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00:00:00,390 --> 00:00:12,760

(Tedros Marcos Tekle)

Hello, my name is Tedros Marcos Tekle, and it's a pleasure to share my experience with you all.

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00:00:12,760 --> 00:00:17,290

So I am a refugee from Eritrea.

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00:00:17,290 --> 00:00:26,080

It's probably a country you've never heard of, a small country along the Red Sea line, the Red Sea coastal line in East Africa.

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00:00:26,080 --> 00:00:36,780

I came from a society where adverse childhood experiences or trauma can be least understood.

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00:00:36,780 --> 00:00:49,500

Born to an economically disadvantaged family and educated in Eritrea, I was able to co-found a disability forecast weekly radio program in April 2000.

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00:00:49,500 --> 00:01:01,950

In September 2003, I joined the National Radio as the first blind journalist in my country, paving the way for others to follow suit.

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00:01:01,950 --> 00:01:10,660

On the morning of January 21st, 2013, I was sitting in my unimposing office,

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00:01:10,660 --> 00:01:22,870

pondering my next article for the only English newspaper in the country. It was around nine a.m. when I heard a rumbling noise of what seemed to me

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00:01:22,870 --> 00:01:34,890

of heavy machinery. Armored vehicles alongside [inaudible] T55 tanks had entered into the premises of the Eritrean

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00:01:34,890 --> 00:01:42,820

Ministry of Information carrying anti-aircraft guns and followed by

mechanized infantry.

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00:01:42,820 --> 00:01:51,890

The ministry used to be guarded by the military, and it was no wonder to see different companies of soldiers come and go.

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00:01:51,890 --> 00:01:57,300

Things began to change precipitously, the gates where the gates were closed,

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00:01:57,300 --> 00:02:05,900

none of us was allowed to leave the premises, a statement demanding the release of political prisoners and journalists,

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00:02:05,900 --> 00:02:10,040

as well as implementation of the long overdue constitution,

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00:02:10,040 --> 00:02:17,160

which was ratified in May 1997, was read at gunpoint on the local channel.

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00:02:17,160 --> 00:02:28,710

Coup d'etat was already underway. A commander of the mechanized division who managed to reach the gates at the behest of the president

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00:02:28,710 --> 00:02:37,750

to take the wind out of the mutineer sails, collapsed from a revolver, a revolver bullet.

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00:02:37,750 --> 00:02:42,580

Long story short, the not well, the not well thought out

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00:02:42,580 --> 00:02:49,600

mutiny vanished into thin air after a 12 hour impasse.

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00:02:49,600 --> 00:02:58,630

Security forces began to closely watch over the ministry. Fingers inculpatings of the English staff for allegedly providing up to the

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00:02:58,630 --> 00:03:08,930

minute information during and after the coup attempt to international media outlets had already begun pointing at the few of us.

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00:03:08,930 --> 00:03:11,300

A number of journalists were detained.

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00:03:11,300 --> 00:03:22,700

Others fled with my assistive technology applications removed from office computers, I was under constant surveillance.

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00:03:22,700 --> 00:03:34,680

In April 2013, I left Eritrea for good due to a political persecution in connection with my background as a radio and press journalist.

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00:03:34,680 --> 00:03:42,240

As the Eritrean government has a long history of abducting dissenting compatriots from the Sudanese soil,

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00:03:42,240 --> 00:03:54,450

I spent a few days there hidden prior to flying to Ethiopia, where I was screened by the national intelligence of this same country.

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00:03:54,450 --> 00:04:00,080

I was registered with a United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees

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00:04:00,080 --> 00:04:06,700

or UNHCR for international protection seven months later.

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00:04:06,700 --> 00:04:16,660

Because my claim was deemed valid for resettlement in June 2014, at which point I officially became a refugee.

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00:04:16,660 --> 00:04:21,670

The UNHCR per its mandate was declared in its statute,

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00:04:21,670 --> 00:04:30,130

submitted their resettlement registration form to the United States regional hub in Nairobi, Kenya.

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00:04:30,130 --> 00:04:37,840

So the United States is one of the partner countries that closely work with the UNHCR.

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00:04:37,840 --> 00:04:48,620

After four years and eight months of protracted security screening and taxing life in exile, I was eventually resettled to the United States.

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00:04:48,620 --> 00:04:53,140

I landed O'Hare International Airport on the afternoon of December 19, 2017,

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00:04:53,140 --> 00:05:03,070

jet lagged from the 23 hour flight.

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00:05:03,070 --> 00:05:08,800

It was supposedly the beginning of a promising future for someone like me who was officially

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00:05:08,800 --> 00:05:16,690

relocated to the United States while at the same time lost in the dark about the starting point.

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00:05:16,690 --> 00:05:26,890

Resettlement agencies make no exception for refugees with disabilities when it comes to educational and employment or career pathways.

