

# THE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Employer Guide to  
Reasonable Accommodations  
using **Assistive Technologies**  
for Employees with Disabilities



Your Technical Assistance  
and Training Resource



**MIKE DREIER**, Administrator  
Minnesota Independent Living Services (MILS),  
Minneapolis, MN

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES:**

Large trackball

Pre-form cuffs  
(to hold a pencil with  
eraser, used to type)

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# The Case for PRODUCTIVITY

## **Disability:**

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

## **Major Life Activities**

Basic activities that most people in the general population can do with little or no difficulty, such as performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, caring for oneself, reading, bending, communicating, and working. Also, bodily functions like those of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neu-rogical, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, hemic, lymphatic, musculoskeletal, and reproductive functions.

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## **More for Less**

If you're using glasses to read this Guide, you're using assistive technology. While most eye glasses are not considered a disability-related assistive technology, the simple truth is that all of us increasingly use technology to maximize productivity. People with disabilities often use assistive technologies which contribute to a more productive workplace, creating a win-win return on investment.

## **The Business Case**

With increased competition for quality talent, expanding the pool of qualified candidates is critical to success and is a hot HR topic. Martha Artiles, Chief Diversity Officer, Manpower Inc., offers this important trend: "Numbers are numbers – we clearly have a population that is ready for retirement and a group of younger people too small to replace them." From sheer demographics to job readiness, employee loyalty and what culture change means for the workplace, inclusiveness has become a business imperative.

## **The Common Sense**

Diversity refers to workforce demographics and employee characteristics. **Inclusion initiatives** increase employee engagement and loyalty. Turnover costs range from 90% to 200% of salary (Society of Human Resource Management). Retaining key talent is of great concern for employers.

The Employment and Disability Institute at Cornell University published tools to help build **inclusive workplaces**. *Disability and HR: Tips for Human Resource Professionals* (<http://tinyurl.com/HRtipsInclusive>) includes a comprehensive section on Assistive Technologies.

**“After my company incorporated low cost assistive technologies so that I could be more productive, other employees here began using them, making the entire organization more productive.”**

**Dara Grimmer**

**DARA GRIMMER**, Customer Service Representative,  
Northern Sun Merchandising, Minneapolis, MN

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES:**

Keyboard setup (\$60),  
highlighters (under \$10),  
Excel spreadsheet and  
spell check (part of MS Office)  
clipboards (under \$15),  
headset (under \$50),  
extra note pads (under \$10).

**“The total came well  
under \$150 for me  
and others benefitted  
too” says Dara.**



**Assistive Technologies:** Any item, 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.

## Debunking the **MYTHS**

**myth:** There will be performance issues if I hire someone who has a disability

**fact:** The performance of workers with disabilities is equal or better than that of their non-disabled peers. According to a DuPont survey, "... of 811 employees with disabilities ... 90% rated average or better in job performance....". ([www.doleta.gov/disability/htmldocs/myths.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/disability/htmldocs/myths.cfm))

**myth:** Employees with disabilities will sue if employment does not work out

**fact:** According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "the Americans with Disabilities Act has resulted in a surprisingly small number of lawsuits." ([www.ada.gov/pubs/mythfct.txt](http://www.ada.gov/pubs/mythfct.txt))

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**myth:** Absenteeism of employees with disabilities will be higher

**fact:** "Employees who have disabilities demonstrate high levels of loyalty and engagement on the job, resulting in lower turnover and absenteeism." (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development)

**myth:** There will be safety issues in the workplace, and safety issues in terms of emergency evacuation.

**fact:** According to an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission study, "the safety and attendance records of employees with disabilities exceed the norm."

# **“60% of new jobs in the United States will require skills held by only 20% of the current workforce.”**

**Bureau of Labor Statistics**

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**myth:** Employee will feel entitled to special treatment, creating a morale problem at work

**fact:** According to the Society for Human Resource Management, 79% of businesses report improved corporate culture resulting from the presence of employees with disabilities in the workplace. Similar findings are confirmed by a study by the Job Accommodation Network.

