

The Invisible Barrier

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

There are many myths surrounding assistive technology (AT) devices and services. These misconceptions may impact our attitudes toward AT and can become invisible barriers to the successful acquisition and use of AT in the home, at work, in school, around the community, or for recreational activities. Some of the most common misconceptions are:

AT is complicated and expensive. In reality, the majority of AT solutions are simple, inexpensive low tech devices. It may be as simple as rearranging a workspace.

AT is just a luxury. For someone with a disability who relies upon AT to perform a critical function or achieve a desired goal in life, AT is very much a necessity. Just because a device makes a task easier or more convenient to do does not make it a luxury. Consider how society initially regarded automobiles and telephones - now imagine life without them.

The professional always knows best. Users of AT have the experience and motivation that lead to discovering the everyday solutions. Professionals and consumers have access to networks and resources and both can keep current in technology advances. It is important for the consumers and professionals to work together to find the appropriate AT solution.

AT product descriptions are always accurate and helpful. Product descriptions are designed to sell products and are intended for general audiences. It can be difficult to determine which information is useful and relevant to your specific needs. It is best to get other, more objective information to supplement the product descriptions.

Only people with certain types of disabilities find AT useful. The need for specific types of AT varies widely from one person to the next, but individuals of all ages, varying abilities and needs, and all types of disabilities may be able to benefit from the use of technology.

It is important to examine our own attitudes about AT. If we are individuals with a disability, our attitudes may be affecting possible solutions for independence. If we are service providers, our attitudes may be negatively

influencing the people we serve. The best way to demystify AT is to learn more about it.

Booting Up: Choosing & Using Technology

Dr. Dave Edyburn, National President of the Technology and Media Division of CEC, presented to a statewide audience of educators and administrators on Harnessing the Potential of Technology in Schools. This presentation was sponsored by IPAT..

Issues of learning and technology are more critical today than ever before. CD-ROMs, the Internet, Macs, PCs, laptops, notebooks and e-mail - with all the technology surrounding us, school systems can no longer adopt a wait and see attitude about its implementation. It is here, it is now and it is the tool of today and tomorrow. So how do we best use it and infuse it to guarantee accessibility for every student?

An important first step is the adoption of school policies which ensure that a schools curriculum, instruction, assessment and technology support student and teacher learning. Technology that does not advance individual learning has little value in the classroom. We must work together to move the current system toward embracing technology and technology enhanced learning environments. We know technology is a current workplace reality and that students need meaningful experiences with it in school, so they can use it successfully outside of school.

At present, purchasing and utilizing technology in schools is uncoordinated at best. Systematic efforts must be made to implement technology so that learners have access to tools that give all an equal chance to learn, produce, and compete. Effective technology integration relies on an identified process of selection, acquisition, implementation and integration of software, hardware and adaptations. To be successful, the commitment of a variety of players is essential and requires time, financing, role changes and parental involvement. Over the next decade, there is hardly a topic that promises to have more influence on how we educate than the use of technology in schools.

IPAT is Guided by Consumer Input

Cindy Vollmer, CAC Chair

The IPAT project recognizes that the advice and counsel of persons with disabilities (consumers) and their family members (secondary consumers) provide a vital link to meeting the AT needs of the people of North Dakota. In an effort to actively forge this link, the IPAT Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed and held its first meeting in May of 1995.

The CAC is unique in that 100% of the membership is made up of primary or secondary consumers. Members represent a variety of ages, disability interest groups and geographic regions. The mission and purpose of the CAC is to provide input throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation of the IPAT project. As well, the CAC is dedicated to facilitating interagency collaboration to promote long range plans for AT access and services for our citizens.

At present there are ten members on the CAC. We meet quarterly and utilize telephone conference calls to conduct additional business. We are actively recruiting additional members to round-out the 15 position roster. If interested, please contact Cindy Vollmer, CAC Chair at 701-258-1039 or Judie Lee, IPAT Director at 1-800-265-IPAT. Watch for updates of CAC activities in future issues of the AT KEY!

Mark Your Calendar!

- April 11-13, 1996 Minot, ND, Pathfinder Family Centers Spring Conference
- May 6-8, 1996 Bismarck, ND, ND Association of Community Facilities Conference
- June 3-6, 1996 Bismarck, ND, Teaching and Technology Conference TNT
- June 13-14, 1996 Minot, ND, International Conference on Aging & Disabilities
- August 9 & 10, 1996 Jamestown, ND, Keys to Independence, Assistive Technology for All Generations

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION IN EDUCATION

Some students with disabilities who are not eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) may require assistive technology devices and services to participate in school activities. These students may be covered under the anti-discrimination provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

A student who is covered under the ADA or section 504 may receive assistive technology as a reasonable accommodation if needed in order to participate in education equally with other students. Assistive technology would enable such a student to overcome functional limitations. For instance, a student who uses a wheelchair might need a specially designed desk in order to do classroom work. A student with a visual impairment might need a larger than average computer monitor or screen enlargement software, but not require other supports through special education.

