



# WORKING WITH DISABILITIES

The challenges and benefits of remote work



By John Burtrum

People with disabilities are often a very undervalued and unused resource for local employers. They represent a great untapped talent pool that many more employers should consider when recruiting and hiring.

They add inclusivity and diversity to the workplace environment, helping to promote a true representation of the community. Another valuable reason to hire people with disabilities is that the employer is helping a local community member with a disability takes steps toward self-sufficiency.

Many new challenges and new opportunities have arisen for people with disabilities in the workplace during the pandemic. The availability of remote work has grown exponentially. In some cases, the ability to work remotely at home helps solve some accessibility barriers and

difficult tasks for people with disabilities to perform their work duties.

Working remotely enables these workers to utilize their own set up at home, but some barriers exist here, too: Weak or non-existent internet access, bad cell phone reception, lack of proper technology, lack of direct support from co-workers, virtual communication barriers (vision or hearing disabilities) and other issues can affect work at home.

The Americans with Disabilities Act does require employers to provide reasonable accommodations at their worksites and businesses, but there are still some physical locations and environments that can have accessibility problems. Some of these barriers include transportation, accessibility to the physical environment, lack of assistive technology, accommodations needed in a community work setting, attitudes/stereotypes and social anxiety.

Disability Network of Northern Michigan can help local employers with locating and addressing accessibility issues in the community by providing information and solutions to break down the barriers

that prevent people with disabilities from participating in our community.

The Network can also provide employment and benefit services to people with disabilities in the community, helping local employers with their staff or potential new hires to be successful. Services include: benefits counseling, career counseling, job search supports, financial wellness

advisement, reasonable accommodations, deducting impairment-related work expenses, locating work incentives, etc.

These tasks do not have to be completed by employers and should not deter them from hiring someone with a disability.

If you or someone you know has a disability and would like to return to work, contact the Disability Network of Northern Michigan (a member of the American

Dream Employment Network). We can offer full employment network services under the Ticket to Work program, as well as other employment services. The Ticket to Work program is a Social Security Administration program that can help those receiving Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental

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Security Income benefits return to gainful employment with the assistance of an employment network.

If you are between the ages of 18-64, receiving a Social Security benefit because of your disability and are employed or looking for employment, Ticket to Work can assist you with many work incentives and guidance on navigating back to the workplace to achieve self-sufficiency. Assigning your ticket is voluntary and there is no fee. This process and services can be completed virtually, if necessary.

Disability Network Northern Michigan is the first stop for people with disabilities and their families in northern Michigan. Our mission is to promote personal empowerment and positive social change for people with disabilities. We educate and connect people with disabilities to resources while advocating for social change in an accessible and welcoming community. We have the tools to support you during this challenging time.

*John Burtrum is a certified work incentive practitioner and employment specialist for Disability Network of Northern Michigan in Traverse City. He is committed to the person-centered approach for program planning, support and services provided to people with disabilities. Visit [www.disabilitynetwork.org](http://www.disabilitynetwork.org) to view programs, up-to-date COVID-19 response information and weekly virtual online events.*