Ability Newsletter

Videoconnection -

Assistive Technology service option for rural and regional clients

People with disabilities in rural and regional areas have long missed out on specialised assistive technology services. In-person visits are rare and usually involve "fly in-fly out" activities.

In 2013 Ability Technology has conducted nearly 20 workshops in country NSW and Victoria. The workshops have mostly been on the topical issue of Tablet Computers. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. People appreciate well-publicised, practical visits and face-to-face interaction. We plan to do more of these in 2014, with dates planned well in advance. We are committed to expanding our country visits in NSW, ACT and Victoria.

But we are also engaged in a project, funded by Perpetual, to examine and evaluate video-conferencing (which we now call "videoconnection") as an avenue for providing advice and support for people with disabilities in rural and regional areas. Is this a contradiction with our face-to-face work? We don't believe so. In fact, by doing both we can enrich the research potential of our project. We can compare people's perceptions of face-to-face services in comparison to videoconnection services. We also see a combination of these services helping to deepen our ability to advise and support people in country areas. It is an exciting time ahead and we look forward to a stronger engagement with people in regional and rural communities.

If you are interested in connecting with us in 2014, then please contact us. We will post a list of planned trips on our web site early in 2014.

ARATA 2014 - CANBERRA "ACTIVELY CHOOSING TECHNOLOGY"

The next National Conference of the Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association (ARATA) will be held at the National Convention Centre, Canberra, from 20-22 August, 2014. More details are available at www.arata.org.au

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Ability Technology

Friedreich Ataxia Project

An online resource has been generated from a pilot research project into the communication and environmental control needs of eight people with advanced FA. The research found that assistive technology can help a person with FA to use a telephone, operate a computer and control appliances in their home environment such as TV, lights, doors and temperature control. The most significant finding was that each participant required a unique assistive technology solution. Overall there was also a general lack of awareness of the range of technology available, the specialist services available to provide advice and support regarding technology, and limited opportunity to trial solutions. This online resource is designed to start to address these needs. See http://www.ability.org.au/research.

More iPads and More...

We have continued our very successful iPads and More workshops in country areas. Since the last Newsletter we have held workshops in Albury (Aug 27), Tamworth (Sept 13), Newcastle (Nov 20-21), Benalla (Nov 27) and Sydney (Dec 4). We have invitations and plans for more workshops in Coffs Harbour, Kiama, Armidale and several venues in Victoria.

The workshops help those who attend to explore where tablets fit in to client needs, in comparison with specialised devices. They also present an analysis of the differences between iPads, Android and Windows tablets. Tablets have strengths but also weaknesses, and those who attend appreciate this objective and informative approach.

Memory Aids Project

Our recent research on memory aids (funded by Perpetual Trustees) is available on the Ability web site (http://www.ability.org.au/research). There is a full and detailed report, plus a quick reference guide. The project focused on memory and organisation software available for smartphone and tablet devices including Apple (iOS) , Android and Windows platforms.

Ability Research Centre

We have completed detailed comparative studies for a range of technologies, including the following, with funding from the Trust Company:

Wheelchair ECUs

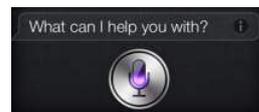**Wheelchair Controllers for Tablets and SmartPhones**

