



press release

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Date: June 15, 2015
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UCP Seguin Team Members Win National Innovation Lab Competition

(Chicago, IL) On May 19-20 people with disabilities joined designers, engineers, technologists and other professionals as part of the first annual "Innovation Lab" sponsored by United Cerebral Palsy's Life Labs Initiative. This intense two-day national competition is part of an overall effort to improve the lives of disabilities through development of innovative technology. Team Wheelhouse, comprised of individuals served by UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago alongside UCP Seguin staff, students and technology professionals, won bragging rights, taking first place in this inaugural contest.

The "Innovation Lab" challenged entrants to design assistive technology or equipment concepts to solve everyday problems for people with disabilities. Team Wheelhouse's winning entry was entitled "Mike.io", otherwise known as "Mobile Interactive Kinetic Environment", inspired by team member and UCP Seguin participant Mike Simpson. "Mike.io" is a tool to assist individuals with disabilities in accessing and making searches on the internet. Team Wheelhouse realized that individuals with disabilities frequently have difficulty conceptualizing how to pose questions for internet queries. They created the idea for a "wiki-type" site structured to address functional day-to-day goings on. This site would include a menu of symbols based on a range of daily activities and the means to access information and resources to assist in completing these activities. One could pick an activity, like transportation and be taken to a sub-menu to select another category, like navigation. Once in that area the user would see popular questions or have the chance to add a question. Upon selecting a question, the individual would be brought to a page that displays helpful videos, products, and related questions and answers.

The Team Wheelhouse site also includes a "crowd-sourcing" section for innovators to submit their product ideas and ask for help funding their projects. The team facilitator has now purchased the domain name, the next step in the process of creating a useful and marketable product to enrich the lives of people with disabilities.

The victorious Team Wheelhouse included individuals with a wealth of talents and wide-ranging backgrounds: UCP Seguin participants Mike Simpson and Miriam Guerrero, accompanied by UCP Seguin staff member Katherine Thurston; University of Illinois-Chicago engineering student and team facilitator Zain Adhami; ADA specialist Robin Morrissey; locally-based universal design innovator Melissa Zlatow; and hailing from France, inventor and designer Hugo de Gentile.

The competition was held at Microsoft's Midwest Technology headquarters in Downtown Chicago and judged by a prestigious panel including Erin Simpson, Civic Tech Fellow for Microsoft; Jane Markham, Vice President of AT&T; and Richard Ellenson, CEO of Cerebral Palsy International Research Foundation.

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UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago is an affiliate agency of the United Cerebral Palsy national organization. UCP National seeks to advance the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with a broad range of disabilities, while educating, advocating and providing support services to ensure a life without limits for people with disabilities. UCP Seguin of Greater Chicago is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit human services agency dedicated to enriching the lives of people with disabilities. Providing programs and services from birth to old age, UCP Seguin helps children and adults with disabilities achieve their potential, advance their independence and act as full members of the community. Its programs include innovative training and education, family support, employment and life-skills training, residential services, and foster care.

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