SWITCHED ON
The Trailblazers’ report into assistive technology
ABOUT TRAILBLAZERS

Trailblazers is a group of disabled campaigners from across the UK who tackle the social issues affecting young disabled people, such as access to higher education, employment and social and leisure opportunities. We aim to fight these social injustices to ensure young disabled people can gain access to the services they require.

We are part of Muscular Dystrophy UK, the charity for individuals and families living with muscle-wasting conditions.

About Muscular Dystrophy UK

- We support research to drive the development of effective treatments and cures.
- We ensure access to specialist NHS care and support.
- We provide services and promote opportunities to enable individuals and families to live as independently as possible.

This report has been researched and compiled by the Trailblazers team and members of the Trailblazers network

Registered Charity No. 205395 and Registered Scottish Charity No. SC039445
Introduction

From the small and simple to the large and complex, there are hundreds of items of technology which can make a profound and positive difference to the quality of life of young disabled people.

Assistive technology has been defined as ‘any product or service that maintains or improves the ability of individuals with disabilities or impairments to communicate, learn and live independent, fulfilling and productive lives’.

Our report demonstrates that assistive technology can greatly reduce the social isolation of young disabled people, while improving confidence, wellbeing and independence.

Through powerchairs that provide access to the outside world, computer technology that provides a gateway to the online world, and communication aids that quite literally provide a voice, assistive technology has the power to transform the lives of young disabled people.

Yet despite this, young disabled people struggle to find out what assistive technology may be available to them and how to get it. The assessment process is often complex, time consuming, stressful and unaffordable. Muscular Dystrophy UK’s Trailblazers believe this needs to change.

Trailblazers is a network of young disabled people who campaign on social issues. In 2014 – 2015, Trailblazers undertook a survey of 100 young disabled people, asking them about their experiences of using assistive technology. We also heard from Trailblazers who were unable to access assistive technology but felt it would benefit their lives.

What the survey revealed:

- a third of respondents felt isolated because of a lack of assistive technology
- nearly half of all respondents were unable to wash/look after their own personal hygiene independently, and believed assistive technology would greatly help them to do so and therefore increase their independence
- nearly half of all respondents were unable to prepare or cook their own food and said assistive technology would greatly assist them to do this
- three-quarters of respondents said they did not have the assistive technology they need because they could not afford to self-fund it
- only a quarter of the pieces of technology used by respondents was found through the NHS and only one in three was funded by the NHS
- more than a third of respondents had to self-fund the technology they use
- a third of respondents had to find more than £5,000 (either their own money, or asking their families to help) to obtain and maintain the technology they needed
- nearly half of all respondents had to do their own research into technology that would be useful for them
- over half cited the NHS’ assessment process as being a barrier to obtaining the technology they needed.

All respondents said that having assistive technology was a key factor to increasing their independence.

“Having assistive technology is very useful. It makes my life a lot easier and gives me the freedom to operate a wide variety of devices without the need to rely on anybody. Without assistive technology I don’t think I’d be able to manage things on my own.”

Mithun Soul, West Midlands

“My tech offers me work, education, and social opportunities, as I can communicate quickly through email or social media with colleagues, tutors, friends and family.”

Fleur Perry, South West
“Life without technology would be intolerable. Internet is vital. Facebook groups … are essential for pooling knowledge, let alone anything social! Internet and technology is vital to living an active, healthy lifestyle with a disability. Technology breaks the boundaries down.”
Michaela Hollywood, Northern Ireland

“Ranging from social, to medical, there are a range of technological innovations that support me to have a good quality of life, so I can live my life the way I would like.”
Jagdeep Kaur Sehmbi, West Midlands

“I consider myself to be quite tech-savvy and strongly feel that more should be done to help disabled people learn the IT skills that could benefit them and give them an added advantage in the workplace and life.”
Sulaiman Khan, London

“Because of my changing needs, it is difficult to know what to ask my social worker and occupational therapist for and they never seem to have many suggestions, I have to find out about things for myself.”
Jennifer Gallacher, North East

Trailblazers are calling on:

