



NYSILC Surveyed Ballot Marking Device (BMD) Testers at Assembly Disability Awareness Day

By Brad Williams

NYSILC surveyed testers of the Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) on display at Assembly Disability Awareness Day on May 12, 2008 at the Legislative Office Building. The Sequoia Dominion Image Cast and ES&S AutoMark were the vendors on hand with their voting machines for individuals to test. Albany County had a display for people to check out their system of choice . the Premier AutoMark. It should be noted that the LibertyMark BMD, which was selected by Hamilton County and tested by NYSILC in a focus group setting, has withdrawn from consideration.

Overall, sixteen testers completed surveys on the BMDs. It was felt that there were not enough surveys completed on the Premier AutoMark BMD (two) and ES&S AutoMark BMD (four) to compile results from them. However, ten individuals did examine the Sequoia Dominion ImageCast BMD,



which will provide sufficient data and allow comparison to the focus group testing in February 2008.

80% were people with disabilities. They identified the following disability types: physical (2), sensory (2), cognitive (1), mental health (1), multiple (2), and none (2). Also, 100% were registered to vote, 100% were frequent voters, and 80% were familiar with accessible voting technology.

The testers used all the different types of interfaces on the machine with the exception of the sip and puff device. In terms of overall performance, on a scale from 0-10, the voting machine achieved a range score of 3 to 8.5 and an average score of 6.8.

The range scores improved by 0.5 at each end of the scale and the average score increased by 0.44.

The voting function time had a range of 8-13 minutes and an average time of 10 minutes. The average voting time improved by 8 minutes.

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The ballot mark function time had a range of 0.25-1.5 minutes and an average time of 1 minute. The average ballot print time improved by 1 minute. The verify ballot function time was not frequently tested and therefore could not be compared. When the testers were asked if they were able to vote privately and independently, they replied: 60% Yes, +20% No, +and 20% Not Sure. + The vast majority of those who answered no or not sure said it was due to the lack of privacy during the testing and people being able to observe the voting process.

Vendors for Sequoia Dominion noted that they have made several improvements to their system that was recommended to them by advocates at the focus group testing in February 2008 at NYSILC ♦

Self-Directed Service Options from OMRDD

By Michael Orzel (Program Operations Specialist I, OMRDD)

The New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) offers a relatively new option for the people we serve. This option, called Consolidated Supports and Services (CSS), is a self directed service option that gives more responsibility to the participant in designing the services they want in order to live the life they want. To participate in this service option, the individual must have certain items in place to enter into the CSS program. A person must have a Circle of Support (COS) that will help guide them through decisions about options that they want. A COS may consist of very few members, or the participant can have a COS that encompasses a larger number of individuals that are his/her friends, colleagues, etc. These people get together regularly to discuss issues that the participant identifies as areas that he/she wants to discuss. The members of the COS will give input as to what they think may be a possible solution for the individual.

I think of it as talking over coffee with the people that you choose to offer you ideas. It is the role of the Start Up Broker (SUB) to work with the individual to locate sources of support that he/she identified with their COS. These services may or may not be provided through OMRDD. The services will be individualized because during each step of the process, both the participant and the COS approve the service.

Then the Fiscal Employer Agent (FEA) will be chosen. It is the job of the FEA to be the employer of record, to pay for services, to keep records, pay taxes and benefits, and to maintain necessary documentation. Although the individual that is receiving CSS may hire people and choose services, they then turn to the FEA for support and assistance in this area.

CSS allows people to design services that support them to do what they want to do. The program provides more choice and control over services for participants. As of April 4, 2008, there were 184 people in New York State participating in CSS, and another 215 people that were working with their Start-Up Broker. So, it is evident that if a person who has a developmental disability (no matter how severe) wants more control over their services, CSS is a possibility for them.

If an individual is interested in CSS, they should explore the program through their Service Coordinator and their local Developmental Disabilities Service Organization (DDSO). If they do not have a COS at present and are interested in CSS, assistance in forming their own COS is available ♦

THE PROS AND CONS OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

By Todd E. Eggert (Child & Family Services Specialist, Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped)

When I was asked to author this article and it was suggested that assistive technology advances to benefit blind or visually impaired people might be of particular interest to readers, I enthusiastically agreed to do so. After all, hadn't I always thought that if my abilities equaled my interests in this area, my career would have been quite different? Then reality hit: Assistive technology is such a huge and varied topic!

It has often been said that the biggest handicap for people with visual impairments is access to printed information, whether it is your monthly bills, letters, or junkmail that clutters up your mailbox daily, an important memo at work, or your informational placards that abound in hotel rooms, shopping mall kiosks, or your neighborhood supermarket. And that's not even considering the latest novel by your favorite author, the phone book, or your hometown newspaper. There are, of course, various public services, computer applications, and other work-arounds that mitigate the lack of access to the printed word, but even the best of these typically require additional time, a learning curve, or the assistance of a sighted person, in order to achieve the maximum benefit. Throughout the 30 years of my adult working life, I have encountered and used several different items of assistive technology that have truly made both a qualitative and a quantitative difference in my ability to perform my job responsibilities. These items range from a portable reading machine to screen reading software designed specifically for visually impaired computer users to have access to the contents of their computer screens. It also includes scanners and optical character reading (OCR), software that allows a blind individual to access the contents of a printed page by performing up to a full page scan and converting it into speech and/or Braille.

And the scanning technology doesn't stop there; there are now devices that are quite portable, one of which functions on a camera phone platform that enables the user to read just about anything, anywhere. Imagine finding some forgotten paper money in your pocket and being able to decide totally independently and accurately whether it will be hot dogs or steak on the grill this weekend!

Another line of assistive technology that has been a cornerstone for me is the Personal Data Assistants (PDAs) that permit speech and/or Braille access to electronic media, including e-mail and the Internet. As a Braille user since early grade school, I have valued Braille access above all else. If the truth be known, though, I defer to speech when I've got a lot to do in a relatively precise time frame, just because it's faster.

So what are the downsides to assistive technology for blind and visually impaired users? As with a lot of assistive technology in general, cost is a huge factor. Some of the devices I use cost nearly \$6,000. If it weren't for Vocational and Education Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH), I daresay even more people with disabilities would be unemployed than is presently the case ♦

Disability Vote Alliance (DVA) Holds Annual Summit in Arizona

By Brad Williams

Over fifty voting access rights advocates from across the country convened as members of the National Disability Vote Alliance (DVA) outside of Phoenix, Arizona in the last week of April, 2008. It included Brad Williams of NYSILC and Helen Benlisa of the Catskill Center for Independence and Upstate HAVA Project.

Sponsored in large part by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), the DVA holds an annual summit to conduct necessary business, support state voter education and %Get Out The Vote+(GOTV) projects for people with disabilities. Members shared updates about their projects and discussed strategies for common problem areas.

Arnie Graf was the primary speaker at the summit. Graf, a representative of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), gave a condensed version of his training in community organizing. The IAF was founded by the highly acclaimed community organizer Saul Alinsky. Since New York State will eventually have its voting access issues addressed

Over the next one to two years, it will be ready to activate a GOTV project for people with disabilities. AAPD conducted a nationwide study in 2000 that identified 3.3 million voting-aged people with disabilities in New York State. The goal of such a project would be to build a disability vote coalition that actively registers and encourages people with disabilities to vote regularly as a bloc of several thousand (if not a hundred thousand or more) connected to a database.

These projects have been established in Missouri, Tennessee, Arizona, and Rhode Island. It is time for New York to fully enfranchise the disability population ♦

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