

Southern Illinois

Center for Independent Living

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For Autistic Kids, iDevices are Life Changers Source: theglobeandmail.com

When you enter Emily Buczek's Toronto classroom, it's like Times Square: Everywhere you look, there's a new visual distraction.

These diversions are there to keep up with students' fleeting attention spans: Emily and her peers at Beverley School all have developmental and/or physical disabilities. Emily, a profoundly autistic 13-year-old with an overgrown pixie cut and fingernails that have been cut or chewed to the quick, doesn't fit the stereotype of an early adopter of the iPad.

wanted," she says. "It's wasting a lot of time, it's a lot of frustration."

But then she downloaded the iConverse app on Emily's iPod Touch. One of many assisted communication programs available for people with disabilities, it allowed Ms. Buczek to load photos of her daughter's favorite stores, set to audio recordings of their names. Now all Emily has to do is run the app and click on the button that corresponds with her choice.

While Apple has not yet revealed Canadian prices for the iPad (it starts at \$500 in the U.S.), Ms. Buczek says a price tag of even several hundred dollars would be significantly cheaper (not to mention more portable) than some of the assisted communication devices currently on the market, which can cost more than \$10,000.

Emily, like many kids with ASD, struggles with her fine motor skills, and a larger screen would help her navigate the apps with greater precision, Ms. Buczek says.

At Emily's school, six teachers are using the iPod Touch with their developmentally-disabled students, as part of a University of Toronto study led by faculty of information professor Rhonda McEwen. Professor McEwen wants to see how it can help them communicate.

So far, their greatest use is easing anxiety among students, says Emily's teacher, Ian Stuart.

Mr. Stuart frequently uses apps like this to help Emily focus before she moves on to a new activity in class, since transitions can be very difficult for kids with ASD.

The latest version of Proloquo2Go, the most popular AAC app in the iTunes store, was released at the start of the month to work on the iPad. As of Friday, it was ranked No. 34 overall in the United States among all 185,000-plus apps.

The iPad can be used by people with disabilities – particularly non-verbal ones, many of whom have strong visual memories – to express their wants and needs. However, it is a luxury that can't be afforded by schools.

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But parents and educators of children with developmental disabilities – particularly autism spectrum disorders (ASD) – have celebrated its release. While the device was created mostly for media consumption, it has plenty of surprising uses for children with such disabilities.

Emily doesn't have an iPad in her hands yet, but the learning curve won't be very steep when it's released in Canada at the end of the month – she's already mastered the

iPod Touch at school and at home.

It's been a godsend, her mother Christina says. With an autistic child, even the simplest tasks can be emotionally and physically draining. She recalls many days when Emily, who is mostly non-verbal, indicated she wanted to go shopping – but wouldn't say where.

"I'd be driving her toward one store and pulling in and she'd be really upset because it wasn't the one she

Health Care Reform and the Disability Community

Source: newmobility.com

Capping a yearlong Congressional battle, on March 30 President Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the first federal legislative overhaul of the nation's health care system since the creation of Medicare in 1965. But what does this mean for the health care needs of people with disabilities? Asked for their opinion, disability rights leaders' thoughts were mostly positive.

"The bill will represent a major step forward for people with disabilities because it eliminates pre-existing condition exclusions and lifetime caps, creates a new funding stream for home and community-based long-term services and supports, and creates an incentive for states to begin eliminating the institutional bias in Medicaid with the Community First Choice Option," says Andy Imparato of the American Association of People with Disabilities. "We still need more aggressive reform of the institutional bias in Medicaid and some of the problems with Medicare, but this bill is an important victory for our community."

Others expressed disappointment that more sweeping reforms — such as the public option — were discarded. Says ADAPT activist Janine Bertram, "That the community-first option is part of health reform means that more members of our community have the choice to avoid institutions and live at home with services and supports. That's enough to set us all dancing. However, it is a travesty that, even when 65 percent of the population supported a public option, Congress and the administration went with what the insurance companies wanted."

"My largest concern about the way health care reform developed is that it became an insurance issue rather than a health care issue," says journalist Marta Russell, a single payer supporter. "This means that millions of dollars will now go to the health insurers, giving them even more clout to hire even more lobbyists to get what they want. I'd say the health insurance corporations are the winner in this bill and that we will need to watch them closely."

While the influence of the health insurance industry is an ongoing concern, the newly-signed bill contained good news for wheelchair users. Expansion of the competitive bidding program, which has been a major concern of the DME industry and end users, will exempt complex rehab users — those who depend on high-end manual and power wheelchairs. Equipment marketed to this group is also expected to be exempt from an excise tax on medical device manufacturers. And finally, the first month purchase option for power wheelchairs will not be eliminated for complex rehab users.



