



Welcoming Motivated Workers!

# ABILITIES

*Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities*

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## Dear Friends ~ Assistive Technology



On behalf of the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, I would like to welcome you to the latest issue of "Abilities"

### **Our first newsletter of 2009 focuses on Assistive Technology (AT).**

Assistive technology is a generic term that includes assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities. These tools allow people with disabilities to become independent and successful in the workplace.

When an employer thinks about hiring a person with a disability, one of the first issues that comes up for them is the term "reasonable accommodation". A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity.

Requests for reasonable accommodations can arise at any time in the course of employment, not just when hiring a new employee. As current employees grow older, sustain injuries, or develop illness, accommodations will be needed.

A reasonable accommodation can take on many forms. Examples include making existing facilities accessible, job restructuring, modifying work schedules, acquiring or modifying equipment, changing training materials, providing interpreters, or reassigning an employee to a vacant position.

This issue of "Abilities" will look at the different types of assistive technologies available, as well as provide information on local resources and funding.

Best regards,

**Fred Jones, Chair,**

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

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## Assistive Technology and Accommodations - Funding

When looking at assistive technology and accommodations in the workplace, there are many options available for funding.

The first option when considering funding is the employer. Employers are required to pay for assistive technology, equipment and other accommodations if the request meets the criteria for a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). According to the Job Accommodation Network, the cost for accommodations to assist employees are typically less than \$500. Accommodations are a small investment to retain good employees. There are also tax credits available to employers to offset costs.

For businesses with 30 or fewer employees or \$1,000,000 or less per year in total revenue, there is the ADA Small Business Tax Credit. Employers can receive a tax credit for the cost of accommodations provided to an employee (or customer) with a disability. This credit covers 50% of eligible expenditures up to \$10,000 (or maximum credit of \$5000 per year).

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is available to employers who hire individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds including people with disabilities. Employers can receive a tax credit of up to \$2400 per individual hired. These credits can be used to help offset costs of assistive technology or accommodations.

Non-employer options to assist in paying for assistive technology and accommodations include:

- Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division for

the Blind and Visually Impaired can assist in paying for assistive equipment for eligible consumers.

- Medical Insurance including Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance may pay for equipment if deemed medically necessary.
- Social Security Work Incentives are available for individuals who receive Social Security disability benefits
- Veterans Affairs is authorized to pay for AT for people with disabilities if they are a veteran.
- Other local service organizations may be available to assist in paying for necessary AT. Here in Vermont, such funding resources include:
  - The Opportunities Independence Fund available through Opportunities, Inc
  - The Sue Williams Freedom Fund which is a program of the Vermont Center for Independent Living, operated in partnership with the State Independent Living Council.
  - The Autism Puzzle Foundation to assist families in purchasing equipment, up to age 18.
  - The Vermont Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program, administered through the Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

## **Assistive Technology for People with Disabilities**

For people with disabilities, there are a variety of assistive technology devices available to help them lead productive lives. These innovative advances are making it easier and more affordable for individuals coping with a disability to be successful in the workplace.

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, there are a variety of assistive

technologies available for use in the workplace. The precise needs vary greatly with the person. Technologies include:

- Hearing aides
- Telecommunication devices including TTY's and TDD's
- Computer assisted and live captioning systems
- Speech recognition software
- Visual alert signalers
- Hearing ear dogs
- Closed captioning decoders
- Assistive listening devices
- Amplification systems
- FM systems
- Loop systems
- Amplified telephones

Technology has removed many barriers to employment for individuals who are visually impaired. This technology includes:

- Speech-to-text software and text-to-speech software
- Larger monitors
- Video magnifiers
- Electronic note takers
- Magnification of word processing, web browsers and other applications
- Personal digital assistants
- Electronic book players
- Optical character recognition systems
- Braille embossers

There is also technology to assist persons with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Specific learning diagnoses focus on different type of deficits, with the most common being deficits in reading, writing and math calculation or reasoning. ADHD is not a learning disability, but more an inability to acquire information as a result of inattentive or hyperactive symptoms. The available technologies include:

- Hardware tools
- Scanner
- Microphone
- Software tools
- Text to speech software
- Learning Disability specific software
- Cognitive mapping software
- Books on tape
- E-text

The advancements in technology have produced solutions that enable persons with disabilities to be successful in the workplace. Finding the right AT is a collaboration between practitioners, employers and consumers.

## **Making Computers Accessible**

In today's society computers are used more and more by employers large and small. There are several types of impairments that can impact computer use. However, assistive technology, through the use of hardware and software, is available to make computer systems accessible.

