



DREAMS FOR KIDS

DIRECTIONS

Technology in Special Education

For Parents & Professionals

Vol. 2, No. 9

April 1996

Transition

by JANET HOSMER

When we talk of *transition* for individuals with special needs or disabilities, we are usually referring to the time when a student leaves a school or educational setting and moves on to a post educational setting. This setting can be in the traditional workplace, in a sheltered workshop, in day programs, or to any number of adult environments. If a child required the use of assistive technologies in school, they will most likely require some sort of assistive technology as they move into the world beyond school.

Technologies used in the workplace are not different from those used in the school or educational setting. Individuals use adaptive computer access devices and software, augmentative communication devices, hearing and vision aids, and tools that make the work environment accessible, and allow the individual with disabilities to perform their job.

Children with special needs rely on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to guarantee that they are provided a free and appropriate education (FAPE) with the assistive technologies necessary for their educational needs. Once these children move beyond the school setting however, they must turn to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to provide an environment that is accessible.

Steve Mendelson, in *Assistive Funding in the Workplace*, states that, "The ADA can, in some cases require an employer to provide assistive technologies. This occurs in the context of the Act's 'reasonable accommodations' requirements, when technology constitutes the most



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My Dear Friends,

4/96

I know that you've heard this a million times by now, but I just have to say it again... I can't believe it's almost summer! Where has the year gone? I don't know about you but we have had an absolutely incredible year at DREAMMS with new things happening all the time!

Speaking of new things, we are planning a very exciting assistive technology seminar in October of this year! We are bringing together some of the most qualified educational and technology specialists in the state of Florida for a one day seminar geared toward practical applications of technology in school and at home! We're so excited to be able to bring parents and educators together in this forum where a hands-on exchange of ideas, techniques, problems and solutions will take place on the beautiful campus of the University of South Florida! Be sure to take a look on Page 9 this month, and get your early registration in!

We are also planning on providing you the ability to read *DIRECTIONS: Technology in Special Education* in electronic form by the fall of this year too! We finally have all the pieces in place, and are starting to "get at it"!

And.... our Web Site is getting better and better as the days go by.... Be sure to stop by and say "hey" (<http://users.aol.com/dreamms/>) !

Things are really happening here... be sure to stay with us!

As always.... my kindest personal regards!

Janet

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Vendors - We welcome product news. Please include pricing and contact name with press releases.

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Technology & Inclusion

Technology and Inclusion is a not-for-profit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization based in Austin, TX. Created by a small group of concerned parents and professionals in 1994, their vision was to establish an organization that would work with individuals with disabilities, their families and professionals with the ultimate goal being maximally inclusive service delivery - at school, at work and in the community. They wanted an organization that would be available to everyone; parent and professional, with no membership fees and no prerequisites- a place that anyone could call for help.

With that vision before them, the Board and Executive Director designed four major program goals:

- 1) to establish an assistive technology resource center in Texas
- 2) to establish a national best practices recognition program
- 3) to establish a continuum of professional training
- 4) to develop & market products which inform and support families and professionals.

In addition, Technology and Inclusion provides traditional on-site consultation services to school

districts, service agencies, families and other organizations. Their phone calls usually start with, "I have a student who.... "

Next month, *DIRECTIONS* will include the first of a series on Technology and Inclusion by Jamie Judd-Wall, Executive Director of Technology & Inclusion. Jamie is an extremely talented individual with tremendous insight into the needs of students, parents and professionals concerning the area of inclusive services and the use of state-of-the-art technologies. This promises to be an enlightening series. Watch for it! □

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ATFSCP Notes

The Assistive Technology Funding and Systems Change Project

NOTICE TO: DISABILITY ADVOCATES INTERESTED IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

From: Jenifer Simpson, Policy Expert, UCP, December 21, 1994

RE: Assistive Technology in the Work Incentive Programs found in the SSI/SSDI Provisions of the Social Security Act

Following are brief descriptions of how assistive technology may be financed through the work incentive programs for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) beneficiaries. Note that individuals must meet all disability eligibility requirements in order to access such work incentives.

ACTION STEPS:

1. SSI or SSDI beneficiaries wishing to access the appropriate work incentive programs described on the attached for purposes of accessing assistive technology should ask for the Work Incentive Specialist at their local SSA field office in order to access such programs. They may also ask for, or request in writing from the SSA field office manager, booklets or leaflets that describe such programs.
2. Disability advocates should also know this person and develop a relationship with them. They can familiarize the SSA person with the full range of assistive technology devices and services that may permit, promote and encourage individuals with disabilities on income supports to

get back to work and maintain employment for the purpose of moving to full sufficiency eventually.

