Product Testing Lab Working with State’s Insurance Exchange on Website Accessibility and Usability

Assistive Technology Partners’ Product Testing Lab (PTL) has been contracted by the Colorado Health Benefits Exchange (COHBE) to assess and test their interactive and information web sites for accessibility and usability. COHBE is the Colorado organization developed to set up an insurance marketplace (the Exchange) where Coloradans can shop for and buy health insurance based on quality and price. By providing easy to understand information about qualified health plans, the new Exchange marketplace will give individuals and small businesses in Colorado more control, quality choices and better protections when buying health insurance.

Given the nature and importance of this public resource, it is imperative this website and its online tools be accessible to people of all abilities. The Product Testing Lab’s role in the development of the Exchange will be to carry out an initial evaluation, and ongoing and final testing of the site and associated tools both for accessibility and for usability. Based on testing results, ATP will make recommendations to COHBE regarding site layout, design, language and feature accessibility.

COHBE hopes to have the Exchange up and running late this year. ATP
Power Wheelchairs and Young Children

When considering a power wheelchair (powered mobility) for a young child, one of the first questions asked is how old the child needs to be before they are ready. Many issues must be considered in order to effectively answer this question, most importantly, the significance of mobility in the development of young children.

Research has shown the role that early experiences play in influencing neurological changes during the rapid development of the brain. Mobility can play an important role in the development of social, emotional, language and intellectual skills. Typically developing children learn about their environment and their bodies through the sensory and motor experience of moving around and interacting physically with their world. Studies show a correlation with deficits in spatial-perceptual, cognitive and social-emotional development with children who cannot do this.

The case for early mobility is well established, however the method by which mobility is achieved remains controversial. At the center of the controversy lies the question of whether or not the use of powered mobility with children who have the potential to locomote on their own or with lower tech mobility devices are sacrificing that potential by using powered mobility. The concern is by using a powered wheelchair, the child will lose physical ability and desire to walk. Proponents for the early use of powered mobility feel the child’s natural urge to walk will continue despite the use of mobility devices; and that powered mobility may either continue as a supplement to other methods such as a walker or canes, or can be discontinued if other methods are more successful or practical.

Opponents to the early use of powered mobility cite concerns of safety. There is concern that children may drive into harm’s way, cause injury to others or damage their environment or wheelchair. The recommended practice is to wait until a child can consistently respond to adult commands or show mature judgement. The irony is that typically developing children who are learning to walk are not told to wait until they can demonstrate these behaviors. Rather, parents and caretakers set boundaries for safety. Unfortunately, due to this philosophy of waiting, young children with disabilities do not receive the powered mobility they need until they are entering kindergarten, or later.

Research on powered mobility shows a trend toward earlier adoption. Ten to fifteen years ago, the earliest age at which a young child would be considered for a power chair was two years. Most experts felt that younger children were simply not ready to drive safely. In 2007, researchers at the University of Delaware built a robotic device to study the ability of young children to drive safely. One child in the study, a seven month old with Down Syndrome, quickly learned to operate the chair and was able to navigate safely around obstacles in a room.

The clinic program at Assistive Technology Partners is a proponent for the use of powered mobility in young children. We consider a range of issues along with a child’s age, but do not dismiss powered mobility on age alone. We consider a child’s motor ability, cognition and vision/visual perceptual skills, and behavior, along with other forms of mobility being used by the child. We embrace the philosophy that you don’t know a child’s potential until you give them the opportunity.

(continued from page 2)
We strongly consider the family's understanding and acceptance of the use of powered mobility, including where the power chair will be used, supervision and how the chair will be transported and cared for. Our evaluation process works hand in hand with training. Children are given a chance to practice in a safe place where they can learn to start, stop, turn and avoid obstacles. We work closely with the family in considering not only the child's “readiness,” but their own readiness.

We believe that, just as a typically developing child learns to walk by trial and error, a child with a disability needs to experience a similar process when learning to navigate, even if from the seat of a power chair in a controlled environment. We know we are successful in prescribing and training for a child to use a power chair when we hear their parents say, “I just can’t keep up with him!” How often do those words come from the mouth of the parent of a toddler?

Chad Baumgardner is currently involved in a research internship at Assistive Technology Partners under the guidance and mentorship of Dr. Patricia C. Heyn. He is a senior at the Metropolitan State University of Denver in pursuit of his undergraduate degree in Human Services with a focus in Mental Health Counseling. He plans on obtaining his Master of Social Work degree from Metro beginning in the Fall of 2013. Chad’s career plans are to work with and help people with disabilities and underserved populations.

We offer expertise in a wide variety of seating systems and drive controls to meet the motor abilities of young children. We work closely with equipment suppliers who are very knowledgeable and experienced. We recently evaluated a 20 month old boy who has a very sensitive joystick mounted so he could swing his hand onto the joystick and then use head and upper trunk movement to control it. Within three trial sessions, he was able to start and stop on his own. There is no question he will soon be exploring his world independently; with all the accompanying benefits to his development.

