Assistive Technology Resources for Children and Adults with Disabilities

Closing The Gap

Solutions

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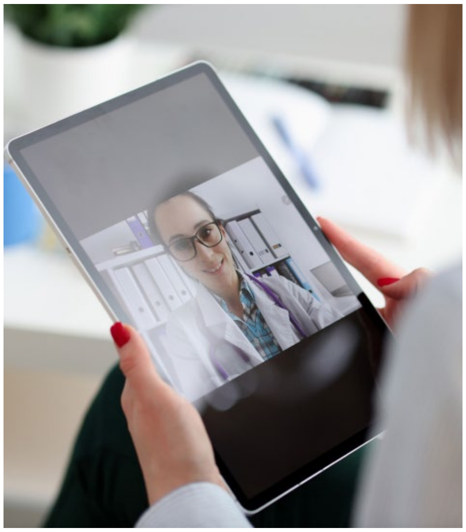

AT Professionals

What Could Their Education Be

Summary:

This paper is about how to get more people into the field of assistive technology. It will explore what the k12 system could do to support all students who might be interested in the field. The author will give his thoughts and ideas for anyone to follow. As the field gets older, we will always need to find a younger generation of assistive technology professionals. This paper will talk about people who have a disability and could go into the field too if they want to.

When I was finishing up with my high school, the teachers talked all of the time about attending college. They would say things to my classmates and I, college is your ticket, college is the next step, and everyone with your abilities attend college to show people that you can do it. In addition, I had someone in my life who really wanted me to go to college. I didn't know what I could do because of my disability. I knew that I wanted to help students and their family live their best life, but how to do this. I heard and knew about the field of assistive technology, but I thought that it was only for speech therapists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. I didn't know about any teachers who just do assistive technology and help school teams with assistive technology needs. I believe this needs to change and lucky for you I will give you some ideas and thoughts on how it can be done.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAN START

Yep, you read it right. This can start when students are in Middle School. Tech ed is a phenomenal way to introduce students to the world of making assistive technology tools and devices. I am sure that everyone reading this will know about AT maker day or an event, these are phenomenal ways to introduce the field of assistive technology. You can ask the school's tech ed, if they would be able to make a cubby that you can have in your classroom or a bench to put outside so students can sit if they need to. Make sure that the class will know that they are making things to help their classmates who have a disability. Maybe invite the class to see your classroom, from that they might get ideas on what to build next. In language arts they might be reading a book with a characters or characters with a disability, ask the teacher if you want me to come in to talk about people who have a disability. If the teacher says yes I would love that, please stay positive and bring one of your students with you. I have gotten to speak with middle school classes before and these are my favorite group to talk to, because these students are just starting to think about what do I want to do for my job. If we can get on their mind working in the assistive technology field is a real job that will be great.

MIKE HIPPLE his a young adult with cerebral palsy and uses a communication device. He has been using a device for 24 years and he has been using different assistive technology tools since he was a kid. He founded the Wisconsin AAC Network. He founded Wisconsin Augmentative Alternative Communication AAC Network. The network mission is to bring Wisconsin state holders for AAC together to have and one voice and to share the knowledge that we have. He is a proud member of Special Education and assistive technology communities. He is a member of Wisconsin Autism Society, Wisconsin CEC, United States Society of AAC [USSAAC] and International Society for AAC [ISAAC]. He enjoy writing about anything to do with assistive technology and education. When he isn't learning or writing, you will find him watching baseball, Law and Order, Netflix, taking walks, or volunteering with his Kiwanis club.

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HOW TEACHERS CAN HELP TYPICAL STUDENTS AND STUDENTS WHO HAVE A DISABILITY GET INTO THE FANTASTIC FIELD

I have been asked to come to speak to a class called future help occupation. This class is for students that are interested in the helping occupation of students that want to be a doctor, nurse, and police officer or fireman. The teacher asked me to do this a few years ago and I look forward to this each year, because I am educating the class about assistive technology. Most students who are taking this class, it is most likely that they won't have a class on the topic. when they will be in college. I bring all kinds of communication boards and I say this okay for this hour you can talk, but you need to use these tools to talk to us. My hope with this that students understand how hard it is for someone to communicate with only using a few words. I tell the person with me that please feel free have fun with them, saying things like I don't understand what you want we need to move forward, your speech therapist just want you to work on feelings, or you aren't interested in using this we will quit trying.

I make sure that we will have time for discussion when anyone can talk on what was going on and what are your thoughts. Some things that I always get are this never happen, I feel sad because teachers and speech therapists don't believe in their students, and this one interest me, what can we do to stop this from happening. These are the future people who will be working in the field with us someday soon.

Most high schools also have computer classes and woodshop classes. What if you ask the teachers, if they will make communication symbols, a desk for a student who uses a power chair, a bench for people to go to when they don't have someone to talk to, or a switch that students can use. Maybe you will find someone who they don't know what they want to be and they might say I think the field of assistive technology looks interesting, I might look into that. Again ask the language arts teachers if they are reading a book with a character with a disability can you come in to speak to their classes and please bring a student to their classes. I believe that if students see someone that they go to school with, they are more willing to listen to you. And they will be interested in going into the field!

Students with a disability can work in the field and we should talk about this with these students. This was me when I was a student. My parents and school team believed in me so they challenged me to be the best so I can write blogs, give speeches and workshops, and work to help the community. High schools have a class for students with a disability and without a disability about life skills and how to work with people who have a disability. This class is excellent for everyone. Let's look at some of the benefits for both groups.

