Phoenix explores in her customized chair.

By Heather Young

Phoenix Barfuss, a growing two-year old with muscular dystrophy, will now be able to be more independent and explore her surroundings, thanks to a power wheelchair that is just her size. A local Assistive Technology (AT) Lab is customizing a wheelchair for Phoenix and her specific needs. Shriners Hospitals for Children--Salt Lake City and the AT Lab at Utah State University in Logan have joined forces to help Utahns. Shriners Hospital recently donated eight surplus pediatric power wheelchairs and 20 manual pediatric wheelchairs to the AT Lab. The AT Lab is in turn customizing these devices for individuals who otherwise would not be able to afford or access them.

"Phoenix is intellectually like any other kid, on the inside she wants to play, run and climb," said Phoenix's mom, Jasmine Bailey-Barfuss. "This power wheelchair she is receiving from the AT Lab will give her more independence to explore her surroundings."

With the help of students from Special Education, Communicative Disorders and other university programs, the AT Lab currently serves over 1,000 Utahns a year.

"Without donations from organizations such as Shriners Hospital, the AT Lab would not be able to provide used and affordable assistive technology to so many Utahns with disabilities," said Stan Clelland, AT Lab coordinator.

Some of the services provided at the AT Lab include modifying equipment such as wheelchairs and tricycles, custom building specialized equipment, loaning out wheelchairs and scooters and so much more to help people with disabilities live more independently.

"With mounting medical bills and stress levels, we are dependent on the generosity of free services like the AT Lab," said Bailey-Barfuss.

The AT Lab is an initiative of the Utah Assistive Technology Program located at the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University.

For more information about the AT Lab, visit www.uatpat.org or call 800-524-5152.