

## **Remaining at Home . . . *Priceless***

### **AN OUTCOME REPORT SPECIFIC TO THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY COMPONENT OF THE REAL CHOICE PROJECT, *NO PLACE LIKE HOME***

#### **Real Choice Project – No Place Like Home**

In August of 2003, the Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) was a partner in the Real Choice Project, *No Place Like Home*, funded by the Department of Human Services. One component of this project was to ensure a systematic exploration and delivery of assistive technology (AT) devices and services for state residents who were at risk of moving to an institution and/or those living in institutions. This outcome report addresses the particulars of the AT component delivered by IPAT.

It is widely recognized that individuals with disabilities and/or long term illnesses who are interested in remaining in their home or moving out of an institution need various types of support. Assistive technology is one of the essential support services for this population, and yet it is NOT widely recognized or acknowledged. Thus, the potential impact of AT devices and services goes unrealized. IPAT's role in this project was to make the AT option available to these individuals by providing the necessary AT services and purchasing the AT devices. The premise being that if AT devices and services are made available, the probability of remaining at home or returning to a less restrictive environment increases.

#### **Delivering AT Services**

IPAT developed the Assistive Technology Client Profile Form as a tool to help identify potential AT needs of an individual. The form was designed as a checklist to be completed by individuals independently or with their family members and/or service providers. It required no prior knowledge of assistive technology and served as the referral tool for the project. The form identified potential AT needs in the areas of home safety, daily living, mobility, dexterity, communication, hearing, seeing, and problem solving tasks. Once completed, the forms were submitted to IPAT for review and follow-up.

IPAT selected applicants who wanted to delay or eliminate having to enter an institutional setting or had a desire to move to a less-restrictive environment. IPAT also sought to represent diversity in age, location, disability, and AT device needs in project participants. Upon receiving a referral which met project criteria, IPAT contacted the individual and/or family member to schedule an AT assessment. This typically involved meeting the individual in need of AT services at their residence, with family members and/or service providers present. The initial meeting started the AT assessment process where AT needs were identified and prioritized, based upon the individual's input. Subsequent onsite

visits were scheduled to discuss, demonstrate, or try-out selected AT devices and/or home modification options to determine feature match and individual preference. When final AT device choices were made, IPAT used *No Place Like Home* project dollars to purchase them.

Once the devices were purchased, IPAT provided the necessary AT follow-up services. These included delivery and set-up of the equipment, as well as specific training on the assistive technology devices, so that the individual recipients, family members and direct care providers would know how to use them.

### **Profile of the Participants**

The AT component of the *No Place Like Home* project met the AT device and service needs of 20 North Dakota residents with disabilities or long-term illnesses. The individuals represented 10 communities: Fargo, West Fargo, Bismarck, Mandan, Minot, Williston, Park River, Grafton, Wilton, and Center. There were 12 women and 8 men, who ranged in age from mid-thirties to mid-eighties. One person resided in a group home, three were in apartments, and 16 lived in single family dwellings. The people served exhibited disabilities in the areas of hearing, mobility, blindness, quadriplegia, cognitive limitations as a result of traumatic brain injury, deafness, or had been diagnosed with long-term illnesses resulting in continued loss of abilities (multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and rheumatoid arthritis).

IPAT's initial goal was to serve 15 people with the funds made available through the *No Place Like Home* project but was actually able to serve 20 people. A sampling of their stories follows:

A retired ranger living with his wife took part in the project. He had lost the full use of his legs and arms to a muscle-wasting disease, but could speak and had good head and breath control. His wife worked outside the home, leaving him alone for a good portion of the day. They both had concerns about how he could get help if something happened while she was at work, and his wife also wondered how he could turn on a light once it got dark. She forgot to leave a light on once when leaving for work and came home later that evening to find him sitting alone in the dark. To ease the concerns of both parties, a hands-free, infrared environmental control system, the Relax II, was purchased with project funds. This system, with the addition of a chin switch mounted to his wheelchair, allowed him to answer his phone, place a phone call, turn the TV on and off, change channels and adjust the volume, as well as control the room lights independently.