- the gaming industry to work with groups such as Muscular Dystrophy UK’s Trailblazers and other disability groups when developing games, consoles and controllers
- the gaming industry to ensure games are compatible with different forms of assistive technology
- wheelchair services to ensure that people get the right chair at the right time
- NHS England to ensure that young disabled people receive the right equipment, consistently and throughout their lifetime
- the Government to increase health and social care funding towards items of assistive and specialist equipment, so that young disabled people only need to apply to charities for funding as a last resort
- the Government to provide funding to charities so that the charity sector is properly financially resourced to support young disabled people who need assistive technology
- the Government to work with industry to provide an up-to-date database of assistive technology that is available to the public, is easy for young disabled people to access, use and understand, and which clearly outlines how they can acquire these items of technology.

**The positive impact of assistive technology**

Technology can be a powerful way of enabling young disabled people to have greater independence. For young people with a muscle-wasting condition, technology can help ease the loss of muscle function by assisting with physical tasks that they would otherwise struggle with.

From assisting with mobility to making it easier to communicate with others, having the right assistive technology can have a profound and positive impact on young disabled people.

Three quarters of respondents told us that assistive technology helped them in day-to-day activities around the house.

Just over half of the Trailblazers we talked to told us that technology helped them with their college and university studies.

Over two-thirds told us that technology helped to increase their confidence.

Nearly half of those surveyed said that having the right technology helped to decrease their physical pain and discomfort.
“Having a voice recorder and voice recognition software has made university easier because I am not in pain writing and it is quicker.”
Layla Harding, South East

CHALLENGES WITH GETTING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Although the benefit of having the right assistive technology is clear, many Trailblazers told us they experienced difficulties with the assessment process.

Assistive technology can be expensive to buy and many Trailblazers have told us they have had to apply for charitable grants or use their own money (or ask their families to help them) to get the technology they need.

Trailblazers also highlighted the lack of information available about assistive technology – what technology is available, which technology could help them and how to get it. Many told us they were left to find out most of this information themselves, through their own research.

Quite often the lengthy assessment process meant that by the time somebody received a piece of technology, their needs may have changed and a different piece of technology would be required.

“Due to the lack of funding, I find myself limited in the things I can do as my kitchen isn’t fully accessible for me and a lot of the equipment is way beyond my budget. It is very difficult to find funding for equipment grants.”
Trailblazer, South West

USING COMPUTERS WITH THE HELP OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

There is an overlap between some areas of mainstream technology and assistive information and communication technologies (ICT). Products may now have assistive technology features built in, where previously they would have been bolted on. For example, magnification, screen readers and text-to-speech/speech-to-text features are now built into operating systems on a personal computer (PC) or mobile device.
Although the explosion of tablets, PCs and apps has added to mainstream consumer choice, in some respects it has made it more difficult for young disabled people to choose the right product.

Sometimes a built-in accessibility feature will meet a young disabled person’s needs and be better than not using the feature at all. However in many cases there may be another item of technology that could do the job much better for them – they’re just not aware that it exists.

If the young disabled person does not have enough knowledge about what is available to them, they may be making do with a solution that is ‘good enough’ at the time. However, with proper assessment and advice, that individual’s access to life, learning and leisure could be so much better with more appropriate technology.

There are high-tech devices, such as eye-gaze systems, which allow people with severe physical disabilities to access a computer. These high-tech systems have an in-built camera which tracks where your eyes are looking, enabling you to move the mouse pointer around the screen. You can ‘click’ by blinking, ‘dwelling’ (staring at the screen for a certain length of time), or using a switch.

Then there are the low-tech solutions. For example, some people with limited hand movement might choose to use a stylus pen to touch their touch-screen device. For disabled people unable to hold a stylus in their hand, it is possible to get devices which can be held in your mouth or attached to your head.

For young disabled people, being able to access and use computers can open up a world of opportunities.

“I pair my iPhone with my Apple laptop using TouchPad from the App Store and can type on there really easily, if it’s too much for me to type directly on the laptop in times of illness.”

Michaela Hollywood, Northern Ireland

“Thanks to technology (my smartphone, which does not require the physical help of anyone) I can watch TV, read and interact with people online even when I am in bed. As a disabled person with severe needs, I am constantly requiring the help of others, so having these technological devices makes me more independent or at least less reliant on people.”

