



2025

Year in Review



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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.

From our Director

Dr Patrick Kitzman PT PhD

2025 was yet another exciting year of growth for ACAT as we continued to expand our programs and develop collaborations that allow us to better support Kentuckians of all abilities. Our work this year ranged from providing essential assistive technology and refurbished durable medical equipment to those who could not otherwise afford it, to training multiple levels of students (elementary, high school, and university) in terms of inclusion and accessibility through adapting toys, games, and devices. We were once again privileged to help support people directly through the Grace Jones Memorial Fund. Under the leadership of Crystal Hignite our pre-employment transitions program grew dramatically to include students from multiple high schools. The Toys with a Purpose program continued to evolve both at the university as well as community levels and I would like to thank our collaborators Dima Strakovsky, Regina Hanneman, and Kristi Bartlett for their continued help expanding this program. While each of our ACAT programs grew individually, we continued to demonstrate the impact and possibilities that occur when these programs interconnect and work together.

Keisha Wells, Crystal Hignite, and I had the privilege of presenting our programs at multiple state and national meetings in 2025; showing everyone how we get it done in Kentucky. In addition, our CARAT-TOP high school students presented at the Appalachian Research Day conference and as expected, these phenomenal young adults did an amazing job demonstrating the ability of this next generation to have a meaningful impact within their communities.

Finally, we excited to announce that we officially entered into a collaboration with UK St. Claire Healthcare system to establish a second ACAT site in Morehead, KY. This new site will complement the work we are conducting in Hazard and expand our ability to meet the needs of Kentuckians in Appalachia. The new ACAT-Morehead will be open by Summer 2026. Over the past 7-8 months Keisha and I have met with a significant number of community organizations, and we are excited at the programs that already exist within Morehead, which provide us with the opportunity to develop new programs and workforce development opportunities. We would like to provide our sincere thank you to Bryan Martin, Tate Sheppard, Debbie Neff, Karen Badger, and Travis Bailey for all of their work in making this site possible.

We all know that programs are only as strong as the people who support them and I would like to give my sincerest thank you to everyone who has been part of our work in 2025. I especially want to give a large thank you to Keisha Wells and Crystal Hignite who do the heavy lifting that keeps each of our programs moving along. I am truly excited to see where we will grow in 2026.



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 AT refurbishing.

This year ACAT reached **2580 people** over **4 events**. We loaned out **14 items** from our loan locker totaling a value of **\$4,294**, and we have given **21 open ended loans** valued at **\$1,163**. Additionally, we were awarded a **\$100,000 HRSA Planning Grant**.



ACAT continued its collaboration with the LKLP Compassionate Hearts Adult Daycare program offering monthly activities and took residents to the Black Gold Festival.

The ACAT team also participated in the Disability Service Center's Valentines Day Celebration, Perry County School's Exceptional Fun Day, and Knott County Sportsplex's Senior games.



COMING SOON

ACAT, in collaboration with UK St. Claire, will expand to a second site in Morehead. A space has been acquired and renovations are taking place. Our goal is to be open in early Summer 2026.





COORDINATING AND ASSISTING THE REUSE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

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 reutilization program facilitates the exchange, repair, recycling, or other reutilization of assistive technology devices for people with disabilities in need of the items at no cost.

This year, CARAT loaned **6 ramps** at a value of **\$3,988** and **107 assistive technology items** to **102 individuals** at a value of **\$24,000**. We also trained **3 physical therapy students** on project CARAT, teaching them how to properly clean and refurbish DME.



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 to assess accessibility and make adaptations within the community. This year students from Buckhorn, Hazard, and Perry were tasked with the planning of a sensory park.



They visited sensory parks and potential sites to gain ideas, researched accessible equipment, made a budget, and presented their findings to community stakeholders. A group of CARAT-TOP students also presented at a state level conference on their past projects.



TOYS

• With a Purpose •



Toys with a Purpose provides free adapted toys to individual families through our online lending library. Its 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 about inclusion and accessibility through the process of adapting toys.

This year, 5 teams of senior engineering students completed the projects of adapting an animal barnyard, creating the electronic versions of the board games Clue and Sorry, updating their modular sensory wall, and an adapting a football tossing machine.

Additionally, 20 undergraduate students worked in the College of Health Sciences Rehab's Makers to create weighted stuffed animals and 3D printed toys. Through these projects and the 2025 4-H Teen conference, we worked with a total of 20 undergraduate students and 20 4-H campers to make adaptations.

