

Technology Improving Our Lives

The Way We Work: New Tools Tackle Old Barriers

(NAPS)—Generations of people with disabilities have faced the challenge of figuring out how to best contribute their skills and talents in workplaces that weren't originally designed with them in mind. Increasingly, employers are acknowledging the benefits of a diverse workforce and advances in technology have improved the outlook for job seekers with disabilities.

The 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) marks a transformative milestone in our nation's civil rights movement. As the ADA improved access to all aspects of public life, Social Security's Ticket to Work (Ticket) Program and other Work Incentives give adults with disabilities better access to the workforce. The Ticket Program offers free employment support services; other Work Incentives give people time to acclimate to employment without immediately losing their benefits, including Medicare or Medicaid coverage. Adults ages 18–64 who receive Social Security disability benefits (SSDI/SSI) are eligible.

Although barriers to employment remain, the authors of the ADA and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act would be encouraged by our progress. Assistive technology solutions are becoming universal. For example, smart phones with speech recognition and voice-activated assistants revolutionized the way we interact with our phones. This technology allowed more people with disabilities to use the phone and improved the experience for all users. Screen readers and screen magnifiers enable people with severe visual impairments to use a computer. Other common examples of technol-



Technology has opened up the world of work to many differently abled Americans with disabilities.

ogy in the workplace include lights that automatically turn on when someone enters the room, doors that open automatically, voice-controlled thermostats and desks that can be adjusted easily.

Today's video conferencing, webinar and open access education platforms have had the greatest impact on the way we work. By enabling telework, offices create positions that are not limited by a company's location. A virtual interface removes the transportation barrier for some and makes office work more accessible for all employees.

As we adopt more technologies and inclusive approaches into our work environments, we develop communities that are more welcoming and beneficial to people of all abilities.

This could be the year to find out what is possible for you. For 20 years, the Ticket Program has helped thousands of people find their path to a better future. If you would like to explore your employment options, call the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 or 1-866-833-2967 (TTY), Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET, or visit choosework.ssa.gov.