

RI Council on Assistive Technology
October 9, 2008: 2:30 – 4:00 pm
TechACCESS of RI, Suite I
110 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, RI

Minutes

Present: Flo-Adeni Awosaki, Jill Blaney, Gary Brandyberry, Susan Gnirke, Elisabeth Hubbard, Margaret Hoyer, Thomas Karweh, Phyllis Lynch, Michael Matraccia, Teresa O'Brien, Jeanne Panarace, Robert Perrello, Dan Pieroni, Colleen Polselli, Bill Robinson, Lezlee Shaffer, Ying Sun.

• **Welcome:**

Meeting was called to order by Jill Blaney at 2:35 pm.

• **Acceptance of Minutes:**

Approval of Minutes for 8/14/08: Motion made by S. Gnirke and seconded by J. Blaney. Motion unanimously passed.

- **Project Director's Report:** Kat Grygiel was unable to attend meeting but sent in a brief report. The State Plan has a new due date of January 2009; the Council needs to schedule a November meeting to review by-laws; dates for next years meeting need to be set up; and she also apologized for not being present.

• **Partner Reports**

ATEL: Denise Corson was unable to attend but did send in a success story to be shared with Council members. "I did a home visit to an elderly lady's home for a request of an amplified phone. When I got to her home I could see she was also suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, which had significantly crippled her hands, so hearing wasn't her main obstacle. Although she would be able to hear on the amplified phone, there was no way she was going to be able to pickup or hold the phone. I returned to my office to get a RC200 Speakerphone and she was able to operate the phone independently."

EBEC: N/A

OSCIL: Lezlee Shaffer handed out an update of OSCIL's activities (Attachment 1). She explained how they visit consumers in their

homes, conduct independent living assessments to identify AT to help with daily living activities. She added they also help to explore alternative funding options to pay for the desired AT. In September she did a presentation to the Arthritis Support Group for the Pilgrim Seniors Center where she passed around low tech AT devices, adding that people got so excited about seeing the different things. In July OSCIL collaborated with the Governor's Commission on Disabilities by hosting one of the public forums which was held at the Warwick Public Library. It was widely supported with 78 participants attending. OSCIL staff testified and encouraged their consumers to either testify or send in comments if they were not able to be there to testify. J. Blaney asked when the transcripts of the Public Forums will be posted. L. Shaffer said the preliminary is out now, however, at this point the GCD has done a breakout of groups to address the issues that came up at the forums.

OSCIL also co-sponsored the Annual RI Independent Living Conference which was held on September 5. She worked on the planning committee with PARI. The Exhibitor Area included service providers and AT vendors who provided information to approx 200 participants. L. Shaffer noted OSCIL is still doing the nursing home transition program and has a new staff member. She added that they are amazed at the number of younger people in nursing homes. G. Brandyberry asked what they are doing for young people in nursing homes. L. Shaffer explained how they do an assessment (PT, OT), talk to family members, staff, and pull all info together. They look to see services needed, homemakers services, visiting nurses, etc.; talk with the discharge team; and work to see if feasible. They also work on terms of identifying where person wants to live. J. Panarace asked what the status is of the Medicaid waiver. L. Shaffer noted that nothing has been resolved yet. C. Polselli added they feel they are at a standstill. Once feds approve it, then it comes back to the legislature. This was a big item brought up at forums.

PARI: N/A

TECHACCESS: J. Blaney handed out conference registrations and an update on TechACCESS activities (Attachment 2) left by Judi Carlson. Reminder that the AT Conference will be held on November 20th at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick. She also stated that the Demonstration and Device Loan Library has been getting good use. Several new low vision devices, remote keyboards and access demonstration software have been added.

- **Chairperson's Reports: N/A**

- **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

- **Executive Committee:**

J. Blaney stated the Executive Committee had not had a meeting yet. She added she still has some concerns regarding bylaws, but will talk to K. Grygiel. J. Panarace commented that she believed the main concern of K. Grygiel was the number of committees. Volunteers to be on this review committee include: M. Hoyer, S. Gnrke, L. Hubbard, J. Blaney, and J. Panarace. They would like to have whatever federal guidelines available for review that have an impact on the Council. An email will be sent out with a date to meet in November.

- **Membership/Outreach**

J. Blaney commented that she was happy to say they have a full Council. One members' end of term is coming up. She will contact that person to see if they are still interested. If not a quorum at December meeting, they will do a mail in ballot.

- **By-Laws:**

N/A

- **Alternative Finance:**

N/A

- **Legislative**

B. Perrello gave out a handout (Attachment 3) of what the ballot is going to look like. He added that you can still get an emergency ballot and vote at town hall but only for President. T. O'Brien commented she has a lot of students that have high anxiety, and asked if they would be able to have their parent be with them when they vote. The response was that a person can have anyone they want with them, just not a union member or their employer. If convicted of a crime, a person can't vote when in prison but can after they are released. C. Polselli commented that some towns require you to call ahead if you are bringing someone in. L. Hubbard responded it is not legal for them to require that. M. Hoyer asked if an individual with a disability goes to the front of the line. L. Hubbard responded they should be allowed to, but it is not required too. R. Perrello added that a person can have 2 people come in with them – a Republican and a Democrat. L. Hubbard noted that if a person gets sick and is hospitalized, they can send

in a family member with a doctors' note to get an emergency ballot. J. Blaney asked how many students of T. O'Brien had registered. She responded 12 students. There are frequently asked questions about voting on the back of the handout.

- **Communications**

Ying Sun stated that the present project is to update the website. Several years ago we had members' biographies and photographs which need to be updated. J. Panarace added there had been recent email exchanges making a small wording change in the RICAT description. She added that earlier today she had talked to B. Robinson regarding doing a presentation at the Lung Association. Tina Ragless is the outreach person, and she works out of their main office on West Exchange St. B. Robinson added that they usually send out news bulletins with 2 months worth of meeting info usually with a featured speaker. In the past it has been someone from the VA, a physical or occupational therapist, or various outreach people. J. Panarace commented that some equipment that ATEL provides based on D. Corson's report would be helpful to these individuals. She will coordinate with Y. Sun. L. Hubbard commented that the Arthritis Foundation is having a function on November 15th at the Rhodes on the Pawtuxet from 9-12:30. She has reserved a table and offered to share with RICAT to distribute information. J. Panarace added that they also had a table at the IL Conference.

- **Partner Support**

J. Panarace noted this was one of the committees K. Grygiel felt was not needed. She further explained they only had been to one site visit. They will revisit when looking at bylaws.

Roundtable:

- Susan Gnrke commented that there was a story on the news within the last 2 weeks with the Governor signing a bill sponsored by Senator Paiva-Weed. She believed it had to do with the centralization for the dissemination of information on health resources. However, she has not been able to find this on the web. She wanted to see what the true intention is. C. Polselli commented she believed it was PAHI, Peer Assisted Health Initiative. (Attachment 4). They now have 24 sites – health centers and physician practices – where a parent of a child with special needs can go. This is an adult version of that. Department of Health works closely with RIPIN. S. Gnrke asked if there was a connection between this group and

OSCIL/PARI. C. Polselli responded that they send out applications to every physician asking them to participate in this program. The funding comes from Title V program at the Department of Health, with Southern RI HEA and Rhodes to Independence also contributing money. S. Gnirke asked how the state decides which family they share information with. C. Polselli responded that if the child is seen at practice that has consultant there. S. Gnirke stated she had no idea this project was even out there. C. Polselli stated they have been working with EMA, Transition Council, etc., and added that RIPIN and DOH have a partnering conference every year.

- J. Panarace commented that legislation sponsored by Patrick Kennedy on mental health care was included in the bailout package. Adding that she is curious how long it will take before it trickles down to the local level.
 - M. Hoye remarked that a lot of agencies have a person from transportation on their boards.
 - J. Blaney noted that before Mike Matraccia left he gave her two articles about MS. (Attachment 5)
- **Next Meeting Date: December 11, 2008** at from 2:30 pm. – 4:00 p.m. at TechACCESS. J. Blaney noted that at the Executive Committee Meeting they will come out with next years' calendar, adding that it will most likely be the 3rd Thursday. They will go over the dates at the December 11th meeting.
 - Motion made to adjourn by S. Gnirke, seconded by J. Panarace. Meeting adjourned at 3:50 pm.
 - **Reminder:** contact Sharon (sharond@ors.ri.gov or 421-7005 ext. 318) if you will or will not attend. Also – any question of where the meeting will be held or date, you can always check the website, www.atap.ri.gov/ricat2.htm.

