

FAST WORK ON ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY WINS HONOURS

Keren Down, the director of the Foundation for Assistive Technology (FAST) has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Founded in 1999, FAST works to promote innovation and good practice in assistive technology, that is aids and equipment designed to help older and/or disabled people live independently. Ms Down has been the charity's Director since 2004.



'I am delighted to receive this award which is a recognition of just how important assistive technology is in all our lives. We hear a lot these days about our ageing population and the need to make our society more inclusive for older and disabled people and assistive technology has a vital role to play in meeting these challenges,' Ms Down explained.

Assistive technology can be anything from a simple gadget like a jar-opener, to robotic rehabilitation aids, wheelchairs, prosthetics and health monitoring systems.

'Developing innovative technology to support older and disabled people is critical if we are to respond to growing health and social care needs. But we also need to make sure that the people who specify, install and maintain assistive technology have the right competencies, and FAST has led the campaign for workforce standards in this area,' Ms Down stated.

FAST maintains a public database of research activity in assistive technology, a fully searchable resource which lists more than 1000 projects and is used by academics, policymakers and healthcare professionals. This information forms the basis of an annual Parliamentary report on current research and development work which FAST prepares on behalf of the Department of Health. FAST also produces newsletters and reports and provides consultancy services.

This year's Parliamentary report lists over 160 projects being carried out by UK universities, charities and commercial organisations.

'Some projects use everyday technology such as mobile phones, for example to record and analyse food intake for people on special diets, or to provide prompts and advice for people with memory problems. We are also seeing a growing number of assistive technology initiatives which use more complex computer systems to monitor someone's health and well-being. These are particularly important for supporting people living with long term chronic health conditions, or people who have early stage dementia, who want to carry on living independently,' Ms Down said.

Such systems use miniaturised sensors which can be worn on the body to transmit information about someone's heart rate or breathing pattern to a central computer system. This can be combined with information from sensors around the house which can detect someone's movements in order to build up a picture of their activity levels and sound an alarm if, for example, the person has a fall.

For more information about FAST, go to <http://www.fastuk.org>

Biography of Keren Down - Director of the Foundation for Assistive Technology (FAST)

Keren has an educational background in English Literature and Fine Art, work experience in user involvement and health and social care provision and voluntary sector experience of community development.

Before joining FAST, Keren worked as a Care Co-ordinator at the Motor Neurone Disease Care and Research Centre, King's College Hospital where she developed the first UK online forum run by people with MND. That experience gave her an insight into the way users view assistive technology services and their desire to be involved in service planning.

Keren became Director of FAST in 2004 and has steered FAST through an exciting phase of development which has seen the organisation developing strategic guidance on service improvement across assistive technology services. Recent work includes proposals for workforce development and a programme to help people choose and use assistive technology to manage long term health conditions, which complements the NHS expert patients programme.

Born in St Albans but now living in South London, Keren's own favourite piece of assistive technology is her PDA, which acts as a memory aid and helps her keep track of a very busy schedule. Outside FAST, her hobbies are painting, knitting and visiting France.

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