

# Did You Know?

## Grants and Charities as Funding Sources of AT

Russell had a perpetual ringing in his ears, an annoying condition known as tinnitus. While many people experience temporary ringing from time to time, Russell's tinnitus was so severe and so persistent that it was causing him emotional distress. Medicaid denied prior approval for a tinnitus masker (a hearing aid type of device that supposedly masks or covers the ringing), claiming they are not covered under the state Medicaid program.

State Medicaid agencies should not categorically deny items and devices that meet the state's definition of durable medical equipment (DME). However, Medicaid agencies may exclude treatment they claim is investigational, or not known to be effective. The Medicaid agency may also deny DME if they do not consider it medically necessary. Russell had tried a tinnitus masker and it had provided him instant relief and all other treatments for tinnitus had failed. Unfortunately, Russell's ear, nose, and throat specialist advised that in 25 years of medical practice, he had never known a tinnitus masker to provide effective relief for the ringing, despite Russell's claims to the contrary. Based on his own experiences, the doctor was unwilling to write a letter stating that a tinnitus masker was medically necessary for Russell.

Fortunately for Russell, his mental health counselor found a tinnitus association (the American Tinnitus Association) that provided grants for tinnitus maskers. She applied for a grant for Russell and he was awarded a grant of \$1,500 to pay for the tinnitus masker.

As Russell's case illustrates, although there are times when traditional funding sources (i.e., Medicaid, Medicare, Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Private Insurance) are not readily available, there may be non-traditional funding options in the form of charities and grants. Service organizations and clubs may provide donations and grants of assistive technology (AT) and should not be overlooked when all else seems hopeless. We will discuss a few of the more easily identified sources of grants and charities for individuals with disabilities who need AT.

According to its website, the Association of Blind Citizens operates an AT Fund that provides funds to cover 50 percent of the cost of adaptive devices or software. The item must cost at least \$200 and not exceed \$6,000. There are family income limits for grants under this program, and applicants must be willing to provide income documentation. The grant may be withdrawn if the item is not actually purchased within 30 days of notification of the award. See [www.blindcitizens.org/assistive\\_tech.htm](http://www.blindcitizens.org/assistive_tech.htm).

The Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) accepts donations of "gently used" items of DME and donates these items to individuals with neuromuscular disease at no cost to them, upon recommendation of an MDA clinic doctor. The MDA also operates a national equipment loan program. "By the way, if you're planning a trip this summer, consider calling ahead to the MDA office at your destination; if the needed item is available, they just might be able to loan you a piece of equipment during your stay!" See <http://quest.mda.org/print/18781>, see also [www.als-mda.org/equipment.html](http://www.als-mda.org/equipment.html).

The Multiple Sclerosis Association of America (MSAA) operates an Equipment Distribution Program that is designed to improve the “safety, dignity, mobility, and independence” of individuals with multiple sclerosis. The items are provided at no cost to the applicant. See [www.msassociation.org/programs/equipment](http://www.msassociation.org/programs/equipment)

The United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) Elsie S. Bellows Fund provides funds for the acquisition of AT to individuals with disabilities who have financial need. Individuals are recommended by UCP affiliates, who submit an application on the individual’s behalf. The Bellow Fund grants can be used with matching funds from other sources, and funds are not restricted to individuals diagnosed with cerebral palsy. See [www.ucp.org/resources/assistive-technology/bellows-fund](http://www.ucp.org/resources/assistive-technology/bellows-fund).

The UCP AT resource guide lists a number of other possible funding sources, such as Alliance for Technology Access, local Elks Club lodges, Easter Seals, Disabled Children’s Relief Fund, and Lions Club International and, in many instances, provides links to the appropriate website. See [http://affnet.ucp.org/ucp\\_channel.doc.cfm/1/14/86/86-86/3934](http://affnet.ucp.org/ucp_channel.doc.cfm/1/14/86/86-86/3934).

There are many lesser known organizations that help with the purchase of AT. For example, the Kaitlin Marie Bell Foundation provides “financial assistance to children with disabilities who are unable to afford equipment and/or services that they need; insurance companies consider many of these items a luxury.” The foundation’s mission is to “increase lifestyle opportunities and quality of life for recipients by providing equipment ... that would not otherwise be affordable.” One example cited was a young ventilator-dependent child who could not be released from the hospital because the electrical wiring in her family’s home was not appropriate for her ventilator and other necessary equipment. This foundation paid to upgrade the electrical wiring so that she could finally come home. See [www.kmbfoundation.org](http://www.kmbfoundation.org).

It is not possible to list all the possible donation and/or grant funding sources available, particularly since some may be available only at the state or local level. The purpose of this publication is simply to alert attorneys and advocates to another potential funding source for AT.

Those who are reading this as a list serve posting are encouraged to use "reply all" to share comments or questions that they want to reach all participants on the list serve. Use "reply" to communicate only with the person who did the posting.

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