

Society for Human Advancement Through Rehabilitation Engineering Foundation, Inc.

Dear Friend,

Can you guess the number one gift that kids (and adults, too) are hoping for Santa to bring this year? It's not a bicycle, a Nintendo Wii or a Twilight Saga DVD. Those are all so "last year." It's not a 3D TV or even a GPS. The answer is below.

Sometimes, we all take gifts for granted.

SHARE's mission is to provide the gift of communication to people with conditions such as cerebral palsy, ALS-Lou Gehrig's disease, multiple sclerosis and many others. It's a gift we have been giving since 1981. Many of the people SHARE helps cannot speak or use their hands. Others are blind or have spinal cord injuries as a result of accidents.

For many, the challenge is to enable them to use a computer for basic communications as well as for access to email and the Internet. These activities are naturally daunting for people whose remaining ability may be only to raise an eyebrow, slightly move their head or shift their eye gaze.

But back to the top...you've probably guessed that number one gift. This year's most hoped-for gift is a tablet computer. There are several different ones. One of the most popular is the Apple iPad.

Our Client Service Coordinator Beverly Thorn recently described how SHARE provided three clients with tablets. These hand held computers are portable, lightweight and have long battery life, features ideal for people who use them to communicate because they are unable to speak. We loaded the tablets with applications (apps) that enable users to type messages onto the tablet screen and then, with the press of a finger or a mouth stick, have those thoughts expressed aloud.

Lou, Kenny and Mick have told Beverly how helpful the tablets have been—and how, they enabled them to enjoy a better quality of life.

Throat cancer robbed Lou of his voice so having an iPad to communicate with others meant the world to him. Before his recent death, Lou shared with Beverly that he was grateful for the opportunity to tell his daughter he loved her and also joked that he was pleased to have the ability to "yell" at his brothers again. SHARE is happy to have made his last days a little brighter.

Kenny, age 23, uses a wheelchair and has Spina Bifida. He recently left a rehabilitation facility for home and now is using an Android tablet to type out his wants and needs and converse with family members. Mick, a gentleman in his 60s who lost his voice as a result of ALS, breathes with the aid of a respirator but he is delighted that he can again "talk" to his loved ones.

Our latest challenge is to get or produce an app for people who cannot use their hands. We have dozens of clients who could make use of a tablet if we could adapt it for control by a single switch such as an eyebrow switch or a sip switch. Your support of our work will help make this dream a reality.

For 30 years, SHARE has been working on solutions to meet the challenges of people with disabilities and is keeping pace with the latest and most effective technology in the process. Our organization provides funding to run the UMass Dartmouth Center for Rehabilitation Engineering and offers equipment and training at no cost to clients. For that reason, we rely solely on the generosity of individuals like you to keep operating.

Like Santa and his elves, the Center's engineering staff, supported by student help, designs, builds and adapts technology to help people with disabilities reach their full potential. For example, Rehabilitation Designer Mark Whittaker has put together a wheel chair mounted, wireless voice amplifier to help one ALS client who is losing her voice's volume as a result of her condition.

Mark and his student helpers are also working on a project to develop a voice-controlled environmental system. Whereas in the past, clients were able to switch TV channels, use the telephone and turn on and off lights via specialized equipment triggered by switches, Kelly, a local woman with multiple sclerosis, will be the first of our clients to control her home with her voice. This method will be less cumbersome than the multiple switches she would otherwise have to control by her limited head movements.

I'm sure Kelly will relish the opportunity to perform everyday tasks with ease and regard her system as a "gift."

You can play a major role in giving the people who turn to SHARE for help the greatest gifts of all—the opportunity to communicate and live more independent lives through the use of assistive technology. Please join us in making the world a little brighter for people with disabilities, not only during this season, but every day we can.

Believe me – I appreciate your help. It is only through your generosity that SHARE was able to provide help for people nearly 1,000 times this year. Thank you for being a part of who we are and what we do. SHARE is YOUR organization. You are the one who makes it all possible.

Even if your gift this year can only be a modest one, please send what you can. Like many other non-profit groups today, our waiting list is growing long and our resources are growing short.

Best wishes for a Happy Holiday Season from all of us at SHARE and the UMass Dartmouth Center for Rehabilitation Engineering.

Sincerely,

Lester W. Cory
President, SHARE Foundation

PS: If you are 72 or older you probably qualify to make a charitable gift from your IRA. This will count toward your required distribution but isn't taxable as income. The law allowing charitable IRA rollovers is set to expire on December 30th. Call to learn more.