



# Access Technologies Group

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**September 24, 2005**

## **ACCESS TECHNOLOGIES GROUP, INC. TO DESIGN “SOCIAL SIMENTOR™”**

Access Technologies Group, Inc. of New Canaan, CT wins Federal Department of Education Small Business Innovation Grant (SBIR) to develop interactive software to teach social skills through simulated role playing with an “e-mentor”

NEW CANAAN, CT, October 21, 2005 - Access Technologies Group, Inc (ATG) today announced the official notification of their Federal SBIR award to develop a web-based interactive simulation e-learning tool entitled “Social Simentor™” Patterned after the patented and successful business training simulation tool, Simentor®. this new tool is aimed at students and adults with disabilities that impair their ability to read social cues and respond accordingly. The initial grant award enables the team to develop a prototype to apply for additional funding in six months.

In attendance at the announcement were Lucy Baney, the President and CEO of Access Technologies Group, Inc who will also serve as the Project Director. She was joined by Leslie Walker Hirsch, an internationally known expert in Social and Sexual Development in youth and adults with disabilities and co-creator of the internationally utilized “Circles®” curriculum series. Dr. Christine M. Casey, a consultant on statewide technology education implementations and developer of the BKFK/XEROX Inventive Thinking Toolkit will round out the team. They will be working together with staff from ATG to design an e-learning tool to teach interpersonal and social skills to individuals with cognitive disabilities. According to Leslie Walker Hirsch, for many individuals with disabilities, “reading” social cues may be more difficult than reading words. Many individuals with disabilities have difficulty in obtaining and retaining employment due to issues related to non-verbal communication, poor social judgment and misunderstanding social messages. The unique nature of this role play product allows for custom interactive situational specific role-play with mentoring and virtually unlimited replay and rehearsal. The use of technology allows for the large amount of repetition frequently necessary for skill acquisition while making the experience embarrassment proof and enjoyable.

Research shows that students retain 5% of lectures, 10% of what they read, and only 20% from audio visual lectures. But when “practice by doing” was combined with “immediate use” and added to other learning components, the retention rates increased 75-80% ([www.ntl.org](http://www.ntl.org)). Social Simentor is a unique e-learning role play product that will offer the opportunity for immediate application and feedback.

“We are excited for the opportunity to take an already proven customizable interpersonal simulation product and developing it to assist individuals with disabilities to acquire the social awareness needed to obtain and retain a job and prevent job loss. Given the need for repetition in the training for this population of individuals with cognitive deficits, a computer based solution would offer significant efficiencies and greater learning retention,” according to Lucy Baney.

According to Leslie Walker-Hirsch, “Greater social competence and interpersonal skill in the workplace, in the community and in personal relationships will add a new dimension to quality of life for people who are “differently abled”. They will learn new skills in an exciting, high tech style that will advance their opportunities for success.”

The grant funding is made possible through the PL 99-506 Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – as amended PL 93-112, and is overseen by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

### **About Access Technologies, Inc.**

Access Technologies Group, Inc. is a pioneer in e-learning solutions, including training products that allow for the creation, delivery, testing, and management of online and leader-led training, as well as consulting, maintenance, and custom courseware development services.

For more information about Access Technologies Group, Inc. and Simentor<sup>®</sup>, visit [www.atghome.com](http://www.atghome.com)

### **About Lucy Baney**

Lucy Baney has spent her entire career in technology, including 19 years with IBM where she held various positions in sales, marketing and technology executive positions. She serves on several boards, including the Foundation Board of Norwalk Community College, where she chairs the Information Technology committee, The Business Council of Fairfield County, and the Icelandic American Chamber of Commerce.

### **About Leslie Walker Hirsch**

Leslie Walker-Hirsch is an award winning educational consultant who specializes in social and sexual development for individuals with intellectual disabilities. She is an advocate, lecturer and the co-creator of the CIRCLES<sup>®</sup> series, multi-media materials for improving social competence and judgment, designed to address the learning styles of youth and adults with cognitive disabilities.

Her publications include *The Facts of Life ...and More* (soon to be in press), and chapters in *Down Syndrome: Visions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, *A Guide to Consent*, and *HIV Infection and Developmental Disabilities*, as well as articles in journals and newsletters.

She is the founder and former chairperson of the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) Special Interest Group on Social and Sexual Concerns, past President of the General Division of AAMR and Fellow in AAMR, member of the National Clinical Advisory Board of the National Down Syndrome Society, serves on the Proctor and Gamble panel of experts for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She has been a speaker at professional trainings across the US and abroad.

Leslie Walker-Hirsch has a Master's Degree in Special Education and Administration. She consults to families, schools, agencies and states to assist individuals with intellectual disabilities and their support networks on issues related to developing social competence and sexual safety.

### **About Christine M. Casey**

Dr. Casey's 30 year career in education has focused on creating educational opportunities for underserved populations through leveraging creative partnerships with community and private industry. While serving as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for the Stamford Public Schools in Stamford, CT, she lead the team that created one of the first "high tech" high schools in the nation; the nationally award winning Academy of Information Technology.

As Director of Educational Initiatives for By Kids For Kids Co. ( [www.bkfk.com](http://www.bkfk.com) ), she led the development of the BKFK/XEROX Inventive Thinking Toolkit, produced and nationally distributed by Scholastic. This unique toolkit offers resources to teachers and promotes project based learning and development of student real world inventions. The toolkit is aligned to national standards and offers exciting and fun activities for all grade levels. Dr. Casey currently consults in the north east region, specializing in creating programs for students with disabilities and underserved populations; grant writing, developing funding sources and coordinating pilot activities. Dr. Casey holds a Doctorate and two Masters Degrees from Columbia University, Teachers College and a Masters Degree from Hunter College in NYC.

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