Bluetooth Headset Access for Mobile Phones

Switch Access for Mobile Phones

Mouse Control for Mobile Phones

Voice Control for Mobile Phones
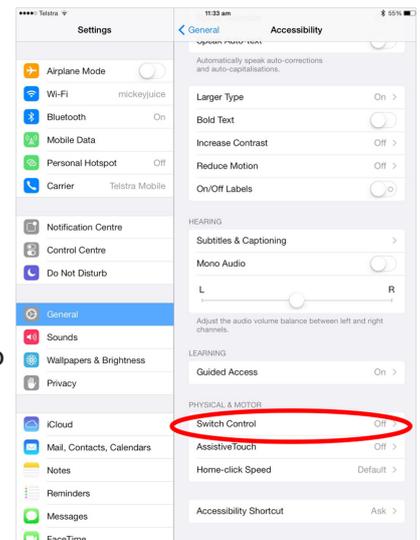

Speech Recognition for Computer

Speech Recognition for Tablets and SmartPhones

These are all available at www.ability.org.au/research. More results are coming!
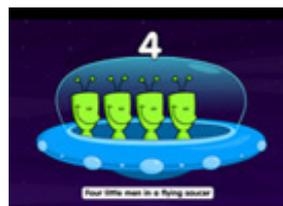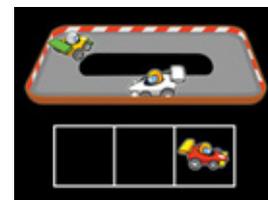
iOS 7 - New accessibility features

The rumours were right - iOS 7 included significant accessibility advances, especially for switch users. Previously the only pathway for switch users was VoiceOver. This was cumbersome to use (although great for people with vision impairment) and made the process complex for switch users. In iOS 7 switch access is built into the operating system directly. Three different types of switch access are supported: external switches, using the whole screen as a switch and using head movement detected by the device's camera. Many options are available in the settings for switch access, including two-switch scanning, audio scanning, switch stabilisation settings and auto scanning.

iOS 7 also features new gestures and rotor settings for VoiceOver, some new accessibility options for Siri, subtitles and captions. The result is a rich array of accessibility options built right into the operating system on iOS devices. All we need now is for software developers to use the tools that Apple have made available. If you find these facilities don't work in an app that you are using, then write to the company and complain. You can also give a review in iTunes - that

Inclusive Technology

One company that keeps producing wonderful apps for kids is Inclusive Technology. The apps are motivating and colourful, with thoughtful designs. They are for iOS and Android devices. A version of Clicker 3 is soon coming for iOS and Android devices. Visit their web site at www.inclusive.co.uk

7-in-1 app for Seniors

The EasyFamily Appsuite provides simplified access to email, web browsing, Facebook and Skype, It offers picture dialling for phone calls (if you have a Skype account). Emails can have pictures, voice and videos attached. It "creates an intuitive online environment for beginners".

It also has photos, reminders and one-click weather information. It is for the iPad and costs $10.49 from the App Store.

HouseMate Mobile Plus

ClicktoPhone brought reliable switch access to Android phones. HouseMate extends that now to control home facilities and appliances. It features 16 programmable grids, and 250 codes. As well it has:

* Auditory scanning with text-to-speech.

* Data back up to SD card and over the internet.

* Create and edit custom pages with buttons to suit TVs and other appliances.

* Re-label buttons and create text-to-speech labels.

* Choose from built in icon library or import images to buttons.

* Learn infrared codes from almost any IR remote.

* Create powerful macros.

* Set and use Reminders.

* Take photos and browse the picture gallery.

* Play music via music player app.

* Programmable scanning options.

* Emergergency alerts.

In addition to all of this, the HouseMate Mobile Plus adds Android mouse control. It incorporates two ingenious methods of controlling almost any application on the Android mobile phone:

First, it incorporates a cross-hair style mouse pointer that moves first vertically then horizontally across the phone screen. This allows the user to click on any icon, button or text input screen in any app. The cross-hair mouse pointer is shown on Google Maps in the image, right.

The new HouseMate Plus also has a screen swipe function. A single switch user can simulate the act of putting a finger on the screen and swiping up, down, left or right. Works with document viewers, photo viewers, maps and many other apps including email, web and Facebook.

The HouseMate Mobile costs $1,690 while the HouseMate Plus costs $1,990. In both cases you need your own phone or tablet. The cost of a switch and mountings for the switch and phone or tablet would also need to be added.

HouseMate Mobile Plus

ECUs currently being tested:

Logitech Harmony Smart Control

This is a device for controlling up to 8 appliances from a iOS or Android device. It comes with a Harmony Hub and IR Blaster. Codes for devices can be downloaded from the internet. We are testing performance and accessibility.

VoicePod and Control 4

The VoicePod (available as an iPhone app or desktop device) gives voice control to the Control 4 home automation system. An Android app is also coming. We want to test how hands free it is, as well as its performance and reliability.

