Our SIG’s “e-Lifelines”:
Tapping Online Resources to Help Meet Special Needs

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The Special Needs SIG’s “e-Lifelines” come in four categories: (1) a comprehensive Web site, (2) a dynamic and data-rich online newsletter, (3) a robust listserv, and (4) specialized e-mail distributions. This paper will take a quick look at each of these 4. More details will be provided in Session UID 8E, “From Disabled to Enabled: Meeting Special Needs to Ensure Accessibility.”

1. Web Site. The Special Needs SIG’s Web site contains the richest source of disability-related resources that you’ll find anywhere. In addition to the latest articles, events, and news, the site includes a glossary and sections devoted to:

- Cognitive Disability
- Hearing Impairment
- Internet Accessibility
- Mobility Restriction
- Sight Impairment
- Speech Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury

While this is indeed a wealth of valuable information, it doesn’t compare with the flood of valuable Web links contained in the “Resources” section. Grouped by disability type, each group contains multiple links to sites that have been hand picked by SIG members. Some of the current 52 different groups include:

- Accessible Travel
- Cerebral Palsy
- Employment
- Hearing Loss
- Language
- Mental Health
- Pain Management
- Sports and Recreation
2. **Online Newsletter.** While you’re on our site, don’t miss the inaugural edition of the Special Needs SIG newsletter *Achieve!*, where you’ll learn about:

- Intranet accessibility and Section 508
- Rhode Island Conference Probes Accessibility: “Web Design that Works for Everyone”
- The Making of the Nashville Conference Guide for People with Special Needs
- What it’s like to walk in someone else’s shoes
- Seeing with new eyes
- Writing about people with disabilities
- What makes a Web site accessible
- Even more Web resources
- And a whole lot more…

3. **Listserv.** If you join the Special Needs SIG, you will have access to another superb “e-Lifeline”: an always informative, often entertaining, and occasionally volatile real-time online forum where SIG members share ideas, compare notes, and debate issues relating to disabilities and accessibility. A digest form is available if the traffic gets to be too much (we are a very communicative group!). One of the best functions of our listserv is that by posting to it, you can immediately bring to bear upon your question, problem, or issue the collective resources of more than a hundred expert technical communicators, many of whom specialize in usability and accessibility. It’s a great place to share and a great place to learn.

4. **E-Mail Distributions.** And then, of course, there’s good old e-mail. E-mail has been an absolutely critical factor in the establishment and the rapid growth of the Special Needs SIG. We have at least a half dozen specialized e-mail distributions pertaining to various elements within the SIG.

First, there is a core team of task leaders who help articulate the SIG’s mission, break it down into specific objectives, and identify and implement activities that will fulfill those objectives. We call this the Steering Team, and I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say that there is e-mail traffic every single day among these dedicated people.

Then there was the “Operation Starfish” distribution. That was a hardy band of volunteers, many of whom also served on the Steering Team, who achieved a nearly impossible degree of membership growth in less than a year through an energetic and enthusiastic outreach campaign to the chapters.

And there are also a number of sub-distributions focusing on special topics. One example is the team that is focusing on a publishing initiative on accessibility. Another team is comprised of SNSIG members who are working to establish or sustain local Special Needs SIGs in their home chapters. And we have another that consists of parents of children who have disabilities. They have been an enormous help to each other and have opened all our eyes to the special challenges this 24-7 responsibility brings.
A final point about e-mail is the fact that many of us have grown so comfortable with the medium that we have literally formed strong friendships with people we have never even met face to face, or, in some cases, even talked to on the telephone. You wouldn't generally think of e-mail as a place to bare your soul and find a soul mate, but we have seen more than a few cases of precisely that.

So come onboard and drop us an e-line some time!

And a Sneak Preview of Our Progression …

During the freeform part of the progression, attendees will have an opportunity to locate areas of specific interest to them, ask questions, and give suggestions and feedback to the facilitators that will help make the Special Needs Web site even more effective and valuable. Attendees will receive a copy of the SIG newsletter and a current list of disability-related Web resources.

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Cynthia Lockley has 30 years of experience in technical communication with various companies and universities in the United States, France, and Germany. She is an Associate Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and the Immediate Past President of the Washington, DC Chapter. She has received the chapter's Distinguished Service Award. She currently serves as the Region 2 Coordinating Webmaster and is the Web Diva for the Washington, DC Chapter, the Special Needs SIG, and the Region 2 Director-Sponsor's Web sites. She has served more than seven years on the Washington, DC chapter's administrative council as chapter president, 1st and 2nd vice president, and as a member or manager of several chapter committees. She has won 5 awards in chapter competitions and also serves as a competition judge. She was public relations co-manager at STC’s 42nd Annual Conference in 1995. Cynthia has spoken at chapter programs and international STC conferences. She has a B.A. in English and a B.S. in Information Systems Management.

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Mike Murray is the principle writer for the Customer Care organization in Lockheed Martin's Enterprise Information Systems (EIS) company and the current President of the Orlando Chapter STC. In over 24 years with Lockheed Martin, Mike has developed a wide range of communications products. His current position entails the development of marketing plans and materials for the products and services EIS supports throughout Lockheed Martin as the primary information technology supplier for the Corporation. A long-time Senior Member of STC, Mike has been very active in the Orlando Chapter’s Education Committee and served as newsletter editor, Vice President, and President of the chapter. He has attended numerous STC Annual Conferences and is certified by Franklin Covey to teach technical writing at Lockheed Martin. Mike is extremely active in his community with various youth organizations. He is currently “The Voice of Youth Basketball of America,” which is headquartered in Orlando. On May 7, 2001, he was inducted into the Dr. Phillips High School’s Athletic Hall of Fame in honor of his fifteen years of service to the Orlando school as “The Voice of the Panthers.” Mike holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in management and Master of Business Administration degree with a concentration in data processing.