

## Case Study:

### Assistive Technology for Learners with Vision Impairment

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#### **The context:**

Provision for individuals with vision impairments (VI) at City of Sunderland College (CoSC) is part of the overall cross college service provided by the Directorate for Learning Support.

This specialist (VI) teaching and support is provided by three qualified members of staff (who are also Disability Advisors across the college) in a specially equipped facility as well as in situ across the college. The VI facility as well as being equipped with state of the art hardware and software is designed to allow for 1:1 teaching (where required) and to accommodate guide dogs and wheelchairs. The provision provides learners with the opportunity to develop or improve existing computing skills and also improve their levels of literacy and numeracy. Participation on appropriate mainstream courses is also highly encouraged.

#### **The challenge:**

Julie Wilkinson is a 43 year old student presently attending the City of Sunderland College. Julie has Optracophy and, is completely blind in her left eye with only very limited peripheral vision in her right eye. Julie also has Pfeiffer Syndrome – a fusion and deformity of the structure of the skull, which is often associated with poor vision. Julie is also a wheelchair user.

#### **What we did:**

In October 2006 the Visually Impaired service acquired a Portset Text Reader which has totally transformed Julie's learning progress. This Personal Reader has high quality British speech and is suitable for any person with a vision impairment. Although designed as an easy to use product for any non- computer user, it has proven such an invaluable piece of equipment that four more machines have been subsequently purchased for wider college use, to include students with dyslexia.

Julie's computer and keyboard is positioned on a height adjustable computer table designed to allow wheelchair access. The text reader is positioned in close proximity to her wheelchair immediately to the right of the key board, as Julie has limited arm mobility. As there are only six easy to operate main function keys, she is able to operate the machine with minimum of exertion.


**The outcomes:**

The text reader has allowed Julie to:

- Work independently without the need for dictation
- Work at her own pace
- Significantly raise confidence and self esteem levels
- Enjoy learning to a greater degree
- Work at a more rapid and productive pace
- Produce work on time
- Complete homework tasks
- Improve level of attendance

**The impact:**

Since acquiring the text reader Julie has successfully completed TROCN courses in Computing level 1; Entry Level 3 Literacy and Level 1 Literacy. She is presently working towards gaining Unit 1 CLAIT File Management and Word Processing. All with the aid of the Portset Text Reader!

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