

# Monday Bulletin on Services to Youth

To Coordinate... To Enhance... To Serve... Through Communication...

## A Look at AT

- AT News & Reviews ... 2
- Shared Tech ... 2
- Augmentative Comm. ... 2
- Free Writing Solutions ...3
- Misc. Free Solutions ... 3
- AT Lending Library ... 2
- Autism Website ...4
- DisabilityInfo.gov ... 5
- About Ira Socol ... 5
- AT Loan Fund ... 6
- Visual Strategies Online Discussion ... 6
- Save the Dates ... 6

## Please Forward or Print Monday Bulletin

E-mail your contributions, ideas and subscription requests for "Monday Bulletin on Services to Youth" to Cynthia Wright: [wrightc1@michigan.gov](mailto:wrightc1@michigan.gov) or call 517/241-3957.

Views expressed in Monday Bulletin articles are not necessarily the views of the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth nor Michigan Rehabilitation Services.

## Planning for Access

By Ira Socol

**It is finally May, which means it is time to start considering how to ensure that your school, college, or university is a place with true access next year.**

The goal is equal access to information and communication, with equal meaning "at the same time," and "in the same place," and "in a form that is as usable," as the information and communication provided to any other student.

When Enda Guinan posted on a blog (<http://epg29.wordpress.com/2008/04/28/where-its-at/>) about Assistive Technology planning at National University of Ireland, Maynooth, I thought, we all need to be asking these questions and making these plans.

Enda begins with the most important thought: "Next semester we will have TextHelp and Inspiration on every PC across the campus. As these are our most popular applications, I reckon that by mainstreaming their availability, the needs of a lot of students will be taken care of. Students with mild dyslexia for example won't need to use the current Assistive Technology Center."

Exactly.

Years ago, at Grand Valley State University, I was asked if we wanted to develop specialized labs for our new AT applications. "No thanks," I told my boss, "I'm done with resource rooms. I want this stuff everywhere people access computers." Education for those with "special needs" will never get better until "regular education" gets better. Regular education should be able to include, and foster success and independence for perhaps 98% of students. Better supports are needed in every school.

So Enda's step one should be everyone's step one. **Every computer in your school, on your campus, should have the basic tools.** Whether you install Text-Help's Read-and-Write or Freedom Scientific's WYNN is your preference. I think highly of both literacy support packages. Your choice will largely depend on what else you are installing (Read-and-Write does more things, WYNN does fewer things with some stronger supports). But your school needs one of these highly-supportive literacy



Holland AT Resource Lab -

Continued on page 4

# Assistive Technology News & Reviews

By Ira Socol

Each year, California State-Northridge (CSUN) hosts the world's largest conference on technology and persons with disabilities. At the conference, participants meet rehab people, software and hardware developers, researchers, faculty, teachers, and users of assistive technology (AT). It is the one chance in the United States for everyone involved in the field to get together and discuss where we are and where to go next.

For more on the CSUN AT conference, see my blogg at <http://speedchange.blogspot.com>

## Solutions built from Shared Technologies

The **Access Tomorrow USB drive** from Ideal Group (with Ohio State University) is a great simple solution. It's a simple USB drive loaded with free AT software that could support any learner, linked by a common interface which makes it really easy to use. **Reading support, screen magnification, writing supports**, and none of the problems created by "cheap" technologies like Premier's "Key for Access." Certainly Text-Help's Read-and-Write-Gold Mobile does more in more sophisticated ways for about \$600, but Ideal is leading the way in Open Source design.

The **ERICA eye-gaze system** is still (at \$7,000 US for the system) half the price of its nearest competitors, yet better than ever, running even more cleanly on newer tablet-PC technology and inter-connecting with almost every communication and information need, including the simplest Skype phone interface you'll find. You could easily spend far more and get far less.



ERICA System -

**Say-Magic** from Next Generation Technologies (expected to release in June) combines Dragon Naturally Speaking (from Nuance) and Freedom Scientific's MAGic screen magnifier/text reader into a wonderful, and very personalisable, feedback centered **computer control system with speech recognition and low-vision support**.

