

# NEW FREEDOM

PENNSYLVANIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION (PATF) NEW LETTER



Marlee can invite friends to the movies and Mom can transport them in her new van.

## Persistence Helps Young Girl Acquire Assistive Technology and New Freedom

What is the secret to a healthy and happy life? "The healthiest thing for human beings, is to have control over their own environment," Judy Luckinbill says. Judy has worked hard to help her ten-year old daughter, Marlee, who has limited use of her hands and feet, obtain assistive technology that gives her more control of her environment.

Marlee uses several assistive devices, including a wheelchair, accessible van and a tract lift system, that have significantly enhanced her independence, and subsequently, her quality of life. The first most dramatic change came after Marlee received her power wheelchair. "I had to fight for that wheelchair," Judy says. "The insurance didn't want to pay for it because they did not think she could learn to use it. You have to have the skills to use the chair before they will approve one." But Marlee and Judy were determined.

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**Greetings from  
PATF President:  
Peter Kennedy**

Imagine a society in which every person has the assistive technology devices and services they need.

A society in which every person could accomplish basic tasks of daily living as independently as the latest technology allowed. Wheelchairs, ramps, stair glides, low-vision aids, hearing aids and other assistive technology would be considered a necessary staple for those who need them—not just for some who could afford them or who qualify for a specific grant or waiver.

This may seem like a lofty goal. But at PATF we believe it is a realistic and worthwhile goal. And we believe access to and resources for assistive technology will improve as we continue to build our program, think “outside the box” and not be limited by current standards.

Not too long ago most of us could not have imagined wheelchairs or computers controlled by head movements. A little further back in time, tract lifts, automatic door openers, or built-in vehicle ramps were non-existent, not just expensive or difficult to obtain. In this issue you will meet a young girl who operates her wheelchair and her computer through a head array. You will also learn about a woman with low-vision who uses “low-tech” assistive devices to read a computer screen, read a newspaper, and enjoy the opera.

It might surprise some to learn that there are many Pennsylvanians today who need hearing aids, but cannot afford

them. There are many who use wheelchairs but cannot leave their homes independently because they do not have a ramp in their home. Others cannot travel into the community for medical appointments or other “essential” errands because they do not have accessible transportation. Today, we do have assistive technology that can be life altering for many people with disabilities. But for some, access to that technology continues to present a major obstacle.

Our program continues to grow as more and more people learn about our great interest rate and repayment terms. In the last year and a half, PATF loans have assisted 127 people to make home modifications, purchase adapted vehicles, and buy scooters, hearing aids, computers and other low-vision devices.

PATF staff and Board members are creating a new outreach plan to effectively promote our program. We are particularly interested in getting the word out in the “harder to reach” areas of the Commonwealth. And we have grown our Funding Assistance Center (FAC) network by adding two centers, making the total 13.

Lastly, we have a new agreement with our lender, Sovereign Bank, to continue to offer an affordable, low-interest rate on loans this coming year. This new rate is 4% for the life of the loan.

If you have any suggestions as to how we can improve our service or how we might promote the loan program, please feel free to get in touch with me or any member of the PATF staff.

Enjoy your spring,  
Peter Kennedy



**Mom assists Marlee who will operate a tract lift system independently as she grows older.**

### **Young Girl Acquires New Freedom**

Continued from the front page.

They went to DuPont Hospital one summer as many days a week as their schedule permitted, so Marlee could practice using a power wheelchair. When those sessions ended, HMS school, where Marlee is still enrolled today, provided a power wheelchair and further instruction during the school day.

The staff at HMS school helped the Luckinbill family advocate to the insurance company, which ultimately approved the wheelchair. Marlee can now operate her wheelchair with a head array that also controls her computer and communication device. Judy watched her daughter evolve from a very passive child to a very independent and increasingly more confident and assertive child. "The people who worked with Marlee at DuPont have told us that Marlee's persistence has opened doors for other children they previously would not have considered for power wheelchairs." Marlee's parents continued to look for ways to give their

daughter more independence. But Judy notes there is a lot of expense involved in acquiring assistive technology, and the family had to prioritize and acquire one item at a time. Persistence, researching available funding resources, advocacy and PATF loans have proven to be very helpful.