First we will talk about students with a disability: being in a regular class, the willingness to work with anyone, following directions that a peer gives, and working together. So I bet you are thinking this class only helps students with a disability? I think no, actually I think this class will help more students without a disability. Let's look at their benefits: they will be understanding of people with a disability, they will have a different viewpoint on life, they will include their friends in clubs and at lunch time, and hopefully when they are adults and owe a business they might hire someone who has a disability. I will ask you which group wins and will get more from this? Most people will say students with a disability get more out of this and I understand but please consider this. We are giving someone who they don't have a disability, no one in their family, or they have no friends with a disability; an opportunity to step into the disability community. Maybe just maybe it could be a start of something and they might be interested in it. We don't know what will start their career and life's passion.

This part of the paper I'm going to be discussing what comes next for the people who might be interested in coming into the field. We need to welcome them like people did for us. I remember going to my first Closing The Gap in 2017. I have only been interested in working in the field for only two or three years, but people like Kelly Fonner, Joy Z, and Caroline Musselwhite were so welcoming to me and wanted to talk to me. It was an amazing feeling and I am so thankful for that! We need to get more students attending these conferences, so they can start networking and learning from these amazing people. When I am talking about students, I mean students at all levels and all abilities. If you are a tenth grader and you know that they are interested in assistive technology ask them hey do you want to go to a conference with me, but please make sure that they know that it isn't a vacation from school. Have things for them to do like go to the QIAT workshop, visit with a family member or someone who uses assistive technology, and start their professional network. Now most high schools won't have money to send a technology class or future helping occupation class to a huge assistive technology and special education conference and I understand that. But states might have a fair on assistive technology and or a conference and you can take your students to it. That way they are starting to explore the assistive technology world and starting to build their network up

Sadly in college we have just a few programs just on assistive technology and I believe that it is wrong and sad, but a lot of assistive technology learning is on your own. Why not start their love and learning about assistive technology in middle school or sooner.

In closing I will ask you the readers a question. Why don't we have a lot of professionals who use assistive technology in the field? Maybe we don't have an answer to this, but I think that some people in the field believe that you need to go to a college to be a professional. Why do they think that you might be asking yourself? Remember at the start of this paper, I told you that I had people in my life that wanted me to go to a university. For the longest time I wanted that myself, but my school team and my family looked and explored with me what college would be like for me. After we looked at it some more, I told them that I didn't think that college wasn't the right step for me. They listened and supported

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me. I hope this paper gave you some insight and perspective on what assistive technology education can look like starting in middle school and that people who use assistive technology, they can be in the field too.

I made this list a few years ago. Please feel free to use it when a language arts teacher is looking for a book to read. If they or you find a different book with characters who need to use an assistive technology tool, please let me know so I can add it. Book list with characters who use AAC

BOOK REVIEW LIST WITH A CHARACTER WHO USES AAC

This is a list of books with a character or story line relating to complex communication needs or communication devices. I read all the books and put this summary together so adults and kids who use a device can feel connected to others by reading about characters that use devices like them. So read a book to them or let them read themselves. School staff: please share with your libraries. If these types of books are in the library and available to classmates to read it may increase classmate's awareness and understanding.
Mike Hipple

WINDOW BOY is geared for seventh grade and up. The author is Andrea White. The book is about a boy who has CP growing up in 1968. It was rare for a student with a disability to be included. Sam's mother convinces the school to let Sam enter sixth grade. Sam gets to go to his local school for the first time. His caregiver Miss Perkins is a caring and loving lady who will do anything for Sam. She oftens spends more time with Sam than his mother. Miss Perkins is from England. She spends hours reading to Sam about Winston Churchill. Sam loves Winston and has imaginary discussions with Winnie. These discussions help Sam cope with his disability. His favorite sport is basketball. The title of the book comes from him sitting in his wheelchair looking out the window of his apartment where he watched kids play basketball. Once he got to go to school, he met friends, but everything changed when his mother met her new boyfriend. The book addresses many prejudices, old beliefs about what people with disabilities can do. Some parts of the books are sad and emotionally charged but Sam does win in the end. Read the Afterword sections too.

OUT OF MY MIND is geared for fourth grade and up. The author is Sharon Draper. The character Melody Brooks who has CP. She's 11 and so smart but no one knows that because she can not speak. She finally gets a communication device and is now able to really be a part of her school. When she got a communication device everyone learned about her amazing memory. She tried out the quiz team and surprised her classmates with how much she knew. The team qualifies for Nationals and she is all set to go with her team but….read on.

ON BEING SARAH is geared for fifth grade and up. The authors are Elizabeth Helfman and Lino Saffioti. This book utilizes Charles Bliss symbol system throughout the book. The book zones in on Sarah's feelings and frustrations with her thoughts(which are set in italics). Sarah finds a true friend Maggie who learns her symbol system.

PRIVATE EYE ROMEO RILEY-THE BOY WHO SAW TOO MUCh is geared for first grade and up. The author is April M Whitt. The book is a three book series with a boy who has CP and uses a communication device. He goes around solving mysteries so calls himself private eye Romeo. This is a great book to read to a new device communicator or their class. I love the way it addresses mishits on a device.

HOW KATIE GOT HER VOICE is geared for first grade and up. Author is a speech therapist, Patricia L Mervine. Katies is starting at a new school where everyone has a nickman, but Katies are different. She can't walk or talk. The book is great for a class discussion with its twelve tips on how to talk with someone with different abilities. Another great book for a new communicator and their class.

