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DID YOU KNOW?

1 IN 5 PEOPLE IN THE U.S. LIVES WITH A DISABILITY

Assistive Technology Partners envisions a world where all persons with cognitive, sensory and/or physical disabilities are engaged in life at home, school, work and play, without barriers and without boundaries.

To receive the communicATor e-newsletter or to request a hard copy, contact us: generalinfo@at-partners.org or call 303-315-1280.

Alternate formats available upon request.

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for the Advancement of Cognitive Technologies (RERC-ACT) Hosts State of the Science Conference

The RERC-ACT hosted its second State of the Science Conference and reception Monday evening, September 30th and Tuesday, October 1st. The RERC-ACT in its ninth year at the University of Colorado. It is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), United States Department of Education. In addition, the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities has provided significant funding to support the efforts of the RERC-ACT. The reception was held at Assistive Technology Partners and featured poster displays and product development demonstrations of ten different RERC-ACT engineering and research projects.

The State of the Science Conference was held at the Ben Nighthorse Campbell building at the Anschutz Medical Campus. Over 50 individuals from 12 states and Canada attended. The conference featured national experts on social assistive robotics, product usability testing, relational/animated agents, non-linear context aware technologies, inclusive design and standards development. Project teams also presented information on the status of their research and engineering projects and findings to date.

The State of the Science Conference was followed by the 13th Annual Coleman Institute National Conference on Cognitive Disability and Technology on Wednesday, October 2nd at the Omni Interlocken Hotel in Broomfield, Colorado.
The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are more than 70 million people worldwide who need wheelchairs, however only 5-15% of these people will receive them. “People in developing countries often depend on the donation of wheelchairs, which are frequently of poor quality and not suitable either for the users or their environment. Health and rehabilitation professionals are not always trained adequately to ensure people with disabilities have a quality wheelchair.” - WHO Wheelchair Service Training Package.

To address this problem, WHO partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to develop two training packages, covering the basic and intermediate level skills and knowledge required to provide quality wheelchairs in less-resourced countries. The Wheelchair Service Training Package - Basic Level (WSTP-B) was launched in 2012. ATP’s Clinic Coordinator Kelly Waugh, PT, MAPT was invited to participate in the launch of the intermediate level course, the Wheelchair Service Training Package - Intermediate (WSTP-I), which took place August 2013 in Cape Town, South Africa.

“I was honored to have the opportunity to travel to South Africa for a week of in-depth training with 20 other individuals from throughout the world. We were immersed in the content of the intermediate level course, so that we could deliver this training package as instructors, either in our own home country or abroad in the other less-resourced countries. Most participants had already been trained to deliver the Basic level training package and several were currently working in a wheelchair service delivery program in their country.” Kelly’s co-participants were from Brazil, Thailand, Mozambique, Philippines, Argentina, Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia, China, Tanzania, Fiji, Romania, Korea and Sudan.

The instructors were from South Africa, Australia and the United Kingdom. “Over the course of the week, these individuals became new friends and colleagues.”

The purpose of these training packages developed by WHO/USAID is to increase the level of knowledge and skill in the whole wheelchair service delivery process - evaluation, fabrication, fitting, delivery and follow up - so that more people in less resourced countries have access to a wheelchair which meets their needs. The mission is to train personnel within these countries to provide the needed services, ultimately developing the resources within their own communities to meet the ongoing need of mobility-impaired individuals in their country.