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00:05:26,890 --> 00:05:36,020

In fact, their staff appear to have not taken enough training on how to help refugees with disabilities

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00:05:36,020 --> 00:05:49,590

or people with disabilities to network with the right resources save the Social Security Administration and the SNAP program.

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00:05:49,590 --> 00:05:59,330

Just months into my arrival, I was in arrears of three months rent all unawares when my resettlement agency was poised

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00:05:59,330 --> 00:06:07,560

to become oblivious to my housing situation without hinting of what the agency was up to.

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00:06:07,560 --> 00:06:14,660

If it weren't for my friends and a church. I would now be homeless.

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00:06:14,660 --> 00:06:24,890

Besides being a blind refugee, my work experience and educational background has and has been of little avail in my quest for gainful employment.

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00:06:24,890 --> 00:06:30,020

I was introduced to a program, Partners of Refugees in Illinois Disability

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00:06:30,020 --> 00:06:40,240

Employment or PRIDE, and joined the second cohort in the final quarter of 2018.

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00:06:40,240 --> 00:06:49,060

Housed at UIC, PRIDE has been doing its best to familiarize participants with federal and state resources,

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00:06:49,060 --> 00:06:54,400

as well as the rights and responsibilities of employees with disabilities,

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00:06:54,400 --> 00:07:01,740

thereby identifying career and educational pathways of dozens of participants.

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00:07:01,740 --> 00:07:13,430

In 2019, I joined the Leadership Education Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities or LEND Fellowship Program in Illinois.

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00:07:13,430 --> 00:07:21,600

And now I am and Master's program fellow at Northeastern Illinois University.

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00:07:21,600 --> 00:07:27,120

A success I ascribe to a PRIDE. As an active participant

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00:07:27,120 --> 00:07:40,640

and a peer mentor at PRIDE, I have been involved in supervision, translation and editing of training materials as well as facilitating

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00:07:40,640 --> 00:07:59,290

interpretation. Let's now talk about some of the challenges I faced at schools. In November 2019,

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00:07:59,290 --> 00:08:04,300

I began taking an I.T. class at a school here in Chicago.

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00:08:04,300 --> 00:08:09,650

It didn't take long for technical showstoppers to crop up.

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00:08:09,650 --> 00:08:21,170

There were quite serious accessibility issues in the instructional design that couldn't be dealt with in a month or a year,

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00:08:21,170 --> 00:08:28,280

and I had to terminate the agreement so as to to join another school.

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00:08:28,280 --> 00:08:30,470

I am now in rehabilitation counseling

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00:08:30,470 --> 00:08:41,080

graduate student at a school that provides disability rehabilitation training and a disability and friendly classroom environment.

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00:08:41,080 --> 00:08:47,190

Following are some of the barriers I have been facing in both schools.

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00:08:47,190 --> 00:08:58,140

One - inaccessible or partially accessible web conferencing applications such as Adobe Connect or GoToMeeting.

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00:08:58,140 --> 00:09:06,910

Two - websites not designed with assistive technology and inclusion in mind.

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00:09:06,910 --> 00:09:13,240

The students lab portal on one of the websites was not designed from a keyboard

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00:09:13,240 --> 00:09:20,740

user's point of view, that screen reader user couldn't access onscreen information.

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00:09:20,740 --> 00:09:27,450

Students were only able to access information using their mouses, their mice.

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00:09:27,450 --> 00:09:35,280

Three - inaccessible instructional materials and examinations containing charts.

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00:09:35,280 --> 00:09:45,240

I still continue receiving scanned documents and other instructional materials that weren't designed with accessibility in mind.

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00:09:45,240 --> 00:09:56,410

Some of the exams are highly graphic and platform controls are short of accessibility standards.

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00:09:56,410 --> 00:10:03,430

The fourth point is counter intuitive web design that impedes efficiency.

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00:10:03,430 --> 00:10:08,950

A university website is designed in such a complicated way that one finds it

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00:10:08,950 --> 00:10:16,950

hard to sift information through or get the services desired in the jungle.

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00:10:16,950 --> 00:10:20,390  
These are just a few of the challenges.

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00:10:20,390 --> 00:10:33,960  
Remember, these all are human made problems, we human beings are making the environment unfriendly to people with disabilities.

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00:10:33,960 --> 00:10:40,400  
But what is disability? Let's now briefly talk about disability.

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00:10:40,400 --> 00:10:53,960  
The World Health Organization, or WHO, defines disability as any condition of the body or mind, also called on impairment,

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00:10:53,960 --> 00:10:59,840  
that makes it difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities,

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00:10:59,840 --> 00:11:10,510  
which is activity limitation, and interact with the world around them, which is participation restrictions.