RULES is geared for fifth grade and up. Author is Cynthis Lord. Catherine, the main character, has a brother who has autism. She writes rules for her brother to live by so he knows how the world works. She likes to come to his occupational therapy sessions and meets Jason who is in a wheelchair and uses a communication book to communicate. She creates new cards to expand Jason's world. They become friends, and their friendship helps her with feelings she has toward her brother's disability. Note: honest feelings of siblings explored.

CINNAMON FRECKLES book series for preschoolers and up. Author is Sarah Leal. The picture book series is written to help her daughter through hard times in her life. What I like about these books is you can email Sarah to get a book put on a student's communication device and they can read it to their classmates themselves.

GHOST BOY biography of Martin Pistorius's journey. It is geared for eighth grade and up. Martin was 12 when he was sick and lost all cognitive and physical abilities. A caregiver recognized his potential. First he used his eyes and body parts to communicate then after hard work and years he became one of the best known AAC communicators in South Africa.

SAY WHAT YOU WILL is geared for high school students. The author is Cammie McGovern. Amy, who is in ler last year of high school, has CP and used a communication device. She's extremely smart, gifted, and wants to have a typical senior year. She recruits peers to be her helpers so she can have a typical

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experience. Note: talks about sex, alcohol and peer relationships

DANCING DAISIES is geared for high school students. Author is Sarah Pyszka. It is about a teenage girl who uses a communication device and she wants to go to a regular summer camp. She broke it off with two friends who betrayed her. She was so sad. Even though she was hurting she decided to go ahead with her camp plans. At camp she met new friends and a boy. They changed her summer. She gets in trouble at camp, will she get sent home?

STUCK IN NEUTRAL is geared for mature readers and is not for everyone. Author is Terry Truman. Note: if you have a student who has a sibling who has CP/severe disabilities, let parents know they are reading this. Emotionally charged, question the value of life. The dad, an author, deals with his emotions, grief by writing poetry about his son who is disabled. He does not know his son is cognitively bright, a secret genius who remembers everything he ever hears. Dad cannot cope, he references his "vegetable son" in his Pulitzer prize winning poem. His son thinks his dad is trying to kill him because of the poetry he writes. The book tells the story of them trying to understand each other.

I thought about leaving this book out but I think people need to understand that the thoughts talked about in the book are still being talked about today on the internet, tv shows and in the news. We need to tell people not to judge people based on their ability to communicate. ■

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RECENTLY ADDED WEBINARS

Becoming a Wonderful WordPower Whiz

By Jane Lindley

WordPower is a robust core word based language system that allows individuals using AAC to access and engage in their world. WordPower combines core vocabulary, word prediction, and spelling into a unique language system that allows for efficient communication.

In this session, we will delve into the organization and guiding principles of WordPower. You'll learn how its robust features work together to create a seamless communication experience. By the end, you'll be equipped with the knowledge to become a WordPower whiz, understanding what makes this tool so wonderful and how it can transform communication for AAC users..

Marvelous, Magical Minspeak

By Debbie Witkowski

Most robust AAC language systems represent language through single-meaning pictures and alphabet-based strategies, such as spelling, word prediction, and printed words. Minspeak systems are unique in that they offer a third method of representing language known as semantic compaction.

This webinar will explore the components of Minspeak systems that lead to successful communication including the semantic organization into word families, the predictable architecture of vocabulary storage, and the design that leads to motor automaticity.

Join us as we explore the marvels and magic of Minspeak systems and learn how the design of Minspeak programs and accompanying tools facilitate language learning and use.

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Supporting Gestalt Language Processors to Keep Scripting

Summary:

This article will help the reader approach Gestalt Language Processors with a new lens. Through a strong understanding of the value of neurodiversity, we can learn to appreciate the functionality of scripting. The article will discuss identifying when someone is not getting their needs met through their current use of gestalts and scripts, and how to help them meet those needs. Self-advocacy in editing is highlighted as a necessary skill to teach.

In the world of speech-language pathology, Gestalt Language Processors (GLPs) have become a major topic of conversation. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is a powerful tool that can make a real difference for both speaking and nonspeaking GLPs. Because many people are new to GLP, or AAC, or both, goals are often messy. While recognizing GLPs is ideally part of neurodiversity-affirming practice, if you're not careful, neurodiversity-affirming can be a buzzword, rather than real change to your way of thinking.

If we really believe that Gestalt Language Processing is simply one of two equally valid ways of learning and understanding language, then we must accept that gestalts and scripting serve a valuable purpose for the GLP. We can't assume that the best way for that person to communicate is to transition entirely into sounding and acting like a neurotypical person. We don't just validate existing scripts, but encourage new ones, and continuing to script when it's useful, even when more flexible language is available.

One note before we dive in: While this article attempts to be accessible to as many as possible, you will get the most out of it if you already have some knowledge of Gestalt Language Processing and some knowledge of AAC. A quick primer is available through my blog article on the AssistiveWare website.

THE PATH LESS TAKEN

A gestalt is a chunk of words being processed as one unit of meaning. For example, most children (and adults!) process "you're welcome" as a gestalt. They aren't thinking about putting together the meaning "you" "are" "welcome" — they are only seeing the whole. All children have some gestalts, even if they mostly start speaking word-by-word. However, for some children, gestalts are the default rather than the exception. We can call these children Gestalt Language Processors. (Some people have features of both analytic and gestalt language processing styles. Think of categories like "GLP" as useful tools to give us a starting point, rather than perfectly contained groups.)

GLPs don't necessarily need to be seen by an SLP. It is a natural development of language, even if it is less common, and many GLPs move to word-by-word generation naturally. However, some GLPs, many of them autistic, stay stalled in the earlier stages of language development.

