

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION SERVICES
PROJECT START



MDRS PROJECT START
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY
ANNUAL REPORT 2008

Dear Governor Barbour and Members of the Mississippi Legislature:

The Project START Advisory Council Members are extremely proud of the programs and services provided to Mississippians through Success Through Assistive Rehabilitative Technology (Project START). Our annual report highlights our successes and commitment to serving individuals of all ages and disabilities. In 2008, Project START touched the lives of thousands of Mississippians through training, technical assistance, trial use of assistive technology, or donating assistive technology to individuals with disabilities.

The council members and staff are dedicated to increasing awareness of and access to assistive technology. We hope all who read this report share in our passion and commitment to expand access to assistive technology so that everyone can be independent in communities of their choice.

Council Chairperson,



Sam Gleese

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MDRS Project START Demonstration Centers

MDRS Project START coordinates and collaborates in providing awareness and access to assistive technology for all Mississippians by partnering with other organizations that serve individuals with disabilities. Our partnerships provide for resource centers to educate individuals and their families/caregivers on assistive technology to aid in hearing, mobility, communication, vision, and performing activities of daily living.

START Assistive Technology Demonstration Centers provide an environment to become educated and familiar with the latest assistive technology. Many of our Demonstration Centers serve a wide range of disabilities; others showcase devices for their field of expertise such as communication or vision. Each Demonstration Center provides resources for funding, technical assistance, and trial use of equipment.

We believe that in order for a person to make an informed decision about the type of assistive technology he or she may need, trial use and consumer support should be provided. Demonstration Center staff provides that support through proper instruction on using the device, which ensures the individual is comfortable and confident with the assistive technology.

Accomplishment: Through Project START partnering, consumers demonstrated 927 devices across Mississippi.

Project START staff demonstrates devices on a daily basis. AT vendors such as Dynavox, Prentke Romich, and Audio Visual Mart, are available to demonstrate devices on a monthly basis. During the fall, several vendors traveled with Project START to WIN Job Centers and Health Departments in the rural areas in Mississippi and displayed their assistive technology devices. Participants in various communities, such as Greenwood, Tchula, Durant and Greenville, experienced, many for the first time, state-of-the-art assistive technology. Vendors showcased their products by displaying and demonstrating features that one could use for independence in communities of their choice. The most important outcome of the demonstrations in rural areas was the collaboration of vendors and community leaders in working with people with disabilities for access to assistive technology. Referrals were made for funding that included different disability organizations who showcased their services for people with disabilities in Mississippi.



This gives Mississippians hands on opportunity to learn about different AT devices for Mississippians to make an informed choice about what will work best for them.

“Try AT Before you Buy AT” Loaner Program

Putting assistive technology in the hands of individuals with disabilities is our goal. The Project START Technology Library is simple, fast, and helpful. The process is as easy as 1, 2, 3! It's like a lending library, only instead of library books, we have a library of assistive technology that you can borrow to take home and try. Requests for loans can come from you, a family member, friend, or advocate familiar with our services.



“Try AT Before You Buy AT” focuses on making sure individuals make the right decision regarding assistive technology before purchasing. How does this help? Keep in mind that some AT devices can cost as little as \$10 or as much as \$8,000. Why is this important? In most cases, if you purchase the device and find out that it doesn't work for you, there is no returning the device. Also, depending on the financial source, such as private insurance, Medicaid, or Medicare, if the device doesn't work for you, it can be five years before they will purchase a replacement. This is our way of watching out for you, by ensuring you make an educated and informed decision in purchasing AT that is best for you.

Accomplishment: Project START loaned 234 devices to Mississippians with disabilities statewide.

Our Loaner Program is centered on trying out AT before actually purchasing. Each time an individual receives technology from one of our resource centers, staff provides demonstrations and follow-up training to make sure the individual and the support system are aware of the proper way to use the device. On March 6, 2008, a speech therapist for a Home Health Company borrowed a communication device for a 62 year old Caucasian female diagnosed with Aphasia. The speech therapist wanted the client to try out a simple communication device so she could communicate in the home with caregivers. Project START staff showed the therapist several low tech communication devices, of which she chose the Tech Talk 8 for a trial use.

After the 90 day trial period, a survey was given to the therapist to rate the services she had received. The therapist stated, “We started with this device because it was simple to use and had the basic commands needed by the client. She was able to press a button that expressed simple but important tasks such as time to eat, want something to drink, or tired. The client's communication gradually improved with this device, which assisted in keeping her independent in her home with her family as a support system. Without this program, we would not have known where to start with this client. It is a program that is invaluable to my patients. It helps me as a therapist to determine if an AAC device is applicable for a patient before requesting insurance to purchase it.”

“Re-use it Mississippi” AT Reutilization

Mississippians with disabilities face various hardships every day. One of the most significant hardships is acquiring financial means to purchase new assistive technology devices and services. Taking this into consideration, Project START has worked diligently to make sure individuals with disabilities who can not afford to purchase services and devices have access.

