SAVE THE DATE

How Assistive Technology Can Help People with Autism

Side Event on the Occasion of the 12th session of the Conference of States Parties (COSP) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

12 June 2019, 15-18PM

Conference Room 11, United Nations Headquarters, New York

The side-event will address the many ways by which technology is helpful in supporting individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) both in education and working place settings and how technology can transform services (from screening to intervention) as well as work and home environments to enhance functioning. It will discuss the need for further assessment and data regarding the wide range of apps available, before decisions are made about use of any technology. The event will also discuss issues related to cost and respective access to individuals with ASD in developing countries, and will make the point that individuals living with autism deserve the opportunity to fully access their right to education and to contribute as productive workers in appropriate employment settings and improving their quality of live. This is key to leaving no-one behind by 2030.

Welcome Remarks

- **H.E. Ms. Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani,** Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations

Panel Discussion

- **Ms. Amal Al Mannai,** Chief Executive Officer, Qatar Foundation for Social Work
- **Ms. Daniela Bas**, Director Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD), UNDESA
- **Ms. Maha Al Mansouri**, Executive Director, Mada Centre for Assistive Technology, Ministry of Transportation and Communications
- **Dr. Dena Al-Thani**, Assistant Professor, College of Science and Engineering, Hamad bin Khalifa University, State of Qatar
- **Prof. Takashi Izutsu**, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, The University of Tokyo
- **Ms. Laalei Abualfain,** Acting Executive Director, Shafallah Center for Persons with Disabilities
- **Dr. Fouad Alshaban,** Senior Scientist, Autism Epidemiology Research Team, Neurogical Disorders Research Center, Qatar Biomedical Research Insitute-QBRI
- **Dr. Sara Abdulla**, Qatar Biomedical Research Institute, HBKU
- **Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu**, Senior Programme Officer, Digital Inclusion Division, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- Speaker, Facebook
- Speaker, Microsoft

Moderator: **Dr. Andy Shih**, Senior Vice-President Public Health and Inclusion, Autism Speaks

RSVP: eventspmun@mofa.gov.qa

Please let us know if you need any assistance inside the conference room

Background

Thousands of children are annually diagnosed with ASD. Studies indicate that 20 to 30 percent of these children will be unable to communicate their wants, needs and thoughts-verbally. The inability to communicate has a significant impact on quality of life, educational access, and development of social skills and relationships. The frustration of not being able to communicate can lead to negative behavior challenges as well. Digital tools such as touch screen phones, tablets, mobile computing devises and the internet can help children and adults with autism spectrum disorders become more independent, work on their respective challenges, improve upon their strengths, and actively engage in society. Technology allows for adaptability and motivation, and has the power to help students and adults communicate and gain confidence. Moreover, it has dramatically changed how service providers deliver educational and behavioral services to individuals with ASD.

Research findings indicate that as the development of new communication technology progresses at an increasing rate each year, children's competency and awareness of such technology also increases. This is also true for children and young adults with ASD. Many individuals on the spectrum are more comfortable interacting with a computer or iPad. In addition, many individuals are visual learners and have strong technological skills. [1]

According to Austin Speaks,[2] the use of technology can help children and adults with autism improve their communication skills at all levels and abilities. One app for example could be geared toward a non-verbal child or adult, while another can help with social cues for an individual with strong-verbal communication skills. On the other hand, visual schedules can be a great tool to help an autistic individual complete tasks and work on skills like self-care and daily living. Also, technology can help individuals make their voices heard regarding decisions, which helps foster key self-advocacy skills. Technological devises can also serve as a motivation tool, as a reward for positive behavior like the completion of a chore or homework assignment. Most importantly, technology helps social networking as it can be easier for an individual with autism to socialize via social networking than through the more traditional methods.

A concern of all individuals with ASD is employment and having the skills to live independently. Employment is a critical component for having a productive adult life. Barriers to successful employment for individuals with autism can be poor communication skills; lack of social skills; the ability to complete the job independently; or sensory issues within the work environment. The use of technology can address some of these barriers, as step-by-step checklists can help an individual stay on top of tasks and complete them in an orderly and successful manner.

[1] Indiana Resource Center for Autism "The Use of Technology in Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders"

[2] Autism Speaks "How Technology Can Help"