



# The AT Messenger

....bringing technology to you

Published by the Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative

Vol. 1, Issue 3, Nov/Dec 1993

## Where We've Been & Where We're Going

The DATI has been operating in Delaware for just over two years. County resource centers are now in place, we've sponsored two conferences and lots of other training, and we publish this newsletter. A great deal of time and effort has been devoted to improving the access to assistive technology through the schools, Medicaid, and other avenues.

The true measure of the DATI's value is its impact on YOU and others throughout Delaware. How do we learn about impact? You need to tell us!

Six public forums will be held in November to get your input. We need to hear what has

worked for you. We also need to hear your suggestions about what else the DATI might do to improve your understanding of—and access to—assistive technology. All of your comments and suggestions will be reviewed by the Statewide Advisory Board as it develops a workplan for the coming years. Your feedback matters, so plan to attend one of the forums and share your experiences and opinions.

If you can't attend, but would like to contribute your ideas, get in touch with the Central Site office at 651-6790 (voice) or 651-6794 (TDD) and we'll send you a brief questionnaire. We hope to hear from you!

## Public Forums Scheduled for November

Each county will have open meetings at two different times in an attempt to accommodate as many different work and transportation schedules as possible. Make plans now for attending the meeting most convenient for you! If you plan to attend and have accessibility needs, please notify the Central Site at 651 -6790 *no later than November 1, 1993.*

### In New Castle County:

November 9, 1993

1:30-3:00pm

and

7:00-8:30 pm

Alfred I. duPont Institute  
Lecture Hall, 3rd Floor  
1600 Rockland Rd.  
Wilmington, DE

### In Kent County:

November 11, 1993

1:30-3:00pm

and

7:00-8:30 pm

Delaware Tech Terry  
Campus  
Room 120A, Science &  
Technology Building  
1832 N. duPont Parkway  
Dover, DE

### In Sussex County:

November 16, 1993

1:30-3:00pm

and

7:00 - 8:30 pm

Delaware Tech Southern  
Campus  
Room 555C & D, Higher  
Education Building  
Route 18  
Georgetown, DE



## **DATI Throughout the State...**

### **New Castle County**

*Delaware Elwyn*  
321 E. 11th Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801-3499  
(302) 657-5647- (302) 658-8860 (TDD)

What is the best device? Who can evaluate me for a large print machine I can use to read my mail? Which is the best switch? What is a good software program for my 3-year-old with cerebral palsy to use on the Macintosh computer? Where can I find a Hoyer lift belt for my elderly mother at home? Where can I get a one-handed keyboard for my employee? Where can I get "Handicapped Accessible" signs for my company? These are just a small sample of the varied questions we receive every day over the telephone, from people who visit our center, when we go out into the community to visit schools, hospitals, nursing homes, home health agencies, churches, and community groups.

A call to the New Castle County Assistive Technology Center, located at Delaware Elwyn, is only the first step in a long trail of events in which center staff, like detectives, looks for the exact resource to help solve any problem. This process requires a team effort. At Delaware Elwyn, in addition to our "in-house" staff and volunteers, we have a sub-contractual relationship with the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) to help us with research and technical assistance for the visually impaired population. Some people who call us are referred to DVI so they can see technology we do not have on display at our center. People of all ages who need specialized information or assistance are referred to DVI.

We also have a subcontract with the Department of Public Instruction's Delaware Learning Resource System (DLRS) located in Hall Education Building at the University of

Delaware in Newark. The staff at the Center for Technology, located at the DLRS, goes out to schools or talks to parents to help increase the awareness of the services of the DATI and the New Castle County Assistive Technology Center.

Assisting us behind the scenes are innumerable people who are experts or resources in specialized areas of assistive technology, like augmentative communication, software, or adaptive toys. Our center also has access to Abledata or other national networks and resources which help us find the exact information you seek.

All in all, helping people with the assistive technology needs is often a process involving many people in many places locally and nationally. But the most important team member is the consumer (person needing assistive technology or a family member of that person). Your involvement, ideas, and suggestions for providing the best services possible is appreciated. Let us know if you get stumped on an assistive technology question!

### **Sussex County**

*Easter Seal of Del-Mar*  
Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center  
600 N. DuPont Highway, Suite 100  
Georgetown, DE 19947  
(302) 856-7946 (voice or TDD)

Business is booming at the Sussex Technology Resource Center at Easter Seal, now that more people know what the TRC is, why it is here, and how to access the opportunities it can provide. As utilization has picked up, our time has become more precious as we attempt to meet everyone's needs.

