



2024

Year in Review



“Improving The Quality of Life for All”

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OUR MISSION

Established in 2008, our collaborative team is dedicated to advocating for and empowering communities affected by disabilities. Through a range of impactful programs, we provide essential assistive technology and resources. Our mission is to enhance accessibility, promote inclusion, and improve the quality of life for individuals facing disabilities, fostering a more equitable and supportive society.

A Message from our Director

Dr Patrick Kitzman PT PhD

"2024 was yet another busy year for us. We continued to grow our programs and developed new collaborations that allow us to better support Kentuckians of all abilities.

Our work this year ranged from providing essential refurbished durable medical equipment to those who could not otherwise afford it in Eastern KY, to training multiple levels of students (elementary, high school, and university) about inclusion and accessibility through adapting toys, games, and books. We were privileged to help support people directly through the Grace Jones Memorial Fund and officially began enrolling students in our pre-employment transitions program.

The Toys with a Purpose program continued to evolve both at the university as well as community levels and has gotten a new website look. I would like to sincerely thank my Toys with a Purpose collaborators Mary Jo Cooley Hidecker, Regina Hanneman, Dima Strakovsky, and Chuck Stamper for all their boundary pushing and help expanding this program.

Each of our programs have grown both individually as well as together. We continued to show that they interconnect, and we were able to demonstrate the impact and possibilities that can occur when these programs work together. Keisha Wells, Crystal Hignite, Fran Feltner, and I had the privilege of presenting our programs at multiple national meetings this year and showing everyone how we get it done in Kentucky.

Finally, we have been meeting with multiple entities to discuss the potential of establishing a full satellite site in a second region of Appalachia to better serve the people of eastern KY. More to come in 2025.

However, we all know that programs are only as strong as the people who support them. I would like to give my sincerest thank you to everyone who has been part of our work in 2024. I especially want to give a large thank you to Keisha Wells, Crystal Hignite, and Autumn Willsey who do the heavy lifting that keeps each of the programs moving along. I am truly excited to see where we will grow in 2025."

The logo for the Appalachian Center for Assistive Technology features a stylized mountain range in orange and blue above the text. The text reads "Appalachian Center" in a bold, dark blue font, with "for Assistive Technology" in a smaller, lighter blue font below it.

Appalachian Center for Assistive Technology

The Appalachian Center for Assistive Technology (ACAT) is the assistive technology resource center serving Eastern Kentucky and is a part of the Kentucky Assistive Technology Service (KATS) Network. ACAT provides assistive technology (AT) demonstrations and consultations, short term AT loan locker, maker space, workforce training, and refurbishing.

ACAT also offers demonstrations and consultations for assistive technology and a short-term AT loan locker. The purpose of a short-term device loan may be to:

- Assist in the decision-making process when finding the most effective AT
- Serve as a placeholder while the consumer is waiting for device repair or funding
- Provide accommodation on a short-term basis

This year ACAT reached **2,269** individuals through public awareness events. Additionally, ACAT's Assistive Technology Loan Locker helped **37** individuals with **46** pieces of adaptive technology. These items had an estimated value of **\$12,862**.



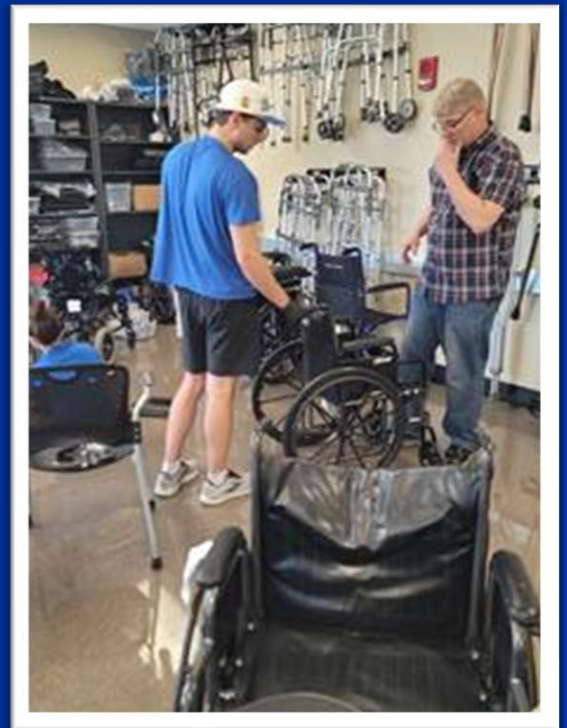
CARAT

COORDINATING AND ASSISTING THE REUSE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The Coordinating and Assisting the Reuse of Assistive Technology project (CARAT) is a community outreach and service-learning program that aims to make assistive technology and durable medical equipment (DME) more accessible to those in underserved areas of Kentucky.