Rhode Island Department of Health

Peer Assisted Health Initiative

Application Guidelines

Background

The Peer Assisted Health Initiative (PAHI) assists primary and specialty care practices in meeting the needs of youth and adults with special healthcare needs. Through the Peer Assisted Health Initiative, Peer Navigators (individual with personal experience navigating the adult healthcare and/or employment system who receive ongoing training regarding the system of care) are placed in practices to support the transition of youth with special healthcare needs from pediatric to adult medicine and assist adults with special healthcare needs in accessing community, independent living, education and vocational resources, and enhancing the practice in providing a patient-centered medical home.

Eligibility

Rhode Island based primary or specialty care practices, including private practices, clinics, health centers, and hospital-based settings with demonstrated experience in providing a “Medical Home” for youth and adults with special healthcare needs.

Practice Requirements

If funded, practices are required to:

- Provide comprehensive, patient-centered care for youth and adults with special healthcare needs regardless of insurance type (i.e. Medicaid or commercial coverage).
- Identify a lead physician and a lead administrative contact.
- Complete provider surveys and participate in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation meetings quarterly with the Department of Health.
- Participate in an Annual Partnership Review Meeting with the Rhode Island Department of Health.
- Gain a broad knowledge and working relationship with all community resources including but not limited to employment, vocational, healthcare, chronic disease management, self-directed healthcare, educational, independent living, and supported living.
- Provide adequate workspace for an on-site Peer Navigator including access to a desk, computer, printer, copy machine, phone, e-mail, Internet access, and parking.
- In partnership with the Rhode Island Parent Information Network, support and evaluate the selected Peer Navigator.
- Support a portion of the Peer Navigator’s salary.

Benefits of the Project

Practices will receive:

- Partial funding for a trained Peer Navigator placed in the practice (funding for up to 15 hours per week);
- Access to training, supervision, support, and a network of hundreds of consumer and professionals working statewide to assist youth and adults with special healthcare needs through the Rhode Island Department of Health and Rhode Island Parent Information Network;
- The most up-to-date resources for staff, including consumer guides, conferences, and information regarding support systems and services for consumers;
- A listing of other PAHI participating practices and other providers who are open to and have agreed to take referrals for youth with special healthcare needs and coloration opportunities with other PAHI participating practices and other providers.
- Assistance in establishing linkages to community, statewide and national services and supports;

- Assistance in identifying and obtaining resources and reimbursements available to physicians providing care to youth and adults with special healthcare needs;
- The opportunity to impact the design, implementation, and quality assurance of the service delivery system for youth and adults with special healthcare needs.

Funding for Peer Navigators

The Peer Assisted Health Initiative has received funding that will allow up to ten practices to participate at varying levels. Practices are required to support a portion of the Peer Navigator's salary in order to maximize the number of placements the Project can facilitate. The Rhode Island Department of Health will fund the training, supervision and support of the Peer Navigator.

Best practice and past experience demonstrates that Peer Navigators should be in practices between 20-30 hours per week to effectively meet the demands of the practices and patients. The practice must fund at least five hours per week, but can fund up to a full time position (37.5 hours per week). Requests for funding can be identified on the application form.

Sustainability Plan

The Peer Assisted Health Initiative Peer has been designed with the ultimate goal of sustainability. The PAHI has an opportunity to prove cost-effective and will work to secure sustained funding for consumer-empowered healthcare including identifying potential local, State, Federal and private funding sources.

Application Process

- Practice must submit a fully completed *Peer Assisted Health Initiative Application Form*.
- An inter-departmental team of state and community leaders will review and score the applications.
- Up to ten practices will be selected to participate.

Notification Process

- Upon notification, the Department of Health and RIPIN will perform a site visit with finalists to confirm preparedness for the Project.
- Final notification will follow within 10 days of the practice site visit.
- Each practice will be given a start-up schedule and an approximate start-up date.

Contact Information

Questions regarding this application process or to obtain additional application materials should be directed to:

- Deborah Garneau, Chief Office of Special Healthcare Needs; Phone: 222-5929;
Deborah.Garneau@health.ri.gov
- Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Program Manager, Disability & Health; Phone 222-4616;
Kate.McCarthy-Barnett@health.ri.gov
- Laura Jones, Program Manager, RI Parent Information Network; Phone: 222-5926;
Laura.Jones@health.ri.gov

RIPIN's Parent Consultant Program Expands

RIPIN and the RI Department of Health are pleased to announce the addition of a new pilot project to help youth and adult patients find extra supports and navigate systems when they visit their primary or specialty care doctor. It's called **PAHI - Peer Assisted Health Initiative**.

According to RIPIN Associate Director **Lisa Schaffran**, "We've had such tremendous success with our Pediatric Practice Enhancement model - reaching out to families of children with special health care needs - that we now will add a similar program for youth and adults. We know this peer support style program can truly make a difference in the adult world."

PAHI certified medical practices will have a RIPIN trained Consultant (called a Peer Navigator) on hand to offer support and guidance to patients and assist practices to provide a patient-centered medical home. (A "medical home" is comprehensive, coordinated health care). Peer Navigators will provide information about state resources, the employment system, social services, support groups, or other information about particular issues pertaining to the patients with dis-

abilities, special healthcare needs or chronic conditions. Utilizing the empowerment model that RIPIN is known for, a PAHI focus will be on the transition from pediatric to primary, an area of need that individuals and families have identified as a huge challenge.

"The Department of Health's research has shown there is a definite need for continuity of care as children with special health care needs grow up, and the Office of Special Health Care Needs is addressing this through the PAHI program," says **Lisa Schaffran**. "In addition, PAHI support will be available to all patients in the practice especially those with chronic care issues including asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer."

Currently, a PAHI advisory committee is in the works and applications are being accepted from general medical practices across Rhode Island.

Any practice interested in this program should contact **Deb Garneau**, Chief, Office of Special Health Care Needs, RI Department of Health at 401.222.5929 or visit RIPIN's website at www.ripin.org.



Contact RIPIN

for information about education, parent involvement and support for your family.

800.464.3399 401.727.4144
www.ripin.org info@ripin.org



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

50 Branch Avenue
Providence, R.I. 02904
(401) 222-2345 Telephone
(401) 222-3135 Fax

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VOTING

When is Election Day?

The presidential election, held every four years, is Tuesday, November 4, 2008

Should I register to vote in my college community or in my hometown?

You do have a vested interest in the local issues of your college community. Issues such as off-campus housing and zoning restrictions, the environment, taxes, transportation and personal safety all affect your quality of life. Voting in your college community is more convenient, and allows you to skip the process of absentee voting. However, if you feel more knowledgeable about your hometown issues, and you have an interest in the elections there, please register to vote there.

Note: *If you have a state-funded scholarship designated for a local student, be sure to check the terms of your scholarship before registering to vote in your college community. You could lose your eligibility.*

Can I register to vote at school and in my hometown?

No. You can only register at one location.

I think I already registered to vote at a different address, but I'm not sure.

Fill out a voter registration form with your current address. Put the address where you think you last registered in the previous address box.

Where do I vote?

To find your local precinct voting location, check with your local clerk at your town hall or your secretary of state. Don't let this confusion keep you from voting.

How do I apply for an absentee ballot?

You may request an application for an absentee ballot from your local county or city election official or clerk.

When should I apply for an absentee ballot?

Deadlines for each state vary, as do the process for requesting an absentee ballot. Some states allow you to download your application from the web. Check with your local city or town or the secretary of states office.

Emergency Ballots

Precinct ID 2186
Congressional District 1
Representative District 73
Voting District 6
Senate District 13
Council/Ward District 1

OFFICIAL ELECTION BALLOT
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
CITY OF NEWPORT
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2008



- To vote:
Complete the arrow(s) pointing to your choice(s) with a single bold line, like this
- To vote for a write-in candidate:
Print the name of the person on the blank line labeled "Write-in" for the office and complete the arrow pointing to your write-in choice like this
- To cast a straight party vote:
Complete the arrow pointing to the party of your choice in the straight party section of the ballot. If you cast a straight party vote and also vote for an individual candidate or candidates for a certain office on the ballot, the straight party vote will not be counted for that office and only the individual candidate or candidates voted for will be counted for that office.

