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## The Abilities Buzz: October 2011

### Abilities Expo Has Gone Mobile!

Ever wish you could plan your Abilities Expo visit with a personalized schedule? Now, there's an app for that!

Starting with the San Jose event on November 18-20, 2011, attendees can browse through the exhibitors and products, review the workshops and events and literally create their own Expo itinerary.



The app is compatible with iPhones, iPads, iPod Touches, Android and Blackberry devices.

To get the guide, choose one of the methods below:

1. Download "**Guidebook**" from the Apple App Store or the Android Marketplace.
2. Visit <http://guidebookapp.com/getit> from your phone's browser.
3. Scan the following image with your mobile phone (QR-Code reader is required. Download an app such as "Red Laser" or "Barcode Scanner," scan the square pattern pictured here and it will automatically take you to where you can download "Guidebook.")

Once you have installed the "Guidebook" application onto your iPhone or Android:

1. Open it up and select "Download Guides."
2. Search "Abilities Expo San Jose."
3. Or you can click "Trade Show & Events," click "Future" and scroll through to "Abilities Expo San Jose."
4. Select "Abilities Expo San Jose" which will download the guide to your phone.



If you are on a Blackberry:

1. Open up a browser and navigate to <http://m.guidebookapp.com>.
2. Click "Future" and navigate to "Abilities Expo San Jose" (The guides are sorted by start date. The San Jose event is November 18-20, 2011.)
3. Select "Abilities Expo San Jose" and it will open up the guide.

Not in California? Don't worry, more Abilities Expo events are scheduled to go mobile in 2012! Stay tuned!

### Product Spotlight: Dycem Non-Slip Products

It was back in the 1960s that an innovative engineer, David Cecil Mills, discovered a special polymer with an unusually high coefficient of friction. He realized the potential and limitless applications of his non-slipping discovery and **Dycem** was born.

Nearly half a century later, Dycem has developed a wide range of products designed to address an array of stabilization and gripping problems. These products are distributed around the world as daily living aids and have been "making life easier" for people with disabilities.



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#### JOIN US ON FACEBOOK FUTURE EVENTS

**San Jose**  
November 18-20, 2011

**Atlanta**  
February 17-19, 2012

**Los Angeles**  
March 30-April 1, 2012

**New York Metro**  
May 4-6, 2012

**Chicago**  
June 29-July 1, 2012

**Houston**  
August 3-5, 2012

### Bottle and Jar Openers

Designed to take the strain out of opening and tightening jar lids and bottle caps, these openers are ideal for individuals with weak grip, decreased sensation in their hands and upper extremity weakness. They are dome-shaped to fit comfortably in the palm of the hand, have unique grip bars to maximize the grip and are malleable to fit any size lid. Its outstanding grip lends itself to a variety of other applications such as medicine bottles (even the push and turn to open kind), door knobs, faucets and cabinet handles.



### Mats

The Dycem non-slip material provides a secure surface that anchors items and prevents them from slipping off trays and tables. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes and the applications are infinite. For someone with Parkinson's disease or other mobility issues, this product line will help to stabilize cups, plates, cooking materials, writing pads, keyboards and the list goes on.

Color contrast is also important for many partially sighted, elderly people as it helps to make items easier to see against work surfaces. Placing a white bowl on a brightly colored Dycem Mat will help make it easier to see as well as making the bowl more stable.

### Floor Mats

The floor mats provide a surer footing for those who experience weight transference and balance problems, either when pushing up from a seated position or when lowering themselves down onto a seat. They even have Nose Over Toes Mats with the foot placement indicated on the surface of the mat. These are perfect for placing under feet to aid with the correct positioning for standing and sitting.



### Netting

This particularly ingenious item, made from soft mesh material, can be cut to fit and spread over the surface of a cushion to hold both it and the person using it in place. The wide mesh design permits airflow for maximum comfort and minimum clamminess. This is ideal for use in wheelchairs, mobility scooters, beds, arm chairs and more. Another popular application is to affix it beneath a rug to prevent slippage on laminate floors.

