

Annual Report for the Interagency Program for Assistive Technology

October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008

IPAT PROGRAM STRUCTURE

IPAT was established in 1993 as North Dakota's Statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Program. IPAT's purpose is to provide opportunities for people of all ages and with all types of disabilities to learn about, try-out, and get the AT they need for home, school, and work. IPAT accomplishes its purpose by providing the following services to family members, service providers and people with disabilities throughout the state: Equipment Demonstration Sites; Equipment Loan Library, Assistive Technology Swap 'n Shop; Alternative Financial Loan Program; Individual Assistance; Public Awareness; AT Training; and Coordination & Collaboration.

The IPAT Consumer Advisory Council (CAC) provides advice for planning, implementing and evaluating the activities carried out by IPAT. This active Council is made up of 10 members who have a disability or have a family member with a disability and 5 agency representatives. The CAC was established in 1994 with members reflecting the diversity of disabilities, ages, regions, and cultures of the state, and serving as a link to existing networks and support systems.

IPAT is funded with federal dollars through the Assistive Technology Act and with state funding appropriated by the 2007 ND State Legislature. IPAT staff is located in the Fargo and Bismarck Technology Access Centers, with a satellite site in Cavalier, and is an affiliate of the North Dakota Association for the Disabled, Inc.

IPAT EQUIPMENT DEMONSTRATION SITES

IPAT provides access to assistive technology devices and services to all state residents regardless of age or disability, and all service providers. Demonstrations are available at IPAT's two comprehensive Technology Access Centers (TAC's), one located in Fargo and the other in Bismarck. Each center has a wide range of devices, and individuals or groups are free to drop-in, or call ahead to set-up an appointment to have specific AT devices demonstrated, or particular AT services explained. These services are at no cost to the user.

The centers belong to all the people of North Dakota and provide an opportunity to learn about and try-out different devices to promote informed choice about AT equipment. Devices can be compared and contrasted onsite, or at remote sites via videoconferencing. Remote site access eliminates the barriers of distance and transportation and is made possible through collaboration between IPAT and the University of North Dakota's statewide telemedicine program.

In FY '08 IPAT engaged in 118 device demonstrations, reaching 154 people. Those involved in device demonstrations included individuals experiencing the effects of aging, individuals with disabilities, family members, and the range of professionals that support them.

WHO VISITED, WHAT DID THEY EXPLORE

Demonstration Service Areas

Education	21	18%
Employment	18	15%
Community Living	73	62%
IT/Telecommunications	6	5%

Demonstration Device Categories

Speech/Communication	19
Vision	11
Hearing	15
Computers & Related	28
Daily Living	19
Learning, Cognition, Developmental	9
Environmental Adaptations	2
Mobility, Seating, Positioning	7
Vehicle Modifications, Transportation	2
Recreation, Sports, Leisure	6

Anecdote

A Bismarck woman came to the IPAT Technology Access Center to look at devices that would remind her son to take his medication in an effort to foster his independence. Several devices were demonstrated for her by the IPAT staff. After weighing the options of the various devices, the woman decided that the MedReady would be the device that would work best for her son. She expressed satisfaction with the demonstration, and opted to rent the device from the IPAT Equipment Loan Library. Once the rental was completed, she requested a referral to a MedReady vendor so the family could purchase the device. Following the success found with the use of the medication dispenser, the family is now looking at expanding their son's independence through the use assistive technology devices in other daily living activities.

EQUIPMENT LOAN LIBRARY

One of the first challenges to be addressed by IPAT in 1994 was the limited opportunity for people in North Dakota to try a variety of assistive technology options before purchasing. In response to this challenge, IPAT established the statewide **Equipment Loan Library (ELL)**. This library service is available to

state residents of all ages with any type of disability and/or family members and professionals that work with them.

The ELL provides short term equipment loans, typically 6 weeks in length. A small rental fee is charged along with shipping and handling. IPAT uses a sliding fee schedule for eligible individuals with disabilities who are not covered by an agency for the rental of ELL equipment.

The ELL is housed in the Fargo Technology Access Center, and contains an inventory of over 1,300 pieces of AT equipment. The inventory is kept current through research and purchases by IPAT staff, and is based on the equipment needs expressed by ELL users. The types of equipment available for loan fall into the following broad categories: activities of daily living, communication, seeing, hearing, learning, computer access, switches, telecommunications, memory, organization and environmental control.

