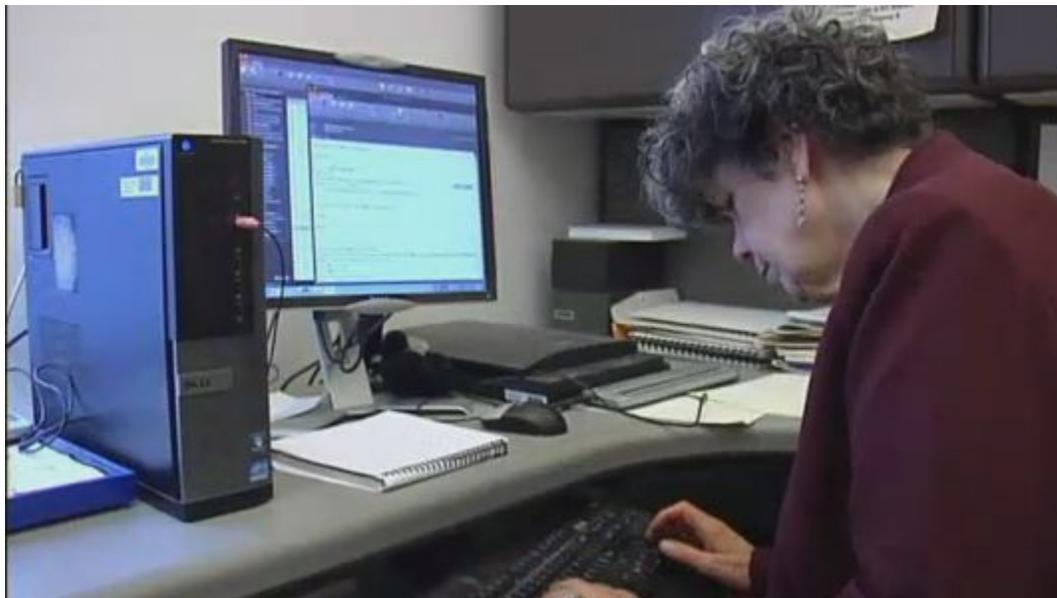




NYer of the Week: Karen Gourgey Makes Digital World More Accessible to Visually Impaired

By: John Schiumo

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This week's New Yorker has been working for years to show those who lack sight how to navigate the digital world. NY1's John Schiumo filed the following report, which was shot, written and edited by Rachel Smith.

As a young woman, Karen Gourgey trained to be an English teacher, but she found a new career in 1977 while visiting Baruch College. There, she learned how a computer worked for the first time.

"I thought that this was something that was going to revolutionize the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired, and I wanted that to be part of my career. I wanted that to be my direction," she says.

It has been ever since, and Dr. Gourgey has helped thousands of others find their way. One year after being introduced to the new technology, she helped open Baruch's Computer Center for Visually Impaired People, or CCVIP.

Lynette Tatum is one of CCVIP's teachers, who show students how to make computers accessible through speech software, or screen magnification for those with some vision.

The center offers classes that teach everything from keyboarding, to surfing the web, to professional courses on PowerPoint and Excel.

"When someone who has not been able to access the computer, hears the speech and they hear the email and they hear the web and they hear their word processing, it's like, 'Oh my God,'" Tatum said. It's such a, it's such a, I think, a magnificent thing."

Beyond CCVIP, Dr. Gourgey has been helping visually-impaired New Yorkers for years. She's helped design tactile subway maps, worked to make train platforms safer, and is advocating for more accessible pedestrian crosswalks.

Though there's a lot more work to be done, she says that visually-impaired people do have options now, it's just a matter of finding them.

"The core mission of showing people that there is more access in this world than they think, that's still us," Gourgey said.

So, for making the real and digital worlds more accessible, Dr. Karen Gourgey and the staff at CCVIP are our New Yorkers of the Week.