### Reels

Perhaps the most versatile of the Dycem products, their reels come in a variety of thickness and colors and can be cut to fit whatever the need. It can be used under the hands, feet and knees and is great for gait re-education and balance exercises. It can stabilize equipment or limbs in weight bearing exercises and, when placed beneath people's feet and on seats, it can help improve positioning and posture. And that is just the tip of the iceberg.



Dycem continues to bring innovative new products to people with disabilities which increase their independence and make their day-to-day a little easier. For more information or to locate a Dycem distributor near you, visit [www.dycem-ns.com](http://www.dycem-ns.com).

## Is Your Realtor an Accessibility Specialist?

By Stephen Beard, Real Estate Consultant and Accessibility Specialist

Stephen Beard will present [Accessible Home Ownership for People with Disabilities and Their Families](#) at the San Jose Abilities Expo on Saturday, November 19, 2011.

Did you know that most real estate agents are not particularly knowledgeable about serving folks dealing with disability?



For the buyer with a disability, the agent may literally have to be the client's legs, arms, eyes or ears, so finding the **right** real estate agent is extremely important. For the seller of a property that has been modified for access, you'll want an agent who can most effectively market the home's unique features.

### What Buyers and Their Families Should Look For

**Consultants, not salespersons:** The Accessibility Specialist must be an advisor to you, helping you to make good decisions. You should NOT get the feeling that they are trying to get you to buy the first place they show you that has a ramp.

**Experience with disability:** Although possible, it is most likely that the agents you consider will not themselves be disabled. However, the more sensitivity they have around disabilities, the better. Inquire about their experience working with clients with special needs.

**Expertise about government benefits:** An Accessibility Specialist will understand the difference between SSI and SSDI, and between Medicare and MediCal. They should understand how collecting these benefits can impact saving and how buyers with disabilities can overcome these challenges.

**Expertise about access:** Your agent should be knowledgeable enough about the homes in your area to describe to you how much accessible property is available, and in which neighborhoods it can be found. They should be able to connect you with contractors who have experience installing wheelchair lifts, ramps and other accessibility features.

**Previewing homes:** As much as possible, the agent should preview the homes he/she wants to show you before taking you to see them. The agent should check for all of their accessibility features, and take detailed pictures of areas inside and outside the property. For visually impaired clients, the agent should happily provide detailed written descriptions of the home's layout, including levels of natural lighting. For chair users, the agent should understand that the absence of steps or thresholds is only part of the equation...they should also be evaluating the ability to roll in and out of narrow hallways and bathrooms using the chair.

**Transportation:** Most agents you interview probably will not have accessible vehicles or portable ramps. If you do not have access to your own car or van or ramps, make sure you discuss transportation arrangements with the agents.

### Patience and understanding:

Many agents are used to dealing with buyers who can preview properties on their own. Some expect to show these clients five or more properties at a time. For many buyers

with disabilities, this just isn't realistic. Make sure all agents you speak with understand the limitations your disability imposes in terms of your time and energy, and make sure they are prepared to take all the time it takes to support you in your search.

#### What Sellers Should Look For

Generally speaking, people selling homes are looking for some of the same attributes in an agent as buyers are. They want a consultant, they want someone who has experience with disability, and who is patient and understanding. Most important, they usually want someone who can sell their home at the highest possible price, in the least amount of time and with the least amount of inconvenience.

When selling a home with features that may be useful for a mobility-challenged person, sellers should be wary of agents that suggest they cannot effectively sell the home unless those features are removed. An Accessibility Specialist can bring you a buyer who will value those improvements. Not only will you sell the home sooner, but you not have wasted money removing those amenities.



Sellers dealing with disability may have challenges that affect the selling process. There may be limitations on how the home can be prepared for sale, how the house can be shown to prospective buyers, and how offers will be reviewed and negotiated. An Accessibility Specialist Realtor will be sensitive to these concerns in a way that may be outside of the experience of typical agents.

For more information, contact Stephen Beard at [stephen@stephenbeard.net](mailto:stephen@stephenbeard.net) or visit his website, [www.AccessibleHomesForYou.com](http://www.AccessibleHomesForYou.com).

