Podcast Transcript
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Technological Advances: Empowering People with Disabilities

Opening: You are listening to the Social Security's Ticket to Work podcast series. Get answers to your questions, access information and resources, and receive expert advice on Work Incentives and the Ticket to Work program.

Interviewer: October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This nationwide campaign raises awareness about disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. This year's theme is "Because We Are All EQUAL to the Task."

In observance and celebration of this year's campaign, our Ticket Talk podcast will recognize advancements in technology that have empowered and enabled people with disabilities by maximizing their independence, productivity, and participation. Without a doubt, the Internet is one of the most influential innovations of the past century. It has changed the way we communicate, work, learn, and socialize. It removes geographic boundaries and brings people together from every corner of the world through virtual communities and social media. Now more than ever, people are able to share ideas, information, and creativity quickly and easily. Virtual collaboration has fueled rapid advancements in science, medicine and technology. Currently, there are more than 2.4 billion Internet users worldwide – a 566 percent increase since 2000!

Social networking has played an increasingly important role in advocacy, politics, and employment. The Internet has altered our lives profoundly. For people with disabilities, these changes have even more potential for life-changing impacts. Technological advances have opened new avenues for people with disabilities to collaborate and strategize with peers to influence, advocate, or protest policies and programs that affect their quality of life. Social networking also provides a means of meeting and befriending new people as well as professional networking and mentoring without interference from physical barriers, judgment or stigma.

The last decade has seen great strides in mobile and wireless innovation. Smart phones, tablets, and mobile applications are able to accommodate a broad range of needs from a diverse community. Today, more than 60 percent of Americans own a smart phone and as a result, text-based communication such as texting, instant messaging, and email has become more and more prevalent. Assistive technologies that rely on text are now better able to help people who are blind, deaf or who have a speech or language disorder to communicate with peers and receive or transmit information through the Web. Software programs such as screen readers and text-to-speech are able to read messages aloud and even translate into Braille using raised dots on a keyboard-like device. Significantly improved speech-to-text programs are now much more accurate and can provide real-time captioning for individuals who are hard-of-hearing or deaf, enhancing opportunities for and speed of collaboration.

At some point recently, you've probably heard someone say "There's an app for that." It's a popular phrase that refers to the vast and growing world of mobile applications or "apps." It's estimated that there are over 900,000 apps available for smart phones. Video-chat apps such as "Skype," Apple's "Facetime" and Google's "Hangouts" have made it possible for people who use American Sign Language to effectively communicate in real time from remote locations. Hands-free and voice-command software can make communication and computing easier and faster, especially for people with limited mobility. People with cognitive or developmental disabilities can achieve greater independence with the assistance of certain mobile technologies, such as "reminders" that can be programmed to help users remember to complete daily tasks, or GPS-based navigation tools that provide guidance and notifications to help people successfully navigate public transit systems.

There's also a wealth of applications and devices that enable self-paced and self-directed learning to help users strengthen their communication and social skills. One example is a device called "Tango," which is designed to help people who have difficulty speaking and expressing themselves. This device contains more than 2,500 pre-formulated sentences and phrases, or users can create their own sentences word-for-word. The device also contains a camera, so images can be captured and stored to help users who communicate better through imagery.

Technology continues to advance, and in an effort to ensure that it continually evolves in a way that is accessible to people with disabilities, the Federal government established the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program or CAP. CAP's mission is to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the information and opportunities within the Federal government by providing reasonable accommodations and increasing employment and retention of employees with disabilities. To learn more about how CAP is fulfilling its mission and increasing employment opportunities, visit www.CAP.mil.

Technological innovations are continually enabling people with disabilities to participate more fully and enjoy richer lives. They can also improve one's employment prospects,

as many employers and organizations acknowledge the power and reach of social media and mobile applications. To learn more about technology training for people with disabilities, visit www.digitalliteracy.gov.

For information about Social Security's Ticket to Work program and employment for people with disabilities, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work, or call the Ticket to Work Help Line at **1-866-968-7842** for voice or **1-866-833-2967 for TTY.**