

## Peer Support Models Survey results

### **Peer support activities:**

Models with *structured instruction* (formal curriculum or lecture) tend to be geared toward younger people, mostly children within a “special” (segregated) setting like camp or school. Parents/caregivers also receive *structured instruction* related to caregiving. *Structured instruction* is always noted alongside other activities such as *unstructured* or *semi-structured conversation, socializing, networking, and advice for difficulties in life*, except for those that take place specifically in a school setting.

*Socializing* is the most commonly noted activity among all peer support models (30) while the next most frequent activities, *semi-structured conversation* and *learning and sharing technology*, each took place in 22 models.

### **Outcomes:**

The most frequent expected outcome of the peer support models was *social (friendship, sense of belonging)* (43).

Most models that are geared toward AAC users have the expected outcome of *increased AAC/AAC device use*. Those that don't specifically note *increased AAC/AAC device use* as an outcome did note *speech/language/communication* as an expected outcome. This may be due to flaws in the survey questions.

### **Development and leadership:**

Most of the peer support models surveyed were *started by professionals for peers* (33), with fewer created by *peers, peers who are also professionals, and/or by professionals and peers working together* (23). Five models were noted as created solely by *peers*. In models where peers were involved in developing the model, most are *co-led* by peers and non-peer professionals (18), fewer are solely *peer-led* (4) and none were led solely by a professional who is not a peer.

Models that were created by *peers, peers who are also professionals, and/or by professionals and peers working together* all support adults 17+ except for one, which welcomes all ages. Those started by non-peer professionals tend to support specific age groups.

### **Frequency, consistency:**

One of Lateef McLeod's recommendations for AAC peer support is solid structure and organization, including a consistent schedule. Kevin Williams noted in his presentation on USSAAC PWUAAC that consistent meeting times not only increased participation but created participants' “sense of normalcy and a chance to be themselves.” Online groups with a set schedule of “hangouts,” “meetups,” or “chats” meet at least once a month at consistent times.

Relatedly, the least frequently selected characteristic of peer support models that increased participation was *flexible session time* was (1).

### **Barriers and facilitators to participation**

Peer support models that operate virtually noted that the online platform may have increased participation, and this was the most frequently noted facilitator among the models. Those that had virtual access and did not note *virtual platforms* as enabling participation were all hybrid models, offering both virtual and in-person options. We initially thought *virtual platforms* could be both a facilitator and a barrier to participation (due to technology issues), but only 6 out of 28 online models noted this.

*Peer leaders or mentors being paid or employees* is the second-most common factor (16) that increases participation in the model.

Peer supports that require payment from participants tend to be in formal, segregated settings (most often schools and camps, and one conference) where there is an imbalanced power dynamic (teacher/expert/professional/adult and student/child/learner) as opposed to mutual/reciprocal peer support models. However, peer support may occur organically in, or grow out of those settings.

*Accessibility* was noted as a barrier to participation in three diverse programs: a virtual AAC community (ImpAACt Voices); on an on-campus University program (ACES); and a formalized peer support specialist training program (CAPS).

Survey respondents recording camps as a peer support model acknowledge that *cost* is a barrier, as do membership-based organizations.

Several AAC-focused peer support models noted that peers may not *recognize the value of the model* or may not find out about the model. Likewise, peer support models that are not specifically geared toward AAC users may indeed benefit them, but they don't advertise as such. This highlights the importance of advancing AAC peer support and raising awareness.