

Program helps disabled students acquire job skills

by Staci Beard
Staff Writer

A new program has recently opened up in the Barlow Learning Center to help the disabled acquire job skills.

Two IBM "clone" computers are available to people with orthopedic problems, brain damage, visual impairments or hearing impairments. The software available covers a wide range of tasks.

"We have programs that give them mental exercises and verbal tests to help people to function again in the written word society that we live in," stated Perry Lensen-Callas, tutor for the center.

Along with mental exercises the users are also able to learn a word processing system.

Because these computers are for those with disabilities a few extras have been added.

For those with visual problems there is the enlarging of the characters on screen up to about three inches high. A voice synthesizer is also hooked up so the user can have the what is written on the screen read aloud to them.

People who at times can't keep a steady hand have an added feature that will slow the computer

keyboard down. This is so if they accidentally hit the key too long it will not repeat ten times.

There is also a touch pad that can be used instead of the direction arrows.

In the future they hope to get the computer to where quadriplegics using a head stick can use the computer.

"There is an incredible amount of brain power that is idle. They don't come to school because of the lack of programs. But if we can develop these programs then we can get these people to come out of the closet and enter into society," stated Lensen-Callas.

One person who knows where she wants to go with the skills she has acquired is Jan Wight.

"I want to teach other people how to use it. I want his (Lensen-Callas') job," explained Wight.

"She is the perfect person. She has the same orthopedic problems that others will have. Plus she has the time to spend working with them," explained Lensen-Callas.

On Disabled Awareness Day the room was open for tours but not many people took the opportunity to view it.



photo by Jillian Porter

The Hi-tech Center, located in the Barlow Learning Center, offers a wide variety of software programs to be used on their IBM "clone" computers. These programs include: enlarging letters on the screen so that the visually impaired can read the text, a voice synthesizer that reads the words on the screen for the user and a feature that slows the keyboard down. Other programs are also available.

So far 40 people have signed up to use the facility, but only six have been using the equipment.

People who are interested are urged to contact Dave Campbell in the Handicap Resource Center

in the Community Center or call him at ext. 600 to see if the program will benefit them.

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