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Can't hear? Device can help you 'chat'

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HEARING-IMPAIRED students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic now depend on reading lips as well as the other person's ability to understand sign language in order to communicate.

But a software program written by their schoolmates may soon help them communicate better with their teachers and friends.

Mr Aloysius Goh, 19, and Mr Wong Fu Yau, 20, have come up with a skin-tight glove with built-in sensors that the hearing-impaired can use for sign language. The information is transmitted to a pocket computer that 'speaks' out what he is trying to communicate with his hands.

The other party can also record his speech in the pocket computer, which then converts it into text that can be read off the screen.

The two final-year mobile computing students were awarded an \$18,000 grant for their work yesterday under the Samsung DigitAll Hope programme, which aims to improve lives with technology.

Mr Goh said they intend to modify their application for 'normal mobile phones' by next June.

Sign language converted into speech will be transmitted like a normal voice call. When the other party replies, it will appear as a text message to the deaf person.

The National University of Singapore's mechanical engineering department also received \$116,800 from Samsung to develop virtual keyboards and other help devices for the elderly and physically disabled.

The devices include skull caps and goggles fitted with cameras to help them control household appliances such as television sets, lights or computers by turning their heads from side to side.

Community Development, Youth and Sports Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, who was at the award presentation, also announced that a second Assistive Technology Centre would be set up by next March by the National Council of Social Service, to help the hearing-impaired. The first centre currently aids the physically disabled.

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