

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast “Jo-Beth’s Story: Finding My Voice with Assistive Technology”

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Debbie GROSSER: We’re here today with Jo-Beth Strong and she’s agreed to talk to us a little bit about her assistive technology that she’s used and thank you for being with us today, Jo-Beth.

Jo-Beth STRONG: Thank you for coming to my house and meeting me.

GROSSER: So, I was wondering if you could tell us a story about a time when you felt like your assistive technology was really a key factor in your success

Assistive Technology DEVICE: When I get nervous or excited, especially if I am giving a presentation, my speech can become almost unintelligible. Assistive technology helps me communicate when people are not familiar with the way I talk. When I am in different environments, without Mom or someone who is familiar with my speech, it’s sometimes hard to get my point across. For example, when I spoke before the Virginia Department of Education Transition Forum, I became very nervous the first year. My speech was very labored and I believe a lot of what I had to share was lost. The second year, I put many of my ideas into my iPad and used it during presentations and during casual conversation. The change, to me, was unimaginable. It was so liberating not to be trapped within my own words. I discovered the AT device that I use now in my second year of I’m Determined. Some of the T/TAC ladies talked to me about them and they asked me if I would like to try one for myself. I said yes.

STRONG: And the last one is if I had any advice.

DEVICE: Just that when you find something that helps you like use it a lot.

STRONG: I use this a lot and now that I have it, it helps me a lot. When I get excited-- new people meet me, they don't always understand me so I...

GROSSER: So you actually type into your iPad and then it speaks for you so it's actually typing the words in. Is that how it works?

STRONG: Yeah. I actually went to a class. A two week class to learn how to use a AT device and it was really cool!

GROSSER: Ah, who sponsored the class that you took?

STRONG: Um. The Department of Rehab.

GROSSER: So Department of Rehabilitative Services set up for you to be able to take (yeah) a class to (and) learn to use your (yes) assistive technology

Angela MINK: Jo-Beth was able to actually try the program that she eventually got on her iPad, which is the Proloquo. And the idea of the folders that you can set up. Like show her the emergency stuff. That's (yep) a cool one.

STRONG: Let's see. Which one is a car accident? I go to the button.

DEVICE: There has been a car accident.

MINK: When Jo-Beth gets really excited or nervous her speech goes-- She gets really high pitched and she loses her breath...like...such you couldn't understand her. So she could put her phone...

DEVICE: This is Jo-Beth Strong. I am using communication device to talk to you. Please do not hang up.

GROSSER: That's fabulous.

MINK: And she could actually... because this is an iPad, she could actually stick the cord into her phone. So it automatically would be completely clear. She wouldn't even have to hold her phone to it. She could actually put...

GROSSER: So you could actually talk on the phone not just for emergency purposes?

DEVICE: Hi, Mom. This is Jo-Beth.

GROSSER: Did you set it up before you made the phone call or...?

STRONG: Yeah.

GROSSER: ... as you talked on the phone you (I...I...) went back and forth?

STRONG: I actually, I preprogramed what I wanted to say and then, um, Deidre and the others helped me spell. They helped me (uh huh) with the spelling and I typed what I wanted to say into the buttons. I could do it myself. Three of us had different iPads.

GROSSER: This same d...this same app is what you're saying can (yeah) be used on like an iPod?

STRONG: Yes.

GROSSER: Could it be used on an iPhone?

STRONG: Probably.

GROSSER: They all had...everybody had a different device, but you were all learning on the same app. Is that what you're saying?

STRONG: Yeah.

Lee Anne SULZBERGER: If you were introducing yourself to someone is there something you already have loaded in like you could introduce yourself to the (yeah) people that are listening to this?

STRONG: Yeah.

DEVICE: My name is Jo-Beth. I have two dogs named Sarah and Angel. They play with each other and gets hair everywhere (laugh). Do you have any dogs at home?

GROSSER: Can you just talk to us a little bit more--I know you mentioned in--earlier that you use this to present. So you've presented at the Transition Forum.

STRONG: Yeah.

GROSSER: And that really changed your presentation (yeah). Made that more successful. And you use this for phone conversations sometimes (yeah), and to talk to people that you're just meeting. Is there anything else, um, any other ways in which this technology (um) has supported you?

STRONG: If I like go out and say to a restaurant. I can put up or I type what is on the eat menu that I want to have and I can ask them myself.

GROSSER: So it allows you some independence in being able to have that (yeah) voice and speak for yourself when you're maybe ordering in a restaurant or out in the community?

STRONG: Yeah.

GROSSER: Are you in school, Jo-Beth? What do you, what do you do with your time? You present. I (laugh) know that (laugh). You're well known across the state as a youth (yes) who is very active, but what else do you do?

DEVICE: I go to Tidewater Community College. I am getting my basic classes done. After that I want to study universal design so that I can design buildings to make them wheelchair accessible.

STRONG: And, with that I kind of changed it a little bit. I still want to make the buildings, but I met um, another lady and she goes to different buildings and places, and she-- and tells them, "Hey, you need to fix this building so we can get in and out."

GROSSER: So consulting with businesses, too and (yeah) how they can be better accessible.

STRONG: ...situations that I have been or is in. I want to help them.

GROSSER: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

STRONG: Let's...

DEVICE: Jo-Beth is awesome! Good bye.

GROSSER: Thank you, Jo-Beth, for your time. It's been great talking to you today.

STRONG: Thank you.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]