Pre-ETS

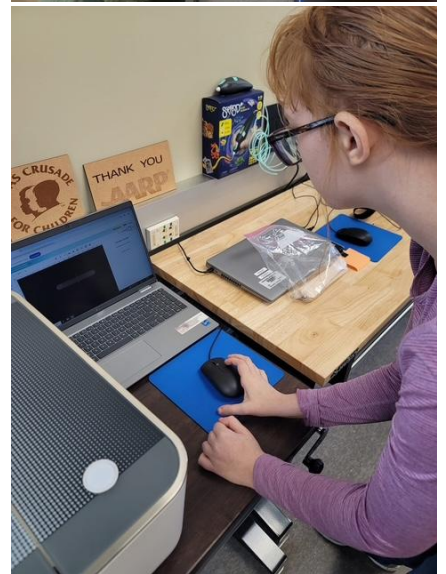
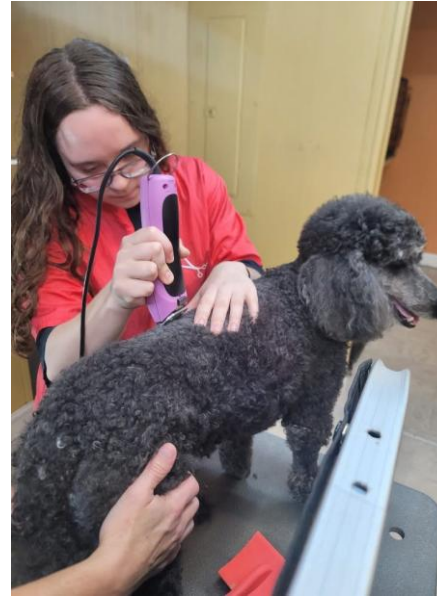
Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) is a collaborative effort between the Education and Workforce Cabinet's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Kentucky Educational Institutions, that trains students with disabilities.

Pre-ETS prepares students for employment through a range of pre-employment transition services, including post-secondary counseling, job exploration, workplace readiness training, self-advocacy instruction, and work-based learning experiences.



Pre-ETS serviced **62 students** across **3 high schools** this year. This totaled **1,537.5 hours** of service, valued at **\$43,413.48**. Students took field trips to the Appalachian Regional Healthcare Medical Center, Toyota, and Food City to learn about job opportunities. They were also trained in the operation of ACAT's Maker's Space equipment.

During the summer, one student completed additional training two days a week. Additionally, we arranged for a student interested in becoming a dog groomer to shadow and practice with professional dog groomers.



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. Over the next 15 years she served as the Associate Professor of Entomology and Professor of Molecular and Cellular Biology. After experiencing a severe stroke in 2000 she overcame her physical challenges and continued teaching and researching.

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 physical/stroke disabilities and their families.

This cycle **4 individuals were awarded \$1000 each**. This included one wheelchair ramp, one adult daycare participation, one meal delivery service, and one chair lift.



Local Presentations

- CARAT-TOP Students Presentation at Appalachian Research Day in Corbin, KY
- Interactive Toy Adapting Presentation at the Assistive Technology in Pre-ETS Workshop in Frankfort, KY
- Presentation on the ACAT's Pre-ETS Program at the Assistive Technology in Pre-ETS Workshop in Frankfort, KY

National Presentations

- Poster Presentation on ACAT, at the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) in Orlando, FL
- Poster Presentation on CARAT, at the American Physical Therapy Association- Combined Sections in Houston, TX
 - Awarded a Blue Ribbon in the Social Responsibility



Thank You



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
- UK St. Claire Healthcare System

CARAT-TOP Collaborators

- AARP
- Hazard Independent High School
- Perry County Central High School
- Buckhorn High School
- Hazard Chamber of Commerce
- City of Hazard Mayor
- Perry County Judge Executive
- Sponsors: Tim Short Chrysler, City of Hazard, First Federal Savings and Loan, Peoples Bank and Trust Company, Perry Farm Bureau Insurance- Janet Smith, Perry County Fiscal Court, Community Trust Bank, and East Kentucky Rental

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
- Child Development Center of the Bluegrass
- University of Kentucky College of Design

Community Collaborators

- Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities

Pre-ETS Collaborators

- Hazard High School
- Perry County Central High School
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Disability Resource Center
- Walmart of Hazard
- Leslie County High School
- Toyota Motor Manufacturing of Kentucky

Contact Us!

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**LINKS TO WEBSITES
AND VIDEOS**



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