Just as the wheelchair gave Marlee freedom, a new accessible van provides Marlee and her parents more independence and flexibility. Now Marlee can invite friends home from school with her, or take friends with her to the movies—friends who also use wheelchairs. The van can transport up to three wheelchairs, as well as a couple of additional passengers who use traditional seating.

Marlee, who agreed to be photographed modeling several of the assistive devices she now uses, smiles patiently as she waits for the photographer to adjust his equipment before she descends the ramp of her accessible van. She is delighted with her

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## Young Girl Acquires New Freedom

Continued from page 3.

van and eager to show it off to others. But you should also know that Marlee has struck a deal with her mother—dinner at Applebees and a new book, in exchange for her modeling work.

"I just wish that everyone who has a wheelchair could have this," Judy says, referring to her Ford Freestar (VMI). Some of Marlee's friends have no transportation, Judy explains. The accessible features in the new van include power doors on both sides, a light-weight in-floor ramp, and a lowered floor that allows access to any parking garage. "It's a fallacy that all vans will bottom out with a lowered floor," Judy says. "Any good dealer will take you for a test drive over speed bumps to demonstrate how your van will ride." Many of the new vans have corrected this problem. Her van, she emphasizes, rides beautifully. And persistence and research paid off. The Luckinbills paid \$7,000 less for the van than the next lowest bid.

"There are a number of safeguards. If one button doesn't work, there are three other buttons that will work to accomplish the same task." Moreover, it can be operated with relative ease. "It is effortless to open these doors. I have rheumatoid arthritis and I have no problem opening and closing these doors," Judy says.

Another type of assistive technology Marlee uses is a tract lift system. The tract system was needed for her bedroom because the space is too tight for her wheelchair to move freely, and is not large enough to accommodate a ramp. Looking to the future, the family would like to eventually extend the tract lift system from Marlee's bedroom into other rooms

of the house. As she grows older, Marlee could operate the system independently, gaining another level of independence.

Not all of the assistive technology Marlee uses is high-tech. Judy stresses that she looks for ways to enable Marlee to participate in and have control in activities she enjoys. Marlee's father has modified a small table in the kitchen that will accommodate Marlee's wheel chair and give her access to on/off switches for mixers and other baking appliances through an "Ablenet," powerlink switching system. "Marlee beams the whole day after she cooks something," Judy says, and Marlee's smile confirms this is indeed a special activity they share.



**Our new mini loan program will help finance low-tech and other important assistive technology, such as hearing aids, costing \$1,000 and under.**

# Telecommunications Device Distribution Program

Are you, or someone you know, unable to use standard telephone equipment? If so, you may be eligible for free equipment through the Pennsylvania Telecommunications Device Distribution Program (TDDP).

The goal of the TDDP is to provide individuals who have a disability with the technology that will help them access telecommunication services independently. Devices that are available through the TDDP include, but are not limited to: TTYs, voice carryover TTYs, amplifiers, hands-free speakerphones, large button speakerphones, TTYs with Braille, ring signalers, and light signalers.

To be eligible for this program, a person must have a disability that prevents them from using standard equipment, be a Pennsylvania resident who is at least 6 years old, have the ability to learn how to use the specialized equipment, have telephone

service, and have a gross yearly income of less than 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (less than \$19,140).<sup>1</sup> Please note that the income eligibility is based upon the applicant's income—not the family's!

If you would like to try out a piece of equipment, before making your purchase, you may be able to borrow the equipment from the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Library ("Lending Library"). The Lending Library is a free program available to all Pennsylvania residents. For more information, call toll-free 877-722-8536 (voice), 800-750-7428 (TTY).

For an application or for more information on the TDDP, you may contact Program Manager Robert Robinson at 1-800-762-4211 (voice) or by email at [roberrobin@state.pa.us](mailto:roberrobin@state.pa.us). TTY users can contact Mr. Robinson through the Relay Service by dialing 711.