What to Do if You Suspect A Child Has a Learning Disability

Source: education.com

'Your daughter struggles for hours with reading assignments her teacher says should take no more than 30 minutes. Or your son, once a bright-eyed, excited kindergartner, has become withdrawn and frustrated, bristling at even the most casual, "How was your day at school?" Maybe it isn't anything specific, just a hunch that when it comes to your child's life as a student, something is definitely wrong.

Every kid goes through perfectly normal periods of aggravation when it comes to schoolwork. However, if you suspect your child is suffering with issues beyond the occasional grumpiness and frustration that come with being a student, there may be something else at play ... a learning disability. Here are a few things to do before you call the physician:

- Your child's teacher can be a great resource. Schedule a conference and prepare a list of things you would like to discuss. Find out if your child has been keeping up with in-class work. Has he been participating in discussions? Does he seem attentive or bored in class?
- Observe your child at home. Does homework go fairly smoothly or is it a constant struggle? Examine your child's handwriting, is it age appropriate? Does your child ever read for pleasure?
- Make an effort to rule out possible physical or emotional causes of your child's problems in school. Has your child had his vision and hearing tested recently? Are there difficulties in your family life that could be causing him to flounder when he is away from home?

If it looks as though your child is suffering from a learning disability, the next step is to have him evaluated. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law with counterparts in every state, requires school districts to evaluate students suspected of having a disability. The evaluation is free and involves a thorough assessment of your child's abilities using a variety of data, including academic records provided by the school as well as the observations and information you as the parent provide. If you disagree with the results of the school evaluation, you have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation which the school must then consider.

Services provided under the IDEA are linked to specifically defined conditions. These include speech, language, and visual impairments, autism, emotional disturbances, and specific learning disabilities. Specific learning disabilities are those involved in understanding or using language, which can affect skills such as reading, writing, and math. There is also a catch-all category called "other health impairments," which is the basis for services for children with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

If your child is diagnosed with a learning disability, the school will hold a meeting to establish an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This meeting will include your child's teacher, a school counselor or psychologist, and you. You may bring other people, such as a tutor, a therapist, or an advocate. If you'd like, your child may also attend. The IEP meeting will review the evaluation results, set goals, and determine which educational and related services (speech, occupational, physical, and psychological therapy) your child may need.

Don't think of a diagnosis of a learning disability as the end of the world. Think of it as the first step in getting your child the help he needs to survive and thrive in school.

Coming & Going: San Antonio Opens Amusement Park for Special Needs Children Source: Disability Scoop

On March 3, San Antonio opened an amusement park with a unique mission: to create a play space for individuals with special needs. Billed as the world's first ultra-accessible family fun park, Morgan's Wonderland covers 25 acres and sits on the former site of the Longhorn Quarry, northeast of downtown. The project's inspiration came from Morgan, the special-needs teenage daughter of founder-philanthropist Gordon Hartman, who watched her struggle at birthday parties, playgrounds and pools.

"The special-needs children come first," Hartman said about the \$32 million, three-year construction. "They have an opportunity to do things they've never done before, like ride in a swing or a carousel or sit with their family in a train."

While researching his idea, Hartman sought out sample rides suitable for physically challenged individuals but came up empty, so he prototyped his own. For example, he created an off-road adventure ride that allows children to cruise around a rock-strewn track. The Jeep-like vehicles can accommodate wheelchairs and feature such innovations as sensors that protect passengers with neck problems. Other attractions include swings (three equipped for wheelchairs), a sand circle with four wide paths, a pirate-themed island, a sensory village, a fishing wharf and the Garden Sanctuary, a calming space with art and piped-in music.

"San Antonio now has another venue that complements what's already here, SeaWorld and Six Flags Fiesta Texas," Hartman said.

The park is free to all special-needs guests; other visitors pay \$5. Reservations are required and can be made at 210-637-3434 or <http://www.morganswonderland.com>.

Social Security to Phase Out Paper Checks

Source: disabilityscoop.com

Social Security will stop issuing paper checks in 2013 at which point all payments will be made electronically, the Treasury Department said Monday.

New enrollees to Social Security programs will no longer be able to receive benefits via paper check beginning March 1, 2011. Current participants in the government benefits programs will have until March 1, 2013 to switch.

Subsequently all Social Security payments will be deposited electronically to a person's bank account or to a beneficiary's government-issued debit card. The special bank cards — known as Direct Express debit cards — were introduced in 2008 in order to allow beneficiaries who lack bank accounts to receive payments electronically.