Metropolitan State College of Denver. Upon the completing of her Bachelor of Arts degree she will attend an MA Program for Speech Language Pathology. Her involvement in this internship position sprouted from her inherent curiosity and her earnest ambition to acquire novel experiences in the professional medical setting.

Lindsey Erickson is a current undergraduate student majoring in Speech Language and Hearing Sciences with a minor in Elementary Education at Metropolitan State College of Denver. Upon the completing of her Bachelor of Arts degree she will attend an MA Program for Speech Language Pathology. Her involvement in this internship position sprouted from her inherent curiosity and her earnest ambition to acquire novel experiences in the professional medical setting.

Say Hello to Our Students

ATP is home to some great University student employees and interns. Here are two recent additions.

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Upcoming Trainings

Assistive Technology Partners has a wonderful line up of trainings for you to choose from over the springs months. For more information visit the Upcoming Events page under the Events section of our website - www.assistivetechnologypartners.org. From there you can download informational brochures and access online registration.

- Creative Solutions with PVC - Presented by Brian Burne, MSM, OTR and Hosted at Assistive Technology Partners in Denver. Hurry, registration closes soon!
- Boardmaker v.6 in Depth Training - Presented by Julie Ford, MS, CCC-SLP and Hosted at Pikes Peak BOCES in Colorado Springs.
- Successful Assistive Technology Funding Practices - Hands on Training for Today’s Economy - Presented by Julia Beems, MA & Christy Blakely and Hosted at Assistive Technology Partners in Denver.
- 3 Day Grant Writing Workshop - Presented by Cathy Bodine, PhD, CCC-SLP & Patricia Heyn, PhD and Hosted at Assistive Technology Partners in Denver.

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.
SATELLITE UPDATES

ATP-SETAC

The Southeast Technical Assistance Center (SETAC) is moving this summer! The Colorado Department of Education administers a capital construction grant program known as BEST - Building Excellent Schools Today. The Pikes Peak Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) has purchased the Gorman Educational Center at 2883 South Circle Drive in the southern region of Colorado Springs. It will use an $11.5 million BEST Grant awarded to them to cover the purchase, remodelling and furnishing of their new facility. SETAC will be relocating with the Pikes Peak BOCES and is grateful for their continued collaboration with Assistive Technology Partners’ to provide space for their satellite office. The Pikes Peak BOCES held an “Open Center” on January 24 to give the public an opportunity to tour their new facility. Look for more details on SETACs move in our next edition of the CommunicATor!

ATP-WesTAC

This spring the Western Slope Technical Assistance Center (WesTAC) office is planning to present trainings on Dragon Naturally Speaking and Low Vision and iPads, watch your email for updates on these trainings.

Denice Roberts of WesTAC attended the HAT (Hearing Assistive Technology Training Conference by the HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America) along with two other members of the Western Colorado HLAA Chapter. She continues to collaborate with HLAA to increase knowledge of AT for Hearing on the Western Slope.

WesTAC also recently received new phones to add to the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Phone Cart. These telephones are for the deaf and hard of hearing and are available for individual demonstrations. Contact Denice at 970.248.0877 to schedule an appointment.

Denice has also been approached by staff from the Center for Independence to collaborate on local presentations to increase awareness for AT for low vision and blindness.

Research Corner

Assistive Technology Partners works to improve the integration of assistive and mainstream technology devices into the lives of people with disabilities and those who are aging through a robust program of research and engineering development activities. There is always one or more research projects underway at our office, or in the community, and we are almost always looking for volunteers to participate in our research activities.

- **Product Testing Laboratory.** We are currently testing how usable 50 different technologies might be for persons with cognitive impairments. We are recruiting working age adults (21-64 years old) with either Developmental Disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injury, or early onset dementia (Alzheimer’s Disease) to spend about an hour testing products that might be used by individuals with these types of disabilities.

- **Non-Linear Context-Aware Prompting System for Persons with Cognitive Disabilities: a 12 month pilot feasibility study.** Slated to begin in April 2013, this study is testing a new product under development by ATP engineers to help working age adults with Developmental Disabilities (mild to moderate impairment) who might need reminders to stay on task to complete their job.

- **Early Developmental Skills Acquisition and Socially Assistive Robotics (SARS): A Pilot Investigation of Effectiveness.** This study will begin later this year and is focused on young children with severe disabilities (age 2-6) who have significant physical and communication impairments. Featuring robotic toys created and adapted by RERC-ACT engineers and clinicians from commercially available, off-the-shelf robotics kits paired with advanced sensor technology and controls systems, the toys are designed to facilitate early developmental milestones in children with significant delays in the areas of communication and movement.

