

**Tools For Life Advisory Council Meeting**  
**May 18, 2004**  
**1700 Century Circle Atlanta, GA**

**Attendees:** Judy Bearden, Norris Curtis, Helen Hill, Carolyn McGonagill, Naomi Walker, John Weber, Tom Bauer, Joy Kniskern, Carolyn Phillips, Joanne Willis, Liz Persaud, Beth Tumlin, Allan Goldman, Amy Childre, Connie Freier, Maya Mattison  
**Notetaker:** Maya Mattison

**11:00 a.m.    Opened meeting, Roll call**

**Tech Act: Information, changes, and updates.**

A review of the current projects covered under the Georgia Tech Act was given by Joy Kniskern. These projects include Tools For Life, the Assistive Work Technology unit, (AWT), the Assistive Technology Resource Centers (ATRCs), and the ReBoot computer and cell-phone recycling program. Emails with a PDF of the current AT Act to follow.

Changes to the Tech Act from 2002-2004 include:

The Act was renamed “*Improving Access to Assistive Technology for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004*”, reflecting the changes in aims and broadening of mission that have been ongoing.

Securing a Federal partnership with programs under the AT act has resulted in increasing and substantial progress providing services. The rewriting of the AT Act now includes emphasis on increasing access to Assistive Technology Devices, and advocacy as well as other aims. There is more emphasis placed on making assistive technology more attainable for disabled individuals.

**Tech-Act requirements vs. discretionary activities:**

In comparison with other state programs related to Assistive Technology, TFL is currently starting, meeting, or exceeding objectives and goals. Five activities were listed, the first two of which are required by the law, the rest of which are considered discretionary.

Of the five areas:

- 1) (*Required*) *Loan servicing grants and programs* to support more activities with the goal of increasing access to assistive technology. To fulfill this requirement, TFL is starting a new program, Credit-Able (more details later). Title I and III projects will be required to work together in partnerships to achieve these goals and will receive interrelated funding, rather than from separate sources as has occurred in the past.
- 2) (*Required*) *Device loan programs* - short-term loans in compliance with the ADA, Continuing Education Act, and Rehabilitation Act. TFL, through the ATRCs, has been meeting this objective for a long time, particularly since at the ATRCs there is an assistive technology lending library, allowing clients to test a number of AT devices before acquiring one

- 3) (Discretionary) *Equipment recycling program*. This is currently accomplished through the ReBoot computer recycling program, and the E-trade and G\*Trade initiatives.
- 4) (Discretionary) *Device Demonstration*. At several recent conferences, TFL staff have presented and demonstrated AT equipment. Best accomplished in partnership with the ATRCs and their lending libraries.
- 5) (Discretionary) *State leadership activities: a) increasing public awareness, b) technical assistance and training, c) outreach*.

TFL is succeeding at all of these, through venues such as the Power Up for the Future conference scheduled in Oct. 2004, staff who are able to provide technical assistance and training include both people in the AWT unit and TFL. Outreach - attending various conferences around the state and sharing information about the TFL program.

There has been a change towards a “train the trainer” ideal that is now not only allowable but encouraged so that the client AND members of client’s team will become more knowledgeable about AT and disabilities. There is an additional focus on assisting underrepresented segments of the population, increasing thanks to the efforts of Jan Cribbs, Wendy Paran, and others establishing councils for specific disabilities (blindness/low-vision)

Transition services are currently underfunded. The good news is that each state will not receive *less* than receiving currently. Georgia was in the top 10 of states with disabled population previously but is somewhat lower now with the way disabled population is counted.

### **Proposed new Tech Act:**

The way section 8 of the new Tech Act is worded *may* discriminate against states’ projects. Unless concerns are expressed sufficiently, the bill will remain as it is now, and the money from state cuts, if there is extra, will be given to PMAs, not go back to the states.

#### *In the Protection and Advocacy section of the new Act:*

Not less than 50,000 given to Native Americans of the western tribes.  
Protection-Advocacy agencies and the AT Act programs need to collaborate.  
Quarterly updates on activities listed in section C are required to be sent to lead agency.  
What happens to the money: if PNA is a positive balance, the excess is sent to other states.

Details of NIDRR data on financial/loan assistance programs for purchase of assistive technology devices, as well as analysis of individuals benefiting from AT in higher education are to be sent in quarterly reports.

There will be no state match presently - in order to earn state funds, the need for state support must be documented.

The question of AT funding coming from the lottery will be looked into, currently only Pre-K and K clients, can be funded this way in addition to the Hope scholarship.

**There is a time limit of 5 years on funding for Assistive Technology as defined in the revised 2004 Act.**

Tech-Able will be acting in an advisory capacity for the Credit-Able program in accordance with the NIDRR requirements.

Application for DD council grant is due in June.