There were 184 equipment loans made during FY '08, of those 130 went to individuals residing in a metropolitan area and 54 went to those residing in a non-metropolitan area.

Snapshot of Loan Library Use By Device Category

Speech Communication	49
Vision	4
Hearing	14
Computers and Related	46
Daily Living	10
Learning, Cognition, Developmental	9
Environmental Adaptations	4
Mobility/Seating/Positioning	1
Other	2

Anecdote

An individual with spastic quadriplegia was referred to IPAT for an in-home AT assessment to promote independence and safety. IPAT provided the assessment and made recommendations for AT devices. The individual, with input from family members, selected the AT devices most desired; a voice operated lamp dimmer, a computer, voice recognition software and a gooseneck microphone. The family was able to obtain all the AT devices desired through IPAT's Equipment Loan Library, and used them in the home for a six week trial period. The trial period helped them determine that the devices did in fact meet the needs of the individual and this fact was key in funding justification. Due to the ability to try-before-you-buy, the individual discovered AT that worked with little financial risk, and IPAT was able to augment a funding request with proof of its effective use. This individual is now using the AT discovered through the device loan program to turn lights on/off independently, for reading, letter writing,

e-mail correspondence and internet exploration. The role of IPAT's ELL program in this individual's life has been life-changing.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY 'SWAP 'N SHOP'

There is a demand for pre-owned AT equipment and there is a supply of it in North Dakota. IPAT has been connecting this supply and demand since 1996 through the operation of the **AT 'Swap 'n Shop'** program. IPAT expanded the AT 'Swap 'n Shop' services in October of 2007, to include the NO cost delivery of the equipment by partnering with an over-the-road trucking company, Cross Country Courier, in Bismarck. The AT Swap 'n Shop program allows individuals to buy, sell, swap, donate or request AT equipment through a statewide, online used equipment database and toll-free number.

Used equipment with a retail value of \$33,804 traded hands through the AT 'Swap 'n Shop' during FY '08. There were 27 exchanges, saving users \$30,389. Equipment exchanged included a range of vision equipment, daily living aids and mobility/seating/positioning devices.

Anecdote

An individual living on the Turtle Lake Indian Reservation was in need of a reclining chair that had an electronic lifting mechanism. This individual took advantage of the AT Swap and Shop, and located a used reclining lift chair for sale in North Dakota. The potential end-user contacted the seller and the price was right. Unfortunately, the chair was available 221 miles away from the reservation, and the individual needing the chair did not have the means to transport it. An additional call was made to IPAT to see if help with transportation of the used equipment was available. Thankfully, IPAT has a cooperative agreement with a local trucking company, Cross Country Courier, and they were able to deliver the chair to the reservation, at no cost to the consumer. This equipment exchange not only yielded a cost savings of over \$2,000 but it resulted in promoting increased safety and mobility for the person within their own home.

ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL LOAN PROGRAM

The North Dakota **Alternative Financial Loan Program** (AFP) is available to help state residents with disabilities or those experiencing the effects of aging obtain assistive technology. It is an affordable alternative for AT financing for state residents primarily because of its two major benefits; 1) lower interest rates, and 2) flexible repayment terms. Loans can be used to purchase a range of AT such as; adapted vans, home modifications, environmental controls, communication devices, scooters, low vision equipment and hearing aids. The AFP is administered by the North Dakota Association for the Disabled, Inc., in partnership with Alerus Financial and IPAT. The funding is made possible through a federal award to the State.

In FY '08, the AFP granted 6 loans, for a total of \$75,108. The average interest rate was 5.09%; the average loan amount was \$12,518 and the loans ranged from \$1,700 to \$25,000. During this program cycle, loans were made for the purchase of an in-home elevator, vehicle modifications, a conversion van and mobility/seating/positioning devices.

Anecdote

The ND Alternative Financial Loan Program assisted a 21 year old male in purchasing an adult standing frame. He has a spinal chord injury with some upper body movement and no lower body movement. The standing frame was suggested by a rehabilitation center and used by the client while a patient. It was suggested that he continue with a home program using the standing frame. He was not eligible through other sources for funding of this piece of equipment so contacted the ND AFP.

