Written by Sandi Rice, Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, Consultant

Through Kady’s Eyes

It has been a true blessing in my life having the opportunity to work with EagleEyes. Over the past year and a half, I have introduced EagleEyes into the lives of numerous children from the ages of five to fifteen. My experiences with these children have forever filled my heart and mind with very special memories.

The first time I experienced the power of EagleEyes was with a twelve year old girl, named Kady. She has no control over her body, except for small movements in her left hand and arm, and her eyes. She has a hearing loss and has Cortical Visual Impairment, (CVI). She is often only comfortable lying on her back with her head turned to the right side.

Kady’s family and I had been anticipating the opportunity to test her with EagleEyes. I practiced using the system countless times on my own children so Kady’s first experience might be as smooth and positive as possible. I put the EagleEyes electrodes on her face, and downloaded the Aliens Game she would play on my lap top. I held the computer on its side near her face. Within minutes, she was shooting down aliens by exploding them on visual contact, engaging in a computer game for the first time. Normally, on a good day Kady maintained her visual tracking for only several minutes at a time. But, this time, right away her eyes opened widely and she was looking at the aliens. Her tracking was phenomenal! She played without tiring for about 20 minutes. She took a short break and played for 15 minutes more!

What made this experience most special for me wasn’t that she was tracking so long or even that she was enjoying it, which certainly was a major event. The part that made it emotionally unforgettable was that Kady’s dad joined in, and he began controlling the vertical movement of the cursor while she controlled the horizontal. After a short time passed, dad suddenly became aware that he was playing a video game with his daughter, and the atmosphere in the room transformed into a blessed moment that will forever be frozen in time. He played a game with his daughter for the first time in their lives.

It doesn’t end there: Kady’s mother, brother and sister are now able to play the game with her and EagleEyes has changed the dynamics of the family forever. Having something they can all do together as a family has been a wonderful and enlightening experience for them.

I have seen first hand how much Kady’s family loves her and how much fun it has been for them to see her experience some joy in an activity that she can control herself. Recently, I watched her play a game of soccer on the computer thanks to EagleEyes, by choosing which ball to kick to make a goal. With her dad’s face close to hers, he coaxes her to go for a particular ball. When she chooses the one he wants, he cheers. When she chooses a different one, he teases her.

I am truly honored to watch children like Kady smile, and watch their families share cherished moments and experiences with their children.

EagleEyes is a technology that can give someone control who has very little control over anything at all in their life. It can inspire grins, giggles, and laughter. It can bring a family together for an activity. It can
Mirna’s Story

by Jorge Castillo

In 2005, Mirna Maria Guadalupe Ramos, who currently resides in Huehuetenango, Guatemala suffered a devastating stroke during what would have been a routine medical procedure. As a result, her cerebral cortex was damaged making her completely paraplegic and lacking any motor skills. Since that time, she has been completely paralyzed and is only able to move her eyes. A group of friends have been looking for any means and ways in which they might be able to improve her life condition, even if it is just marginally. As a result, they discovered the “Opportunity Foundation of America” (OFOA), a non-profit organization that manufactures and distributes an assistive technology called EagleEyes (www.eagleeyes.org). The technology was developed at Boston College and allows individuals with severe physical disabilities to move the mouse cursor with the simple movement of their eyes or other facial expressions.

During the month of June, a collection was conducted by ADTRAN, my employer, in Huntsville, Alabama. The response was overwhelming, with $1,200.00 donated to OFOA for the cost of the EagleEyes system. A laptop and a flat screen monitor were also donated.

In July, we traveled to Guatemala. EagleEyes was set up and we began training Mirna’s family on how to use the system. The family is hoping that the technology will represent a big improvement in the quality of Mirna’s life since it would allow her to express her needs and perhaps most importantly, her emotions. It would likewise help to relieve her family of a great burden on trying to interpret what she is trying to say. The doctors tell us that she is fully conscious and can hear, smell and see. However, she has been inside a physical prison ever since that fateful day back in 2005 and is not able to communicate in any way with her family.

Now, with the support of EagleEyes Mirna will have the opportunity to play simple games and learn how to communicate with her family and friends.

We all know this is just the beginning of a journey together and that with love, patience and effort, we will see even greater results from our friend Mirna Ramos. She is a fighter and we all pray that with very hard work, one day she will be able to post a little note on this blog to express her emotions and feelings towards all of you that have blessed us all with your generosity and make this endeavor a reality.

We will be updating Mirna’s blog http://mirna-ramos.blogspot.com as often as possible to keep you posted on her progress. May God bless you all!
Boston College and the Republic of Ireland have had a long-term relationship sharing educational innovations, through the Irish Institute at Boston College. It was through this relationship that the Republic of Ireland’s Education Department was introduced to the newest technologies developed at Boston College. In 2007, while on a tour at the BC Campus School, educators had the opportunity to witness first-hand the Camera Mouse and EagleEyes technologies being used.

Camera Mouse utilizes a webcam and is designed to help individuals who can not use their hands to control the mouse but can voluntarily move their head. Camera Mouse can be downloaded for free at www.cameramouse.org.

EagleEyes is an innovative eye-controlled technology that helps children and adults with profound physical disabilities interact and communicate with other people by using the computer. Electrodes are placed above and below the dominant eye and on both temples to magnify the electrical signal of the eye and convert it into the mouse cursor. EagleEyes is designed for individuals who have little or no facial movement. The less facial movement the individual has the better he or she can master EagleEyes.

From this brief encounter it was decided that both Camera Mouse and EagleEyes would be extremely beneficial in the Republic of Ireland school system. I was extended an invitation to implement these technologies in the “School of the Divine Child” in Cork, Ireland. The first visit in fall of 2007 was centered around the Camera Mouse as EagleEyes was in the process of being re-engineered and re-designed.

Since the first visit the Camera Mouse system has been placed in every classroom in the “School of the Divine Child” and the teachers are using it with many of their students to achieve educational goals.

My most recent visit in June of this year was to implement the EagleEyes technology into their academic curriculum. After witnessing the success of several students with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) using EagleEyes in the State of Utah, the decision was made to reach out to the same demographic in Ireland.

John was the first child with CVI we tested. Our initial expectation was that he would be able to shoot down at least 2 out of 10 aliens in the EE Aliens Game. We also hoped that he would be able to find a comfort level with the electrodes on his face. The results were far better than expected. John was not only able to tolerate the use of the electrodes but he successfully shot down 7 out of 10 aliens using his eyes as the cursor. To everyone’s delight he then requested to have the electrodes put back on so he could play again. His second trial the next day was witnessed by his mother who was overjoyed with his accomplishments.

The remainder of my time spent in Ireland was focused on the evaluation of students and staff training on the use of the technology. In the future there will be on-going collaboration as to how EagleEyes can best be utilized by the students to achieve communication, recreational and educational goals that would have been impossible before.
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