**myth:** Accommodations are too costly

**fact:** For every dollar spent on accommodations, companies received over \$10 (Job Accommodation Network) and up to \$28 (U.S. Department of Labor) in benefits. “When asked how much they paid for an accommodation beyond what they would have paid for an employee without a disability who was in the same position, employers typically answered around \$320.” (JAN, August 31, 2009, Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact. <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/new/index.htm>) Further, this study confirms that many accommodations cost nothing at all.

**Reasonable Accommodation:** Any change in the work environment or in the way things are usually done that enables an individual with a disability to participate in the application process, to perform the essential functions (or fundamental duties) of a job, or to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment that are available to individuals without disabilities. Accommodations help employers not only hire new workers with disabilities, but also keep workers who may become disabled.

*(Office of Disability Employment Policy. Feb. 2009. The Job Accommodation Process: Steps to Collaborative Solutions.)*

# Template for **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY** Planning

■ Current best practices\* to identify appropriate job accommodations:

1. Identify employee's abilities, needs, and personal preferences
2. Identify and analyze the work environment
3. Identify and analyze the work task(s)
4. Identify and consider assistive technology solutions
5. Identify training and support needs (if any) associated with implementing assistive technology in the workplace.

For an information systems perspective on developing an Accessible Technology plan: [www.microsoft.com/enable/business/plan.aspx](http://www.microsoft.com/enable/business/plan.aspx).  
For types of assistive technology products: [www.microsoft.com/enable/at/types.aspx](http://www.microsoft.com/enable/at/types.aspx).

\* Adapted from the SETT Framework by Joy Zabala, Ed.D., ATP. For more information, email [jzabala@cast.org](mailto:jzabala@cast.org).

**Employers may be eligible for \$2,400 to \$15,000 in tax credits.** These tax credits are available to help employers cover the cost of accommodations for employees with disabilities and to make workplaces accessible. Visit the Internal Revenue Service's website (<http://tinyurl.com/EmployerCredit>) and consult with your tax advisor.

# Building a Culture of Inclusiveness

- >> Reasonable accommodations allow all employees to be their most productive selves, which builds success for the entire organization.
- >> When businesses encourage employees to make reasonable accommodations requests, the result is an inclusive and disability-friendly work environment and corporate culture which fosters creativity, innovation, and solid measurable outcomes.
- >> Reasonable accommodations are the right thing to do. They are a business imperative for success.
- >> Take the first step: Communicate to all employees that your organization is willing to make reasonable accommodations when requested. It is a matter of productivity. It makes business sense.

*Source: Joan Willshire, Executive Director,  
Minnesota State Council on Disability*



**STEVE OACHS**, Technology Assistant  
Southern Minnesota Independent Living  
Enterprise and Services (SMILES), Mankato, MN



# Technologies by **FUNCTION**

Some examples of assistive technologies commonly used to complete work-related tasks:

## **Walking, Standing, Performing Manual Tasks, Lifting, Bending**

- Height adjustable workstation or desk
- Page turners, book holders
- Grips for writing tools and handheld equipment
- Accessible file system
- Voice activated phones, copy machines
- Ergonomic keyboards and mice, one-handed keyboard, onscreen keyboard with switch access, speech recognition software
- Related: Automatic door opener, accessible parking, work site, restrooms



**SHEILA NELSON, Payroll Services**  
Minnesota Independent Living Services

**“Ms. Lacy is a dedicated employee ... contributes to continuous quality improvements ... brings a unique and valuable perspective to our discussions.”**

**Ronna Linroth, Manager Adult Outpatient Services,  
Gillette Lifetime Specialty Healthcare**

**MICHELLE LACY**, Receptionist Scheduler Assistant,  
Gillette Lifetime Specialty Healthcare, St. Paul, MN

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES:**

Specialized keyboards,  
mouse, and headset;  
lamp to signal that she  
is on the phone, and a  
lap tray that goes on  
her wheelchair.



