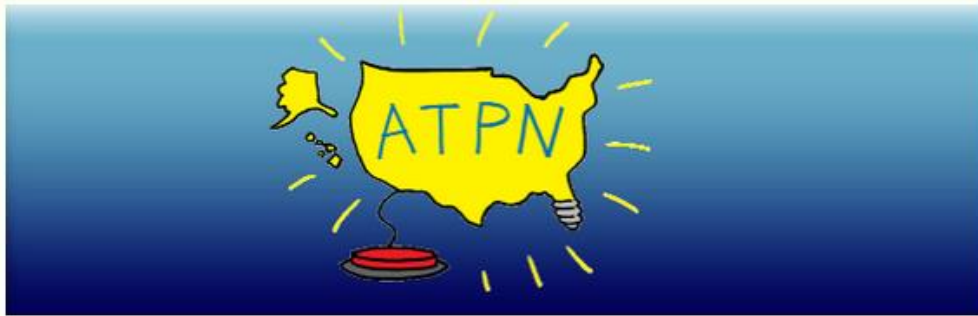


August 2015: Aging in Place with Assistive Technology

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A.T. in (its) Place

North Dakota's Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) Reaches Seniors Where They Live



North Dakota IPAT's outreach to seniors has evolved dramatically since *ATPN* last reported on their efforts in 2011. At that time, IPAT focused on providing and setting up devices, like automated medication dispensers using Older American Act funds through an agreement with ND Aging Services. What IPAT found, however, was that even with outreach and coordination via different aging services providers, most seniors still did not understand how A.T. could fit into and benefit their lives. "Even Hands-on opportunities at IPAT demo centers in Fargo and Bismarck would only go so far," observed Peggy Shireley, IPAT Senior A.T. Consultant. Seniors, it became clear, needed more than simple exposure to gadgets. "They needed to see how A.T. could improve their whole environment."

The realization led to a new IPAT initiative called Home First. In the following years, IPAT would grow Home First; each program iteration inspired by listening carefully to the seniors they serve.

Home First Assessments

Home First began as a new fee-for-service activity to provide in-home A.T. assessments and identify equipment and strategies that could benefit each individual. Shireley says talking to seniors about A.T. in their homes was profoundly different from IPAT's centers. "They really got it. We went into their homes and the light bulbs turned on. They told us over and over it makes so much sense now, and that before they hadn't known where to go to learn about all this stuff. And they asked where they could go to learn more!"

Home First's Fargo Showroom

Those reactions got IPAT staff thinking. Since fee-for-service assessments could only ever reach so many households (and mostly those who could pay), what was needed was a home anyone could visit to see A.T.. Consequently, IPAT made designing an age-in-place showroom a priority. They creatively stitched together resources, and in 2012 opened the IPAT Home First Showroom in Fargo. Laid out like a house, the new space includes a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, living room, dining room, and den... all equipped with A.T. "Compared with our demo centers, the Ah Ha moments just quadrupled," Shireley reports. "Visitors really understood how devices could work for them once they saw the A.T. in its context."

Indeed, the Fargo showroom spiked demand for device loans, generating numbers that soon contrasted starkly with IPAT's Bismarck location. And it became clear that a second showroom was needed. Funding for a further expansion, however, just wasn't available. So IPAT came up with another creative solution...

The Home First Showroom iPad App!

Shireley would like a showroom in Bismarck, but in the meantime the [Home First Showroom iPad App](#) offers a stop gap measure in the virtual world. The app allows users to virtually visit each of the six Home First Showroom spaces and click on devices to learn more. And while a second showroom would provide a hands-on experience, the app is proving to be a different kind of age-in-place awareness tool. "It's free and so we're promoting it with not only case managers to use with their clients, but also family members to use to start conversations with loved ones." And with no cost attached, Shireley observes, anyone can use it to learn more about A.T. for aging in place, and that includes A.T. programs in other states. "It's a tool that can spark ideas with seniors and families well beyond North Dakota." ([Download the IPAT Home First Equipment Listing](#) PDF)

For the future, IPAT intends to keep listening to the needs and wants of ND seniors. "The timing is right for this focus," Shireley reflects. Back in the early 2000s, IPAT did a study that demonstrated how cost effective A.T. could be toward helping individuals avoid out-of-home placements. "Since then, I imagine those numbers would look even better; the cost of out-of-home placements has gone way up while the cost of technology has come way down." The timing is also right, she realizes, because of the demographic shift that looms with the aging baby boomer generation. "We know that the baby boomers are going to put whole different demands on every service provider, and they're not going to be afraid of technology. They're going to want and expect A.T.! They're going to ask a whole different set of questions, and we'd better be ready."