Trailblazer, London

“My MacBook has opened up opportunities for me to work, volunteer and study from home. As my condition progresses, I have had to find new ways to do things. I am not physically able to use a regular computer keyboard so instead I use an application called VirtualKeyboard. This displays a small keyboard on the screen and you use the mouse to click on the keys to type; a great little piece of software!”

Jagdeep Kaur Sehmbi, West Midlands

Trailblazer Mithun Soul, from Birmingham, tells us about his experience of using assistive ICT

“Due to muscle weakness caused by Duchenne muscular dystrophy, I have encountered difficulty operating my iPhone as I struggle to touch the screen, type and turn the device on and off. This was frustrating, as I used to get tired holding and touching the phone to open up an app or to type. It was hard to reach certain parts of the screen to open up an app and sometimes the phone would fall..."
out of my hand. As is the case with many people, my phone is a very important part of my life; it’s an invaluable source of information and entertainment.

As it became progressively harder for me to use my phone, I began to look for help in the form of assistive technology. I did some research on different types of assistive tech devices for operating phones and, through a forum I use on Facebook, I found out about a device called Tecla Shield.

I read up on the device and what it supported. It stated that it supports iOS, Android, PC and Mac devices and I was impressed by its functionality, as well as how compact the device looked in comparison to other devices, which are big and bulky. It took two weeks to come as the manufacturer was based in Canada. I tried to find a UK distributor, but I was unable to, so I decided to go direct.

Tecla Shield is an interface device, which allows me to enjoy the full functionality of my phone simply by pressing two very light click buttons which are located on my wheelchair. One button controls a scrolling selector from left to right and the other button controls a scrolling selector from top to bottom. By combining the two scrolling selectors, I am able to easily navigate the content on my phone.

ACT and AAC can help young disabled people who struggle with speech by acting as a substitute voice, ensuring their voices are heard, and enabling them to live more fulfilled, integrated and independent lives.

ACT and AAC devices can take many forms. Some, such as the ‘Patient-Operated Selector Mechanism’ (POSM or POSSUM), use a grid selection system from which users can pick words and phrases which will then by vocalised by the device they are using. Others offer direct text-to-speech, where a user will type what they want to say and the device will generate speech.

These technologies are typically much slower than speech, with most users producing an average of eight to ten words per minute. There are various strategies that can help to increase a user’s rate of communication.

Nadia Clarke, from West Yorkshire has cerebral palsy and is deaf. She uses assistive technology to communicate. She visited the USA headquarters of DynaVox, one of the leading companies in the field of ACT.

“I was keen to visit the headquarters of Dynavox in Pittsburgh, USA, since, having been a communication aid user for the last 15 years, I felt it was important to meet the people who market and sell the product. And for me to have the opportunity, as one of their consumers, to have a voice in their product delivery.

Over the years I have had regular contact with the suppliers in Britain and have spent many hours with their technical support team. We have had a lot of input and training over the years. More recently, we have had contact with the Pittsburgh team over the telephone when things have gone wrong with the technology. As I was already in Pittsburgh at a Conference, I thought it was a good idea to meet their US team.

In 1983, an undergraduate student called Gary Killiany, a volunteer at the rehabilitation institute of Pittsburgh, met a young woman with cerebral palsy. He was inspired to create a device, which would give the young woman a voice.

For young people living with a muscle-wasting condition or other disabilities such as cerebral palsy, speech can sometimes be severely affected.

Assistive Communication Technology (ACT), sometimes also known as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), can be an invaluable tool.
I think communication aids play an important role in society because disabled people need a voice. Being a confident communication aid user takes years of practice and hard work. It also requires a holistic approach and needs team work from a range of people. It doesn't just happen.

Words need to be programmed, taught, practiced and, due to the physical access being limited, there also needs to be motivation and encouragement. There is no doubt and in my own personal experience that using an aid is hard work.

Growing up, I personally found times that I just did not want to use my communication aid and sometimes I felt like giving up. It was thanks to my family and those around me that I realised how important it was to have a voice. Motivation can come from my family but often there is a range of professionals involved with the necessary skills and experience when using a communication aid. From all involved, there need to be high expectation and knowledge. There needs to be a belief in the person's ability and their true worth.”

