

TECHNOLOGY TODAY

ODP Technology Taskforce Newsletter



New Year, New You

Welcome to 2025! As the calendar turns to a new year, we are presented with a fresh start, no matter what challenges or setbacks we faced in the previous year. The new year invites us to reassess our goals, establish our priorities, and strive for positive changes in our lives, whether it's changes in our health, mindset, relationships, or careers.

The ODP Tech Taskforce's newsletter: *Technology Today* hopes to promote growth in the new year by providing opportunities for new technology, more accessibility, and better support for individuals with disabilities, family members, and providers. We're dedicated to sharing resources, events, and important updates in the supportive technology world. We invite you to join us in starting the new year with intention. The intention to embrace change and celebrate progress in our lives.

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Assistive Technology Solutions Enhance Supports for People with Disabilities

My first experience with Assistive Technology (AT) solutions was in 2016 while working for a provider to find employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I was intrigued with its potential and the limitless possibilities beyond that function.

By definition, Assistive Technology is any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

When strategically adapted, it promotes autonomy, self-direction, and community engagement and can help address direct care workforce shortages with different types of remote supports. [Read more here.](#)

Allis Kensing / Enabling Technology Manager / Penn-Mar Human Services

Mobile Application Resources

[Dragon Anywhere:](#) This is a dictation and transcription app that can be used to help those who have difficulty reading and writing due to disabilities. This app can create templates, add custom words, and instantly dictate your documents, it will automatically adapt to how you speak. Available on iOS and Android for a free trial.

[Talking Calculator:](#) This app helps individuals with visual disabilities use a calculator on their mobile devices. There are large colorful buttons, creating an easy-to-use interface. As the app's name suggests, the calculator also talks! It will let you know what buttons your finger is hovering over. Once your calculation is complete, the calculator will vocalize the answer. Available on iOS and Android for only \$1.99.

[BARD Mobile:](#) BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) is the app for the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). Users have access to download nearly 50,000 books, magazines, and music scores in audio and braille formats. Available on iOS and Android for free, must be eligible NLS patron.

[OneStep Reader:](#) Formerly known as KNFB Reader. This app is designed for blind, low-vision, dyslexic, and other print-disabled users which converts text to speech or text to Braille. Take a photo and the app will read text out loud or display it on a connected refreshable Braille display. Available to download on iOS and Android for free, in-app purchases.



Philadelphia's Sensory Friendly Sports



Subaru Park, home of the Philadelphia Union soccer team, has joined the ranks of all other major Philadelphia sports venues as being sensory friendly.

Through a partnership with KultureCity, the Philadelphia Union has had medical professionals train staff on how to recognize someone who may have sensory needs as well as how to provide support in situations where a guest may be experiencing sensory overload.

Guests with sensory needs can now download a free KultureCity app prior to attending games to learn about what sensory offerings will be available to them, and how to get them. One sensory support offering is a sensory bag which includes noise-canceling headphones, fidgets, and cue cards. Guests will also have access to seats designated for those with sensory needs.

These additions being provided by Subaru Park and the Philadelphia Union are similar to those being implemented in venues across the country. Many teams and events are recognizing small steps that can be taken to become more inclusive to all guests. [Learn more here.](#)

Upcoming Events

transformED - Assistive Technology Making - Solder, Switches, & Stuffing

- **What:** This hands-on workshop will introduce participants to assistive technology (AT) making skills to create usable access products. Participants will learn basic soldering to join wire segments and assemble mono and stereo components for use in a variety of AT applications.
- **When:** Thursday, March 6, 2025. 8:30am - 3:30pm
- **Location:** Allegheny Intermediate Unit - Homestead, PA
- [Registration & More Information](#)



PA Tech Accelerator - Pennsylvania Technology Summit

- **What:** The goal of the Summit is to expand the awareness of, and access to, assistive technology and remote technologies in order to build capacity of technology users throughout the Commonwealth.
- **When:** Thursday, March 6, 2025. 9:00am - 4:30pm
 - **Location:** Philadelphia at Temple University, Howard Gittis Student Center
- **When:** Thursday, March 13, 2025. 9:00am - 4:30pm
 - **Location:** Pittsburgh at Carlow University, A.J. Palumbo Hall of Science and Technology
- [Registration & More Information](#)



Success Story

Smart Homes Empowering People with Disabilities

Smart home technology is revolutionizing the way people with disabilities can live more independent, comfortable, and secure lives. For the past four years, Community Interactions (CI) has embraced this innovative shift, integrating smart home devices into the homes of the individuals it supports to enhance autonomy, safety, and convenience.



With the encouragement of the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (ODP), funding through waiver services, grants, and dedicated efforts, CI is creating homes that cater to the specific needs of the men and women it supports, helping them lead fuller lives. To date, CI has integrated smart home tech in ten of its residences. “The primary goal of our smart home technology initiative, which is part of our strategic plan, is to foster independence,” said Christopher Lynn, CI’s Director of Operations.

For individuals with physical disabilities or limited mobility, tasks that might typically require assistance, such as adjusting the thermostat, turning lights or entertainment systems on and off, are now made possible through voice commands and smartphone or tablet apps.

[Read more here.](#)



Call for Personal Stories



Our Taskforce is always looking for more individuals with disabilities to provide personal stories. We want to know how supportive 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