectfully yours, C. Wesley Archer

IPAT...About the Project

The Interagency Project for Assistive Technology is a federally funded statewide program committed to increasing the full inclusion and integration of people with disabilities into the community through improved access to assistive technology (AT). Through a variety of activities and programs, information and assistance are provided on devices, services, and funding resources. IPAT works in partnerships with consumers, employers, educators, public and private agencies, and other organizations to reduce barriers to AT.

The IPAT staff are:

- **Judie Lee**, Project Director, 1-800-265-IPAT;
- **Beth Duncan**, NE Regional Coordinator, 1-701-265-4807;
- **Mike Bishop**, SE Regional Coordinator, 1-701-845-8626;
- **Peggy Shireley** SW Regional Coordinator, 1-701-328-9544;
- **Dud Zimmerman** NW Regional Coordinator, 1-701-857-8630.

Funding News

Service clubs, churches, foundations, and other philanthropic organizations can be important sources of funding for assistive technology (AT) devices.

Generally all private funding sources, especially smaller local funding sources, fund people not technology. If a person with a need that coincides with their identified area of interest becomes known to them, they usually will attempt to help. Most of these organizations will provide funding only after public avenues of assistance have been unsuccessful.

The following steps are important in approaching service clubs for assistive technology funding assistance:

- Identify and contact the appropriate service club or organization.
- Become familiar with the areas of interest and their operating procedures.
- Decide the focus of the request for assistance.
- Make a personal presentation and state the need.
- Write a follow-up thank you note.

AT Equipment Loan Library

The IPAT AT Equipment Loan Library provides free access to a variety of equipment for a short period of time. The purpose is to give individuals of all ages and types of disabilities an opportunity to try equipment before purchasing it for themselves. The Loan Library is housed at the Resource Center in the ND School for the Blind, Grand Forks. If you know what

piece of equipment you would like to borrow or want information on the availability of equipment, call Judy Smith at 1-800-421-1181. If you need assistance in determining the appropriate equipment to borrow, call 1-800-265-IPAT or your IPAT Regional Coordinator.

Wanted: AT Stories for Publication. Contact Peggy, 1-701-328-9544.

Wanted: AT Questions, Answers Free. Contact AT Info-Line, 1-800-451-8693.

Mark Your Calendar!

- March 23, 1996, West Acres Mall, Fargo, Disabilities Awareness Day, "Come Learn With Us"
- March 27-29, 1996, Grand Forks, Collaborative Partnerships in Early Intervention Institute
- March 11-13, 1996, Indianapolis, IN, National Rural Conference on Assistive Technology
- March 19-23, 1996, Los Angeles, CA, CSUN Technology Conference

Equipment Spotlight:

The AlphaSmart Pro is a portable, affordable word processing keyboard which lets individuals enter and edit text and then easily transfer it to a Macintosh, Apple IIGS, or PC for formatting and printing. This easy to use device is an inexpensive way to take notes, do homework, and access a computer. It may provide a substitute for a laptop computer in some cases. The AlphaSmart Pro is available for free trial use through the IPAT Loan Library and may be purchased from Intelligent Peripheral Devices, Inc., 408-252-9400. Base Cost: \$299.

Assistive Technology Info-Line 1-800-451-8693