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00:11:10,510 --> 00:11:13,900  
Americans with Disabilities Act, or the ADA,

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00:11:13,900 --> 00:11:26,520  
defines disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

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00:11:26,520 --> 00:11:37,650  
The world, the World Health Organization, or WHO, published the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health,

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00:11:37,650 --> 00:11:49,360  
which is also known as ICF in 2001, which was ratified by 192 countries, almost all countries around the world.

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00:11:49,360 --> 00:11:58,210  
The ICF model provides a standard language for classifying body functions and structures,



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00:11:58,210 --> 00:12:07,320

activity, participation levels and conditions in the world around us that influence health.

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00:12:07,320 --> 00:12:21,320

This description helps to assess the health functioning activities and factors in the environment that either help or create barriers for people

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00:12:21,320 --> 00:12:30,890

to fully participate in society. Ableism is another important concept.

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00:12:30,890 --> 00:12:36,730

Ableism is discrimination in favor of the able bodied,

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00:12:36,730 --> 00:12:44,480

be it in school, at work environments, or in social activities.

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00:12:44,480 --> 00:12:50,820

These are all interrelated definitions involving two important concepts.

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00:12:50,820 --> 00:13:02,190

The first one is activity, which is the execution of a task or action by an individual, and the second is participation,

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00:13:02,190 --> 00:13:12,640

which is a person's involvement in a life situation which are all related to human made environments.

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00:13:12,640 --> 00:13:24,260

As [inaudible] puts it well, "the greatest barrier to people with disabilities are not physical ones. In fact unalterable

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00:13:24,260 --> 00:13:42,630

prejudices and stereotypes have been hampering the employability and placeability of people with disabilities in their career pathways."

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00:13:42,630 --> 00:13:52,030

There are a wide variety of disabilities or conditions, and the ADA regulations do not list all of them.

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00:13:52,030 --> 00:14:00,390

Some disabilities are visible, some aren't. Examples of conditions

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00:14:00,390 --> 00:14:16,680

include cancer, diabetes, post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, HIV, autism, cerebral palsy, deafness or hearing loss,

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00:14:16,680 --> 00:14:29,490

blindness or low vision, epilepsy, mobility disabilities such as those requiring to use the use of of a wheelchair or a walker or a cane,

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00:14:29,490 --> 00:14:34,350

intellectual disabilities, major depressive disorder,

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00:14:34,350 --> 00:14:45,530

traumatic brain injury. Let's not talk about inclusion at work.

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00:14:45,530 --> 00:14:53,750

Inclusion at work involves creating reasonable opportunities for gainful employment for people with disabilities,

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00:14:53,750 --> 00:14:59,040

thereby eliminating or reducing factors hindering

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00:14:59,040 --> 00:15:01,650

disability inclusion.

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00:15:01,650 --> 00:15:14,400

One of the major factors working against disability inclusion is the inaccessibility of physical and digital environments at work.

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00:15:14,400 --> 00:15:31,020

What is accessibility? Accessibility is the ability of disabled people to access and efficiently use products, devices, services or environments.

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00:15:31,020 --> 00:15:40,630

The question then is. Is the physical and digital environment at work accessible to everyone?

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00:15:40,630 --> 00:15:47,730

Are products, devices, services and/or environments,

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00:15:47,730 --> 00:15:54,900

in any organization, accessible to, usable and navigable by everyone?

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00:15:54,900 --> 00:16:16,470

One of the digital spaces is the website. Let's now have a brief look at reasonable, reasonable accommodations. As dc.gov puts it,

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00:16:16,470 --> 00:16:21,720

the following types of accommodations are defined as reasonable.

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00:16:21,720 --> 00:16:27,660

So reasonable, reasonable accommodations are basically divided into three.

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00:16:27,660 --> 00:16:37,920

The first of which is no-tech, or an accommodation costing little or no money.

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00:16:37,920 --> 00:16:46,430

It can be time, support and creativity. Example, additional preparations,

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00:16:46,430 --> 00:16:54,970

additional preparation time for an individual or a color coded filing system.

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00:16:54,970 --> 00:16:58,460

The second type of accommodation is low-tech.

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00:16:58,460 --> 00:17:08,430

Any accommodation that is technologically simple or unsophisticated and readily available in most offices. Example,

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00:17:08,430 --> 00:17:21,070

replacing a door knob with an accessible door handle, providing a magnifier, etc. The third is high-tech.

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00:17:21,070 --> 00:17:30,500

This type of reasonable accommodation is the one that uses advanced or sophisticated devices

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00:17:30,500 --> 00:17:38,240

or technology. Example, screen reading software with synthesized speech.

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00:17:38,240 --> 00:17:46,410

Reasonable accommodations often do not cost employers or universities a dime.

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00:17:46,410 --> 00:17:53,100

Issues related to reasonable accommodation can be addressed through partnership with the Division of Rehab,

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00:17:53,100 --> 00:18:01,970

with Division of Rehabilitation Services or some universities that specialize in assistive technology.

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00:18:01,970 --> 00:18:04,053

Thank you very much.