<sup>1</sup> In 2005, 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (which is updated each year) for a family of one is listed as \$19,140 annually.

## Count Me In!

Yes, I want to support the good works of the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation. Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution.

\$200    \$100    \$50    \$25    Other \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make this gift in honor of or in memory of:

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When we receive your donation, we will send you an acknowledgement for tax purposes.

THANK YOU!

**Considering an  
Assistive  
Technology  
Purchase?**

**CURRENT  
INTEREST  
RATE**

**4.0%**

# From Low- to High-Tech and Low to High Cost: “Low-Vision Aids” Enhance Enjoyment and Ease of Everyday Activities

by Janice L. Knuth, MSW, LSW, AT Funding Advocate, Institute on Disabilities

I am a person who was born with low-vision, and I am an enthusiastic user of low-vision aids. My visual impairment can't be corrected by ordinary glasses or contact lenses, but low-vision aids can help me see better so I can do everyday activities. Like all assistive technology, low-vision aids run the gamut from low- to high-tech and from low to high cost. There are many devices and services available. The Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation can help make some of these items more affordable by providing low-interest loans to pay for them.

My low-vision is due to albinism, an inherited condition that causes decreased

pigmentation, white hair, fair and sensitive skin, sensitivity to bright light, and low-vision. Sunglasses and hats with big brims are a necessary part of my life. Sitting next to the chalk board, large-print versions of reading material, and adequate lighting help. But sometimes these simple adaptations are not enough, and I need more help.

## Magnifying Glasses

I used my first magnifying glass to help me read fractions in elementary school. Without the magnifying glass, I was lost. As I got older, I used a magnifying glass for more reading and other tasks. Now I keep

a large one on my desk at work and at home. I keep smaller ones in the kitchen to read food labels, in my living room to read TV listings, and in my bathroom to read medication labels. I also carry one in my purse to read price tags and other information materials. Magnifying glasses come in a wide variety of styles, powers (strengths), and prices—from \$7 to \$100.



**A CCTV is compact and portable to facilitate comfort and ease with leisurely activities such as reading the newspaper.**

## Reading Glasses and CCTVs

There are many other low-vision aids that will assist with reading. The simplest are microscopic lenses, which are high power reading glasses. Mine enable me to read even newspaper print.

Closed circuit televisions (known as CCTVs) provide the highest magnification and are made in a variety of styles. A closed circuit camera picks up the image of the text or other object being viewed and projects it on a screen. The size of the magnification can be adjusted. Also the contrast can be changed, i.e., black letters on a white background can be viewed as white letters on a black background, thereby reducing the glare. CCTVs also come in full color. CCTVs were originally the size of a regular television with a small camera and reading stand. Manufacturers are designing more and more compact styles as well as portable styles. CCTVs range in price from \$800 to \$4,000.

## Telescopes and Bioptics

One of the most common low-vision aids for viewing things at a distance is the hand-held telescope, sometimes called a monocular. Hand-held telescopes come in a wide variety of sizes, magnification powers and prices. They work best to quickly view a distant object, such as reading a sign or locating an object. Clip-on telescopes slip over the user's glasses. They work well for extended periods, such as watching TV, movies, or live stage performances.

I use a bioptic, which is a pair of glasses with telescopes mounted into the lenses. Since I see out of only one eye at a time, I have the telescope in the lens for my dominant eye. The bioptic gives me

**Bioptics are used to view things at a distance such as power point presentations—and they come in handy at the opera!**



almost normal vision and enables me to see things such as projected PowerPoint presentations, newsprint, and subtitles at the opera. There are many styles and manufacturers of these lenses. Prices range from \$100 up to \$2,000 plus the cost of related services.

