

LBDP Guest Hour: MDTAP

Announcer 00:01

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Ashley Biggs 00:17

Hi, everyone, welcome back to another LBDP Guest hour. Today, we have Denise Schuler from Andy tap, who is going to be talking to us about the accessible program that they have, where you can actually check out materials to test out and see if there are the right tools for you. So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Denise.

Denise Schuler 00:44

Hi, Ashley, and everyone else. Thanks for having me on. So just give you a quick overview of MD tap or Maryland Technology Assistance Program. That is one of 56 Technology Act projects. So we've been funded for a little over 30 years now, there is one in every state and American territory. So wherever you're listening, you can look at your own state and find out where that's located. And as Ashley said, We are like a library system, which is why we call it the 80 demo and loan library when you come in. Because we do have different pieces of assistive technology there that individuals can actually look at, and then check out just like you would check out a book. But it is short term, which means typically about four weeks. So what some someone will do is give us a call, it could be the end user, it could be a family member, a representative education, employment, it doesn't matter. As long as that end user is a Maryland resident with a disability, that's any disability and any age group. So they call us up typically, they just give me a diagnosis first, but we're not all our diagnoses, or I would be a whole lot of things listed up that we don't want to talk about. But we look about the whole person, if someone comes in talking about a vision issue, they might have hearing and mobility issues as well. So we talk a little bit about that, but also what their strengths are, we usually use what's called the SETT framework where we change the s for student into P for person. So that person is you know, a person with maybe a vision difficulty, but also what let's talk about what their strengths are as well, then the E stands for environment and what that individual is going to be doing in the environment is going to make a big difference. For example, in my Baltimore office, my desk is right next to a elevator shaft. And so that causes some issues. As far as hearing goes. Sometimes you have a lot of natural light, sometimes you don't so really depends on what environment you are working in, or living in, are you in assisted living center your own home, your workplace scenario, again, that you're you outside doing something or inside, that's going to make a big difference on what different devices we look at. And then the first T stands for tasks. And again, that's going to vary individually. That's why we do these individual consultations. I have a two year old still in the workforce. So their tasks are going to be much different than someone who just wants to maybe look at their grandbabies pictures or listen to, you know, a

podcast or something like that. So what their tasks are is going to be different. And then and only then do we bring that other T in for technology or tools. So someone makes the appointment comes into one of our offices. And then we do this consultation just talking about those needs that we talked about, and then showing them a few of the different devices. If you haven't been to any of our libraries, especially the one up in Baltimore, I do invite you to come because it's just an amazing place. When you walk in, there's setup of all different types of assistive technology based on disability, but it goes across the board honestly, to be able to just really see touch hands on these devices. So once we do pull a few devices out for someone at a consultation again, they will be able to touch it, feel it, play with it, whatever. And then they can make a decision if they actually want to borrow this device, what looks good on the shelf, what's your neighbor thought was really cool, might not fit for you. So the someone with the exact same diagnosis would use two different devices, it's really personal preference. So they can borrow the device for up to four weeks take it back into their home, their workplace, their community based setting, we're at school doesn't matter. We are free of charge, the consultation is free of charge, the loan is free of charge, we do ask that you sign a loan form because you're actually going to be responsible for that device wherever you may take it. Again, as I mentioned, the loan of the device is up to four weeks, we can sometimes extend that loan if necessary. But this really is more of a try before you buy we would like individuals to have the device in their hands and try out before you or anyone else puts money towards it. So we really don't want devices laying in the closet getting dust or for someone to spin A lot of money on a device that may not really work for them. If they do come back after the four weeks and say this is a great device, we can then help them find funding sources. Part of our program is the 80 LP, which is the assistive technology loan program. And that's financial loan. So we have two loan officers who can talk to you about getting a financial loan, the loan interest rate, even at now as things are going up are between three and 4%, which is pretty good. So individuals can borrow at a very low interest rate from 500 to I believe, it's up to \$60,000. Now, so that can go for any of the technology you see in our library, as well as some of that higher funding could go for an accessible wheelchair van, or a home modification, perhaps you need a renovated bathroom with door widening and make it more accessible ramps and that sort of thing. So it can be across the board and their umbrella of what they are able to purchase with that money is quite broad, but you can talk to the loan officers, they're great to deal with. Unlike banks and other lending institutions, they're not just looking at that, you know that one number or just your you know how much your money you're making, they're looking at your debt to income ratio. So even if you do have an issue with maybe you've missed a house payment, or something, they just don't cross you off the list, they'll talk to you about why this occurred. They understand they're working with individuals with disabilities. So they'll talk you through the program to see what it is. And if they have a good enough debt to income ratio, you're bringing in enough money to pay this loan off, then you would probably be okay for the loan. But that's really not in my bailiwick. So you can talk to the two loan officers about that. But it's a great program to be able to have. Besides that you can also borrow device not just to try before you buy, but you can borrow it, let's say you are teaching a class or maybe you're taking a class for something, someone just recently is taking a Braille class and they borrowed one of the Braille note takers in order to take that class, you can use it for then your own professional enrichment. Or if you wanted to show it to some class, maybe you also are getting used to using some device. And so you want to be able to teach others you can borrow our devices for that as well. What you will see in the libraries are all newer devices that are available. Now we do not show any device that is discontinued. Because we don't want to get you excited about a device and then say I'm sorry, you can't get this device anymore. So anything you see