STRAIGHT PARTY To vote a "Straight Ticket" complete the arrow pointing to the party of your choice.		SENATOR IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 13 TWO Year Term Vote for 1		STATE	STATE QUESTIONS
DEMOCRAT			M. Teresa PAIVA-WEED DEMOCRAT		
REPUBLICAN			Donna J. PERRY REPUBLICAN	Approval of this question will authorize the State of Rhode Island to issue general obligation bonds, refunding bonds, and temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$80,000,000 to match federal funds and provide direct funding for improvements to the state's highways, roads and bridges; \$3,570,000 to provide funding for commuter rail, and \$3,645,000 to purchase and/or rehabilitate buses for the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority's bus fleet.	
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS FOR:		Write-in		Question 1 APPROVE	
President Barack OBAMA Vice President Joe BIDEN DEMOCRAT		REPRESENTATIVE IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 73 TWO Year Term Vote for 1		Question 1 REJECT	
President John McCain Vice President Sarah PALIN REPUBLICAN		J. Russell JACKSON DEMOCRAT		2. OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BONDS \$2,500,000 (Chapters 378/469 - Public Laws 2008)	
President Bob BARR Vice President Wayne A. ROOT LIBERTARIAN		Write-in		Approval of this question will authorize the State of Rhode Island to issue general obligation bonds, refunding bonds, and temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$2,500,000 to be used by the Department of Environmental Management to purchase or otherwise permanently protect through the purchase of the title, development rights, conservation easements and public recreation easements, greenways and other open space, recreation lands, agriculture lands, forested lands and state parks.	
President Gloria La RIVA Vice President Robert MOSES SOCIALISM & LIBERATION		NON-PARTISAN COUNCIL-AT-LARGE TWO Year Term Vote for any 4		Question 2 APPROVE	
President Ralph NADER Vice President Matt GONZALEZ Independent		Marvin L. ABNEY		Question 2 REJECT	
President Chuck BALDWIN Vice President Darrell L. CASTLE CONSTITUTION		Herbert B. ARMSTRONG		LOCAL QUESTIONS ON SEPARATE BALLOT	
President Cynthia McKinNEY Vice President Rosa CLEMENTE GREEN		Jeanne Marie NAPOLITANO			
Write-in		Stephen C. WALUK			
SENATOR IN CONGRESS SIX Year Term Vote for 1		Stephen J. COYNE			
John F. REED DEMOCRAT		Mary C. CONNOLLY			
Robert G. TINGLE REPUBLICAN		Write-in			
Write-in		Write-in			
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS DISTRICT 1 TWO Year Term Vote for 1		Write-in			
Patrick J. KENNEDY DEMOCRAT		Write-in			
Jonathan P. SCOTT REPUBLICAN		Write-in			
Kenneth A. CAPALBO Independent		Write-in			
Write-in		Write-in			

VOTE BOTH FRONT AND BACK OF BALLOT

A VOTER'S GUIDE to Federal Elections

A VOTER'S GUIDE to Federal elections

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has developed this guide to help voters successfully navigate the Federal elections process, from registering to vote to casting a ballot on Election Day. In addition to the basics of ballot-casting, this guide includes information on eligibility and early voting, as well as the registration and voting process for military and civilians living abroad, and polling place services that make voting more accessible.

AM I ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

At a minimum, you must be 18 years of age and a U.S. citizen to be eligible to vote.

States may also have their own requirements, which are outlined in the "State Instructions" section of the National Mail Voter Registration Form (available online at www.eac.gov). State and local election offices can also provide information on voter eligibility.



HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You may register to vote by completing and submitting the National Mail Voter Registration Form.* This form may also be used to report a name or address change to the voter registration office or to register with a political party. The National Mail Voter Registration Form can be downloaded on the EAC's Web site at www.eac.gov or the Web sites of state and local

*North Dakota, Wyoming and U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Guam) do not accept this form. New Hampshire accepts it only as a request for a state absentee voter mail-in registration form.



election offices. You can also obtain the form in person from the following public facilities:

- state or local election offices
- the department of motor vehicles
- public assistance agencies
- state funded programs that serve people with disabilities
- any public facility a state has designated as a voter registration agency (such as a public library, public school, and city or county clerk's office).

You may also register to vote by using your state's voter registration form.

What about military service members and overseas citizens?

To register to vote, members of the military and overseas citizens may use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) Web site at www.fvap.gov. All states and territories accept the FPCA as an application for both registration and an absentee ballot. Printed copies of the form are also available at U.S. embassies, military bases and consular offices. Voting Assistance Officers at those sites can provide any information or assistance needed to complete the form. You may also contact FVAP by telephone at (800) 438-8683 or e-mail at vote@fvap.ncr.gov if you have any questions or would like additional information on how to register to vote.

What if I am registering to vote for the first time and I register by mail?

If you are voting for the first time in your state and are submitting a voter registration form through the mail, Federal law may require you to show proof of identification the first time you vote. This proof of

identification includes the following (or if voting by mail, a COPY of the following):

- A current and valid photo identification; OR
- A current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or government document that shows your name and address.

Federal law does not require you to show proof of identification at the polling place or when voting by mail if 1) you provided COPIES of the above with your voter registration form, 2) your voter registration form has been verified by an election official, or 3) you are entitled by Federal law to vote by absentee ballot. Please note that individual states may have additional voter identification requirements.

Did You Know...?

Your state may require voters to present identification at the polling place even if they meet the Federal proof of identification requirement. Contact your local election office for additional information.

WHEN CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You must register by your state's registration deadline to ensure voting eligibility. Each state has its own registration deadline. You can find this information in the "State Instructions" section of the National Mail Voter Registration Form at www.eac.gov, or by contacting your state or local election office.

IMPORTANT: Call your state or local election office at least five (5) weeks before an election to learn if you are registered to vote and what to do if you are not. Do not leave it for the last minute; otherwise you may not be able to vote in that election.

ABSENTEE VOTING

Voters who cannot go to their polling place on Election Day can vote an absentee ballot. Each state establishes its own rules and procedures for absentee

voting. For example, some states require voters to provide a reason for why they cannot vote on Election Day, while others offer "no-excuse" voting that allows any eligible citizen to vote absentee. States also have different deadlines for requesting and submitting absentee ballots. If you need to vote absentee, contact your state or local election office as soon as possible to make sure you do not miss the deadline for requesting and returning an absentee ballot.

IMPORTANT: After you have requested and received your absentee ballot, read its instructions carefully to avoid any errors that may result in your ballot not being counted. If you return your absentee ballot by mail, make sure to place the correct postage amount on the return envelope to prevent any delays in the delivery of your ballot.

MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS— HOW DO I VOTE?

Military service members and citizens living abroad can vote in Federal elections by filling out the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). This single form allows overseas and military voters to register and request a ballot at the same time.

An online version of the FPCA is available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) Web site (www.fvap.gov). The online form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage, or using the FVAP's pre-paid return envelope. All states and territories accept the FPCA. Alternatively, overseas voters may also send a signed written request for an absentee ballot to their local election office.

States and territories allow voters to register and request an absentee ballot by submitting a single FPCA during the election year. If you are already registered you should still submit an FPCA to request a ballot, ideally early in the election year.

You may also contact FVAP by telephone at (800) 438-8683 or e-mail at vote@fvap.ncr.gov if you have any questions or would like additional information about how to register and vote absentee.

WHAT IS EARLY VOTING?

Some states allow voters to cast a ballot before Election Day. Early voters can cast their vote by mail or in person at the local election official's office or at another location designated by the local election official.

Early voting dates and times vary among states. For information about whether your state offers early voting, and when it is offered, contact your state or local election office.

WHERE DO I VOTE—WHERE IS MY POLLING PLACE?

Voters are assigned to a polling place based on the address they provided when they registered to vote. To find out the location of your polling place, contact your state or local election office.

IMPORTANT: Update your voter registration information each time you move.



WHAT IS A PROVISIONAL BALLOT?

Voters whose eligibility to vote is in question—either because their name does not appear on the official list of voters for their polling place, or a question is raised about the voter's eligibility—are offered a provisional ballot. In both cases, voters have a right to cast a provisional ballot, provided they declare they are eligible and registered to vote in that jurisdiction. The provisional ballot is then counted if the appropriate state or local election official determines that the voter is indeed eligible to vote under state law.

Did You Know...?

Federal law requires states to provide a "free access system" that allows voters to check the status of their provisional ballots. Contact your state or local election office for more information about your state's system.

HOW CAN I BECOME A POLL WORKER?

Poll workers are central to ensuring smooth, fair and accurate elections. They prepare the precinct by setting up voting equipment, greeting voters, verifying registrations and providing voters with appropriate ballots. At the end of the day, poll workers close the precinct and prepare election materials for delivery or personally deliver the materials to the elections office.

Poll workers typically must be registered to vote in the precinct or county they wish to serve. However, some states have recently changed their rules to allow college students to work at the polls near their school even if they are not registered to vote in that jurisdiction.

To find out more about how to become a poll worker, contact your state or local election office.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

Polling places are equipped to accommodate the needs of voters with disabilities by providing clearly marked parking spaces, accessible entrances and ramps, and well-marked routes pointing the way to voting locations.

