

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF
REHABILITATION SERVICES

PROJECT START



SUCCESS THROUGH ASSISTIVE
REHABILITATIVE TECHNOLOGY

ANNUAL REPORT 2009

Dear Governor Barbour and Members of the Mississippi Legislature:



Helping Mississippians with disabilities break down barriers to independence best describes what our agency does on a daily basis. In 2009, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services Project START Division continued a successful journey of educating, training, and providing services that improve the lives of people with disabilities, their family members, and rehabilitation professionals.

I invite you to share in our successes as you read these stories of consumers and families whose lives have been touched by MDRS' Project START. Of great importance to the success of our program is partnerships and opportunities formed with the University Medical Center, St. Dominic Rehabilitation Program, Baptist Rehabilitation Program, University Rehabilitation Center, Department of Education, Department of Human Services, and various skilled nursing facilities and home health agencies.

Staff of Project START are always accessible by phone, email, or fax to assist individuals who may have questions or need assistance with Assistive Technology. Such requests may be for training, trial use of a device, assistance with finding resources, repairs of durable medical equipment, or help with choosing the right device. Project START continues to be a national leader in efforts to improve access to assistive technology devices and services. At MDRS's Project START we look forward to helping people enhance their independence through the use of assistive technology.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H.S. 'Butch' McMillan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light-colored rectangular background.

H.S. "Butch" McMillan, Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

Dear Governor Barbour and Members of the Mississippi Legislature:



It's been an exciting and rewarding year for Project START. We've helped thousands of Mississippians with disabilities gain the assistive technology they need to turn possibilities into realities. From the minute we enter the office, our work begins by helping change the lives of consumers. We locate assistive technology, identify community resources for help, offer technical assistance and training, and provide a "try before you buy" opportunity for consumers.

Recently, a consumer stopped by my office after visiting his doctor for a follow up on corneal surgery. In the past, we helped him adjust to his visual disability and recommended assistive technology to assist with independence. Many times I accompanied him during eye exams to help explain his diagnosis and doctor's recommendations. On this occasion, he handed me a stack of papers with a perplexed look on his face and asked what he needed to do. I read the papers, made a few phone calls, relayed the information to the consumer, and helped him complete the paperwork. At Project START, it's not all about Assistive Technology, it's about helping Mississippians with disabilities live independently in communities of their choice. He could have asked anyone for help, but he trusted us to give him the quality help he received in the past.

I would like to thank the Executive Director and staff of our parent agency, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services. The agency has an array of dedicated employees who share the workload with Project START. A special thanks to Project START staff Ruby Jamison and Jason Bates for working with me through last minute changes in plans and meeting the schedules of our consumers. From technology delivery and pick up to training, keeping up with the finances, computer support, and marketing, it takes all of us working together to carry out the mission of Project START and the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Dorothy Young, Director
Project START

MDRS Project START Training

CELEBRATE!



Come celebrate the countless possibilities that exist with **Assistive Technology!**

APRIL 13-18, 2009

MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2009

Assistive Technology Service Day

Sponsored by: Project Start and Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center
Where: 2550 Peachtree Street in Jackson, Ms
Contact: Dorothy Young, (601) 987-4872

Come and learn about the different technology services provided by Project START and Addie McBryde. Take a tour of the Addie McBryde facilities. Bring your donation and have your wheelchair service for free.

Play Day With Technology

Sponsored by: Technology Learning Center
Where: 730 East Beach Blvd, Long Beach, MS
Contact: Ashley Nicole Ross, (228) 214-3514

Come have fun with wheelchair tennis, basketball, kayaking, golf, fishing, art, and archery. We invite you to "Try it Out Day" to try the latest sports and recreational equipment with lessons.

Computer Lab Demonstrations

Sponsored by: Technology Assistive Devices (TAD) Center
Where: 967 Regional Center Drive in Oxford, Ms
Contact: Julie Chadwick, (662) 234-1476

The TAD center will host an equipment demonstration on Monday afternoon demonstrating adapted computer equipment, augmentative communication devices, and other technology.

TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2009

Autism Conference

Sponsored by: Project Start and Mississippi Dept. of Education
Where: Mississippi E Center at JSU
Contact: Dorothy Young, (601) 987-4872

Teachers, parents, and supports join us for "Empowering People With Autism Spectrum Disorder: The Technology Solution" to learn the latest developments in technology for children with autism.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2009

Magnolia Speech School Open House

Sponsored by: Magnolia Speech School
Where: 733 Flag Chapel Road in Jackson, Ms
Contact: Anne Sullivan, (601) 922-5530

Join us for an open house to see the latest technology provided by Project START in the classroom and clinical settings.

Assistive Technology Demonstration and Display

Sponsored by: Mississippi School for the Blind
Where: 1252 Eastover Drive in Jackson, Ms
Contact: Dr. Rosie Pridgen, (601) 984-8203

Join us to learn more about assistive technology opportunities for youth who are blind or visually impaired to assist with learning in the classroom and independence in the community.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2009

Autism Conference

Sponsored by: Project Start and Mississippi Dept. of Education
Where: Delta State Speech & Hearing Clinic in Cleveland, Ms
Contact: Dorothy Young, (601) 987-4872

Teachers, parents and supports join us for "Empowering People With Autism Spectrum Disorder: The Technology Solution" to learn the latest developments in technology for children with autism.

LIFE Exponential with Rocky Blier

Sponsored by: Life of MS
Where: Regency Hotel, 400 Graymont in Jackson, Ms
Contact: Ricky Anderson, (601) 960-4009

Come hear former Pittsburg Steeler Rocky Blier. Vendors will be displaying the latest at products and services for enhancing independence for people with disabilities.

FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2009

T.K. Martin Assistive Technology Fair

Sponsored by: MSU T. K. Martin Center
Where: 326 Hardy & Morrill Road, Mississippi State, Ms
Contact: Jamie Cirlet-New, (662) 325-1028

Join the T.K. Martin staff for viewing and demonstrations of assistive technology equipment. Tour the facility and bring any AT items you would like to donate for refurbishment.

Speech and Hearing Clinic Demonstration

Sponsored by: Technology Assistive Devices (TAD) Center
Where: 967 Regional Center Drive in Oxford, MS
Contact: Julie Chadwick, (662) 234-1476

Join the staff of the TAD Center for a demonstration of AAC devices as part of the Hippotherapy program

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2009

Lynn Meadows Discovery Center Open House

Sponsored by: Lynn Meadows Discovery Center
Where: 246 Dolan Avenue in Gulfport, Ms
Contact: Cynthia Minton, (228) 897-6039

Visit the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center to learn about activities for youth with disabilities.

The 8th Annual TEAAM Walk for Autism

Sponsored by: Together Enhancing Autism Awareness in Mississippi
Where: Winner's Circle Park in Flowood, Ms
Contact: Bridgette Yeager, (601) 733-0090

Join TEAAM for the 8th annual walk for Autism. Come out and enjoy all the fun! Ride the train, jump in the Space Jump, play games, eat cotton candy, and check out all our exhibitors.

MDRS Project START Training

Training is vital to the consumer and family member in need of the equipment. Project START provides training statewide. Training targets the thirteen poverty areas and individuals who are unable to travel to the nearest Demonstration Center. Hands on training with all types of assistive technology are demonstrated. Resources on where to acquire the technology are also available for consumers or anyone who attends the workshops. All workshops are made available to the public. Information is distributed through the local newspaper where the training will be held, through radio advertisement, television, and the Department of Education's training website. CEUs are offered either through the Department of Education or Project START.

Accomplishment: Project START provided training to 3,444 Mississippians.

