



The AT Messenger...bringing technology to you

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Lotsa Helping Hands Create Community

Would you, your family, or someone in your community benefit from the organization of meals, transportation, in-home assistance, and/or information sharing? Many people find it

difficult to ask for assistance and the coordination of extensive needs takes time and energy. Thankfully, there is a great solution available to you— *Lotsa Helping Hands*, www.lotsahelpinghands.com. In fact, this remarkable website may be the greatest form of social networking to hit the internet. The compilation of resources available at the *Lotsa Helping Hands* website was created to support caregivers and volunteers by empowering their circles of community who are eager to help.



Lotsa Helping Hands is a web-based service that provides the necessary tools to develop a “community” aimed at meeting the physical, emotional, spiritual, and everyday needs of people seeking such supports. Community volunteers can easily view and sign-up for tasks, review their current commitments, and be confident they won’t forget any assignments as the system automatically sends out email reminders of upcoming obligations. Community members have access to private message boards, photo galleries, resource sections for sharing relevant web links and documents, and a “Well Wishes” wall. *Lotsa Helping Hands* relieves the awkwardness of having to ask for help every time there is a need. Once a member signs up for a task, the community website shows tasks as assigned, which avoids the overlap of efforts. Furthermore, any number of custom community sections can be created in order to improve the flow and sharing of information within the community, keeping all members, near and far, ‘in the loop.’



Lotsa Helping Hands is committed to providing this service free of charge to all communities, which means that the growth of the website is supported by organizations who pay a license fee to offer a specialized version of the service to their audience. *Lotsa Helping Hands* never provides membership information to anyone.



If you'd like additional information, or you have questions that aren't answered in this article, please contact *Lotsa Helping Hands* by sending an email to info@lotsahelpinghands.com. You can learn more about available services and the company at www.lotsahelpinghands.com/info/ or www.lotsahelpinghands.com/create/. ■

Enhancing Voter Participation of People with Disabilities

Daniel Atkins

*Legal Advocacy Director of the Disabilities Law Program
Community Legal Aid Society, Inc.*

In the 2008 federal election, 14.7 million people with disabilities around the country voted. That is the good news. The bad news is that the voter turnout rate for people with disabilities was 7% less than the rate for people without disabilities. In Delaware, the rate for people with disabilities was 58.7%, and for people without disabilities, 68.4%, meaning Delaware did worse than the national average in helping people with disabilities vote. Numerous factors contribute to low voting rates among people with disabilities—inaccessible polling places and voting machines are just two problems that could be alleviated with better use of existing technology. In 2008, the federal General Accounting Office found that only 27.3% of polling places had “no potential impediments to voting.” In other words, nearly three-quarters of all polling places have at least the potential to present accessibility challenges to people with disabilities.



Voting is a fundamental civil right exercised and enjoyed by citizens and a bedrock principle in the United States. As such, numerous federal laws have been enacted that specifically address the voting rights of US citizens with disabilities. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 recognized for the first time that the law must sometimes be used to protect this fundamental right by explicitly permitting voters who need assistance due to disability or illiteracy to receive help voting from a person of their choice. The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 requires polling places to be physically accessible, unless it is impossible to do so, and requires the reassignment of voters to accessible polling places if the voter requests a new site in advance. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires state and local government programs, which include voting, to be accessible. This, unfortunately, does not mean that all voting places must be accessible, but rather that if voting is taking place in a state or local government building and that polling place is inaccessible, a voter with a disability must be provided with a place or method of voting that enables him/her to vote. The ADA also requires that polling places in a "place of public accommodation" (which means a place that is open to the public, but not a government building) must make readily achievable modifications to facilitate voting. Furthermore, the ADA requires all new buildings built after 1992 to be fully accessible.

In the 2008 election, the Federal Election Commission estimated that between 20,000 and 120,000 polling places were inaccessible. Eight percent of voters with disabilities experienced some problem voting, including polling place accessibility, functionality of machines, or readability of ballots. Among people with disabilities, people with hearing impairments have the highest turnout, and not surprisingly, people who need assistance leaving their homes have the lowest turnout. This is due not only to inaccessible polling places but also to a lack of accessible transportation on Election Day.