Polling places also have voting equipment that ensures every voter is given the same opportunity for access, participation, privacy and independence.

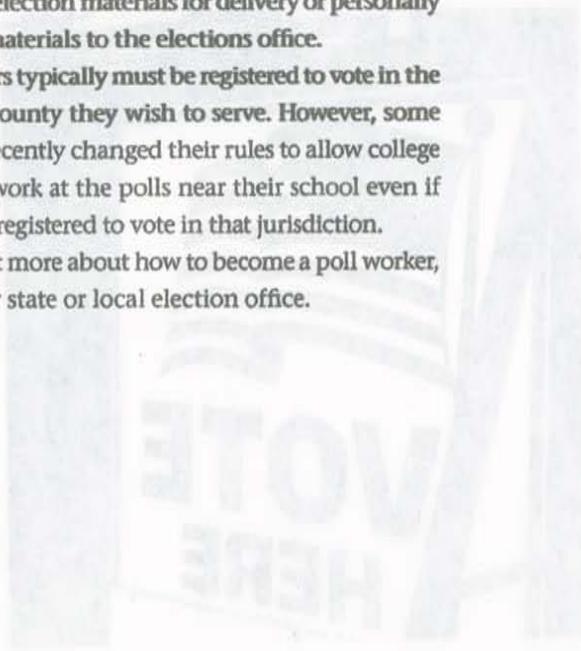
If you have questions about the accessibility of your polling place, or need information about voting equipment for individuals with disabilities, contact your state or local election office.

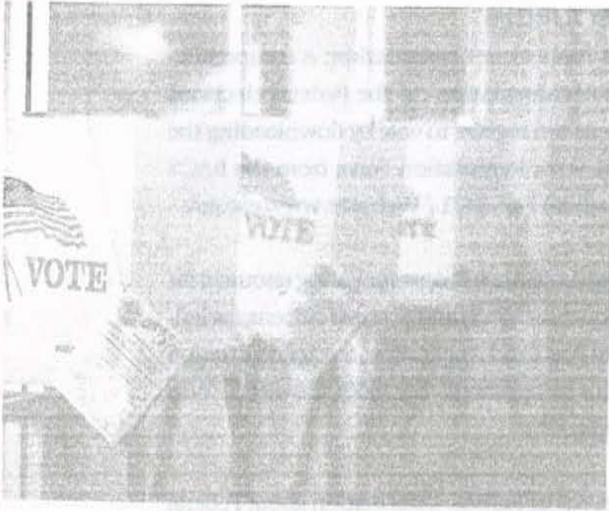
LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

Your state or local election officials may provide assistance to those with limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. These efforts may be voluntary or required by Federal law. Language assistance may include equipping polling places with voting materials (such as ballots and voting instructions) in other languages, staffing polling places with bilingual poll workers, and providing voting information online in languages other than English. Contact your state or local election office to learn more about language assistance in your area.

Did You Know...?

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission provides information for voters on its Web site in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese. The Commission has also issued comprehensive glossaries of voting terms in these six languages to assist voters and election officials.





MAY I REQUEST ASSISTANCE TO VOTE?

Under Federal law, voters that require assistance to vote by reason of blindness, disability or inability to read or write may bring an individual, such as a friend or relative, to assist them in voting.* A poll worker may also provide voting assistance. State election laws may include additional provisions governing such assistance, so be sure to contact your state or local election office for additional information.

Did You Know...?

Some states offer "curbside voting" for voters who are not able to easily leave their cars. During curbside voting, a poll worker brings all necessary materials, including a ballot, to the voter's car. Check with your state or local election office to see if curbside voting is available in your jurisdiction.

VOTING EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE

First-time voters, voters with disabilities, and voters at polling places where new equipment has been introduced may require assistance with voting equipment.

*Federal law prohibits voters from receiving voting assistance from the voter's employer or agent of the employer or officer or agent of the voter's union.

If you need help using voting machines, ask a poll worker for assistance. Poll workers are there to provide voters with instructions and demonstrations in using voting equipment.

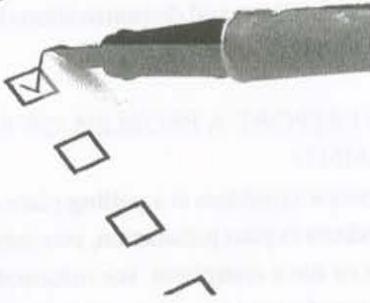
HOW DO I REPORT A PROBLEM OR FILE A COMPLAINT?

If you experience a problem at a polling place or with voting procedures in your jurisdiction, you may report the problem or file a complaint. For information on complaint procedures in your state, contact your state or local election office.

About the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC)

This publication was prepared by the EAC, an independent Federal agency established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). The EAC is charged with developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information about election administration. The EAC also accredits testing laboratories and certifies voting systems, audits the use of HAVA funds, and maintains the National Mail Voter Registration Form developed in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.

CHECKLIST



VOTERS' CHECKLIST – THINGS TO DO BEFORE ELECTION DAY

- Confirm you are registered to vote. Update your registration if information such as address, name or political affiliation has changed.
- Know how and when to apply for an absentee ballot if you are unable to get to your polling place on Election Day.
- Know your options for early voting.
- Know the voter identification requirements in your state before you attempt to vote.
- Familiarize yourself with the voting device used in your jurisdiction. Learn how the device is accessible to voters with disabilities.
- Know which polling place you are assigned to and how to get there.
- Learn what assistance is available in languages other than English.
- Know what time the polls open and close.
- Become acquainted with the candidates and issues on the ballot.
- Consider becoming a poll worker in your community. Call your local election office to learn about poll worker requirements.

VOTER RESOURCES

U.S. Election Assistance Commission: A comprehensive resource of information on the Federal elections process. Citizens can register to vote by downloading the National Mail Voter Registration Form from the EAC's Web site. Tel.: (866) 747-1471 / Web site: www.eac.gov

Federal Voting Assistance Program: Voting resources for uniformed service members and overseas citizens, including the Federal Post Card Application, a voter registration form for citizens living abroad. Tel.: (800) 438-8683 / Web site: www.fvap.gov

U.S. Department of Justice: Information about Federal voting rights laws. To report problems related to ballot access, including voter discrimination, call the Voting Section at (800) 253-3931. To report problems related to voting fraud or voter intimidation, you may contact the Department's main switchboard at (202) 514-2000 to be directed to the appropriate Federal law enforcement agency. Tel.: (202) 514-2000 / Web site: www.usdoj.gov

Federal Election Commission: A clearinghouse of information on Federal campaign finance. Tel.: (800) 424-9530 / Web site: www.fec.gov

Report to ATAP Advisory Board

TechACCESS of RI October 9, 2008

TechACCESS of RI has been busy getting the ATAP Assistive Technology Conference ready for November 20th at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick.

Briefly,

- The program has been finalized and registration brochure completed
- The registration brochures have been mailed (over 4,000 !)
- Email brochures have been sent out
- The brochure is on the web @ www.techaccess-ri.org
- Requests for scholarships are being accepted
- Please tell all your colleagues and friends – take brochures if you want to pass them around
- If you would like to volunteer to help, please call Judi @ 463-0202

Demonstration and Device Loan Library are getting good use. Several new low vision devices have been added to the Loan Library as well as some access demonstration software and remote keyboards.

Judi Hammerlind Carlson



OCEAN STATE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

1944 WARWICK AVENUE WARWICK, RI 02889

401-738-1013 (V) 401-738-1015 (TTY) 401-738-1083 (FAX) oscil.org

Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL)

RICAT Meeting Summary for Quarter 7/08 – 9/08

Device Demonstration, Public Awareness & Information Dissemination, Collaboration & Networking, and Transition Activities

Device Demonstration/Reutilization

Visits to consumer homes continue, providing an opportunity to conduct independent living assessments and/or OT assessments to identify AT to help with activities of daily living. Visits may include bringing sample AT for demonstration, short-term trial use of AT, providing vendor catalogs and ordering information, and exploring alternative funding options to pay for desired AT. Home visits provide a chance to observe consumer in their home environment performing daily activities.

Donations of used AT (wheelchairs, tub benches, transfer benches, walkers, etc.) are still being received and recycled.

Public Awareness & Information Dissemination

In September, OSCIL staff conducted a presentation and informational display at an Arthritis Support Group meeting held at Pilgrim Seniors Center in Warwick. Twenty participants attended. Samples of low tech AT were passed around to allow participants an opportunity to examine them and ask questions about specific function, costs, etc. Additional AT information was given to participants to take with them.

