

**The "Real" Challenges of Assistive Technology**

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

New and ongoing advances in the development and manufacturing of assistive technology (AT) is increasing the potential opportunities for people with all types of disabilities. The challenge is no longer in the development of the device. Rather, the "real" challenge lies in selecting, obtaining and supporting the appropriate AT device. The potential of AT is unfulfilled if the appropriate equipment is not chosen.

People must examine what it is they want the technology to enable them to do, determine if the technology will work in their environment, choose the equipment that best matches their needs, and identify individuals that can assist in answering their AT questions. Asking comprehensive AT questions prior to purchase is necessary to avoid situations like the following: an individual was fitted for an expensive power wheelchair to increase independent travel, unfortunately once delivered it did not fit in his van. Consequently, the expectation of independent travel through AT was not fully realized.

The potential of AT is unfulfilled if it is unavailable to people. Individuals need to begin to investigate funding sources at the same time they start looking at assistive technology. Insurance companies, agencies that provide educational and vocational services and philanthropic organizations are possible funding sources.

A child that waits four years while fund raisers are being held to purchase an augmentative communication device cannot realize the impact of AT on their development or quality of life. The potential of AT is unfulfilled if the appropriate AT is not supported through training. If the classroom teacher or work supervisor does not know how to use an assistive device, they cannot help the individual use it.

When training support is not part of the AT equation, it results in equipment abandonment and/or minimal device use. Training for the user and their circle of support must be part of the assistive technology plan. The Interagency Project for Assistive Technology has extensive information available on: 1) the wide range of devices available and considerations for selecting the appropriate device; 2) information regarding potential funding sources; and 3) resources available for training and supporting various assistive technology. If you need assistance in any of these areas you may call the AT Info-Line at 1-800-451-8693.

## **RECYCLING THE AT WAY**

Karen Pearson, AT Info-Line

Recycling programs are a national movement. The need to recycle has become obvious as we realize the importance of being good stewards to protect our finite resources. A different kind of recycling movement is underway in North Dakota, the recycling of adaptive devices. The ND Assistive Technology Info-Line is building a database of used equipment for sale, trade or donation. Individuals who have equipment to list simply call the Info-Line at 1-800-451-8693.

Staff will then send a copy of the procedures for listing equipment and a form regarding the item to be listed. Once completed, the signed form is returned to the Info-Line, and the information is entered into the computerized data base. When callers contact the Info-Line in search of a device, the staff will provide the caller with information on all listings that may be appropriate to their needs. The caller will decide which listings to pursue, and will organize the sale, trade or donation with the person listing the device.

Once an item is no longer available, it is the responsibility of the person listing the item to notify the Info-Line staff. Failure to do so may result in continued phone calls from individuals in search of that type of device. Please help the Info-Line break the funding barrier by calling 1-800-451-8693 to list, or look for, used adaptive devices.

## **ON NORTH DAKOTA ROADS: MSP**

Don Olson, AES/MSP Director

The Adaptive Equipment Services (AES) project has been providing custom adaptive devices (car seats, wheelchairs, standing frames), to people with disabilities since 1982. The original mission of AES was to provide customized seating and positioning devices for individuals living at the North Dakota Developmental Center in Grafton. After six years of supporting individuals at the Developmental Center, the AES project began to provide custom adaptive services on a statewide level.

This shift was in direct response to the rapid placement of individuals with disabilities into community settings and their need for adaptive devices in those settings. In 1991, AES was awarded grant funding through the State Council on Developmental Disabilities to develop a mobile outreach service for North Dakota. In April of 1992, the Mobile Service Project (MSP) was a reality, and made its first visit to Minot, ND to do on-site

consultations. Within a year, MSP was expanded to include the city of Bismarck, ND.

The MSP continues in its present form with support from the Interagency Project for Assistive Technology (IPAT) and the Developmental Center. The Mobile Services Project is able to offer North Dakota residents with disabilities services in the following areas: wheelchair seating and positioning, powered and manual mobility, home management, job-site and classroom modification, environmental controls, equipment mounting, product information and referral, and other adaptations as needed.

MSP services range from actual equipment fabrication to referral to appropriate equipment suppliers. Services are provided at Grafton, Minot and Bismarck locations. When appropriate, the AES/MSP staff will travel to the home, school or work-site of the individual in need of adaptive equipment services. If you have questions, or would like to make a referral, please contact: The Adaptive Equipment Services-Mobile Services Project 1-800-252-5911

### **AT IN RURAL AMERICA**

A national conference addressing rural assistive technology issues was sponsored by the Breaking New Ground Outreach Program at Purdue University. The IPAT project sent three individuals to this conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, to bring back current information specific to farming and ranching via AT solutions. Dud Zimmerman, NW IPAT Coordinator from Minot, Gerry Nies, Adaptive Equipment Services staff at Grafton, and Craig Fahlstrom, IPAT consumer advisory committee member from Dickinson, attended to expand AT options in rural North Dakota.

The conference emphasized AT accommodations for the farmer or rancher with disabilities, but included information on meeting the needs of family members as well. Some of the topics covered were: AT for rural caregivers; recreation alternatives; work site modifications and accessibility; funding AT and device/equipment fabrication. As well, accident prevention and farm/ranch safety was a theme throughout. If you have specific questions relating to this topic please call Dud (701) 857-8630, Gerry (701) 352-4501, Craig (701) 227-4546 or Jerry Phelan with ND AgrAbility at 1-800-548-1372.