**Student Writers Editing with Text-to-Speech** is another "assembly." The goal is to **join text-to-speech reading to the writing process**, especially for writers who struggle to read, but really, for everyone who lacks a sophisticated reader to assist in editing at the moment of need. The idea is that when you hear what you've written you will not only be more aware of grammar mistakes, missing words, punctuation, etc., but also

more aware of the way rhythm works in writing, description, pacing, and dialogue. This isn't just for ten year olds with dyslexia - but might be the essential support for struggling community college and university writers. This can be done with a comprehensive support like WYNN (which then adds great supports such as Word Prediction and much more), or through free solutions - such as Google Docs combined with Firefox and CLiCk-Speak.

**ABISee** offers a brilliant USB-linked **portable video magnifier - book reader - book scanner - image to text-to-speech converter system**, which can even grab images from, say, a whiteboard. Light and easy to carry, functioning primarily via a smart combination of softwares installed on your laptop computer, it offers a wide range of low-vision supports in the classroom or at work.

## Augmentative Communication

Communication has moved far beyond big picture boards, enabling real social interaction. The following devices - and many others - are true life changers. Three best solutions for Augmentative Communication are...

The **Cyrano Communicator** was wonderful running on H-P's iPAQ, but it's even better now that it is based on the Pidion BM 150-R smart phone with GPS. The Cyrano is a lifespan technology idea, with an interface that allows extremely simple uses but can support the highest-level communication requirements, all wrapped up in a tiny, simple package (about \$1,600 complete).

The amazing Tango now brings **Tango for Teens**. Tango was the breakthrough in kids' alternative communication, offering

Continued on page 3

## AT Lending Library

Michigan's Integrated Technology Supports (MITS) maintains a lending library with a wide variety of assistive technology equipment and software available to school districts throughout the state of Michigan. Parents are welcome to become a member of the software lending library. Equipment and software may be checked out for 8 week trial periods. For a complete listing of items available for loan, please visit the MITS website at [www.cenmi.org/mits](http://www.cenmi.org/mits) or phone the library directly at (989) 774-2522.

# Assistive Technology News & Reviews

continued from page 2

everything from ease of use, to real-life supports, to emotion. Now the teen version adds higher literacy supports, tools for school, and new teen characters and voices. Try the Tango emulator (about \$7,000 complete).

**Dynavox's iChat 2G** is another great option for symbol reliant users. It is more than just a communicator, able to run other Windows CE applications. The device is small and not cumbersome to carry with good voices.

## Free Text-to-Speech & Writing Solutions

Before you buy expensive recommendations, consider that free might be better. But even if free isn't better, it is often the best evaluation/justification tool we have. Does text-to-speech work for our customers? If the free stuff doesn't work at all, the expensive stuff won't either.

**Adobe Acrobat Reader with Speech (v. 8.x):** If this is not installed, get it installed. It allows most Acrobat docs to be read out loud with variable speed and pitch. <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

**Microsoft Reader with Text-To-Speech engine and Read in Microsoft Reader (RMR) add-ons:** This is a slightly complicated install – must be done through Internet Explorer – requires three or four (with the dictionary) steps. But it reads to your students, allows them to highlight and take notes, and even has dictionaries – and can handle English, Spanish, French, and more. See Ira's blog for download details at: <http://speedchange.blogspot.com/2008/03/csun-2008free-universal-design.html>

**NaturalReader Free Version:** A simple, highly-effective screen-reader (it reads selected text in most programs). Best used via the "Miniboard" option which puts a tiny control panel on your desktop. <http://www.naturalreaders.com/download.htm>

**Firefox Browser v2 with CLiCk, Speak Text-To-Speech (Dyslexia):** Firefox is the far more accessible web browser, and when linked to the CLiCk-Speak text-to-speech add-on, it reads to you via a simple three-button set-up in your toolbar. You can also install one-click dictionaries, and right-click translations. See download details at: <http://speedchange.blogspot.com/2008/03/csun-2008free-universal-design.html>

**Firefox Browser v2 with FireVox Text-To-Speech (Blind/Low-Vision):** Firefox is the far more accessible web browser, and when linked to the FireVox TTS engine, it reads to you.

