

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Success Through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology

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## **Mission Statement**

It is the express mission of Project START to empower Mississippians with disabilities through education, awareness and access to Assistive Technology.

## **Vision Statement**

Mississippi Project START (Success Through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology) was established to provide information about assistive technology to consumers and other interested parties so they may make informed decisions about available assistive technology services.





**Chris M. Howard**  
**Executive Director**

*Letter from our Executive Director*

Dear friends,

I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Project START, also known as the Mississippi Technology Act Program. START stands for Success Through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology.

Project START is a program administered by the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services which provides Mississippians with disabilities access to assistive technology. Assistive Technology includes mobility devices, such as wheelchairs, accessibility software, technology for low vision and blindness, and augmentative and alternative communications devices.

For many children and adults with disabilities, access to and acquisition of assistive technology can make a tremendous difference in their ability to fully participate in employment, school, and recreational activities. The right tools-very specialized devices-allow individuals with disabilities to live, learn, work, and play independently.

Please see what great things we have done together this past year, and know that your continued support of Project START is vital to our mission and to what we can accomplish in the next year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Howard" clearly legible.



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF  
REHABILITATION SERVICES  
*Opportunities for Independence*



**Jamie Tucker**  
**Director**

*Letter from our Director*

It is my pleasure to share with you our 2023 annual report highlighting the accomplishments of Mississippi's Assistive Technology Act Program, Project START. Working with and providing services for Mississippians with disabilities is a true blessing. Each day Project START strives to ensure every individual has the opportunity to live their life to the fullest through the assistance of assistive technology.

I would personally like to thank Mr. Chris Howard, Executive Director of Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, and his dedicated employees for their hard work and support of our program. Also, thank you to our Advisory Council for their guidance and support, and last but not least, our dedicated staff who work tirelessly every day to assist Mississippians with a disability.

As the director of Project START, I am excited about some additions to our program for the coming year and invite you to first our website at [msprojectstart.org](https://msprojectstart.org) for more information about our services and upcoming events. You can contact us at any time through our website or by calling our office at 601.853.5249 or 1.800.852.8328 or emailing me directly at [jtucker@mdrs.ms.gov](mailto:jtucker@mdrs.ms.gov).

Jamie Tucker, Director  
Project START



# Device Reutilization

The Device Reutilization program focuses on the under-served populations in Mississippi with the mission to provide education, awareness and access of assistive technology to individuals with limited resources in their community. The program redistributes used equipment that has been sanitized, checked for safety and refurbished for appropriate use.

## Device Reassignment/Refurbishment

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Mobility, Seating, and Positioning	2
Daily Living	1
Computer and Related	79
Vision	2

## Customer Satisfaction

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Highly Satisfied	80
Satisfied	0
Somewhat Satisfied	0

Total Surveyed 80

## Testimonial

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Project START had a client who lost his housing. In the process of transitioning to his new home his bed was lost, and he was sleeping in his power chair. Project START provided him with a refurbished hospital bed and mattress. He stated that this would be the first time in weeks he was able to sleep somewhere other than his power chair.

Project START continues to provide its computer refurbishment program to Mississippians with disabilities. Laptops and desktops are donated to our program that are in turn wiped clean and updated with the latest operating systems. We are able to donate these to those in need for educational, occupational, or community needs.

# Device Loan Program

Project START provides a short term equipment loan program allowing an individual to try a device before they purchase it. This program also allows an individual to borrow a device to use while theirs is being repaired or while funding is being secured for the purchase of their device.

## Device Loans by Type or Borrower

Individual with Disabilities	120
Family members, Guardians & Authorized Representatives	15
Representatives of Education	6
Representatives of Employment	1
Representative of Health, Allied Health & Rehabilitation	1
Representative of Community Living	0
Representative of Technology	0

## Purpose of Devices Loaned

Assist in Decision Making (device trial or evaluation)	123
Serve as Loaner During Device Repair or While Waiting for Funding	3
Provide an Accommodation on a Short-Term Basis	9
Conduct training, self education or other professional development activity	8

## Types of Devices Loaned

Vision	51
Hearing	1
Speech Communication	24
Learning, Cognition, & Positioning	33
Mobility, Seating, & Position	43
Daily Living	13
Environmental Adaptions	1
Vehicle Modification & Transportation	0
Computers & Related	1
Recreation Sports & Leisure	0
Total	167

## Customer Satisfaction

Highly Satisfied	136
Satisfied	5
Satisfied Somewhat	2
Not at all satisfied	0
Non respondent	0
Total	143

## Testimonial

Mississippi experienced devastating tornados in April 2023 resulting in catastrophic loss in a poor, rural community. We immediately contacted emergency officials to see how we could assist with AT needs in the area and learned of a young boy who not only lost his wheelchair but also his prosthetic leg. These tornados hit in the middle of the night, so he wasn't wearing his prosthetic leg. After a visit to the community, we were able to provide him with a loaner wheelchair that ultimately led to a donation. The loss of his prosthesis kept weighing on us, so we reached out to a local prosthetics company with whom we have a great relationship. In turn, they wanted to help as well so they reached out to the family to offer a new prosthetic leg pro bono! They will continue following and serving him as he grows and needs additional fitting and therapy.

