

Another Darn Letter (ADL)
from
Jeff Symons

Hi Everyone,

As I look at my past newsletters I have done a lot on ergonomic equipment and not much on Assistive Technology. So in this issue I thought I would focus on Assistive Technology and how it can help people. Assistive Technology can include a large variety of different types of devices for activity of daily living (ADL), such as reachers, cooking aids, reading and writing aids etc. to assistive listening devices, to wheelchairs and scooters to augmentative communication devices and many more items.

I often find that when people have a problem it can affect more than just one area of their life. When a person has a problem with gripping a pen they may also have problems gripping other objects. There are ADL devices that would make these tasks much easier for them. There is foam available that can wrap around not only pens and pencils but can be used for toothbrushes, forks, knives and spoons as well. Sometimes these items may not come under the purchasing scope of the Agencies but I like to let the individuals know the options and they may be able to purchase these items themselves. I have a catalog that I sometimes give to clients that has a wide variety of ADL devices that they can purchase.

Here are some other examples of unique assistive technology devices that I have found beneficial.

There are a variety of different types of reachers that can be used to help people. Most reachers are kind of big and bulky and difficult to carry. One new one that is available telescopes and has a hook, magnet and a sticky pad for papers. This one does require the user to have pretty good upper body strength to extend and retract the wands. If anyone wants some brownie points, I heard that the Director of the Department of Rehabilitation, Tony Sauer, drop some papers during the opening of the new building and could have used this type of reacher. The website is: www.telestik.com

Another issue that I have seen with people using powered wheelchairs is that the control joystick often prevents them from getting close to their worksite because it sits in front of them. Sometimes people think about making a special cut out for the joystick, but a better solution might be to look at the swing-away joystick. A swing-away joystick enables the user to swing the joystick to the side so that they can get closer, not only to a work surface, but to any table such as in a restaurant. These swing-away joysticks are not typically covered under most medical insurance and therefore are not standardly installed on most wheelchairs, but they can be purchased separately. In order to purchase one of these you would need to work with the local durable medical equipment supplier who works on the wheelchair.

Recently I have seen several clients who are hearing impaired and have needed assistive listening devices. There are a variety of assistive listening devices and I have found that people with hearing impairments need to be able to try these devices. Each person's hearing issues may be different and what works well for one person may not work so well for another. I have a source who will let me borrow these devices for clients to try and even loans them out if necessary.

Sometimes there are no commercially available products to meet a client's needs but either a custom device can be designed and manufactured or a commercially available product can be modified to meet their needs. The latter is usually preferable because it is less expensive and easier to do. Recently I had a client who was attending a culinary school and had only one arm. She needed to have a cutting board made up that would help her hold things when cutting them. There is a cutting board that had a vice like feature to help her hold items in place but it needed to be larger with some additional features added. A local plastics place was able to make the necessary modifications.

One of my resolutions was to find better ways to meet the needs of the counselors and clients.

When out on the road I often get asked by counselors and others about how to adjust or fix some piece of equipment that is not working properly. Often it is a very simple fix. Some of the ergonomic chairs over time will go out of adjustment even though you have not touched the controls. The backs may slip down from constant use and may no longer provide adequate lumbar support but rather very low back support or upper gluteus support. While I have done a number of injury prevention type ergonomic assessments for the Department of Rehabilitation I do realize that in this economy we are looking for ways to save money (although I think everyone should have an ergonomic assessment but I realize that I am biased in this area). One thought I had to help solve this problem is that people can always contact me and, probably on the phone, I can instruct them on how to possibly adjust a chair or other device. Another option would be to e-mail me a picture of the worksite and person (side view) and then I could contact the individual and discuss their setup and some possible suggestions. At this point I do not see charging for the service unless I get inundated with calls and e-mails. I also have a web cam set up on my computer at my office and if there are web cams at other offices we could possibly set up a time to do a remote evaluation. There are also a lot of new counselors and if needed I would be glad to do an in-service on a specific topic or area if requested. I also encourage the counselors to attend the assessment so they can understand the process.

Another New Years resolution is to be more environmentally friendly.

In an effort to be more environmentally friendly/greener I have been e-mailing my reports and invoices to the counselors and not sending a hard copy unless requested. I was wondering how this was working out for the counselors and if you had any other suggestions. FYI we do recycle and compost.

I recently have changed my rates this New Year. I have been doing this now for six months on my own and I have contacted other individuals who do assistive technology evaluations in the Bay Area and the others here in Sacramento. Their charges range from \$100-\$150 per hour. My new rates are \$110 per hour for evaluation and \$75 per hour for travel. If anyone has any input or ideas I would gladly welcome your thoughts and opinions. One issue that I have had is that some payments happen very quickly and others can take several months. I do not know if there is anything I can do to expedite this process but am willing to entertain any suggestions.

If anyone has any suggestions they would like to see covered in future news letters please let me know. Feel free to forward this to anyone who might be interested and if you want to be removed from this list please let me know.

As Always

Thanks,

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