## ■ Seeing, Reading

- Screen reader software
- Refreshable Braille display
- Screen magnification software
- Computer scanner with OCR software
- Handheld or desktop magnifier
- Large print/Braille
- Stand alone reading machine (desktop or handheld)
- Talking devices such as tape measure, scale, calculator, cash register

## ■ Hearing

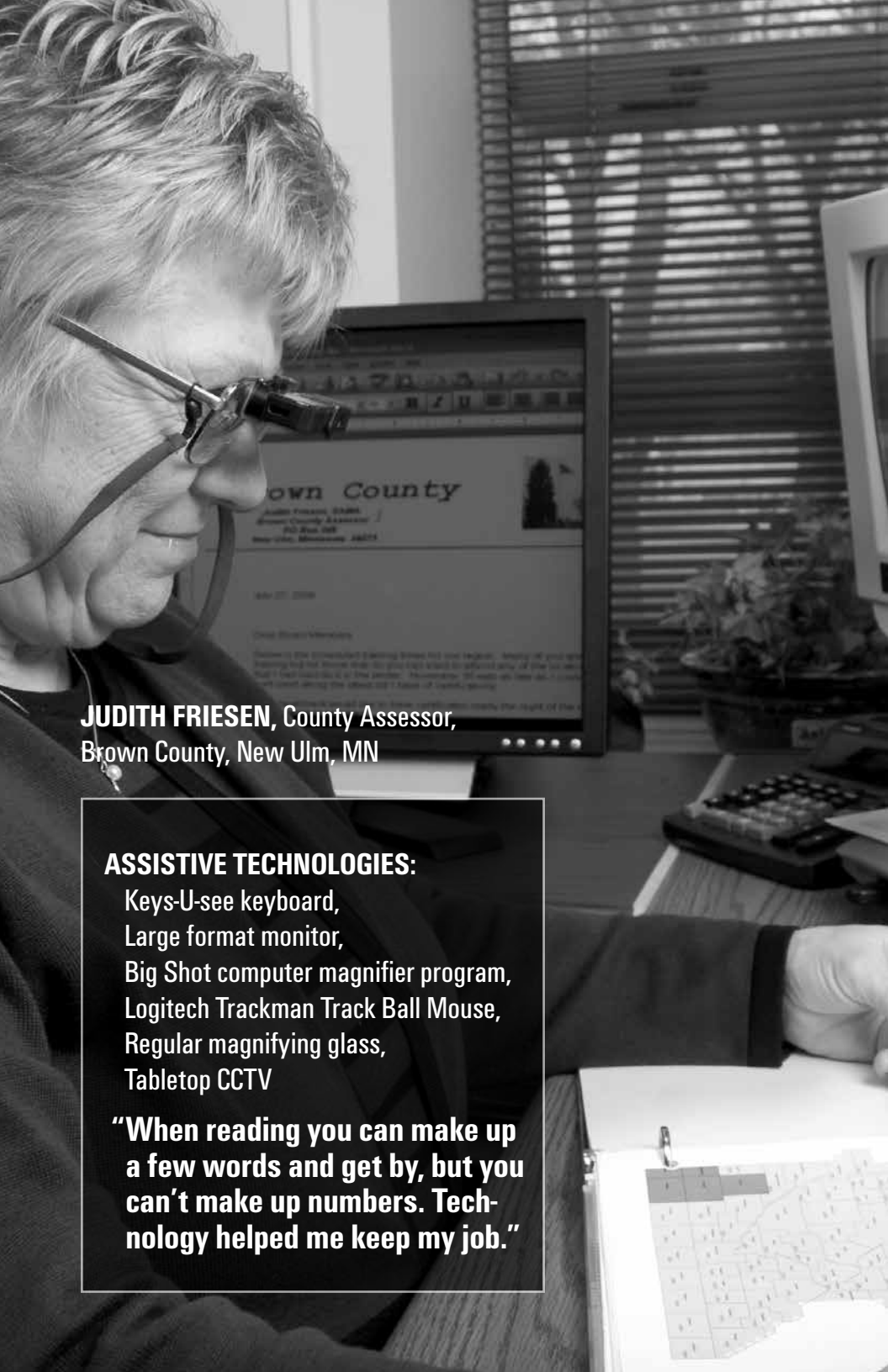
- Communication device
- Text messaging and email
- CART services (Computer-Assisted Realtime Technology)
- Videophone, TTY, CapTel phone
- Captioning/subtitles
- Computer settings to provide visual alert
- Mirrors
- Flashing light and/or vibrating alerts (fire/smoke alarms)