## Workforce Development Summit 2011 at San Jose Convention Center

By Rebecca Fortelka, Bay Area Coalition for Employment Development

Workforce Development Summit is doing it again! This year WDS is even bigger and better with 12 educational sessions at the day-long conference at the San Jose Convention Center on Friday, November 18th, 2011.



The event is organized by the [Bay Area Coalition for Employment Development \(BACED\)](#), a non-profit networking organization dedicated to workforce development professionals. The goal of the conference is educational training and sharing of best practices for professionals in the employment industry. Career Counselors, Employment Developers, Recruiters, Career Services Specialists, Job Developers and job seekers are all welcome to attend.

Larry Robbin, a national trainer and consultant in the workforce field with more than 45 years experience, is a huge supporter of the event stating, "What makes this conference so unique and successful is that it's organized by people entirely on the front lines of doing employment related work. No other conference cuts across funding lines, program types and populations served to bring the entire field together. The powerful synergy and extensive peer-to-peer exchange of information that results from this wide audience makes the Workforce Development Summit an outstanding learning experience for everyone that attends."

Jessica Orozco, one of the BACED Co-chairs and Employment Specialist for TransAccess, said, "This is our third year and we are committed to making it an even better conference every year. The synergy we have as dedicated workforce professionals and the support we receive is what makes our conference so successful. We understand the economic times and we understand what barriers we are facing each day. BACED was established in 1987 and to be a part of a legacy that has grown and adapted throughout so many years is an honor."

Topics include labor market information and studies, recruiter presentations, sector spotlights, employer and job development tips, best practices panels on re-entry/disability/youth employment and much more! There will also be an after-conference mixer with happy hour specials for friendly networking and fun at Il Fornaio.

Come join us for an exciting informational day of informational sessions! More information and ticketing information is available at [www.workdevsummit.org](http://www.workdevsummit.org).

## Finding the Best Wheelchair Can Be an Ordeal—Does It Have to Be So Difficult?

By Ann Eubank, UsersFirst



Sometimes it feels like it might be easier to build a wheelchair yourself than to voyage through the jungle of insurance turmoil. I have, unfortunately, witnessed the most absurd reasons why an insurance company wouldn't pay for a reasonable wheelchair. Do you relate to any of the following scenarios?

1. The insurance company asks for all kinds of paperwork and then says you don't "qualify" for the same type of chair they approved last time. Did you change? Not necessarily. More likely, their policy changed.
2. Your insurance company decides to "cap" your medical equipment benefits to something like \$1,500, which is not enough for a good wheelchair.
3. Weeks and months go by while the insurance company "reviews" your claim.
4. You no longer have access to your local favorite wheelchair supplier because your insurance company is forcing you to use a medical equipment supplier they chose. Or, one of my favorites...
5. You are told "a wheelchair is not medically necessary." Really?!? I guess they figure you should roll on the ground, scoot, or possibly slither or just be in bed?!!

These are absurd reasons and they all negatively affect your overall health. Think about it—if millions of Americans are forced to be "homebound," which I think translates to "bedbound," then we will be sicker as a nation. I thought that was what all the fuss was about in Washington, that health care is expensive. If humans are not able to move about will we not be more expensive due to illness?

Why is it so difficult to get the best wheelchair?

One reason may be that the insurance industry is making record profits, even in the current economic environment. That means they have millions of reasons to deny a wheelchair or at least make it so cumbersome and frustrating that the average person settles for less than what is best. By "best" I mean the wheelchair that actually works for you in your life, the one that allows you to be independent and move about in your life.

Another reason may be that they do not see the wheelchair as "fixing" a condition, much like they view hearing aides. This is discrimination, because access to a wheelchair is a civil rights issue. Americans have the right to participate in their communities.



Another big reason might be that wheelchair users don't yet have a united voice to challenge bad insurance policies. If we were united like the AARP, all insurance companies, public and private, might think twice before cutting benefits.

We need a united voice, as wheelchair users, and as Americans who care about fair access to wheelchairs and freedom of movement. We need to get CONNECTED and STAY CONNECTED.

**UsersFirst** is a consumer organization that focuses on access to wheelchairs. We will support you in your quest for the best wheelchair and we will challenge policies that limit access to good wheelchairs.