*“ . . . don't get me wrong, nursing homes are needed and are fine places for some people. I just want to stay home and do as much as I can for myself for as long as I can, keep my wife company and be part of my family. The technology you found for me lets me do that, thank you.”*

Participant with quadriplegia –  
Bismarck, North Dakota

- Cost of AT device: \$1,358.75
  - Cost of AT service: \$694.79
  - Average cost of assisted living care: \$19,726/year
  - Average cost of nursing facility care: \$43,815/year
  - Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**
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A middle-aged woman who has been blind since birth and lives alone with her cats was referred to the project. There was assistance available to help her do her shopping (food, medicine, clothing) when out in the community, but when it came time to cook, take medication, do laundry, or get dressed, she was on her own. This led to frequent frustration and safety concerns when wrong choices were made. Without vision, she found it difficult to determine which pill bottle was blood pressure medication, which soup can was tomato, or which laundry items needed to be washed in cold water. To help make living alone with blindness less frustrating and safer, the i.d.-mate II Bar Code Scanner was purchased for her with project dollars. This device reads the item label and other item specific information (contents, weight, dosage) aloud as she moves the infrared scanner over the product barcode. She can then distinguish between medicine bottles, food products, clothing care instructions, and other coded information independently.

*“ . . . I take the i.d.mate II to the grocery store to identify the contents of canned goods, bottles, boxes, and bags before the purchase. Once home, I can prepare meals independently and without waste by using the scanner to identify the container contents, and ‘read’ the directions for preparation on the package. No more opening a can of peaches when I wanted kidney beans for chili, or adding too much water to a rice dish and ending up with an icky rice soup.”*

Participant with blindness –  
Minot, North Dakota

- Cost of AT device: \$1,624.00
  - Cost of AT service: \$356.25
  - Average cost of assisted living care: \$19,726/year
  - Average cost of nursing facility care: \$43,815/year
  - Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**
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A married couple, who both use wheelchairs for mobility, were selected to be project participants. They were living in a house without a ramp, which rendered them prisoners in their own home – once inside, there was no safe way to get

outside. A ramp was purchased for their home, making it possible for them to go in and out as they chose.

*“ . . .thank you for all the work and assistance you gave us in getting a wheelchair ramp built. We feel so much more safe and independent since we have had it – we can even get out to empty our own garbage again.”*

Participants with mobility issues –  
Williston, North Dakota

- Cost of AT device: \$1,204.15
  - Cost of AT service: \$658.68
  - Average cost of assisted living care: \$19,726/year
  - Average cost of nursing facility care: \$43,815/year
  - Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**
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### Comments from Other Participants

*“ . . .I thought I needed a contractor to redo my shower and laundry room space because of the step, now I found out I can use an EZ Step instead for less than \$100 – this is great, and my kids will be so much less worried about me falling.” “ . . .it is nice to know my options, but for now I will just go with the tub-rail and bath bench – if I ever need the hydraulic bath lift, I know where to go.”*

Participant –  
Mandan, North Dakota

- Purchased: EZ Step, jar opener, and bathtub rail
  - Total cost of AT services and devices: \$570.83
  - Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**
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*“ . . .figuring out what my wife needed was really so simple, but I couldn't do it myself – I didn't know where to start. . .it seemed so big.”*

*“ . . .now, having my wife wear the Emergency Dialer Telephone pendant gives me peace of mind, and allows me to drive into town to run needed errands when it works out for me rather than making it work with a friend or family member's schedule.”*

Spouse –  
Wilton, North Dakota

- Purchased: Swivel seat and emergency phone dialer
- Total cost of AT services and devices: \$1,111.60

- Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**

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*“ . . .with my arthritis, using a key to unlock my door was difficult and painful, so many times I just left the door unlocked when I went out. When my kids found out I did that, they were not happy! So, what I want to say is that for me and them, this remote controlled deadbolt is a godsend.”*

Participant –  
Bismarck, North Dakota

- Purchased: Remote control deadbolt, Up-easy chairlift, & an X-10 module
- Total cost of AT services and devices: \$708.23
- Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**

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*“ . . .My husband and I would like to sincerely thank you and IPAT for the assistive devices he has received. Each and every one is truly an item that was so needed and we are so appreciative. We are most anxious to be able to use the threshold ramp so he can get in and out of the patio door to the backyard. With spring around the corner, it is such an uplifting thought for him to be able to make the transition from indoors to outdoors on his own. The wireless keyboard and mouse are so neat. . .no more wires getting caught in his feet under the desktop either.”*

Participant –  
Fargo, North Dakota

- Purchased: Wireless keyboard and mouse, Palm ZIRE 72 with keyboard, 2 threshold ramps, and a wheelchair tray
- Total cost of AT services and devices: \$2,215.23
- Having the choice to remain at home: **PRICELESS**

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### **Types of Assistive Technology Services Delivered**

IPAT provided the services necessary for the participants to select, obtain, and use the assistive technology needed to accomplish the activities they identified as priority. These services included: developing and administering a screening tool; completion of the assessment process; ordering and purchasing the equipment; set-up of the equipment in the individual's home; and necessary training specific to the devices purchased.

