Computers in Community Care

Norwich Health Authority is at the forefront of computer use as a learning tool for people with special needs.

The Health Authority created a post for a peripatetic computer advisor for six months (just finished at the end of September) to oversee and coordinate the use of computers in community homes and other caring institutions.

The computer advisor, Charlie Hacon, has been advising and training staff in community homes and providing technical and consultative back-up as necessary. He has had a fund of £4000 to buy computer equipment. This has provided the core of a central bank of equipment which can be loaned to community homes to use until they buy their own computers. The equipment used is BBC B and Master 128 machines, with touch screens and joysticks.

Clients in the homes are benefiting greatly from the introduction of computers. The equipment offers a new and enjoyable opportunity to develop their skills, and each individual's learning programme can be tailored precisely to his or her needs. Each client's computer activity is guided and monitored by a key worker who is familiar with the individual's abilities and requirements. A combination of directive and non-directive teaching helps build clients' skills and confidence with the computer.

Norwich Health Authority takes a structured approach to the use of computers in the homes, keeping detailed records of each client's progress and preferences. The care with which records are maintained has brought a pay-off in the success of the scheme.

Norwich Health Authority has produced a 13-minute video filmed in one of their community homes showing their work with computers in this area. The video is called Load it! and is available from the Health Authority, price £20.

FUTURE EVENTS

9–11 October: Micros for Special Needs Exhibition Queen Elizabeth Hall, Oldham

17–19 October: Naidex '90 Alexandra Palace, London

4 December: Acorn Software Roadshow Alverton Manor Hotel, Truro

Acorn

ACORN SPECIAL NEEDS DEPARTMENT

SOFTWARE UPDATE

Acorn is showing its commitment to its special needs customers by setting up a department dedicated to the special needs market. Located in Acorn's Consumer Business Unit, the Special Needs Department is proud of its separate identity which reflects its involvement with education, healthcare, social services, charities, individual and corporate customers. Krys Boughey is Sector Manager for Special Needs, and Vorn Hancock works with her as Special Needs Support Coordinator.

One of the main tasks of the new department is to increase awareness about Acorn as a supplier of special needs systems, both within and outside the company. This means involving members of Acorn's Technical Division to ensure that Acorn hardware and software products are suitable for customers with special needs.

It also means ensuring that plenty of appropriate software and hardware for use with Acorn's range of computers is available so that special needs customers can take advantage of what current technology has to offer.

By co-operating with support bodies and hardware and software developers whose products can be used with Acorn computers, Krys and Vorn aim to find out how people with disabilities can benefit from computers. They will also identify Acorn suppliers who can service the special needs market, and then pass on the information through Special Solutions News, at promotional events, and through Acorn distributors.

One success so far is the newly created Acorn Special Needs Forum. This consists of a body of key representatives from different organisations and professions, whose common interest is information technology in special needs. The forum meets several times a year to debate hardware, software and specific issues and to make recommendations. The last meeting decided to host a workshop for software developers to increase their awareness about special needs.

The Special Needs team will be working to provide a better framework to support the special needs community by working with distributors and dealers, independent software and hardware developers, support and care organisations and, naturally, the most important people — the customers.

Data-handling software for RISC OS computers

DataSweet is a package to introduce data handling on BBC A3000 and Archimedes computers. It's a suite of five mini-applications which build up skills from basic to advanced levels.

DataCard is a card index program. Type in text on a 'card', and then sort cards using up to six keywords. **DataPick** is similar, but with a 'key picture' instead of keywords.

DataFind is a more sophisticated database that introduces fields within records. Files from DataCard can be imported into DataFind as students' skills develop.

DataCalc is an easy-to-use spreadsheet that can import data from the other applications.

DataPlot is a graph-drawing program. Use it with the other applications to draw graphs from database and spreadsheet data.

DataSweet was written with the National Curriculum guidelines on data handling in mind, and places emphasis on ease of use within Acorn's WIMP environment.

For further information, contact Hampshire Microtechnology Centre (0705 378266).