

HMS Assistive Technologies Program

Helping Students Find their Voices

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD

Recently, our Assistive Technologist Dawn Rainey gave me an update on HMS's Educational Technologies Program, its current impact and how she sees it evolving.

For our students, communication is key. Many of our students are nonverbal, so they depend on a myriad of assistive technologies for activities of daily living. From navigating their power wheelchairs to communicating, they use these technologies to advocate for themselves and maintain as much independence as is possible. The process of equipping our students with the proper devices is time-consuming and complex, as each of our students has unique abilities and needs. For many years, HMS has recognized the complexities of this detailed process. As a result, we have established a long-term lending library of assistive devices that allows students to try any number of alternatives for an amount of time far exceeding the 6-week maximum time offered by state sources. We have access to a diverse array of technologies that includes switches, joysticks, adaptive devices and touch screens, in addition to a highly trained network of staff including our Assistive Technologist Dawn Rainey. By the time our students receive their own devices, they have been using them successfully for some time. This is exactly how HMS student Lauren found her voice.

Before Lauren came to HMS, she was frustrated – the Tech Talk 32 location device with flip board she used provided few communication opportunities. The basic options of her communication device meant her language was limited, as was her ability to effectively interact and socialize with others. Although an adequate device, Lauren needed more specialized options and staff to truly meet her potential. Soon after her arrival at HMS, it became clear, that Lauren had the potential to become a direct selector, someone who builds her own sentences from an expansive vocabulary by scrolling through options and selecting various words and phrases, then using a touch screen. To test this, HMS lent her a Dynavox VMax for a few months – and she excelled! This spring, Lauren used the device to sing in *The Rainbow Sea*, a musical collaboration between students from HMS and an independent school in Center City Philadelphia. Soon, she will have her own and she couldn't be happier about it!



Lauren using a Dynavox VMax to sing
in *The Rainbow Sea*

At HMS, we are committed to making sure our students find their voices and never lose them. **We hope you'll join us in continuing to help give students like Lauren their voices!**

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