If you, or someone you know, is interested in volunteering for any of our research programs, please contact Assistive Technology Partners at 303.315.1280 or cathy.bodine@ucdenver.edu and we'll be happy to connect you with the appropriate team members.
It Takes a Village to Effectively Deliver Interdisciplinary Augmentative Alternative Communication

Without a doubt, individuals with complex communication needs (CCN), require the services of a speech language pathologist (SLP) trained to provide Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) services. But truly effective, comprehensive intervention does not begin and end with an SLP. Motor therapists must address access issues, itinerants need to be consulted regarding sensory issues, special and general education teachers must accommodate, differentiate, implement and integrate across environments, and parents are central to the transfer of skills in the home and community. All communication partners need to be educated and trained in the strategies and techniques that support individuals with CCNs. This year’s annual SWAAAC Summer Symposium will feature workshops designed to promote AAC services provision across disciplines.

This year’s symposium takes place June 3-4 at The Conference Center at Adams 12 in Thornton, Colorado. Don’t live in the Denver Metro area? Consider registering for one of our 2 distance learning locations in Grand Junction and Colorado Springs. Gather your interdisciplinary team and register early for this multifaceted training event. Early Bird registration ends April 19, 2013.

**Speech-Language Pathology Track:**
- **Day 1: Comprehensive AAC Assessment**
  - Morning Session: Multi-Disciplinary AAC Assessment: Clinical and School-Based Approaches
  - Afternoon Session: Assessing Motor Access for AAC
- **Day 2: Achieving Implementation in the Classroom and Across Communication Partners**
  - Morning Session: AAC in the Classroom: Evidence Based Practice for Classroom Support and Integration
  - Afternoon Session: Training Communication Partners for Successful Communication

**Physical Therapy/Occupational Therapy Track:**
- **Day 1: Wheelchair Seating Assessment: Determining Critical Features of the Body Support System**
- **Day 2: Mounting, Interfacing and More!**

**Special Education and Related Services Track:**
- **Day 1: Connection AAC & Literacy: Learning & Participating in the Classroom**
- **Day 2: Lessons Learned Integrating AAC into Classrooms**

For more information on the workshops, presenters or registration, please visit the SWAAAC website at www.swaaac.com.

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**2013 AT Expo**

The 2013 AT Expo: Technology for Living & Learning, hosted by ATP, will feature vendors showcasing the latest innovations in hardware, software, educational materials, Assistive Technology devices and solutions for home, school, work and play. Colorado organizations that provide services to individuals with disabilities or to those who are experiencing problems associated with aging will also be present. Visit the Annual Events section of our website for more information.

Exhibitor registration is now open.
Early Bird pricing ends March 19th!
Volunteer Corner
Déjà Vu Rendezvous Committee

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

In this issue, we would like to thank our Déjà vu Rendezvous Committee members. This annual event is coordinated by members of the Colorado construction industry. Proceeds from the event help ATP meet our mission for persons with cognitive, sensory and/or physical disabilities to reach their highest potential at home, school, work and play through the addition of appropriate assistive technologies to their lives. These incredibly busy community leaders contribute generously on a number of levels. From monthly meetings to marketing, organizing, catering and financial support: they volunteer tirelessly to make sure our annual Déjà vu Rendezvous fundraising event is successful.

The event was first envisioned by retired Trautman & Shreve CEO, Bill Cail, as a way to annually celebrate the construction industry and as an opportunity to build relationships. It has since grown to be so much more! In 2012, the event was hosted at Denver’s Mile High Station and received record attendance and support of over $220,000. Last year’s Déjà vu Rendezvous had more than 100 event sponsors, with UMB Bank leading the initiative as the presenting sponsor. GE Johnson vice president, Mike Harms, chaired the planning committee in 2012. ATP is deeply grateful for their ongoing support and looking forward to the 2013 event in May.

2012 Committee Members include:
- Marc Able-ABS Consultants, Inc.
- Bill Cail-Retired, Trautman & Shreve, Inc.
- Chris Cail-Encore Electrical, Inc.
- Peggy Coleman-ABS Consultants, Inc.
- Gary Constant-GH Phipps, Inc.
- Darby Donohue-Gourmet Fine Catering
- Cathie Greig-CRL Associates
- Mike Harms-GE Johnson
- Rick Kinning-RK Mechanical
- Dean Nelsen-Retired, Mortenson Construction
- Ron Norby-Retired, Hensel Phelps
- Robert Sobel-Community Volunteer
- Tom Traxler-Trautman & Shreve, Inc.
- Bob Wade-Saunders Construction, Inc.
- Jim Weber-Saunders Construction, Inc.

Save the Date

The sixth annual Déjà vu Rendezvous event, celebrating those in the construction industry will be held on Friday, May 17, 2013 at Mile High Station in Denver. Together, the construction industry will have raised $1 million to benefit the work of Assistive Technology Partners.

For more information, please contact Cathie Greig at 303.592.5461.