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A Proposal to Establish a Computer Based
Bulletin Board System

ILRU Project
The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research
Houston, Texas

The purpose of this project is to establish and demonstrate the utility of a computer-access bulletin board information system which will facilitate exchange and provision of information related to rehabilitation, independent living, and disability. The proposed system will be modeled after a highly successful demonstration project sponsored by the National Science Foundation and operated by the Houston Museum of Natural Science. This model bulletin board system called Apple Astronomy can be accessed by almost any micro-computer, minicomputer, or ASCII terminal equipped for two-way telephone communications. The model system offers a wide array of information related to astronomy and provides message bases for the exchange of electronic mail related to microcomputing, astronomy, astrology, and teaching methods.

The proposed disability bulletin board will offer information about local, state, and national rehabilitation service providers, local access to restaurants, public buildings, and entertainment and recreational facilities. The system will offer message bases for the exchange of information about services, accessible facilities, relevant legislation, consumer group and organization news, and so on. The general information and message base will be expanded and altered according to utilization trends and user suggestions.

It is anticipated that the primary users of this system will be Houston-area rehabilitation consumers and professionals who presently have access to microcomputers or terminals. It is estimated that there are several hundred individuals with such capacity in the Houston area at the present time. A secondary set of system users, and eventually possibly a primary set of users, will be staff persons and consumers at independent living centers located across the country. At the present time, approximately half of the 200 independent living programs in the United States have the capability to use the proposed system and no other known bulletin board system has established an information library and message bases of the sort described here.

The proposed system will be operated by the ILRU Project using an Apple II microcomputer equipped with a hard disk and modem. A modified version of the Networks bulletin board program will be used as software for this system. Initial hardware and software costs for this system will be on the order of \$4,000. The operation of this system will require the installation and maintenance of a dedicated phone line at a cost of roughly \$600 per year. Daily maintenance of the system by ILRU staff members will be required and is estimated to equal 15% of one full time equivalent non-professional staff person's time annually or \$2,500. Installation and set-up for the system will require approximately three weeks of a professional staff person's time for a one-time cost of about \$1,500.

The estimated total cost of establishing this demonstration system and operating it for one year is \$8,600. It may be possible to limit the capacity of this system somewhat and thereby reduce the cost to roughly \$6,600.

The degree to which this system is utilized and the purposes for which it is utilized will be documented and reported. The interactive nature of the system will enhance ILRU's ability to monitor its function and obtain user feedback on its utility and performance.

If the system appears to successfully meet an identifiable need during the one year demonstration period, ILRU will try to maintain it as an ongoing community service. Funding to continue this service may be generated through a combination of user contributions and system membership fees. Installation and design of the system may also be marketed to independent living programs and rehabilitation service providers in other cities who want to establish local networks in their own communities.