

SYSTEMS CHANGE, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY & YOU

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

What is systems change? How does it impact assistive technology and you? The "Tech Act" of 1988 (P.L. 100-407), refers to systems change as: Efforts that result in permanent change through laws, regulations, policies, practices, or organizational structures that will promote consumer responsive programs and facilitate increased access and funding for assistive technology. All fifty states, the District of Columbia, and four territories are funded under this act. IPAT is North Dakota's "Tech Act" program.

Congress conducted hearings in 1994 and found that technology was enabling people with disabilities to engage in meaningful tasks, leading to fuller, more productive, independent lives. However, barriers within state laws, regulations, policies and procedures were also found which kept technology out of the hands of those same individuals. The hearings identified the need to eliminate these barriers permanently through systems change and advocacy activities at the state and federal levels. Consequently, the 1994 "Tech Act" amendments focused state's activities on systems change, realizing that only then would people with disabilities gain access to technology.

Consumers around our state have identified barriers they face in obtaining assistive technology. As a result, IPAT: a) initiates interagency activities such as the "Keys. . . Conference" to encourage and facilitate partnerships; b) collaborates with special education units to assist with the building of local capacity to provide AT services, c) reviews and monitors state policies and regulations for consideration of AT and disseminates this information to consumers; d) supports the development of a statewide consumer advisory committee to assist the project in being consumer responsive and consumer driven; e) sponsors a variety of AT training; f) began the AT Info-Line to disseminate and/or research information for individual callers; g) developed the Equipment Loan Library so individuals may try a device before purchasing; and h) established regionally staffed offices to provide technical assistance at the local level.

Everybody needs to play a role in systems change activities in order for the citizens of North Dakota to realize increased access to AT solutions. The AT user needs to be informed, search for information and answers, and advocate for themselves and/or family members. The responsible service provider needs to stay abreast with current technology and

application trends and support the people they work with in finding appropriate AT solutions. The proactive administrator will be the driving force for AT by communicating the positive aspects of AT to other decision makers, providing leadership in AT policy directions and by supporting staff development in the area of AT. Barriers to solutions are created by people . . . and can be removed by people.

PEER FACILITATOR PROGRAM

Karen Pearson, AT Info-Line

In today's society, the effectiveness of peer support is widely recognized. Support groups, twelve step programs and mentorships all illustrate the success of people helping people. A peer support opportunity specific to AT is being offered through the North Dakota Assistive Technology Info-Line - welcome the Peer Facilitator Program!

Through the Peer Facilitator Program, individuals who are currently using an assistive device can volunteer to support or help someone who is just beginning to use a similar device. Individuals who wish to volunteer as a peer facilitator can call the ND AT Info-Line at 1-800-451-8693, to request a registration form. Once completed, the signed form is returned to the Info-Line where the information is entered into the database.

When callers contact the Info-Line seeking a peer facilitator, Info-Line staff will make every effort to pair callers and volunteers who are similar in age, geographic location and assistive device. Volunteers will continue to be listed on the database until they notify the Info-Line staff they no longer wish to participate. Individuals under the age of 18 must have the written consent of their parents to become peer facilitators.

If you're learning how to use a new AT device, or if you have experience using an AT device and are willing to teach someone else, please call the ND Assistive Technology Info-Line and check out the Peer Facilitator Program . . . someone may be looking for someone just like you!

ADVOCACY FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Teresa Larsen, Director,
ND Protection and Advocacy

Many individuals with disabilities are experiencing increased opportunities for learning and independence through the use of assistive technology devices and services. North Dakota's Interagency Project for Assistive Technology (IPAT) has initiated a number of activities to increase the awareness, availability and quality of such devices and services.

Unfortunately, many barriers continue to exist which prevent individuals with disabilities from accessing assistive technology devices and services that would allow them to increase, maintain, or improve their ability to perform functional activities. Reported barriers include nonexistent or inadequate evaluations, lack of knowledge as to options for devices and services and how they can assist an individual, and the inability to access funding sources.

IPAT, as designated in the federal Technology Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act, has a contract with the North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project (P&A) for the provision of advocacy services to assist North Dakotans with disabilities in accessing needed assistive technology devices and services. P&A's activities are to focus on systems changes that will benefit numbers of citizens, as well as representation of individuals in accessing devices and services to which they are entitled.

Services available through P&A, relative to assistive technology issues, include information and referral, education (examples: access to funding sources and appropriate assessments, self advocacy skills/techniques), and representation in team meetings, administrative hearings and other legal proceedings. Services are provided by disabilities advocates as well as attorneys employed by P&A.

P&A also has a focus on systems advocacy, such as changes in rules, policies, and laws, that will increase access to assistive technology devices and services by individuals with disabilities now and in the future. Efforts can include working towards change with schools (including higher education), private insurance carriers, Medical Assistance, employers, Vocational Rehabilitation and other state entities, as well as providers specific to Native Americans with disabilities.

For more information about P&A's services, contact your local P&A office, or the P&A administrative office (toll free) 1-800-472-2670, or IPAT. P&A is very interested in hearing about barriers individuals might be experiencing in attempting to access assistive technology devices and services. Advocating for change begins with identifying the problems!

Positions Available on IPAT CAC

The IPAT Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) is accepting applications for membership. The Committee membership is made up of individuals with disabilities or their family members. Members represent a variety of ages, disability interests and geographic regions.

