



Assistive Technology Initiatives in Pennsylvania & Maryland

Pennsylvania

ODP's Technology Taskforce introduced its first edition of Technology Today! The aim of this quarterly newsletter is to share the work being done by the taskforce, as well as resources, events, and success stories. Check out the inaugural edition of this newsletter and future editions! Technology Today newsletter is available on home.MyODP.org.

Maryland

Maryland becomes a technology first state! The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration held a Technology First Initiative Kick-off Event on August 15th. Secretary Beatty presented the Governor's Proclamation to DDA's Deputy Secretary Bernard Simons making Maryland a Technology First state! The Maryland Technology First (MD Technology First) Initiative establishes a system of support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to access assistive technology. Assistive technology is assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities to enhance their functional independence. Technology First is a statewide initiative to empower all Marylanders with disabilities to have access to technology that will enhance their ability to pursue their best life as they define it.

Smart Home Pilot Update

a different kind of natural support

Alexa, a virtual voice assistant, recently moved into a few of Penn-Mar's homes. Individuals and team members have been learning how Alexa can provide reminders for taking medication or when to leave the house for church, provide music for dance parties, and announce the current weather.



COMING SOON!

Assistive Technology Lending Library at Penn-Mar, Far Hills location

Penn-Mar's Assistive Technology Library, funded by an ODP Assistive Technology grant, gives Penn-Mar's team members access to borrow available technology solutions for trial with people in the community, at home and in a workplace setting. The library will carry low-tech, mid-tech, and high-tech items. More information to come.



Assistive Technology Spotlight

How the people we support are using assistive technology to live their lives

In 2021, Mike Gallo and his family presented Penn-Mar with a conundrum. Could we provide supports to someone who has moved away from our typical service area? Having been extremely happy with the services that they were being provided, Mike and his family did not want to find a different provider at that time.

As with most of the individuals we support, routine and familiarity are important. With Mike moving into a new home and neighborhood, having supports from a familiar provider could make the transition easier. The teams at Penn-Mar were willing to try.

Mike met with his fully virtual employment team weekly, via Zoom, to complete the discovery process for seeking customized, integrated employment near his new home using technology to bridge the physical distance. There were many struggles with attempting to move the program to a new platform, but as with all things person-centered, the work was worth it. Mike and his team used online platforms to play games, watch videos, learn about a variety of employment opportunities and tasks, conduct interviews, and meet new people. Mike and his family did a great job exploring job skills at home and using technology to share the process with his employment team.





After many hours of work, numerous applications, and phone calls to employers, Mike decided to apply at Chick-fil-A near his home in Annapolis. “What was amusing to me”, said Victoria Blankenship, “is that Mike doesn’t even eat at Chick-fil-A, however, during an activity where we were “walking” down the street near his home (using Google Maps and Street View), Mike asked if he could apply at Chick-fil-A and indicated the building he was seeing on the screen. At that point, Mike had been primarily focused on coffee shops, as he wanted close interactions with the people that would frequent them. As with most requests of the individuals we support, Mike’s Employment Specialist responded “sure” and explained to Mike the similarities between some of the positions at Chick-fil-A and some of the positions he had currently been applying for at the coffee shop.”

Unknown at the time, the Chick-Fil-A near his new home communicates with prospective employees via an app. Mike and his Employment Specialist used the online app to communicate with the regional manager throughout his hiring process. Despite a few hiccups, Mike received a message for not one but three different interviews! Using Zoom, Mike’s employment specialist was able to “join” him in his interviews. Phone in hand, Mike went through his interviews explaining that the person in his phone was his job coach. As the management at Chick-Fil-A interviewed Mike, Victoria was “there” with him. Using facial and gestural prompts, as well as sign language, Victoria was able to help Mike remember to smile and use the information they had previously discussed to respond to the interviewer.

After 3 interviews, Mike landed the job! Mike and his family’s challenge to Penn-Mar allowed us to examine how we used technology to support individuals during the pandemic and apply it to the discovery process in a new way. We are hopeful that the information we learned through this process with Mike and his family will allow us to provide varied employment supports despite geography. As technology and the attitudes surrounding its use expand in scope, Penn-Mar will continue to lead the way in meaningful supports that meet each person’s specific needs. We are grateful to Mike and his family for challenging us to expand our thinking around how we can use technology to support employment seeking individuals.

“For most of us, technology makes things easier. For a person with a disability, it makes things possible.” - Judith Heumann