**Living Independently with the Help of Assistive Technology**

In our survey, Trailblazers told us how they struggled to do many things around the house that most people take for granted, such as switching on lights and putting the heating on. But assistive technology can help young disabled people do these simple tasks themselves.

Environmental control systems (ECS) are rapidly being absorbed into mainstream use. Modern technology means you can use your smartphone to control your heating, turn on your washing machine and even find out what’s in your fridge! They also help people who lack full mobility to open doors, answer telephones and intercoms, and operate a host of electronic devices, from lamps and televisions, to motorised chairs and beds.
It’s a field that has seen plenty of innovation in recent years and has led to much progress in the functionality and application of the technology.

Integration of technology around the home has given many disabled people greater independence. Historically, a user may have needed one remote device to open a door, one to turn on a light and another to operate a motorised bed. Now it is possible to operate all these devices through a smartphone – and, as this technology becomes more accessible, more and more of the home environment can be controlled with greater ease.

A widely used example of this technology is the ‘evoassist’ app, which was developed by the company RSLSteep. This app allows the user to control a wide range of devices in their home, provided that those devices have been configured to interface with the app.

Advancements in technology, such as showers that can be controlled through ECS and machines that can wash your hair, can also help young disabled people to handle their personal care themselves.

But, of course, the greatest barrier to accessing this technology is being able to afford it in the first place.

What Trailblazers told us:

“I use an environmental control system – I use my phone to control things like turning lights on/off, opening and closing blinds in my room and opening the front door, as well as an intercom, controlling both TVs.”
Michaela Hollywood, Northern Ireland

GAMING WITH THE HELP OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

For many people, having fun playing computer games is an important part of having a good quality of life. It’s an enjoyable activity that offers a chance to compete and socialise with other gamers across the world.

The gaming industry is now estimated to be worth £1.7 billion to the UK economy alone. With global revenues from the games industry expected to exceed $100 billion by 2017, computer games are a serious business.

Because muscle-wasting conditions cause progressive loss of muscle function, access to gaming can become more difficult as people gradually lose the ability to press buttons or physically hold a controller. However, assistive technology can help with this.

There are many inventive adaptations that can be made to enable easier access to gaming. Buttons can be made easier to push, grips can be moulded to better fit your hand and mounts can be used to remove the need to hold a controller. It is also possible to rewire the electronics of a standard console controller so that you can use separate switches and buttons that are easier to press.

Trailblazer Vivek Gohil from Leicester tells us how he is able to enjoy games with the help of a few simple adaptations.

“One of my big passions in life is gaming. The first game that hooked me was Super Mario World on the Super Nintendo. I played it for hours trying to complete everything and being amazed by the secret levels. Now that I look back, I realise the simple act of running and jumping allowed me the freedom of movement that was limited to me in the ‘real’ world.

Over the years I’ve slowly had my Duchenne muscular dystrophy affect my gaming enjoyment. I’ve been unable to quickly press R3 or L3 buttons on my PS3 controller but I could press them if I held the controller in a twisted position or I just didn’t use those buttons, so it was slightly limiting.

During my teenager phase, this impact would have created anger and frustration. But now I feel that it’s always a new challenge to find a workable solution. This epiphany was brought on by purchasing a PS4 and then catalysed by the disappointment after holding the controller. Who could adapt my PS4 controller?”
The solution to my gaming woes came from an amazing charity called Remap. Remap works through a nationwide network of dedicated volunteers, who use their ingenuity and skills to help people with disabilities to achieve independence or to enjoy leisure opportunities. They make or modify equipment, when nothing suitable is available through mainstream sources. I’ve used them many times before but never for anything electronic.

A Remap engineer visited my house and took the PS4 controller away for a week. The analog sticks are used as normal but the gold sticks I tap for R3 or L3 and the R1 and L1 are modelled concave using SuGru. Remap have since adapted my friend David’s controller by moving the R1 and R2 underneath.

I want to praise the wonderful engineers at Remap for improving my quality of life. I will never stop being a gamer!”

Carl Tilson from Manchester tells us about his love of gaming

“I enjoy gaming online, with friends or on my own – it’s something I can still take part in and because I’m unable to physically go out and play football or any kind of physical activities, it gives me something to do!