These children can be easy to identify when they are speaking because they speak mostly in 'scripts' or 'delayed echolalia'. This means they repeat phrases they have heard before, often out of context, as their primary way of communicating.

LILY KONYN (she/her) is an AAC researcher and support team member with AssistiveWare. As a part-time AAC user, family member to an AAC user, and AAC professional, Lily offers a unique perspective in the field. In 2021, Lily graduated from CSUN with a degree in Assistive Technology and Human Services. Over the past three years, Lily has focused on researching AAC user perspectives, as well as adding nuance to the conversation about Gestalt Language Processors.

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Nonspeaking GLPs can be more difficult to identify. You may find lists of traits that suggest someone is a GLP when they are nonspeaking. These lists often overlap with behaviors that are typical of most children. By building a true foundation of what it means to process via gestalt, it becomes easier to understand the difference. For example, most children like music, but a GLP

might insist that "The Wheels on the Bus" be played every time they hear a baby crying and be inconsolable if the singer is particularly off-pitch. The good news is that you don't have to be perfect at identifying a nonspeaking Gestalt Language Processor. If you're not sure, it doesn't hurt to try different strategies and see what works, especially since many AAC strategies stay the same for GLPs.

Liza watches game shows at the same time every night. During the day, she shares that she wants to transition to a new activity by singing the closing song of Jeopardy! and imitates the buzzer sound when she has made a mistake. A few times, she has found an old episode of a game show online while her family is talking, only for them to see that the moment Liza has chosen from the episode is related to their story. -

AAC BENEFITS ALL GLPS

We have improved immensely as a field at making sure nonspeaking people have access to robust AAC, although there's a lot of room to grow in this regard. However, we are still in the infancy of understanding the benefits of AAC to speaking people.

AAC can significantly improve auditory processing by providing a visual representation of language. Auditory processing issues make it more difficult to find word boundaries and to hear a word the same way every time, which are vital parts of learning to understand and produce words. By visually demonstrating the building blocks of language, AAC can help GLPs actively see word boundaries, grammar conjugations, and how concepts may be categorized into groups.

Many AAC users have expressed that there are times they are only able to use echolalia via speech, while with AAC they can express significantly more. This suggests that someone's brain might not be "stuck" in a stage of GLP; rather, their vocal system hasn't caught up to their receptive understanding.

My personal experience as an AAC user who mostly speaks is that sometimes echolalia comes out much more smoothly than other words. There are times when the echolalia "stuck in my head" is too loud to let the authentic words come out. There are other times when I can't twist my tongue around any words but ones I've used before. This doesn't mean my overall language processing or language development is delayed. It means I need my AAC.

When Aaron's aide started modeling AAC, it was a relief. He could focus on the letters and pictures, and stop struggling to differentiate her words from the background sounds. His performance in class improved, but Aaron's teachers were more excited by his AAC use. While his AAC sentences sounded less complex than the echolalia he spoke in, they were words of his own. -

THINKING FROM A NEURODIVERSITY LENS

Neurodiversity is the reality that human brains come in a great deal of variety. The neurodiversity paradigm posits that this variety is a normal and beneficial part of human diversity. TIf we accept this variety of brains as beneficial, the extension of this is that brains that diverge from the societal 'norm' (I/DD, mental health conditions, learning disabilities, etc) do not need to be changed. The neurodiversity movement started in 1990 as part of, and a reaction to, the social model of disability.

Many practitioners have begun to embrace the neurodiversity movement, but have not yet fully understood the foundations of the movement. This can end up looking that using identity-first language, acknowledging GLPs, but still writing goals that aim for the GLP to look 'indistinguishable' from a neurotypical speaker.

When setting goals for GLPs, it's essential to think beyond typical language use and focus on meaningful goals. It's about supporting their ability to communicate effectively and authentically, not just conforming to conventional language norms. Many ideas that we have about how a GLP will develop are straight lines from 'echolalic speaker' to 'typical speaker'. Yet many of their current communication strategies might be working for them just fine, or they might be better supported by adding more gestalts even once they are able to use single words. We can set goals based on skills that really are crucial, and support those skills with scripts or single words.

For instance, the first skill to learn might be repairing communication breakdowns. GLPs are frequently misunderstood, because their listeners don't understand what their gestalts truly mean. Early AAC customization may be adding phrases to help them explain themselves: "that's from my favorite TV show", "this situation is reminding me of a quote", or "that's not quite what I meant".

Before changing a way that someone communicates, identify whether it is working for them or not. This means starting by being a detective. What need is the script or gestalt meeting? Is it helping with sensory needs? Social? Once the need is identified, you can ask yourself: Is this scripting meeting that need? If it isn't, that's when it's time to step in.

A script meeting a need might look like someone walking away from interactions that start seeming happy with how the interaction proceeded. It might look like someone successfully getting other people to leave them alone. An unmet need can look like frustration, or like being frequently misunderstood by others.

Ian's scripting was meeting his needs . . . until suddenly it wasn't. Ian loves to talk to people about his favorite dinosaur documentaries. His family knows that when he brings a quote to them, it's likely a conversation starter. Now that he's in school, he gets frustrated that people don't know what to do when he talks to him, and often they

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turn away. He works with his SLP and family to start off with "can I tell you something cool?", so that more people will have dinosaur conversations with him. -

PRIORITIZE SELF-ADVOCACY IN EDITING

Involving AAC users in choosing and editing their vocabulary is crucial. Even early AAC users should have a say in the words and phrases available on their devices. This involvement can be facilitated through direct input from the user or by observing their interests and preferences.