Currently a considerable amount of TRC space is devoted to providing a computer room which contains computer devices and programs for

pre-schoolers, students of all ages and adults learning English as a second language. Computers may be accessed a variety of ways from sip and puff switches to adapted keyboards like Intellikeys.

During the next several months, we will provide a series of in-house workshops about the computer capabilities that currently exist in our TRC. These workshops are open to consumers, teachers, therapists, students, seniors, and other interested parties.

We have scheduled some dates and selected some topics, but we can be extremely flexible to meet the needs of others. Please review the calendar to enroll in any of the workshops or call for your own personalized visit or demonstration. This is an opportunity you won't want to miss. Give us a call at (302) 856-79461!

We would also like to point out that our "neighbors" at the Kent County TRC host a variety of worthwhile workshops. If anyone in Sussex County is interested in attending these, please call the Sussex Center and we may be able to arrange a car pool. We are already planning to attend the workshops on November 3 and 17. We will also be providing transportation to the Parent Information Center Conference on November 18. Please call if you would like to ride with us.

## **Kent County**

*Easter Seal of Del-Mar  
Kent County Community  
Carver Rd.  
Dover, DE 19901-2716  
(302) 739-6885; (302) 739-6886 (TDD)*

There is an increasing number of individuals with disabilities who are learning and working alongside able-bodied peers. The success of integration in the educational setting depends on the ability of those involved to operate available technology/tools. Efforts to use or incorporate technology to promote integration should not be delayed due to lack of familiarity. Each TRC has a wealth of technology available to educators and consumers and staffs are trained to offer informational support.

The staff at the Easter Seal TRC in Kent County have been asked for "canned or "recipe-type" approaches for adapting curriculums for students with disabilities. There aren't any canned approaches! The following, however, are some suggestions to facilitate integration:

*Modify regular curriculum materials to meet the needs and abilities of the individual.*

- Use a copier to enlarge, simplify or darken pictorial or printed materials.
- Laminate paper materials (i.e., pictures, clocks, money) that students use over and over again.
- Make use of word processing, math and pre-reading computer software (call the TRC in your county for more information).
- Keep modified materials in a binder in the classroom so that support staff can have easy access to the materials and eliminate the task of recreating materials in the future.

*Modify the environment to allow for active participation and greater independence for individuals with physical impairments.*

- Raise/lower a desk or table.
- Adapt a chair with back or side supports (telephone books and paint rollers may be helpful; dycem may keep an individual from sliding).
- Provide easels, clipboards, masking or double stick tape, velcro, or paper weights to hold work.
- Use pencil holding devices, arm braces, weights, wrist supports to assist with prewriting or computer use.
- Consider the use of computer workstations for students with physical disabilities.

# FINANCING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

## AT Funding Through Social Security Work Incentives

*Ron Sibert, DATI Funding Specialist*

In our last newsletter, we discussed new ways of looking at Vocational Rehabilitation, and mentioned how it can sometimes be better for VR clients to get equipment through other programs.

There are two work incentive programs available through the Social Security Administration (SSA) that provide great opportunities for people with disabilities to obtain assistive technology (AT) devices and related services. These programs do not pay for AT directly, but they are powerful tools that allow income to be set aside to purchase equipment. In some cases such purchases can even help increase income! That's right – it is possible for a person to buy equipment using one of these programs and end up with more money than s/he could without the purchase.

Here's the story (with several alphabet letters thrown in for good measure). People who receive or qualify for social security benefits, i.e., Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are eligible to use SSA's work incentive programs. The first, called the IWRE (Impairment Related Work Expense) program, can be used under both SSI and SSDI. The second program, called the PASS (Plan Achieving Self Support) is only available to SSI beneficiaries.

### **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):**

As the name implies. SSDI is a type of insurance. Eligibility is based on disability status and inability to work. In addition, a person must have paid into the Social Security program, e.g., through payroll deductions, for about half the number of years since having reached age 21. SSDI beneficiaries receive a monthly cash allowance. Now, SSA measures a person's disability status/inability to work in terms of an income level called *Substantial Gainful Activity* (SGA). Earnings

must be at or below the SGA level in order for the person to be eligible for SSDI benefits. The IRWE is used to purchase equipment and services in a way that reduces income below the SGA level. This allow for the purchase of equipment and services while allowing the beneficiary to retain *both* earned income *and* SSDI income.