I have recently been struggling to grip the controller and there are some buttons – depending on which game I’m playing – that I can’t reach or press. These are buttons you need to press to get to the next stage of the game, which is really frustrating.

I feel bad for those who can’t even use the controller at all because they have no strength in their hands or fingers. I believe gaming should be available for all, no matter what the disability.”

Trailblazers are calling for:

- the gaming industry to work with groups such as Muscular Dystrophy UK’s Trailblazers and other disability groups when developing games, consoles and controllers
- the gaming industry to ensure games are compatible with different forms of assistive technology.

Getting Around with the Help of Assistive Technology

Technology such as powered wheelchairs and scooters has done a lot to support disabled people with their mobility needs. Muscular Dystrophy UK continues to campaign to improve the provision of wheelchairs through the NHS Wheelchair Services, so this section will focus more on the cutting-edge advances in the field.

It used to be the stuff of science fiction, but modern technology has now advanced to the point where companies are developing fully-functioning robotic exoskeletons, which allow people with severe disabilities to walk around and even climb stairs!

'REX' is one example of the application of advanced technology to aid people who have reduced mobility. REX was designed by Rex Bionics to provide mobility to non-ambulatory wheelchair users, rather than as a means to enable otherwise mobile individuals to lift heavy loads, enhance endurance or aid the mobility of those able to walk with crutches. The device is designed to enable all users to stand and walk.

Rex Bionics’ innovation in robotics provides varied benefits to REX users with a unique combination of lifestyle and medical needs. There is extensive public data available which underlines the health benefits of a person being able to stand and walk.

Today there are two primary REX devices available: an adjustable REX Rehab for use in rehabilitation centres, and a streamlined, fit-for-purpose REX Personal made for each individual’s specific medical and physical requirements enabling the user to perform tasks and functions previously unavailable.

Another cutting-edge advance in this field is the invention of the ‘Topchair-S’. Manufactured by Topchair, the Topchair-S is a stair-climbing wheelchair capable of going up and down straight stairs and pavements without any assistance.
Technology offers many benefits to overcome the challenges faced by people with reduced mobility. However, these advances in technology are currently not easily available for the wider public and young disabled people continue to wait far too long for even a standard powered wheelchair suitable for their needs.

“My electric wheelchair helped me a great deal in making the transition from a special needs school into a mainstream one. It gave me the chance to befriend people and just ‘hang around’ with them independently, not needing anyone to push or help me, ultimately building my self-confidence and making me feel equal to them.”
Trailblazer, London

“My powerchair means freedom – to move where I want, when I want, just as ambulant people use their legs. It is an NHS chair, but I have also partly-funded the riser function on it. Wheelchair Services deemed this not a requirement, so refused to pay for this, but to me the riser function symbolised a new freedom that I wanted to experience and so I paid to have it added.”
Jagdeep Kaur Sehmbi, West Midlands

Trailblazers supports the Wheelchair Leadership Alliance’s Wheelchair Charter which outlines ten principles for how wheelchair services should be commissioned and delivered to ensure that people get the Right Chair at the Right Time. www.rightwheelchair.org.uk

Fleur Perry, from Wiltshire, writes about how she has benefitted from assistive technology

“We hear a lot about the dangers of modern technology, how Facebook and Twitter and YouTube are making us all lazier, more socially isolated and more demanding. We want the world, and we want it now, at a higher download speed. We’re constantly told to be on our guard for hackers, snoopers and spammers and scammers, shadowy characters aiming to ruin our day.

This, however, is only one side of the story. Assistive technology – sometimes known as AT, AAT, or ACT – is invaluable to a huge number of people, and I wouldn’t be without mine. My tech offers me work, education, and social opportunities, as I can communicate quickly through email or social media with colleagues, tutors, friends and family. I can then discover almost anything I need to know online, cross check that information and store it, or use it.

I’m often to be found looking up, surprise surprise, more tech. There’s some great products moving on to market, but there’s also a growing movement of DIY tech. Hackers are no longer those shady figures hunting for your bank details, but curious people taking things apart and putting them back together to make them work in a different way. This has some exciting implications for assistive tech; a little imagination and co-operation and what could we have?