### **CONSUMER Technology Gives Receptionist Voice**

Marilyn Wilson, ND Voc. Rehab. Counselor

Joanna (Joey) applied for Vocational Rehabilitation services after completing a 2-year business and management program at a North

Dakota college. She had been successful academically, but found few opportunities to demonstrate her skills in the workplace. At the age of 11 years, she had an inflammation of the brain which resulted in post encephalitic neurologic dysfunction, effecting her speech and extremities. Over time, Joey learned to accommodate for her upper and lower limb difficulties, but had difficulty adapting to her absence of speech.

Joey was able to type with one finger of her right hand, so she used a Canon Communicator as her primary mode of communication. While functional for simple messages, it was inefficient for complex interactions. As a result, she experienced feelings of frustration, dependence on family and isolation from peers. Joey was motivated to succeed and had marketable job skills, but needed a way to communicate more effectively with others.

Joey was referred to VR's AT consultant for advice regarding augmentative communication options. The AT specialist met with her and this counselor to discuss her needs. All agreed Joey needed a fast, efficient, intelligible speech output device for conversational interactions with friends, family and at the work site. Joey discovered that EZ Keys from Words+, with a Multi-Voice Speech Synthesizer was easiest for people to understand.

Her speed of message delivery increased significantly and she was able to customize the system to meet her specific needs. EZ Keys software with a laptop computer addressed the needed keyboard accommodations. She was excited about word prediction and abbreviated expansion as these options increased her communication speed and efficiency. At Joey's request, along with the recommendation of the AT consultant, EZ Keys software, Multi-Voice Speech Synthesizer, a laptop computer and a printer were obtained with VR funds.

Joey was tutored in the use of her new equipment and became proficient in its use. Having remedied the major obstacles to communication, employment was no longer the problem it had been in the past. Joey has been employed for the past 1 1/2 years as a data coordinator and receptionist. Her outgoing personal style combined with her newly acquired mode of communication have enabled her to function in an effective, professional manner. She is now enjoying personal, community and social activities to a greater extent than ever before.

## **CONNECTION**

- Judie Lee, Director - 1-800-265-IPAT - [lee@pioneer.state.nd.us](mailto:lee@pioneer.state.nd.us)
- Beth Duncan NE Coord. - 1-701-265-4807 - [duncan@pioneer.state.nd.us](mailto:duncan@pioneer.state.nd.us)

- Mike Bishop SE Coord. - 1-701 845-8626 - [mikebishop@valleycity.net](mailto:mikebishop@valleycity.net)
- Peggy Shireley SW Coord. 1-701-328-9544 - [shireley@btigate.com](mailto:shireley@btigate.com)
- Dud Zimmerman NW Coord. 1-701-857-8630 - [mailto:dud@minot.com](mailto:mailto:dud@minot.com)

## **FUNDING NEWS LINK TO FOUNDATION FUNDS**

The Otto Bremer Foundation provides funds for a large number of programs for people with disabilities living in Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota. Specific funds are designated for communities served by the Bremer Financial Corporation bank, insurance, trust or management service organization. The foundation is active in the health and human service fields, where most of their disability-related funding has gone, although recent priorities also include combating racism and rural poverty. Grants recently supported by the Bremer Foundation include: \$10,000 to develop the Life/Guide Program providing support and funds for people with developmental disabilities in Dickinson, North Dakota; \$20,000 to develop affordable, accessible housing for people living in St. Cloud, Minnesota; and \$50,000 to form a revolving loan fund supporting computer-based employment of homebound people with severe disabilities in Royalton, Minnesota. To obtain further information or to begin the application process, contact the Otto Bremer Foundation, 55 East 5th Street, Suite 700, St. Paul, MN 55101. Phone: 612-227-0836.

## **Keys to Independence . . . Conference Update**

The IPAT project staff is proud to announce that the first annual Keys to Independence . . . Assistive Technology for All Generations Conference will take place August 8, 9 and 10, 1996 at the Anne Carlsen Center in Jamestown, ND. The conference will begin on the afternoon of Thursday, August 8, 1996, with a half-day preconference session Funding Assistive Technology. A nationally recognized speaker and funding specialist, Steve Medelsohn, will present this session. On August 9 & 10, 1996, there will be over fifty concurrent sessions offered, covering seven assistive technology (AT) strands. The strands will include information about: 1) AT and Independent Living; 2) Computer Access; 3) Employment & Accommodations; 4) Communication; 5) Recreation & Leisure, 6) Policy/Funding; and 7) Transportation/Mobility. In addition to the concurrent sessions, there will be an opportunity for participants to visit with a variety of top-notch commercial exhibitors in the arena of AT. Conference specifics and registration information will be mailed to IPAT's newsletter recipients, ILC mailing lists, and Aging Services mailing lists. We will be happy to answer specific conference questions at 1-800-265-4728.

## **EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT The Walker Talker**

The Walker Talker is a portable speech-output device designed for the active individual. It is carried in a belt strapped around the waist. It weighs under 2 pounds and has one or two minutes of speech. The Walker Talker is available for free trial use through the IPAT Loan Library and may be purchased from Prentke Romich Co., 1-800-262-1984. Base Cost: \$1,195.00.

### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

- June 13 & 14, 1996 Minot, ND International Conference on Aging & Disabilities
- July 25, 1996 Minot, ND Senior Festival All Seasons Arena Theatre ND State Fair Grounds
- August 8-10, 1996 Jamestown, ND Keys to Independence... Assistive Technology for All Generations Conference
- September 13 & 14, 1996 Bismarck, ND Assistive Technology for Individuals with Learning Disabilities at School and Work