Even very young people or very emergent AAC users should be allowed to make changes to their device. Their first changes may come from their supporters observing what they are satisfied with and when they seem frustrated with the device. For example, if a child consistently shows interest in certain activities or topics, incorporating related phrases and even audio recordings into their AAC system can make it more engaging and relevant.

The next step might be modeling and teaching them to ask for additions. "I need something added to my AAC" is an important phrase to have available, allowing the user to point to books, videos, and things in their environment. This can greatly reduce the addition of useless or counter-productive phrases, as the AAC user determines what is important to them.

Eventually (and earlier than you think!), a user must be allowed to edit their device themself. Don't be afraid to let them make mistakes! Save frequent vocabulary backups, and teach skills such as word prediction and audio recording.

Leanore loves to talk about SpongeBob and have people join in her SpongeBob scripts. She often walks up to people and scripts about SpongeBob, but is disappointed when they don't reply. Leanore is learning to use a symbol-based AAC app on a tablet. Lenore's dad offers a few different phrases to add, and Lenore shows the most enthusiasm when they try out "do you want to talk about SpongeBob with me?" and "this is my favorite part!". -

AVOIDING MISTAKES IN GOAL-SETTING

Valuing scripting and gestalts does not necessarily mean adding lots of phrases to single buttons in their AAC system without the input of the user.

Before applying advice meant for speaking GLPs to AAC users, it's important to understand the principles behind the advice. What works for speaking GLPs might not always be appropriate for those using AAC. My long term goal for a GLP is that they be able to formulate their own novel utterances. I have to be able to see how the path there might vary between speech and AAC.

One example is that, in Stage 1, with a speaking GLP, we are offering them lots of phrases to pick up as gestalts. When I really pause to think about what this does for them, I start to question adding a lot of phrases on buttons. If I am a speaking GLP and pick up a gestalt that is offered to me, my mouth and vocal folds are practicing not only that gestalt, but each word and sound within that gestalt. This makes it simple when I am ready to break up that gestalt - I already have the motor memory of each word in me, all that needs to be developed is my language processing systems.

In contrast, if I am a nonspeaking GLP and someone puts a whole phrase on one button, I have learned none of the skills I need to break that gestalt up later. I haven't learned the locations of each word, and I haven't seen how to conjugate in my system. I haven't practiced navigating folders or using the message window. This makes it unlikely that I'll show when my language development is ready to move to new stages, because I don't have the motor memory or operational competency.

Professionals might better support nonspeaking GLPs by choosing a set of phrases to model word-by-word. It can feel complex to have multiple button presses to say one thing, but that's what speech is as well - a sequence of complex motor movements. When phrases are added, they should be phrases that will continue to serve the user even as they are transitioning to new stages of language development, or phrases that the GLP is already using vocally (because that indicates to us that the GLP themself has decided that that phrase is important).

NOTHING IN A VACUUM

AAC doesn't happen only in the speech room. Families play a critical role in supporting AAC users and ensuring the system is used consistently and effectively. However, it's easy to end up talking past one another when you're trying to teach the family how to support their AAC user. Take a step back if you need to, and engage in some perspective-taking.

Involving families in goal setting and vocabulary creates family ownership over the device. Encourage families to participate in these processes by seeking their input and permission before making changes. Families can offer valuable insights into preferences and routines, making the AAC system more personalized and effective. Often families are already engaging in communication repair for their GLP, by saying things like "he's telling you about his favorite movie" or "that means he's happy". Use those things for communication repair phrases and communication repair practice with the GLP.

For the nervous family, this role of vocabulary editing means new confidence and ownership, which creates more use of the device. For the confident family, you show that you believe they are the expert in their child, and you channel their energy to a very useful place. Sometimes a family who is confident in editing is secretly very uncertain about their ability to implement.

When they see that you value their editing, it can be easier to suggest that editing time may be taking away from modeling time. Talk together about what goals they are trying to achieve with their editing. You may learn that they are really trying to fill a gap in a certain communication function.

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CASE STUDY PRACTICE

Try out being a detective, asking what need is being met, and whether it is being met effectively, with this example client. Think how you might meet the needs that are not met, whether through providing a script, single words, or changing the environment.

- Vida recites whole episodes of her favorite television shows loudly when it is noisy. People who know her well know they should quiet down the room and back off, because this warms of a meltdown.
- Vida smiles and laughs when others join her in reciting favorite TV lines.
- After years of non-GLP customized therapy, Vida uses single words to tell others where she's going or to request specific things.
- Vida has not been offered an AAC device, but really likes computer and iPad games

Positive attitudes towards neurodiversity have been growing in the past few years. It's wonderful to see more people acknowledge the value in having a diversity of minds in our world. The process of learning to be neurodiversity-affirming in your work means questioning your assumptions about what your goals should be. With any client, take a step back and work with them to picture their ideal future for themself. The goals will follow.

Language throughout this article follows the preferences expressed by AAC community members in research conducted by myself and my research partner Alyssa Hillary Zisk at AssistiveWare. You can read more about this research here: (https://www.assistiveware.com/blog/how-to-talk-about-aac). ■

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42ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 22-25, 2024

Pre Conference Workshops: Monday and Tuesday, October 21-22, 2024

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Bloomington

Reservations can be made by contacting the hotel directly, or booking online using the links provided below. Refer to the “Closing The Gap Conference” when making reservation to receive conference room discounts when and where applicable.