As a well-known educator on the topic of wheelchair evaluation and service delivery in the United States, Waugh was only one of two Americans invited to participate. “While I have taught post professional courses on wheelchair evaluation for many years in the U.S., I have not been involved in wheelchair trainings in less resourced countries, and so I was curious why I was invited!” Chapal Khasnabis, Technical Officer with WHO and director of this initiative, told Waugh that he hoped she could help facilitate adoption of the principles and overall mission of this global initiative among therapists in the United States. He hopes that Waugh will promote the use and/or adaptation of the training packages for delivery in the United States, specifically targeting physical and occupational therapists who volunteer with the organizations that donate wheelchairs to less resourced countries. Waugh is currently pursuing funding to adapt the training packages for inclusion into physical therapy pre-professional curriculums in the United States.
CLINIC SPOTLIGHT

Andrew Has New Wheels

Andrew Luke got an early present for his third birthday. But it’s not what you would expect for a typical toddler. He got a brand new shiny red power wheelchair. And he’s thrilled! When he first laid eyes on it he could not wait to drive it. Andrew had been practicing in a loaner wheelchair for several months. But this one was his!

Andrew was born with Arthrogryposis, a condition where the muscles and joints in the arms and legs do not develop properly. So he essentially has no movement below his waist. But he is a bright, curious little boy, and it did not take long to determine that he would be a good candidate to drive a power wheelchair, even at the tender age of two. At ATP he was fitted into a loaner Permobil Koala power wheelchair using an adapted joystick mounted next to his right knee. He was able to swing his hand on top of the joystick and then drive the chair using head and trunk movement. It took a little trial and error, including running into the spare tires on the “driving course” in the basement at ATP. But with a little patience, practice and maturation, Andrew fulfilled all expectations.

This means Andrew is now independently mobile. In other words, he can go where he wants, explore, play and “run”. His parents are proud, excited and a little cautious at the same time. They also realize that, for the first time in Andrew’s life, they don’t have to carry or push him in order to go somewhere. When his mother Stacey was asked if she was ready for a few scraped walls in their home she said, “No problem. My dad can fix them!” Andrew and his family are clearly ready for this new chapter in their lives because they know all the opportunities it will provide, not just for Andrew, but for the whole family.

Assistive Technology Awareness Week - October 6-12, 2013

Governor Hickenlooper proclaimed October 6-12, 2013 Assistive Technology Awareness Week in Colorado. Organizations who serve people with disabilities geared up to remind people about the tools and resources that are available to improve the quality of an individual’s life.

ATP, along with other members of the Colorado AT Coalition, highlighted AT Awareness in a variety of ways. ATP held Open Houses at the Denver, Colorado Springs and Grand Junction offices. New technology for mobility, communication, positioning and learning were available for demonstration and trial as well as information on current research in the field.

ATP also hosted two trainings focused on AT. On October 7, Jim Sandstrum presented “Empower Student Success with the iPad: Real World Examples”. Over 130 people attended between the live presentation at the Anschutz Medical Campus and distance sites in Colorado Springs, Durango, Grand Junction and Lamar. On October 18, Denice Roberts presented “Dragon NaturallySpeaking for Beginners” at STRIVE in Grand Junction.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation held an open house on October 11 in honor of Disability Awareness Month. The American Council of the Blind of Colorado held a Raisin’ Cane event on October 15 in downtown Denver. The group challenged downtown employees and City/State officials to a blindfolded walk down the 16th Street Mall to support and increase awareness about eye health, accessibility and blind/visually impaired issues.
Assistive Technology and Simple Machines

October is a busy month for ATP, given the focus on Disability Awareness. Along with our typical activities, we invited a group of second and third graders from the Odyssey School to come in for a visit at the request of teacher, Andy Hartman. The students were studying simple machines: the wheel and axle, the lever, the inclined plane, etc. After speaking to their teacher, it became clear that an introduction to the ways simple machines may help people with disabilities would work very easily into the curriculum.

Aleaza Goldberg, MA, CCC-SLP gave a brief introduction on Assistive Technology and how simple machines help people with disabilities. The students participated eagerly, volunteering how they might feel if they were not able to be independent in some area of their lives. Responses were heartfelt and surprisingly insightful, “I’d feel emotional” offered one boy, “I’d feel isolated”, said another. When asked how they might feel if they were not given a chance to be independent, their responses were no less powerful - “I would feel disrespected”, “I’d feel mad”. The responses left the adults speechless.