3. Assist individuals with disabilities in familiarizing themselves with these SSA work incentive programs and developing ways to access necessary assistive technology so they may enter or maintain employment utilizing these income disregards.

4. Monitor such work incentive program use by individuals with disabilities on SSI/SSDI. This office would be very interested to hear about any individual with a significant disability currently on SSI or SSDI who moves to full sufficiency as a result of using the work incentive income disregards for purchase of assistive technology. As you may already know, all income support/welfare programs, including SSI, are under intense scrutiny by a hatchet-minded Congress. Examples of transition to full self-sufficiency will be used by advocates at the federal level to retain, expand and promote such programs that are critical for individuals with disabilities!!

SUMMARY OF WORK INCENTIVE PROGRAMS IN THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT WHICH PERMIT FINANCING OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Work incentives are believed to be helpful in increasing the proportion of individuals working who are beneficiaries under Title II (SSDI) and Title XVI (SSI) of the Social Security Act of 1935. Most of these incentives have been added in the past decade and are attempts to move individuals from income maintenance to self-sufficiency. There is some evidence to suggest that these incentives, which may be used to access assistive technology, promote the move to independence. However, determining the role of these incentives to encourage individuals to move to full self-sufficiency, i.e., no reliance on any benefits (cash, health care or other benefits) from SSI/SSDI has not been ascertained. Nevertheless, such work incentives permit purchase of certain assistive technology devices and services.

The SSA has been trying to promote increased use work incentives by designating a work incentive specialist at each SSA field office.

PASS PROGRAM

One of the more well-known work incentive programs is the Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) program, added in the Social Security amendments of P.L. 92-603. This program permits individuals to set aside income from sources other than SSI (e.g., SSDI benefits or earnings from employment) and resources (e.g., a bank account) to purchase assistive technology and other items that are needed to pursue their vocational goals. Income/resources set aside in a PASS are not counted in determining SSI eligibility or in calculating the amount of the SSI benefit.

The following are some examples of how individuals with disabilities can utilize the PASS program income set-aside for purchasing or to finance assistive technology such as:

- the lift for a van (to get to classes and to a job) for a person who uses a wheelchair;
- a bicycle to go to a typing class for a person with a mental disability;
- a Text Telephone or TTY to make calls to potential employers;
- hand controls for a car;
- a screen reader for a person with a vision disability;

PESS PROGRAM

Another underutilized work incentive that can be used in financing assistive technology is the Property Essential to Self Support (PESS) program, which permits individuals to exclude the value of property used in a trade or business or for work as an employee, such as specially adapted tools or equipment, in the determination of SSI benefits. Eligibility is available to both current and potential SSI beneficiaries, as with the PASS program.

The following are some examples of how individuals with disabilities can utilize the PESS program income set-aside for purchasing or to finance assistive technology such as:

- adaptive software (e.g., a ‘Sticky Keys’ program) for a computer-related job;
- adaptive devices, such as customized hand control extensions, to operate equipment or machines for those with motor disability or telephone headsets to permit hands-free switchboard answering.

IRWE PROGRAM

In contrast, the Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) program, a work incentive available to both SSDI and SSI recipients, can be used only for work expenses that are directly related to the person’s disability.

IRWE is available for individuals who are self-employed as well as those who are employed by others. Unlike the PASS program, there is no time limit to IRWE deductions and they can be used for ongoing expenses.

The Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) program allows both SSI and SSDI recipients who work to deduct half of the cost of assistive technology and their other expenses that permit them to maintain employment and that are associated with their disability. This is offset from the amount of their earnings for it would otherwise reduce their federal monthly payment.

The only significant problem is that only half of the amount expended under IRWE is actually available as a deduction of earnings, because of the way deductions and SGA, income, and payment amounts are calculated.

‘1619’ PROGRAM

The major work incentive program for SSI recipients with disabilities is the 1619 program, initiated as a pilot program in the Social Security Amendments of 1980 (P.L. 96- 265) and made permanent by the Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-643). It primarily retains Medicaid coverage which permits access to certain “medically necessary” assistive technology.

TRANSITION Continued from Page 1

appropriate form of accommodation for a worker with a disability. Applicable to government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses that employ 15 or more people, the ADA does not require the provision of accommodations that would impose an undue financial hardship upon the employer. But, assistive technology is not necessarily expensive, and it frequently represents the best solution in the workplace."