Get connected and help make positive changes for people who use wheelchairs:

- Sign up yourself and everyone you know at [www.usersfirst.org](http://www.usersfirst.org).
- The more people who are signed up, the more clout we have when trying to create positive policy change.
- "Like" UsersFirst on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/UsersFirstAlliance](http://www.facebook.com/UsersFirstAlliance)—and ask your network to "like" UF.
- The more people signed up, the more clout we have when trying to create positive policy change.
- Tell your wheelchair story at [www.usersfirst.org/submit-your-story/](http://www.usersfirst.org/submit-your-story/).
- Ask any wheelchair question at [usersfirst@unitedspinal.org](mailto:usersfirst@unitedspinal.org).

## High School Senior with Cerebral Palsy Excels Academically Through Bookshare's Digital Library

By Valerie Cherneke, Bookshare

Bookshare is exhibiting at the San Jose Abilities Expo, November 18-20, 2011.



Seventeen-year old Zach Bryant attends North Carroll High School, Maryland. He pulled straight A's in his studies this past year. He's read all of his required assignments at school as well as numerous non-fiction and political science books for pleasure. Zach, a bright young man was not always an avid reader. Throughout his earlier years, he struggled with reading. His mom, Danya Bryant, defined those years as frustrating.

Zach has Cerebral Palsy (CP). He cannot walk or speak. He uses an augmentative communication device to share his thoughts and to write his papers. Zach finds simple reading tasks daunting such as turning the page or finding a book chapter. "CP has affected his fine motor skills," said Mrs. Bryant, "but not his ability to think. He's our brainiac!"

As a youngster, Zach showed no signs of learning problems. He just couldn't keep up with his studies because of involuntary eye and head movements. He couldn't hold his finger to

a page to read the lines of a book. When he looked up, he lost his place. Eventually he shut down. According to Zach's mom, this experience happens to many children with disabilities. She knew there had to be an answer and found it through the support of her local school's Assistive Technology Department. They introduced her to [Bookshare](#), the world's largest online library of accessible books and periodicals for people who are blind, have low vision, a physical or a reading disability that prevents them from reading a standard printed book.



Sixth grade Zach reading with classmates.

Bookshare is free for students with qualified print disabilities through a \$32 million award by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Today, Bookshare offers over 95,000 books, textbooks and teacher-recommended reading in accessible formats for students with qualified print disabilities.

Mrs. Bryant describes life at the Bryant residence before discovering Bookshare. "We tried large print, but someone always had to turn the pages. This was time consuming for Zach's aide and for me. Zach likes to be independent and he found this process wearisome."

"Bookshare has made it possible for me to read any kind of digital book," said Zach. "I wouldn't read as much without the library. Now, I don't have to wait for the school or my mom to scan a book and I don't have to have someone else turn the pages for me."

The first optical scanning machine (text reader) the Bryant family used was the Arkenstone Reader; a reading software and hardware machine that converted printed text into digital format. Mrs. Bryant said, "We saw Zach's reading level jump three grades. What a difference assistive technologies can make. It's neat that this tool was developed by Jim Fruchterman, the man that now leads Bookshare and the Benetech organization."

The Bryant's Maryland Public School system uses the Kurzweil 3000 as their text reading accommodation for students with disabilities. Mrs. Bryant says that she is grateful her state is on the leading edge when it comes to having the latest assistive technology support.



"Zach likes using the computer and easily caught on to Kurzweil to support his physical challenges," shared Mrs. Bryant. "However, we still had to scan the books. It took weeks. Bookshare has cut down on my scanning time. Sometimes, teachers just don't know what books they will use for the next semester. When this happens, it becomes a frantic search for books in a short period of time. Bookshare has changed this!"

Zach does his own searches now on Bookshare and can get books he wants through his individual membership or from the school's organizational membership. When he finds a book, he downloads the digital file in html, uploads the file to Kurzweil 3000 and opens the book, which looks just like the printed book. Using this software, he quickly locates exact pages and book chapters. He has recently read *Marley & Me*, *All Creatures Great and Small*, *Harry Potter*, and a political science book on the life of Ann Coulter. Today, he reads on grade level and does well in all subjects. He anticipates attending Wright State University. His mom says Zach will use Bookshare for his college studies. She is excited that Bookshare is now collaborating with U.S. colleges, universities and publishers to contribute their legally scanned textbooks to increase the collections.

