

TECHNOLOGY TODAY

ODP Technology Taskforce Newsletter

Spring has sprung! Welcome to the ODP Technology Taskforce's fourth edition of *Technology Today*. This newsletter continues to look for ways to support individuals with disabilities, family members, and providers with resources, events, and other important updates in the assistive technology world.

Call for Personal Stories

Our Taskforce is looking for more individuals with disabilities to provide personal stories. We want to know how assistive technology has made a positive impact on people's lives. These personal stories can be in the form of videos, blogs, or written essays. They will be highlighted in our future newsletters.

If you're interested or want to know more, reach out to: ra-PWODP_Outreach@pa.gov

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An Interview with Dr. Mark Friedman: PA Technology for All

Throughout his career, Dr. Mark Friedman has been the state advisor to Speaking for Ourselves, Vice Chairperson of the Pennsylvania DD Council, and been a technology researcher at Temple University. He is no stranger to advocating for and creating systemic change. He's now taking that experience to help promote the use of assistive technology across the state. 5,000 people have now been trained by Mark and his team, since the COVID pandemic began, to help bridge the digital divide for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

[Click here to read more.](#)

Mobile Application Resources



Fuel Service: This free app is designed to help drivers with a disability find gas stations that will help with fuel their car. It locates nearby gas stations who have assistants that will refuel the car for the driver within the next 30 minutes.

[Click here](#) to learn more.

ModMath: This free app, created by parents for their child with dyslexia and dysgraphia, is perfect for assisting with basic math problems as well as complex math like algebra on an iPad. Features include virtual graph paper so students can set up math problems legibly, ability to move completed equations to different points on the page, assignments can be saved, and completed worksheets can be printed or uploaded to Drop Box. [Click here](#) to learn more.

WheelMate: This free app helps individuals locate clean, accessible restrooms and parking. Locations are rated by other users allowing the user to save time by knowing where to stop. More than 30,000 locations in 45 different countries are included. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Hello, It's Me: For \$12 a month, this online platform provides a safe place to learn, interact, and connect with others. It was created with the mission "to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness in people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities." Users can meet new people and start new friendships while practicing skills through the dating/friendship section. [Click here](#) to more.



Virtual Roadshows

The ODP Technology Taskforce has wrapped up a 4-session virtual roadshow series. Individuals, families, SCs, AEs, and providers have shared their personal stories and experiences with exploring how technology can support and improve everyday lives. You can find links to the recordings below. Plans are underway to gather stakeholder input to expand the series to include new topic areas. Stay tuned for more to come!



[Incorporating Enabling Technology As A Natural Support](#)

Presented on November 15, 2022

[Technology to Support and Enhance Communication](#)

Presented on December 13, 2022

[Person-Centered Planning with Technology](#)

Presented on January 18, 2023

[Imagine, Discover, Explore, Try, and Get – A Pathway to Assistive Technology](#)

Presented on February 16, 2023

TechOWL AT Champions Program

Empowering young people to spread the word about Assistive Technology and local resources.

[AT Champions](#) is an effort to engage young people with disabilities to learn about activism, disability history, and local resources to help spread the word and empower their communities. The purpose of the AT Champions program is to develop and implement an outreach strategy that will improve authentic engagement with assistive technology by all disabled people in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. As this 5-month program wraps up the AT Champions have focused on AT Awareness, Fabrication, Activism, Funding and Outreach.





The Arc: Tech Toolbox



It can be challenging to find accessible technology that works for a wide range of needs and disabilities. That's why The Arc created their Tech Toolbox, to hold lots of products into one easy, user-friendly space.

This toolbox is a place to discover, rate/review, and add new technology for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. There are almost 700 different "tools" within the toolbox for a wide range of prices, including around 200 apps that are free of charge! You can also choose filters or the "Tech Recommender" option to find products more specific to yours needs.



