**PRIDE Provider/Peer Mentor Module #4:**

**Workplace Accommodations & Assistive Technology**

Transcript

Hello, everyone, and welcome to PRIDE Provider Training Module 4: Workplace Accommodations and Assistive Technology. This module will feature PRIDE partner agency the UIC Assistive Technology Unit, also known as the ATU, which is an organization based at the University of Illinois at Chicago that supports people with disabilities to identify their needs for, find, and use assistive equipment, as well as assess and implement workplace accommodations.

To start off, let’s read this case example together. This is part 1 of Magda’s story.

“Magda, a young refugee from Bosnia with spina bifida, is working as a bagger at a grocery store. She has been offered the opportunity to get promoted to work as a checker at the same store. Her new job will require her to scan and bill items while standing at the register. Magda experiences difficulty standing for long periods of time without support. She also has a hard time reaching for items and the scanner. She has heard about workplace accommodations and wonders whether she is eligible.”

Note that Magda is a refugee from Bosnia with Spina Bifida, and needs to be able to stand for a long period of time at her job and reach for items and the scanner.

So, what do workplace accommodations mean? In short, they are changes to work tasks, the work environment, or the way that tasks are usually done. These changes allow people with disabilities to perform necessary job tasks and enable them to secure and maintain employment and to be successful in their employment. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide “reasonable accommodations” to job-seekers and employees with disabilities.

Let’s go through some types of workplace accommodations.

First, workplace accommodations could be physical changes such as installing a ramp at entrances or adding braille and raised print to signs. They could also include changing communication systems, which may be providing a sign language interpreter during meetings or installing amplified phones for better hearing. Another type is a policy change, which could be permitting service animals in the workplace or allowing flexible work schedules to accommodate for more doctor visits if needed. A fourth type of workplace accommodation is assistive technology, which may be videophones for people who are deaf or adapted computer hardware for people with dexterity problems.

So, what does assistive technology mean? Assistive technology includes devices, equipment, software programs, and other products that can help support a person with a disability to participate in activities of his/her choice. This technology assists people with disabilities to be independent at home, in their community, and at work. By doing so, assistive technology enhances an individual’s employment options.

What are some examples of assistive technology? Mobility aids such as wheelchair controls; devices such as modified computer keyboards, screen magnifiers, communication board; and text-to-speech software are all common examples of assistive technology that people with disabilities use.

Okay, now that we have some knowledge about assistive technology and workplace accommodations, let’s take a look at part 2 of Magda’s story.

“Magda approached the UIC ATU for help with her workplace concerns. After evaluating her worksite and identifying her unique needs, the ATU recommended a cart with rails and trunk support. Using this equipment, Magda is able to successfully complete all work tasks in her new role.”

Note that the Assistive Technology Unit, or ATU, recommended a cart with rails and trunk support to allow Magda to work in her new role.

You heard about the UIC Assistive Technology Unit, or the ATU, in part 2 of Magda’s story. Let’s discuss what the ATU is. The ATU is located at the University of Illinois at Chicago, or UIC, and is a PRIDE partner. The ATU consists of a team of architects, occupational therapists, physical therapists, rehabilitation engineers, speech-language pathologists, and case managers. The entire team collaborates to support people with disabilities to find, select, and learn how to use assistive technology equipment that meets their need. This equipment will support them in life, including in employment.