Our site is located at the University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health (UK CERH), which is a service-learning program that involves students in the University of Kentucky Doctorate in Physical Therapy program. Students are trained to clean and refurbish DME to distribute to those in need. Project CARAT also has several satellite locations across Kentucky, including a site in collaboration with Kentucky Homeplace, and is overseen by the Kentucky Assistive Technology Service Network (KATS).

This year, CARAT assisted **146 individuals!** This included **149 items:** collectively valued at **\$42,150**. In addition, CARAT loaned out **4 ramps:** valued at **\$1,588**. This brought our total value of assistive technology loaned out to **\$43,738!**



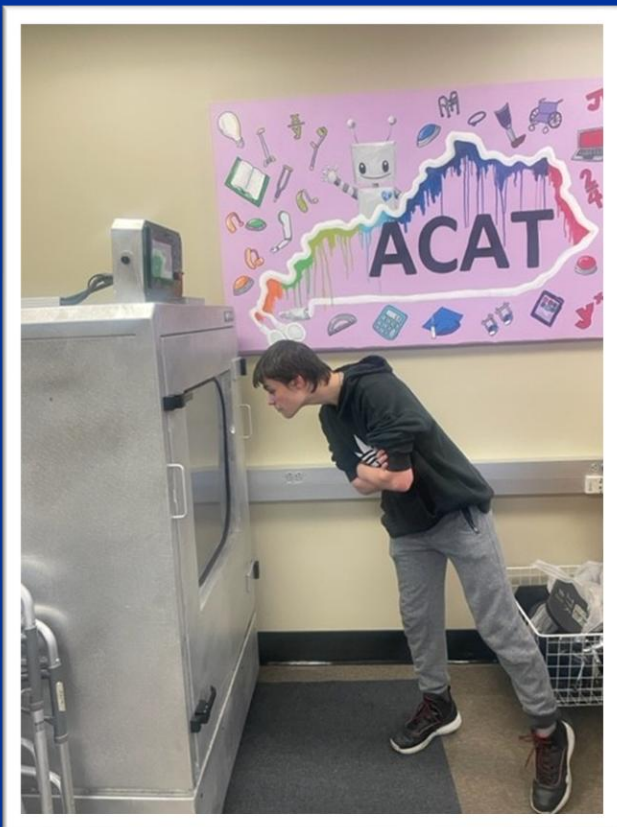


Device Reuse

Reutilization program provides for the exchange, repair, recycling, or other reutilization of assistive technology devices for people with disabilities in need of the items at no cost. It offers solutions for individuals with disabilities who need items public sources will not pay, who need a device that is no longer manufactured, or who have an acute need for a device while they pursue or wait for funding.

Reutilization program includes:

- Refurbishment programs – donated devices are cleaned up, sanitized, repaired or otherwise “made ready” for new owners
- Open-ended loans - the consumer can continue to use the item until no longer needed



COORDINATING AND ASSISTING THE REUSE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY: TOGETHER ONE PRIORITY

CARAT-TOP



CARAT-TOP is a **10-week program** that brings together students, of all abilities, from local high schools and the community to develop skills in assessing community accessibility, refurbishing used medical equipment, adapting toys and books, prototype new parts, and developing strategies for engaging community stakeholders (leaders, businesses, faith communities, local media, etc.).

This year, we held a CARAT-TOP mobile event with **13 4-H students** from **3 different counties**. We met them in Jackson and began by teaching them about the importance of accessibility and inclusion. They then brainstormed ways to adapt toys for different abilities and planned how they could make their ideas a reality. Finally, they used our mobile build and tool kits to execute their plans. This took lots of trial and error, but we had a lot of fun testing our ideas and trying again!

We have continued our collaboration with UAccel. Their marketing and management students helped to develop different business strategies for The Kentucky Appalachian Rural Rehabilitation Network (KARRN). The students then presented their ideas the week of April 15th. They were extremely enthusiastic about helping with the work being done with ACAT.