Mississippi’s Project START program offers three access activities:

(1) **The Mississippi Equipment Connection Program** - an online recycling database that helps Mississippians with disabilities and older people with functional limitations find affordable assistive technology devices and equipment. This access program gives Mississippians available Assistive Technology at a reduced price or free, depending on the source.

Accomplishment: Project START gave away 3 devices last year.

Savings to Consumer: \$1,510.00



(2) **Computer Refurbishment Program** - in-home placement of refurbished computers for people with disabilities. The goal is to support educational and vocational development, as well as enhancement of personal independence, for people with disabilities through the use of computers.

Accomplishment: Project START gave away 156 computers last year.

Savings to Consumers: \$54,600.00



“Re-use it Mississippi”

AT Reutilization

(3) **Mississippi Re-Tech Access Program** – focusing on 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. Partnerships are formed with local health departments, churches, and durable medical equipment companies. The goal of this collaboration is to provide individuals and



organizations within the communities opportunities to have access to assistive technology devices and durable medical equipment through redistribution of used equipment that has been sanitized, checked for safety, and repaired for appropriate use. Project START collects donations from across the State and prepares it for redistribution to persons who need this assistive technology but can't afford it and have no other means of resources to acquire it.

Accomplishment: Project START staff assisted in repairing durable medical equipment for 350 individuals with disabilities.

For many Mississippians with disabilities, the costs of assistive technology can leave them with little access to much needed equipment. Through Project START's Reutilization, this barrier may be removed. One example of our many accomplishments was pointed out this year by an individual who received several refurbished devices. The individual stated, "I am a 63 year old African American who receives only \$611 per month in SSDI benefits. I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and it is getting bad. I am in need of a roll-in shower chair, and my power wheelchair at times will not tilt. The most important thing to me, if you can help, is to help me with the shower chair. I am used to bathing myself and for several days I have not been able to do this. Please help if at all possible."

Our first step was to assess the needs of this individual. Afterward, Project START provided a roll in shower chair and parts from a previously donated power chair that were used to replace the client's tilt switch. Also, our repair specialist installed donated grab bars in the client's bathroom to help client with safe transferring in and out of the shower. With our assistance, this individual saved over \$2,500. Upon completion, the individual stated, "Thanks to Project START for donations and repairs to my wheelchair. This has allowed me to take a full body shower, thus promoting better hygiene and a better positive confidence in myself. My options were very limited but, with the donated grab bars, I am confident in showering on my own. I feel much better about my self worth. It helped to boost my morale and took away a cloud of depression. Thanks again."

Successes such as this are made possible by donations from across the State for Reutilization, thereby making access to assistive technology affordable for everyone in Mississippi.

Training

In addition to the other programs that are offered at Project START in 2008, 2,077 Mississippians received training on assistive technology throughout the state. Some training topics include, but are not limited to, Motor Planning Development for Children with Autism, Working with Communication Devices, and Using Early Adaptive Technology.

Accomplishment: Training is a vital part of making sure individuals in Mississippi understand how to use and maintain their assistive technology. Project START provided training statewide but focused on making sure individuals with disabilities in under-served areas had adequate access to various types of assistive technology. With a poverty rate of 19.3%, Mississippi has one of the highest poverty rates in the United States. Critical poverty rates in Mississippi are isolated on the western side of the State along the Mississippi River. Counties that are considered to have critical poverty rates have poverty rates which are at least 50% higher than the state average. There are 14 counties in Mississippi which fit this criterion. A critical rate of poverty also occurs in one major city, Greenville, with a poverty rate of 29.6%. In 2008, Project START provided outreach training to this area titled “Reaching Out with Assistive Technology for Everyone.” Instructors were Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Biomedical Engineers, and Vision Specialists. Trainings were one-day events, comprised of breakout sessions that covered topics such as: Vision 101; Working with Communication Devices 101; Working with Students with Autism through Assistive Technology; Working with Early Adapted Toys and Positioning for Function in the Classroom; and Hearing Devices in the Classroom. The training covered all types of assistive technology, and during the breaks, participants were able to visit with assistive technology vendors and other resources around the State.



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Number Attended: 150

Location: Greenville, Ms

Goal Accomplished: Project START brings awareness and accessibility of Assistive Technology to a high poverty area with the focus on educating, training, and acquiring the necessary technology needed to be independent in the community.

Outcome: Follow up continues in the community with trainings, demonstrations, and donation rallies. Various local resources have been established in the community as a result of this training.

No School Left Behind: Other Training

Through a partnership with the Department of Education, Project START provides assistive technology training to educators around the State. This training gives teachers, parents, and consumers a chance to have hands on experiences with assistive technology. Exhibitors from across the State showcased their new and established AT products and services to the participants.



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Project START Mission Statement

Empowering Mississippians with disabilities through education, awareness and access to assistive technology.





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**Mississippi Department of
Rehabilitation Services**

Providing the freedom to live

The Project START annual report was developed by the MDRS Office of Communications and Consumer Relations.