

A Closer Look

Increasing Access to and Acquisition of Assistive Technology for Georgians with Disabilities

An Assistive Technology Publication of Tools for Life, the Georgia Assistive Technology Act Program
Fall/Winter 2010

Director's Notes

By: Carolyn Phillips

Stay Outside the Box

We live in an incredible time . . . a time when assistive technology (AT) is moving forward at lightning speed, breaking barriers and creating opportunities along the way. In the 20-plus years I have worked in the AT field, I have thought more than once that we could make this classroom accessible; this restaurant could easily add accommodations for blind patrons; this employer could benefit from hiring more folks with disabilities, this woman could leave the nursing home behind and live in the community of her choice -- if only the AT solutions existed. Well, now they do.

Society at large has taken inspiration from the disability community, and we have posted a long track record of thinking "outside the box," creatively

resolving the problems and eliminating the barriers directly related to our own life experiences. Our successes include curb cuts, talking crosswalk signals, automatic opening doors, easy-grip handles for tools and utensils, auto-flushing commodes and motion-detectors on faucets. History also tells us that both the telephone and e-mail were conceived as ways to improve communication with Deaf individuals.

The GPS that “speaks” directions is a good example of “out of the box” thinking. It is a close cousin to the AT solution of text-to-speech, which was developed for individuals with print-related disabilities, including low vision, various learning disabilities, and/or those that prevent being able to physically hold heavy books. It is rewarding to see AT innovations evolve from being developed specifically for individuals with disabilities to being embraced by the mainstream.

Many use text-to-speech solutions on a daily basis to learn, work, play and navigate environments.

Using one’s voice for typing, dialing, dictating texts, composing e-mails is now commonplace.

DriveSafe.ly is one of my favorite text-to-speech apps on my BlackBerry. This app reads my caller id, text messages and emails to me – directly in my ear through my wireless Bluetooth headset - and it is Free. I used my voice to compose this article on an iPad with Dragon Dictate; it is also Free. In 1990, it

cost \$40,000! Thanks to the evolution and mainstreaming of AT, the price is right and the solution is making everyday life easier for everyone. I recently trained an individual with a spinal cord injury to use Dragon on his iPad – he is able to save his energy and still do all his schoolwork with this solution. And then I watched and listened to my Dad's physician use her voice to quickly and efficiently dictate her notes and orders into her iTouch.

This edition of A Closer Look is packed full of apps, widgets and AT solutions related to the iPad, iTouch, and other smart devices. Each of our ATRCs has some of these solutions for you to explore. Come by to try them out. Let us know what you think, and if you have any favorite apps or widgets let us know so we can share your observations and suggestions on www.gatfl.org.

Look around and celebrate the many contributions we all have made to the mainstream. Keep thinking "outside the box." Turn your challenge into a solution. Imagine what this world can be as we continue to break barriers through Assistive Technology!

Yours in the Struggle & the Hope!
Carolyn P. Phillips

AT Spotlight

By: Martha Rust

There's an App for That!

Small handheld computers that fit in your pocket, smart phones are all the rage! Today you are more connected than ever to your calendar, e-mails, contacts, and social networks. But did you know that there are many applications (apps) that are available that can assist you in other ways? Tools for Life has recently purchased an iPod Touch and an iPad for the AT Loan Libraries, and staff is finding creative new applications every week! Here are just a few favorites:

SmallTalk Aphasia (Free) -- This application was created to assist someone with aphasia. There are two parts to this app. One consists of icons that represent various conversational phrases, such as a dinner plate representing "I am hungry," that turn the iPad or iPod Touch into a communication device. It also contains phrases such as "I have trouble speaking, but I can understand you" and "I cannot write down your message." The second part of the app has a library of phrases and words with videos of what a mouth looks like saying the word or phrase, as well as speaking it out loud.

ICE - In Case of Emergency (\$.99) -- This application stores all your medical information in one place. There is a space to list all medications that you are taking and/or to which you are allergic. It also stores your emergency contact number(s). This app would be great for anyone -- just in case an emergency happens.

HireMe! (\$.99) -- This application is perfect for those who are on the job hunt. It runs through 300 different potential interview questions and gives you the option to record your answers for feedback. This app contains videos on tying a tie for that interview, as well as a long list of job posting websites!

Logitech TouchMouse (Free) -- This application turns your iPhone or iPod Touch into your mouse pad and keyboard! Instant navigation at your fingertips!

Shapewriter (Free for the Lite Version) -- This application is all about making the keyboard more user friendly by allowing the user to “slide” a finger through the letters on the keyboard to write the word. There is a free sample version available to test out this unique way of typing versus hitting each letter individually. This app could work for someone with limited fine motor skills.

To check out these apps , contact your local ATRC (www.gatfl.org) or Martha Rust, TFL AT Specialist, at Martha@gatfl.org

Tools for Life Data Corner

By: Connie Freier

Georgia's Assistive Technology Program, Tools for Life (TFL), and the Assistive Technology Resource Centers (ATRC) that were formed by TFL have just completed another successful year. Data collected through an extensive online program developed several years ago was revised to reflect current data collected as required by the National Information System for Assistive Technology (NISAT), the Data Collection Instrument and Performance Report for Statewide AT Programs. Data collection procedures continue to be updated with information that allows TFL to grow and develop new projects.