Looking around my home, there’s quite a few bits and bobs of non-standard tech. There’s a Kindle with adapted buttons, made possible by the charity Remap. There’s a USB wireless touchpad mouse, simply bought online. Then there’s all sorts of crafty modifications I’ve made to make life simpler. There’s a watch velcroed to the armrest of my wheelchair, and a compass too, so wherever I’m headed I know which direction I need to go and how long I’ve got to get there. With my retro satnav and a reasonable knowledge of astronomy, I could sail around the world and be back in time for tea.
There’s always more than one way to do everything, and sometimes the stylish way is also the simplest. Medications can be measured in a shot glass; vanity mirrors are a great aid to reversing; and a music stand can hold almost any book. Is this assistive tech? To most people, not really, but I would class these as highly useful daily living aids.

Over the years, I’ve seen very specific devices made or commandeered for unusual purposes. A device for throwing tennis balls for Labradors and other canines, a toothpaste squeezing gadget and a hands-free hairdryer.

The future of assistive technology is a little more exciting. Eye-tracking computers, where the mouse is controlled with your eyes, are proven to work but are still expensive. 3D printers promise the ability to make what you need when you need it with just a few clicks. Driverless cars could deliver the open road to all. BCIs, or Brain-Computer-Interfaces, are being linked up to electric wheelchairs, meaning in the future we could travel on a wish and a dream, with both hands free.

It will take time before these technologies are available to us all, but when they are, I want to be using a BCI-controlled 3D printed robot arm to toast the future.

This article was typed using a programme called Dasher, a free download which has previously spellbound and almost hypnotised colleagues of mine. Its colourful display moves around in response to movements of a mouse, and types as you guide a crosshair through letters. It’s partly predictive, and the speed can be controlled. There are, in fact, few things more relaxing than typing with this programme.”
NHS funding for assistive technology

Every Trailblazer who responded to our survey told us that technology had enabled them to have greater independence in their life.

Acquiring the right technology to meet specific needs can also make a huge difference to an individual’s quality of life.

However, more than half of all the Trailblazers we surveyed (55 percent) told us they saw the NHS’ assessment process for adaptive and assistive technology as a barrier in itself. Trailblazers cited a lack of clarity in the funding process, and a lack of knowledge from some assessors, as being challenges. We also heard of instances where the needs of Trailblazers would be disputed by their assessor or service provider.

With Trailblazers only finding out about 23 percent of the technology that they use via the NHS (compared to 41 percent via their own research), it would appear that the NHS could be doing more to promote the benefits of technology to disabled people.

There is currently no central database of adaptive and assistive technology products, assessors, advisors, training providers and related sources of information. This makes it very difficult for anyone to make adequately informed choices.

Technology advances at a staggering rate. Access to adaptive and assistive technology is often dependent on a range professionals and carers who themselves may not be able to keep fully up-to-date.

We have also heard from Trailblazers who told us that although they received the technology they needed, they were not trained in how to use it.

“When I was younger, my mother wanted me to have a communication aid because I can’t speak, due to my weaker lung muscles. She asked for funding from the NHS. I remember they helped me to acquire a DynaVox (a communication aid that ‘speaks’ the words I type into it) but nobody actually taught me how to use a communication aid and I was left to puzzle through the very complex interface on my own.”

Nadia Clarke, Yorkshire and Humber

Trailblazers is calling for:

- NHS England to ensure that young disabled people receive the right equipment for the right task at the right time, consistently and throughout their lifetime.
- the Government to increase health and social care funding towards items of assistive and specialist equipment, so that young disabled people only need to apply to charities for funding as a last resort.

Charity funding for assistive technology

Through its welfare arm, the Joseph Patrick Trust, Muscular Dystrophy UK provides grants for children and adults with a muscle-wasting condition towards the costs of specialist equipment, such as powered wheelchairs, adapted computers and electric beds.

Over the past 28 years, Muscular Dystrophy UK has awarded more than 6,000 grants, totalling more than £6 million, towards specialist equipment, helping more than 5,000 children and adults with muscle-wasting conditions to purchase specialist mobility equipment that is not available on the NHS.

