

## 1. What do you know about the STAR Center?

The STAR Center provides assistive technologies and therapy for individuals with various types of disabilities. It is located in Jackson, Tennessee and has been serving West Tennessee for several years.

The STAR Center serves adults and children as well as their families and caregivers. The youngest attender is 3 months old and the oldest is 104.

The STAR Center was founded in 1988 as a small volunteer group to help individuals with various disabilities. It now serves over 17,000 people each year.

## 2. What do you know about...?

- Assistive Technology?
  - Assistive technology is a term denoting various types of technology used by individuals with disabilities to assist them in performing various tasks and meeting academic, employment-related, and personal goals.
- Art Therapy?
  - Art therapy is an therapeutic intervention using art to help individuals with disabilities to meet academic, work, or personal goals. Art therapy can be used to develop motor skills, hand-eye coordination, communications skills, and self-esteem.
- Augmentative Communication?
  - Augmentative communication systems are a type of technology that assists one in communicating. Augmentative communication systems can come in different forms but the basic concept is the same, technology is used to assist people with certain disabilities in expressing their thoughts and needs to others. Some clients who require augmentative communication are traumatic brain injury patients, developmental display, and autism.
- Environmental Controls?
  - Environmental controls are technology systems that allow people with disabilities to control their environments with voice or movement-based controls. This technology helps people with disabilities to customize home or work environments to meet their needs.
- Hardware (keyboards, mouses, screens, trackballs and more...)?
  - The Learning Lab is a computer lab for children and adults (and their families as well as healthcare and rehabilitation specialists) with various disabilities can reach their dreams beyond what they ever thought possible. In the Learning Lab, people learn basic computer, academic and life skills. The goal is to make the individuals attending the STAR Center ready to achieve a goal such as high school graduation, GED, or even entering into a vocation.
- Low Vision Aids?
  - After a low vision consultation has been performed, aids are given to help individuals establish an "accurate level of vision" based on what

eyesight capacity they do have. Devices that are used in this therapy are prisms, magnifiers, telescopes, high-powered reading glasses, and electronic magnification systems.

- Music Therapy?
  - This uses music as a means to reach a non-musical goal. It helps individuals to access their emotions and to build up their self image. It can be used for individuals who have experienced head injury or stroke or also people who have attention deficit disorder, developmental delays or autism.
- Software (voice synthesizer & voice activated)?
  - Software such as voice synthesizers and voice activated controls are typically a part of the augmentative communication service. These can be beneficial to persons with various disabilities, such as stroke, brain injury, cerebral palsy, and autism. They greatly enhance the communication skills of individuals who struggle with this extreme barrier.

### **3. What would you like to know about the STAR Center?**

I would like to learn more about the services they offer, especially those that are more educational in nature. DO they partner any with educators or schools? What services do they find most beneficial for middle school age students. I am especially interested in their therapies for individuals suffering from ADD. In addition, I am interested in how they fund their programs. Are these services free? Do they require referrals? - Bob

I am interested in learning about the music and art therapy offered by the STAR Center. I know that the goal for these therapies is not to directly related to art or music, and I am interested to see how these means help individuals meet emotional and physical goals. I also am interested in learning if they have an "application" of some sort or if anyone can attend. Can the "students" get scholarships if fees apply to their services? Will insurance help cover services like this as part of a rehabilitation program? I would like to know if they work with some students to work them into the regular classroom. Finally, I would like to find out how the STAR Center works with companies and various employers to help find jobs for the individuals of the STAR Center. -Natalie

### **What did you learn from the visit to the STAR Center?**

From our visit to the STAR Center I learned so many different things! Learning how the job tracks program works was one of the most intriguing things that I learned. The fact that adults can gain basic and useful skills to help them be successful is such an important part of making them more self-sufficient and independent. I also found the personal assistant program incredible. How amazing for a person who may have had to have an assistant for them at one point be able to be an assistant for someone else! Learning skills such as CPR, first aid, and social skills will help them in so many areas, such as jobs, emergency situations, and even parenting. Finally, the fact that the center will go into individual homes to help those with disabilities is such a convenience for those needing the help. With the vision department, they will go into homes and work with infants to adults on walking with canes and using other adaptations in the home. If they learned how to walk using a cane at the center, but then went home it would not be nearly as beneficial as

learning to walk around their own home first, where the surroundings are more familiar and consistent. - Natalie

As a result of our visit to the STAR Center, I learned many new things, especially about their philosophy and the wealth of assistive and adaptive technologies available to those with disabilities. They seek to help their clients in an individualized manner, evaluating each client and tailoring the programs to meet their specific needs. Their goal of reaching each client with an individualized program based upon a personal evaluation is very interesting. In addition, their goal of having each student become an independent learner is very commendable and a worthy goal for all educators. I was also fascinated by the myriad of ways the center is able to help people with disabilities. I did not realize that they also had academic programs at the center for students who just have a more temporary special need, such as severe troubles with algebra. They meet these individuals' needs as well those of those with more permanent disabilities. I also learned a lot about the therapeutic possibilities for music and art. I had no idea that their were people trained in these disciplines who are able to help clients meet such a wide variety of goals through these therapies. The diverse ways in which they are able to apply art and music is very interesting. - Bob

#### **4. Classroom connection?**

I am greatly looking forward to implementing some of the ideas I learned from the STAR Center into my classroom. Understanding that all students learn at a different pace and in various ways is crucial to being an effective classroom teacher. The STAR Center focuses on keeping their clients working individually and at their own speed. Some people may take 3 months to learn a task that others may master in 3 weeks. Being aware of my students' needs, strengths and weaknesses will help heighten my sensitivity to them and help me to be able to meet their needs and also help them to become independent and productive citizens. - Natalie

Today's visit to the STAR Center has benefited me as an educator in several ways. First, listening to Ms. Duke share some of the educational philosophy reaffirmed to me the need for students to be engaged with the methods and strategies that are best for them. No one learns the same way, and the therapists and workers at the STAR Center understand this and act accordingly. Furthermore, they strive for their clients to become independent in learning, living, and every other area of achievement. These are philosophical ideals with which I agree and hearing them tonight in a different setting from a traditional classroom helped reaffirm them in my mind. I will certainly be holding them in my mind as I teach this fall. - Bob