Accessibility – The hotel offers a limited number of handicapped accessible rooms. If you require an accessible room, state your needs when making your reservation and reserve early to better insure a room that will best accommodate your needs. Learn more.

PLAN NOW TO JOIN US IN 2024!

Join us for the 42nd Annual Closing The Gap Conference and return home with knowledge and tools to implement all that is gained!
Through shared best practices and research, networking, training, hands-on opportunities and an expansive exhibit hall, conference participants will find information, strategies and products that prove beneficial and, oftentimes, unsurpassed for use in their work and in their lives.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Anyone interested in finding practical and readily available AT solutions for ALL disabilities, mild to significant, infant through adult.

- ✓ **SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS**
- ✓ **OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS**
- ✓ **AT CONSULTANTS**
- ✓ **TECHNOLOGY SPECIALISTS**
- ✓ **AUTISM SPECIALISTS**
- ✓ **SPECIAL EDUCATORS**
- ✓ **UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTORS**
- ✓ **ADMINISTRATORS**
- ✓ **PHYSICAL THERAPISTS**
- ✓ **USERS OF AT**
- ✓ **VISION SPECIALISTS**
- ✓ **PARENTS**

This year’s conference will build on a tradition of providing a comprehensive examination of the most current uses of technology by persons with disabilities and the professionals who work with them.

Topics will cover a broad spectrum of technology as it is being applied to all disabilities and age groups in education, rehabilitation, vocation, and independent living.

Come and learn, first-hand, about the best AT products, practices and strategies used by teachers, therapists, clinicians, parents and end users alike.

REGISTER NOW!

he Gap 2024

RENCE

NNEAPOLIS, MN

Pre Conference Workshops: Oct. 21-22

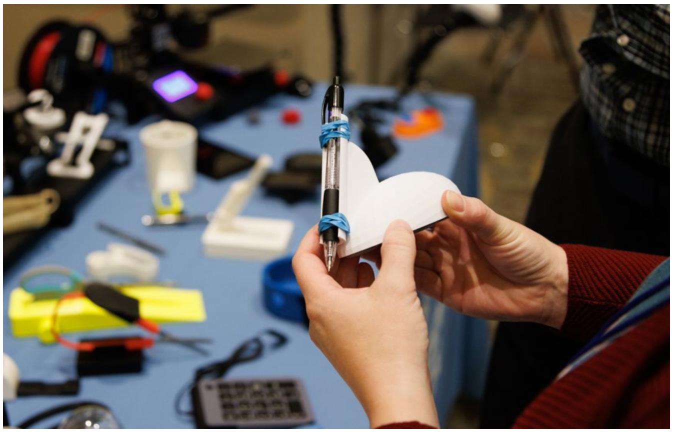
Pre Conference Workshops
Monday and Tuesday, October 21-22 2024

IN-DEPTH LEARNING Pre conference workshops focus on assistive technology implementation and best practices. Each workshop is conducted by a nationally recognized leader in the field, providing in-depth professional skills necessary to successfully implement assistive technology in the lives of persons with disabilities. Workshops range from introductory to advanced and cover many different topics.

VIEW WORKSHOPS

AT Maker Event
Call for Participation

For those interested in becoming more involved in the AT maker event, this is an opportunity to showcase exciting new creations, tools, and materials for making A.T. and to learn from the AT maker community.



LEARN MORE

Don't Let Terrain Stop Your Wheelchair

Working with Brad for over 12 years has opened up my eyes to how inaccessible various places can be. One specific area we constantly struggle with is terrain. Since I push Brad in his wheelchair everywhere we go, I've noticed that his wheelchair doesn't fare well on certain types of terrain. Sometimes even pushing him on the sidewalk can be a challenge, due to giant cracks or holes, items blocking the way, the lip to enter/exit the sidewalk isn't flush with the street, etc. Sometimes on our walks we see places that we'd like to check out, but unfortunately can't because the wheelchair won't be able to physically make it there.

Right next to our office is a beautiful forest with walking trails made out of wood chips. I go in on nature walks all the time by myself and always think how awesome it would be to bring Brad with me. Unfortunately, due to the type of terrain his wheelchair wouldn't be able to handle it. So again, Brad misses out!

I also remember a time when on one of our walks we saw a beautiful lookout point near the water. We wanted to go and watch the waves roll in, but unfortunately couldn't because the terrain was grass and it was uneven. So instead we kept on strolling down the sidewalk.

During the winter when the sidewalks are covered with snow and ice his wheelchair doesn't stand a chance! This causes us to stay indoors more during the colder months. During the summer when beaches open up, Brad would love to join me, but unfortunately cannot due to his wheelchair not being able to handle the sand.

BRADLEY HEAVEN AND DANIEL O'CONNOR Bradley was born with nonverbal spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, but he never lets it hold him back from living life to the fullest. What started out as a job for Daniel at the age of 19, working as Brad's full time aide while he attended high school, has turned into a journey neither of them would have ever expected. Over the years they've built a very unique and everlasting friendship. A decade later, they're still attached at the hips! They're now using their unique journey and experiences with adaptive products and assistive technologies to help others with disabilities through their non-profit, All Access Life.

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A few years ago we decided to go to work and find products that would allow us to conquer any type of terrain. In this article we will discuss our top 2!

JOSI ADAPTIVE JOGGING STROLLER

This adaptive product makes it possible to go on any type of terrain with ease! JOSI Stroller is an all customized jogging stroller and bicycle trailer!

When we got our hands on the JOSI stroller all the mentioned above became a thing of the past!! JOSI can handle pretty much any type of terrain. To this day, we still haven't been held back by any!