Maryland curriculum supervisors and teachers get textbooks for students like Zach from the [NIMAC](#), (National Instructional Materials Access Center). The NIMAC is a central repository established by the [U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs](#) (OSEP) to hold digital files from U.S. textbook publishers as defined by IDEA. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) Many U.S. states, including Maryland, have now designated Bookshare as an Authorized User of the NIMAC. Books and textbooks are kept in the NIMAC in a standard file format called NIMAS (National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard). NIMAS files must be

converted into student-ready formats such as the latest DAISY 3.0 format (Digital Accessible Information System) or BRF (Braille Ready File) to read with software applications, such as a digital ebook or text readers, or Braille devices. Educators can search the NIMAC for textbooks and then ask one of their state Authorized Users, such as Bookshare, to assist them in quickly getting the requested books converted into the appropriate formats. If the book is in the NIMAC, Bookshare can convert it and get it ready for the student in under a week.

Mrs. Bryant advocates for Bookshare to parents. She frequently visits the [Great Schools website](#), an online organization (formerly Schwab Learning Foundation) to keep abreast of the latest disability issues and AT resources. She talks about Bookshare with parents in her community and at a camp, called *Camp Chatter Box* in Massachusetts, for children who use augmentative communication devices. "I'm amazed at how many parents don't know what technologies and resources are available to them," she said. "I feel it's my duty to educate them to become Bookshare members and to help all kids with disabilities live meaningful lives in school and in life, just like Zach has done."

Bookshare offers a variety of membership options for schools, organizations, qualified students and individuals. To register visit <http://www.bookshare.org/signUpType>.

#### About Bookshare

[Bookshare](#) is the world's largest accessible online library for people with print disabilities. Through its technology initiatives and partnerships, Bookshare seeks to raise the floor on accessibility issues so that individuals with print disabilities have the same ease of access to print materials as people without disabilities. In 2007, Bookshare received a \$32 million five-year award from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), to provide free access for all U.S. students with a qualified print disability. The Bookshare library now has over 110,000 books and serves more than 100,000 members. Bookshare is an initiative of [Benetech](#), a Palo Alto, CA-based nonprofit that creates sustainable technology to solve pressing social needs.

## New Research Study on Exercise and Mood Could Help You

Have you ever felt depressed? People who are depressed experience persistent sad mood or loss of interest in activities, changes in sleep and appetite, poor energy, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, being restless or slowed down, or having recurrent thoughts of death or suicide. Depression is more common in people who are living with disability than in the general population. The good news is that depression is treatable.



If you feel you might be depressed, you should talk to your health care provider. He or she may recommend treatment with antidepressant medications or counseling, both of which may be good options. But what if medications or counseling aren't the right choice for you or you'd like to try something more? Another option for treating your depressed mood might be physical activity. We know that people who are inactive have a higher risk of having depression. By the same token, research has shown that increasing your level of physical activity can be an effective way to improve mood.

People with illness or injury may face major challenges trying to resume the physical activities they enjoyed before and, as a group, are quite inactive. Studies of people with multiple sclerosis (MS) and spinal cord injury (SCI) have shown that exercise results in improved strength, reduced pain, less stress, and improved mood. However, these studies only evaluated people who didn't have major depression. To learn more, researchers at the University of Washington in Seattle are doing a study to see if telephone counseling aimed at helping people with certain physical disabilities become more physically active is an effective treatment for depression. People aged 45 with MS or SCI living anywhere in the United States may be eligible for this study, since it is carried out entirely by telephone. **Call toll-free 1-866-928-2114 or email us at [agerrtc@uw.edu](mailto:agerrtc@uw.edu) if you are interested in finding out more about this study.**

What should you do if you have symptoms of major depression now? Talk with your health care provider about getting treatment. You may also consider participating a research study, like the one mentioned above. If you have serious thoughts of death or suicide, please call 911, the 24-hour National Crisis Hotline at 800-273-8255, or your local Crisis Clinic right away.

*This study is funded by a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant number H133B080024.*

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