IPAT PROVIDES A WIDE RANGE OF SERVICES

Assistance to Individuals

Through IPAT's toll-free lines, website, e-mail and video-conferencing, staff provided information to 1,228 people about the benefits, range, funding options, and regulations/policies specific to obtaining assistive technology devices and services. The highest percentage of calls was made by people with disabilities seeking information on their own behalf, followed closely by their family members and representatives. Of the calls fielded by IPAT, 60 % were received from individuals residing in a metropolitan area and 40% were received from those in a non-metro area of the state.

Service Recipients Assisted by Category

Individuals	346	28%
Family/Reps	310	27%
Education	108	8%
Employment	84	6%
Health	225	18%
Community	140	11%
Technology	10	1.5%
Others	5	.5%

AT Training Provided

IPAT staff is looked to as the assistive technology leaders within the state, and as such conduct AT trainings within existing conferences, as stand alone sessions, as part of staff-in-service education, at parent support groups, college classes and/or special venues. During FY '08, IPAT provided 18 training sessions attended by 525 people. A sampling of training topics included: AT for Multiple Sclerosis, AT for Dementia and Mental Illness; AT for Learning Disabilities, I Can Hear You Now and Dragon Naturally Speaking.

People IPAT Trained

Metro	280	53%
Non-Metro	245	47%
Total	525 people	

Up-close View of an IPAT Training Activity

Three IPAT assistive technology (AT) coordinators and the IPAT director, with over 40 years of combined AT experience conducted AT training for 19 transition coordinators and 1 project director. Their mission is to transition North Dakota residents currently living in nursing homes back into the community. The training took place in IPAT's Technology Access Centers, and provided an overview to AT, plus a hands-on opportunity to explore numerous AT devices. The devices highlighted promoted living at home safely with increased independence. The intended impact of the AT training was to decrease the likelihood of professionals responsible for transition services overlooking AT as a solution. This in turn, increases the likelihood that individuals in transition would have access to AT devices and services that would be vital to their success in community living.

Bringing AT Awareness to the People

IPAT consistently engages in a variety of awareness activities to promote the use and understanding of assistive technology. In FY '08 IPAT participated in 65 awareness events attended by a total of 6,132 people across the state. In addition to awareness events, IPAT produces a free bi-monthly newsletter about AT with a readership of just under 3,000; updates and maintains a website at www.ndipat.org and creates and distributes a variety of publications covering AT services, funding and use.

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION ACTIVITIES

A member of the IPAT staff provided technical assistance to the **Bismarck/Mandan area Rebuilding Together™** (RT) affiliate. RT is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to rehabilitate homes for low-income homeowners, particularly the elderly and those with disabilities at no charge. The technical assistance provided by IPAT was specific to providing assistive technology expertise to promote in-home personal safety and independence for the eight homeowners selected for home refurbishing in 2008.

IPAT provided AT expertise to the **Money Follows the Person (MFP)**

Stakeholders task force as well as the MFP Policy and Procedures and Housing subgroups. These groups have representatives from many agencies, including: Aging Services, Housing Authority, Protection and Advocacy, Medical Services, County Care Providers, Independent Living Centers, consumers, Long Term Care Association, and Legal Services whose charge is to rebalance nursing home placements in North Dakota. IPAT educated the groups on the need for a systematic exploration and delivery of assistive technology devices and services

for anyone considering moving from a nursing home back to a more independent living arrangement. IPAT developed the Assistive Technology Client Profile Form (ATCPF) as a tool to help MFP partners identify potential AT needs of an individual prior to community placement. The form was designed as a checklist to be completed by individuals independently or with their family members/and/or service providers. Use of the ATCPF by the MFP Transition Coordinators will reduce the risk of overlooking AT as one of the essential support services.

IPAT staff has been involved with the **North Dakota Committee on Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Populations** (CEP) since its inception in 2006. During the last year, a framework for safe, secure, accessible shelters that are prepared to assist in maintaining independence for people with functional needs due to age or disability was established. IPAT has served in a participatory role on the CEP, and within that capacity has offered technical assistance.

North Dakota's Premier AT Event, the AT Expo

IPAT collaborated with numerous private, non-profit and public entities to sponsor the **5th Annual AT Expo** in Fargo, North Dakota. This AT awareness event attracted approximately 500 people from across the state and surrounding region that were able to visit with close to 60 AT vendors, and attend informational presentations on a wide range of AT topics. This collaborative AT awareness effort resulted in the highest attendance numbers recorded for the AT Expo, with representation noted from education, employment, health services and community living.