You can also install dictionaries, and right-click translations. Download details at: <http://speedchange.blogspot.com/2008/03/csun-2008free-universal-design.html>

**Ghotit – context spellchecker service:** A website with a context-based spellcheck system that (a) does not require you to "be close" to suggest the correct spelling, and (b) gives you definitions of the alternative words suggested. A brilliant step forward for those who often get little or no help from the spellcheck in Microsoft products. <http://www.ghotit.com/home>

**SpokenText - free online text to mp3 converter:** Make it a sound file! And now that information is completely portable - via computer, iPod, phone, CD. <http://www.spokentext.net/>

**WordTalk – converts Microsoft Word into a talking word processor:** An add-in from the UK that allows Word to speak, free of charge! <http://www.wordtalk.org.uk/>

**Click-N-Type – the on-screen, programmable keyboard:** That even shows upper and lower case letters to struggling writers and runs in dozens of languages. <http://www.lakefolks.org/cnt/>

**Jott:** Free speech recognition from your mobile phone. Dictate into your phone and send an email or text message to yourself or anyone else. <http://jott.com/default.aspx>

**SpokenText:** A free converter of documents to audio files. Perhaps all of the "entry" documents for Michigan Rehabilitation Services customers should be available converted to audio content for applicants with low-vision and LD? <http://www.spokentext.net/>

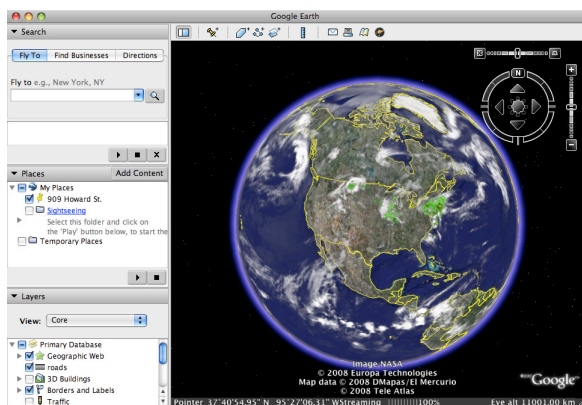
## Miscellaneous Free Solutions

**Google Notebook:** The simplest of research tools, allows students to grab online data, organize it, and share it – from Google Labs. <http://labs.google.com/>

**Google Docs and Spreadsheets:** Sharable (within the room or worldwide), free, word-processing and spreadsheets. This changes everything. <http://www.google.com/google-d-s/tour1.html> (a tour with get started links)

**Google Calendar:** Share calendars with your students and keep them on task. This sophisticated system can even send reminder text-messages to the student's mobile phone. [www.google.com/calendar](http://www.google.com/calendar)

Continued on page 4



solutions everywhere (network “concurrent use” licenses are available for both).

Dyslexia and other print disabilities represent up to 80% of the “disabled” students in any school population, and weak readers, who could benefit from these tools as well, may include as many as two-thirds of your students. In addition, word-highlighting text-to-speech systems seem to have significant positives for students with attention issues. Inspiration is another “everywhere” solution. Writing support is essential if the students currently not succeeding are to succeed, and Inspiration is a proven, inexpensive solution.

**Google Earth:** If you are not using this tool you are missing a key tool for almost every subject, from Geography to Math to Creative Writing. [earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com)

**Graph-Calc – the on-screen graphing calculator:** Even allows you to paste equations into notes in a word processing program. <http://www.graphcalc.com/download.shtml>

**Google Maps:** In whatever language you please... a simpler, no need to install anything, global place finder. <http://maps.google.com/> (US)

**Wayfaring – map-making software:** Let students build simple geography and history projects with this wonderful “map mash up” software. <http://www.wayfaring.com/>

**SENSwitcher – the simplest switch program:** With great support for high-needs students. <http://www.northerngrid.org/sen/Menu-L.htm>