In 2002, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) created a new federal agency clearinghouse for voting issues, provided funds to improve voting administration and systems, enacted minimum accessibility standards for states, and gave money to Protection and Advocacy agencies like the Disabilities Law Program of Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. (DLP of CLASI) of Delaware to enhance voting participation by people with disabilities. As a result of HAVA, all polling places and voting systems must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. Election officials must make

reasonable accommodations and modifications to help individuals vote. Accommodations include architectural modifications such as the installation of exterior ramps, ballot changes such as large print, and wheelchair accessible voting booths at polling places. Modifications may include giving a voter extra time, permitting an “X” or stamp in lieu of a signature, or letting a helper accompany a voter into the voting booth. Most importantly, each polling place must have at least one Direct Recording Electronic Voting System or other system equipped for people with disabilities. Delaware uses the Guardian Electronic 1242, which has a tilt feature that changes the orientation of the voting system for people who cannot stand, as well as a system known as “ADAM,” for voters with visual impairments.

Voting has become increasingly sophisticated, though the pace of such change is slow. One recent national survey revealed the following:

National voting systems in use	National numbers tell the story
punch cards	34%
lever systems	19%
optical scanners	27%
computer systems	9%
paper ballots	2%
hybrid	9%
discarded ballots due to voter error	2%

Regardless of a voter’s disability, the voting process can be quite challenging. Punch cards, for example, are particularly problematic for voters with vision impairments. Voting can occur in more ways than entering a voting booth—absentee voting, voting by mail, and curbside voting as an alternative to machine voting. While email, absentee, and mail

voting are a trend, some individuals with disabilities understandably want the complete experience of going to the polls on Election Day. However, among voters with disabilities, 59% voted at the polls, compared to 71% of all voters.

The DLP of CLASI is working with Delaware state officials to improve the accessibility of voting places. The DLP monitors all federal elections, inspecting as many sites as we can to ensure that voters with disabilities are able to access their polling place and voting booth. We train poll workers, educate consumers about their voting rights, and enforce those rights when violated. If you have questions or concerns about voting, please contact your county DLP of CLASI office:

New Castle: 100 W. 10th Street, Suite 801, Wilmington DE 19801, 302-575-0690

Kent: 840 Walker Road, Dover, DE, 19904, 302-674-8500

Sussex: Georgetown Professional Park, 20151 Office Circle, Georgetown, DE 19947, 302-856-0038. ■

Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired

Jack Holloway

Communication/Outreach Coordinator

Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired

The mission of the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) is “Working in partnership with Delawareans who are blind or visually impaired empowering them to be self-sufficient.”



DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Division for the Visually Impaired

DVI provides a holistic, integrated service approach—serving over 1,000 individuals annually. Services are available to blind and visually impaired consumers from birth to death through a variety of programs. The agency works in partnership with the consumer and the community to improve the safety, education, and employment of blind and visually impaired Delawareans. One important responsibility of the agency is maintaining the Registry of the Blind.

Title 31, Section 2108, of the Delaware Code mandates that physicians report legally blind persons to DVI for inclusion on the Registry. The agency utilizes the Registry to provide important information and services to blind and visually impaired citizens. The information is confidential and being included on the Registry does not mean that the consumer must utilize any of the available services. However, being listed on the Registry ensures more timely access to services when requested.

Persons on the Registry may be kept abreast of the latest in programs and services available through mailings such as the DVI Views newsletter available in a multitude of formats—large print, CD, Braille and audio. Maintaining an accurate, up-to-date Registry is an important tool to track trends in visual impairments and demographic data, and to target services in areas of highest need. Finally, maintaining a current Registry is critical to support requests for monies from state and federal funding sources for new or existing programs.

National data indicates that with a population of nearly 900,000, Delaware should have in excess of 8,000 citizens who meet agency eligibility criteria. However, in 2010, we have identified only 3,000 on the Registry. Accordingly, the agency is conducting an outreach to 175 ophthalmologists and optometrists statewide reminding them of the Registry law by supplying them with Eye Report forms and the latest in resource guides. Plans are underway to print new agency brochures and posters, and to develop outreach opportunities so that, in addition to service providers, the broader community becomes more aware of the agency and the services available.

For more information, please call 302-255-9800 or go online:
www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dvi. ■

Social Security Adds 38 Compassionate Allowance Conditions: Expansion Will Speed Benefits to Thousands of Americans with Disabilities

*Michael Astrue
Commissioner
Social Security Administration*

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, recently announced that the agency is



adding 38 more conditions to its list of Compassionate Allowances. This is the first expansion since the original list of 50 conditions—25 rare diseases and 25 cancers—was announced in October 2008. The new conditions range from adult brain disorders to rare diseases that primarily affect children. The complete list of the new Compassionate Allowance conditions is below.

