

Developmental Disabilities and Assistive Technology

Developmental disabilities is a term that describes many different conditions, including mental, cognitive and physical impairments or combinations of these impairments that begin by the age of 22 and are life-long. These disabilities all share a common characteristic, in that they result in substantial limitations in three or more major life areas including self-care, language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity for independent living and economic self-sufficiency. Some examples of developmental disabilities include mental retardation, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and neurological disorders including brain injury.

Assistive Technology

An assistive technology device is any item that is used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of an individual with a disability. There are a variety of assistive technology devices that can greatly benefit individuals with developmental disabilities. Some of these devices are:

- **mobility aids** which enable individuals to move from place to place; for example, a wheelchair;
- **augmentative communication devices** which enable individuals who are non-verbal or have limited speech to communicate; for example, the DynaMyte;
- **electronic aids to daily living** which assist individuals to independently operate equipment in their homes by a switch or voice recognition;
- **building modifications** which result in barrier-free access for people with disabilities; for example, ramps or grab bars;
- **computer access aids** which are devices and software that provide for easier computer access; for example, modified keyboards or speech recognition software;
- **seating and positioning devices** which are modifications to seating that give greater stability to the body and reduce pressure to the skin. This also includes equipment used for positioning; for example, a wheelchair with a customized adaptable seat insert;
- **sensory aids** which assist individuals with audio and visual impairments; for example, TTY or CCTV;
- **recreational devices** which enable people with disabilities to participate in a range of recreational activities; for example, wheelchairs modified for racing, adapted bicycles; and
- **aids for daily living** which enhance independence in carrying out everyday tasks such as eating, dressing and cooking; for example, electric can opener.

Funding Sources

Prior to obtaining funding from any source, the individual with a disability should have an assistive technology (AT) evaluation to determine what device the individual needs and for what purpose.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) can provide many different services to people with developmental disabilities. These services may include, but are not limited to, case management, guardianship services, family support, residential services, day programs, and supported employment. Assistive technology devices can be funded through DDD's Assistive Device Fund, available through each regional office, as well as their Family Support Program.

There are a variety of other sources that are used to fund assistive technology devices, including Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, vocational rehabilitation and local school districts through their special education programs. In addition, loans are available through Home Depot stores which offer Home Improvement Loan Accounts for home improvement projects that exceed \$2,000 and the Fleet Bank which offers low interest loans to qualified individuals or businesses to purchase equipment or to make home modifications. To apply for a Home Depot Loan, call 1-877-969-3779. For more information about obtaining a loan from Fleet Bank, either call 1-973-642-0598 or visit you local branch.

Where can I get Information and Assistance in Obtaining Assistive Technology for a Person with a Developmental Disability?

The Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC), a program of Disability Rights New Jersey provides information and referral, outreach and education, technical assistance and legal and non-legal advocacy in the area of assistive technology. Call 1-800-922-7233 in New Jersey, or access our website at <http://www.drnj.org>.

The Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) of DRNJ

210 South Broad Street, Third Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608

For voice assistance and information, please call 1-800-922-7233. TTY users may dial (609) 633-7106, or use the NJ Relay, 711 to reach the 800# above. Visit us on the web at www.drnj.org

The 56 statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Programs form a national network of statewide assistive technology (AT) programs. Information contained in this brochure represents the accumulation of knowledge of this national network. The AT programs receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to implement the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, as amended. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred.

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