

Organizational Background and History

The Mission of EmpowerTech is to assist children and adults with physical and developmental disabilities in leading independent and productive lives through the use of technology.

EmpowerTech was founded in 1986 by two dedicated parents, whose children had disabilities, along with other area professionals who saw the need for and impact of this type of education. Today, EmpowerTech staff teaches both children and adults with disabilities, with a goal of inclusion to all aspects of our society including education, communication, play and employment.

EmpowerTech has played a crucial role in the development and empowerment of its students; providing education, support and opportunity for the personal, academic and professional growth of each individual. Classes begin with learning basic computer skills while finding and utilizing Assistive Technology tools for maximum usage for each student.

EmpowerTech was among the first organizations in the country to address the potential of computer technology to improve the lives of people with disabilities. It remains the only Assistive Technology (AT) center in Los Angeles; offering consultation services at no cost to any who need them.

EmpowerTech is a member of the Alliance for Technology Access, the national membership organization for Assistive Technology, which provides us with technical assistance and other

support to enhance EmpowerTech's quality of services. EmpowerTech is certified by the California Department of Education and vendored by the CA Department of Rehabilitation, State of California Department of Developmental Disabilities and Area Regional Centers. EmpowerTech also works closely with academic Task Forces, the City of Santa Monica and provides staffing resources to local school districts, Charter Schools and senior centers.

Current Programs & Accomplishments:

Mitch, a student who began in our Pre-school program and eventually moved into our TRADE program is now working as a data entry clerk for the Los Angeles Mayor

Devon, who has limited speech and motor skills and by using a Headmouse is able to communicate with his sister 2000 miles away via email by visiting our offices each week for FREE Open Access, his only opportunity to use the computer each week.

Sara, a blind and low vision student who has furthered her independence by learning Online Banking and is no longer reliant on others to access her personal financial information

Assistive Technology Explorations provides Assistive Technology and resource information to individuals with disabilities and their families. This is the first step to independence and self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. An exploration session offers these individuals the

Assistive Technology Assessment is designed to evaluate what technology options will help the client achieve their individual goals. In addition, the assessment evaluates the client's ability to use a particular device or software program.

TRADE (Technology Related Accommodation, Development and Employability) enhances employability for people with disabilities. It is taught in two separate educational sessions. The first session is focused on individual students' technology development. The curriculum is determined during an initial student admission meeting, where a student, parent/caretaker, or caseworker is present. Students join the two-hour, four-day a week classes training on any requested or required technology goals decided in admission meetings. Many students frequently develop skills in file management, Microsoft Office Suite, touch-typing, emailing and the use of Internet search engines. Students are encouraged to expand their skill sets as they pursue individual goals. The second session is the Employability Program, a three-hour course, held 5 days per week. This program has an even greater focus on individualized support. This class is geared toward those who are looking to increase their employability and may have specific goals based on previous job training or current job placement. Many

students will increase their competency in touch typing, using Microsoft Office Applications, using Internet search engines and emailing. Students also work on many specific tasks using word, Excel and PowerPoint applications. Some of these tasks will include pre-employment opportunities such as resume writing and interviewing skills. The job placement and job-coaching component of T.R.A.D.E are completed through collaborations with other community organizations with expertise in this area. T.R.A.D.E. is vital to breaking down barriers and working with people with disabilities in seeking higher-level job opportunities. ** The weekly lesson plans developed by the TRADE director are extremely unique in that he takes the students on a tour of America and the world by focusing each week on a different state or country. Therefore they are not only are they learning how to use Microsoft Office Suite and

internet navigation skills but political structures, GDP, state capitals, geography and other areas of interest.

Low Vision/Blind Services was developed in collaboration with the California Department of Rehabilitation/Blind Service Division, which refers students to the program. EmpowerTech staff work with blind and low-vision clients to use specialized technology that will enable them to use the necessary assistive technology to facilitate their use of the computer. Learning computer skills enhances their opportunity to find employment, maintain current employment, or continue their education. Classes are held daily. This service continues to expand due to the increase in requests from individuals and other organizations that serve blind and low-vision consumers. As part of this program 15-20 students will complete this three to four month program. At completion of the program 100 percent of the students will be able to use assistive technology (such as Jaws, Zoom Text or Open Book) and 80 percent will be able to perform the following seven tasks; edit, format and print various types of documents using Microsoft Word, perform necessary e-mail tasks, navigate and use the Internet.

- Between 20-30 students annually will complete the three- to four-month program. At completion of the program, 100 percent of the students will be able to use assistive technology (such as Jaws, Zoom Text or Open Book) and 80 percent will be able to perform the following seven tasks; edit, format and print various types of documents using Microsoft Word, perform necessary e-mail tasks, navigate and use the Internet.

Open Access Labs is open for both adult education and community service. Many students only have computer access during class times. EmpowerTech wanted to ensure all students and other individuals in the community had additional opportunity to use computers for practice and personal needs. Open Access was created as a free and innovative community service

that provides weekly opportunities for individuals with disabilities to use the Internet, search for a job, do homework, practice computer skills, send e-mails, or play Internet games. It also provides a mentor program for student development and assistance along with opportunities for socialization. EmpowerTech provides computers, internet access, staffing resources and access to assistive technology tools.

(NEW) Online Classroom will provide an opportunity to record and archive classroom lessons, create opportunities in reaching new students, parents and instructors who are not able to meet during normal hours or who are unable to travel due to physical restrictions and add flexibility for educating more students. Despite these opportunities many students are unable to attend due to physical limitations, lack of travel resources or time constraints. By offering classes, lesson plans and presentations on a fully accessible website and online classroom, EmpowerTech is eliminating the restraints that prohibit many individuals from having opportunity to learn.