

ADDRESSING COMPLEX COMMUNICATION NEEDS

**Annie Galiani, M.S., SLP; Mary Stapleton, M.A., MPH, CHES;
Julie Yaroni, M.S., OTR/L; *LEND trainees*
Jenna Lequia, PhD; *LEND faculty***

**Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities
(LEND) Program
Westchester Institute for Human Development
University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
and New York Medical College**

Team Project Abstract 2017-2018

Background: Communication plays an essential role in everyone's day to day life in order to express needs, wants, and develop relationships. According to Beukelman and Mirenda (2013) approximately 1.3% of people (about 4 million Americans) are unable to reliably utilize natural speech to express their daily communication needs. The National Survey of Children With Special Health Care Needs (2005-2006) estimated that 2.9% of children in the United States experience speech difficulties. Kenney and Kogan (2011) showed that of those 2.9%, approximately 2% did not receive a communication device.

Individuals with complex communication needs may experience challenges verbally expressing themselves, and often rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems. AAC systems include both low and high tech equipment ranging from PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) to tablet applications. In order to best utilize AAC as a means of communication, collaboration between students, parents, peers, and educators is essential (Chung & Douglas, 2014).

Objective: The goal of this project was to evaluate parent and professional knowledge and confidence related to AAC to inform the development of training for parents and professionals.

Methods: An online questionnaire was administered via email or Facebook to parents of children with special needs and professionals who work with them. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: demographics, knowledge, confidence, and training preferences. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze results received from the needs assessment.

Progress To Date: Thus far, 20 questionnaires were completed. Based on our results, it was shown that there is a relationship between years of experience with AAC and perceived level of confidence. In addition, all individuals who had less than one year of experience with AAC are not confident in their ability to help

a child use AAC in natural environments. Ninety percent of respondents feel that additional training in AAC would be beneficial for their day to day responsibilities. Although speech therapists are viewed as the “experts” on AAC, about 50% of speech therapists who responded to our survey reported that additional training in AAC would be beneficial.

Conclusion: In conclusion, additional training in AAC would be beneficial across all disciplines regardless of years of experience or past exposure to AAC. The top three desired training topics include modeling and/or prompting AAC use, using data to inform use of AAC intervention, as well as maintenance and programming of AAC systems.

Next Steps: We plan to continue with data analysis and develop new methods to administer our needs assessment questionnaire to parents of children with complex communication needs. In addition, trainings will be developed based on desired content, frequency, and mode of delivery.

References:

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