

# Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

## Assistive technology devices improve seniors' quality of life

By Daniel Casciato  
For Pittsburgh Senior News

Technology has dramatically changed our lives by making us more productive and efficient. It also has made our lives easier and more comfortable. For seniors with disabilities, assistive technology can help restore their quality of life.

According to the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living (TRCIL), assistive technology devices and services enable some seniors with disabilities to have greater control of their own lives and to participate in and contribute more fully to activities at home and work, and in their communities.

Many of these devices are designed for home use, as well as in hospitals, rehabilitation facilities and nursing homes. These technologies are helping seniors to keep moving on their own, and they are only limited by what they can and will use.

"The only real limits on assistive technologies is literally what people will use because if there is an instance of somebody wanting to perform a task, there's almost always some way of figuring out how to do it," said Thom Gressman, assistive technology specialist for TRCIL.

These items can range from low-tech to high-tech. The low-tech items include shower seats or tub stools, grab bars for the bathtub or shower, raised toilet seats, bedside commode, reachers, door levers, dressing aids, extended shoe horns and adaptive eating utensils.



Shower grab bars

The higher-end devices can be as simple as an amplified phone. "For somebody who has a little trouble hearing over the telephone, you can amplify the incoming voice about 60 decibels, which is pretty loud," said Thom.

Voice and hearing carryover phones are also available. Voice carryovers will assist someone who has lost their hearing later in life and needs help with hearing what another person is saying. "In that case, the person will go through a relay service," Thom explained. "It's like someone using a TTY service. When the other person talks, someone will type on a TTY and it will appear on a screen on the phone of the person who is deaf or hard of hearing."

Hearing carryover works the opposite way. For those who can't speak, they'll type on the TTY device and the message will be translated back to the other person.

There are also different types of magnification systems for someone who has visual disability - everything from simple magnifying glasses to a device



Adaptive eating utensils



Bathtub grab bars

resembling a closed circuit television (but about the size of a large paperback book) that enables you to read the product labels in a grocery store or your medicine bottles. There are also more sophisticated technologies, especially those found in hearing aids. Today's hearing aids differ significantly from their analog predecessors because they now have a digital application that allows a person who is hard of hearing to hear considerably better than before.

Of course, such devices are expensive. Fortunately, there is the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF), a statewide program that provides low-interest loans to seniors who need funding assistance for assistive technologies. People of

all income levels may apply for a loan.

According to Thom, for items costing \$100 to \$1,000, a zero-percent loan is available with the possibility of getting half of that as a grant. "So, potentially you can borrow \$1,000 and only pay back \$500 at zero percent," said Thom.

For items costing \$1,000 to \$65,000, a four-percent interest loan is available to those who qualify.

Since PATF began, more than 680 loans totaling approximately \$12 million have been made to Pennsylvanians for the purchase of adapted vehicles, ramps, roll-in showers, hearing aids, CCTVs, seat lift chairs, computers and other devices. Continuing advances in assistive technologies will revolutionize how seniors experience the aging process. Most importantly, by improving their quality of life, they make it possible for seniors to remain independent in the comfort of their homes and communities.

For more information on assistive technologies, contact Three Rivers Center for Independent Living at 1 (800) 633-4588. *PSN*

### In this ACAA issue...

Allegheny County offers various senior housing options	16
Onorato, Logan provide funding for Monroeville Senior Center expansion	17
Day of Learning and Appreciation	18
Menu	18