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**IMPACTING THE DISABILITIES COMMUNITIES THROUGH INNOVATION:
THE DAN MARINO FOUNDATION NAMED RECIPIENT IN GOOGLE IMPACT
CHALLENGE, GRANT MONEY TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES
AND INDEPENDENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Fort Lauderdale, FL – Earlier today, Google announced a list of 25 innovators who have been awarded a grant from [Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities](#). Included among the recipients is [The Dan Marino Foundation](#) (DMF) for its ViTA DMF software and curriculum.

ViTA DMF is a job-interviewing tool crafted specifically for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and developmental disabilities. Google.org, along with a panel of external advisors, selected the Foundation to receive a grant in the amount of \$853,757. These funds will be used to develop new features of ViTA DMF that enrich the user experience and to help roll it out to schools and nonprofits throughout the country.

83% of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities are unemployed. Job interviews are stressful for everyone. For people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or other developmental disabilities, who often struggle to communicate effectively or read social cues accurately, the job interview can be a major barrier to employment.

“Nationally, 1 out of every 7 people is diagnosed with a developmental disability; corporations can’t afford to miss out on this talented pool of workers. Diversity in the workforce, the inclusion of people who look at things differently, is what drives innovation. Until companies initiate better ways to assess candidates, bold, novel solutions like ViTA DMF are urgently needed,” said Mary Partin, CEO of The Dan Marino Foundation.

“The government is unable to sustain the needed services for this growing and maturing population in meeting employment goals. With existing employment services often resulting in part-time and low-wage jobs, the current system is not meeting the need of this dynamic population. New technologies, like the Foundation’s ViTA DMF must be leveraged in order to open the doors of opportunity,” said Dan Marino, Chairman of the Dan Marino Foundation.

“At Google.org, we support organizations that offer innovative solutions to complex challenges. We’re thrilled to back The Dan Marino Foundation as they help build a world that works for everyone,” said Brigitte Gosselink, Head of Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities.

ViTA DMF is a software and curriculum designed by a team of experts from DMF and the University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT). It leverages more than 15 years of ICT research and development in the creation of virtual humans to give students with ASD a technology-based solution to help them prepare for job interviews.

Built with natural language capabilities, the virtual interviewers pose questions and then reply to interviewee’s answers. Students interact with ViTA over a computer monitor and each exchange is video recorded and reviewed afterward, with instructors providing feedback about an interviewee’s responses, body language and eye contact.

ViTA DMF is also an important research project. The USC Institute for Creative Technologies and The Dan Marino Foundation will be gathering data and user feedback from ViTA DMF community to evolve and improve the product.

“After seeing VITA DMF in action, we realized there is limitless potential to help in many of the soft skill areas where folks on the autism spectrum struggle, both in and out of the workplace,” said psychologist Skip Rizzo, ICT’s director of medical virtual reality. “We can provide experiential practice with a virtual human to help students practice a range of social and vocational skills, including how to take turns properly in a discussion, how to respond when someone says something inappropriate, or even how to make small talk.”

For more information on The Dan Marino Foundation, please visit danmarinofoundation.org, or for more information on the ViTA DMF, please visit vitadmf.org.

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ABOUT THE DAN MARINO FOUNDATION: The Dan Marino Foundation, Inc., a 501(c) 3 organization was established by Dan and Claire Marino, motivated by their experiences in raising their son, Michael, who is diagnosed with autism. For over 24 years, the Foundation has been a leader in innovation and change, "empowering individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities." The Foundation has raised more than \$53 million to create unique and impactful initiatives in the community. Among these first-of-their-kind initiatives are the Nicklaus Children's Hospital Dan Marino

Outpatient Center, the Marino Autism Research Institute, Marino Adapted Aquatics, Summer STEPS Employment Programs, Virtual Interactive Training Agent Program (ViTA DMF), and now Marino Campus. For more information, please visit danmarinofoundation.org or marinocampus.org or vitadmf.net.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR CREATIVE TECHNOLOGIES: Established in 1999, ICT is a DoD-sponsored University Affiliated Research Center (UARC) working in collaboration with the U.S Army Research Laboratory. ICT brings film and game industry artists together with computer and social scientists to improve how people interact with computers and expand what they use them for. ICT prototypes, including interactive virtual humans, virtual reality systems and video game trainers have transitioned for use in military training, health therapies, education and more. Visit: ict.usc.edu.

ABOUT GOOGLE.ORG

Google.org, the philanthropic arm of Google, supports nonprofits that innovate to address humanitarian issues. Google.org was created to pursue, experiment with, and build upon ideas to improve the world, and continues to take an iterative approach to philanthropy today. Google.org develops and invests in pursuits that can have measurable impact on local, regional and global issues, and rallies Google's people in support of these efforts with a singular goal of creating a better world, faster.

ABOUT THE GOOGLE IMPACT CHALLENGE: DISABILITIES

Launched in May of 2015, the Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities (g.co/disabilities) committed \$20 million in Google.org grants behind nonprofits using emerging technologies to increase independence for people living with disabilities.

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