## Computer Aids

Recent versions of Microsoft Windows have accessibility features that provide magnification and cursor enlargement. Information about them can be found on the Microsoft website, <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/training/default.aspx>. I use screen magnification programs, ZoomText at work and Bigshot at home. Both programs magnify information on the screen. Bigshot costs \$99 and is a very simple program. ZoomText also provides cursor enhancements and some additional features. It can also be purchased with a screen reader, which is good for individuals whose



**Jan magnifies images on her home computer screen with "Big Shot" screen magnification program that costs under \$100.**

## **Low-Vision Aids**

Continued from page 7.

vision is continuing to decrease and/or for those who want to be able to see and read sometimes and want the computer to read to them at other times. Without the screen reader, ZoomText costs \$395. With the screen reader, it costs \$595. (Of course, the cost of the computer is separate!) There are other screen magnification programs and other screen reading programs available.

## **Where to Get Low-Vision Aids**

The best place to start is a low-vision clinic, optometrist or ophthalmologist who specializes in low-vision. The low-vision practitioner can recommend specific aids based on your needs and goals. Low-vision clinics usually have a variety of aids on site to try, and their specialists can help you get the most out of the technology. It is important to try out and compare as

many aids as possible before choosing. CCTVs and other low-vision aids can be borrowed for trial use from Pennsylvania's Assistive Technology Lending Library <http://disabilities.temple.edu/atlend>.

Screen magnification and screen reading programs can also be downloaded from the Internet for brief free trials.

The American Foundation for the Blind maintains a directory of low-vision clinics. Call 1-800-AFB-LIND (232-5463) or visit [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org) for the list. Your local agency for the blind may have a low-vision clinic or can recommend one to you.

Your local Funding Assistance Center (FAC) can help you find low-vision clinics or practitioners, catalogs, and websites and help you access Pennsylvania's Assistive Technology Lending Library. For information about your local FAC, contact PATF at 888-744-1938.

## United Cerebral Palsy of Philadelphia and Vicinity Joins the PATF Network

The newest Funding Assistance Center (FAC) to join the PATF network is United Cerebral Palsy of Philadelphia and Vicinity (UCP). Founded by six parents fifty years ago, UCP now provides direct services to over 2,400 adults, children and families as well as information and referral support to over 4,000 area residents every year.

The mission of UCP is "to positively affect the quality of life for persons with cerebral palsy and other disabilities." This statement plays out in many different ways at the agency. In the role of an FAC, Joe Scullin, director of the Community Social Services Department, and Nashia Foreman, social worker, help people in the 5-county area of SE Pennsylvania find the necessary funding for assistive technology devices and services. Oftentimes a phone call or a home visit will lead to a discussion about assistive

technology (AT) and how AT can help a person get in or out of their home, roll into a shower, drive to a doctor's appointment or to a friend's house, use a computer, or play power wheelchair floor hockey! From these conversations, Joe and Nashia will help construct "funding packages" that may include money from public resources as well as a loan from PATF.

UCP has just completed a major renovation project to its Chestnut Hill facility. It's exciting to see the cheerful and bright classrooms for the children, the new accessible playground, the expanded adult program area, and the new reception space. There are also a lot of renovations that you don't see, like new wiring and more efficient heating and cooling systems. The "new" UCP is well positioned to serve the growing needs of the disability community.

Welcome UCP!

## CALLING FOR VOLUNTEERS

### **"Many Hands Make Light Work!"**

As our loan program grows, our mailings increase, our phones ring more, we develop new programs—that produce more mailings and more phone calls.... It's all very exciting and let's us know we are accomplishing our mission. But we could use some help!

If you live in or near the King of Prussia area and would like to volunteer a few hours a week or month, or work on special projects, we'd love to hear from you. Call Jamie at 888-744-1938 to discuss how you might lend your skills and interests to help put assistive technology into the hands of those who need it.