Collaboration/Networking

In July, OSCIL collaborated with the Governor's Office on Disabilities by hosting one of the Public Forums. The forum, held at Warwick Public Library, was attended by approximately 78 participants. OSCIL staff testified at the forum and also encouraged our consumers to participate through submitted written or verbal testimony.

During the quarter OSCIL co-sponsored the 22nd Annual RI Independent Living Conference held on September 5 at the Providence Marriott. The all day conference was attended by approx. 200 participants and included exhibits from service providers and AT vendors.

"People Helping People to Achieve Independence"

Technical Assistance/Transition Services

Nursing home transition efforts target the younger disabled (30 – 60 years old). OSCIL provided services to thirteen (13) transition consumers this past quarter, three of whom transitioned back into the community. Nine other consumers are in process, having already completed initial intakes and assessments and indicating tentative goals of transitioning back into the community. One consumer's health deteriorated significantly during this time period and was unable to be transitioned.

Lezlee Shaffer
OSCIL Program Director

- Home >
- Sign Up
- Technology Tips
- How to Participate
- The Survey
- Accessible Technology
- About the Team
- Newsroom

Welcome to My MS My Way -

Your guide to using technology to help improve the way you live with multiple sclerosis (MS).

Snapshot!

Your guide to technology solutions
 By answering a few simple questions on the Snapshot quiz, you will be able to find solutions tailored to your specific needs. It is designed to help you find customized solutions and information to help you use technology to move your life forward.

In association with:



Accessible Technology Video

Learn about affordable, easy-to-use technology solutions that can help you stay connected.
[Learn More](#)

Give Us Your Feedback!

Do you use technology to help manage your MS? What have you learned from MyMSMyWay.com? We want to hear from you!
[Learn more](#)

Survey Results

We have completed fielding our first-of-its-kind survey, designed to explore the role technology plays in the lives of people with MS.
[Click here to see the results](#)

Tech Connect

By Ellen Kampel & John M. Williams
 Ellen Kampel is the public affairs manager for the Accessibility Business Unit at Microsoft. John M. Williams has been writing about disability issues since 1978 and coined the phrase "Assistive Technology".
[Read more](#)

Accessible Technology Video

[Home](#)

[Sign Up](#)

[Technology Tips](#)

[How to Participate](#)

[The Survey](#)

[Accessible Technology](#)

[About the Team](#)

[Newsroom](#)

MS is an unpredictable disease. Some people face visual, dexterity and cognitive challenges which can make everyday tasks such as reading the newspaper, typing an e-mail and communication with friends challenging.

There are affordable, easy-to-use technology solutions that can help you stay connected. Voice recognition software, screen readers and magnification devices are a few of the assistive technologies that can make everyday tasks easier.



In association with:





Search

Privacy Policy | Terms of Use | Site Map | Text Size +A | -A

How to Participate

- Home
- Sign Up
- Technology Tips
- How to Participate**
- The Survey
- Accessible Technology
- About the Team
- Newsroom

Please Note: MyMSMyWay@Edelman.com is strictly designed for information sharing regarding technology and MS. MyMSMyWay staff members are not equipped to answer medical questions or discuss medical symptoms. Always seek the advice of your physician with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or 911 immediately.

Share Your Technology Tips!

Do you use assistive or accessible technology to make the computer easier to use or help you live better with MS? For example, do you program your cell phone to send you reminders about when to take your medication? Have you enlarged the font size on your computer screen to help with your vision? Are you a part of any online support groups that help you connect to others living with MS? If so, we want to hear from you. Please e-mail MyMSMyWay@Edelman.com with the following information:

In association with:



- First Name and Last Initial
- E-Mail Address
- Zip Code
- Explanation of how you use technology in your daily life to live better with MS

How Has the Snapshot Tool Helped You?

Has the Snapshot tool helped you learn about assistive and accessible technology products? If so, we want to hear from you. Send us an e-mail at MyMSMyWay@Edelman.com with the following information:

- First Name and Last Initial
- E-Mail Address
- Zip Code
- A brief description of what you've learned from using the Snapshot tool and how that information has helped you.

Select submissions may be edited and used on MyMSMyWay.com, as well as other MS Technology Collaborative materials. Only those submissions containing all of the above information and pertaining solely to either a technology tip or Snapshot tool feedback will be considered. Select participants may be contacted by an MS Technology Collaborative representative for further information.



Search

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Text Size](#) +A | -A

The Survey

- [Home](#)
- [Sign Up](#)
- [Technology Tips](#)
- [How to Participate](#)
- [The Survey](#)
- [Accessible Technology](#)
- [About the Team](#)
- [Newsroom](#)

We have completed our first-of-its-kind survey, designed to explore the role technology plays in the lives of people living with MS. Findings from this survey will be used to identify tools, resources, and connections that could be used to benefit people with MS.

Click on the links below to view these landmark survey results.

[Press Release](#)

[Executive summary](#)

In association with:



[Home](#) | [Sign Up](#) | [Technology Tips](#) | [How to Participate](#)
[The Survey](#) | [Accessible Technology](#) | [About the Team](#) | [Newsroom](#)
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Site Map](#)

Tech Connect

Home

Sign Up

Technology Tips

How to Participate

The Survey

Accessible Technology

About the Team

Newsroom

Assistive Technology Helps Employees Keep Pace in the Workplace

By Kevin Curtin

In the past, limited vision, dexterity or cognitive function may have excluded someone with a disability from the working world. Given recent technological advances, this is no longer the case. Instead, assistive technology can help people with disabilities to compete on an even playing field in the workplace.

Every month we are seeing advances in assistive technology. Whether it is new devices for people with low vision or advances in voice recognition software, people with disabilities now have a robust toolbox to help them stay connected.

For example, more and more assistive technology programs are now available on USB flash drives. Previously if someone used assistive technology they were often limited to the one computer at their desk or home that had the appropriate software. Unlike their peers they were not free to work anywhere and anytime. With the advances in technology this is no longer the case.

This means that someone who uses screen magnification software can take a work assignment that will put him or her on the road. If they wind up at a remote worksite, all they have to do is take their USB drive and plug it into an available port and they are ready to work. Likewise, if someone who uses a screen reader goes to their local library, the computer that was inaccessible now becomes accessible when they plug their assistive technology into the USB port. A great example of this technology is the [Dolphin Pen](#).

While mobility is becoming more and more important to today's workforce, assistive technology continues to redefine the office workstation. For example, I am using voice recognition software right now to create the column that you are reading. I can use this software not only to create a simple Word document, but I can also surf the Web, create a spreadsheet, respond to e-mails, work in a database, or do anything I need to do with my computer. In fact, if you are interested, you can [watch an example of me using speech recognition](#).

Unfortunately, not everyone knows about these tools. Likewise, many are not aware that resources exist to help you understand what types of accessible technology can help you in the workplace. At the [USDA TARGET Center](#) in

In association with:



Washington, D.C., we evaluate the needs of USDA employees and work with them to integrate assistive technology and worksite accommodations to help them do their jobs.

Many employers will offer similar programs. If your employer does not, you can individually consult with an [Assistive Technology Practitioner](#) or contact your local [Microsoft Accessibility Resource Center](#) for help finding the right assistive technology product to suit your needs. The TARGET Center also holds the [TARGET Discovery Series](#), a regular series of educational sessions on assistive technology and other issues related to the employment of persons with disabilities. These sessions are available in person and live online via [TARGET Web Connect](#), at no cost to the participant.

Kevin Curtin is the Acting Director of the USDA TARGET Center, an organization dedicated to ensuring that all USDA employees have safe and equal access to electronic and information technology by assessing, educating and advocating for the integration of assistive technology and worksite accommodations.

See other articles in the [Tech Connect archive](#).

[Home](#) | [Sign Up](#) | [Technology Tips](#) | [How to Participate](#)
[The Survey](#) | [Accessible Technology](#) | [About the Team](#) | [Newsroom](#)
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Site Map](#)

Accessible Technology

- Home
- Sign Up
- Technology Tips
- How to Participate
- The Survey
- Accessible Technology
- About the Team
- Newsroom

There's no question that technology has revolutionized the way we interact with colleagues, family, and friends. But for some of us living with multiple sclerosis (MS), technology can pose both benefits and challenges. Depending on your symptoms, everyday tasks such as reading an e-mail or manipulating a mouse can be difficult.

Instead of trying to work around these obstacles, take advantage of the ways technology can flex to your changing - and often unpredictable - needs. Customizable products and features are designed with you in mind, and can help make living with MS easier.

