



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Users Report on the Peer Support Experiences that Helped Them Learn AAC



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Project background – How we got started

The University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at OHSU, in partnership with CommunicationFIRST, was awarded a contract from AUCD to develop recommendations for a national plan for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Peer Supports.

A survey was sent to AAC users to gather data about their personal peer support experiences. These data, not often sought from AAC users, will inform future recommendations.

This is the largest national survey to gather data about AAC peer support experiences. The results formed the foundation for the AAC Peer Support Consortium, a national group of AAC users, disability organizations, providers, and researchers who meet monthly to develop the recommendations for a national plan.

Survey process – What we did

The AAC Peer Support survey was distributed nationally through social media, disability organizations, providers, and AAC manufacturers.

It was made available to users in many formats, including a Google survey form, Microsoft Word form, or individual assistance from Peer Support Project team members.

The survey asked four questions:

1. Have other AAC users helped you develop AAC skills? If so, how much?
2. Would you like more mentoring from other AAC users?
3. What kind of support or mentorship from AAC users have you gotten?
4. What kinds of support would you like to have from other AAC users?

Survey results – What we learned

**What kind of support or mentorship from AAC users have you gotten?
What kinds of support would you like to have from other AAC users?**

Gaining information about AAC	“Guidance on using symbol-based apps, navigating cost barriers, decided on which app is most helpful to purchase.”	
Acquiring and training direct support staff	“How to train staff as communication support and how to find funding for that staff.”	
Navigating college	“I would like more support from other AAC users on how to navigate the college environment, how to explore work possibilities and how to expand my social network.”	
Transportation and mobility	“I am no longer able to get to library because I began using a power wheelchair 10 months ago. Too heavy and large to transport in cars. I need AT now more than ever...”	
Practicing real world skills	“How to use devices successfully in various settings out in the community.”	
Community learning	“A How to start a group for AAC users in your area or find one that exists guide could be cool? Or just in general sharing of resources about in-person stuff. I know for myself I don't know any other AAC users where I live but I know that said individuals exist.”	

Data show that 64% of AAC users experienced peer supports when learning AAC. 94% of these respondents stated they wanted more peer support from other AAC users.

Of those who did not experience peer support when learning AAC, over 78% stated they would like to receive peer support from other AAC users, or they were unsure.

The peer support experiences that AAC users shared ranged greatly. Many attended AAC camps. Others rely on internet communities on Facebook, Discord, Twitter (X) or online technical assistance.

Respondents reported that AAC peer supports reduce isolation, normalize their communication, and validate the process, while also presenting troubleshooting of technical challenges on speech generating devices. These data will be presented as part of the recommendations for a national plan.

Conclusion – Why this matters

Most AAC users want peer support. Peer support experiences help AAC users in many different ways and takes many different forms. It offers social, emotional, and technical support. Note: this is only a sample of AAC users who could respond.

Contact info – Where to learn more

To sign up for email updates about this work, and to view written descriptions of the image, go to our site:

sites.google.com/view/aac-peer-experiences

Or scan the QR code:



Email ucedd@ohsu.org or info@communicationFIRST.org

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