



# Return to Work for SCI Survivors

Jen Goodwin

Dignity. Respect. Advocacy.




# OUR MISSION & VISION

Our mission is to **vigorously** advocate for and enforce the legal rights of people with disabilities.

We envision an Arkansas where people with disabilities are **equal members** in their communities and can dictate the course of their own lives through **self-determination**.

DRA treats all people with **dignity, respect,** and **compassion**.



# JEN GOODWIN

Jen Goodwin earned her Juris Doctorate at the University of Arkansas Little Rock Bowen School of Law. Prior to joining DRA in August of 2019, Jen was an Equal Justice Works Fellow working on Legal Aid of Arkansas's Medical-Legal Partnership. She has also worked for U.S. District Judge Beth Deere and was an extern at Disability Rights Arkansas in 2014.



# Learning Objectives

- 1. Understand the Impact of Spinal Cord Injury on Work Ability**  
Describe the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial challenges commonly faced by individuals with spinal cord injuries that affect their ability to work.
- 2. Articulate the Importance of Work**  
List and explain five reasons why work is important for individuals, particularly those with disabilities such as spinal cord injuries.
- 3. Identify Resources for Returning to Work After Spinal Cord Injury**  
Identify and describe three specific resources available to individuals with spinal cord injuries who are seeking to return to work.





# My Story







# Why is Work Important?





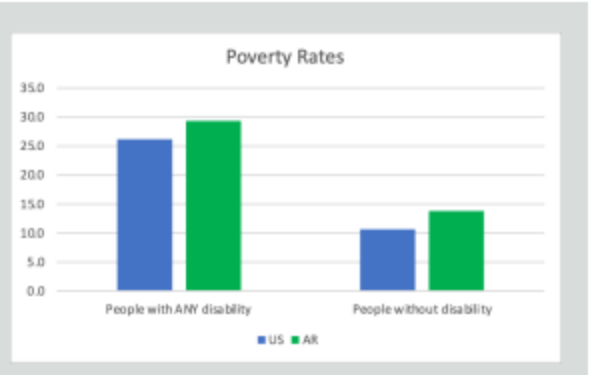
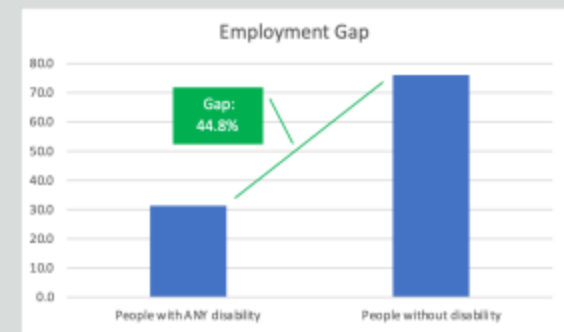
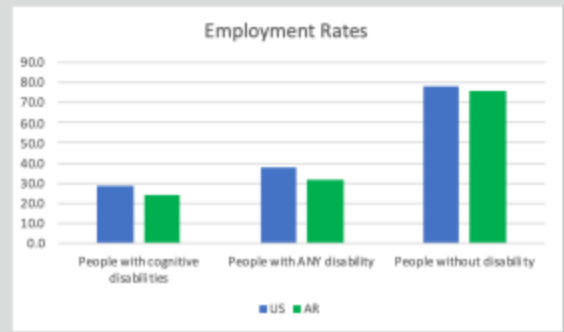
**State Disability Employment Summary:**

- Working-age Arkansans with and without disabilities are less likely to work than the national average. The employment gap between Arkansans with and without disabilities is wide.
- The rate of poverty of Arkansans with and without disabilities is above the national average. However, Arkansans with disabilities earn \$3,921 less on average than Arkansans without disabilities.



275,710

Working-age Arkansans with disabilities living in the community



**\$3,921**  
Annual Income Gap for Arkansans with Disabilities

Data source: 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium / American Community Survey (2018)  
(Non-institutionalized, male or female, ages 18-64, all races, regardless of ethnicity, with all education levels in the United States who reported a disability.)





# 5 Reasons Why Work is Important

- Financial
- Community
- Health
- Purpose
- Independence



**So, You Are Ready  
to Work? Now  
What...**



# Ask These Questions

Can I perform the essential functions of a job, with or without reasonable accommodations?

What are essential functions?

What is considered a reasonable accommodation?



# Essential Job Functions

To be qualified for a position, an applicant or employee must be able to perform essential job functions. Essential functions are job duties that are fundamental to the position, they are the reason the job exists. Some of the factors for determining essential functions of a job include:

- Whether the position exists specifically to perform these essential functions
- The number of other employees who are available to perform the same job duties
- The expertise or skills required to perform the essential functions



# Reasonable Accommodation

## In General:

Any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the job application process, to perform the essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities.



