

Device helps physically disabled turn on computer

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More than 14 million Americans under age 64 have a physical disability, according to the 2005 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau. A large percentage of these persons have little or no use of their hands to manipulate a computer or access the Internet. While several helpful technologies have been created for those with physical disabilities, such as special switches that activate numerous hardware and software, one problem remains—turning the computer on and off.

“For months, we looked for a device for someone who lacks fine motor skills for months but couldn’t find anything,” says Dr. Joseph Drew, Kent State associate professor of political science.

Thus, Drew, his graduate assistant Ron Franklin, who has quadriplegia, and Kenneth McElravy, a manufacturing lab technician at Kent State Trumbull, found a solution on their own by adding a jack to the back interior wall of the central processing unit and paralleling it to the on/off circuit of the motherboard. Any existing technologies, such as sensitive or sip/puff switches mentioned above, can be plugged in to the added jack allowing users with physical disabilities to turn on the computer by themselves.

“The idea is to make those with disabilities as independent as possible,” says Drew, who also has designed a unique online Master of Public Administration degree program, the only one in the nation to meet and exceed the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Source: Kent State University

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