“The addition of these new conditions expands the scope of Compassionate Allowances to a broader subgroup of conditions like early-onset Alzheimer’s disease,” Commissioner Astrue said. “The expansion we are announcing today means tens of thousands of Americans with devastating disabilities will now get approved for benefits in a matter of days rather than months and years.” Compassionate Allowances are a way of quickly identifying diseases and other medical conditions that clearly qualify for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability benefits. It allows the agency to electronically target and make speedy decisions for the most obviously disabled individuals. In developing the expanded list of conditions, Social Security held public hearings and worked closely with the National Institutes of Health, the Alzheimer’s Association, the National Organization for Rare Disorders, and other groups.

“The diagnosis of Alzheimer’s indicates significant cognitive impairment that interferes with daily living activities, including the ability to work,” said Harry Johns, President and CEO of the Alzheimer’s Association. “Now, individuals who are dealing with the enormous challenges of Alzheimer’s won’t also have to endure the financial and emotional toll of a long disability decision process.” “This truly innovative program will provide invaluable assistance and support to patients and families coping with severely disabling rare diseases,” said Peter L. Saltonstall, President and CEO of the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD). “On behalf of those patients and families, I want to thank Commissioner Astrue and his enthusiastic team for creating and expanding a program that will have a direct impact on the quality of life of thousands of individuals.”

“The initiative not only assists those whose applications are quickly processed, but also assists those whose applications need more time and attention from SSA adjudicators,” said Marty Ford, Co-Chair, Social Security Task Force, Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities. “We are pleased to see this expansion and look forward to working with

Commissioner Astrue on further expansion of this decision-making tool and other ways to expedite determinations and decisions for disability claims.”

“We will continue to hold hearings and look for other diseases and conditions that can be added to our list of Compassionate Allowances,” Commissioner Astrue said. “There can be no higher priority than getting disability benefits quickly to those Americans with these severe and life-threatening conditions.”

New Compassionate Allowance Conditions

1. Alstrom Syndrome
2. Amegakaryocytic Thrombocytopenia
3. Ataxia Spinocerebellar
4. Ataxia Telangiectasia
5. Batten Disease
6. Bilateral Retinoblastoma
7. Cri du Chat Syndrome
8. Degos Disease
9. Early-Onset Alzheimer’s Disease
10. Edwards Syndrome
11. Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva
12. Fukuyama Congenital Muscular Dystrophy
13. Glutaric Acidemia Type II
14. Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH), Familial Type
15. Hurler Syndrome, Type IH
16. Hunter Syndrome, Type II
17. Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis
18. Junctional Epidermolysis Bullosa, Lethal Type
19. Late Infantile Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinoses
20. Leigh’s Disease
21. Maple Syrup Urine Disease
22. Merosin Deficient Congenital Muscular Dystrophy
23. Mixed Dementia
24. Mucosal Malignant Melanoma
25. Neonatal Adrenoleukodystrophy
26. Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinoses, Infantile Type
27. Niemann-Pick Type C
28. Patau Syndrome
29. Primary Progressive Aphasia
30. Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy

31. Sanfilippo Syndrome
32. Subacute Sclerosis Panencephalitis
33. Tay Sachs Disease
34. Thanatophoric Dysplasia, Type 1
35. Ullrich Congenital Muscular Dystrophy
36. Walker Warburg Syndrome
37. Wolman Disease
38. Zellweger Syndrome

Social Security began electronically identifying these 38 new conditions March 1, 2010. For more information about the agency's Compassionate Allowances initiative, go to

www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances. ■



*Linda Heller
Disabilities Committee Chair
Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the UMC*

Faith communities and people with disabilities—what's the connection?

In the Delaware Valley there are a thousand or more churches of many faiths—Christian, Jewish and others. Regardless of their faith, people with disabilities and their advocates often refer to the Bible's Old Testament verse: "For my house will be a house of prayer for all people." (Isaiah 56:7)

Furthermore, churches and faith communities in the area are beginning to live out this vision. They are working toward being welcoming, hospitable, and inclusive.



Bishop Peggy Johnson, elected to the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in 2008, is a remarkable proponent of disability rights. As such, she has made a point to initiate changes in the conference that she leads. In fact, she has stated, unequivocally, that her vision for UMC houses of prayer are places where “all people feel welcome, supported and included in all aspects of church life so that each member, regardless of their differences or God given gifts, are enabled to be instruments of the church in action, living out its message in the community.” You can find more information on Bishop Peggy Johnson’s blog, <http://bishoppeggyjohnson.blogspot.com/>.