The mission and purpose of the CAC is to provide input and guidance throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation of the IPAT project. The members are a proactive, enthusiastic group of individuals dedicated to expanding awareness of and access to AT for all people in North Dakota.

If interested, please contact Cindy Vollmer, CAC Chair at 701-258-1039 or Judie Lee, IPAT Director at 1-800-265-IPAT.

OOPS!

The June issue of the AT Key listed an incorrect phone number for the Mobile Services Project - the correct number is: 1-800-252-4911 ext. 4583

CONSUMER CONNECTION

AT PILOT PROJECT IN NEW TOWN ALLOWS STUDENT TO SUCCEED!

Barry D. Johnson, Devin's Dad

Our son, Devin, was diagnosed with dyslexia in 1990, while in the second grade. He was unable to read, due to what the New Town school teachers thought was a lack of phonic skills. They sent him to a special class for that school term.

When Devin was in the third grade, the school decided to have him tested. They found his dyslexia causes a severe learning disability in the areas of reading, spelling, comprehension, and written language.

Devin was getting progressively worse and unproductive. His stress level was getting to the point of being out of control. In 1994, we came into contact with technology used for the blind and thought something like that may work for Devin. We tried it at home and he made progress. We approached the school with this idea and were unsuccessful at first. In the fall of 1995, with help from Dud Zimmerman of IPAT and [Dr. Lynda Morris](#), we were able to get this technology in the school for Devin as a pilot project. Mr. Zimmerman arranged the use of a laptop, voice synthesizer, and software for Devin at school. Dr. Morris developed a teachers in service and coordinated the project for the 1995-1996 year.

Under this project Devin was in FULL INCLUSION in the classroom. Devin was tested again in March of 1996. He had gone from being two to three grade levels below to grade level. The stress Devin had been showing is gone. The teachers commented that Devin was even answering questions in class and was reading aloud in class for the first time. This technology

has made such a difference in Devin"s life and education that words cannot say it! Thanks for all the help!

IPAT Staff:

- Judie Lee, Director - 1-800-265-IPAT - lee@pioneer.state.nd.us
- Beth Duncan NE Coord. - 1-701-265-4807 - duncan@pioneer.state.nd.us
- Mike Bishop SE Coord. - 1-701 845-8626 - mikebishop@valleycity.net
- Peggy Shireley SW Coord. 1-701-328-9544 - shireley@btigate.com
- Dud Zimmerman NW Coord. 1-701-857-8630 - dud@minot.com

FUNDING NEWS

ND GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

To obtain a copy of the Guide to Policy and Funding for Assistive Technology in North Dakota", contact the IPAT Central Office, 800-265-4728 or 701-265-4807.

In response to requests from North Dakotans with disabilities for information to assist in the pursuit of assistive technology funding, IPAT has developed a "Guide to Policy and Funding for Assistive Technology in North Dakota". The document provides descriptions of North Dakota"s major funding sources, an overview of each, current eligibility criteria, assistive technology funding potential, the application process, and the appeals process.

Although this guide has been designed to assist individuals with disabilities, individuals experiencing the effects of aging, and their family members, others including disability rights advocates, service providers, and equipment vendors may also find the information particularly helpful.

With this information consumers and their families will more accurately identify appropriate funding streams, will understand the processes involved, and will have resources identified within each area to provide additional information, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful funding for assistive technology.

Upcoming Conference:

The LD-AT Link

In response to requests from individuals with disabilities and service providers throughout North Dakota, IPAT will host a conference specific to assistive technology solutions for people experiencing learning disabilities.

The information provided will focus primarily on successful AT strategies for individuals in early adolescence through adulthood.

The conference will be held at the Doublewood Inn in Bismarck, beginning the evening of Thursday, September 12 and running through Saturday, September 14. Participants will be provided an overview of AT for individuals with LD covering no-tech to high-tech options. A sample of topics covered will be: writing tools, outlining tools, electronic books, word prediction, speech synthesizers, and scanners. There will be a hands-on lab featuring both Macintosh and PC platforms.

IPAT feels fortunate to have secured two nationally recognized presenters for this conference. Richard Wandermann, a successful adult with a learning disability, out of Litchfield, CT, and Diane Rivera, a professor at the University of Texas, Austin, specializing in learning disabilities. Together they will provide numerous ideas and resources for helping people with LD build skills both in school, at work or at home.

Conference specifics and registration information will be mailed to IPAT's newsletter recipients. We will be happy to answer conference questions at 1-800-265-4728.

EQUIPMENT SPOTLIGHT

The Speech Enhancer

The Speech Enhancer, a new addition to the IPAT equipment loan library, is designed to amplify and clarify whispered or inaudible speech. It can also be used to improve articulation by providing private practice opportunities.

Models are available weighing 2 or 4 pounds and can be mounted on a wheelchair or hand-carried. Voices are enhanced through an internal speaker, earphones for the listener, a portable speaker, or a combination of all three.

The Speech Enhancer is available for trial use for ND residents at 1-800-421-1181

or may be purchased from Electronic Speech Enhancement, Inc., 1-800-600-9819. Base Cost: \$1,795.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

- September 12-14, 1996 Bismarck, ND, Assistive Technology Solutions for Individuals with Learning Disabilities at School and Work
- September 26-28, 1996 Bismarck, ND, Harvest of Literacy Conference

- October 22 & 23, 1996 Minneapolis, MN Closing the Gap Pre-conference
- October 24 & 26, 1996 Minneapolis, MN Closing the Gap Conference

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