Tools for Life data is made available on the TFL website Tools for Life data is made available on the TFL website www.gatfl.org or by calling the TFL at 1-800-497-8665. Individuals and groups use this data to advocate for funding needed to increase availability of state-of-the-art assistive technology equipment, which enhances daily living for people

with disabilities and increases opportunities for successful employment.

Data Details - Fiscal Year 2009

- New Persons Assisted (Direct Service) 3,886
- Information and Referral 14,600
- Training/Tech Assist Classes (groups) 5,234
- Training/Tech Assist Classes (Individuals) 1,029
- Vocational Rehabilitation Clients assisted 339
- Loaned Equipment
 - Pieces of equipment checked out 552
 - Recycled Computer Project
 - Number of computers placed from inception of project 1994 – 2009 Over 9,000

TFL News and Notes

What's in Your Junk Drawer?

By: Martha Rust

Password Required. How many times a day do you have to enter a password to retrieve your information? Passwords must contain 5 letters, 2 characters, must have 1 number. Does this sound familiar?

Today I decided to count how many different passwords I use in one day. In the course of one hour I used 5 different passwords! One to open my

work computer, 2 for different work e-mails, 2 for different databases and to top it off, 2 of these passwords change every 30 days! So how in the world do I keep up with all of them?

If you find yourself frustrated at having to remember all of your passwords or just the one, here is a helpful tip that will help you, and better yet, it is most likely closer than you think. Look around your work area; odds are there are pictures nearby. A quick trick is to write down your passwords on a small piece of paper and place them behind a picture in the frame. A frame with a magnet works great too! Now you can put it on your filing cabinet or refrigerator.

Give it a try. The next time you find yourself struggling to remember your passwords, just remember it is behind the picture of your favorite dog, Fluffy!

Training Requests

To see a list of training opportunities from the Tools for Life team please visit our Training Page at <http://www.gatfl.org/Training.aspx>. Click on the Training Request Form to submit your request or contact Liz Persaud at Liz@gatfl.org to discuss your training needs.

Events and Calendar

Want to keep up with the latest Tools for Life activities? Visit our Calendar Page at <http://www.gatfl.org/Calendar.aspx> to see what we will be doing, where we will be, and how you can join us. Listed below are some highlights:

Tools for Life Network in the Community

Every Tuesday and Thursday

from 9:00am to 12:00pm

Touch the Future, Inc. - Computer Basic Skills Class

Call 770-934-8432 to schedule a class

October 27 - 30

ATIA Chicago - AT Reuse Strand

October 30

TechAble Disability Halloween Extravaganza

RSVP to Pat Hanus 770-922-6768

November 16 -18

Medtrade, Georgia World Congress Center

Funding and Resources

By: Rhonda Perling

The Center for Financial Independence & Innovation

The Center for Financial Independence & Innovation (CFII) offers Georgians with disabilities access to affordable financial products/services that help them purchase assistive technology, accumulate wealth and have more control over their personal finances. CFII offers free and low-cost assistance to Georgians with disabilities through the following programs: 1. Credit-Able, 2. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), 3. Financial Education Workshops, and 4. Individual Development Account (IDA).

As Georgia's Alternative Financing Program for Assistive Technology, Credit-Able provides low-interest loans and loan guarantees to give Georgians with disabilities access to affordable financing for assistive technology and home and vehicle modifications. Examples include adapted vehicles with ramps, lifts, and hand controls, hearing aids, computer equipment and software, recreational equipment, and home modifications such as ramps, roll-in showers, railings and hand bars. The new mini loan program is available for loans under \$2,500 and

is serviced directly by Credit-Able staff. Larger loans are a partnership with the Georgia Credit Union. The VITA program offers free tax preparation for low to moderate income individuals and families. VITA sites offer free electronic filing, enabling clients to receive refunds more quickly than by traditional paper filing, and to have refund checks directly deposited into their bank accounts. Many qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a refundable federal income tax credit. The EITC has no effect on benefits and is not used to determine eligibility for Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, or low-income housing for most Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

The IDA is a pilot project between the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta and the CFII. This project involves a matched savings account for every dollar of earned income. The CFII and United Way provide a 5:1 match up to \$1000 for a total of \$6000 towards the purchase of assistive technology. Eligible participants must live in the metro Atlanta area, have a disability, and meet income requirements. For more information, call the CFII at 404-541-9005.

CFII's staff includes:

Jackie Wilks-Weathers, Executive Director

Daphne Brookins, Credit-Able Consumer Liaison

Bridgette Long, IDA Project Coordinator

gTRADE, Georgia's Assistive Technology Equipment Exchange Program

Do you have an assistive technology item that you would like to sell, donate or need?

Post a FREE ad on gTrade, Georgia's Online Equipment Exchange Program!

To get started, go to the TFL homepage

www.gatfl.org or directly to www.gtradeonline.org.

