SHARE Client Jacqueline Correia and Volunteer Dick Douglas Tell an Interesting Tale

Jacqueline Correia dreamed of devoting her golden years to writing a memoir chronicling her life and family history. But with multiple sclerosis severely limiting her range of movement and muscle control, holding a pen and writing her story by hand had become impossible.

At her family’s request, the UMD Center for Rehabilitation Engineering evaluated Correia and equipped her with a dual computer system and Scan Keys software that she could operate using a head switch. But like many from her generation, Correia had never used a computer in her life. Yet she refused to let her age or physical limitations stop her from tackling the technological challenges before her.

SHARE volunteer Dick Douglas began working with Correia late last summer, and he says the computer training sessions were a learning experience for them both.

“She was really quite new to computers,” recalls Douglas. “She wanted to be able to type a Word document. It was a matter of teaching her how to start and shut down the computer, how to save documents.”

Given the physical demands of operating the head switch, the two also worked together to devise shortcuts that would reduce the number of keystrokes needed to achieve a task. “I had never used the Scan Keys program before, so I was learning at the same time,” says Douglas.

By December, Correia was telling her life story, one keystroke at a time. “She wasn’t flustered by the fact that it was new,” says Douglas. “For someone who’s never used a computer before, she made amazing progress.”
FY 2005: An Outstanding Year of Service

Thanks to the wonderful generosity of our donors, FY 2005 was another banner year for the UMass Dartmouth Center for Rehabilitation Engineering. Last year, the Center responded to 819 requests for service from 253 different individuals, including 124 new clients. To date, we have worked with more than 2,400 different individuals in 38 different states, as well as people in Canada, England, Nigeria, Panama, Sri Lanka, Poland, Colombia, and the Azores.

The majority of our work is still directed toward providing alternative means of communication for nonspeaking people, enabling them to live more independent, productive lives. Toward that end, we worked with 35 people with cerebral palsy, 30 people with ALS, 25 people with multiple sclerosis, 13 people with muscular dystrophy, and 11 people with Machado’s Disease over the past year.

Another focus of our work is to provide increased independence and access to employment for people who are blind. Last year, we provided scanning reading equipment and/or talking computer systems to 28 people who are either blind or severely visually impaired.

The third biggest category of users includes those who are paralyzed as a consequence of a spinal cord injury. In 2005, we provided voice-controlled computer and environmental control equipment to 20 individuals who are unable to use off-the-shelf technologies, such as TV remote controls, light switches, or computers.

We also provided equipment and services to approximately 100 other individuals who came to us with a wide range of abilities and needs. They include people who are disabled as a result of automobile or sporting accidents, people who have had strokes, and people who have lost limbs, as well as those with cancer, spina bifida, deafness, autism, and 21 other disabling conditions.

Our warmest thanks go out to all who, in so many different ways, have made it possible for us to improve the quality of life for those who turn to us for help. Your support has the power to change lives, and we thank you, as always, for your unfailing compassion, commitment, and generosity.

Help Us Stack the Deck!!!

SHARE volunteer William Holen has launched a special project that promises to bring fun and entertainment to SHARE clients who are blind. Using a Braille embosser, Holen adds Braille characters to ordinary decks of playing cards for use by children and adults who are blind or visually impaired. SHARE then distributes the Braille decks free of charge to clients for their recreational enjoyment.

If you know of someone who would enjoy a deck of Braille playing cards, please call SHARE at 508-999-8482.
SHARE Receives Multiple Sclerosis Foundation Grant to Purchase Adaptive Equipment

The SHARE Foundation has been awarded a $7,500 grant from the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation to purchase adaptive switches and voice recognition software for clients with multiple sclerosis.

The funding will allow the UMass Dartmouth Center for Rehabilitation Engineering to replenish its inventory of adaptive switches used by SHARE clients to operate computers and other household electronic devices, such as televisions, radios, lights, fans, heaters, and air conditioners.

Equipment shortages often increase the wait time between a client’s request for adaptive systems and the provision of customized equipment. The grant funding will help ensure that the Rehabilitation Engineering Center has the adaptive switches and voice recognition software needed to build adaptive computer systems to meet users’ unique needs.

“The longer it takes for these unique computer systems to be delivered, the less time people with disabilities have to experience fuller participation in the world beyond their doors,” says Professor Les Cory, SHARE Foundation president.

“Thanks to the support of the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, we will be able to strengthen our ongoing efforts to serve those who seek SHARE’s help.”

Remembering Patty Swift

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Pat Swift, longtime friend and supporter of SHARE. In the many years that we had the pleasure of knowing her, the colorful Fairhaven resident covered a lot of ground in her motorized wheelchair, which she proudly decorated with fluttering flags. Patty had a unique flair for catching your eye and making you see past any physical limitations to the limitless possibilities bubbling inside.

One of SHARE’s earliest clients, Patty was a familiar face at SHARE’s Fun Walk each year, and she could be counted on to bring a league of fans and supporters with her. Over the years, she helped spread the word about SHARE’s work by sharing her own story, and her tireless fundraising efforts helped to ensure that SHARE had the financial resources to make a difference in the lives of so many more children and adults.

We wish to extend our heartfelt sympathies to her family, friends, and members of her church. Patty will be remembered always for her advocacy, her generosity, and her bright, bright spirit.

Check Out SHARE on the Web!

Please visit our new and improved website at www.share.umassd.edu for all the latest news and information on SHARE and the UMass Dartmouth Center for Rehabilitation Engineering!

Thanks to a new feature on the site, clients can now complete and submit an online application requesting equipment and services. The goal is to make it faster and easier for clients to access the resources they need to lead fuller, more independent lives.

SHARE would like to thank UMass Dartmouth graduate student Akilesh Shrestha for his efforts to update the site and make it more user-friendly. Check it out and let us know what you think!
With Deepest Thanks

We extend our gratitude to the many supporters who have donated to SHARE over the past few months. Your generous gifts are making it possible for us to provide the opportunity for independent communication to more children and adults with disabilities.

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