Bishop Johnson—formerly the pastor of the Christ Church of the Deaf in Baltimore, Maryland—brings many years of passion for deaf and hard of hearing people to her current role. From her experiences as a sign language interpreter and pastor, she has expanded her vision and work to include and serve all people with any type of disability throughout the region for which she is responsible. Bishop Johnson has issued a challenge to the churches within the conference that she leads. She has organized the first “Peninsula-Delaware Conference Committee on Disabilities,” which includes 452 churches in the designated area. A committee focused on disabilities is in place in the Eastern PA Conference.

Bishop Johnson is devoted to helping churches become more accessible to people with all types of disabilities. Using the best models and resources available—from the national UMC, faith community resources, and other programs—the Bishop wants all churches to be welcoming in more than attitudes and behaviors. She is asking that all barriers to people with disabilities serving in leadership positions of churches and in every aspect of church life be removed. Bishop Johnson appointed a committee chair to carry out her vision. The committee is currently developing a resource directory and training guidelines and is seeking expertise in all aspects of disabilities. The Bishop’s goal is to assist churches to move toward being “more inclusive and welcoming to people with disabilities.” Not surprisingly, this is not a small endeavor. Information, education, and training need to be developed and presented to pastors, church leaders, consumers, and caregivers regarding disabilities. The need for and availability of assistive technology must be explored so people can enjoy and be included in every aspect of the faith community to which they belong. These aspects of the project are critical to making Bishop Johnson’s and the Prophet Isaiah’s

vision—that “every house will be a house of prayer for all people”—a reality.

For more information on this committee, please contact Linda Heller, Chair, UMC Peninsula-Delaware Conference Disabilities Committee, by email: lsheller@comcast.net, or call 302-292-3066 (V/Relay). You may also go to the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of the United Methodist Church at www.pen-del.org. ■

The AT Bargain Basement

Marvin Williams

AT Specialist

DATI New Castle County ATRC

Hello, True Believers, and welcome to another action-packed installment of the *AT Bargain Basement*! I am Marvin Williams, your guide in the land of AT bargains. As usual, if you are a regular to the *Basement*, welcome back! If this is your first trip with us, I’m glad you could join the party! The rules of the *Basement* are simple—I find AT bargains costing \$100 or less and share them with you. I will be sure to let you know if you can find the bargains locally or if you need to order them over the telephone or internet. So without further adieu, let’s get to the bargains!

Our first bargain is the **Scoot-N-Do Caddy**.

It’s a seat for those who like to be in the garden, but may find kneeling on the ground a bit difficult. It’s got a swiveling, contoured seat that can be adjusted in height, four pneumatic wheels for a smooth ride even over the roughest terrain, knobby tires for good traction in the dirt and mud, a steering bar for the front wheels to make maneuvering easier, and a metal mesh basket to make carrying items that much easier. The unit is a must-see for anyone



who loves to garden or work in the yard but doesn’t have elevated planter boxes or might have a tough time getting down to the ground and an even tougher time getting back up. So far, I’ve only been able to find the **Scoot-N-Do** for sale through *Sky Mall* magazine. It sells for \$79.95, plus shipping and handling. To order this unit from *Sky Mall*, you can call 1-800-SkyMall

(1-800-759-6255) or visit their website at skymall.com. I've looked for other sources without success, though I've found other wheeled garden seats. However, they don't appear to be as sturdy or physically supportive.

Our next bargain was brought to my attention by Sussex County AT Specialist, Dan Fendler. He told me about an application or "app" for the iPhone and iPod Touch called **Dragon Dictate**.

It works by tapping the on-screen start button and speaking into the iPhone or into the microphone plugged into the iPod Touch. The unit then records up to 20 seconds of your speaking. When you are done recording you can hit the stop button. Now your recorded speech is sent to a remote computer where it's converted back to text and then sent back to your iPhone or iPod for you to use. How will you use it?

By tapping the text, you can choose to select all of it and then paste it into an e-mail or text message. It's fast, it's easy, and it's pretty accurate. It does make some mistakes, but considering that you're doing this with an iPhone or with an iPod, it's still very amazing. The best part about this app is that it's free. That's right, FREE! All you have to do is visit the *App Store* on your iPhone or iPod Touch and search for "**Dragon Dictate**."



