Robots and iPad to Help Children With Autism

SOURCE: Autism Centers of Pittsburgh

From the Autism Center of Pittsburgh: Interbots, Inc., a high-tech spin-off company associated with the Carnegie Mellon University Entertainment Technology Center, has teamed up with the Autism Center of Pittsburgh to provide innovative robot-based therapy for children with autism.

The program, "Character Therapy," through the use of the Interbot robot "Popchilla," will test the ability of children with autism with limited or no verbal skills.

According to Seema Patel, CEO and co-founder of Interbots, "we've had numerous individuals tell us our robots could be tremendous tools for Autism therapy. We're excited to be working with the Autism Center of Pittsburgh and the Sprout Foundation to take this first step. We're going to learn a lot from the next few months."

"The premise behind the program is that children with autism are sometimes more likely to communicate with a non-human entity," said Cindy Waeltermann, Founder and Director of the Autism Centers of Pittsburgh. "When you have a child with autism, you use whatever interests them to gain access into their world. The idea is to bridge the gap between their word and ours."
Popchilla will be used in the first phase of the program with a trained therapist. Programmers and developers at Interbots have created an iPad application that will allow the therapist to direct sessions, which will eventually be transitioned to allow the child to control the robot through an iPad application to identify emotions.

According to Waeltermann, "by using Popchilla as an intermediary, we hope to increase the understanding of the child's internal feelings, thus reducing behavioral frustrations. If they are able to identify that they are 'angry' and what 'angry' means, it can significantly help them understand what they are feeling, reducing behavioral ramifications."

“The program is funded by Spark. Spark is an initiative of The Sprout Fund catalyzing projects and programs that engage children ages birth to eight through the creative use of technology and media. Spark challenges individuals, organizations, and communities to generate inventive technology-based solutions to the issues and opportunities facing today's young child. Through its funding opportunities and extensive network of support, Spark is unleashing the innovative potential of Southwestern Pennsylvania and transforming our region into one of the best places on earth to be a kid.”

"Our emphasis has always been making the use and control of our robots as simple and flexible as possible. You don't need to have a technical background to control our characters. You can control them with a variety of other familiar devices. So that opens a lot of interesting applications - like having a therapist or a parent use our robots as a tool to interact with children - even the possibility of kids using the robot to express themselves and explore emotions on their own," according to Sabrina Haskell, Interbots, Designer & Co-Founder. The iPad application is currently in production and the program is slated to begin this fall.

"Nobody is more excited than the parents of the children with autism who have the potential to gain great strides from this program," said Cindy Waeltermann. "That's what this is all about -- thinking outside the box to reach these kids."

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Seema Patel, CEO & Co-Founder, Interbots, (412) 687-0818
SOURCE Autism Centers of Pittsburgh
Latest News from the Device Loan Program

It’s that time of year again. TTAP is preparing to purchase net AT devices for our Device Loan Program. Are there any new devices you would like to see available in the Device Loan Program?

Please email us and let us know!

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Assistive Technology Q&A

Q: What’s the difference between “assistive” technology and “adaptive” technology?

A: Adaptive technology adapts existing technology whereas assistive technology can be developed from scratch.

Examples:

Adaptive Technology - Screen Magnifier: primarily designed for people with low vision, have been adapted from screen- zooming techniques. They are, however, also used by graphic designers who wish to work on minute details.

Assistive Technology - Teletypewriter, which converts typed characters into tones that may be sent over the telephone line, enabling deaf-mute people to communicate.

Tech Corner:

Picture of Mobility Lifter in use. The Mobility Lifter is attendant operated, battery operated and lightweight. This stair climber is completely mobile and usable anywhere, in or out, up or down almost any stairs.

The Liftkar PT product line allows for visit ability. Liftkar can hold up to 352 pounds. The PT-U allows your manual wheelchair to be rolled-on/rolled off easily.

http://mobilitylifter.com
Spotlight on Demonstration Centers

Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Austin

Vision and Values

Values:

• Everyone Matters
• Integrity
• Strong Families
• Innovation
• Collaboration
• Superior Service
• Continuous Improvement
• Sustainability
• Employer-Driven

Vision:

Empowering 100,000 Central Texans to Transform their lives through work

For almost six decades, Goodwill Central Texas has relentlessly focused on a single goal: empowering people to work.

The extremely high levels of unemployment among segments of our community are unacceptable, specifically for those people who have disabilities, lack education, have criminal backgrounds, or are facing homelessness. We believe everyone matters, and that advancing business and valuing our earth leads to stronger communities where individuals and families thrive.

More than 100,000 Central Texans are unable to find stable employment on their own. Our education and job training, retail stores and business services, and community partnerships enable us do whatever it takes to transform lives through the power of work.

1015 Norwood Park Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78753
(512) 637-7520

http://www.goodwillcentraltexas.org
What’s on TTAP for Spring/Summer 2014

June 14, 2014
Ms. Abilities America Pageant
Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74464

Contact: Elizabeth Reeve
549 South Cherokee Avenue
Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74464
(918) 431-0445

July 1-6, 2014
NFB National Convention (National Federation of the Blind)
Orlando, Florida

Contact: National Federation of the Blind
200 East Wells Street at Jernigan Place
Baltimore, Maryland 21230
(410) 659-9314

July 11-19, 2014
American Council of the Blind Conference and Convention
Las Vegas, Nevada

Contact: ACB
2200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 650
Arlington, Virginia 22201-3354
(202) 467-5081 (800) 424-8666

July 25-27, 2014
Abilities Expo Houston
Houston, Texas

Contact: David Korse
Abilities Expo
2601 Ocean Park Boulevard, Suite 200
Santa Monica, California 90405
(310) 450-8831 Extension 3
info@abilitiesexpo.com

Just for Laughs

(picture: “pig, cow and chicken grouped around a farmer in overalls with his head crashed through the screen of a Dell computer monitor”) Caption: “Quick, call tech support, the farmer is in the Dell.”
Any suggestions, comments, or article you would like to have included in our newsletter, please contact us:

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Texas Technology Access Program
The University of Texas at Austin
Texas Center for Disability Studies
Commons Learning Center
10100 Burnet Road
Austin, Texas 78758-4445
http://techaccess.edb.utexas.edu

**TTAP Demonstration Centers**

- Ability Connection, Dallas
- Brazoria County Center for Independent Living, Angleton
- Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living, Bryan
- Coastal Bend Center for Independent Living, Corpus Christi
- Disability in Action, Abilene
- East Texas Center for Independent Living, Tyler
- Easter Seals of Greater Houston
- Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Austin
- Goodwill Industries of Fort Worth
- Heart of Central Texas Independent Living Center, Belton
- Helping Hands, Amarillo
- Houston Center for Independent Living, Houston
- Paso Del Norte Children’s Development Center, El Paso
- REACH Center for Independent Living, Plano
- RISE Center for Independent Living, Beaumont
- VAIL – Valley Association for Independent Living, McAllen