Assistive Technology Can . . .

AT can enable very young children to maintain typical development.

Two-year-olds without disabilities are mastering their environments, learning from everything they do, see, hear, and touch. When very young children with disabilities are provided with communication devices, wheelchairs they can use independently, and other assistive technology devices, they won't miss out on crucially important learning experiences. A communication device enables a child to communicate with family and friends and acquire important social skills. Independent mobility devices can ensure a child develops interdependence as she masters her environment. Other high-tech and low-tech devices can ensure children can play and learn alongside their peers. When we do not provide the appropriate and necessary AT devices for young children, we inadvertently contribute to retarding their growth and development.

AT can promote inclusion in the regular education environment.

Many children with disabilities are excluded from general education classrooms because they aren't "performing at grade level" or because they have "extensive needs." When children are provided with AT devices, however, they can be very successful in general education classrooms. A child who is not reading at "grade level," for example, can learn her lessons via the appropriate computer software. A child who is not writing with pencil and paper can also use a computer for schoolwork. The variety of ways AT devices can enhance a child's learning is limited only by our imaginations! Communication devices, independent mobility equipment, learning aids, and other high- and low-tech devices can ensure students with disabilities are educated and included in general ed classrooms in their neighborhood schools.

AT can enable adults with disabilities to be successfully employed in real jobs.

Assistive technology can help reduce or eliminate the current 70-75 percent unemployment rate of adults with developmental disabilities. In addition to communication and mobility devices and computers, a myriad of other low- and high-tech products can enable men and women to enter the competitive job market. Workers who *don't* have disabilities routinely use technology of all kinds, every minute of the work day. Shouldn't workers *with* disabilities also have access to the technology they need for success at work?

AT can enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community.

Assistive technology "levels the playing field" and can ensure children and adults can participate in and contribute to the ordinary activities in their communities. When my six-year-old son who uses a wheelchair couldn't handle the standard-sized bat used in the community T-ball league, a shorter, fatter bat enabled him to make contact with the ball and be part of the team. A communication device can enable a three-year-old to participate in his Sunday School class. A power wheelchair can enable an adult to be a referee in a pick-up basketball game at the park. A script in large print can enable a person with low vision to participate in a play. How many other ways can assistive technology enable children and adults with disabilities to be fully-participating members of their communities?

AT can enable individuals with disabilities to achieve self-determination and natural lives.

Being able to make your own choices—from the simplest decision about whether you want chocolate or vanilla ice cream to the complex decisions about where to live and work—is the foundation of self-determination. Others making decisions for you, or controlling your life in other ways, leads to dependence, loss of dignity, learned helplessness, and an unnatural existence. When individuals with disabilities are able to speak for themselves, move independently when and where they choose, and have the power to make other decisions for themselves, they'll begin living self-determined natural lives.