The next bargain comes to us from *Hear More*. They have a device called the **Krown Phone Flasher**. This is a great little device for someone who has a tough time hearing the telephone ring. If you find yourself missing phone calls because you just can't hear the phone ringing, this may be a little gem for you. All you do is plug it into the phone outlet in the wall, then plug it into your



telephone, and you're all set! When the phone rings, the light on the top of the unit flashes, giving you a visual alert to the ringing. The unit uses LEDs for its light so you never have to replace a bulb. It also runs off the power in your phone cord so it doesn't need batteries. While other units also incorporate a ringer amplification system into the flasher, this one keeps it simple by just providing the flashing light as the call alert. This unit has a

low price of \$24.70 (plus shipping and handling) at *Hear More*. It works on regular telephones, on video phone units and with some PBX systems (office telephone systems with extensions). You can visit their website at hearmore.com or call them toll-free at 1-800-881-4327.

Our final bargain is the **Sonic Shaker SBP 100 Portable Alarm Clock**. This is a combination pillow shaker and travel alarm clock. To use it, you set the regular clock time and the alarm time. Then, when you're ready for bed, you fold the face of the clock back into the body of the unit and place the whole unit under your pillow. When the alarm goes off it not only vibrates under your pillow, but it also sounds a very loud audible alarm. So,



instead of just having a vibrating or loud alarm, you get both in a very compact format. By having the clock be the actual pillow shaker, you remove the problems of forgetting to pack the pillow shaker or of having a wire get damaged during travel so that the shaker doesn't work. Also, if you don't take a special travel alarm with you but you do take the pillow shaker then you might not have a clock that will work with your pillow shaker. This all-in-one unit is a nice solution to the problem. The buttons are hidden away, so you don't have to worry about changing the alarm or the clock while you sleep. The **Sonic Shaker** is made by *Sonic Alert*, makers of the Sonic Boom Alarm Clock and a trusted name in the hearing loss community. The **Sonic Shaker** can be found for \$29.95 (plus shipping and handling) from *AssistiveStuff.com*, a web site brought to my attention by Blake Bossert with the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies. Besides the **Sonic Shaker**, you can find many other useful items from *AssistiveStuff.com*. If you'd like to order the **Sonic Shaker** from them, you can visit their website at assistivestuff.com or you can call them at 812-358-7300. Please note that the company is located in Indiana, meaning the call is long-distance.

Now, I know that I've tried to provide several sources for each item in the past, but time and space are limited. So, in an effort to be more prudent, I encourage you to do your homework via internet searches and shopping outings to find the best price for any item of interest and the related shipping and handling fees. It is no surprise that costs change, coupons appear in our mailboxes or inboxes, and sales happen. Plus, looking for

better prices may help you find a completely different item that you've been searching for. With that said, this will bring another installment of the *AT Bargain Basement* to a close. I hope you had fun and found the bargains interesting and possibly helpful to you or to a friend or loved one. Don't forget to come back next time when I'll have more bargains to share. As always, if you would like to share any AT bargains or helpful hints you've found, please don't hesitate to call, write, or e-mail me! I'll make sure your suggestion makes it to the *Basement* for everyone to see. So until next time, remember, that just because something's a bargain, doesn't mean it's cheap! ■

We Connect Now

Gabriela McCall Delgado
Creator and Webmistress
We Connect Now

We Connect Now, <http://weconnectnow.wordpress.com/>, was designed to connect college students with disabilities so that they could share experiences and work together on issues of common interest. The website began with seed money from a grant received from Young People For (YP4), www.y4.org, which is a "strategic long-term leadership development program that identifies, engages and empowers the newest generation of progressive leaders to create lasting change in their communities." As the creator of the website, I believe that people with disabilities need to be involved with activism on issues beyond just disability-related matters in order to be truly powerful in society. From the research that I did and as a college student with a disability, there was no place to go in order to connect with each other about the college experience. Thus, the idea for the *We Connect Now* website was born.



We Connect Now is dedicated to uniting people interested in rights and issues affecting people with disabilities, with particular emphasis on college students and access to higher education and employment issues. One of our goals is to help college students with disabilities succeed in their studies by getting the information and support they need through various resources—links, blogs, news, laws, stories, events, and jobs. Through *We*

Connect Now, people can share and read stories from other contributors, and we encourage website visitors to take action by writing blogs, hosting events, or becoming involved in politics by learning about upcoming legislation. We have a “focus of the month” that addresses a particular disability or condition in an effort to bring our visitors more information and support. In addition, if people have questions, we encourage them to contact us.

