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A glove to chat if you can't hear too well; Invention by two Ngee Ann Poly students converts hand signs into words

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548 words

5 November 2005

TODAY (Singapore)

AM N PM

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English

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THIS is a project that lets the hands do the talking.

Using wireless technology, the project involves an electronic Data Glove that captures hand signs from a hearing-impaired person, and then converts the sign language into text on a pocket PC.

The text is then synthesised and read aloud, so that a person with normal hearing can understand what has been signed.

Called Glovology, the project is the brainchild of two students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's School of InfoComm Technology, Aloysius Goh, 19, and Wong Fu Yau, 20, who were inspired by a suggestion from a hearing-impaired schoolmate.

"We really hope to dissolve the boundaries between the hearing-impaired and the rest of us, so that we can understand and integrate them better into society," Mr Wong told Today.

Glovology aims to facilitate a "seamless conversation" with the hearing-impaired. The hearing person can respond normally, as the pocket PC can translate the sound waves into text for the hearing-impaired to read.

The two students now hope to incorporate this technology into a pocket PC phone, so that the hearing-impaired will be able to conduct a phone conversation. And they have just been given a boost.

On Friday, Glovology received an \$18,000 grant from electronics giant Samsung under the **Samsung DigitAll Hope** 2005 programme. The other Singaporean winning entry was the National University of Singapore's Augmented Reality Assistive Keyboard to help the physically disabled better carry out their daily tasks.

Into its third year, the programme received 14 entries from Singapore and close to 300 entries from the region. In total, US\$500,000 (\$850,000) in grants will be awarded to 11 projects this year.

"Technology is but an enabler for brighter futures for everyone," said Samsung Asia's regional president Sang-Jin Park. "Through the DigitAll Hope programme, we are proud to crystallise our goal of giving back to the communities."

Also at the award ceremony was Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan, who stressed the importance of technology in helping people with disabilities.

He announced that the National Council of Social Service will set up two Assistive Technology (AT) centres - one for the hearing-impaired and one for the visually-impaired - by next March.

AT helps people with disabilities through the use of devices like hearing aids and computer devices featuring Braille or speech output. The Society for the Physically Disabled currently runs one AT centre.

The new centres will, among other things, promote the use of AT devices and provide the necessary assessment and after-sales support. They will also work with the private sector in the research, development and marketing of affordable AT devices.

The Government set up a fund in 2003 for persons with disabilities to acquire AT devices at subsidised rates. To date, 114 persons have benefited.

Dr Balakrishnan urged for greater innovation in developing AT devices, and for voluntary welfare organisations to develop better competencies and expertise.

"Every new technological innovation opens up opportunities for persons with disabilities to better integrate into society and achieve their aspirations," he said.

Document TDAYSG0020051104e1b50002c

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