Recent statistics indicate an increasing number of students with learning difficulties that are now being identified. Of the 8.5 million children who have disabilities in this country, learning disabilities are the most commonly addressed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Jans, 2000). Taking this into consideration, MDRS's Project START works diligently with Department of Education teachers who are trained to know how assistive technology can be used and, in particular, how learning disabilities can be successfully addressed. When a student's Individualized Education Program requires assistive technology equipment and software, a teacher must know its application and use. In addition, the training of a student's parent or caregiver in the use of the assistive technology is critical.

Accomplishment: Project START provided training to 1,605 representatives of education throughout the State.

Success Story:

A communication device can range in price from \$450.00- \$14,000. Project START has loaned the Vantage Lite PRC Device seven times in four different school districts. The Vantage Lite price is \$7,900. The resulting cost savings of this one type of communication device alone is \$55,300.00 to school districts. If no one is on the waiting list for the device, Project START can re-loan the device to the school district until the child has acquired the device.

In 2009, 53 devices were loaned to School Districts by Project START with a cost savings to the districts of \$89,140.00.

The successful implementation of assistive technology for the student is dependent upon the knowledge and skill of the teachers. The teachers who use what they have learned from higher education, their teaching experiences, continuing education programs, and in service classes initiated by MDRS's Project START.

MDRS Project START Demonstration Centers

MDRS's 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 Demonstration Centers to educate individuals and their families or caregivers on assistive technology to aid in hearing, mobility, communication, vision, and performing activities of daily living.

START Assistive Technology Demonstration Center 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, training and trial use of the 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 along with the vendor with the proper instruction on using the device, which ensures the individual is comfortable and confident with the assistive technology.

Accomplishment: Through Project START partnering, 1,512, devices were demonstrated to consumers across the state.

Devices are demonstrated on a monthly basis around the state by START's partner Demonstration Centers. Demonstrations are performed by START staff as well as vendors. The demonstrations educate consumers on the device features and connect the consumer with the appropriate vendor. At the end of the Demonstration, the consumer receives a print out that includes: the manufacture's contact information, the representative to service the device, the cost of the device, a description of the device, and any comparable devices that may be available. A survey is mailed to the consumer 30 days after the demonstration inquiring if the decision was made to purchase the device. As one consumer stated, "Because I was able to learn about the device from this demonstration I am now aware that this device is not worth me purchasing but the smaller communication device seemed to be easier to use and easier to handle. I was able to contact the vendor for the device and now training has been set up near me because of the demonstration from START."



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

“Try AT Before you Buy AT” Loaner Program

The Loaner Program offers people with disabilities the opportunity to try equipment up to 90 days free of charge. Consumers borrow the device and “try it out” to learn about the equipment before purchasing. Employers use this program to find the most appropriate and reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities (as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act) and to avoid wasting resources on uninformed decisions. Educators benefit by borrowing necessary equipment to help integrate their students with disabilities into school activities at the start of the school year. By doing so, they assess what equipment works best before being procured. Consumers with disabilities benefit by borrowing equipment to help decide if they want to purchase like equipment. Insurance providers often require proof of a short-term trial of the equipment before providing reimbursement for DME expenses. Equipment vendors do not always provide trials or they may have prohibitive fees.

Participants will receive training and support throughout the loan from the Project START staff. This helps individuals achieve an understanding and have an accurate review of the device. The device is used in the consumer’s natural environment so he or she has the opportunity to practice in his or her own community and home where the purchased device would be used in everyday activities.

In 2009, Project START loaned 455 devices to Mississippians with disabilities.

Project START’s main goal for the device loan program is to make sure assistive technology is available so individuals can make an informed decision about the device before purchasing. The staff call borrowers and mail letters to them throughout the loan period of ninety days. The borrower completes a survey when the equipment is returned which rates the quality and helpfulness of the program. The following is a response taken from a survey answered by an educator:

Type of devices loaned: Communication, vision, FM System, Adaptive toys, and computer switches

Loan Period: 90 days

“These devices increased the independence of the user, the academic, mobility and communication skills, the participation and the involvement in the community, family, school, church, the ability to be involved in leisure or recreational activities, social skills, the vocational skills and participation of the daily living skills. This program has made it possible for so many of the students here to see, experiment, use and learn different types of assistive technology. I can’t begin to say how beneficial the loaner program is to all students. The Project START staff are professional, helpful, and personable in helping to find whatever is needed to make sure equipment is available for loan to help with the decision process.”