### **Impairment Related Work Expense (IWRE):**

An IWRE can include payments for any service or item a person may need in order to work. Some popular examples are: transportation (including purchase of cars/vans) medication, medical equipment, home modifications (including ramps), office/work-related machinery... the list goes on. There are three basic requirements:

- Items or services must be purchased directly by the person (**remember to keep all receipts**).
- Items/services should not be reimbursable through other funding sources such as public or private insurance.
- The items/services are necessary in order for the person to work.

The last requirement can include a very broad range of device and services. For instance, equipment needed to prepare for work before leaving home can be purchased through an IRWE. Transportation to and from work, and even assistance in the home after work are reasonable options. For the IRWE, the requirements under SSI and SSDI are very similar. Contact your local Social Security Administration office for more information.

### **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**

SSI is a small monthly income supplement for

people of all ages with disabilities and for people who are age 65 or older. It is different from SSDI in that eligibility is not based on the employment status/history of the beneficiary (or the family's primary wage earner). It is based on the individual's income level. The person must have no income for at least one month prior to applying, and have very limited resources. Resource and income levels are calculated by complex formulas; some income is counted, and some is not – certain resources are countable, and others are not. *The best approach is to contact the Social Security office for eligibility information.*

### **Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS):**

The PASS is a way of setting aside money to purchase equipment or services needed to accomplish vocational goals in a way that keeps income below the cutoff for SSI eligibility. So there is *no reduction of benefits*. The money can then be used to finance assistive devices, education, business start-up, etc. Unlike the IRWE, the PASS must be in writing and approved by the SSA. Remember—it is only available to SSI recipients. Each PASS is reviewed periodically by the SSA to be sure that the approved plan is being followed. A separate bank account should be established for the set aside money. Contributions should be made to the account according to the schedule stated in the PASS. Finally, the plan's time-frame cannot exceed 48 months, Two notes of caution: 1) Once money has been set-aside for a PASS, spending it for something else can result in loss of SSI benefits, and 2) the PASS set-aside does not affect SGA determinations under SSDI. In that situation, PASS money is still considered SGA income and cannot be excluded to help qualify a person for SSDI benefits.

For more information, call the Delaware's Social Security Administration office at 323-0304 or 1-800-772-1213 or the Delaware Department of Labor/Division of Vocational Rehabilitation at 368-6570.

### DATI Throughout the State (cont'd from p 3)

to replace books, paper, and pen. It may also provide environmental control capabilities and allow the student to experience success.

*Use multiple choice formats to allow individuals using AAC systems an opportunity to actively participate.*

- Create a set of generic pictures/printed words related to lessons/themes to facilitate both receptive and expressive language skills.

*Consider the use of visual, auditory and tactile feedback for children who engage in self-stimulatory, nonpurposeful behavior.*

- Adapted toys may offer purposeful and successful experiences (and provide movement and tactile feedback for visually impaired children).
- The use of switches and tape recorders provide auditory feedback.
- Low tech communication systems with and without voice output should be introduced early to facilitate effective interactions and social closeness.

Parents, teachers, clinicians and administrators must be committed and work together to make integration successful. Success is clearly dependent on positive attitudes, high expectations for success, an emphasis on abilities rather than disabilities, the availability and use of technology, and a little ingenuity.

Occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists may offer teachers other suggestions that promote integration and active participation. The Easter Seal TRC in Kent County has a variety of resource materials to assist professionals working in educational settings. We will be happy to do some problem-solving and brainstorming with you!

## Annual Conference Wrap-Up

The second annual DATI Conference "Assistive Technology: More Power to You!" proved to be an exciting, informative, and challenging meeting for all that attended. Clayton Hall's Exhibit Area was abuzz with augmentative communication devices, adapted bicycles, robotic arms, accessible toys and games—even a mechanical mimicking parrot! Conference registrants took advantage of interesting sessions that focused on the use of assistive technology in leisure activities like gardening, woodworking, music, and sports. Guest presenters from the state projects in Minnesota and New York offered insight into what was happening in their respective programs. And the current hot issues of a tight economy and health care reform led to packed sessions on funding alternatives for assistive technology!

