

Computer voice helps handicapped kids speak

A computer's monotone voice is giving Down Syndrome children one that is full of life and vitality.

Children afflicted with Down Syndrome, the most common form of mental retardation, share similar facial characteristics, small mouths and therefore long tongues, thus making speech difficult, and a greater difficulty in learning how to talk than other children. Approximately one in 1,000 babies are born with Down Syndrome.

The voice of the Halton Down Syndrome Association's most recently acquired Apple computer gives equal importance to the pronunciation of each word in a said sentence, the association's vice-president, Acton resident, Debbie Boycott, says.

Down Syndrome children need to be communicated with in this way to properly learn how to articulate a complete sentence, Ms. Boycott said. And teaching these children how to communicate comprehensively is one of the association's primary goals.

For Down Syndrome children to grow mentally and socially, they have to be able to integrate with other children, and speech is critical to this integration process, Ms. Boycott said.

A Down Syndrome child has more difficulty learning speech from people because of people's inability to duplicate the computer's monotone voice.

When the child hears a sentence spoken by another person the child only picks up the main words and

not the sentence's connecting prepositions.

As a result Down Syndrome teenagers, for example, have the ideas of teenagers but the words of two-year-olds, Ms. Boycott said.

The \$3,000 computer was donated to the six-year-old association by the Kiwanis Club of Georgetown as part of their ongoing support for the association's work. Last year the club paid for a speech therapist for a Down Syndrome child.

Ms. Boycott, whose six-year-old daughter, Emily, has Down Syndrome, can attest first hand to the computer's effectiveness. Not only has her daughter's speech improved, but also, she can count better and is now able to differentiate between upper and lower case letters, Ms. Boycott said.

"Emily likes the computer's voice and the colors that come up on the screen," she said.

"It has made learning fun for her." A lack of appropriate software, programs that are neither too slow nor too fast, is the problem currently faced by Ms. Boycott. However she is receiving help from Ms. Diane Norton of Brookville Public School in Acton, who has given her a number of good programs.

The computer is shared on a monthly basis among the five families in the North Halton Region, who have a Down Syndrome child. The association has also obtained two computers to serve families in Burlington and Oakville.



Learning how

Six-year-old Emily Boycott is captivated by the voice and colors produced by her new teacher - an Apple II GS computer - as her mother, Debbie Boycott, looks on. (Herald photo)



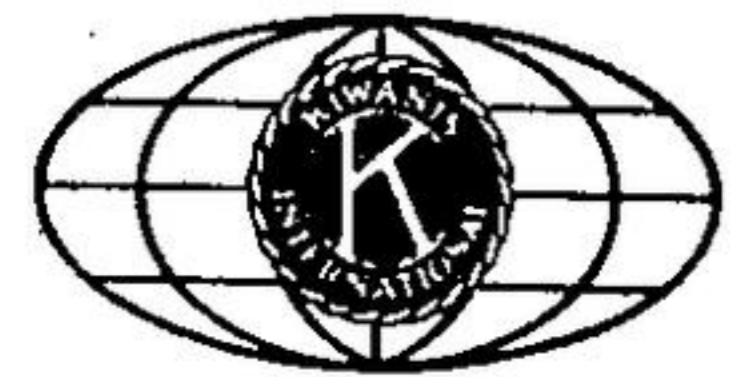
The vice-president of the Halton Down Syndrome Association, Debbie Boycott, accepts a donation on behalf of the association from the president of the Kiwanis Club of Georgetown, Brian MacAdam, at Ms. Boycott's Acton home, May 11th. The money was used to purchase a computer that helps teach Down Syndrome children speech.



A KIWANIS CONCERN

Forty wide eyes and twenty attentive stares told the story that "Officer Ollie's" message about "stranger danger" was making an impression. The eyes belonged to twenty Elmhurst, Illinois preschoolers. Officer Ollie was a puppet under the control of policeman Clifford Stasi, the city's crime prevention officer. And the program itself was made possible through a generous donation from the Kiwanis Club of Elmhurst.

Kiwanis International, a community service organization, raised more than \$65 million this year for community service projects. With more than 320,000 members in 8,000 clubs, the K-Family serves 73 nations and includes two, coed youth affiliates. Circle K International is a college service group with 10,000 members in 600 clubs. Key Club's 125,000 members are active in 3,700 high schools.



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