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GETTING READY FOR WORK

If you support people with a disability in career education this article is a must read!

Students with a disability who are at school, like all students, have aspirations to work. Some of these students will go straight to work while others might decide to study or do further training when they leave school. For many students with a disability work will be necessarily different. It is different because the way people with disabilities do a job is sometimes different from people who do not have disabilities. What this means is that in preparing for work the student with a disability must explore adjustments that are required to do certain parts of a job.

Students with vision impairments often require technology to be able to do their job. They sometimes require screen readers to help them read what is on the screen. Sometimes they prefer to use hot keys to make it easier to navigate around the computer. For example they might assign CTRL P as the hot key for printing. Sometimes they use the accessibility features of the computer as well, for example to enlarge text. Individuals with vision impairments may also have to design their workplace to enhance mobility. They may have to educate work colleagues about their needs for Occupational Health and Safety reasons.

People with a physical disability may need to adapt their workplace. People with physical disabilities may need to adapt their workplace so that they can get around the workplace with ease. They may require ramps, or they may require wider doorways. They may require specially designed keyboards so that they can use the computer. There are many things that can be considered.



People who have hearing impairments also often use technology. Sometimes they require listening devices such as FM systems or volume controls so that they can hear on the phone or in meetings. Many cannot benefit from listening devices and may need to utilise captioning or sign language interpreters.

Captioning for meetings can be organised so that it comes direct to a laptop. What happens is a captioning company receives an audio feed, usually by the phone line, and instantly captions what others are saying. This is called live remote captioning.

Some people with hearing impairments use text to communicate on the phone. Sometimes this is done with a device known as a TTY. Sometimes it is done on the computer using instant messaging. Phone calls through the National Relay Service can be done on either the TTY or using IP relay which uses instant messaging as a format.

Deaf people who use sign language can also use technology to access meetings and the phone. Using Skype, interpreters can be beamed to a laptop. The National Relay Service currently also uses Skype to provide Auslan interpreter access to the phone, although this is currently only a trial and operates from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Individuals with learning disabilities can also benefit from computer software. Here, when I speak of learning disabilities, I speak of those people with otherwise normal intelligence but who have a condition that interrupts their ability to learn such as Dyslexia. A vast array of software exists to assist people with learning disabilities to read documents on their computer. Documents can be scanned and then, using text to speech software, they can be read out. (Vision impaired people also use similar software.) When typing documents software exists that will highlight each word that is typed and also use audio to read it out. This allows the person with a learning disability to know of, and correct errors, as they arise.

It is vitally important that school age students with a disability know what they require in the workplace. Whether the student with a disability is using special technology or needs to physically change their workplace to access it, they need to explore these issues while they are at school. There is no point just placing a person with a disability into a work experience placement and then avoiding exploring the issue of disability in the workplace. It is vitally important to explore, in detail, how the student's disability will impact on their work.

Careers advisors and disability support people need to help the student explore how they will do the job. The following tips can help careers advisors to explore the issue of disability in the workplace.



In planning the work experience it is a great idea to try and incorporate the needs of the student into the placement. If the student uses assistive technology to allow them to complete the tasks in the try and explore the use if this technology in the workplace. If there are meetings at work and interpreters or captioning are needed, see if you can organise these so that the student can practice using them in work situations. If there are mobility issues help the student explore these and to develop the assertiveness to be able to inform the workplace of adjustments that are needed.

Explore the tasks involved with the job thoroughly and consider:

- **How the student will access and get around the workplace;**
- **What communication issues may arise;**
- **What technology may be needed;**
- **What human support may be needed; and**
- **What education work colleagues may need.**

At work, students with disabilities are expected to be independent and to be able to explain their needs. This is not possible with all students but many of them are able. Explore issues surrounding disclosure of disability in the workplace with particular emphasis of the benefits of disclosing. Do not shy away from discussing disability with the student. Whilst it can be difficult , avoiding the issues can cause more harm than good. For more information on disclosure strategies try this website:

<http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/disclosure/>

Getting ready for work is all about being prepared!

The more you know, the more skills you have in using things like technology or asserting your needs, the more likely you are to succeed. There are some great programs out there to assist people with disabilities in the workplace. Make sure your students with a disability are prepared and knowledgeable. This all starts at Work Experience. Don't miss the opportunity!

For more information about a range of assistive technology click on the link below or contact your NDCO today!

[http://www.adcet.edu.au/StoredFile.aspx?id=2780&fn=Assistive+te
chnology+booklet.pdf](http://www.adcet.edu.au/StoredFile.aspx?id=2780&fn=Assistive+te+chnology+booklet.pdf)

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