The variety of impairments that can affect computer use include:

- ~ motor or dexterity impairment
- ~ visual impairment
- ~ hearing impairment
- ~ cognitive impairments and learning disabilities

Improving the ergonomics of computers is one example of AT for computer users. Examples include:

- ergonomic keyboards
- chorded keyboards
- expanded keyboards
- compact keyboards
- keyboards with big keys
- large print keyboards with high contrast colors
- foot mouse
- trackballs
- joysticks
- touch pads

Other examples of AT that can be used to make computers accessible are the varieties of software available to make computers easier to use. The capabilities of software are far reaching including:

- software to assist with a variety of keyboard shortcuts
- predictive text
- spell and grammar checkers
- text-to-speech and speech-to-text software
- voice recognition software
- touch typing software
- hand-eye coordination skills software
- symbol based software

For more information on making computers in your workplace more accessible, contact the Vermont Assistive Technology Program at 800-750-6355.

## **Assistive Technology Resources**

## **Vermont Assistive Technology Program**

The VATP strives to ensure that all individuals with disabilities receive the assistive technology they need and want. Its services include: direct access to assistive technology, AT demonstrations, technical assistance in selecting AT devices, training and resources, providing funding resource information, public awareness activities, and information and referral services.

Contact the Vermont Assistive Technology Program at the numbers below as a key resource for information.

103 South Main Street, Weeks Building  
Waterbury, VT 05671-2305  
(802) 241-2620 (Telephone)  
(802) 241-1464 (TTY)  
(802) 241-2174 (Fax)  
[ATinfo@ahs.state.vt.us](mailto:ATinfo@ahs.state.vt.us) (Email)  
[www.dail.state.vt.us/atp](http://www.dail.state.vt.us/atp) (Website)

## **Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

DBVI offers evaluation, purchase and training in AT to help the blind and visually impaired with employment.

103 South Main Street, Weeks Building  
Waterbury, VT 05671-2304  
(888) 405-5005  
[www.dad.state.vt.us/dbvi/](http://www.dad.state.vt.us/dbvi/)

## **Communications Assistance**

This organization provides assistive technology for communications:

### ***Vermont Telecommunications Relay Service (VTRS)***

Connecting people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing and speech disabled with the world.

(800)253-0195 (Voice)  
(800)253-0191 (TTY)

## **General**

These organizations provide general assistance:

### ***ABLEDATA***

National database of information of over 24,000 assistive technology and rehabilitation products.

[www.abledata.com](http://www.abledata.com) (Website)

### ***The Caption Center***

Will caption videos and/or add descriptive video service to videotapes for blind and visually impaired persons.

WGBH

125 Western Avenue

Boston, MA 02134

(617)300-3600 (Voice/TDD)

[www.wgbh.org/caption](http://www.wgbh.org/caption) (Website)

### ***Vermont Interpreter Referral Service***

Provides assistance in securing interpreters.

130 Austine Drive, Suite 110

Brattleboro, VT 05301

(800)639-1519 (Voice/TTY)

(802)258-9564 (Fax)

### **Used Equipment**

These organizations assist in providing used assistive technology and durable medical equipment.

### ***Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL)***

(800)639-1522 (Voice/TTY)

(802)229-0503 (Fax)

### ***Assistive Technology Exchange in New England***

[www.getatstuff.com](http://www.getatstuff.com)

## **The Vermont Assistive Technology Program**

According to ***The Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988***, assistive technology is "any piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities".

It is through this piece of legislation that the Vermont Assistive Technology Program (VATP) was created. The vision of the Vermont Assistive Technology Program (VATP) is that all individuals with disabilities receive the assistive technology they need and want, and that the benefits of assistive devices and technologies figure prominently in the minds of consumers, policy makers, and service providers. This dedicated program is committed to enabling Vermonters with disabilities to have greater independence, productivity and confidence and to provide Vermonters with a clear and direct avenue toward integration and inclusion in school, the work force and the community.

The services that VATP provide include: direct access to assistive technology, AT demonstrations, training and workshops, funding resource information such as low-cost financial loan programs, conducting public awareness activities, information and referral services, and technical assistance in selecting AT devices.

In addition to these services, VATP also has four Vermont Assistive Technology Tryout Centers to provide demonstrations, short term equipment loans, group trainings and technical assistance around the latest technology. These centers are located in Randolph, Rutland and Waterbury. The Vermont Family Network in Williston also has an AT Tryout Center.

For more information, you can contact the Vermont Assistive Technology Program at 802-241-2620 or 802-241-1464 (TTY), website:

[www.dail.state.vt.us/atp/](http://www.dail.state.vt.us/atp/)

Thanks for reading this issue of "Abilities". We welcome your comments, feedback, and suggestions for future issues. Copies of past issues may be found on our website - [www.hireus.org](http://www.hireus.org), or in the [Constant Contact archives](#).

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