in our libraries are going to be up to date. We do have 10 community libraries all over the state. Again, our main library is here in Baltimore, at the workforce Technology Center in northeast side of Baltimore, right next to Morgan State. That is our main library that has the majority of the devices in it. But we also contract with Southern Maryland Center for Independent Living down in St. Mary's RFI, which is resources for independence. That's out in Western Maryland, and Cumberland. And then we have community libraries at all the other centers for independent living. So that's seven libraries right there, plus our main one, we just opened a small library up in the ark of the chest, northern Chesapeake up in Harford County, which can serve Harford and Cecil. And then we also have a small community library at the Howard County loan closet. And that's obviously in Columbia, Maryland. Also, at that location, we were able to open up a reuse center at the reuse center, we have collected different assistive technology, because again, at the end of the day, when someone does say I really liked this device, but perhaps they can't afford it with any kind of funding sources, they're just saying unable to purchase it. So we have collected devices that are still usable. we sanitize them, refurbish them, fix them if need be, and then we list them on that site. These devices, again, across the board, vision, hearing, and so forth are devices that can be given to someone who cannot afford a device. So these are free of charge. And these are pretty much open ended loans, it just becomes the property of the person who actually takes them. Again, this is all free. So if you didn't need to, let's say you need a Braille note, you can come check us out. If we have it in our library inventory for your use, you're able to check it out and sign a loan form that basically says it is yours, but you're not going to hold us responsible, we're not going to be able to repair and so forth. But otherwise it becomes yours for as long as you need it. And we have CCTVs in there, we've got communication devices, we just got a very nice donation from NFB of Braille notetakers and I think a few other magnifiers. So those are something that individuals can take advantage of and then you have a device all by yourself that belongs to you and it's free of charge. That's pretty much the gist of both of the programs. So Ashley, I don't know if you had any questions about each one of the programs or not.

Ashley Biggs 09:55

That's a lot of information. Well My first question would be, can you walk me through the process? I know you've gone, I know you gave an overview of it. But let's say that I come into your Baltimore office. And I want to check out a device, you said that there's a alone paper that has to be filled out and signed. And that paper basically says that I would be responsible if it was damaged.

Denise Schuler 10:27

Correct. So let me just backtrack for a second, because that's a good, you made a good point, I'm just saying I walked into the office. So we are by appointment, only. James Whitney is our newer at clinician who we hired about two years ago. And he's covering much of the Baltimore office these days where I'm dealing with Columbia. But you would have to make an appointment because we are out and about at a lot of different presentations, just like today, we do a lot of web webinars, and a lot of different outreaches as well. So we do have to make an appointment with one of us. Typically, you can get in in less than a week's time. So it's not like we have a long wait list. But once you do make the appointment, and you come in, we do that consultation, if you do want to borrow Yes, so the devices again, all this is free, but we do own these devices, or shall I say the state does. And thus they make us have someone sign a form that they're responsible for the device. So if you do drop it or break it, you are responsible

for replacing it. To be fair, I've been there for almost 17 years, there's been very few things that have been having to be replaced more often than not, it may be a cord that a cat has chewed through. So a power cord, you know, a charger cable, rather something like that, and one or two other things. So that does deter a few folks from borrowing. But honestly, in the again, 16 plus years I've been there, we might have had two or three people say they're not going to be responsible. My understanding is that your home insurance, whether it's renters, or homeowners insurance will cover obviously after your deductible if something is broken in your home.