“Re-use it Mississippi”

Mississippi Re-Tech Access

This program focuses on the underserved 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. The program redistributes 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 assistive technology but can't afford it and have no other resources to acquire it.

Accomplishment: Project START staff assisted in repairing durable medical equipment for 309 individuals with disabilities. with a cost savings to consumers of \$198,064.00.

Throughout the year, customer satisfaction surveys completed by the many people served through the Mississippi Re-Tech Program have emphasized the need that exists for the program and the positive result it has on the individual's independence. This independence is the major commonality found after analyzing the program outcomes. Donations and repairs to equipment made possible through the Re-Tech Grant have greatly increased the ability for individuals with disabilities in Mississippi to live independently by diminishing the barriers one may face in achieving a desired goal. One example lies within the story of a child with Cerebral Palsy who was in need of a computer. Her Education Advocate contacted Project START and requested a donated computer and an adaptive mouse. The family was unable to afford one and the advocate felt the child would receive education and therapeutic benefits from learning to use the computer. The following is a response from her advocate as noted on the survey: “Thank you so much for your help. The system was fast and did a wonderful job for this little girl. She sits at that computer every day and stays there until her mother forces her to get off. She is able to work independently by using her mouse and she loves it. Recently, she was able to complete a history report by using this computer. My child is now able to do things other kids can do instead of having to sit back and watch everyone else learn and have all the fun. Thanks, Project START.”

This program provides 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 placed 102 computers in homes of people with disabilities with a savings to consumers of \$38,250.00.

Project START

Statistics

NUMBER OF DEVICE DEMONSTRATIONS BY DEVICE TYPE

Vision	214
Hearing	78
Speech communication	568
Learning, cognition and developmental	124
Mobility, seating and positioning	175
Daily living	67
Environmental adaptations	3
Vehicle modification and transportation	84
Computers and related	75
Recreation, sports and leisure	124
Total	1,512

TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS IN DEVICE DEMONSTRATIONS

Individuals with disabilities	675
Family members/guardians	78
Representatives of Education	568
Representatives of Employment	57
Representatives of Health and Rehabilitation	87
Representatives of Community Living	451
Representatives of Technology	24
Total	1940

NUMBER OF REFERRALS

Funding source (non-AT program)	521
Service provider	185
Vendor	362
Repair service	75
Total	1,143

Project START Statistics

TYPES OF DEVICES LOANED

Vision	126
Hearing	38
Speech communication	104
Learning, cognition and developmental	71
Mobility, seating and positioning	54
Daily living	12
Environmental adaptations	5
Computers and related	15
Recreation, sports and leisure	31
Total	456

NUMBER OF DEVICE LOANS BY TYPE OF BORROWER

Individuals with disabilities	261
Family members/guardians	68
Representatives of Education	53
Representatives of Employment	41
Representatives of Health and Rehabilitation	10
Representatives of Community Living	13
Representatives of Technology	9
Total	455

SHORT-TERM DEVICE LOANS BY TYPE OF PURPOSE

Assist in decision making	391
Loaner during device repair or while waiting for funding	49
Provide an accommodation on a short-term basis	15
Total	455

Success in Education

I would like to just take a minute to thank the MS Department of Rehab. for funding and giving the State of MS the agency of Project Start under the direction of Dorothy Young. I honestly do not know what the school districts of this state would do with out the continual help, assistance, the training provided, and the loaner department of Project Start.