Accessible Technology (AT) is any item, piece of equipment or system that increases, maintains or improves functional capabilities of individuals who have physical or cognitive difficulties, impairments or disabilities. Accessible Technology encompasses both accessibility features and assistive technology. Accessibility features such as the options on your computer that allow you to change font size and color for better visibility, are built into software and other technology products. These simple adjustments to your operating system offer free solutions and will make the computer easier to see and use. Assistive technology includes products or equipment, such as screen readers or alternative keyboards that people with disabilities often use to improve their functional capabilities.

Some elements of accessible technology are already built into computers. Having trouble seeing the cursor on your computer screen? With just a few clicks, you can make the cursor bigger or change the blink rate. You can also enlarge the text of your entire computer screen.

Other elements are specially made for individuals with dexterity, vision, speech, or cognitive difficulties. For example, if you have trouble moving your mouse around, you might want to consider using a trackball instead.

Technology also can improve how you take your disease-modifying therapy. Having trouble taking it at the right time each day? Consider setting a reminder on your cell phone or sending yourself a text message.

For more ways to make the computer easier to see, hear and use, visit www.microsoft.com/enable.

In association with:



Accessible Technology Video

Learn about affordable, easy-to-use technology solutions that can help you stay connected.

Tech Connect

By Ellen Kampel & John M. Williams

Each month, Ellen and John will offer their perspective on how accessible technology can help you live well with MS. Ellen Kampel is the public affairs manager for the Accessibility Business Unit at Microsoft. John M. Williams has been writing about disability issues since 1978 and coined the phrase "Assistive Technology."

Share Your Technology Tips

Do you use technology to help manage your MS? If so, we want to hear from you?

Snapshot

By answering a few simple questions on the Snapshot quiz, you will be able to find solutions tailored to your specific needs. It is designed to help you find customized solutions and information to help you use technology to move your life forward.

[Home](#) | [Sign Up](#) | [Technology Tips](#) | [How to Participate](#)
[The Survey](#) | [Accessible Technology](#) | [About the Team](#) | [Newsroom](#)
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Site Map](#)

FORTUNE

SMALL BUSINESS

Health Care
How small biz
fares under
McCain's and
Obama's plans.

>> PAGE 14

Opening New Worlds

How entrepreneurs thrive
by bringing cutting-edge
technology to the disabled.

>> PAGE 58



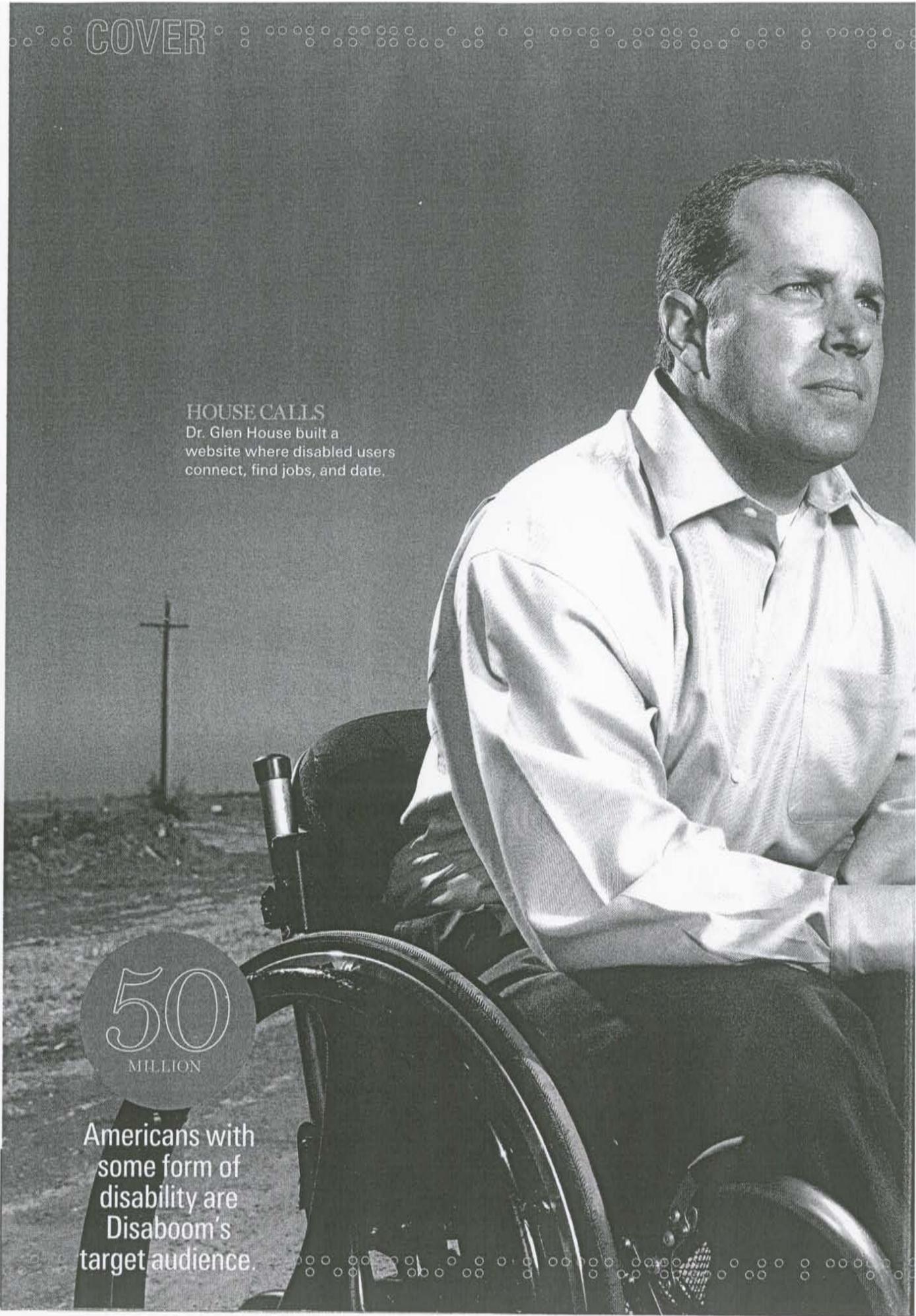
Jason Yeh's
videophone
helps deaf
users (like him)
communicate.

HOUSE CALLS

Dr. Glen House built a website where disabled users connect, find jobs, and date.

50
MILLION

Americans with some form of disability are Disaboom's target audience.



DESPITE HIS WHEELCHAIR, and often because of it, Dr. Glen House has always enjoyed doing what he isn't supposed to. Take the time he persuaded his neighbor in Colorado Springs, J.W. Roth, to join him on vacation in the ice fields of Taku, Alaska. The trip entailed flying to a remote lodge in a tiny ski plane that was ill-equipped for disabled passengers: Boarding was via a rope ladder. "They said no wheelchairs," Roth recalls. "So we signed up."

