

New Ergonomic Study Addressing Computer Use by Young Children

With the recent publicity about the potential for long term damaging effects of computer usage on younger children, Divisible By Zero, in-conjunction with the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), has recently completed a study at two Victorian Primary Schools.

This study involved the use of computer input devices (keyboards, trackballs and mice) designed specifically for the smaller hands of younger children.

It is expected that with equipment designed specifically for their physical needs, it will be possible to guide the children to adopt a proper ergonomic posture while using a computer. This is not normally possible as the size of the normal (adult sized) keyboard and mouse supplied with computer systems prevents them from adopting and retaining a good posture.

The trial involved assessing the children's posture, introducing the new equipment, instructing them in proper posture and then monitoring and recording of any improvements in posture and useability over time.

While the results of the trial are yet to be fully analysed, the initial findings are very promising and demonstrate that significant improvement is achievable.

The equipment being used consisted of the **DataDesk LittleFingers**[®] keyboard and the **ittiBitty** brand of children specific mice.

In each of the two schools one classroom was equipped with LittleFingers Deluxe keyboards (which incorporate an integrated trackball), while in the other, LittleFingers Standard model keyboards were installed (no trackball) and were used in conjunction with an ittiBitty Tiny Mouse.

David Brennan, a Director of Divisible by Zero is eagerly awaiting the study's results:

*"to date, while many people have expressed concerns about computer usage and the young, no-one has yet really come up with a possible solution for the problem. We fully expect that the study results will show that something can be done **now** and that we can take steps to protect the future health of our children, without robbing them of the learning opportunities presented by computer systems."*

The LittleFingers keyboard is the first keyboard specifically designed for small hands. The size and spacing of the keys have been scientifically engineered to allow younger children to easily reach all of the keys, naturally and comfortably. Apart from improved confidence, children can now learn to type proficiently and safely without having to hunt-and-peck on an adult sized keyboard.

Another unique feature is the inclusion of lower case letters on the keycaps – helping to address another area where younger users have to grapple with technology designed for adults. Coupled

with this comes an integrated trackball, with lockable scroll buttons, greatly simplifying use for younger users.

While focussed on the educational market, *LittleFingers* will find a place in homes where parents wish to ensure that their children can gain effective use of a PC from an early age. It is also considered that the keyboard's size will be of benefit to users with certain disabilities – such as the use of a single hand – where the ability of their hand to span the entire keyboard will enable them to radically improve their typing performance.

LittleFingers is manufactured by DataDesk Technologies of Seattle. Its concept is so original and unique, that it has been awarded United States and Australian patents and foreign patents are pending.

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or visit www.dbz.com.au for comprehensive information about *LittleFingers* and *ittiBitty*.

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