

Technology helping those with disabilities

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Mandy Lau was inspired to create a Braille alphabet puzzle after a night of darkness.

Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme legislation isn't the only progress being made for those living with disabilities. Recently we've looked at three new assistive technologies - two of them home-grown - helping people who have autism or hearing or sight impairments.

Reach and Match

A night floundering in the dark inspired Monash University industrial design masters graduate Mandy Lau to create her Braille learning toy: sensory two-sided puzzle pieces imprinted with the Braille alphabet.

The Dialogue in the Dark event in Hong Kong is part of a global initiative that invites sighted people to perform basic tasks in complete darkness.

"I couldn't even do simple tasks," Lau says.

Her invention, which she entered in the 2012 James Dyson technology award, is trying to solve the problem of declining Braille literacy; 40 years ago, 50 per cent of blind school-aged children used Braille as their primary reading medium, but today it is just 10 per cent. "Because a lot of blind children go to mainstream schools, it's more difficult for them to learn Braille," Lau says.

With the success of speech output technology for the blind on devices such as the iPhone, Lau is trying to fund the next phase of development for the sensory toy, with plans to upgrade its functionality to include audio and digital components. "I think that could be powerful and useful." Lau is seeking investors and collaborators to help commercialise the learning kit.

reachandmatch.com
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This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/digital-life-news/technology-helping-those-with-disabilities-20130904-2t3oy.html>