

C-ing is believing

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Disabled students have greater access to education with C-Print captioning

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BRISTOL, R.I. – Without having full use of his hands, Jeff Delgado can't grasp a pencil, take notes in class, or turn the pages of a book.

But Delgado, who suffers from Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, will graduate from Roger Williams University with a bachelor's degree in business management in 2007. He credits modern technology for allowing him to excel in school.

"I hope to own my own business," said Delgado, 23.

Delgado uses C-Print captioning—a speech-to-text system developed at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology – to take notes in all of his classes.

Jacquelyn A. Sessa recently started her own business, RealTime Captioning in Fall River, using C-Print to help deaf and disabled students gain greater access to education.

C-Print is a computer program. A captionist uses the software and attends classes with the student. The captionist takes all necessary notes, while the deaf or hard-of-hearing student can also enter notes and communicate with the captionist and the teacher. The student receives the notes from the day in electronic version or hard-copy.

"It really varies with each student," said captionist Liz Tidwell. "A lot of students have their own technique. What I do is put everything Jeff needs in electronic form."

Tidwell e-mails him all of the notes from each of his four classes. Since Delgado has enough dexterity in his hands to use a computer mouse, he can study his notes on the computer screen, without every having to flip a page.

Delgado was diagnosed with Duchenne's muscular dystrophy when he was 3 1/2 years old. His mother, Gail Delgado, said she noticed her son wasn't meeting walking or speech milestones.

But, Delgado did walk and had use of his hands and arms when he was a young child.

"I walked until I was 9 1/2. I was able to write until I was 16," said Delgado.

He's undergone some seven surgeries, including a spinal fusion at the age of 11 to keep him from living on a ventilator. Although Delgado is able to eat, his most recent surgery was the insertion of a feeding tube to supplement his food intake.

"We haven't found anything yet to stop the progression" of the disease, his mother said.

She also hasn't found anything to halt her son's enthusiasm, not that she wants to.

"He's outlived a couple of live expectations. My son's always been blessed," said Gail Delgado. "He's had special people in his life."

Delgado said the captioning service has been extremely helpful to him.

“It helped tremendously. I kind of adapted it for myself,” said Delgado. “(Tidwell) also became a good friend to me.”

Delgado met Tidwell when he was taking classes at Bristol Community College in Fall River. A freelance captionist, Tidwell is now also employed by RealTime Captioning.

The business earns money for its services when it is employed by educational facilities and municipalities. Sessa said that by law, schools must offer a quality education to all students, regardless of disability

Sessa said municipalities can also benefit from C-Print because the technology can be used to televise real-time text during town meetings and gatherings.

Sessa said she understands that communication is key, whether between student and instructor, or captionist.

A former paralegal, Sessa was laid off from her job in Boston in 2003. With an interest in learning sign language and a knowledge of computer programming, her loss spiraled into a new career when she learned about C-Print and how captioning could help deaf and disabled students do better in school.

“I just decided I wanted to spend my life helping” students in needs, said Sessa. “I’m excited. My whole dream is to network students and institutions.”

Sessa is currently negotiating to offer her services to Deaf Inc. in New Bedford, and several schools in Boston and Providence.

She said it’s gratifying to see how her business is helping students like Delgado.

“It makes them now, for the first time, be interactive” in class, said Sessa.

“I think it’s terrific,” said W. Brett McKenzie, Delgado’s computer programming instructor.

For more information about RealTime Captioning, call Sessa at 508-676-0463, or realtimcaptioning@yahoo.com.

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