Ashley Biggs 11:57

Now, what is a consultation? Exactly? Kind of talked about it a little bit, but can you go a little more in depth?

Denise Schuler 12:04

Sure. So a consultation again, and someone will come in. And again, they give me a diagnosis, which is just a little teeny piece, we want to know what are you having trouble doing? What do you really want to be able to do that you're unable to do right now because of a disability. And then we can talk through a few different answers for you. More like a brainstorming session with you. So sometimes even though we're called the Assistive Technology Program, the technology does not have to be high technology, it doesn't have to be like a high tech video magnifier or something that reads out to you worth, you know, 1000s of dollars, it could just be, you know, bumped dots on your on your dial for your oven or something like that. So we do talk about a lot of low tech devices as well or low tech options. So the console is really just a brainstorming session with the individual to say, Do you think this would work for you. And here, let me show you this device. And this might be work, you know, something that might work for you. So it's really just kind of a back and forth. We bring out those devices, high tech and low tech. If we don't have something in the library, we can kind of suggest something if we've seen something before that say, Hey, we've seen this device before, or another program has it, you might want to try this out as well. So it's really a brainstorming session about how can we best fit that individual's needs?

Ashley Biggs 13:18

And do you teach people how to use those devices?

Denise Schuler 13:21

Good question. We don't have the time or the staff to do full trainings while you're in the library. However, as we're doing those demos, we are showing you how to how to turn it on and off and so forth. So we are giving you know, we just don't, you know, put the device in your hand and let you walk out we do show you how to charge it properly, how to turn it on, and how to use most of the features, whatever features are necessary for that individual. As you know, a lot of technology, even your phones have so many bells and whistles that we're not using. So we just pretty much try to stick to what the individual needs at the time, you probably are all aware that many devices now we're not even coming with manuals, you have to look them up online, especially the Braille devices as well. And we might get one small page in Braille of a quickstart guide. Like basically, here's where you plug it in. And here's the on off switch. So we can send you with whatever manuals we have or send you the electronic copy of a

manual. Many times we do send individuals to YouTube because many of the manufacturers actually have really great instructional videos on YouTube that someone can either watch or listen to in order to get a step by step through how to work the devices. So the answer is yes and no, yes, we show them a little bit of how to use it before they borrow it. No, we can't do a lot of in depth trainings on the devices, especially if it's a higher tech device and the individual purchases it. We do talk about the local representative for that device who sells the device and they are way better at knowing the device by heart all the bells and whistles and can do the trainings for that device. While we're on this subject when we talk about purchasing the device Again, we talk, we look at a lot of different funding sources. We do price comparison shopping, basically, for the individual. And it's not always the best, the cheapest price, excuse me, that's the best. So some of these devices are available at Amazon. But I'm sure you've all shopped at Amazon, you get in the box, and here it comes to you, there's nobody who's going to set it up for you. When we have individuals, let's get it, let's say getting a CCTV, or something that does optical character recognizer on it, we will talk about the local reps, because those local reps will carry the box in for you set it up, you know, set up this large CCTV wherever you want it, and then give you a training. So we do kind of look at that as well. It's not always the cheapest price. But sometimes it's the best deal, you know, with all the training involved as well.

Ashley Biggs 15:44

Now, if someone was interested in learning more or connecting with you, what would be the best method?

Denise Schuler 15:53

So the best bet would probably we do have online forums that are accessible, that you can sign up, fill out and basically give us what you're looking for? Are you looking for a demo of the device, you know, a consultation, a lot of folks already know what they want, I do just want to borrow something, say I just want to have, you know, borrow the Vario altra. And then they they type that in, and then they can that will definitely go right directly to our emails. Otherwise, an email or a phone call will be the best bet in order to get a hold of us to just set up that first appointment with us.

Ashley Biggs 16:28

And the best phone number to reach you would be the one on the website.