In 2015, Muscular Dystrophy UK’s Independence through Technology appeal raised £100,000 to date for a pilot to provide assistive equipment. The scheme focuses on items for people who are losing muscle strength in their fingers, hands and arms, and therefore finding it difficult to use touch-
based technology due to limited movement. www.musculardystrophyuk.org/jpt

There are other charities that can help with the cost of acquiring adaptive and assistive technology and their details can be found in the useful links section.

Trailblazers is calling for:

- the Government to provide funding to charities so that the charity sector is properly financially resourced to support young disabled people who need assistive technology
- the Government to work with industry to provide an up-to-date database of assistive technology that is available to the public, is easy for young disabled people to access, use and understand, and which clearly outlines how they can acquire these items of technology.

“Friends recommended to me certain assistive technology but I would have liked to see other people's online reviews on the assistive technology too.” Vivek Gohil, East Midlands

“It would be better if local authorities could fund devices such as Tecla Shield (a device for controlling a phone/PC, with limited hand strength) because some cannot afford assistive technology. If local authorities could provide it, it would make life so much easier for thousands of people.” Mithun Soul, West Midlands

“I am struggling to pay for the bed I need as the council and NHS refused to even part-fund it. They each maintain that it’s the other’s job to supply it. I couldn’t access charity funding as my occupational therapist wouldn’t take the time to support my application and charities wouldn’t take the care nurse’s recommendation. I really need a bed with a turning function as I can no longer self-turn but I simply can’t afford it without part-help.” Trailblazer, Scotland

“Without technology, life would be intolerable. Internet and technology are vital to living an active, healthy lifestyle with a disability. Technology breaks the boundaries down.” Michaela Hollywood, Northern Ireland

USEFUL LINKS

Ability Net
www.abilitynet.org.uk
AbilityNet exists to change the lives of disabled people by helping them to use digital technology at work, at home or in education.

Aidis Trust
www.aidis.org
The Aidis Trust is a charity that provides free and impartial advice and support on technology to help disabled people across the UK.

AT Alliance
www.at-alliance.org.uk
The AT Alliance links four national charities that provide independent information about the products that make independent living possible. These include high street products as well as specially designed assistive technology equipment.

British Assistive Technology Association
www.bataonline.org
BATA campaigns for the rights and interests of those needing Assistive Technology.

The Communication Trust
www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk
A coalition of organisations who support children and young people who struggle to communicate because they have speech, language and communication needs.

DMD Pathfinders
www.dmdpathfinders.org.uk
A charity for teenagers and adults with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. DMD Pathfinders have published a guide on Assistive Technology.
**Family Fund**  
[www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk)  
The Family Fund help families across the UK who are raising a disabled or seriously ill child or young person aged 17 or under with grants for items including furniture, sensory toys, computers and tablets and more.

**Muscular Dystrophy UK**  
[www.musculardystrophyuk.org](http://www.musculardystrophyuk.org)  
The Joseph Patrick Trust (JPT), the welfare fund within Muscular Dystrophy UK provides grants towards the costs of specialist equipment such as powered wheelchairs, adapted computers and electric beds, for children and adults with muscular dystrophy or a related neuromuscular condition.

**Remap**  
[www.remap.org.uk](http://www.remap.org.uk)  
Remap is a national charity working through local groups of skilled volunteers to help disabled people achieve independence and a better quality of life.

**Rica**  
[www.rica.org.uk](http://www.rica.org.uk)  
The Research Institute for Consumer Affairs carries out research and publishes information to enable disabled and older people to live independently.

**Sensory Guru**  
[www.sensoryguru.com](http://www.sensoryguru.com)  
Sensory Guru specialises in the design and installation of sensory environments, gesture-controlled software, Tobii Dynavox AAC and eye-gaze systems.

**Special Effect**  
[www.specialedeffect.org.uk](http://www.specialedeffect.org.uk)  
Special Effect is a UK-based charity which uses video games and technology to enhance the quality of life of disabled people.

**Smartbox**  
[www.thinksmartbox.com](http://www.thinksmartbox.com)  
Smartbox create assistive technology for people with disabilities; for communication, environment control, computer control and much more.

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