



DVRS Intern's Adaptations Bring Joy of Toys Within Reach for Children with Disabilities



Anne Phoenix, right, a speech language pathologist, tries out the adapted helicopter with intern Sarah Gachuz, left.

Dec. 13, 2019 – A simple battery interrupter assembled by Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services intern Sarah Gachuz is bringing joy to children with disabilities who can now activate battery-operated toys that previously posed a challenge for them to turn on and off.

Carolina Assistive Technology Program (/divisions/vocational-rehabilitation-services/north-carolina-assistive-technology-program) in August.

The interrupters allow a child to use his or her own ability switch – a button, proximity switch, grip switch, etc. – to operate a toy. Her efforts left no new battery-operated toy without a hand-made, accessible battery interrupter in the inventory of NCATP.

"I literally ran out of toys," said Lynne Deese, NCATP Assistive Technologist/Media and Training Coordinator. "She fixed switches for every toy I had."

So now, kids who couldn't operate the toys without help, can feel that they are in charge.

"Many of the young children we serve cannot interact with popular toys in the traditional manner due to having motor and access limitations," said NCATP Director Tammy Koger. "Providing adaptable switch access to battery-operated toys means that children with disabilities can have the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to play independently."

Gachuz demonstrated her capabilities on her first day at NCATP, making herself at home in the technical environment that many others might have found intimidating.

"She showed a keen interest in our clients and services from the start," said Deese. "She took on presentations, equipment demonstrations, and worked on the equipment reuse program and NCATP's annual vendor expo."

Gachuz also learned from staff at the program's Raleigh Center how to help North Carolinians access assistive technology services.

"It was such a great opportunity to learn about assistive technology in depth and how it can promote independence in people of all ages," Gachuz said. "Working at NCATP sparked my interest in the AT field and I am eager to use my knowledge of available resources in my career in rehabilitation."

Her internship ended in November, but she created a series of instructional videos, Switch Adapting Toys (<https://vimeo.com/showcase/6536418>) that provide step-by-step details on how to make battery interrupters that can be used on most battery-operated toys.

Before leaving NCATP, Gachuz modified 22 toy helicopters and all were distributed to local families, clinicians and classrooms in the regions served by NCATP's Raleigh and Greensboro offices. Her next step? Graduate school.