FOLDABILITY

The first day we got it, we were amazed how compact it was. We took it out of the box and it was in a cube-like shape. This is one of our favorite features of JOSI. Since it has the ability to fold up into a cube-like shape, it makes it extremely easy to store at home or bring with you on the go! Brad always stores JOSI in the trunk of his adaptive van. This way he has access to it whenever he wants. When he needs to store it in his home, his family puts it underneath a desk so it takes up little to no space.

It also folds extremely easily! I wanted to see how fast I could fold it so I set a timer and went to work. It only took me a total of **48 seconds** to fold it into its cube-like shape.

After assembling all the pieces together for the first time, I picked Brad up out of his wheelchair and put him in the JOSI for the first time. I then fastened him securely in the harness system and off we went on our first walk in JOSI. I could tell immediately this product was a winner! Brad was in a more relaxed position with his legs almost straight and had a huge smile on his face. It looked as if he was just chilling out on a couch!

We went straight to the entrance of the forest near our office and instead this time we went in! Brad was overwhelmed with excitement! He was taking in all the new scenery around him and loving every second of it. His head was darting from side to side the entire time. Even when we encountered hills or uneven terrain, the JOSI handled with ease. It also has shocks on it so Brad is able to enjoy a smooth ride.

COVERS

Sometimes on our walks we encounter rain or even swarms of pesky mosquitoes. However, JOSI has a solution for both those issues as well. We have a rain cover for the rainy days that easily clips into the outer edge of JOSI allowing Brad to stay completely dry and enjoy the meditative sound the rain makes as it hits the cover. We also have a bug cover for the more buggy walks. This cover keeps all the bugs out so Brad can enjoy the walk without having to fight off mosquitoes and flies the entire time.

RUNNING

Walking is just one of the ways we use JOSI, we also use it to run in! I'm able to push Brad as I run with relative ease. Since I love to run and Brad loves being outside surrounded by nature we began training a lot together. So much so that we decided that we wanted to run a marathon together! We began training a lot together and constantly pushing the distance further and further. I remember our first half marathon in the JOSI was an adventure! We ran along the canal and saw beautiful scenery the entire time. We also stopped to take many pictures and take it all in.

After months of training, on October 17th, 2021, we completed our first marathon together! To-date we've completed 2 marathons in JOSI and plan on doing many more!

A lot of people think it must be difficult pushing Brad in the JOSI as I run, but to be honest, it's not too strenuous. JOSI just glides across the concrete, so it doesn't feel like you're really "pushing" it's almost as if it's an extension of you! I also enjoy it because when I'm by myself and not pushing Brad I notice how much my running has improved by adding this into my regiment.

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BIKE TRAILER

Another AMAZING feature of the JOSI is it also doubles as a bike stroller. Since I have an electric bike, I'm able to attach the JOSI to it and take Brad on bike adventures without even having to peddle (since it's electric).

All I have to do is:

1. Take off the front wheel on JOSI
2. Attach the bicycle attachment
3. Connect the JOSI attachment to the connector on my bike
4. Attach safety clips

These steps take about a minute to complete then we're off! Bike adventures are always fun because we can go much faster than walking or running. Of course, we always wear safety helmets! Brad absolutely loves these biking adventures! He loves how fast we're able to go and how the wind hits his hair. He finds it very refreshing.

Our further trip to-date is 70km and we plan on going much further this coming summer.

JOSI is available in three different sizes (S, M, +L). Many seating and positioning options and accessories with customized colors.

Website: https://www.josistrollerusa.com/

WHEELBLADES

Trying to maneuver a wheelchair in snow and ice is extremely difficult. We've learnt the hard way by breaking multiple wheels and sometimes even getting stuck in the snow! When we found

JOSI Review: Adaptive Jogging Stroller and Bicycle Trailer - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hK6GAyTiPs

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out about Wheelblades we were extremely excited! They are skis that attach to the front wheels on a wheelchair and make it possible to glide through snow and ice with ease! We've even tested them out on a skating rink and they were a success!

Oftentimes, during the winter while Brad attended College downtown we were forced to stay indoors the entire day! We were luckily able to go to the shopping mall beside the College since there was an underground entrance, but not everywhere has that possibility. A few times, we decided to brave the cold weather and ventured outside. We never knew what to expect the sidewalks to look like. The snow removal crews are very hit or miss in some areas and sometimes it doesn't even matter how well they removed the snow since the ice forms random uneven patterns that make it nearly impossible to push the wheelchair over.

The first day we got the Wheelblades, we clipped them in, put on our jackets and decided to head over to Starbucks two blocks over. It was snowing outside, which would normally be a deterrent. We opened the main door to the school and were immediately met with a few inches of snow. However, this time there wasn't any struggle. This time we were gliding across it! We were both smiling from ear to ear and laughing the entire time as I pushed Brad at rapid speeds to the Starbucks. In the end it was a success and we decided to make a full product review video on Wheelblades showcasing how game changing this product is.

One thing we love about them is how easy they are to put on! We can clip them on or take them off in a matter of seconds. They are also very portable since they are lightweight and relatively small. We usually bring a bag with us to transport them. When we come in from outside, we usually brush off all the snow/ice build up on the skis then store them back in the bag.

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Wheelblade Review: Adapted Skis for Wheelchairs and Strollers! - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQpTpNWdw-E

Another discovery we made was they aren't only useful for wheelchairs, but strollers too! Many parents who push their children in strollers during the winter experience similar issues as wheelchair users. Now, they too can glide across the snow with ease!