The “links” that have been compiled on *We Connect Now* run the gamut, currently from “A” to “W.” The aim of the links is to help site visitors connect and learn more about their rights as a person with a disability, take action, and network. Included resources have several areas of focus—diagnosis based agencies/organizations, national and community based organizations that focus on disability services, college and university programs serving students with disabilities, various advocacy organizations, and so much more.

The “blog” segment of *We Connect Now* gives our site visitors a voice. Bloggers and readers, alike, are welcome! You are invited to blog for the site as a regular contributor or as a guest blogger. Simply email us, weconnectnow2008@gmail.com, send along your resume, and let us know why you would like to blog for us. You are also welcome to promote the website by sending the blog to friends and associates. We’d appreciate you letting us know when you pass along this information. In addition, we share information about other “blogs worth reading” along with “reading for thought.”

Check the “news” page for the latest information affecting people with disabilities. Common segments of this page include national and international news, as well as past articles, that we think are of particular interest. We are always looking for additional information and welcome individuals sharing important news items with us. We may even feature you as our news source of the week, with your permission.

The “laws” page is widely varied in its content. A wide range of laws, regulations, pending legislation, and other legal resources are touched upon in this section. Not surprisingly, federal laws governing the rights of individuals with disabilities are included as are the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. We also include information related to international laws governing the rights of individuals

with disabilities, legal resources on rights to vote in national elections for people with disabilities, and some state specific information.

“Stories” can be vital in our understanding of the people and world around us. *We Connect Now* site visitors are invited to acquaint others with what it is like to be a person with a disability in college or elsewhere in life. You are also welcome to read others’ stories and compare experiences. Stories can be submitted in several formats—written, audio, or video—by creating a link to a video posted on YouTube. Check out several students’ stories at the “We Connect” YouTube page, <http://www.youtube.com/user/weconnectvideo>, and please remember to take care with what you share on social networking sites like YouTube! Social networking via the internet can have great benefits, but it can present challenges and hazards, too. With that said, it is important to remember that *We Connect Now* is not responsible for other content or information contained on the YouTube site.

The “events” page is an invaluable resource for our site visitors! Listings typically cover the gamut with regards to location and event type—fundraisers, rallies, and disability related employment. We would be happy to post information about upcoming events scheduled to take place at your college or in your community that celebrate or support people with disabilities. We also encourage you to create your own event within your school or community that supports your cause, and it would be great if you would forward photos of the event. We would love to hear from you so that we can help you publicize your upcoming event, as well as hear about the event itself.

People with disabilities face challenges and discrimination in the work place. According to the United States Department of Labor statistics, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities far exceeds that of individuals without disabilities. In an effort to promote increased equality between these two populations, the “jobs” section presents several broad topics to assist college students with disabilities to obtain gainful employment. One of the best places to find work as a college student with a disability is with your college disability service office. College students interested in public service should consider the federal government, which is one of the main employers in tough economic times. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management site, <http://www.opm.gov/disability/>, is dedicated to disabled Americans looking for a job with the federal government. Teach For America, <http://www.teachforamerica.org/careers/>, is a nationwide

service corps that works to place people interested in helping underserved public schools. You need not be an education major to serve. These are but a few resources available on the “jobs” page.

If you would like to help develop *We Connect Now* further, I am currently seeking people to blog on national and disability-related issues. In addition, we would like you to share your personal stories about having a disability in college. If you are interested or know someone who is, please email me at weconnectnow2008@gmail.com. Lastly, I would appreciate it if readers of this article provided me with their comments regarding the website, which can be sent to the email above. Your feedback will help me improve the website, with the ultimate outcome of it being more beneficial to college students with disabilities and others. ■

Gardening - Work Smarter, Not Harder

Lisa Becker

*Project Coordinator, Delaware AT Reuse Project
Center for Disabilities Studies*

Gardening is healthful, a social outlet, and can improve thought processing, regardless of an individual’s abilities. In fact, it can be a lifelong activity. Gardening tasks are attainable with planning, functional tools, guidance and creativity. I encourage you to give some thought to your abilities and hope that the following will help guide you along your garden path.

Garden designer and wheelchair user Gene Rothert, in his book titled The Enabling Garden, suggests raising your soil level to a comfortable working height via raised beds, containers, window boxes, and/or hanging baskets. Hanging baskets are adjustable using a pulley system. Raised beds bring plants to an arm’s reach, and depending on the design, can be a place to rest for a weary gardener or additional seating when entertaining. Containers come in a variety of sizes and costs and can be placed on a raised surface—curbs, walls, pedestals, tables, and/or wheeled plant stands—in order to bring plants within reach. Trellising and espaliering are options for vertical gardening, making it easier to admire your garden and harvest your produce.

