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The B.E.A.T.

Bulletins in Education and Assistive Technology

The Opportunity Foundation of America Adopts EagleEyes

The Opportunity Foundation of America (OFOA) recently began a partnership with Boston College to bring EagleEyes to individuals with disabilities in the US and beyond. The goal of the Foundation is to manufacture the miniaturized systems and to give them away for free to facilities and families who can make good use of them.

The Opportunity Foundation has contracted to have five initial prototype EagleEyes boxes manufactured. Systems will be placed in Craighalbert Centre in Cumbernauld, Scotland, United Cerebral Palsy in Salt Lake City, Goodwill Columbus in Columbus, Ohio, and Boston College.

The Opportunity Foundation is a non-profit organization that endeavors to improve the quality of life for people with severe physical and mental disabilities. The Foundation is based in Salt Lake City.

Debbie Inkley, Co-Founder and Executive Director, said "We are excited about the opportunity of EagleEyes to improve the lives of so many people with severe disabilities. We hope to make EagleEyes available to the public on a much larger scale."



Cameron and his mother

Individuals have already started to work with the new EagleEyes systems. Recently, the Foundation began working with eleven year old Cameron Olivares. Cameron has severe cerebral palsy which leaves him totally dependent on others for all of his needs. Even though this energetic young man has only been working with EagleEyes for a few months, he has already begun to exert his new found independence. Cameron's eyes and contagious smile light up the room during his EagleEyes sessions. He loves playing "Shoot the Aliens" and his little brother and sister are always there cheering him on.

Cameron's parents are extremely enthusiastic and are determined to help him reach his full potential. "We feel Cameron has a lot to say and a lot to do. We were excited when a good friend of ours showed us the Michael Nash DVD. Even though Cameron has only been working with EagleEyes for a relatively short period of time, we are very optimistic. We believe that EagleEyes will help him achieve everything we have always known he can

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Cameron Olivares works with the EagleEyes system

Good News Travels Fast

You never know where you'll find a new opportunity. For the Cortes family, new hope came in a newsletter. A year ago, The Families of Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) newsletter featured a letter from Patty Bottone, mother of John Bottone, sharing their experience with EagleEyes. As a result of Patty Bottone's effort, awareness of EagleEyes grew within the SMA community. The Cortes family is one of many families who learned of the EagleEyes program as a result of Patty Bottone's letter. (Please see the Summer 2004 issue of The BEAT for an interview with Patty Bottone.)

Like John Bottone, Rob Cortes was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type I (Werdnig Hoffmann Disease). At 6 1/2 Rob has very limited movement and must use a ventilator and a gtube feeding system. Rob's family was encouraged by John Bottone's success in using the EagleEyes software and looked forward to the national Families of SMA conference in June where EagleEyes would be featured. At the conference, Rob had the chance to try out the system and by August the Cortes family had an EagleEyes system in their home. Mrs. Cortes was so excited by the prospect of Rob's using the system that she had downloaded the manuals for the system in March, long before Rob even tried it. "We were.... very excited about the potential opportunity it would provide Rob."

Rob is working with his system three times a week. He uses "EagleEyes Paint," "Shoot the Aliens" and "Tic Tac Toe," and has even begun using "Reader Rabbit" and "Finding Nemo" on the computer. With practice, Rob's family hopes he will demonstrate sufficient proficiency to convince his school district to use the program in school to aid in his communication and education.

Mrs. Cortes believes that Rob will only be limited by his own imagination as he becomes more adept with the system. "We hope he will learn to type sentences and to e-mail his friends. Our son, like most young boys, has developed a passion for cars. He enjoys navigating the Hot Wheels web site. Hopefully as he grows more proficient with the system he will be motivated to use the system to investigate web sites and gain proficiency at the same time... With Rob's diagnosis, it is such a great opportunity for Rob to experience a world he would not otherwise have access."

A small act may have implications greater than we may appreciate at the time. Word of mouth is a powerful force, especially for the EagleEyes program. We never know where our actions may lead, or whose life we may change with a few minutes time. Mrs. Bottone's afternoon spent drafting a letter has brought new possibilities to the Cortes family many miles away.



Rigo, Rob, and Terry Cortes

OFOA (Continued from page 1)

accomplish. This new technology has given us hope that one day Cameron will be able to really express what he is thinking and feeling. EagleEyes is a gift for Cameron and our entire family. We are so grateful to Boston College and to Professor Gips and are looking forward to the communication and educational opportunities that EagleEyes will provide for Cameron in the near future."

For more information and to make charitable donations please email or call the Opportunity Foundation of America at ofoa@aol.com or 801-231-6691 or www.ofoa.net. The Opportunity Foundation of America and "A Gallery" will host a Trevor Southey Fine Art Exhibition/Fund Raiser for EagleEyes in Salt Lake City, Utah on Thursday, June 16th from 7pm to 10pm. The highlight of the event will be an oil on canvas created by Mr. Southey depicting EagleEyes.

An EagleEyes Love Story

EagleEyes doesn't just bring college students and disabled students together. It even facilitates the occasional romantic relationship. The BEAT recently interviewed Peter Brandano about how he first met Laura Mazor in the EagleEyes Program.

How did you get involved in EagleEyes? What was your role in the EagleEyes Program?