### **Types of Assistive Technology Devices Purchased**

A total of 45 assistive technology devices were purchased to help the participants remain living where they chose. These devices fell into six equipment categories: Home or Building Access; Vehicle/Vehicle Access; Seating,

Positioning and Personal Mobility; Vision Equipment; Health, Safety and Daily Living Equipment; and Computer and Related Computer Access Equipment.

### **Costs of the Assistive Technology Components**

The total amount awarded to IPAT to complete the assistive technology activities identified in the *No Place Like Home* project was \$33,518.34. The following is a breakdown of expenditures:

Total Cost of AT Devices: \$13,625.84

Range of device cost per participant: \$153.13 to \$1,624.00

Average AT device cost per participant: \$681.29

Total Cost of AT Services to participants: \$11,042.51

Range of AT service cost per participant: \$190.60 to \$1,447.84

Average AT service cost per participant: \$552.12

Total Cost of General Training & Awareness: \$552.12

Total Cost of Other IPAT Services: \$7,462.06

*Other services included: product development; review of all applications; management of service process; coordinate/research purchases of equipment; budget management; and costs related to project administration.*

The average cost per participant for AT devices and services was lower than projected; consequently, funds were available to meet the assistive technology device and service needs of 5 additional people.

Average cost for nursing home care in North Dakota is \$43,815 per year and the average cost for assisted living care in North Dakota is \$19,726 per year. The average cost of the AT devices and services for an individual participating in this project is \$1,233.41.

### **Related Assistive Technology Projects, Senior AT Safety Program and Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program**

At the same time that IPAT implemented the *No Place Like Home* project, they also administered the Senior Assistive Technology Safety Program (SATS) and the North Dakota Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program (TEDP). Some of the participants of the *No Place Like Home* project were also in need of specialized telephone equipment, medication dispensers, and AT safety equipment. IPAT was able to coordinate and extend resources by accessing funding from SATS and TEDP to provide those devices. This freed up money to buy other equipment for the participants and allowed 5 additional people to participate in the *No Place Like Home* project.

It is worth noting that in addition to the 45 devices provided through the *No Place Like Home* project that 588 medication devices (32 different types) were distributed through the SATS program from 2003-2005. Many notes and comments were received by IPAT regarding the differences they made. A typical comment “. . .our biggest concern for our mother living alone was that she mixes up her medicines and forgets to take them or takes them at the wrong time. After getting the MedReady, she now takes her medicine like she is supposed to and I now feel much more comfortable with her staying in her own home.”

The SATS program distributed a total of 5130 pieces of AT safety equipment to 3508 people living in their homes. The TEDP program distributed a total of 510 telephones and 61 telephone accessories to 537 North Dakota residents. Although these folks have not been followed like the *No Place Like Home* participants, it is a fact the AT devices are assisting them to live ‘safely’ and remain in their own homes. A note from a Milton resident, “Thank you for all of the items. . .It’s a wonderful program and will help many of us to stay at home.”

### **Outcomes**

The people served through the AT component of the *No Place Like Home* project had a number of services in place, but were still struggling to remain at home. The provision of AT devices and services had not been considered as part of their service plan prior to this project, and yet it was one of the decisive factors in making remaining home possible for them. The average cost of a participant to receive the assistive technology devices and services necessary to help them remain living at home was \$1,233. The average yearly cost for an individual to reside in a nursing home in North Dakota is \$43,815 and \$19,726 for assisted living care.

One year later, 17 of the 20 people are still in their own homes. They have delayed, and will possibly avoid, entering an institutional setting. They continue to live with their families, are more independent and safer as a result of the AT devices and services received through this project.

One individual moved away from North Dakota. She received services but no equipment, and her whereabouts are unknown.

Two of the individuals who participated in this project passed away approximately one year after receiving their AT devices and services. After their passing, IPAT received calls from family members stating what a huge difference the assistive technology made, especially in helping their family member to stay home the last months of their life. Recognizing the importance of AT, one family has donated the devices back to IPAT so someone else can benefit from their use.

### **Conclusion**

This project showed that when the assistive technology provision is part of the service delivery plan, it can delay institutional or other high-cost placements.

This in turn, enables people of all ages with disabilities or long term illnesses to have a choice as to where they live, which everyone can agree is PRICELESS.

*“ . . . We are still at as neighbors, husband and wife, parents and grandparents, rather than a woman alone with a husband living off in a separate facility as a member of the disabled community. Making changes to our living space and using assistive technology was more cost-effective for us and it allows us to be together. We stay active together. The quality of our lives is so much richer.”*

*Spouse of a No Place Like Home  
Committee Member –  
Bismarck, North Dakota*

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