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## **VARIETY ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF AT&T'S 'ACCESS YOUR VOICE' PROGRAM**

***Program will give children like 7-year-old Aaron, who has autism,  
the ability to communicate with the help of assistive devices***

ST. LOUIS (November 21, 2011) – In this season of Thanksgiving, we all ponder what we're most grateful for in our lives. Aaron doesn't have to think very hard to find his answer. At 7 years old, Aaron, who deals with autism, developmental delay and expressive language disorder, just found his voice. It comes in the way of a Vantage Light communication device – a \$7,755 piece of equipment provided by Variety the Children's Charity.

"It's just wonderful to see a child who has no language – no voice – tell me he wants pretzels or cookies, or he wants to go outside," said Aaron's mom, Beth. "Before, it was a guessing game when he needed something. This truly gives him a voice. It is an absolute gift."

Variety is pleased to announce that this device is funded by a new initiative with AT&T called "Access Your Voice." AT&T has committed \$25,000 to the program, which will provide Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices to children with physical and mental disabilities throughout the year. These devices range from software that can be loaded onto a family's iPad, costing about \$200, to highly sophisticated eye-gaze devices controlled by direct vision in one or both eyes. The latter type of equipment is for those with limited use of their hands, and can cost as much as \$15,000. Variety works directly with a child's physician and/or therapist to obtain a prescription for the appropriate device. Once Variety has purchased the equipment, Health Services Director Diane Gruszka stays in close contact with the family to monitor the child's progress.

"We are absolutely thrilled about this initiative from AT&T, a valued Variety partner for more than four decades," said Variety CEO Jan Albus. "The communication devices are essential to these kids' growth and development. Imagine not being able to communicate your basic needs, participate in school or tell your parents you love them. Variety and AT&T are making all of that possible."

Over the years, AT&T and its employees have gifted more than \$1.5 million to Variety, helping St. Louis children with disabilities reach their full potential. AT&T has been an enduring source of vision and leadership for Variety, as three former company presidents have served as president of the Variety

Board of Directors. AT&T employees have also supported Variety with their volunteer efforts, particularly by staffing the Variety Telethon phone bank for nearly 40 years.

“Keeping people and their families connected to the ones they love is at the core of everything we do at AT&T,” said John Sondag, president of AT&T Missouri. “These communication devices are more than just technology – they are a lifeline. We are proud to support Variety in helping even more local children, like Aaron, find their voice.”

**About Variety the Children’s Charity of St. Louis**

For more than 75 years, **Variety the Children’s Charity of St. Louis** has helped thousands of children with disabilities say “I can” by providing them with vital medical equipment, as well as educational, therapeutic and recreational programs such as the annual Adventure Camp and Variety Children’s Theatre. An international leader in fundraising, Variety the Children’s Charity also distributes grants to more than 80 qualified agencies throughout the St. Louis area to fund programs and/or services that directly impact the lives of children with physical and mental disabilities. David Steward, chairman and founder of World Wide Technology, Inc., is the organization’s president. For more information on Variety, including upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, visit [www.varietystl.org](http://www.varietystl.org).

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