His article also states, "Technology is key to the performance of a steadily increasing proportion of meaningful jobs in our economy. It has transformed the lives of all workers,

but it has been particularly important for people with disabilities because it often represents the best way -- or the only way -- for people with disabilities to perform certain jobs that people without disabilities do in other ways."

"Many individuals with disabilities enter or reenter employment with the assistance of vocational rehabilitation services provided under the auspices of state programs administered pursuant to the Federal Rehabilitation Act. It is important for disabled workers and job aspirants, as well as current and prospective employers, to bear in mind that these services can properly include the provision of

assistive technology devices, or standard tools or equipment, needed for the service recipient to obtain or maintain gainful employment."

As parents of children with special needs, we are always concerned about what the future holds for our kids as they move beyond school. As we prepare for their adult experience, it is important to remember that assistance and guidance do not stop with graduation from school. Information about the ADA can be obtained from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission or the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. □



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IDEA Reauthorization Update

Despite the Federal Budget Debate, IDEA is moving forward. The Senate hopes to have its version of its bill voted on by the end of March. The House is right behind and the Administration has already proposed a reauthorization bill.

IDEA is currently funded as a federal/state partnership, with the federal government authorized to fund up to 40 percent of the costs of special education. The House version is seeking to eliminate the language that authorizes federal funding up to the 40 percent level.

The Administration and House bills are seeking to change the formula states use to make grants to Local Educational Agencies. Currently, grants are based on the number of children with disabilities served. The Senate bill seeks to retain the current child formula for grants, whereas the Administration and House bills would allow states to make grants based on population, school enrollment, population of children receiving Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), allocations for previous fiscal years, any two or more of the previous factors, or poverty in combination

with one or more of the other factors.

In the area of Individual Education Plan (IEP) components, the Administration, House and Senate bills would omit short-term objectives from the IEP. All drafts would change existing requirements and include new components.

Parents and teachers should know that they can contact their state and local representatives to voice their support of the current language in IDEA. (Source: DEES Advisory Memo, Karyn Pirrello, Legislative Chair)

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Software Review

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activity. These activities are sorting, counting, matching and sequencing. The program also allows for four levels of difficulty for each activity. Problems can be solved by color or shape with the option of adding custom pictures too! The students are rewarded for correct answers by a friendly human voice!

Mix n' Match is a quality teaching and learning tool with lots of fun built in for the early learner! It requires a color Macintosh with 4MB of RAM and System 7.0 or higher. □



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A Dad's Perspective on FATIC 96

by TOM NURSE

After the wonderful experience of visiting FATIC/FETC in March of 1995, I was eagerly looking forward to returning to the Orlando Convention Center as a "veteran" this year. However, I made a major change in my approach to attending FATIC this year. I brought my five year old daughter in her powerchair. Talk about a different experience!

First, I had never taken Shelby, our daughter, to such a massive event in her powerchair... so I wasn't sure how she would react to all the crowds and bustling activities. I was also concerned about her crashing into someone or wiping out thousands of dollars of computer equipment. Boy, was I wrong! Shelby was like a kid in a candy shop! We went into the hands-on lab and Shelby immediately started playing with all the different software, using IntelliKeys, and talking with everybody. She turned to me and said, "Go away... I'm busy... See you later!" Well this was even better than I had dreamed! Not only was she driving around independently and safely, she was on her own doing what Shelby wanted! If I was any more proud, I think I'd burst!

Later in the day we went to the main vendor's exhibit hall where Shelby saw her teachers and other staff from her school, Frontier Elementary; Terri

from CITE, and Paula Walker the local assistive tech specialist (LATS) for the Pinellas County Schools. Everyone seemed so pleased to see Shelby at the show and I think they too were proud of the role they have played in helping Shelby to be so happy and independent. Although I didn't have as much time as I would have liked to talk to some of the vendors in the main hall, it was well worth the trade off to see our daughter, growing up as an independent, positive, productive person. I know that without her powered mobility, and her use of computers, her choices would be severely limited.

Our family counts our blessings daily when we consider how lucky we are to be alive in the age of technology and we will continue to work hard for Shelby and other children like her, so they can experience the joy of independence that assistive technology can bring to families like ours.

So... it's true, dreams can come true. If you get involved... work hard... have some faith... and work together as a team. Good luck and keep on dreaming! □

Tom Nurse of the Parent Resource Organization is a parent advocate for assistive technology and a frequent contributor to DIRECTIONS.

ATFSCP Continued from Page 5

Section 1619(a) of the Social Security Act provides for continuation of cash benefits for those SSI recipients who are receiving benefits on the basis of disability even if they are working at the SGA level (i.e., make more than \$500 per month or \$930 if blind) and as long as there is not a medical improvement. The amount of their cash benefit is gradually reduced as their earnings increase until their countable earnings reach the SSI benefit standard or break even point.