My school district has been using loaner equipment in the areas of communication, visual, hearing, and computer technology for the past few years. Our district uses the equipment with students to access what is appropriate, what can be utilized by the special needs students, and exactly how the equipment works/ functions with these special students. This helps us as we decided exactly what the individual needs are for each student. It also provides us with the needed equipment as we wait sometimes on funding, or approval of equipment. It bridges the gap so often for these special needs students in the academic setting.

We also utilize the training that Project Start provides for the state. It is truly necessary and beneficial for the parents, the teachers, and the students. Project Start offers monthly trainings, as well as specialized training that are necessary for learning the high tech communication devices and programming, as well as training to learn specialized computer programs to be used by the visually and hearing impaired student. These training are necessary and a requirement for our teachers who work with special needs students. The teachers are also able to get the CEU's needed for renewal of their teaching or state licenses through the training.

Recently we were able to have a loaner device that is highly specialized. Project Start had in its inventory a very high tech communication device that also had as an attachment a piece of equipment used for eye gaze. By have access to this device we were able to make a decision on exactly what would work best for a particular student that needed eye gaze and a communication device. Having the loaner was absolutely essential in making the best decision for this student. We were able to keep it to use while waiting for the students funding and device to arrive. Therefore the student was able to continue with her academics.

Again, thank you Project Start for your availability to service us whether it is with equipment, training, loaners, or advice. A special thank you to Dorothy and Ruby for your hard work daily.



From Our Clients

The Project START program of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services received a significant award on September 15, 2009, at the National AT Reuse Conference held in the CNN Center in Atlanta, Georgia. This event was hosted by the Pass It On Center and the National Assistive Technology Technical Assistance Partnership (NATTAP) and designed to recognize the accomplishments of Reuse Programs across the nation.

The Pass It On Center presented Dorothy Young, Project START Director, the Newbie Award for Project START's Computer Reuse Program. This award is given to an individual and/or organization that created and operated a successful Assistive Technology (AT) Reuse program after 2006. Within three years, the Mississippi Project START Computer Reuse Program has shown exemplary strategies to build partnerships and resources to create a successful Reuse Program that will serve as a model for others in the field.

The Project START presentation at the Reuse Conference was entitled "Mississippi Marketing Strategies Promoting Reuse". Mississippi's marketing tips and techniques discussed at the conference will be used as a training tool for other states that wish to start a Reuse Program. It was noted that Mississippi advertised simply, with little cost, by partnering with other resources in the State. Dorothy Young states, "I want to thank our MDRS Executive Director, Butch McMillan, and the staff of the MDRS Office of Communication and Consumer Relations for developing the video and marketing the programs." Mississippi's video was used to open the conference, and it highlighted the fact that Project START enables citizens with disabilities to maintain an active lifestyle.

Featured in the video was Norman Washington of Clinton, who is able to get back and forth to his job at Clinton's Walmart thanks to the Reuse Program. Norman's motorized wheelchair is kept functioning



with parts donated from across the State, so he is able to work on a full-time basis at the Walmart Garden Center, where he is known for his helpfulness to customers. Norman is also able to transport himself to church and community activities.

Thanks to this program, many other Mississippians with disabilities are able to work and maintain their independence in daily activities.

Norman Washington (left) is recognized by his supervisor for a job well done.

Project START Staff



Dorothy Young
Project START Director



Ruby Jamison
Project START Assistant



Jason Bates
Repair Technician

Council Members 2008-2009

Sam Gleese, *Chairperson*
Darlene Oliver, *Co-Chair*
Stacey Blackwell
Tanya Bradley
Karen Brown
Katherine Culpepper
Mary Fortune
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Lisa Indest
Anita Naik
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*Empowering Mississippians with
disabilities through education, awareness,
and access to assistive technology.*

For more information, please contact us at:

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**Mississippi Department of
Rehabilitation Services**

Providing the freedom to live

These programs are FREE.

Funded by the Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education under the Assistive Technology (AT) Act of 1998, as amended in 2004.