

Assistive Technology: ways to grow independence

Introduction

Technology is playing an increasing role in our lives, and is starting to have an impact in the lives of people living with disability. In particular, there are increasing conversations in the NDIS and elsewhere about something called Assistive Technology.

Some people love conversations about technology, while other people can find it a bit dry and difficult to understand. But Assistive Technology can make a big difference in people's lives.

This QuickGuide looks at what Assistive Technology is, and how peer networks can help their members learn more about the possibilities of Assistive Technology.

Let's make it happen

Assistive Technology (AT) is a general term that refers to a range of devices that can help a person with daily life activities. A classic AT device is the motorised wheelchair, which assists the user to move around their home and community. Under NDIS Assistive Technology includes toileting devices, prosthetics, home modifications, and communication devices. More recently, the AT possibilities have grown dramatically through the arrival of smart devices such as automatic door openers, front door cameras, voice and switch commands to interact with a range of devices they use at home.

Assistive Technology can make a big difference for a person living with disability, including in many cases reducing their reliance on the assistance of other people. You can see some people's stories of how they use AT here: <https://openinghomes.org.au/open-homes>.

Importantly, the NDIS also looks at equipment as part of participants' individual plans, so this increases the chances a person living with disability can get help.

For these reasons, it's worth a peer network having a conversation about Assistive Technology, where peer network members share their ideas and experiences in how technology can help build independence.

Here are some ideas to run a conversation about Assistive Technology at your peer network meeting.

1. You could start by inviting members to talk about what equipment and devices they use in their daily lives that help them be more independent.
2. The group could then talk about which devices reduce the person's need for help from other people
3. The group could then notice which ones are 'lower tech' (eg a manual wheelchair, a catheter bag, a kitchen utensil with a bigger handle to make it easier to grip, a screen magnifier, etc) and which ones are 'higher tech', such as motorised wheelchairs, automatic door openers, voice command devices, smart phone apps, etc
4. Group members could then talk about how they got the device, and how they learnt how to use it
5. Group members who have Assistive Technology in their NDIS plans could then talk about the way they did that with their planner.
6. With more advanced participants can explore when an assessment is needed, the Complexity Level Classification, what
7. The conversation could finish off by handing out information to help people find out more about Assistive Technology.

Where you can find more information

To read more about Assistive Technology, start here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assistive_technology

For an example of an agency that can assist a person to get Assistive Technology, go here:

<https://stretchytech.org.au/>

To find out how NDIS talks about Assistive Technology, start here:

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-equipment-and-supports/equipmentassistive-technologies>

Co-authored by Stretchy Tech