HAZARD HIGH SCHOOL CARAT-TOP Cohort

In addition, we began a new cohort of **17 students** from Hazard Independent High School in the CARAT-TOP program. These students focus was not only on adapting toys but also adapting books and games. They began by planning what disabilities they wanted to address and what adaptations would need to be made to their items. Students then came to the ACAT Center for several weeks to work in the makerspace to adapt their items.

This group was our first group to use audio recorders to adapt books. They also developed a creative device to pick up NERF bullets, for those with mobility challenges and wheelchair users. One of our students who had experience with sewing make weighted stuffed animals.



At the end of the semester, they each presented their toy, book, and game adaptations to their community stakeholders. Our team spoke with the stakeholders and students who had plenty of great feedback and suggestions for next year!

TOYS

• With a Purpose •

Toys with a Purpose provides free adapted toys to individual families through an online lending library. Our goal is to ensure that children of all abilities have access to the toys they need for healthy mental and physical development. It also serves as a platform for educating students from multiple levels (high school, community college, and university) about inclusion and accessibility through the process of adapting toys.

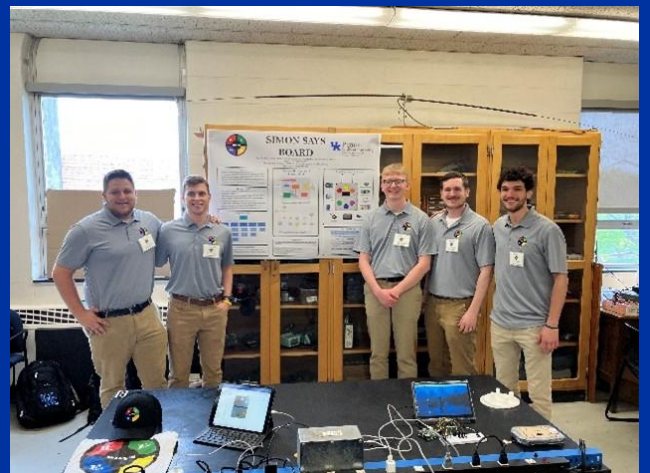


Throughout the year we continued our collaboration with the College of Engineering. We worked with 12 teams of senior engineering students (63 students) who worked on projects ranging from one-handed controlled R/C cars to electronic board games, a wheelchair mounted fully automatic NERF gun operated with a joystick, a wall hanging Simon Says game with hand control, and a modular sensory wall.

Toys with a Purpose reached over 250 students this year!

- **75** high school students this summer as part of the 4-H Teen Conference and the College of Health Sciences Summer Bridge Program.
- **10** high school students participated in our first mobile program in Breathitt County.
- **17** students in the CARAT-top program that adapted toys for their projects.
- **20+** CHS undergraduate students working in the UK Rehab Makerspace to adapt toys, create 3D printed switches, and weighted stuffed animals.
- **37** students in the UK IHRC program.
- **2** School of Arts and Visual Arts students are helping with the interactive hallway project in collaboration with the University of Kentucky Children's Hospital and the Child Development Center of the Bluegrass.
- **2** School of Arts and Visual Arts students helped redesign the TWP website.
- **24+** CHS undergraduate students adapting toys as part of their work with the CHS Rehab makerspace program
- **37** students in the Interprofessional Healthcare Residential College program to discuss accessibility, participation, and inclusion for individuals with disabilities through adapting toys and games.
- **26** undergraduate students working in the CHS Rehab Makerspace on multiple projects.

We have worked with organizations such as: Child Development Center, Various school systems, UK Kings Daughters, UK Children's Hospital, and communities, to provide over 50 toys.



Pre-ETS

Pre-employment transition services, better known as Pre-ETS, is a collaborative effort between the Education and Workforce Cabinet's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Kentucky Educational Institutions, that trains students with disabilities.

Pre-ETS is committed to addressing the employment requirements of students with disabilities. It achieves this through a range of pre-employment transition services, including:

- Post-Secondary Counseling
- Job Exploration
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Self-Advocacy Instruction
- Work-Based Learning Experiences

This initiative encompasses students from public or private schools. These services aim to proactively engage students with disabilities in job exploration activities, easing their transition from secondary to post-secondary education/training and ultimately leading them towards competitive, integrated employment opportunities.

In 2024, Pre-ETS program worked with students our Pre-ETS program continues to work with students at Perry County Central High School and began our first year at Hazard High School. Combines, Pre-ETS has provided training to 52 students at these schools.