Under the 1619 program, each state determines a threshold level which is the point at which it is assumed that individuals have sufficient income to be responsible for the purchase of their own health insurance rather than continue on Medicaid. States also vary in their support to promotion of the 1619 program, and participation rates vary considerably among the states.

Governmental Activities & Advocacy Department, United Cerebral Palsy Associations, 1522 K Street, N.W., Suite 1112, Washington, DC 20005, Tels: (800) USA-5UCP or (202) 842-1266. Fax: (202) 842-3519. □

Please be sure to check legislation and consult specialists in your own vicinity when making decisions. -- Ed.

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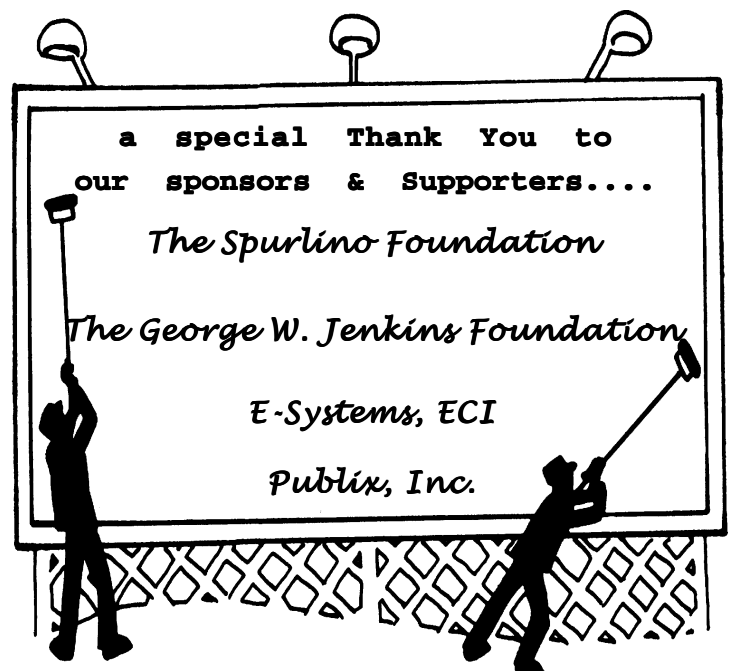
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CONFERENCES

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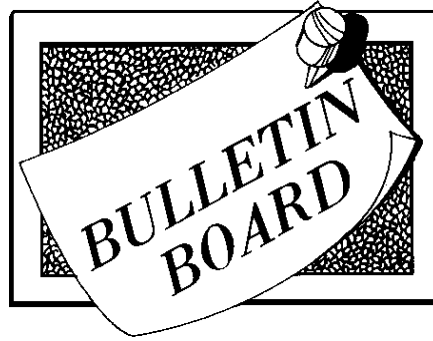
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InSights '96 Entries

The American Printing House for the Blind (APHB) is accepting entries for *InSights '96*, its fifth annual art competition and exhibition for visually impaired artists. Anyone who meets the legal definition of blindness (eyesight of 20/200 in the better eye with correction) is eligible to enter original artwork by the deadline of May 1, 1996. *InSights* presents an excellent opportunity for creative students and adults to showcase their abilities and share their talents with varied audiences through APH. The exhibition is taken to the Kentucky State Fair and is also displayed at various other locations. *InSights* is a vital part of APH's mission, which is to promote the independence of blind persons by providing special media, tools, and materials needed for education and life. For more information, contact the American Printing House for the Blind:

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DREAMMS Super Pak

Clearwater, FL - DREAMMS for Kids, Inc., a non-profit service agency and information clearinghouse, announces the release of the newest of their assistive technology information products. The *DREAMMS Super Pak* is a comprehensive resource containing information relating to the acquisition, funding and use of assistive and adaptive computer technologies in the home, school and community.

The staff at DREAMMS has been collecting and compiling assistive technology related public domain articles, reprints, and literature from over 40 agencies for the past 3 years. These reprints contain valuable and useful information and form the framework and basis for the *Super Pak*. Adding catalogs and product information from over 30 vendors and providing an easy to use index makes this a comprehensive and ready reference for parents, teachers, therapists and administrators.

The *Super Pak* is available for \$49.95 in the U.S. and \$59.95 in Canada. Price includes shipping and handling costs. Contact DREAMMS for Kids, Inc. for more information at:

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