



Fall/Winter 2011

In This Issue:

- 1...National Disability Employment Awareness Month
- 1...Winter Weather Accommodations
- 2...TDDP News
- 3...Captioned Telephone
- 3...FREE Software for Learning & Studying

October reminds us that we can profit by investing in workers with disabilities!

Easy solutions can help people stay healthy and active in winter weather.

America Celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month

This October marks America's 23rd National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The idea took shape in 1945 when Congress selected the first week in October as "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week". The goal was to raise public awareness of disability and employment issues. In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to include individuals with all types of disabilities. And in 1988, Congress designated the entire month of October and renamed it National Disability Employment Month.

Today, it is sponsored by the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, which works toward full inclusion of people with disabilities in national employment practices. This year's theme focuses on how America's workforce can "Profit by Investing in Workers with Disabilities," highlighting the many important contributions that employees with disabilities make to the nation's workplaces and to the economy.

This theme sends a clear message to American businesses: the advantages of hiring or retaining workers with disabilities can far outweigh the risks. With the bleak state of our current job market, this message is especially important. This summer's unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 16.1%, almost double the 8.8% for people with no disability (Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2011).

Employers may be reluctant to hire or retain employees with disabilities because they may not understand how to meet individuals' needs, or how the needs may affect their business. Providing job accommodations or assistive technology is often cost-effective, and tax incentives can help businesses provide necessary accommodations. And just as important as accommodations and technology is fostering a work environment that focuses on the talents and abilities of workers, rather than impairments. Employing workers with disabilities can lead to many benefits for the entire workplace—including increased productivity, morale, and diversity. The hope is that the message of full inclusion in America's workforce will be heard not just in October, but every day of every month.

Winter Weather Accommodations

As the seasons change during this time of year, many of us enjoy the cooler weather and may even look forward to the first snowfall. Yet for some individuals, winter weather can have a big impact on their daily



Ergonomically designed IceDozer Mini windshield ice scraper.



Sno Wovel wheeled snow shovel.



ManPlow easy-glide snow shovel.

routines. People with autoimmune or thyroid disorders, burn injuries, or other conditions may be extremely sensitive to the cold and may have difficulty regulating their body temperature.

Providing accommodations in the workplace can help individuals who experience temperature sensitivities stay safe, healthy, and productive. For instance, allowing such employees to have a portable space heater, or an office with a separate thermostat, can help them stay warm. Modifying employees' work schedules, or allowing them to work from home, can help employees limit their exposure to harsh winter elements. It may be necessary to modify the dress code for employees with temperature sensitivities so that they can stay warm. Heated clothing, garments made of cold-resistant material, or heated inserts for shoes and gloves can also ensure that individuals are safe when temperatures fall.

With frigid temperatures also comes snow and ice. Individuals with arthritis, osteoporosis, weakness, fatigue, or other mobility limitations can find it difficult to keep their cars and walkways clear of snow. Several windshield ice scrapers available on the mass market have large foam handles that are easy to grip. Others, like the Ice Dozer Mini, are ergonomically designed to eliminate the gripping motion altogether. Electric and battery-operated ice scrapers generate heat so that drivers can glide the scraper over the windshield to melt the ice easily, and with less effort than is needed to scrape manually.

To keep sidewalks and driveways clear of snow, powered snow blowers are abundant on the mass market. Other options include adaptive snow shovels, such as the Sno Wovel wheeled shovel, which reduces physical exertion and risk of back or heart injuries. Similarly, the ManPlow is designed to glide easily across surfaces to clear snow without having to lift or strain.

For more information about these products, or for other accommodation ideas for people with temperature sensitivities, contact the AT Program.

New Eligibility Guidelines for Statewide Telecommunications Device Distribution Program

The Telecommunications Device Distribution Program (TDDP) provides free accessible telephone equipment to eligible Pennsylvanians with disabilities. This spring, the program's income requirements were adjusted according to the federal government's most recent poverty guidelines. For many residents who have been laid off from work and are receiving unemployment benefits, this may mean that they now meet TDDP's income guidelines.

Goodwill's Assistive Technology Program acts as a TDDP Volunteer Center and can provide information about the current eligibility standards and available equipment. The AT Program can also provide support in applying for the program. Contact your friendly AT Specialist today to find out more.





CapTel 800 captioned telephone.

TDDP Equipment Spotlight: Captioned Telephone

A variety of accessible telephone equipment is available for free, through TDDP, for eligible Pennsylvanians with many types of disabilities. One device that applicants with hearing loss can receive is the CapTel 800 captioned telephone. This telephone provides a text transcription of whatever is said on the other line, in real time on a large built-in screen. It may be ideal for individuals who are hard of hearing and who need to read captions of what the person on the other line is saying. It can also be helpful for individuals who cannot hear but are able to speak. Some features of the CapTel 800 captioned telephone include:

- Automatic connection to captioned telephone relay service, without having to dial a separate number.
- Option to receive captions in Spanish.
- Ability to turn off captions so that it can be used as a traditional telephone.
- Amplification for conversations of up to 40 decibels.
- Large full-color LCD display with customizable text size, and background and font colors.
- Ability to save captioned conversations to read and review later.
- Captioned answering machine option to provide captions of messages left when the user is not able to answer the phone.
- Visual display on the screen, along with an amplified ringer of up to 95 decibels, to alert the user that the telephone is ringing.

Free Software Assists with Learning & Studying

Among the types of assistive technology on the market, computer programs to aid in learning are popular for students of all ages. These programs can provide support for reading, writing, studying, and test-taking. However, many of these software programs can be expensive. As a result, students with learning disabilities may not be getting what they need to learn successfully.

MyStudyBar is a free alternative to more costly literacy software. It is a downloadable aid that makes reading, writing, and studying more accessible. MyStudyBar features include text-to-speech so users can hear text aloud; word prediction to make writing and spelling easier; a visual tool to aid in planning and organization; and much more.

To learn more, or to download MyStudyBar for free, visit http://eduapps.org/?page_id=7.



MyStudyBar downloadable tool to aid in studying and learning.

Alternative formats of this newsletter are available upon request.

Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania's
Assistive Technology Program

118 52nd Street

Pittsburgh, PA 15201

Adrienne Tolentino, Assistive Technology Specialist
412-632-1877 | adrienne.tolentino@goodwillswpa.org