Denise Schuler 16:33

Yes, so we do have a an 800 line. And that might be the easiest for folks to get to do want me to give that out to you. That would be great. Sure. So the one 800 line is one 808 3248 to seven. And that's our just our master line. And so whatever you're looking for, whoever will pick up those messages will send it to either the loan program for the finances, for to James and I for any other information to set up a console, or if you just had any questions about either any of the devices are how our program works.

Ashley Biggs 17:08

All right, I'm gonna repeat that number for everyone. It's 1-800-832-4827, the website

Denise Schuler 17:15

is also accessible. So it's, it's M D, ta p.org. And that has, it's also very accessible. It has a list of everything we do on there. The links will show the different devices in our main library, there's also a link to go to the Reuse Program. And that also has a link to everything that is available at this moment for individuals to request. And then a lot of other basic information if we don't do it at Maryland tap and it does have to do with disabilities. We do have resources, for example, we don't do any sort of home modifications. But we do have a home modifications directory that we can either send an electronic or a hardcopy to individuals who want that

Ashley Biggs 17:59

if I have a device that I no longer use, let's say that it's in good condition. And you know, I don't need it anymore, or I bought an updated version. And I want to give it to one of your loan closet. Do you accept devices? for that?

Denise Schuler 18:19

We accept almost any device that's possible for the assistive technology for use program. Yes. So whether it's a braille notetaker, a vision, hearing pretty much everything we don't take durable medical devices, the loan closets that are around for that do Durable Medical. And then the the state of Department of Aging has a very large durable medical closet. So anything that's the assistive technology, whether it's high tech or low tech, we will take that that location is Columbia, but I've been known to meet people all over the state to be able to pick up the devices or where we can we can meet somewhere to gather those donations. Yes.

Ashley Biggs 18:56

Okay, so no wheelchairs, but a CCTV would work. Exactly. Okay, cool. All right. Well, Denise, thank you so much for being here today. I really appreciate it.

Denise Schuler 19:08

Not a problem. We appreciate, you know, you having us. And so I would just invite anyone who would like to, we can do presentations that are specific as well. So if somebody needed, let's say, a low vision support group, or a Parkinson support group, either James or I would be glad to come out and do that, bring some devices, talk a little bit more about the program and then show a few devices. So we do specific on again, vision or so forth, or just a basic what is assistive technology on the whole and do a real quick overview of that with devices as well. We can do virtual trainings like that, or in person ones I prefer in person just because we can touch and see and feel all the devices as well. And so we you know, we'd welcome that we welcome individuals to want to come in either one at a time, or as a group to do tours of the Main Library. In Baltimore. And then also, I am looking for any volunteers who would like to help me with working on some of the devices that come into the reuse center, and that is in Columbia, but I can bring some to Baltimore if need be. To help me triage some of the devices, I'm not gonna lie to you. I am not a Braille user. And so that is something that's out of my wheelhouse as far as making sure a Braille device is working correctly. So I can always use volunteers to help you know, not only those devices, but any device to kind of get them cleaned up repaired, if you have any kind of

training with, you know, electronics and so forth, that would be great. And we certainly would like to reach out to anyone who has donations because we're definitely looking for donations. So far. We we started out in 2020. Right before COVID started so that your wasn't banner, but we did give out over over \$24,000 worth of equipment free to individuals and excuse me, over 44,000 the next fiscal year, we gave out over \$88,000 worth of equipment for free. And that's from the Reuse Program. And then so far this year, we're coming up on the first quarter. And I've given out over \$26,000. So if we keep going on that we're looking at maybe \$100,000 year for our fiscal year. So this shows me how necess unnecessary. The reuse program is these devices were given out to individuals for free. So if anybody has anything in their closet that they would like to donate, I would gladly gladly accept them to help these individuals.

Ashley Biggs 21:31

Thank you. All right. Well, everyone This has been LBPD Guest hour with Denise shoulder from MD tap. And again, that phone number is 1-800-832-4827 and the website is MD tap.org MDT A P dot o RG. Thank you Denise so much. I really appreciate you being here. I can't wait to hang out and another outreach adventure.

Denise Schuler 21:57

Thanks so much for having me.

Announcer 21:59

This has been a presentation of the Maryland State Library Agency. For links to additional resources provided by today's presenter, please visit the show notes. For more information on MSLA or the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, visit [Maryland libraries.org](https://marylandlibraries.org)