ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

IT IS A LIFE-LONG TOOL
This is better, making a presentation in afternoon, not in early morning whereas I can barely operate my assistive technologies to drive and use the Morse code to access my laptop. Even though, I still need my espresso in the afternoon. I am glad and honored to be here today. I am the assistive technology specialist at Wise in Spokane, Washington. Matching people with adaptable software and devices has always been my passion. Over half of my life, I have been blessed with loving Parents who saw a spark within me that would not go out. The solution was and still is assistive technology for me and for millions of people with disabilities similar to me.
• The National Council on Disability reported pertaining to gratifying effects of assistive technology. In the study, they summarized:

• Almost three-quarters of school-age children were able to remain in a regular classroom, and 45 percent were able to reduce school-related services.

• In the employment section, of the 42 users of assistive technology who reported having paid jobs, 92 percent reported that the assistive technology enabled them to work faster or better, 83 percent indicated that they earned more money, 81 percent reported working more hours, and 67 percent reported that the equipment had enabled them to obtain employment. Fifteen percent indicated that the equipment enabled them to keep their jobs, 38 percent reported that the equipment allowed them to pursue advanced degrees, 23 percent reported taking a larger academic load, and 12 percent reported increasing training.
• I have an overwhelming passion to see everyone in United States with impairments to live to the fullest through high and low adaptive software and hardware. That is, enjoying their life, making life choices including in their personal life and their job or career. The government cannot just give families or individuals funding for special equipment or software, they need to support and to provide training especially on the higher technology devices throughout person’s life’s stages – childhood, middle adulthood and old age. Or, the devices will be a simply glorified clothes rack and cause frustrations at home and/or in employment environment
Since 1986, President and Congress passed a series of Assistive Technology laws to acknowledge the importance of having adaptive software and devices. It is not a privilege to have these changing electronic assistants, however, it is a right as American citizens. The disabled community through technologies has the same opportunity during elementary, middle, and high school in and out of the classrooms. The opportunity to rise in their knowledge pertaining to the world surrounding them and have their social life. Assistive technology has to be there. I did not have a laptop in my public education years and it was difficult. All that I had was a desktop computer and a headlight, because the technologies fell short of my needs and wants.
At least in the Spokane public schools, the transition out of the public educational system is most troublesome and scary into the adulthood life to parents. The parents of the transition students have no special equipment safety net. The parents run to their children’s case managers and/or their job coaches. The system needs to be more responsive and team up with the school districts to provide more smoother assistive technology transit from school to hopefully working world. Perhaps, a team of school staff and tech center personnel. The stakeholders would be in client-centered exploratory of upgrading the individual’s current technologies or purchasing the same adaptive equipment that the school provided. This team should ask the individual what is the perfect system and how would the client wish to operate the device. As school staff fade away, the individual must be reassured that her or his needs would be met including tech support and training.
• As the individual continues to develop in social and educational ways, his/her assistive technology has to advance more if their cognition has the capability. Also, when they enter the world of meaningful employment, their adaptive equipment and software may need some modifications. For example, a sale person has stock phrases that she or he might say such as “May I help you?” The question, “May I help you?” could be program into application as an abbreviation or a shortcut: “MHY”. The abbreviation can be expanded with the store name and their name – “I am William, may I help you? Costco has very good selections.” An employee may have difficulties in remembering the layout of Costco, therefore their iPad or a smartphone could have a map of the store with a search box. This app will be updated periodically. The tech team has to be responsive to these stages in order to obtain opportunities and advances.
• Assistive technology is redefining what is possible for children and adults with a wide range of disabilities. In the home, the classroom, the workplace, and the community, assistive technology is providing creative solutions that enable individuals with disabilities to be more independent, self-confident, productive, and integrated into the mainstream of society. Assistive technology includes adapted toys, computers, seating systems, powered mobility, augmentative communication devices, special switches, and thousands of commercially available or adapted solutions. These technology solutions improve an individual's ability to learn, compete, work, and interact with family and friends (Enders, 1990).
Let’s go out there and change lives! Thank you very much! This was where I started…