Local Program Recognized For Reusing Assistive Technology | CPD

CREATE coordinators Heather Young and Alma Burgess

It's a great goal to keep usable equipment out of the landfill and in the hands of people who need it. It's essential to make sure the refurbished technology is safe. When the Citizens Reutilizing Assistive Technology Equipment program launched a little more than a year ago, it was committed to both goals. Now, CREATE has received a national “Newbie” award for its efforts to put affordable mobility equipment into the hands of people who might not otherwise get it. “We wanted to recognize programs that are up and coming,” said Liz Persaud, training and development coordinator with the Pass It On Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Pass it On wanted to highlight programs that put equipment into the hands of people that really needed it, and that were willing to share the experience they picked up along the way. They chose CREATE not only because of its success, but also because its coordinators were willing to help train others with the same goals. CREATE is an initiative of the Utah Assistive Technology Program located in the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University.

The technology reuse program serves people of all ages in the entire state, regardless of their geographic location. It has two branches; one in Logan on the Utah State University campus, the other in Salt Lake City. CREATE's program coordinators, Heather Young and Alma Burgess, were invited to present to people from assistive technology reuse programs nationwide during the Pass It On Center's National AT Reuse Conference in Atlanta last month. Their session was jam-packed, Persaud said. The conference was co-hosted by the National Assistive Technology Technical Assistance Partnership. The Pass It On Center helps ensure that the 170-plus AT reuse centers nationwide are doing their jobs efficiently. Some centers, like CREATE, focus on mobility equipment. Others may focus on assistive technology for computers. All are dedicated to providing affordable equipment to those who need it. An added benefit is that the technology they refurbish stays out of the landfill. photo of Newbie AwardGiven the green-conscious theme, even the awards given out at the conference were recycled. CREATE’s plaque is made from the hulls of sunflower seeds. “The whole conference was all about reuse,” said Young, who coordinates CREATE. “The biggest emphasis is being able to get equipment out to people who could not otherwise access it. That's the biggest push, but now, with the green revolution, reuse is becoming a bigger deal.” CREATE has kept a running total of how much equipment it has kept from being trashed (16,000 pounds and counting). The program has also focused on safety. Each device goes through multiple checklists before it leaves the warehouse, including refurbishing, sanitization and an evaluation to make sure it fits the person who will use it. These procedures make sure that the equipment will safely help the people it serves. “Assistive technology is a huge need,” said Persaud. “It's been proven time and time again that it really does work for people with disabilities. ... Refurbished equipment isn't going to cost as much. It’s not necessarily the only answer, it’s one avenue, but when it works, it works.”