

Dale's Telemarketing

A Successful Partnership

By Leslie St. Andrew

Photos by Mark Portland



As part of his assistive technology evaluation, Dale received a new power wheelchair, which he operates via joystick.

More than 14 years ago, Dale Custer was injured in a diving accident that caused level C4-5 spinal damage, resulting in

Andrews Center in Johnstown, Pa., to determine employment opportunities. Services provided by HGA include vocational evaluation, individualized post-secondary education to provide career opportunities and independent life skills.

For the next few years, Dale worked in a variety of fields, including surveying nursing homes to make sure they met national standards. One morning, his personal care attendant arrived and showed Dale a toy computer she had purchased for her son. Dale tried it out and was amazed at how easily the computer responded to his commands. From that day on, he became interested in working with computers.

Dale began researching different career opportunities to determine what computer-related employment was available for people with quadriplegia. He contacted his vocational counselor at the Johnstown District Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to get information regarding computers and work opportunities. Recognizing that Dale would need more advanced assistive tech-

nology to reach his goal, his counselor contacted the Center for Assistive Rehabilitative Technology at HGA for an appointment.

CART is a comprehensive assistive technology program funded by the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. It was formed in June 1995 to fill a need for assistive technology services in the state. CART offers people with disabilities a consumer-driven atmosphere in which

they can explore and experiment with assistive technology devices. Its mission is to enhance the ability of people with severe disabilities to fulfill their life goals through the provision of assistive technology services.

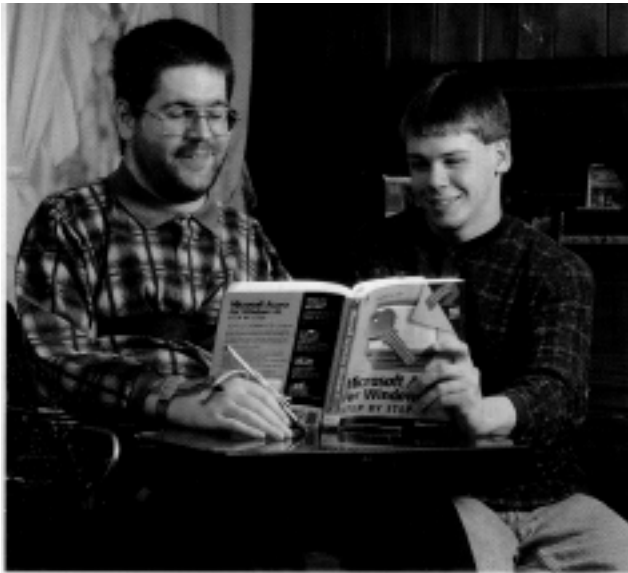
The CART team consists of a physiatrist, physical therapists, occupational therapists, rehab engineers, rehab technology specialists, speech pathologists, a computer access specialist, an environmental control specialist, and rehab and peer counselors. Together, they work with each client to provide a holistic and integrated approach to meeting the person's specific assistive technology needs.

Since it started, CART has provided services to nearly 500 clients throughout Pennsylvania. The assistive technology service-delivery process includes information gathering, screening, evaluation, equipment provision, training and follow-up.

Information-gathering involves reviewing the client's case and

contacting the client to gather general background information. This information is shared at a screening meeting attended by the CART team members, and the client is scheduled for an evaluation with the most appropriate CART team members based on services needed. A thorough report including referral information, background information, the evaluation process, recommendations and justifications, and an assistive technology equipment list are then prepared and presented to the client and his or her counselor. Equipment is then ordered and training begins.

Once the equipment arrives, a follow-up visit takes place to ensure that the equipment is functioning properly and that the client is satisfied with the service provided. Depending on the services provided, this follow-up takes place either at CART or at the client's home or office. The scope of the assistive technology service-delivery process varies depending on the amount of equipment ordered and the complexity of the case. If required, clients can stay in



Dale and his son Ben.

dormitories specially designed for people with disabilities on the Hiram G. Andrews Center campus.

Before he actually visited CART, Dale and his vocational counselor developed an individualized written rehab plan with specific goals, including assistive technology such as a computer and related interfacing technology. According to Dale, he found the process of putting together the components that would

best meet his needs very challenging because of the vast amount of technology available.

At CART, Dale used the Resource Lab to research vocational options related to computers. He eventually decided to pursue telemarketing.

Keeping Dale's ultimate goal in mind, the CART team began coordinating his vocational needs by providing a comprehensive assessment. Several assistive technology evaluations were recommended by the CART team including power mobility, computer access and environmental control. The challenge for meeting Dale's assistive technology requirements was to provide

an integrated solution to allow access to the environmental control unit and computer from his workstation and power chair. Since his office was constructed in his bedroom, an additional requirement was for the equipment to be accessible from his bed.

Dale does have some upper-body strength in his shoulders and arms, so his occupational therapist recommended an Invacare Arrow

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power chair controlled by a right-hand joystick. With some circuitry enhancements, this new wheelchair would permit environmental control unit access through his joystick controller.

The computer-access specialist recommended an IBM-compatible, 486 Pentiumprocessor computer system with fax capabilities, a printer, and Windows-operating software. Dale also needed a program that would respond to voice commands (he decided on DragonDictate); a voice-activated Tele-recorder to intercept incoming calls, place calls, record conversations for future referrals and take messages when he was not available; and a microphone. This equipment provides Dale with the ability to access the telephone using his computer software.

Dale's bedroom was rather large (about 13 by 20 feet). A desk and bench built by his father fit comfortably against the wall and allowed

more than enough room for Dale to move around safely in his power wheelchair. To accommodate his vocational needs, the equipment was integrated into this area.

The power wheelchair permitted access to his Imperium environmental control unit through his joystick controller. When Dale was in bed, he accessed his ECU through dual switches. At his workstation, the ECU was activated either through his wheelchair's joystick control or voice input through his computer system and an IQ 1000 Windows interface.

The computer-access evaluation resulted in a recommendation for input through DragonDictate voice-input software. Dale could access the computer at his workstation and while in bed through a second monitor and microphone system. The computer system permitted operation of his business at home through online capabilities and his Tele-recorder.

The ECU is used to activate the telephone and computer system. It also can open or close a sliding glass door leading to an outside ramp, operate climate controls (e.g., fans and the heating system), open and close drapes, and control interior and exterior lighting.

After receiving his power chair, controllers and computer system, the CART team visited Dale and provided an overview of the equipment so he would feel comfortable operating them independently.

The entire assistive technology recommendation and selection process has taken more than a year. Most of the equipment worked well early on, but several voice-activated computer programs were evaluated before finding the one most compatible with his computer equipment. It helped that Dale was extremely determined and committed to achieving his goal. He assisted the CART team throughout the process by asking and answering questions, locating problem areas, and not being afraid to make suggestions.

Dale is now becoming familiar with the recommended equipment and is close to realizing his goal of being a home-based telemarketer.

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