The students were then ready to move on and the class began to explore the various devices laid out for them. The goal was to guess what each item was used for, imagine how it might support a person with a disability and, finally, to determine what kind of machine made the job easier. Enthusiastic comments like, “If I couldn’t get up, this chair would lift me!” or “It’s easier to pour [a full kettle] if you don’t have to pick it up” (commenting on using a Kettle Tipper). For some items, the answer was not as transparent. The Liquid Level Indicator and the Sock Aid needed a demonstration, but the students sought out the explanation and asked thoughtful questions.

The students were then shown several videos, each emphasizing that whatever the disability, people search for ways to be independent in life. Examples shown included how complex technology can help a boy with a spinal injury do his math homework on a laptop using a mouth operated mouse (Quadjoy). Another featured a rough and tumble wheelchair rugby team competing at the London Paralympic games. And the last video showed a girl expressing her dislike of people using baby talk when speaking to her because she is smart. She uses an eye-gaze communication device to convey these messages. One student said, “She’s so cool!” Another student offered, “You should never judge a book by its cover”. Again, the adults were left speechless.

In the end, the students were amazed with the wide variety of simple and complex technology available to help those with disabilities and we at ATP were just as excited to have them. Of course, we have our ulterior hidden agenda. As we hoped through this interactive fieldtrip, we have whetted the appetite in that class for future engineers, therapists and legislators to keep moving toward supporting those with different abilities. Disability awareness should be included in all classrooms and we were glad to help out in this classroom.

SATELLITE UPDATES

SETAC & WesTAC Closure

Assistive Technology Partners would like to make you cognizant of some upcoming changes. As you may be aware, sequestration and other financial challenges have required us to make difficult decisions and restructure how we provide services. Consequently, effective November 30, we will be closing our satellite offices in Colorado Springs and Grand Junction. We will work to ensure that there is as little disruption in support as possible. Despite this transition, we remain fully committed to assistive technology services and support across the state. Responsibilities for these offices will be transitioned to our main office in Denver and supported through a variety of formats. We will continue to operate courier services to other locations in these communities, offer distance and in-person professional development events around assistive technology and provide technical assistance via a variety of electronic formats. We wish our colleagues, Heather Lyons and Denice Roberts the best as they leave ATP to go on to bigger and better pursuits. Please don’t hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.
VOLUNTEER CORNER

Marc Able

There are many generous volunteers who contribute their time and talent to ATP each week. To thank and honor them, we include this volunteer corner as a regular section in our quarterly newsletter.

In this issue, we would like to thank Marc Able, President at ABLE Consulting Group, LLC. Over the past five years Marc has contributed countless volunteer hours to help ATP achieve its goals. Marc began his support as a volunteer on the planning committee for the annual DéjàVu fundraising event. In this role he has been instrumental in ensuring this annual event is a success. He also currently serves as a member of the Assistive Technology Partners Advisory Committee where he supports ongoing decision making and guides the group toward its annual goals. Marc is engaged and supportive in every aspect of ATP.

Marc is an engineer at heart! He brings his natural gift of problem solving to all aspects of his volunteer time with ATP. For example, on the first Friday of each month he joins faculty at ATP for the Engineering Problem Solving Team Meeting where he meets with the engineers to discuss the latest challenges they face. Together they brainstorm ideas and strategies to solve any challenging issues.

We so appreciate all Marc does for ATP. His dedication and countless hours of work have truly touched the hearts of the ATP team. ATP would like to thank Marc for his time and expertise and invaluable support and generosity.

Say Hello to Our Students

ATP is home to some great University student employees and interns. Muse Jama is currently a research student intern at ATP under the mentorship of Dr. Patricia Heyn. He is a senior working towards his undergraduate bachelor’s of science degree in Biology at Metropolitan State University at Denver. He loves helping people and making a difference in the community. His hobbies include basketball, chess, running, reading and spending time with his family.