# Reasonable Accommodation Includes:

- Providing or modifying equipment or devices,
- Job restructuring,
- Part-time or modified work schedules,
- Adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies,
- Providing readers and interpreters,
- Making the workplace readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, and
- Reassignment to a vacant position



# Reasonable Accommodation Does Not Include:

- Removing essential functions,
- Lowering production standards,
- Creating new jobs or bumping coworkers,
- Providing personal need items such as hearing aids and wheelchairs, or
- Providing accommodations that create an undue hardship



# Interactive Process

Step 1: Making a Request

Step 2: Providing Information

Step 3: Exploring Accommodations

Step 4: Choosing an Accommodation

Step 5: Implementing the Accommodation

Step 6: Maintaining the Accommodation





# What Happens if You are NOT Provided Appropriate Accommodations

- Internal Resolution Process
- EEOC Complaint





# Resources



# Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission

Mission is to assist Arkansans with spinal cord disabilities in living as independently as they choose

Their goals are to:

- Provide effective Case Management services to all eligible clients to improve independence and function
- Conduct comprehensive consumer-driven service programs to meet client needs
- Provide education and resources to individuals with spinal cord disabilities, their families, health care professionals, and the general public
- Research the specialized needs, issues, trends, services, and healthcare resource utilization of individuals with spinal cord disabilities and make recommendations for change
- Network with state, federal, public, and private agencies to coordinate services and resources and to advocate for the needs of people with spinal cord disabilities
- Market and promote the activities and services of the Commission and the successes of our clients



# Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

Mission is to prepare Arkansans with disabilities to work and lead productive and independent lives

Their services include:

- Vocational Counseling and Guidance
- Assessment Services
- Job Placement Services
- Restoration (Physical/Mental) Services
- Assistance with College and Vocational Training
- Supported Employment
- On-Job Training
- Assistive Technology
- Pre-Employment Transition Services



# Division of Services for the Blind

Mission is to enhance the personal and economic independence of blind and severely visually impaired persons of all ages in Arkansas

Their services include:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Assistive Technology Services
- Transition Services
- Supported Employment
- Business Engagement
- Independent Living Services for the Blind



# Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program

A statewide service that helps individuals understand Social Security work incentive rules, and access work incentives available under the Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance Programs.

A WIPA coordinator can meet with individuals to discuss how returning to work will impact their SSA benefits, as well as recommend work incentives that can maximize their income and healthcare options, focused on achieving greater financial self-sufficiency.



# Arkansas Achieving a Better Life Experience (AR ABLE)

Save for qualified disability expenses without losing eligibility for certain assistance programs, like SSI and Medicaid

Investing at different risk levels is an option with an account

An individual can open the account for themselves, or an authorized individual can open one on an individual's behalf, if:

- The individual's disability was present before the age of 26; and
- One of the following is true:
  - The individuals experience blindness as determined by the Social Security Act; or
  - The individual is entitled to receive SSI or SSDI benefits or have a similarly severe disability with a written diagnosis from a licensed physician.

\*In 2026 the age the disability will have to be present by will raise to 46



# Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

The leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on job accommodations and disability employment issues. JAN provides free one-on-one practical guidance and technical assistance on job accommodation solutions, Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and related legislation, and self-employment and entrepreneurship options for people with disabilities. JAN provides individualized consultation to assist:

Employers and their representatives seeking guidance on practical ways to engage in the interactive process, provide job accommodation solutions and comply with Title I of the ADA

Individuals with medical conditions and disabilities seeking information about job accommodation solutions, employment rights under the ADA, and self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities

Family members and rehabilitation, medical, educational, and other professionals in their effort to support successful employment outcomes for individuals with medical conditions and disabilities.





# Increasing Capabilities Access Network (iCAN)

The Arkansas statewide Assistive Technology program designed to make technology available and accessible for everyone who needs it. Tools for Life is their philosophy—assistive technology for everyone! iCAN offers a number of services to help Arkansans of all ages find the AT tools they need for home, school, work, and getting around in the community.

Services include:

- Information Assistance
- AT Device Loans
- AT Device Demonstrations
- AT Device ReuseAT Device Exchange
- AT Training on devices and issues related to accessibility
- Presentations about iCAN and the benefits of technology
- Tours of the iCAN Tools for Life Demonstration Center
- Technical Assistance to employers, service providers, educators, and others

The services offered by iCAN are available to all Arkansans, regardless of age, geographic area, disability, income or eligibility for any other service.



# Questions?



# Contact Us



Jgoodwin@disabilityrightsar.org



(501) 296-1775



www.DisabilityRightsAR.org



<https://linktr.ee/disabilityrightsar>



# References

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5607448/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10344866/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4612197/>

[https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/impact\\_of\\_employment\\_health\\_status\\_health\\_care\\_costs\\_0.pdf](https://leadcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/impact_of_employment_health_status_health_care_costs_0.pdf)

<https://msktc.org/sites/default/files/SCI-Facts-Figs-2022-Eng-508.pdf>

[Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission Arkansas Department of Health](#)

<https://dws.arkansas.gov/ar-rehabilitation-services/>

<https://dws.arkansas.gov/services-for-the-blind/>

<https://www.arsources.org/wipa>

<https://savewithable.com/ar/home.html>

<https://askjan.org/>

[Home | ICAN Tools for Life \(ar-ican.org\)](#)

<https://www.eeoc.gov/how-file-charge-employment-discrimination>





# Disability Rights Arkansas

Dignity. Respect. Advocacy.