

Student interns modify toys for children with disabilities

Installing cables and jacks on battery-operated toys allows any child to use a toy.

Participation in a toy adaptation workshop by high school students from the Lewis Educational and Research Collaborative Internship Program (LERCIP) proved to be enlightening and an opportunity to brighten the upcoming holiday season for area children with disabilities.

Glenn and RePlay for Kids, a nonprofit organization that modifies toys and repairs assistive devices for children with disabilities, hosted the workshops at Glenn on July 26. Under the guidance of Glenn employees and volunteers from RePlay, LERCIP students took battery-operated toys apart and installed cables and jacks. This process allows any child to use a toy once the appropriate switch is inserted. These switches include ones that are larger or easier to press, or that are activated by puffing into a tube or tilting one's head.

"Through this workshop, our students saw firsthand how achievements in science, engineering, and technology can improve someone's quality of life," said Jo Ann Charleston, chief, Educational Programs Office. "The interns not only learned more about electronics but also about people with disabilities, while providing a useful community service."

Samantha Hasselbusch, a senior at Valley Forge High School, organized the daylong event, which was part of her summer internship. Hasselbusch, who is blind, is a LERCIP student under the High School/High Tech Program, which is operated through United Cerebral Palsy. She reported that 75 students and 20 mentors participated in the workshops, modifying 28 toys.

The workshop toys were donated by Glenn employees and by the U.S. Marine Corps' Toys for Tots program, which has a partnership with RePlay to supply toys that can be adapted for switch access.

The toys adapted at the Glenn workshops will be donated to local agencies for holiday distribution.

"We knew that the technical skills of the NASA employees would be a great fit for our workshops—and the student involvement was an added benefit," said Bill Memberg, president of RePlay. "We hope to collaborate with NASA on future workshops too."

For more information on RePlay for Kids, go to www.replayforkids.org. ♦

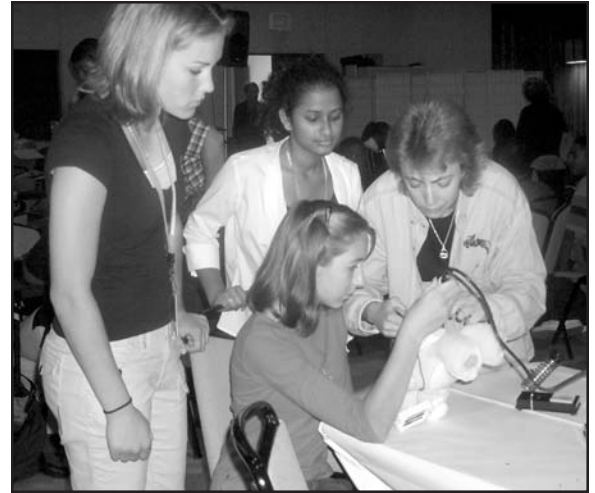


Photo by Doreen Zudell

Joanne Walton, Microgravity Division, standing, right, works with LERCIP students, left to right, Jessica Moore, Felishia Mangla, and Anna Gillespie, to insert a switch in a Care Bear stuffed animal so that it can be operated by a child with a disability.