The two-day conference concluded with a Consumer Advocacy Workshop in which assistive technology access issues were discussed. Participants identified five areas in which advocacy efforts should concentrate: outreach, funding, networking, training, and policy change. The group agreed that people in the community must take responsibility for spreading the word about assistive technology resources and opportunities. Attendees also recognized the value in rallying around issues like health care reform to ensure that disability issues are not overlooked. Anyone interested in getting a written summary of the meeting can do so by calling the DATI Central Site.

This year's attendance boasts a 25% registration by consumers (those with disabilities and their family members) and a record number of 27 exhibitors. All materials were available in Braille, large print, and audiotape formats.

Thanks to all of you who attended as registrants, exhibitors, presenters, volunteers, or caregivers! We were thrilled with the turnout — and are looking forward to meeting and hearing from even more of you next year! So make a note now to look for the *third* Annual

DATI Conference to be held in the fall of 1994. See you there!

## Strab Wins Statewide Accessibility Award

One of the highlights of the 1992 DATI Conference was a demonstration by Tom Strab of a safe, cost-effective door-opening system that he invented. Since those days of relative obscurity, Mr. Strab has hit the big time, recently receiving a statewide award from the Delaware Architectural Accessibility Board. Beth Mineo, Director of the DATI, nominated Tom for this award, citing "his commitment to reasonably-priced, safety-conscious solutions to accessibility problems." At the awards presentation ceremony on September 23 in Newark, Tom received a rousing ovation following the demonstration of his system. He is currently exploring the possibility of marketing the system in conjunction with Elwyn Inc. For more information, call Tom Strab at 239-4045 or write him at P.O. Box 77, Yorklyn, DE, 19736. Congratulations to Tom on the well-deserved recognition!

## Have You "Engineered" some Assistive Tech?

If You've come up with a clever, useful, or practical solution to an accessibility problem, we'd like to hear about it! Please send us your ideas for equipment adaptations, funding sources, or information sources so we can share them with *The AT Messenger* readers.

# AT Product Spotlight

## Cooper Car

R.J. Cooper & Associates

With this popular toy, young children with physical challenges can "drive" themselves around their environment by using a joystick or an array of switches. While the car is not as sophisticated as a powered wheelchair, it is much less expensive and may serve as an effective and fun beginning, training, or evaluation vehicle for a particular child.

The car's features include variable start-up speed, optional latch/timer, remote safety switch controlled by an adult, a joystick with a variety of lengths and knobs, and single and multiple switch adaptations.

The most affordable means for purchasing the car is to buy the Conversion kit from R.J. Cooper and buy the car, "The BOSS" by Hedstrom from a local toy store or Sears. This is a viable option for do-it-yourselfers who are on a budget. R.J. provides a videotape to guide you through the conversion process. In addition, some type of adapted seat will need to be purchased or built to position the child in the car. If switches are to be used, these also may be purchased separately from a variety of sources.

Diane Bicknell, a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University, has developed a safe and flexible seating system for the Cooper Car which provides the needed support and stability for toddlers and pre-schoolers with poor trunk and/or head control. She and her husband customized a Rifton toddler chair to fit the Cooper Car by cutting down the legs and bolting it into the car. They also added padded seating, footrests of varying heights, a chest harness with Velcro closure, a lap seat belt, and additional padding on the roll bar to make it as safe and comfortable as possible seat for the user.

Their work demonstrates the value and power of teamwork, collaboration, and creativity in creating assistive technology. They were able to develop their version of the Cooper car with funding from a grant and donations from the local Knights of Columbus. The Charles County, Maryland schools, where Diane is a physical therapist, can now take advantage of the Cooper Car to evaluate students as candidates for early powered mobility.

The Cooper Car can be ordered from:

R. J. Cooper & Associates  
24843 Del Prade Suite 283  
Dana Point, CA 92629  
(714) 240-1912

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## And Like a Good Neighbor...

Delaware's size and location permit easy access to several other states and their "Tech Act" projects. Besides the many opportunities offered right here, there are other information sources right next door. Here's where you can find our neighboring AT colleagues:

### **MD Technology Assistance Program (MD TAP)**

Maryland Rehabilitation Center  
2301 Argonne Drive  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
(800) TECH-TAP (832-4827)

### **PA's Initiative on Assistive Technology (PIAT)**

Institute on Disabilities/UAP  
Temple University  
Philadelphia, PA 19122  
(800) 204-PIAT (204-7428)

### **NJ Technology Assistive Resource Program**

Labor Building, Room 806  
CN 938  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
(609) 292-3604

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