ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) USE IN AN AT LOAN PROGRAM IN MAINE

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INTRODUCTION

Research shows that people do not receive the assistive technology (AT) items that they need because many health care providers are unaware that it exists or do not feel competent in the area of AT provision" (NCD, 2004). The Technical Exploration Center (TEC) in Bangor, Maine is an assistive technology loan program that provides Maine's citizens with an opportunity to "examine technology items that may be beneficial in improving their lives, allows people to borrow items for short term use, receive training in the use of assistive devices, receive assistance with understanding of these items and participate in educational training regarding AT services (TEC, 2010). While TEC has been in existence for over 10 years, a systematic review of what equipment is being demonstrated and loaned has never been carried out. This research project was initiated to begin that process.

PURPOSE

The purpose of our research was; (1) to identify which of TEC's over 2000 items were most frequently used and which AT categories these items belonged to; (2) to examine what percentage of items were being used in comparison to the total number of items in the inventory;(3) to complete a thorough analysis of one category to identify utilization trends and (4) to provide recommendations to improve utilization of inventory items at TEC.

METHODS

This study used the Technical Exploration Center's Inventory Database to analyze the usage of items available in the inventory. Records from January 2009 to December 2009 were used to identify the number of items used by category. From the records provided, the percentage of items used in each category as well as over all percentage was determined. An in-depth analysis of one category was conducted to determine how many items were used a certain amount of times.

RESULTS

From the study, twenty-one categories of assistive technology devices were identified. The number of items in each category varied. The categories are titled according to the purpose that it serves. From the records provided from 2009, the percentage of items used in each category was determined.

Abbreviation	Name	# of Items	Used 2009	% Used
APE	Adaptive Physical Education Equipment	5	2	40
COG	Cognition	22	7	32
TEC	TEC Supplies	11	3	27
COM	Communication Aides	129	32	25
SEN	Sensory Items	123	29	23.5
STT	Switch Adapted Items	75	17	23
ERG	Ergonomics	5	1	20
VIS	Visual Aides	65	13	20
GM	Gross Motor	27	5	18.5
HER	Hearing Aides	37	6	16
SWT	Switches and Mounting Systems	285	45	16
CPT	Computer Hardware	128	19	15
MOB	Mobility	68	9	13
POS	Positioning	141	18	13
ADL	Activities of Daily Living	199	24	12
REC	Recreation	181	20	11
BOK	Books	217	12	5.5
CPO	Computer Software	238	19	5.5
TOY	Toys	75	4	5
FM	Fine Motor	5	17	*
M+B	Mounting and Bracketing Equipment	0	3	*

* There is inadequate of incomplete data for this category.

TEC's inventory includes two thousand thirty-six items. During the year 2009, two hundred nineteen items were used indicating that only 15 percent of the total inventory was used.
A thorough analysis was conducted on the activities of

daily living (ADL) category. The total number of items in the category is one hundred ninety-nine. Of these items twenty-four were used in 2009.The number of times that a specific item was utilized was determined.

# Of Times Used	# Of Items Signed Out
1	15
2	6
3	1
4	2

DISCUSSION

TEC provides a wide variety of AT items to loan and demonstrate to Maine's citizens who could benefit from these technologies. Based on the findings, TEC's inventory is not being fully utilized. Health care providers may better serve their clients by taking advantage of the resources available at TEC. Targeted marketing may be useful to increase awareness of TEC and its resources to both consumers and their caregivers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the evaluation of TEC's inventory and usage, the following observations have been made:
(1) The inventory tracking software at TEC has not been updated in 12 years. We recommend updating the software program, which would make it easier for TEC staff to systematically review inventory utilization.
(2) Many items in the inventory appear to have been purchased between the years 1995 and 2000 and they may be outdated.
(3) TEC has a limited amount of space; so clearing out outdated items may allow more room for more current technology items.
(4) TEC may benefit from finding additional ways to inform potential clients about its programs and resources, such as brochures that target particular audiences (i.e. elders vs. school-based populations) rather than the current brochure which is generic.

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