[Click here
to learn more.](#)

TECH CORNER: ACCESSIBLE SHOES



Almost everyone wears shoes every single day. But not everyone has an easy time putting them on. For someone with disabilities, hands-free and accessible shoes mean greater independence. You can step right into *Kizik* shoes within a matter of seconds. These allow individuals to take on the day without ever needing to use their hands to put them on. These shoes have spring-back technology so the heels won't be crushed and you don't have to stomp or wriggle your feet in!

With *Kiziks*, individuals don't need to worry about tying shoelaces, fastening Velcro, or asking others to help. Altogether, they're comfortable, convenient, and stylish. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Check out [Nike's FlyEase](#) Shoes and [Zeba Shoes](#) for more accessible and affordable options. If you only struggle with tying regular shoe laces there are other alternative options for this as well, such as elastic laces [Caterpy: No Tie Shoelaces](#).



ODP Waiver Renewal Highlights

Effective January 1, 2023 The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) approved the Consolidated, P/FDS and Community Living waivers renewals with some noted significant changes. This information was communicated by the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) per ODP Announcement 23-002.

The waivers were approved for the next five years. The current Consolidated, Community Living and P/FDS Waivers expired June 30, 2022, but were extended twice as discussions continued between ODP and CMS.

[Click here to read more.](#)

Events

Center for Instructional Technology: Accessibility and OER

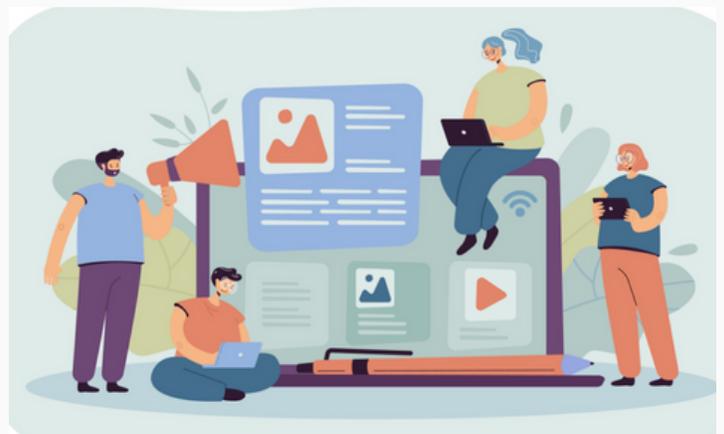
When: April 21, 2023. 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM.

Where: Online (Zoom). [Register here.](#)

Research Study Recruitment

Penn State is conducting a research study to learn more about ways that caregivers can support the use of Alternative or Augmentative Communication (AAC) in adults with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities. The study will examine the use of a mobile application, or “app”, on a phone or tablet. The app is designed to help parents, caregivers or direct support professionals use AAC to communicate with the person that they support.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Abilities Expo New York Metro

When: Friday, May 5 - Sunday, May 7, 2023.

Where: New Jersey Convention and Exposition Center. [Register here.](#)



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



Q

Q: Where do I start with Alexa?



A

Choose the right device: Alexa is available on a range of devices, including Amazon Echo smart speakers, Echo Show devices with screens, Fire TV, and some third-party devices. Choose a device that meets your needs and fits your budget.

Set up your device: Follow the instructions that come with your device to set it up. You'll need to connect it to a Wi-Fi network and link it to your Amazon account.

Learn the basics: Alexa can do a lot of things, from playing music to setting reminders and answering questions. Take some time to learn the basic commands, such as "Alexa, what's the weather like today?" or "Alexa, play some music."

Customize your experience: Alexa can be customized to your preferences. You can change the wake word, set up routines, and add skills (apps) to enhance its functionality.

Explore third-party apps: Alexa has a range of third-party apps (called skills) that can be added to the device to expand its functionality. Browse the Alexa app or the Alexa Skills Store to find skills that match your interests.

Practice using it: The more you use Alexa, the more you'll get comfortable with it. Practice using it for different tasks and see how it can help you in your daily life.

Want to get involved?

For more information about the Taskforce, to get involved, or to submit a question please contact:

ra-PWODP_Outreach@pa.gov