**\*Information on Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)**

Recently there was a meeting with two representatives from United Way Atlanta to discuss IDAs - what they are, the basic requirements and process of setting up IDAs, how to maintain an IDA, and other basic information, so that the idea of developing IDA's for the specific purchase of assistive technology devices might be pursuable at some time in the future. The advisory group Ga. IDA's has said that the bill relating to IDAs was dropped 3 weeks before the end of session. 501c3s need to get on the eligibility list. Information would be sent out to consumers afterward, and there is also a possibility of tax deductions for the amount donated to an IDA.

**Title III Grant and Credit-Able program:** The Credit-Able Alternative Financing Program is a new program currently in development by TFL, which with a grant from the National Credit Union Foundation and the Ga. Credit Union foundation, as well as partnerships with several local credit unions (Gwinnett Federal, Maaco, and three others) will be able to provide loans for purchase of assistive technology. Credit-Able is made possible by a Title 3 grant and is being supervised by Tech-Able. Additional goals of the program include financial management classes, financial literacy, and other services as needed. Currently the tentative rollout date for Credit Able is in mid- to late- July. The annual report will be made in August.

**Tools For Life grant initiatives**

**-ATRCs and ReBoot:** are involved in delivery of services as per new Act. There has been major growth in the Assistive Technology field lately and also in the Assistive Technology Practitioner (ATP) area. Outcomes are strong. Six of the latest Voc Rehab referrals have new jobs. There has been an increase in institution-to-home transitions. There needs to be more funding support for the ATRCs, the funds need to be more widely dispersed to help w/ the increasing number of clients.

While there have been some problems with reimbursement, those may be field (counselor) based.

The partnership between ATRCs and ReBoot has increased outreach efforts and will continue to increase them. Regional committees are also encouraged to increase outreach efforts.

**-PUFF 2004:** The Power Up For The Future conference will be held in Augusta at the Radisson Riverfront Hotel October 27-29. Alvin Law is the current keynote speaker, and will be focusing on transition, assistive technology as well as sharing his own personal experiences. Currently in negotiations with the producers of “Freedom Machines”, a PBS documentary on assistive technology and disabilities, scheduled to air in October, to hopefully show the documentary at the PUFF conference and have some cast and crew members attend and share their experiences.

Regional teams focused on transition issues will have an afternoon session scheduled specifically for a transition workshop.

**Website updates:** Currently, the TFL website is receiving approximately 14,000 hits per month, mostly for information gathering. A calendar focusing on assistive-technology related conferences and events, both nationally and internationally, is in the process of being added to the site. In the near future will be a section on the ATRCs Tech Library, which will contain information about which ATRC has access to particular devices, and links to vendors. Also on the website is information on the University of Miami’s Tech ABC’s course. There are scholarships available, and applications will be accepted through June 30<sup>th</sup>. The goal is to enable 10 people to take the course through scholarships from Georgia.

#### **AT Updates:**

**GAO AT Consortium:** Current projects include Telecommunication Equal Distribution, and training speech-language pathologists with augmentative communication devices in a pilot program for nursing homes. The goal of the pilot program is to train SLPs in the nursing homes to evaluate patients and train them in the use of augmentative communication devices and/or environmental controls. Goal is to obtain equal ATRC-type loan program through the vendors. Currently the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund, Georgia University Speech Pathology School, Brenau University’s Occupational Therapy program, and GAO are involved in the partnership. Currently those involved are examining funding issues. The anticipated start date for the program is October.

**Unlock the Waiting List:** Currently there are 10 waivers for DOL, 5 waivers for physical disabilities. DHR wants information to share at the Atlanta meeting which is June 16<sup>th</sup>. The short-term waiting list has been broadened for people needing services within 6 months.

**ATRC & ReBoot Consortium:** Currently working on presenting the funding issue to the Atlanta Council on Aging. The AcoA has 3 aging and 2 budget priorities, and is not receptive to supporting financially, but a \$20K restoration to the budget will increase their budget up to the original \$200K originally present, and some of that money may be earmarked for special projects.

The E-text grant meeting is scheduled in June.

The consortium needs early support for upcoming issues.

### **Advisory Council**

**Board nominees:** Please send nominations via e-mail to Carolyn Phillips. There is a need for more South Ga. nominations.

Re-evaluation of approach: should there be a more strategic approach to this process?

Need nominees with experience in fund-raising and/or grants

### **Long-Range Planning:**

Suggestion was made to plan a retreat for the TFL advisory council members to allow for detailed long-range planning as well as some fun activities to promote group cohesion.

Suggested dates for this retreat, at present, are 12/2-12/3

**Meeting dates:** The majority of the meeting dates for '05 meetings will be decided after the October conference. The next meeting will be 8/31/04 from 11-2 at the TFL state office. November 17<sup>th</sup> was suggested as the date for the follow-up meeting after the PUFF conference, with possible dates for a retreat 12/2 and 12/3.

**2:00 pm Meeting adjourned.**