New York University and AT&T Launch Tech Challenge to Empower People Living With Disabilities

NEW YORK, APRIL 6, 2015 /3BL Media/ — Nearly twenty-five years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), how can mobile technology be used to enhance the lives of people with physical, social, emotional, and cognitive disabilities? That is the question New York University's ABILITY Lab and AT&T* put to developers around the world today by launching the first-ever Connect Ability tech innovation challenge.

Over the next three months leading up to the July 26th anniversary of the enactment of the ADA, developers will compete for more than $100,000 in prizes to design software, wearable and other technology solutions aimed at enhancing the lives of people with disabilities at work, home and play.

The Connect Ability Challenge will leverage the expertise of NYU's ABILITY Lab, an interdisciplinary research center dedicated to the development of adaptive and assistive technologies for people with disabilities. To best engage the user community, the Connect Ability Challenge will utilize an innovative Exemplar model. Developers will have the opportunity throughout the competition to interface directly with four people with diverse disabilities who will share the challenges they face and help guide innovators to find solutions.

The Exemplars are:

- Xian Horn, a teacher, speaker and writer from Manhattan who has cerebral palsy, which impacts her mobility.
- Gus Chalkias, an assistive technology specialist, career counselor and college student from Queens who is blind.
- Paul Kolter, a lecturer and student from Philadelphia who has autism. Kolter communicates using computer-assisted technology and struggles with impulse control.
- Jason DaSilva, a filmmaker from Brooklyn who has Multiple Sclerosis. DaSilva uses a powered wheelchair and has limited upper- and lower-limb use.

"The Americans with Disabilities Act was landmark legislation aimed at enabling people with disabilities to participate more fully in our society. Twenty-five years later, as advances in technology have allowed us all to connect in ways we never imagined, we believe we can further remove barriers the disability community continues to encounter," said Marissa Shorenstein, AT&T's New York State President. "AT&T is excited to partner with New York University's ABILITY Lab on this groundbreaking project to attract innovators from across the world and harness their creativity and skills to create innovative and potentially life-changing solutions."

The challenge directs developers to solve for four functional categories and one category addressing public policy for the disabled community:

- People with sensory disabilities
- People in need of mobility solutions
- Social and emotional solutions
- Solutions for people with communicative and cognitive disabilities
- Solutions impacting policy and society

"We are extraordinarily proud to once again partner with AT&T on an initiative that will benefit so many in our communities," said R. Luke DuBois, Associate Professor of Integrated Digital Media at the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering. "The Connect Ability challenge rests on the idea that the developer community has a tremendous opportunity to leverage cutting-edge technology to improve the lives of

persons living with disabilities. This challenge, and the work that will come from it, is a testament to NYU's enduring advocacy on this issue and our role at the ABILITY Lab in researching and developing client-centered solutions in accessible technology."

"Knowing firsthand the barriers that people with disabilities encounter each day trying to function in an able-bodied world, we at the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities are very excited to see AT&T pursue this initiative and the ideas that these talented developers and designers propose," said Victor Calise, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. "We applaud New York University's ABILITY Lab and AT&T for addressing the needs of people with disabilities and with helping us make NYC the most accessible city in the world."

"As an occupational therapist in NYU Steinhardt's Department of Occupational Therapy, I focus on helping people participate more thoroughly in activities in their homes and the community that are meaningful to them. Our expertise in disability and barriers to participation meshes well with the expertise of designers, developers, engineers and technology users and sets us up to perform meaningful research and develop comprehensive solutions to complex problems," said Anita Perr, Clinical Associate Professor at the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. "We are so excited to see the solutions developed for our exemplars through this challenge and in partnership with AT&T and New York University's ABILITY Lab."

NYU and AT&T will tap national experts to attract the broadest base of developers. For example, the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) will advise on the formation of teams of engineers and persons with disabilities in at least six metro regions with large numbers of computer science, rehabilitation science, and engineering students. RESNA is a professional membership organization dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of people with disabilities through increasing access to technology solutions.

These experts will also serve as a resource to developers, who will use off-the-shelf technology to design their solutions so that winning tech can be delivered more quickly into the marketplace.

"We're looking forward to working with New York University's ABILITY Lab and AT&T to help bring terrific ideas from concept to reality for people with disabilities," said Michael Brogioli, Executive Director of RESNA. "Our membership of engineers and assistive technology professionals bring a "deep bench" of expertise and resources to this exciting project, and we can't wait to get started."

A panel of experts from the engineering, technology and disability community has agreed to judge the submissions and identify the winning solutions. These judges are:

- Marissa Shorenstein – President of AT&T New York
- Zach Suchin – Co-founder/CEO, Brand Knew
- Anita Perr – Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, NYU
- Jason DaSilva – Producer/Director of AXS Lab
- Paul Kotler – Student, Blogger, Lecturer, Advocate
- Gus Chalkias – Assistive Technology Specialist in Blindness, Career Counselor and College Student
- Xian Horn – Teacher, Speaker, Blogger, Beauty Advocate
- Jerry Weisman – Principal, Rehabilitation Technology Services/President Assistive Technology Solutions Inc.
- Aaron W. Bangor – AT&T Lead Accessible Technology Architect
- Paul Schwartz – Assistive Technology Services Manager, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institution (SVR), University of Wisconsin-Stout

ChallengePost will power the challenge.

Developers will have the opportunity to interact with exemplars and develop their initial concepts at a Hackathon sponsored by AT&T and NYU on Saturday and Sunday, April 18th and 19th, at NYU's Media and Games Network (MAGNET) center in Downtown Brooklyn's MetroTech Center.

Winners of the Connect Ability Challenge will be announced July 26th, the 25th Anniversary of the ADA. For more information or to register for the challenge, visit http://connectability.challengepost.com/ and follow the latest news on Twitter using the hashtag #ConnectAbility.

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About the NYU ABILITY Lab

The New York University ABILITY Lab is an interdisciplinary research space dedicated to the development of adaptive and assistive technologies. Students and faculty of all fields work together to create inclusive systems, design human-centered projects, and further intellectual and clinical research around areas of ability. Located in Downtown Brooklyn, the ABILITY Lab is a collaboration of three NYU colleges—the Polytechnic School of Engineering; the Steinhart School of Culture, Education, and Human Development; and the Tisch School of the Arts—and supports research and education across NYU. The ABILITY Lab incubates long-term projects that are client-facing and often developed in partnership with New York City advocacy groups and agencies. It is dedicated to open-source practices and provides service learning opportunities to students across NYU. For more information, visit: abilitylab.nyu.edu.

About ChallengePost

At ChallengePost, software developers share their latest projects, explore new technologies, and compete in software competitions. Our global community has participated in over 650 online and in-person hackathons. Past competition sponsors include government agencies, universities, corporations, and non-profits.

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