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Help at hand for the hearing-impaired

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Poly students make glove that converts sign language into speech

THE term 'helping hand' has just taken on a whole new meaning with Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Glovology project, one of two made-in-Singapore projects to be awarded grants by Samsung's DigitAll Hope 2005 programme.

The project, developed by two final-year students in Ngee Ann Poly's Information Technology (Mobile Computing) programme, consists of a glove that can convert sign language into speech. Aloysius Goh, 19, and Wong Fu Yau, 20, had been developing the idea since May this year.

The system consists of an electronic Data Glove and Pocket PC Phone. The hand signs of a hearing impaired person wearing the glove will be captured and converted into voice on the Pocket PC, enabling the other party to understand what he is saying.

The reverse is also possible. The speech of a normal person can be converted into text that is displayed on the Pocket PC for the hearing-impaired person to read. This allows for quick and handy two-way communication between a hearing-impaired and normal person. This can also be accomplished using a mobile phone in place of the Pocket PC.

The presentation ceremony for DigitAll Hope 2005 was held at the National Library Building and the grants were given out by Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.

'Samsung is blazing the trail for other technological innovators, designers and manufacturers to step forward and show us what technology can do to help people with disabilities or no disability lead lives of dignity and quality,' he said. The other award-winning project was the Augmented Reality-based Virtual Keyboards and Assistive Technology Devices research project by a team from the National University of Singapore.

The project enables handicapped and elderly people to operate standard household equipment and communicate via the Internet and computer technology. Showcased was a headset that could control a television with just minute movements of a person's head.

'We envision the project to be useful to individuals with disabilities to carry out their daily living tasks and we hope to bring it to users in other countries as a useful assistive tool,' said project leader associate professor **Ong Soh Khim**.

Aimed at enriching lives with technology, Samsung DigitAll Hope is now into its third year and extends across seven countries in Asia Pacific - Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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