What are the ATU’s core services? The ATU offers the following services, selected and customized to each client’s identified needs:

Activities of daily living: Identification of equipment that will help clients to perform activities such as dressing, bathing, cleaning, and cooking;

Adaptive equipment: Modification of existing equipment or custom-designed devices such as specialized grip for holding utensils; and

Augmentative communication: Identification of strategies and tools to improve communication such as communication boards and electronic devices

The ATU also offers:

Computer access: Examination of alternative computer input hardware, such as modified keyboards, and adaptive software, such as text-to-speech, to support educational and work goals;

Electronic aids to daily living: Exploration of handheld devices and smartphone apps to help with scheduling and traveling in the community; and

Environmental control: Identification of assistive technology for independent control of phones, appliances, and other electronics within the client’s environment

Other core services of the ATU include:

Environmental modification: Identification of ways to make the client’s home, workplace, or community environment more accessible;

Specialized seating and mobility: Assessment and delivery of specialized seating and mobility equipment, such as customized wheelchairs; and

Worksite modification: Determination of equipment or changes to existing equipment to improve the work environment

In order to determine each client’s individual needs, the ATU uses a 6-step person-centered assessment process. The process includes:

Step 1 - Collaborative goal-setting

Step 2 - Identification of abilities

Step 3 - Identification of issues and barriers

Step 4 - Development of AT recommendations

Step 5 - Implementation of AT recommendations

Step 6 - Follow-up

Mobile services. The ATU has 9 mobile units that go out into the community. These mobile units bring assistive technology services to ATU clients. They visit schools, homes, workplaces, recreational and spiritual facilities, and even community and social events.

How can the ATU support job-seeking refugees with disabilities? The ATU can individually assess the assistive technology needs that a refugee with a disability has across many settings. They can then recommend what assistive technology or accommodations would help the refugee with a disability succeed at his/her job.

Who is eligible for ATU services? People of all ages, including refugees, with a wide range of disabilities are eligible for ATU services. However, if a person is seeking services from ATU, they must have an open case with the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) –Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), another PRIDE partner, which is featured in the DRS-VR module.

We’ll end the module with two more case studies featuring different individuals and situations. This one is about a man named Carlos. We’ll read it together.

“Carlos, a middle-aged man with cerebral palsy from Colombia, approached the ATU about modifying his work equipment so he could consider a promotion at work. He had the opportunity to be hired as a file clerk. His new job involved drop filing, requiring the use of a cart and a ladder. Although he was ambulatory without the need for a mobility aid, he was concerned about losing balance due the instability of the cart and ladder.”

Note that Carlos is from Colombia and has cerebral palsy. He was concerned he would lose his balance on a cart and ladder used in his new job.

“The ATU set Carlos up with a mobile cart and handrail system. He was instructed in how to use the cart when working off of low shelves and to use the handrail system for high shelves. He was able to lean against the rails, thus freeing his arm for filing.”

The ATU supported Carlos by setting up a mobile cart and handrail system. In addition, the ATU provided instruction to Carlos in how to use the equipment and how to lean against the rails safely.

Finally, we’ll wrap up with a case study on Khin. Let’s read it together.

“Khin, a refugee from Burma, works as a mail clerk at a large office. He consulted with the ATU regarding reasonable accommodations within his job tasks. Khin has an intellectual disability along with early onset arthritis. He was experiencing difficulty with sorting the office mail. His supervisor also expected him to work at a faster pace, as he often spent a lot of time transitioning from one job task to another.”

Note that Khin is a refugee from Burma who has an intellectual disability and early onset arthritis. He needs support in sorting the office mail, transitioning between tasks, and working at an overall faster pace.

“The ATU recommended a mail holder that Khin could wear around his neck to make it easier for him to use his fingers to sort the mail. As a reasonable accommodation, the client’s supervisor also agreed to provide him on-the-job feedback on pace of work using a set of headphones and a chart with required daily tasks.”

In this case, the ATU was able to make specific recommendations to support Khin in his job: a mail holder and an accommodation using assistive technology. These recommendations were implemented by Khin and his supervisor.

Here is some information on how refugees can connect with the ATU. The ATU is located at 1640 West Roosevelt Road, Room 415 of the DHSP building (Mail Code 726), Chicago, IL 60608

Appointments can be made by phone or email. Phone: 312-413-9065; Email: atu@uic.edu

The slide also contains links to the ATU website and the ATU referral form.

This slide contains the sources used in the module. Thanks so much for completing the module, everyone!