**PowerTalk:** A free text-to-speech reader for PowerPoint. Not just for reading disabilities, this was first designed to allow the blind to present with confidence (they can be sure which slide is being shown). <http://fullmeasure.co.uk/powertalk/>

**Find more AT, articles, and insights on Ira's blog:** <http://speedchange.blogspot.com/2008/03/free-speech-recognition.html>

**Announcing...**  
**Autism Society of Michigan's  
New Website!**  
<http://www.autism-mi.org> -

But those “cost-to-purchase” products should only be part of what is installed everywhere. **Your computers must have all “that free stuff” that both builds access and teaches students (and faculty) that supportive technology is everywhere.**

Dyslexia and other print disabilities represent up to 80% of the “disabled” students in any school population, and weak readers, who could benefit from these tools as well, may include as many as two-thirds of your students.

Start with Firefox, properly equipped, on every computer. Properly equipped means that **FireVox** (the blind browser support) and **CLiCk-Speak** (the dyslexic browser support) are installed, as are right-click dictionaries (US) and spellcheckers (UK) and **g-Translate**. (You can add the dictionary switcher as well.)

Then make sure the other free text-to-speech solutions are available on every computer, as well as other free solutions listed in this Monday Bulletin.

And one more thing : Keep those boxes of alternative keyboards and mice, and ready-to-grab headsets handy.

OK, that's the “everywhere” stuff, but as Enda points out, you need two other support centers. You need a place where students can experiment, learn, and screw up, that's private enough to keep the costs of failure low, and thus encourage risk-taking. And that learning lab can double as a low-incidence disability support center, with less “typical” software and hardware, like JAWS and Braille printers, Zoom-Text or MAGic, and AAC tools and switch devices.

And you need a place, and a program, of faculty training and support. Just as students need a place to safely play, experiment,

# Planning for Access

continued from page 4

and learn, so do teachers and professors. This space needs to double as a materials accessibility lab, where everything from PDF accessibility to website accessibility to captioning is as simple and easy as possible. If it is not, your delivery system will be ineffective because the teaching materials are likely to remain inaccessible.

If your school is not set up as above, you have a long summer of work ahead of you. Not having accessible information and communication technologies is the same as not having accessible entries or accessible toilet facilities. Or maybe it is worse, since the very purpose of the school is the transmission of information, and if some students are denied the fair access to that, there's no reason for those students to come to the school at all.

---

## About Ira Socol

Ira Socol works with Michigan Rehabilitation Services as “blended staff” in the Holland Office where he maintains the Holland Assistive Technology Resource Lab, investigating new Assistive Technology solutions while evaluating customer technology support needs and providing recommendations and training. He has studied and developed assistive technology and universal design technology solutions for a dozen years, since he created (and implemented) the campus information technology access plan at Grand Valley State University in the 1990s – making GVSU the first university in Michigan with accessible computers in every campus computing location. He also completed the Assistive Technology Applications Certification Program through California State University – Northridge and is now a doctoral candidate in Special Education Technology at Michigan State University. Within the past three years he has presented over 18 times at conferences in the U.S. and in Europe on the application of these assistive technologies in classrooms and employment and has supported both academic and museum-based research studies of technology and disability.



In addition, Mr. Socol is a user of text-to-speech, speech recognition, and digital organization applications in his own life, including in his employment and academic studies. He is the author of a novel, *The Drool Room*, available through amazon.com (or as an accessible acrobat book downloadable through lulu.com). He writes an internationally recognized blog on technology and access issues at <http://speedchange.blogspot.com/> He is best reached via email: [socoli@michigan.gov](mailto:socoli@michigan.gov)

# DisabilityInfo.gov

## One-stop Web Site for Disability Information

Disabilityinfo.gov is a comprehensive web site designed to offer people with disabilities access to important information they can use. Disabilityinfo.gov is a one-stop web site — not only for people with disabilities, but also for older Americans, employers, Social Security beneficiaries, community- and faith-based service providers and others. Disabilityinfo.gov features information on a number of related topics. The site is easy to navigate, and is organized into subject areas, including benefits, civil rights, community life, education, employment, health, housing, technology and transportation.