Paths and walkways are important considerations for safe maneuvering in all outdoor spaces. They should have a smooth, firm surface—pavers,

brick, or concrete—for anyone who has difficulty on uneven or soft surfaces. Walkway edges should be high enough or have enough color contrast to guide individuals, and adding sound-making devices such as wind chimes, water features, or even pinwheels can help orient and guide individuals with low-vision.

Plant selection is a challenge many gardeners face, regardless of their abilities. Choose plants suitable for your climate that will thrive in your garden’s micro-system—soil, temperature, precipitation, and sun exposure. Additional considerations include:

- Plants in containers or raised beds are more vulnerable to drought and cold. Water and fertilize frequently and consider overwintering under a shelter.
- Annual flowers or vegetables are good choices for containers.
- Gardeners with visual impairments may want to choose fragrant plants, those with brilliant colors, and without thorns.
- Tabletop planters—those with space underneath to accommodate a wheelchair—have less space for roots, so choose plants with shallow root systems.
- Choose compact plants to get the most from your raised beds.

For specific plant suggestions, visit your local garden center or contact the Delaware Cooperative Extension Offices (see resources below).

“Proper” Garden Tools make tasks easier for all gardeners. Long-handled and lightweight tools reduce back stress and enable you to work longer. Individuals with weak grips may benefit from thicker handles. Of course, remember your local ATRC for garden tools and ideas for adaptations to the ones you own. Additional information about choosing tools follows.



Helpful Websites

- AbleData, www.abledata.com, is a source for assistive technology information where you can search “gardening and lawn care” for reviews and overviews of products.

- Radius Garden, www.radiusgarden.com, is the manufacturer of ergonomic garden tools.
- The Center for Excellence in Disabilities at West Virginia University, www.cedwvu.org, offers information about “accessible gardening,” which you can find by typing the phrase into the search field.
- The Oregon Extension Office makes “Adapting Garden Tools to Overcome Physical Challenges” available in the advanced search field at extension.oregonstate.edu using the title.

Homemade Enabling Tools

Kneeling Pads can be created with a sheet of foam rubber, an old pillow, or a cushion about 8 ½” wide, 16” long and 1 ½” thick that is sealed in a plastic bag with waterproof tape.

Knee Pads that attach to long pants can be made from two 5” by 5” pads of 1 ½” thick foam. Sew a heavy duty, durable fabric around the foam like a pillowcase, attach Velcro to each pad and your pants, then attach pads when needed.

Cushioned Tool Handles increase gripping ability, protect sensitive hands, and decrease fine motor fatigue by inserting tool handles into foam pipe insulation tubes, crutch handle grips, or the like. Gluing may be necessary if handles slip.

Wrist Splints are helpful for individuals who cannot grasp tools. Small tools can be adapted using two or three long lengths of Velcro straps then wrapped around a hand, wrist, and/or forearm. Be careful not to over-tighten the straps, which could limit your circulation.

Padded Plant Stakes decrease the likelihood of injury if someone falls in the garden. Cut off the foot of socks, nylons, or tights just below the heel and stuff it tightly with cut up pieces from the remainder of the item. Tape or tie it on the end of the stake, making sure you cannot feel the stake through the padding. Consider synthetics because they dry quickly and are less susceptible to mold or mildew.



Homemade Pellet Seeds are made by rolling a small seed into a small piece of toilet paper, making the seed easier to see and handle. The toilet paper will break down after the seed is planted.

No-Bend Seeders consist of a length of PVC pipe 3' to 5' long—a length that reaches from your lap to the ground—and no wider than 3 inches, though narrower is fine if it doesn't hinder your ability to drop a seed into the opening. A funnel can be attached to the PVC pipe, if necessary. This process is especially useful for planting larger seeds.

Seed spacers are designed to help properly place seeds and plants to avoid overcrowding and come in a variety of forms. Three are described below. Standardizing the spaces to 6" will simplify their creation. You can use temporary markers, such as clothespins or rubber bands, to easily identify greater increments, referring to the instructions on seed and seedling containers prior to planting.

