

## **WELCOME TO THE ABILITYNET NEWSLETTER: Edition 3, March 2006**

This occasional newsletter is designed to keep you up to date with news and information relating to healthy computer use/computing with a disability and how we can help you. If you know someone this information may help, please Forward this newsletter to them.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

AbilityNet helped over 390,000 people with disabilities in 2005, through our advice, factsheets, assessments, training and assistive technology.

One of our clients Norman, kindly provided us with this account of how AbilityNet have helped him.

"I've had Parkinson's Disease for about 8 years and my handwriting has deteriorated to the point where I can seldom read the notes I make and find it a little difficult to use a standard keyboard or mouse. My AbilityNet assessment began by talking about what my job entails and then by observing me working at my standard PC.

It was suggested that I should consider using a small lightweight laptop so that I could type notes during meetings, and try using a Trackball and smaller keyboard instead of the standard equipment.

I was also very keen to try voice recognition software as I had heard a lot about it, both good and bad. Although my voice is not particularly strong because of my condition, I was amazed to find that on my first attempt at least 90% of my words appeared correctly on the screen. The software was everything that I'd hoped it would be and more. Initially, it will help to improve my productivity and in the longer term it will be the difference between being able to do my job or not.

My assessment has made a big difference to my working life and it is reassuring to know that there will be support for me in a year or two when my condition progresses as it inevitably will."

If you know someone who could benefit from AbilityNet's help call us on 0800 269545 or email us on [enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk)

### **FREE AbilityNet Courses through the ICT Hub**

AbilityNet are part of the ICT Hub, a group of voluntary sector organisations who have come together to plan and deliver a co-ordinated framework of ICT guidance, good practice, advice and support for voluntary and community organisations, accessible at a local level.

To find out more about the ICT Hub visit [www.ictconsortium.org.uk](http://www.ictconsortium.org.uk). To find out more about AbilityNet's work as part of the ICT Hub please contact [sue.pullan@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:sue.pullan@abilitynet.org.uk).

As part of the ICT Hub AbilityNet are offering the our 'Successful Computing on a Low Budget' course free to voluntary and community sector organisations, and to circuit riders.

Computers can make a world of difference to the learning, employment and leisure opportunities of people with disabilities. They can serve as an alternative recording

tool for those who cannot manage pen and paper, they can be an inspiring and enabling tool for those with reading or writing difficulties and they can improve access to written communication for the visually impaired. However, very often computers need to be adapted before individuals can take advantage of their full enabling potential. There is a general misconception that all enabling solutions are very expensive and in this time of tight budgets this is often the thing which deters individuals and organisation from pursuing the computer option. Fortunately, there is a great deal of adaptation which can be done either freely or very cheaply and it is our aim within this course to make people aware of the difference they can make without spending a great deal of money.

To book a place on AbilityNet's free courses as part of the ICT Hub visit  
[http://www.ictconsortium.org.uk/abilitynet\\_successful.htm](http://www.ictconsortium.org.uk/abilitynet_successful.htm)

### **More FREE Parents' Information Days**

Does your child or a child you know have difficulty using a computer because of learning difficulties or a disability? Stuck for ideas? Need advice?

Following the success of our Parents' Information Days last year we have secured more funding to hold further days in 2006 across the country.

Our Parents' Information Days are held during the school holidays for parents of children with a disability or learning difficulty. Come along to a Parents' Information Day and have the opportunity to try out some adaptive computer solutions with your child that will enable them to access the computer at home for leisure and homework activities. One of our AbilityNet Consultants will be on hand to offer advice and answer specific questions, as well as suggest fun things to do on the computer at home.

To find when we are holding a Parents' Information Day near you look on our website at <http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/content/oneoffs/parent-day.htm>

### **What next for Communication Aids?**

The Communication Aids Project (CAP) was set up by the Department for Education and Skills in 2002 to provide specialist assessment, equipment and training to help children overcome communication difficulties and take part in mainstream schooling. In addition to working with children directly, the project has provided an opportunity to support the development of teams who can provide local specialist advice and support on communication aids and assistive technology for children with disabilities within schools.

Unfortunately, the Communication Aids Project has now ended and with it will go all of the funded support which local authorities have been able to tap into free of charge.

It is a serious concern of ours that much of the good work of CAP will be undone very quickly unless authorities prioritise the maintenance and development of this local expertise.

In recognition of what has been achieved under CAP and also what could be lost when the project finishes, AbilityNet and the two ACE centres are working together to offer a range of services to local authorities to ensure that they can still be supported in developing local provision or delivering communication aid/assistive technology services.

If you are interested in finding out more on how we can help please get in touch by calling our Education Office on 01480 839091 or via email on [education@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:education@abilitynet.org.uk)

### **CEO Project to help disabled people set up their own business**

AbilityNet are supporting a new project to help disabled people in setting up their own business through accredited education and mentoring. The Consortium for Enterprise Outreach (CEO) is a European funded (Leonardo da Vinci) pilot project that aims to increase the availability of accessible and accredited education to teach enterprise and provide business mentoring for those who are disabled or chronically ill, and their carers, wishing to set up in business.

A cohort of 20 disabled individuals and/or carers from each partner country (UK, Latvia and Italy) will access the enterprise education programme from February 2006, through electronic delivery and support from business mentors. Assuming no prior business knowledge, the pilot project makes the process of becoming self-employed a learning opportunity with a University qualification. If you have a business idea you would like to progress and would be interested in taking part in the CEO programme, then please contact Dr Tracey Carter ([tracey@businessboffins.com](mailto:tracey@businessboffins.com)) on 01844 278448. There are limited places left.

### **Assistive Technology Kits for your Students and Learners**

Accessibility is about far more than physical access to buildings. Appropriate ICT solutions can make an incredible difference to learners with disabilities. Access to the right technology in a variety of learning environments can lead to greater independence, self-confidence, participation, ambition and achievement for disabled learners. Every college, university, learning centre or public access centre has a moral responsibility to strive for these goals.

Institutions also have to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and their duties of 'reasonable adjustment' with regard to access to IT facilities.

AbilityNet's assistive technology kits can help. With over 20 years experience of helping 1000s of disabled people we have developed kits of adaptive technology based on our direct experience of what works with groups of clients. Our range of kit solutions can help overcome access issues faced by those with physical, visual or reading and writing difficulties, or indeed anyone who finds it difficult to use a standard screen, keyboard or mouse.

Our kits range from entry level kits at £195 which include the most essential items to meet primary needs, through to the assessment kit at £4,995 which includes a ready configured laptop and a day of supported assessments with one of our consultants. We are also able to supply network versions of the software included in the kits with the prices adjusted accordingly. These kits will go a long way to meeting the access needs of the majority of the learners who are using your IT facilities.

To order the kits online click on

<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/content/abilitynet/products/it-kits.htm> or contact our Supply Centre today on 01905 420520 or by email on [sales@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:sales@abilitynet.org.uk)