

Legislators Learn about Technology Projects for People with Disabilities

“Technology is part of our lives, everywhere we go,” Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) Executive Director Roger Webb recently told legislators. “We are finding that many of our grantees are employing and deploying technology in new and unexpected ways.” For people with disabilities, this can be specialized assistive technology products or the same products used by other people, such as smart phones and software applications, global positioning systems that enable some people with cognitive disabilities to independently move around their neighborhood or city, computers and social networking tools.



Webb was invited to talk to the Texas House of Representatives Committee on Technology on March 30, along with other speakers from a TCDD employment project in the Rio Grande Valley. Project HIRE, Helping Individuals Reach Employment, will assist 50 persons with developmental disabilities in Hidalgo County who are between the ages of 18 and 25 to attend South Texas College and find jobs.

TCDD awarded the five-year project to Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) this year, and the first 12 participants have been selected. The students will receive a laptop and other assistive technology, intensive summer training including self-determination and advocacy, and support by a team of people, including individual business mentors and educational coaches to help them succeed higher education, as well as job training and employment.

“This is a wonderful project,” said Rep. Aaron Peña, chair of the technology committee. “It is doing great things with technology that will assist people with disabilities in preparing for and obtaining careers in the mainstream.”

TCDD is also funding two other five-year projects that started this month, which will develop new technology to increase employment of people with disabilities. These projects, awarded to Educational Programs Inspiring Communities (EPIC) and Strategic Education Solutions (SES), will both be pilot tested in Houston. EPIC will create an interactive mobile application for use in inventory, requisitions, shipping and receiving, and similar jobs. SES will develop a virtual job coach application containing lessons on job search, applying for work and employment.

“As part of this effort, TCDD will support organizations and businesses to explore how collaboration between technology companies and people who have developmental disabilities might further increase the level of creativity involved in the design and marketing of technology,” Webb explained in written testimony. “Additionally, designers may find that collaboration with people who have disabilities enables them to create technology that is more functional for and appeals to a wider range of people. For example ... the field of robotics holds great potential for helping people with significant disabilities live much more independently with fewer paid caregivers in their lives.”

NEWS RELEASE: MEDIA KICK-OFF EVENT (April 3, 2012)

DRS Project HIRE Grant awarded to the Dept. of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services *50 Job Seekers in Hidalgo Co. with Developmental Disabilities to Benefit*

McAllen – The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS), will host a media event this Tuesday, April 3, 2012, at 8:55am at the McAllen Chamber of Commerce to announce their grant award of \$225,000 a year over five years, from the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD). At this event, DARS will recognize and present elected officials, along with key community partners, with a certificate of appreciation for their assistance in making this grant possible.

Confirmed to attend include: State Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr.; State Rep. Aaron Peña; Dr. Shirley Reed, STC President; Dr. Robert Nelsen, UTPA President; Jim Hanophy, DRS Asst. Commissioner; and Debra Wanser, DARS Commissioner. Also in attendance will be several DRS Project HIRE participants.



This grant will fund DRS Project HIRE – Helping Individuals Reach Employment. DRS Project HIRE is an innovative program that will assist 50 individuals with developmental disabilities in Hidalgo County who are 18-25

years old to attend South Texas College and secure employment.

DRS Project HIRE will bring together a community of partners, striving towards the same goal: to serve local students with disabilities. These partners include: The University of Texas Pan American (UTPA), South Texas College (STC), Workforce Solutions, Access Granted Technology Services, Communication Access Ability Group of South Texas, DARS Division for Blind Services, and a 12-member Project Advisory Committee from the local disability, business, and education community.

Coverage of the Event Included

YouTube videos

- Workforce Solutions
- DARS

Twitter

- McAllen ISD
- Rep. Peña
- Rep. Guillen

Newspapers

- Texas Border Business
- My Harlingen News
- UTPA

Other

- Action 4 News (CBS affiliate, Rio Grande Valley)
- Rep. Peña's Blog