# Device Demonstration

In addition to our offices at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services in Madison, our partnerships provide Demonstration Centers throughout the state to educate individuals and their families or caregivers on assistive technology to aid in hearing, mobility, communication, vision and performing activities on daily living.

## Demonstrations By Device Type

Vision	8
Hearing	3
Speech Communication	49
Learning, Cognition, & Developmental	3
Mobility, Seating, & Position	2
Daily Living	1
Environmental Adaptions	0
Vehicle Modification & Transportation	0
Computers & Related	0
Recreation Sports & Leisure	0
Total	66

## Types of Participants

Individual with Disabilities	45
Family members, Guardians & Authorized Representatives	53
Representatives of Education	2
Representatives of Employment	26
Representative of Health, Allied Health & Rehabilitation	3
Representative of Community Living	23
Representative of Technology	0
Total	152

## Customer Satisfaction

Highly Satisfied	64
Satisfied	84
Satisfied Somewhat	4
Not at all satisfied	0
Non respondent	0
Total	152

## Testimonial

A Surehands wall mount lift was installed in the classroom of TKMC. Demonstration of a Surehands lift is something that is not readily available in the state due to the installation process. The Surehands at TKMC is now available to allow individuals to try the device and the different slings. The lift can also be used the help transfer individuals from one chair to another for evaluations of mobility devices. Daily the lift is used in the classroom to aid the students in moving to the changing table. This helps keep the lift functional. In the classroom, the lift is also used to help the students to become accustomed to using a lift. None of the students currently have a lift in their homes, but long term each of them will need to use a lift for all transfers.



# Training Participants

Project START provides training, technical assistance and public awareness activities, providing information on availability, benefits and cost of AT devices and services.

## Total Training Participants

Individual with Disabilities	228
Family members, Guardians & Authorized Representatives	0
Representatives of Education	250
Representatives of Employment	8
Representative of Health, Allied Health & Rehabilitation	0
Representative of Community Living	0
Representative of Technology	84
Total 592	

57 trainees on general AT, AAC, driving, adaptive computer access, vision and hearing, and AT for learning disabilities were not able to be categorized

## Testimonial

A day-long training hosted by Project START's sub-contractor, T.K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability, was conducted to include areas that people had expressed interest in learning more about. The theme was "Low Cost, High Impact Technology." CEUs were provided at this training, and the attendance was high! The training began with the Digital Archivist/Assistant Professor at Mitchell Library of Mississippi State University showing how to use Alt text and other tools to make documents accessible. This session was hands-on where attendees brought laptops and practiced along with her. In addition, the program coordinator who is an ATP explored the accessibility features of iPads, Chromebooks, and other devices. Many times our technology already has features built in that can be used to meet the needs of individuals. Information on the new free Morpich software was also discussed. The day wrapped up with a show and tell of DIY AT solutions. DIY solutions from pencil grips to visual schedules to farm tools and all points in between were discussed. Attendees also brought their favorite DIY solutions to share with the group.

Project START technologies were used in a demonstration day for Smith and Simpson County homeschoolers. The homeschool population has a large percentage of students with at least speculated specific learning disabilities including dyslexia, ADHD, and other diagnosis. The students were able to have hands on experience with the technology. They were informed of the use of the technology as well as career opportunities in the fields of AT. Multiple questions were answered regarding the process for procuring AT and the use of AT in college and the workforce. One child in particular was able to share some information on the AT already used at home. The same child was also interested in the more updated technology. Offers of a loan of the technology were made, but have not yet been accepted. The family would like to wait until a particular time to receive the maximum benefit of the loan.



Your perspective is extremely valuable,  
and we greatly appreciate any and all feedback!

Please send any comments or questions to:

Jamie Tucker

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Mississippi Project START is funded under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998,  
as amended by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services  
Administration.

MDRS Project START, the statewide assistive technology program for Mississippians,  
is coordinated by the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services agency