Contact the classroom teacher or local school administrator to discuss reasonable accommodation issues in your child's educational setting.

If you have experienced or are experiencing difficulties in obtaining reasonable accommodation in educational settings, please contact your regional IPAT coordinator.

Equipment

The Gentleman Door Opener is an affordable alternative to an electric door opener. It allows individuals to enter and exit environments independently with ease. It is powered off a compressor or bottled carbon dioxide. It is operated by a two function hand-held remote control. The door remains fully open until the operator chooses to close it. Installation is easy - no special tools, no electrical work. It may be purchased from the Gentleman Door Company, 302-239-4045 or e-mail dhermansen@powersurfr.com <mailto:dhermansen@powersurfr.com> . Base cost \$350.

Need More Information About AT?

As part of Pathfinder's annual spring conference, there will be a technology exhibit offering opportunities to try out a variety of assistive devices in mobility, augmentative communication, recreation and alternative computer access. Experience the exhibit! International Inn, Minot ND- April 11-13, 1996.

IPAT Staff:

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- Dud Zimmerman NW Coord. 1-701-857-8630 - dud@minot.com

Together We Did It!

An Interagency Task Force of consumers, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Governors office, universities, Developmental Disabilities, Aging Services, Public Instruction, private service providers and IPAT, was established in September 1995. Our goal was to explore the possibility of collaborating to provide a consumer oriented assistive technology event in North Dakota. The possibility has become reality - mark your calendars for August 9 & 10, 1996! See you in Jamestown, for the first Keys to Independence Assistive Technology for All Generations conference.

AT Public Forums

The IPAT staff conducted a series of eight public forums across the state. The purpose of the forums was to provide individuals with disabilities and other members of the public the opportunity to comment on any and all aspects of assistive technology in North Dakota.

One hundred twenty-five people shared their assistive technology successes, the barriers they encounter when attempting to acquire or use AT, and suggested statewide AT solutions.

Primary barriers consumers identified include:

- Individuals don't know what kind of equipment is available.
- Professionals in all areas (i.e. medical, education, rehabilitation,) lack awareness of and training in assistive technology.
- Lack of understanding of eligibility for funding through existing sources such as VR, Education, Medicaid, and private insurance.
- Misconceptions about AT that negatively impact attitudes

Potential solutions include:

- Provide training to consumers and those to whom consumers look for help.
- Smooth transitions between agencies by establishing interagency/organization agreements.
- Coordinate 800 numbers and create generic infoline.
- Develop resource directory of professionals providing AT services.
- Develop resource directory defining funding options.
- Use all types of media to reach the general public regarding assistive technology.

This valuable insight will provide direction for IPAT activities. If you have additional comments. IPAT welcomes your input at any time.

Consumer Connection

Shawn is an 11 year old boy with spina bifida. He uses a wheelchair for mobility and when out of his chair at home moves himself along on the floor. Low tech accommodations have significantly increased his independence.

Getting Ready!

Shawn Jones

My name is Shawn and I have a story to tell you about my dad. My dad makes lots of things for me so that I can do things by myself. He made me a bookshelf (along the floor) so that I can put anything I want on it. It is so cool because I can reach my stuff myself.

He made a ramp for my bed, but my new puppy can't get up it because it is too slippery. I think it's funny because even though my bed is on the floor, she can't get up. Maybe I should make her a ramp.

I also have a cool nightstand. Each spot is for something - like my CD player, which I can't play too loud. I also have a spot for my books. My mom and I read Goose Bumps mysteries at night. She gets into them a lot. She even tries to scare me when she reads them, but she doesn't scare me.

When I am in my room by myself I can shut my door. I can do that because my dad put a hook on my door handle so I can reach it when I am on the floor. My light switch works the same way.

The playroom is where me and my sister go and play. That's where we can make a mess and my mom doesn't care. The TV and VCR are on the floor so I can watch them whenever I want. The light switch is the same as in my bedroom so I can work it too.

My dad put a new sink in our bathroom and lowered it so that I can wash my hands and brush my teeth by myself. My mom really likes it and says, Your teeth look great!

Me and my dad made a ramp outside to our front door so I can go outside whenever I want to. It is cool - just so long as I don't forget to shut the door. My mom helps to remind me of that.

We have a van with a cool lift. It has switches so that I can get in and out by myself. It has other things in it like hand controls so I can drive it, but I have to wait until I am 16, I think. My mom and dad keep getting the age different every time.

In the summertime, I like to drive my go-cart my dad made for me. He used an old riding lawnmower he got from my grandpa, and he used our new mower for the motor. I told him we should fix it so I could mow the lawn, but my mom tells my dad that he could use the exercise.

My dad bought a pontoon boat for this summer. My dad and I are going to fix it up, he even said we could fix it so I can drive it. Maybe you don't need to be 16 to drive a boat. I can't wait! It will be so cool, especially when I see my friends. I need to start getting things together for the boat.

My mom said my dad can't find anything when he needs it - not me, I'll be ready.