The changes apply to those who receive Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, benefits, which assist Americans with disabilities, in addition to a host of other government programs.

The new requirement is designed to cut mailing costs and increase reliability and financial security for recipients, Treasury officials said. Already 85 percent of those who receive federal benefits are paid electronically.

Illinois License Plate Discount for Circuit Breaker Participants

Effective January 1, 2010 the license plate discount for Circuit Breaker participants has increase to \$75.00. The renewal for Circuit Breaker members will remain at

- \$24.00 for a regular plate
- \$31.00 for a personalized plate
- \$37.00 for a vanity plate



Vehicle Production Group to Begin MV-1 Production by October 2010

Source: www.mfrtech.com



The Vehicle Production Group LLC (VPG) says volume production of the MV-1, the first factory-built and assembled wheelchair-accessible vehicle designed to meet the unique needs of the para-transit, taxi and consumer market, will commence in October 2010. The new vehicle will be powered by the rear wheel drive Ford 4.6L 2V EFI V8 engine and 4 speed automatic transmission and will be available in either gasoline or dedicated Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) models.

The MV-1 is the first and only vehicle built from the ground up in the United States to meet or exceed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) vehicle guidelines. Unlike other wheelchair-accessible vehicles, it is not a conversion or aftermarket retrofit. Safe, durable, and less expensive than other accessible vehicle choices, the MV-1 was specifically designed to meet the demands of para-transit and taxicab fleets as well as individual consumers.

The MV-1 production will commence at the AM General plant in Mishawaka, Indiana with volume production beginning in October. AM General, which designs and produces the military HUMVEE and assembles the HUMMER H2, has a world-renowned reputation for building rugged vehicles, based on eight decades of successful innovation and growth. Durability and safety are critical to MV-1 customers and AM General is best positioned to help deliver on those needs.

The MV-1 is the only vehicle in its class with an OEM-engineered and factory assembled dedicated CNG fuel system option to ensure the same durability, reliability and quality that fleets demand from gasoline powered vehicles. The clean-burning CNG vehicle features a range of 250 miles and best-in-class cargo compartment volume. As a result of a strategic partnership between VPG and Clean Energy Fuel Corp., Clean Energy intends to expand its CNG fueling infrastructure in key US markets to support fleets operating the CNG powered MV-1.

The new MV-1 features 56-inch high and 36-inch wide rear doors for easy wheelchair entrance via a wide ramp that carries a 1200-pound capacity yet easily stores beneath the floor inside the vehicle. The MV-1 can accommodate five passengers plus the driver, including up to two forward facing wheelchair riders. With an interior floor to ceiling height of nearly 5 feet, the MV-1 can easily accommodate even the largest electric wheelchairs and provides easy entry and exit for all passengers with or without mobility challenges.

For more information about the MV-1, please visit <http://www.vpgautos.com>

Someone to Talk to ...

One of the biggest hurdles our Southern Illinois seniors face – in addition to disability onset in many cases, is isolation and just plain loneliness! Often the spouse has either died or is ill, the children have grown and moved away, and neighbors are busy or too far away to visit.

We at SICIL have run across this time and again in our Elderly Blind Program that serves persons who are over 55 and legally blind. Add the fact that many are no longer able to drive due to sight loss, more than a few of our friends are just plain lonely!

In order to help seniors with vision address this issue, SICIL is starting a VOLUNTEER VISITATION program to help seniors in need of “someone to talk to.”

If you would be interested in helping someone break the isolation barrier, learning from someone else’s experiences, and making a real difference for someone else, OR if you are in need of a volunteer visitor, please call Barb Stotlar at 618-457-3318 for more information.

To volunteer, you need only have a valid driver’s license, time to spend with someone outside your home, and a sincere interest in listening to and talking with someone who may be a stranger at first but quickly will become a friend.

SICIL

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This newsletter is available on audio tape

Shoes to Share

The Southern Illinois Center for Independent Living will be collecting shoes throughout the month of June for nursing home residents and people with disabilities who do not have income, family, or friends providing for them.

How can you help?

Deliver new or near-new shoes to the Southern Illinois Center for Independent Living, located at 2135 W. Ramada Lane in Carbondale, Illinois.

ASK YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS FOR THEIR EXTRA SHOES.

If you have lots of shoes and want us to pick them up, call 457-3318 and we will arrange to pick them up. If you have valuable shoes we can provide you with a tax letter.

IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS:

**NEW OR NEAR NEW SHOES
PLEASE NO HIGH HEELS**

NO ONE NEEDS TO BE BAREFOOT WITH SO MANY SHOES TO SHARE

Thank you for your help!