Willy Douglas is a recent graduate of the University of Denver (DU) with a Bachelor’s of Science in Mechanical Engineering and minors in Mathematics and Physics. For his senior engineering project at DU, Willy worked with a team in partnership with ATP to develop a social robotic toy to assist the development of children with cognitive disabilities. He is now working on a parallel project with another robotic design. For this project, he is primarily focused on developing computer vision software for the Microsoft Kinect to accurately track a robot in space.

ATP student Chad Baumgardner and mentor Dr. Patricia Heyn at the Rocky Mountain Regional Neuroscience Group Annual Meeting (RMRNG) on May 16, at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. RMRNG is a Chapter of the Society for Neuroscience and at this years meetings the topic was on “Progress in regenerating axons after spinal cord injury (SCI)”. Chad and Dr. Heyn presented a paper about the effects of a mixed-reality exercise program on participation levels of individuals with SCI and developmental disabilities.
Focus on Funding

If you are looking for low-cost assistive technology equipment, you should check out ATP’s AT Finder, an online tool that simultaneously searches four online classifieds and/or auction sites (Craigslist, eBay, eBay Classifieds and Oodle). A recent search for a Pride Scooter resulted in 60 products ranging in price from $32-$3,500. AT Finder can be accessed at www.colorado.atfinder.org.

If you are short of funds, ATP’s AT Funding Sources is a searchable online database and has over 2,000 agencies that provide funding for different types of assistive technology devices and services for all ages. Searches are based on your county of residence, diagnosis as it relates to the need for AT, age, area of need, and type of device. A recent search for a 14-year old child with autism living in Denver county needing a prompting device (learning, cognition, and development) for school resulted in 38 agencies that could assist. Agencies varied from public insurance (Medicaid), Colorado Department of Education, Public and Private Agencies (Joni and Friends - Christian Fund for the Disabled, Variety of Colorado - Tent 37), Grants and Trust funds (Colorado Fund for People with Disabilities, Friends of Man, The Good Shepherd Fund), Community Service Organizations (Elks, Kiwanis) and Low Interest Loans (American Association of People with Disabilities/Digital Credit Union, PFS Patient Financing). AT Funding Sources can be accessed at www.at-partners.org/ATFunding.

The Colorado AT Network

An alternative for agencies who want to provide product demonstrations to their clientele is the Colorado AT Network. The Colorado AT Network supports Coloradans in learning about and acquiring assistive technology devices or tools to assist in maintaining or increasing functional capabilities, independence, and safety at home, work or in the community. The AT Network provides FREE monthly webinars on specific AT topics that expand the ability of an agency or organization to provide information about AT devices and services to their consumers; FREE Demonstration Kit loans that allows individuals to learn about and try a piece of equipment before purchase; and FREE access to the AT needs assessment to help identify individual AT needs. If you are interested in learning more about, or joining the AT Network, please contact Julia Beems at 303.315.1284 or julia.beems@ucdenver.edu.

UPCOMING TRAINING

Wheelchair Seating for Postural Control and Function

Assistive Technology Partners will be hosting Kelly Waugh’s 3 Day Wheelchair Seating for Postural Control and Function training, April 24-26, 2014. This training is a unique, intensive two day course emphasizing client centered assessment and problem solving, with optional third day hands on practicum. In this intensive workshop, participants will learn a comprehensive approach to seating assessment and intervention for individuals with mild to severe postural and/or orthopedic impairment.

Participants will be eligible to receive up to 2.1 CEUs for this training. CEUs are provided by RESNA, authorized by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) for an additional cost.

Registration is open and seats are limited so register soon!

To keep up to date on the latest ATP trainings join our electronic mailing list. Please contact elizabeth.woodruff@ucdenver.edu to be added to the list.

You can also visit the Upcoming Events page on our website - wwwassistivetechnologypartners.org.