ACAT Activities

LKLP Compassionate Hearts Adult Daycare

ACAT continued its collaboration with the LKLP Compassionate Hearts Adult Daycare program, offering a stem and/or interactive activity each month. Compassionate Hearts is an adult daycare that provides care for individuals for personal hygiene, grooming, and recreational activities daily. We were able to invite 12 of these individuals to travel to the UK Center of Excellence in Rural Health to work in the ACAT makerspace. We adapted the workspace to accommodate these individuals who helped to develop back to school kits for the Pre-ETS students we work with. Pre-ETS students usually make the “build” kits for the LKLP adult daycare participants, making this an intergenerational collaboration.



We also had 7 Doctor of Physical Therapy students accompany the ACAT team to take the program to the Hazard Black Gold Fall Festival. The students paired with participants and accompanied them through the festival, providing aid as needed. Everyone had a blast and hope to go again next year!



Eastern Kentucky Veterans Center and Buckhorn High School

ACAT continued its collaboration with the Eastern Kentucky Veterans Center (EKVC), as well. This collaboration consists of activities offering stem and/or interactive activities. In 2024, some examples of these activities include: catapults, balloon tennis, and acrylic heart sun catchers. The EKVC is a 120 bed long-term care facility providing skilled nursing care and rehabilitation for Kentucky veterans.



EKVC is operated by the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs and was built for the sole purpose of taking care of Kentucky Veterans.



ACAT collaborated with Buckhorn High School and students within the school's Pre-ETS program. Students were able to come to the ACAT and work in the makerspace and area.

THE GRACE JONES MEMORIAL FUND

The Grace Jones Memorial Fund was established in memory of Grace Jones who in 1984, joined the Department of Entomology at the University of Kentucky and by 1990 was the Associate Professor. In 1991, she began her career in the School of Biological Science and by 1999 became the Professor of Molecular and Cellular Biology. After experiencing a severe stroke in 2000, her resilience and commitment to continuing her study of biology during a time of great adversity made her an inspiration to all.

The Grace Jones Mini-Grants help persons with disabilities and their families. While priority is given to patients and families with physical disability resulting from stroke, people with central nervous system disorders such as traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, etc. can also qualify.



In 2024, the College of Health Science chose the Grace Jones Fund to be the primary recipient of One Day for UK. This day raised **\$8,160!** In addition, our director, Pat Kitzman and Clara Bond participated in a **Behind-the-Blue** podcast to raise awareness about Kentucky Appalachian Rural Rehabilitation Network (ACAT) and the Grace Jones Memorial fund. [Click to listen!](#) This cycle we were able to fund 4 individuals. This includes the purchase of 2 lift chairs, participation in a therapeutic riding program, and participation in the LKLP Compassionate Hearts Adult Daycare program which provides relief for the caregiver as well.

Local Presentations

- Informational table at the Senior Games 2024 in Perry Co.
- Exhibitor table at the Kentucky Assistive Technology Service Network Summer Assistive Technology conference
- Multiple presentations at a community health worker training hosted by Kentucky Homeplace
- ACAT presentation at the Aging Council meeting in Perry County
- ACAT demonstration with the staff at the Knott County Nursing Home

National Presentations

- Presented at the National Rural Health Association conference in New Orleans.
- Presented at the Closing the Gap conference in Minneapolis, MN.
- Presented at the ATIA conference in Orlando, FL.

Thank You



TOYOTA



ACAT Collaborators

- University of Kentucky College of Medicine- Center of Excellence in Rural Health
- University of Kentucky College of Health Sciences
- KATS/OVR

Project CARAT Collaborators

- UK Center of Excellence in Rural Health
- UK College of Health Sciences
- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Kentucky Assistive Technology Service Network
- Kentucky Homeplace

CARAT-TOP Collaborators

- Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities
- AARP
- University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health
- Hazard Independent High School
- Hazard Chamber of Commerce
- City of Hazard Mayor
- Perry County Judge Executive

Toys with a Purpose Collaborators

- University of Kentucky - College of Health Sciences
- Center for Interprofessional and Community Health Education
- College of Engineering
- College of Fine Arts. School of Arts and Visual Arts
- College of Agriculture
- University of Kentucky Children's Hospital
- UK KARRN undergraduate club

Community Collaborators

- WHAS Crusade for Children's Foundation
- Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities
- UK College of Agriculture, Food, and Economics' CEDIK program
- ACAT Advisory Committee

Pre-ETS Collaborators

- Hazard High School
- Perry County Central High School
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Disability Resource Center
- Walmart of Hazard

Contact Us!

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AND VIDEOS**



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