Disabilityinfo.gov also is a useful information and referral tool for responding to the questions and concerns of Social Security's nearly 50 million beneficiaries. Individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), disability or retirement benefits, as well as advocates who work with beneficiaries, will find answers to questions about work incentives, the appeals process, Medicare and Medicaid, youth transitioning from school to work, accessible transportation and much more.

The Disabilityinfo.gov web site shares general information about how Social Security can help people with disabilities, and much more. The web site offers a free subscription service where you can sign up to receive Disability Connection, a quarterly newsletter, as well as other e-mail alerts covering information tailored to your individual interests. Just fill in your e-mail address under the gold “subscribe” banner on the right side of the page.

To learn more about information available for people with disabilities, visit [www.disabilityinfo.gov](http://www.disabilityinfo.gov). To learn more about Social Security, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

---

## New Videos

### Youth Sharing Their Success Strategies

The New England ADA Center and No Limits Media have released informative videos featuring students with disabilities sharing their strategies for successfully staying in school, graduating and getting jobs. Students reveal their struggles with self-reporting their disability, and negotiating accommodations in school and at work. These videos can be used as part of trainings (each video is 7-9 minutes) and shared with students and other professionals. The videos are open captioned and can be viewed at [http://adaptiveenvironments.org/neada/site/student\\_videos](http://adaptiveenvironments.org/neada/site/student_videos)

From: Reference Points

# Bookshare.org

## Making print accessible

Bookshare.org dramatically increases access to books for the community of individuals with visual impairments and other disabilities that impact access to print. This online community enables book scans to be shared, thereby leveraging the collections of thousands of individuals who regularly scan books, eliminating significant duplication of effort. Bookshare.org takes advantage of a special exemption in the U.S. copyright law that permits the reproduction of publications into specialized formats for the disabled.

### Who can benefit from Bookshare.org?

- People who are blind or have severe visual impairments that prevent them from reading ordinary newspaper print, even when wearing glasses or contact lenses.
- People with learning disabilities such as dyslexia which interfere with the ability to read print material.
- People with mobility limitations that interfere with holding or turning the pages of a book.

Bookshare.org also serves organizations such as the state, local and federal educational system, the rehabilitation system, libraries, specialized nonprofit agencies and various governmental units that provide accessible materials to people with disabilities. Schools or groups can sponsor independent access through subscriptions, or through institutional access, download books themselves to deliver directly to qualified individuals signed up under their account.

For more info go to: [bookshare.org](http://bookshare.org)

## AT Loan Fund

Michigan Assistive Technology Loan Fund allows Michigan residents with disabilities to purchase equipment to enhance quality of life and independence. A wide range of services may be purchased including, but not limited to, telecommunication devices, hearing aids, power scooters, adapted vans, and home modifications. Up to \$30,000 may be borrowed from this fund and there is no minimum amount required for a loan.

To apply, contact the local Disability Network Center for Independent Living or use the information below:

**1 (800) 828-2714**

**[www.michiganloanfunds.org](http://www.michiganloanfunds.org)**

## Save the Dates Events & Training

### June

Michigan Integrated Technology Supports (MITS)

Summer Institute

June 17-20, 2008

Hagerty Center, Traverse City, MI

See: <http://www.cenmi.org/mits/NewsView.asp?id=821>

### August

Association for Children's Mental Health (ACMH)

Parent Leadership Camp

August 7-8, 2008

Lansing

<http://www.acmh-mi.org/plc3-08.pdf>

### October

Association for Children's Mental Health (ACMH)

Annual Conference- **The Family Express: Turn Your**

**Passion Into Action**

Scholarships available

October 13-14, 2008

Holiday Inn West, Lansing

<http://www.acmh-mi.org>

Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan

Conference

October 26-28, 2008

East Lansing, MI

<http://www.ldaofmichigan.org/calendar.htm>

### November

Michigan Rehabilitation Conference

November 5-7, 2008

Grand Traverse Resort

Acme, MI

<http://michiganrehabilitationconference.org/>

<http://www.maro.org/>