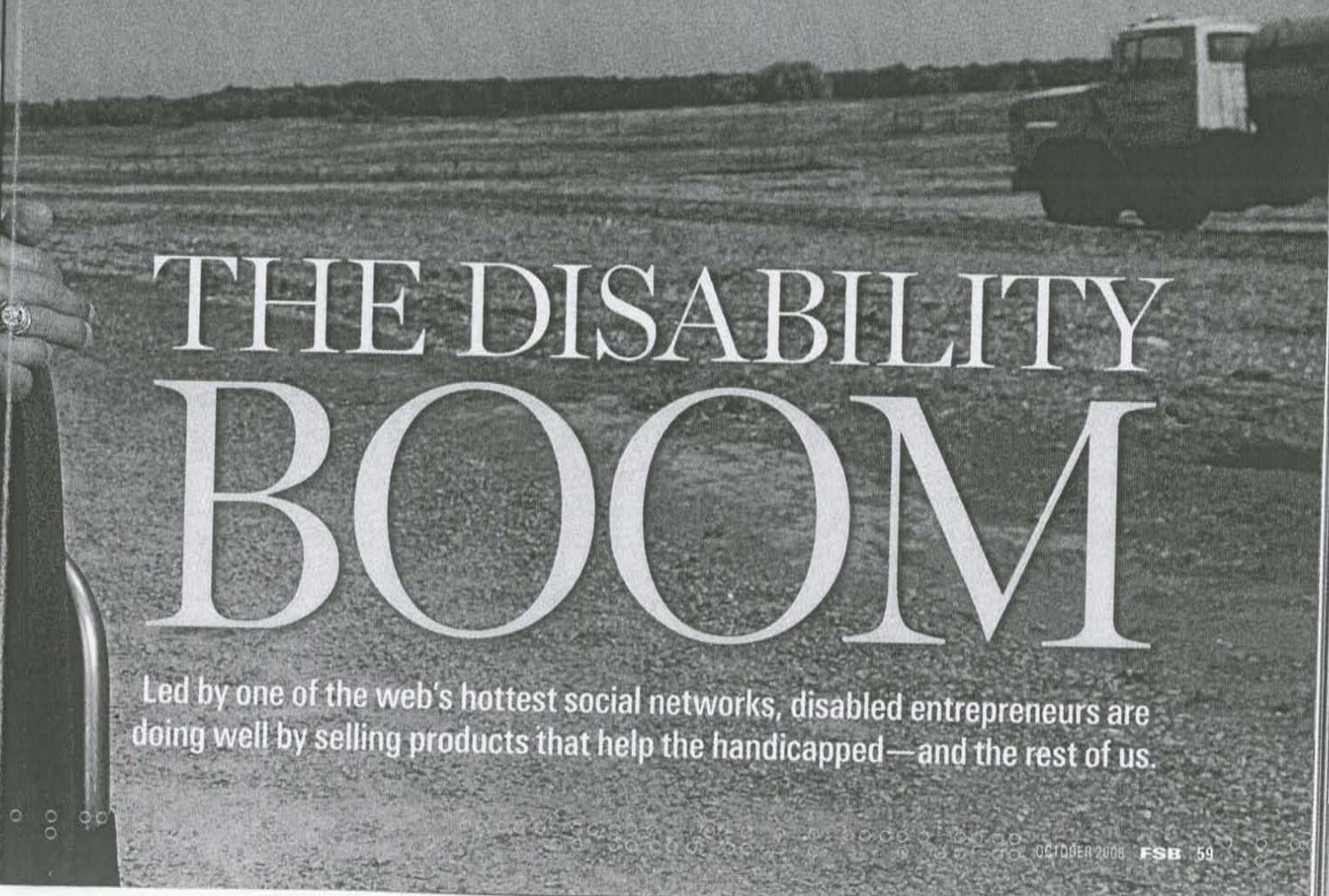
That 2006 trip was a turning point for House and Roth. The boarding process was dicey: Roth gave House a fireman's lift up the plane's

ladder, which dangled over the ice. "If I go down, you're going with me," House snarled on the way up. But later the pair sat in the Taku lodge, wondering how they might bring such exhilarating experiences to other disabled people. "They're sick of doctors," House told Roth. "They want to know how to live forward with their conditions."

That chat led to this year's launch of Disaboom.com, a fast-growing social network aimed at the 50 million Americans with disabilities and their caregivers. In a time of social-network fatigue, as Facebook and MySpace have spawned hundreds of bland imitators,

BY CHRIS TAYLOR

Photographs by David Yellen



THE DISABILITY BOOM

Led by one of the web's hottest social networks, disabled entrepreneurs are doing well by selling products that help the handicapped—and the rest of us.



of disabled people are now self-employed. Among the rest of us, the figure is 8%.

Denver-based Disaboom is unique. It focuses on a large, untapped audience eager to get answers and make connections, and one that advertisers had previously been unable to reach.

LIKE THE ENTREPRENEURS IN the stories that follow, House demonstrates that disabilities are no obstacle in the brave new world of technology. If anything, the determination they engender provides a clear business advantage. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of self-employed Americans with disabilities has grown from 12% to 15% since the dawn of the web. For the rest of us, the figure has stayed static at 8%. Your next competitor may just zoom past you in a wheelchair.

When House wants to get somewhere, he goes fast. "That is how I ended up in the wheelchair," he says. During a ski vacation in Snowbird, Utah, House ignored the sign that read DANGER! ROCK! and at 20 became a quadriplegic from the pectorals down. But House lost no time pursuing his next goal: He began studying for medical school. His Disaboom colleagues all have stories of his dangerously fast driving; one had to pull him from his car when it skidded off the road into the Colorado snow.

House is the public face of Disaboom, writing most of the medical guides to the 40 disabilities the site covers and participating in its forums. It doesn't hurt that he and Roth founded the company last year just as the Fox drama *House*, which features a partially disabled doctor named Greg House, started winning over critics and viewers. Glen House was not the inspiration for the show, although at least one patient insisted on his autograph anyway.

It helped that Roth, one of the founders of biotech firm AspenBio, came aboard as CEO. Roth swiftly garnered \$15 million in funding and began targeting advertisers. By April, Disaboom had racked up \$1 million in ad sales to corporate Godzillas such as Ford, Avis, Johnson & Johnson, and T-Mobile, and had served up 23 million online ads. Roth launched a sister site, Disaboomjobs.com, in an effort to address the 60% unemployment rate among disabled Americans. He even bought a disabled-dating site called lovebyrd.com. "We don't want Disaboom to smell like a doctor's office," Roth says. "We want to deal with dating issues, sex issues, how to drive a fast car."

Disaboom officially launched in January. The main site now boasts 72,000 registered users, and the rate at which new users sign up is growing by 500% a month. In March presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain both launched profiles on the site. Roth and House maintain folders full of thank-you e-mails, many from parents of

disabled kids who didn't know where to turn until they found sympathy and suggestions from the Disaboom community.

The site is not without problems. Roth decided to take Disaboom public before its launch; as of late August, the stock was trading at an anemic 50 cents a share, \$1.30 off its 2007 high. One disabled blogger at GearAbility.com complained that Disaboom jobs listed too few positions specifically for the handicapped, and that much of the content read like PR blurbs. "There's a lot of buzz about them," says Jennifer Simpson, senior director of technology policy at the American Association of People With Disabilities, a lob-

bying group in Washington, D.C. "We talk about them all the time, but I don't think they're where they want to be."

House and Roth are working on that. They recently struck deals with the Mayo Clinic and Harvard Medical School to license a reliable range of medical content. With \$4 million cash in hand, Disaboom's stock slump isn't going to bite anytime soon. The 39 employees on staff include three full-time "social marketers," who write blogs and help promote the site on a range of popular websites such as Digg and Twitter.

"This is the tip of the iceberg," says Roth at his conference table in a suburban Denver office park. He already has plans to launch other social networks for underserved markets. Neither he nor House will say more than that, but it seems likely that they'll soon be doing something they weren't supposed to do, one more time.

Why Disabled Techies Rock

AT AGE 20, MARK LOEFFLER WAS A FORMER high school jock who worked as an hourly laborer at a tropical plant farm in Hawaii. Then one afternoon, vacationing with his parents at a lake in Michigan, Loeffler dove off the end of a dock and snapped his neck. "I couldn't rely on brawn anymore," says Loeffler. "I had to get technical skills." Now 43, Loeffler is an engineer, working as a contractor for the Department of Education in Washington, D.C.—with an assist from TecAccess, a small business that places disabled workers in technology jobs.

Based in Richmond, TecAccess also consults with or-

From Iraq to B-School

FOR DISABLED veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, it was a very different kind of boot camp. In August, UCLA's prestigious Anderson School of Management opened its doors to 15 disabled veterans with new businesses after putting them through three weeks of online training. Though



FIRING LINE Disabled veteran Rico Edillor presents his business plan to the class.

conceived as a way of thanking the troops, the free classes on business plans, funding, and operations did not pull any punches. At the final pitch meeting the entrepreneurs' fear was palpable. "We're not here to clap and send them on their

way," says associate dean Al Osbourne. His colleagues are following up with online mentoring and web-based study sessions. That works for Allen McAfee, 26, a Navy corpsman who sustained shrapnel injuries in Iraq and suf-

fers from posttraumatic stress disorder. He and a fellow disabled vet launched a startup that will clean toxic sites. Business courses at their community college had been unhelpful, McAfee says, "but I'm really digging this."

—DESA PHILADELPHIA

ganizations all over the world that want to make their hardware, software, and websites more accessible to the handicapped.

Founder Debra Ruh knows that technology developed for disabled users often winds up benefiting the general population. "Closed captioning on televisions is a great example of something originally for the disabled that we now all take for granted," Ruh says. "It was developed for the hard of hearing. Now it's used in airports, bars—everywhere." Similarly, voice-recognition technology was originally created for users who couldn't type. Now it's hard to navigate a phone system at a major company without coming across it.

Before Ruh started TecAccess, she divided her time between running the IT department of a local bank and volunteering in her daughter Sara's classroom. Sara was born with Down syndrome, and Ruh taught Sara's sixth-grade special-needs class how to create computer games. That's when she realized how digital technology could empower the disabled population. "Accessibility used to be about building ramps," Ruh says. "Now it's about building ramps to technology." After the bank laid Ruh off, she liquidated her 401(k) and savings accounts to launch TecAccess. At 49,

Ruh has an easy laugh, a motherly persona, and a sharp business mind. She set up TecAccess as a for-profit firm, though many of her competitors, such as the Job Accommodation Network, are nonprofits. "We didn't want to be marginalized," she says. "We wanted to emphasize that this is good for business."