Everyday Tools for Everyday Tasks

By: Liz Persaud

My Dad loves tools. On any given weekend it's not unusual to see him building something. There are constant reminders all over our house of his accomplishments -- an entertainment stand for his large screen TV; an accessible vanity that I can easily get to from my wheelchair; a small windmill that is sitting on a tree stump in our backyard just because he wanted to build something one weekend!

Even when I was little, I was in awe of all the tools that my Dad tinkered with; I remember admiring his tool collection and thinking that he owned every tool known to man. (In fact, now that I'm older, I know that's true!) One day I asked him why he had so many tools. He looked me straight in the eye and

said, “If the right tools are available and you have the determination, you can accomplish anything you want and don’t ever let anyone tell you that you can’t.” At the time I thought he was talking about building tables, desks, shelves and such around the house. What I realize now is that he gave me advice for life about tools for life.

Tools for Life. It’s more than just the name of Georgia’s AT Program. It’s what we do. We provide tools for life . . . tools that allow people to be independent so they can live, learn, work, and play in the communities of their choice. I am so amazed at the assistive technology field and all the innovative technology that helps people to accomplish their goals. But what makes me truly excited is to see how everyday commonplace technology is used by people with disabilities to accomplish tasks that they more than likely would not be able to do otherwise. I use over 32 pieces of assistive technology every day of my life, and many of them are mainstream pieces that are found in local stores and that most everyone else uses as well.

My new favorite, which has made my personal and professional life so much easier, is the iPod Touch. While I love the fact that my iPod Touch can play music, it’s one of the last things that I think about when I use it! There are so many other apps

available that make my everyday tasks simpler and greatly reduce my fatigue throughout the day. For example, how many times have you met someone and wanted to exchange contact information but then found yourself fumbling through your phone to quickly enter the information? Well now there's Bump It. This free app allows you to literally bump phones with the person with whom you'd like to exchange information, and presto, it's done! Keep in mind that both individuals need to have the Bump It app, but when you do, think of all the time and energy you're saving.

My work at Tools for Life carries the responsibility for coordinating training, updating the websites, creating marketing materials and organizing events. Each one involves sending numerous e-mails throughout the day, typing many keystrokes, and using lots of hand movement. One of the most frustrating things to me is moving my hands back and forth from the mouse pad to the keyboard repetitively all day long. When you think about how often you're at your computer, that's a lot of expended energy. So I use another free app called the Logitech TouchMouse. This app turns the iPod Touch into a mouse pad and keyboard. Now all your computer access methods are converted into one convenient smaller device. For me, it has been so helpful to sit back, relax and accomplish all my work by using small movements

rather than reaching for a mouse, stroking a mouse pad and typing on a large keyboard. I find that I can accomplish much more in a shorter amount of time. Another app that has truly saved my energy and helped me to send e-mails, instant messages and text messages, as well as take notes is Shapewriter. Instead of tapping each letter on the iPod Touch touch-screen keyboard to type, you just slide your finger from one letter to another as if you're drawing shapes. This eliminates fatigue because you aren't constantly picking up your finger with a tapping motion. I have become very fast at this after a lot of practice and am now sending longer text messages to my family, friends and co-workers!

So here I am using my iPod Touch and Logitech TouchMouse to write this article and share my new found everyday tools and accomplishments. The fact that mainstream devices are enabling people with disabilities to be more independent is a dream come true for many of us. Being able to "blend in" and use technology seen every day, but for purposes not easily seen by everyone, boosts confidence and independence. I'll always remember those words my Dad said to me that day when I was little, "You can accomplish anything you want when you have the right tools available." This is why I am proud to be a member of the Tools for Life team working to provide people with access to assistive technology.

Tools for Life Network

Services include an initial interview, information and assistance, device demonstration, equipment lending library, assessments and training.

Disability Connections

The Middle Georgia Center for Independent Living, Inc.

170 College Street, Macon, GA 31201

478-741-1425 Phone/TTY

1-800-743-2117 Phone/TTY

www.disabilityconnections.com

Tech-Able

1114 Brett Drive, Suite 100

Conyers, GA 30094

770-922-6768 Phone/TTY

www.techable.org

Walton Options for Independent Living, Inc.

948 Walton Way

Augusta, GA 30901

706-724-6262 Phone/TTY

www.waltonoptions.org

Touch the Future, Inc. Home of Reboot™ and the Assistive Technology Center

4508 Bibb Blvd., Suite B10

Tucker, GA 30084
770-934-8432 Phone/TTY
www.touchthefuture.us

The Center for Financial Independence & Innovation
(CFII)
Alternative Financing Program/Credit Able
1419 Mayson St NE
Atlanta, GA 30325
404-541-9005 Phone
www.thecfii.org

FODAC
4900 Lewis Road
Stone Mountain, GA 30083
770-491-9014 Phone
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Tools for Life data and resources are made available to everyone on the web at www.gatfl.org or call 404-638-0390 for more information.

Individuals and groups advocate for funding that is needed to increase availability of additional state-of-the-art assistive technology equipment that would greatly increase daily living for persons with disabilities.

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