I first saw EagleEyes at my Freshman Orientation at Boston College and I remember being amazed that such work was being done at the college that I was going to attend. I never forgot Prof. Gips's name after that presentation. When I felt I had a strong enough footing in the major I contacted Prof. Gips again. Soon I was working on the project. My primary role was to help design and implement software that could be used by EagleEyes students. In my senior year, I wrote a set of programs called "Fun and Games" that included matching and pattern recognition games aimed at helping the students with reading readiness. In addition to writing software I often worked with Mike Nash and Rick Hoyt as well as other students. They helped me to test my software. Before leaving I also helped to put together an assembly manual for the EagleEyes system. I majored in Computer Science and graduated in 2001.

How was Laura helping out with EagleEyes?

Laura majored in Biology and graduated from BC in 2001. She worked on the less technical side of EagleEyes. Laura helped do research for the book written about the project by Professors DiMattia and Gips. She would often work with the students at the Campus School, but we rarely crossed paths.

How did you two meet?

Sometime during my senior year I met Laura when we both played the "You Don't Know Jack" trivia game with Campus School students. We played for about an hour and didn't talk to each other much. After playing trivia, another Campus School volunteer insisted that she put the names "Laura Mazor" and "Pete Brandano" into an online "Love Calculator." I had just met her so this was very uncomfortable. Of course, we got an incredibly high score. I remember Mike Nash thought it was pretty funny.

Did you ask Laura out?

Months came and went, and I finished up my final classes at BC. When graduation day came, as I was sitting on Alumni field listening to our graduation speakers, I thought to myself "I guess I never will get to know Laura Mazor." She had made a pretty big impression on me despite our rare meetings.

After 7 months or so I decided to call Laura. I looked her up in my old BC phonebook. I hadn't talked to her in nearly a year, and before that, we never had a long



Laura Mazor and Peter Brandano

conversation. Nonetheless, she had remained on my mind. After a day or so of getting the guts up, I called her school number with no idea what to say. I got voicemail and left a somewhat awkward message. Unfortunately, she was on winter vacation. Almost a month passed without a returned phone call. I had all but given up. Finally, she called. We had no idea what to say...

Well did you go on a date?

We decided to make a date for the North End. That night we learned that we shared a love for restaurants, and I realized that she was as cute as I remembered. I had no idea how much we had in common.

What has happened since then?

After graduation, I took a job with General Dynamics in Needham, Massachusetts. I am a Software Engineer on a project that builds the world's only high-definition entertainment system for hotels. We're currently deploying our latest system in Las Vegas's next mega hotel.

Laura is putting her degree to use as a Research Associate at Genzyme Corporation. She works in a lab that helps to produce pharmaceuticals for "orphan" diseases that have very small patient populations such as Fabry and Gaucher diseases. Laura is currently in the process of applying to graduate schools.

Being part of EagleEyes was one of the most incredible learning experiences of my life. I am so proud to have had the opportunity to take part. I met incredible people like Professors Gips, DiMattia, and Olivieri, and even more incredible people like Mike Nash and Rick Hoyt. I also met the love of my life, Laura Mazor. Laura and I can only hope that we will find future projects that are half as rewarding and inspirational as EagleEyes.

A Fond Farewell to Lindsay Monet

Lindsay Peterson, one of the original EagleEyes students, is moving on from the Boston College Campus School. The EagleEyes and Campus School staff will miss Lindsay. The BEAT recently spoke with Lindsay's mother, Kathy Peterson, about Lindsay's experiences and upcoming departure.

How old is Lindsay? What kind of illness/ disability does your daughter have?

Lindsay will be 22 years old. She has Miller-Dieker Syndrome, which leaves her totally dependent on others for all of her needs. This is a rare chromosome disorder and there is not much information on it. Lindsay is the oldest living person with this syndrome. She is in a wheelchair totally supported, she does not have the ability to sit or stand or even hold her head, but she has great eye control and will answer questions with her eyes.

How long has Lindsay been using the system? What has Lindsay been working on with EagleEyes?

Lindsay has been using the system for 11 years. She first started with choice programs and eye paintings. Lindsay enjoys playing games, more specifically Tic Tac Toe, which she is the EagleEyes champ. [Lindsay won nine Tic Tac Toe games in a row.] Lindsay's favorite thing to do is Eye Paintings. She was given the nickname "Lindsay Monet" because of her awesome paintings.

Do you have any special memories about your daughter using EagleEyes?

We will always remember when Frank Curran [the first EagleEyes teacher and the program's spiritual mentor] would come into the room while Lindsay was on the system and he would stand at the back of the room and try to observe. This would never last long because Frank could never curb his enthusiasm and would always end up jumping up and down cheering when Lindsay hit a target. We would turn around and look at him and he would say he was sorry and he would not do it again, but of course a few minutes later he would do it again. We miss him terribly now that he is gone.

What have you learned about your daughter?

We now know that she has been absorbing a lot of what we have been trying to teach her. That she has a very

definite stubborn side to her as she has shown through not wanting to leave a program until she has finished and that if she doesn't like a program she will refuse to participate. She has much more intelligence than we were told that she would have and that you never stop trying to teach because you never know what is retained.

What is on the horizon for your daughter?

Lindsay will be attending an adult dayhab after she turns 22. Right now she will continue with what she is using, but you never know what she will master in the future.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

We would like to thank all the staff for all of their hard work and the dedication that they have given to Lindsay. Without their enthusiasm and determination to push Lindsay to her limits, we might never have known just how much Lindsay was capable of doing. It's been important that Lindsay is able to have some independence in one area of her life. So much is controlled by others.

Our thanks go out to the creators of EagleEyes for putting their heart and soul into creating this program and their desire to continue making the world accessible to those individuals who would otherwise not be able to communicate with the world around them. They are truly remarkable people and the world is a better place for all the users of EagleEyes because of them.



Lindsay with her many dates at the Campus School Semi-Formal

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