

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ARIZONA TECHNOLOGY ACCESS PROGRAM

In 1988, Congress passed the Technology Related Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act. Known informally as the “Tech Act,” the purpose of the legislation was to help the states and territories increase the availability of, funding for, access to, provision of, and training about assistive technology devices and services. Each state had to submit an application to receive funding under the Tech Act. Arizona’s initial applications were not accepted. However, in 1994, Arizona DES/RSA approached Dr. Richard Carroll, IHD’s Executive Director to write and submit the Arizona grant proposal. This submission was successful and NAU-IHD was designated as the lead agency, by then Governor, Fife Symington.



The program was based in Tucson for the first several years. Much time and effort was spent in developing program materials, outreach strategies and gaining stakeholder input about Arizona’s unmet assistive technology needs. There were some initial rough patches as stakeholders had conflicting opinions as to how to address these needs. Dr. Dan Davidson took over as Project Director in 1997 and the program moved north to the NAU campus in Flagstaff. Under his leadership AzTAP was able to transition forward with consensus and support from the major stakeholders. Notable accomplishments during this time period included the establishment of four contracted Assistive Technology Regional Resource Centers and advocacy for the passage of AT- friendly state statutes including an AT Lemon Law and Alternative Methods of Access to Electronic or Information Technology.

When Dr. Davidson resigned in 1999 to take another position at NAU, Jill Pleasant became the director and the project relocated to Phoenix. Now AzTAP was at the center of the state’s population base and in closer proximity to state agencies. This enhanced AzTAP’s access and visibility which was beneficial to its systems change activities. Also, during this time period AzTAP received additional private and federal funding to establish Arizona Loan\$ for Technology (AzLAT) and SEED Loan\$ as its alternative financing programs. The contracts for the Regional Resource Centers remained in place as did the contract with the Arizona Center for Disability Law in support of their AT-related advocacy efforts.

As initially drafted, the Tech Act was set to sunset (end) 10 years after it was enacted with the assumption that state budgets would provide continued funding to carry out the work. However in most states, including Arizona, this did not happen. Recognizing this and the need for continued support of the existing programs, Congress reauthorized the Act in 1998 without a sunset provision renaming it the Assistive Technology Act. In 2004 the AT Act was again reauthorized, but the amended statute shifted the program focus away from systems change activities. Programs were now responsible for allocating a higher percentage of their resources to four “state level” activities: device loans, device demonstrations, AT reuse activities and alternative financing programs. A smaller share of the resources would go to “state leadership” activities including public awareness, information and assistance, training and interagency collaboration. The AT Act now emphasized providing statewide services that would directly improve the ability of persons with disabilities to learn about and obtain assistive technology.

In response, AzTAP restructured its service delivery approach and adopted a model of mainly centralized service provision through its own staff instead of contractors. A model that would be more cost efficient, effective and allow for greater consistency and control over services. AzTAP hired its own credentialed assistive technology specialists, increased its collaboration with the IHD-AT Center on the Flagstaff campus, purchased and continually updates a large inventory of AT-related equipment and has developed well organized processes and procedures for its statewide AT loan and demonstration activities. It was during this time that AzTAP entered into contracts with the Arizona Department of Education to develop and manage the Short Term AT Loan Library for public schools and with the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide Telecommunication Equipment demonstrations.

To implement AT Reuse services, AzTAP opted to establish an online AT Exchange site where individuals can post, search for and purchase pre-owned AT less expensively. A more recent enhancement was the creation of the AT-DME



Coalition to identify other organizations throughout Arizona that loan or donate equipment. Our low interest financial loan programs – AZLAT and SEED Loans have grown and enable individuals with disabilities to purchase technology that might otherwise be beyond their financial reach.

Throughout AzTAP's 20 year history, staff has provided numerous trainings, conducted technical assistance and collaborated with many other organizations to promote more assistive technology friendly practices, while reaching out to diverse populations across the state to build assistive technology awareness and knowledge.

During the past two years, AzTAP has incorporated additional technology in the way it delivers information and services. A complete redesign of the website resulted in a dynamic and interactive framework for providing information to and assistance requests from consumers and service providers. Thanks to support from IHD, we now use AdobeConnect as our platform to deliver webinars. This makes our training efforts far more accessible to persons who are outside of Maricopa County. We transitioned to an E-Newsletter format (although a print version is still produced). We are regularly using social media to inform stakeholders about our program and to share newsworthy AT information. All of our annual conference materials are electronically available on the website and via a mobile app. In response to the trend towards mobile devices, AzTAP has vastly expanded our Apps inventories and like our other AT items, Apps loaded onto our tablet devices are also available for short term loans and demonstrations. Scan our QR code into your smart phone, iPad or Android device and learn more about AzTAP.