Vera Z-Wave System

We are evaluating this wireless appliance control system. Initial testing is promising. We are looking at accessibility of the available apps for iOS and Android, including the HouseMate, as well as the performance of the Z-Wave components themselves.

NDIS Services

Ability Technology is registered to provide services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme. How can technology help with your goals and aspirations?

Modern technology has great potential to help people with disabilities to be more productive, connected and independent. It can help people with disabilities to perform many tasks, including being able to:

* Use a computer * Use an iPad or tablet * Use a telephone * Operate a TV * Control the home environment including doors, lights and call systems

Technology can help people with disabilities to:

* Have more control and choice   * Be more connected with others

* Be safer and more independent at home   * Manage schedules, tasks and finances

* Do schoolwork   * Engage in employment

Call (02-99079736) or email us (info@ability.org.au) to discuss your options.

■ Technology and the NDIS: A Workshop

How can technology help with my goals and aspirations?

University of Newcastle, Thursday 6 February, 2014   *This workshop will give an overview of technologies that can assist people with disabilities. It is ideal for people with disabilities, their families, disability workers and therapists who would like ideas and inspiration about what may be available for them. This workshop will cover:*

- *The types of activities and tasks technology can assist with.*
- *Types of technology that may help people with disabilities.*
- *Services that can assist with choosing, setting up and using technology.*
- *Information and resources.*

Contact Ability Technology for details!

Touchscreens

Under the inspiration of tablet computers, we have now seen a proliferation of touch screen computers. Windows 8 is designed to support touch screen access, so we now see desktop and laptop computers with this feature.

One common configuration is the all-in-one desktop with a touch screen display. There are laptops with touch screens, plus also "convertibles", which combine the features of a laptop with those of a tablet. There is even as Asus that combines Windows and Android. Interestingly, Apple, whose iPad probably did more than any other device to make touch screen technology popular, does not yet have a touch screen computer.

If you really want a very large touch screen, then maybe you should look at... PADZILLA!

Padzilla

ABILITY News

ARATA 2014

We are looking forward to ARATA in Canberra next August. The theme is "Actively Choosing Technology" - very apt given the emphasis on consumer choice in the NDIS and other schemes. We are presenting papers and also exhibiting at the conference. We have a strong connection with Canberra through our regular visits and work with Hartley Lifecare.

FAREWELL ROWENA!

Sadly we bid farewell to Rowena Clarke, one of our occupational therapists. Rowena and her family are moving to the south coast in the new year and Row will finish up with Ability at Christmas. We wish Row and her family our best wishes for the future and a hearty "thank you" for her hard work over the past 4 years!

ABILITY HOUSE

We have been overwhelmed by the positive response to our virtual house, Ability House. This represents a whole new way of introducing people to assistive technology. See it at: www.abilityhouse.org.au

ABILITY Services - Medicolegal Reports

One of the services Ability Technology provides is in the area of medico-legal assessments and reports. We have provided this service throughout Australia for over 20 years. The reports cover the reasonable technology needs of a person in personal injury and medical negligence cases.

Such reports are usually requested by the injured person's solicitor or barrister. We look at the person's lifetime needs for computer equipment, tablets, communication, telephones and home control technology. The reports include the services required as well, such as generic and specialised setup, training (for the person and those supporting them) and technical support. Periodic reviews of the person's technology needs are also costed.

We have provided services in all States and territories except Tasmania and NT. We travel anywhere to see clients and assess their needs. We have provided reports for people of all ages.

Not all solicitors are aware of the availability of specialised reports such as those provided by our service, so if you or someone you know has a claim for damages, it might be worth calling Dr Graeme Smith on 02-99079736 to discuss the service.

Season's Greetings!

We take this opportunity to wish all of our readers our best wishes for the holiday season. We hope you have a peaceful and enjoyable time with those you love - and everyone else too! We look forward to connecting with you again in 2014!

From Graeme, Gemma, Bronwyn, Rowena, Deidre, Guy, Alan and Sandra