## ■ Speaking, Communicating

- Pen/paper
- Communication devices
- Speech-to-Speech Relay Service

## ■ Learning, Cognition, Concentrating, Thinking, Interacting with Others

- Checklists, text or photo guides
- Multisensory task-promoting device (handheld PC, iPod)
- Templates, guides or jigs
- Portable music player with headset
- Natural or full-spectrum lighting in work area
- Color overlays (such as Irlen lenses) or color contrast
- Calculator
- Wide-lined paper, column guides
- Portable keyboard (such as an AlphaSmart) or mobile device (handheld computer, tablet PC)



**JUDITH FRIESEN**, County Assessor,  
Brown County, New Ulm, MN


**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES:**

- Keys-U-see keyboard,
- Large format monitor,
- Big Shot computer magnifier program,
- Logitech Trackman Track Ball Mouse,
- Regular magnifying glass,
- Tabletop CCTV

**“When reading you can make up a few words and get by, but you can’t make up numbers. Technology helped me keep my job.”**

[Using assistive technologies,] “Cat’s productivity has increased dramatically ... Cat may not have sight, but she has a tenacious desire to overcome the obstacles put before her.”

Lane S. Waters, American Council of the Blind, Brooklyn Center, MN



**CATALINA ROISUM**, Accountant, American Council of the Blind, Brooklyn Center, MN

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES:**

Brilliant Adacell Braille Display  
Talking calculator  
Jaws screen reader  
Kurzweil 1000 keyboard  
Duxbury Braille Translating software  
Juliet Classic Embosser Braille printer



# Assistive Technology RESOURCES

## FOR BUSINESS

Contact the Disability Employment Specialist in your area for no-cost assistance in getting the right assistive technology resources for your business. Your Disability Employment Specialist will advise you in recruiting, hiring, and retaining workers with disabilities, and will provide resources and guidance on strategic alliances to tap into the talent pool of people with disabilities. To find your nearest Disability Employment Specialist: <http://tinyurl.com/hirepwd>

For additional information on hiring people with disabilities: [www.PositivelyMinnesota.com](http://www.PositivelyMinnesota.com). Go to “For Business,” select “Finding Workers” and then “Hiring People with Disabilities.”

**[www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org](http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org)**

Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, the *What Can YOU Do?* web site is the centerpiece of the *Campaign for Disability Employment*, which seeks to promote positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

## ■ FOR INDIVIDUALS

### **Pathways to Employment (PTE):**

The Disability Linkage Line (1-866-333-2466) will answer your questions about potential sources of funding for assistive technology devices. Their web page: [www.DisabilityLinkage.info](http://www.DisabilityLinkage.info)

For a Directory of Funding for Assistive Technology Resources in Minnesota: <http://tinyurl.com/MNfundAT>. The Minnesota STAR Program also serves as a clearinghouse for events and resources related to assistive technologies, including device demonstration, device loan programs, and reuse opportunities:

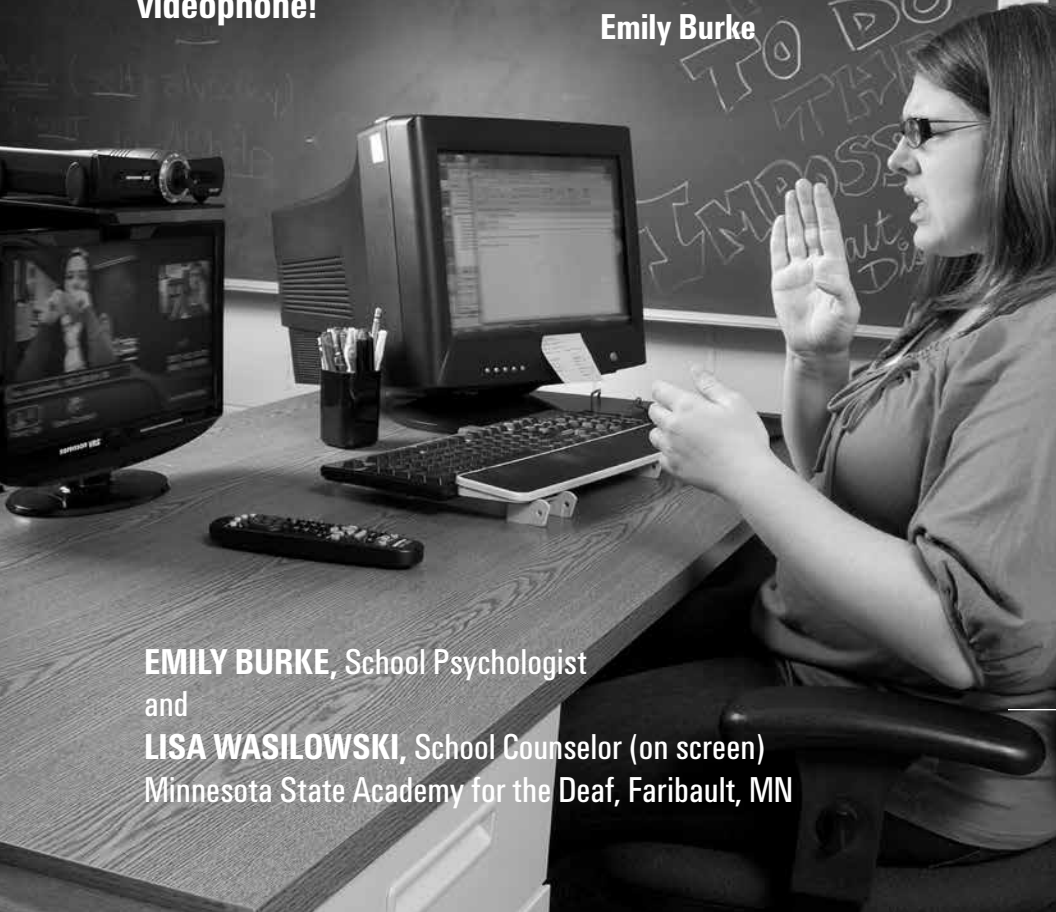
[www.StarProgram.state.mn.us](http://www.StarProgram.state.mn.us)

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

Your information and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**“Having a videophone on my desk is very valuable for me because I have equal access to communication with my colleagues. When I need to correspond with some people outside the workplace, there is no need to accommodate my schedule with the staff interpreter, because professional interpreters are available just a click away on the videophone!”**

**Emily Burke**



**EMILY BURKE**, School Psychologist  
and

**LISA WASILOWSKI**, School Counselor (on screen)  
Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf, Faribault, MN

**“I do not see these devices as assistive technology. These devices are the coolest and latest technology gadgets that happen to be accessible for deaf and hard of hearing individuals! These gadgets prove to be functional and equally accessible so I can be on the same page as my hearing colleagues.”**

**Lisa Wasilowski**

## SOURCES

The sources of information contained in this Guide include those listed under “Debunking the Myths,” the organizations listed under “Assistive Technology Resources,” and the additional sources listed below.

[www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/902sum.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/902sum.html)

20 U.S.C. Chapter 33, Section 1401 (25)

[www.ada-il.org/resources](http://www.ada-il.org/resources)

This document is available in alternative format.  
See MSCOD contact information on back page.  
The latest version of this publication is available  
online at [www.disability.state.mn.us](http://www.disability.state.mn.us)

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Your Technical Assistance  
and Training Resource

Minnesota State Council on Disability  
121 E. 7th Place, Suite 107, St. Paul, MN 55101  
651.361.7800 | 651.296.5935 fax | 800.945-8913 voice/tty  
[www.disability.state.mn.us](http://www.disability.state.mn.us)



**LORIANN DOANE**, Intervener at the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf in Faribault, MN, working with student **JORDEN CURRAN**.