Ruh recruits mainly in the disabled community: Current staffers live with handicaps that include quadriplegia, cerebral palsy, and various mental health issues. Many employees work from home, using adaptive technology such as keyboards that can be operated with only one hand.

Since March 2000 the company has been selling technology consulting services to government agencies and corporations. That means, for example, helping the client develop a website that blind people can navigate using software that reads text but not graphics. TecAccess advises clients to place descriptive captions underneath pictures so that the screen reader can pick them up. Who better to evaluate the result, Ruh thought, than a blind employee?

As the company grew it expanded into equipment testing and gained larger clients. In 2003, Canon hired a TecAccess team to help make its photocopiers more accessible. The team's advice: Provide voice-recogni-



unemployment among the disabled—ten times higher than the national average.

SEE ME NOW?

Jason Yeh's hearing-impaired workers built the first all-in-one videophone for the deaf, the VPAD.



every year from a federal fund enabling phone and video calls for the hearing impaired.

kit, which won an award last year from the American Foundation for the Blind. "That allowed us to remain competitive in the marketplace," says Aubrey Woolley, Canon's government policy and compliance analyst, "particularly with government customers who focus on accessibility."

In addition to her consulting business, Ruh estimates that she has found technical engineering jobs for hundreds of disabled techies in the past year. Half of them, like Loeffler, are contract workers employed by TecAccess and placed with the client. Some clients fear the expense of making the necessary workplace accommodations, such as buying special keyboards or chairs, that are required by the Americans With Disabilities Act. But Ruh says that the most she ever asked a client to spend is \$2,000 for screen-reading software. According to a 2005 Department of Labor study, 59% of employers that hire disabled workers don't need to spend anything to meet ADA requirements. The median investment: \$600.

Ruh says the expense is more than offset by higher productivity and retention rates. Annual turnover for her 35 full-time employees averages 1%, compared with a national average of 23%. Many clients agree. "In some cases employees are more motivated if they're disabled," says Scott McKay, CIO at Genworth Financial, who has used TecAccess to source both contract workers and staff employees.

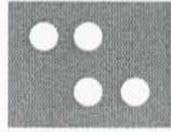
A recent study by Virginia Commonwealth University rated disabled workers the same as or better than nondisabled co-workers on attendance, punctuality, task consistency, and work quality. And disabled workers scored only slightly lower on work speed. "Managers say they want their workforce to be creative," Ruh says. "Well, these are people who have to think creatively every day. The world isn't made for them. They have to figure out how to get into the restaurant or

tal. She projects revenues of \$4 million this year. Just as satisfying: being named one of the Small Business Administration's top ten success stories in 2008.

Not content with that, Ruh is now focused on placing wounded Iraq veterans. She has trained 30 disabled vets so far and has found jobs for half of them already. Mark Loeffler had to wait years to get the training he needed. His successors can

launch high-tech careers in months. —PHAEDRA HISE

Helping Deaf Callers Connect



ASON YEH WANTED TO BUILD A COMMUNICATION device that at least 10% of the U.S. population would be eager to use. Early adopters would include Jason, 24, and his father, John, 61, who had just sold the family software company. The Yehs could tap into federal funding that would cover most operating costs and launch the company with a modest \$1.5 million in startup capital. They had access to cheap skilled labor. And they could avoid pricey market research, because they knew their market intimately.

John and Jason—like all their employees and many of their potential customers—are deaf. In summer 2005, Jason dropped out of the prestigious Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., which educates deaf and hearing-impaired students. The father-and-son team set up Viable in a nearby suburb. Its products include the first videophone designed, engineered, sold, and distributed entirely by (and to) the deaf and hard of hearing.

Phone communication for the deaf has been possible since the 1960s, but for many years it was a laborious and little-used process involving teletype machines. In 1995 a new technology called video relay services (VRS) arrived. A deaf person with a videocamera would place a video call to a sign-language interpreter, who then called a hearing person. VRS became a big business in 2002, when the FCC began collecting a monthly fee from phone users to pay

for VRS cameras and interpreters (you may have noticed the charge on your telecom bill).

That fund now collects \$800 million a year—and has spawned a flurry of VRS startups. The change has been revolutionary. “For my parents these were literally the first long-range conversations they’d ever had,” says Anthony Mowl, Viable’s assistant vice president for business development. “There was a lot of crying on those calls.”

Sorenson Communications, a giant video company based in Salt Lake City, released the first commercial VRS device, the VP-100, in 2000. The videocamera, which worked with most PCs or TVs, was given free to deaf people, enabling video relay conversations for anyone with a fast broadband connection. Sorenson currently claims about 70% of the VRS market.

But the Yehs spotted a weakness in Sorenson’s business model: The company is run by the hearing. An office of deaf workers would understand the market better. Says John: “We saw room for a new type of technology company.” They started by providing better VRS services, recruiting top interpreters, and offering above-market wages. The FCC pays VRS providers about \$6 a minute for calls, but the meter starts ticking only once the interpreter connects both callers. So Viable invested in speedy servers and software that would get the VRS sessions up and running as fast as possible.

Next, the Yehs formed a 20-person gadget team—headed by Jason and his college buddy Larwin Berke—to develop a dream line of products to rival Sorenson’s VP-100 and its successors. The result was the VPAD, a \$699 videoconferencing device that launched in January. Rather than tying the videocamera to a PC or TV like its rivals, the VPAD incorporates its camera and screen into a sleek, portable, Wi-Fi-enabled

Deaf School Dynamos

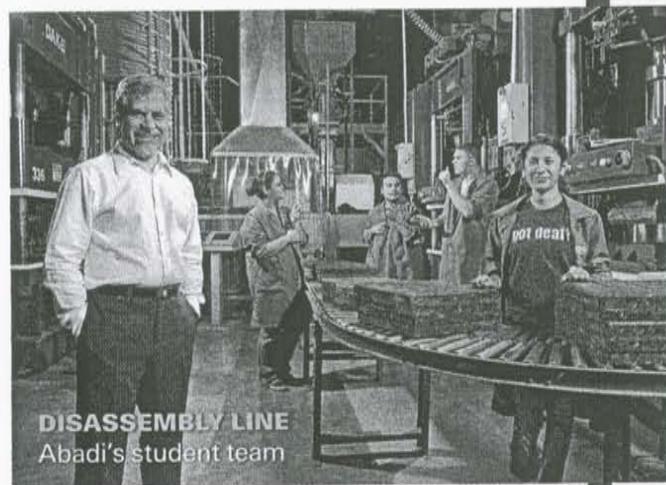
ALEX ABADI IS not just doing a good deed by hiring students from the Texas School for the Deaf. The 49-year-old owner of Image Microsystems, an Austin-based business that repairs and recycles computer parts, also credits deaf employees with the rapid growth of his recycling division—which has nearly doubled his sales.

Abadi first brought the students into his business in 2004—cautiously. A handful of employees who had hearing-impaired children mentored the newcomers. But the students soon proved they didn’t need hand-holding. Now Abadi

simply keeps a sign-language interpreter on staff. His deaf employees extract usable plastic from used hard drives, printers, and monitors. This year a quarter of Image’s staff are deaf, and Abadi’s revenues are on track to hit \$40 million—up

\$14 million over 2007. “Disabled workers are better than regular employees,” says Abadi. “They are more committed and like their jobs better. Other companies just need to give them a chance.”

—BRANDI STEWART



DISASSEMBLY LINE
Abadi’s student team

unit with very few buttons. “We found that we don’t need a feature-rich device,” says Berke.

Inside Viable’s immaculate (and very quiet) headquarters, mirrors at every hallway corner prevent accidental collisions. But not everything has gone smoothly. Early VPADs were buggy, testers reported, and did not play well with the web. Viable engineers claim to have ironed out most of those wrinkles. The company has racked up \$7.5 million in revenue so far this year. It now boasts 95 employees.

So is Viable ... viable? “I want them to succeed,” says T. Alan Hurwitz, president of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, N.Y. But, given the competition, “it will be a challenge.” Still, Viable’s staff face challenges every day. And as far as the Yehs are concerned, their rivals are impaired by hearing.

—JONATHAN BLUM

More
Access

Check out our gallery
of disabled inventions
at [cnnmoney.com/
smallbusiness](http://cnnmoney.com/smallbusiness).

To give feedback, please write to
fsb_mail@timeinc.com.