- *Planting boards* are 1" by 4" pieces of lumber about 4' long with beveled ends for making furrows. Cut notches every 6" along the length of the board.
- *Plant spacers* are cut lengths of 1" by 1" lumber—6", 12", 18", etc.
- *Knotted Garden Line Spacers* are lengths of nylon rope or clothesline the length of your longest planting row with knots tied every 6". Tie a loop at the ends to stake the line as you plant.

This section comes from the UNL Cooperative Extension-Platte County's [Tools & Techniques for Easier Gardening](#) by Ocone & Thabault, and the National Gardening Association.

Additional Resources

Thrive, a small English charity, helps people with disabilities start or continue gardening and offers practical information at carryongardening.org.uk.

Iowa State University Extension Office provides information about raised beds—building, planting, and caring. Search “Creating Raised Bed Planters” at www.extension.iastate.edu to download the guide.



The University of Delaware Cooperative Extension, ag.udel.edu/extension, offers many services to Delawareans, among them general home gardening and landscape. They've also partnered with the Food Bank of Delaware, www.fbd.org, to host "Plant a Row for the Hungry," which encourages gardeners to share produce with food banks. Click on the carrot at the Food Bank website to learn more.

When all is said and done, the idea is to get out in a garden, be creative, and the rewards will follow! ■

New AT Exchange Feature: We've partnered with Maryland & Pennsylvania to add a new feature to the AT Exchange—the ability to search regional listings! Go to our website, click "AT Exchange," "Regional Listings," then "Go." ■

Note: If you are looking for items not on the AT Exchange, contact the DATI's Sussex County ATRC at 302-856-7946 or 800-870-DATI (3284). If you call the 800 number, you will interact with an automated system. In order to reach the Sussex ATRC, press 1 after the first prompt and 6 after the next prompt.

New items are added regularly. If there has been no activity or interaction with the contributor to the list within six months, items are automatically removed from the list.

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To Contact DATI's Central Site office or the ATRC closest to you, call 1-800-870-DATI (3284)

Press
#1 for English or
#2 for Spanish,

then press
#3 for the Central Site office
#4 for the New Castle County ATRC
#5 for the Kent County ATRC
#6 for the Sussex County ATRC



TDD callers: Do not press #1 or #2 and your call will be answered on a TDD line at the Central Site office. ■

DATI Equipment Loan Policy

DATI has a wide variety of equipment at the Assistive Technology Resource Centers (ATRCs) for the primary purpose of demonstration and short-term loan. The policy for equipment loans is as follows:

The standard loan period is two weeks, defined as the day borrowed (e.g., Monday the 10th) to the same day two weeks later (e.g., Monday the 24th). Loans may be extended provided there are no names on the waiting list and/or that an extension will not interfere with an existing reservation. The maximum loan period is four weeks.

A maximum of four devices may be borrowed during any single loan period. However, combinations of devices may be treated as a single device if the components are interdependent—either operationally or because one component is required for the borrower to use another. Equipment loans across state lines are not permitted. Equipment must also remain in Delaware throughout the loan period. ■

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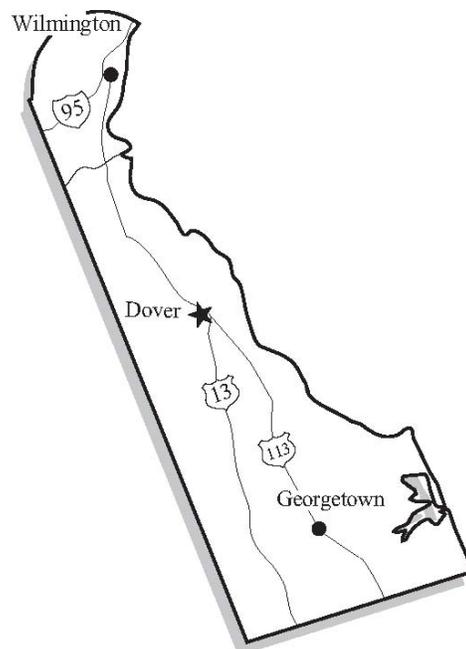
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DATI RESOURCE CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE STATE...

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1600 Rockland Road
Wilmington, DE 19803
302-651-6790
302-651-6794 (TDD)
302-651-6793 (fax)

Kent County ATRC
Easter Seals Kent County Center
100 Enterprise Place, Suite One
Dover, DE 19904-8200
302-739-6885
302-739-6886 (TDD)
302-739-6887 (fax)



Sussex County ATRC
20123 Office Circle
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302-856-6990 (fax) ■

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