**Meet  
Jamie Kelly**

**Jamie Kelly has joined our staff as the new assistant director. Jamie will be working on**

**outreach activities, our new revolving loan program for loans under \$1,000, and with loan applications. Jamie has worked in the disability community for the past nine years in different capacities. Prior to coming to PATF, Jamie was the Clinical Programs Manager at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society/ Greater Delaware Valley Chapter in Philadelphia where she developed a care management program and managed the chapter's financial assistance program.**

**"One aspect of my work that I have really enjoyed is helping people achieve a greater level of independence. Assistive technology is still such an underused resource, and I really look forward to helping raise awareness about assistive technology, and most importantly, getting it into the hands of the people who need it."**

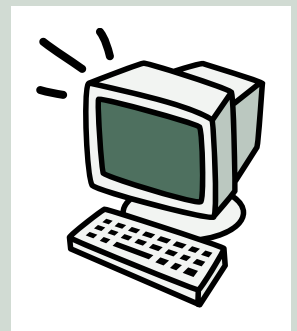
**We are delighted to have Jamie join us.**

**PATF Funding Assistance Centers Help Find Alternative State and Local Funding Options**

PATF has contracted with thirteen social service organizations throughout Pennsylvania to provide outreach and awareness of the PATF loan program, as well as other funding options for assistive technology. These organizations are referred to as PATF "Funding Assistance Centers" (FACs).

The FACs can answer questions about the loan program, provide PATF brochures, loan applications, newsletters and other PATF materials. FAC staff can also offer assistance with completing PATF loan applications. In the interest of making assistive technology more affordable, PATF supports the FACs' efforts to provide information about other regional and state-wide funding resources that may be used in conjunction with a PATF loan, or in place of a loan to purchase assistive technology. To find the FAC nearest to you, visit the PATF website at our new website address: [www.patf.us](http://www.patf.us).

**BOOKMARK OUR  
NEW WEB  
ADDRESS  
IN YOUR  
BROWSER:  
[www.patf.us](http://www.patf.us)**



## **Governor Proposes Increased Costs and Reduced Services for Elderly and People with Disabilities Who Receive Medicaid**

On June 30th, Governor Rendell will sign budget bills that could significantly impact the health care of people with disabilities, and older Pennsylvanians who receive medical assistance. The Governor's proposed budget, submitted on February 9, 2005, and now in the hands of the General Assembly, includes service caps, expanded and increased co-payments for services, restricted eligibility as well as requirements for some parents of children with disabilities to pay premiums.

According to "Health Law PA News," all of these changes could severely affect Medical Assistance recipients' ability to receive medically necessary care. The proposed budget includes limits on prescriptions, inpatient hospital physical health admissions, inpatient medical rehabilitation admissions, outpatient visits, Durable Medical Equipment and ambulance services. All adults (21 years and older) would have caps on services. The caps would be applied in the fee-for-service system and could be applied in the managed care system, at the option of the HMO. The Department of Public Welfare has indicated there will be an exceptions process for these services, but the exact form of the process is still very unclear.

The budget proposes capping medical equipment and supplies expenses at \$5,000 per year per consumer. As members of the disability community well know, \$5,000 per year, per person, would not cover basic necessities for many consumers. For example, a power wheelchair with necessary attachments costs much more than \$5,000.

If you would like to have a say in how this new budget is shaped, contact your local state representative to let him/her know how the proposed budget will affect you, or those close to you. You can find your PA representative by visiting [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us). Click on to "contact your legislators" in the upper left corner of the screen. Click on to "your PA representatives" on the next screen. You can search representatives from an alphabetized list, or simply plug in your zip code/county in the top left corner.

For more detailed information about the Governor's proposed budget and additional information as it becomes available, visit the Pennsylvania Health Law Project website: [www.phlp.org](http://www.phlp.org). (This article contains excerpts from "Health Law PA News")

[www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us)

[www.phlp.org](http://www.phlp.org)



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**NEW ADDRESS:** [www.patf.us](http://www.patf.us)

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The Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF) is a non-profit organization that provides financing opportunities to people with disabilities and older Pennsylvanians so they can buy the assistive technology devices and services they need. PATF offers cash loans with lower interest rates and longer repayment plans than any commercial bank offers. Individuals who do not qualify for a traditional bank loan may still qualify for a PATF loan by demonstrating an ability to repay the loan.

PATF's program is made possible, in part, by grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, an office within the United States Department of Education.

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**Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation**  
**1004 West 9th Avenue**  
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**King of Prussia, PA 19406**

**For Information & Loan Application**

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**[www.patf.us](http://www.patf.us)**