

Sara PYSZKA

Though she moves about in a wheelchair, and cannot speak or use her hands, Sara Pyszka does not think much about the disabilities associated with her cerebral palsy. She is too busy with her studies and friends at Wright State University near Dayton, Ohio, where she is a sophomore majoring in rehabilitation services. Passionate about music, Sara, 21, is an accomplished composer and performer. She welcomes every opportunity to let her talent shine.

Using an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device, Sara socializes, controls consumer electronics and completes school assignments independently.

The local public school district purchased a DynaVox for Sara at age 13. She quickly learned to navigate it and realize its capabilities by working with engineering and education specialists (including a certified speech-language pathologist). To master the single-switch scanning method of accessing the device, Sara adopted a common baseball strategy. Like batters watching the ball, Sara keeps her eyes on her desired vocabulary selection on the device screen. When the scanner highlights the selection, she moves her head to activate the switch on her wheelchair's headrest.

With the DynaVox, its computer access component and Word Power-2 language application software, Sara accomplishes tasks independently. She logs onto the Internet with one head stroke and accesses websites directly using macros (keyboard shortcuts) she created. Using a preprogrammed telephone page, Sara places calls and holds private conversations. She uses the environmental control features of the device to work common household electronics including the lights and her stereo.

Sara's technological journey has also been a musical one. After teaching herself to use the Song Editor on the DynaVox, Sara studied under renowned classical musicians. She has sung the national anthem at Major League Baseball games, composed songs, and performed for numerous audiences. The Song Editor converts the device display screen to a staff with musical notation. Via single-switch scanning, Sara enters lyrics onto the page as text or phonemes used for the text-to-speech synthesizer on the device. She then matches notes to lyrics, syllable by syllable, adjusting the pitch and tempo of the song until she gets it just right.



With her current technology, Sara's communication rate has increased. She can log onto the Internet and begin instant messaging in nearly one-sixth the time that it took her to do so with earlier software—44 seconds vs. 3 minutes, 50 seconds. There is less need for Sara to ask family and friends for help with daily tasks, so she has more time for meaningful conversation. Because Sara can access her computer and the telephone through the DynaVox, she enjoys the same privacy that most people want while emailing, text-messaging or talking with friends and loved ones.

Sara completes school assignments and writes for pleasure, and can work on projects anytime because there is no need to wait for someone to help her.

With the DynaVox and its Song Editor, Sara's love of and talent for music soared to a new level. Studying composition with professionals, teaching other aspiring musicians who use AAC devices and performing for live audiences are among her greatest rewards.

Name:	Sara Pyszka
Age:	21
Occupation:	Student, Consumer Representative
Location:	Bethel Park, Pennsylvania
AT Device:	DynaVox
AT Software:	Word Power-2 and Song Editor from DynaVox Technologies

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