Assistive Technology Is a Part of Everyday Life:
Employment

#ATAwarenessDay

March 1, 2023, is National Assistive Technology Awareness Day! Congress has designated this day to recognize the role of assistive technology (AT) and AT services in the lives of persons with disabilities. Celebrate AT!

What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

AT is any item, device, or software used to maintain or improve the independence and functioning of persons with disabilities and older adults. AT devices can be "low tech," such as a built-up handle on a spoon to improve the ability to grasp, to "high tech," such as computers controlled with eye gaze. AT includes the services necessary to get and use the devices, including assessment, customization, repair, and training.

Eliane Kleingeld with her speech-generating device (see page 2).

What Services Do State and Territory Assistive Technology Act Programs Provide?

AT Act Programs assist individuals with disabilities of all ages (including veterans and older adults) to identify and acquire AT that supports their independence, safety, and personal goals. Programs serve AT users directly and their family members, caregivers, educators, therapists, and employers. Anyone with a reason to learn about AT is welcome.

AT Act Programs provide opportunities to learn about and try out AT. Visitors can compare the functions and features of a range of devices through hands-on exploration. These equipment demonstrations often lead to device loans that help inform future purchase decisions or fulfill a short-term equipment need.

AT Act Programs do not sell new AT. Instead, they may provide funding counseling and financing to obtain or purchase AT. Visitors are not pressured to choose any particular product or vendor. AT users learn about devices from AT professionals who may use assistive technology themselves. AT Act Programs also support the reutilization of gently-used devices to provide free or affordable equipment. Learn more at AT3Center.net.

How Does Assistive Technology Support Employment?

Every day, assistive technology is being used by persons with disabilities in all employment categories. There are amplified stethoscopes for medical personnel with hearing impairments, voice-recognition software for controlling a computer's operating system and writing with speech, hand-control modifications for driving tractors and combines, and talking tape measures for workers with visual impairments. AT makes it possible for individuals with disabilities to accomplish tasks they could not do ordinarily or do what they can longer. AT often supports stamina and pain reduction in the workplace, such as a workstation used while laying prone.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations, including AT, for employees with disabilities. In their study, "Benefits and Costs of Accommodations," the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) finds that most employers who report a cost to accommodations show a one-time expenditure of $500 or less.

A Story from North Carolina

"CJ" works for Lowes as a Workforce Supervisor. She met with staff from the North Carolina AT Act Program (NCATP) when she became concerned she could not perform the keyboarding function of her job with only one hand. NCATP staff members demonstrated three computer access options: 1) a keyboard designed for one-handed typing, 2) software for one-handed typing, and 3) speech-to-text software. After reviewing her options, CJ borrowed the RH Maltron Keyboard. This uniquely shaped one-handed keyboard optimizes layout to minimize finger movement (placing the more common letters closer to the finger 'home position'). She also trialed the speech-to-text software with a noise-canceling headset and microphone. CJ reported she was much more productive after using both the keyboard and software at her worksite. She and her employer have since requested information on how to purchase both options to keep CJ working.

A Story from Colorado

Eliane Kleingeld is a nurse with 47 years of experience. Following her total laryngectomy, she was faced with how to return to work without her voice. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation referred Eliane to the Colorado AT Act Program, a component of the University of Colorado Denver's Center for Inclusive Design and Engineering (CIDE). Eliane trialed speech-generating devices with recommendations made by CIDE's speech-language pathologist. She concluded the Wego 7A was her best fit. Pre-set word buttons help build novel responses quickly. The keyboard with word prediction allows for typing unique messages. For more predictable interactions, programmed buttons with pre-stored phrases may be selected to convey her personality and humor (a top priority for Eliane) and for use with a job interview. With her Wego, Eliane emphatically told clinic staff, "I can do everything I used to be able to do, except talk. I can do my job with this device." In July, after a successful interview using her pre-programmed device, Eliane was offered a full-time position at St. Joseph Hospital in Denver. (Read Eliane's full story.)

Examples of AT for Employment:

- ergonomic workstations
- screen reading software
- lift-assist devices
- tools for memory and cognition
- literacy software
- assistive listening devices
- magnifiers
- voice amplifiers
- speech generating devices
- wheelchair ramps
- accessible vans with hand controls
- foot stools
- contoured hand tools