

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 East Boulevard Avenue – Department 325, Bismarck ND 58505-0250**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March is Brain Injury Awareness Month

Assistive Technology enhances the lives of individuals affected by brain injuries

BISMARCK, N.D. – A SmartPen, voice recognition software, electronic text books: these are some of the assistive technology (AT) devices helping individuals with brain injuries gain greater independence at work, school, and at home.

“We see success stories every day,” said Judie Lee, executive director of the North Dakota Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT). “Assistive technology gives people hope. It makes daily tasks possible that weren’t possible before like going back to work, or creating a safe environment for someone to live independently.”

Approximately 13,000 North Dakotans live with some type of disability resulting from a brain injury. Labeled as the “signature” injury of returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq, brain injuries are also caused by motor vehicle accidents, falls, sports-related injuries, strokes and assaults.

Brain injuries range from mild to severe and can affect movement, thinking, language, learning, vision, hearing, emotions, and behavior. Lee said each brain injury is very different, and one piece of equipment that works for one individual might not work for another individual.

“We first find out from an individual what specific task they want to accomplish like using a television remote. We then match an assistive device that meets that goal,” she said.

One individual benefiting from assistive technology is 17 year-old Hannah Anderson who experienced a traumatic brain injury over two years ago. Earlier this month, she began using a LiveScribe Pulse SmartPen from IPAT, and it has made a world of difference in her education.

“I’m so glad I started using the SmartPen in high school,” said Anderson. “By the time I go off to college this fall, I will be comfortable using it and prepared for every college lecture.”

The special pen is about the size and weight of a highlighter pen. It is equipped with an infrared camera and built-in microphone that captures writing and sound then synchronizes both for playback. The SmartPen records pen strokes on a special type of paper and stores the information in the pen’s internal memory which can hold up to 32,000 pages of text. By tapping on a particular word, the SmartPen recalls what was being said when the word was written down.

Hannah’s mother, Lisa Anderson, said she was amazed to see how many assistive devices there are available to help individuals like Hannah achieve success in the classroom.

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“Hannah will be able to go to college just like her peers. She will not need me or my husband, Duane, by her side all the time. She will be able to use assistive tools to become more independent in life, and achieve her future goals and dreams.”

The Andersons encourage others to contact IPAT or the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Division to find out what resources may be available to assist them.

In recognition of the importance of supporting people affected by brain injuries in their recovery and of working to prevent brain injuries, Governor John Hoeven has proclaimed March Brain Injury Awareness Month. His proclamation is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/proclamation-brain-injury-awareness-month.pdf.

Individuals interested in learning more about assistive technology should contact the Fargo IPAT office at 800-895-4728 or the Bismarck IPAT office at 888-540-4728 or go on-line to www.ndipat.org.

For more information about brain injury services and supports, contact the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division of the N.D. Department of Human Services at 701-328-8920.

Media Opportunity:

- Hannah and Lisa have consented to visit with journalists about how assistive technology is helping Hannah achieve her education goals.
 - **When:** Friday, March 26 – 2 p.m.
 - **Where:** IPAT office, **400 E. Broadway Ave. # 306**, which is located on the third floor of the Wells Fargo Bank in downtown Bismarck.
 - **Other resources:** Peggy Shireley, IPAT assistive technology counselor will be on hand.

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