Wheelblades have allowed us to get outdoors more often during the winter months and we are extremely grateful for this! No longer does snowfall or icy sidewalks hold us back! We can now confidently head outside and enjoy what winter has to offer.

FEATURES:

- Attaches/Detaches in seconds with very little effort
- The convenient size and lightweight means you can take the Wheelblades XL anywhere
- The skis are impact-resistant and break-proof thanks to high-quality, robust materials
- The adjustable clamp fastening means the Wheelblades XL can be set to any position
- The Wheelblades XL makes it easy to push strollers, rehab buggies and walkers through the snow
- High-quality design

Amazon link: https://www.amazon.com/Wheel-Blades-Standard/dp/B08NTQG9PF ■

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Revolutionizing LTSS:

Enhancing Care with Remote Support

Summary:

The Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) sector faces significant challenges in delivering quality care due to the high overhead costs and staff burnout associated with institutional, in-person care models. These operational pressures have exacerbated workforce shortages, severely limiting the sector's capacity to meet increasing demand.

The use of remote support, particularly remote direct support professionals (rDSPs), presents a promising solution to these challenges. While still in its early stages, (rDSP) services show potential in enhancing the independence of care recipients, alleviating DSP staffing shortages, and expanding care capacity.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is a powerful tool that significantly broadens the channels through which we communicate, facilitating social connections that transcend geographical and cultural barriers (Ruben, Stosic, Correale, & Blanch-Hartigan, 2021). This potential extends to enhancing inclusion, independence, self-determination, and engagement for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) (Friedman, 2023a). Moreover, technology has gained significant popularity among older adults, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it helps to support overall well-being and maintain community connections (Sixsmith, Horst, Simeonov, & Mihailidis, 2022). This surge in technology adoption among seniors was part of a broader trend accelerated by the pandemic, which also saw rapid advancements in telehealth, assistive technology, remote support services, and home and community-based services (HBCS) (Friedman, 2022).

JASON RAY, CEO at SimplyHome; Certified Aging in Place Specialist. Since beginning with SimplyHome in 2008, Jason has been a national speaker on enabling technology, remote support, and technology first transformation to associations, state and national agencies, and provider organizations. Jason was named in 2012 as a recipient of the Stephen E Sallee Excellence in Technology Award, and accepted the 2012 Edison Award for Best New Product for SimplyHome. Jason's work with SimplyHome has been featured on multiple episodes of ABC's Extreme Makeover Home Edition along with many other national publications. From 2017-2019 Jason served as the Subject Matter Expert on Enabling Technology and Remote Support for Tennessee Department on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (TN DIDD) Technology First Initiative. From 2021-2024 Jason served in the same capacity for New Mexico's Developmental Disability Supports Division's Technology First Initiative. Jason also contributed to the founding of SHIFT in 2021, the Nation's leading education and training platform on Technology First principles. Finally, in 2022, Jason helped to launch the Technology First Alliance, a non-profit organization focused on advancing technology first principles in long-term services and support.

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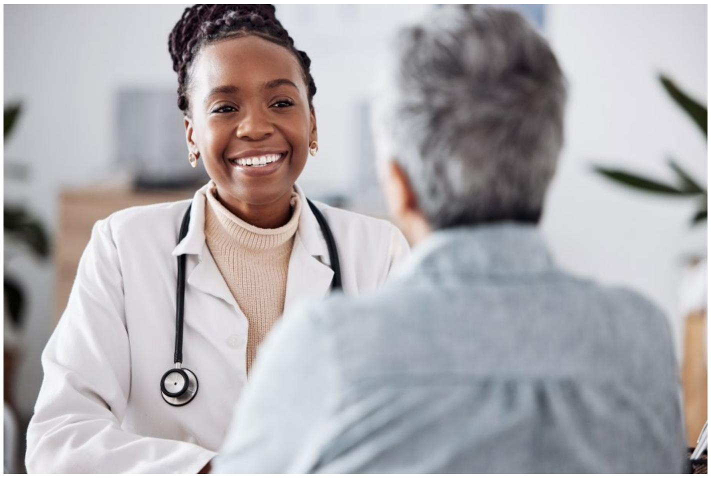
This white paper explores the social and economic benefits of remote support solutions as a promising strategy to tackle challenges in LTSS. It highlights the emergence of rDSPs as an innovative service. By integrating rDSPs into existing care teams and combining human support with advanced technology, this approach aims to alleviate financial constraints, mitigate workforce shortages, and effectively provide more independence and care to a wider population.



CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING SUPPORT

A WORKFORCE IN CRISIS:

Direct care workers, comprising home health aides, personal care aides, nursing assistants, and psychiatric aides, constitute the backbone of LTSS. Despite their critical role, a significant cant majority of these workers across 34 states earn wages below $20 per hour (Mohamed, Burns, & O'Malley Watts, 2023) due in large part to insufficient reimbursement rates in the Medicaid program (Ancor, 2023). The demand for these roles is projected to surge by 41% by 2036, outpacing the anticipated 22% growth in employment of home health and personal care aides over the next decade (National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, 2023). Alarmingly high turnover rates among direct care staff, ranging from 38% to 50% (PHI, 2023), underscore the urgency of this challenge.

Below are the key findings from Ancor's the State of America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis 2023 survey:

95%	77%	72%	75%	54%
of participants reported facing moderate to severe staffing shortages in the past year	indicated they had to turn away new referrals over the past year due to staffing shortages	found it challenging to maintain established quality standards due to staffing issues	struggled to connect people with services because of a lack of available providers	stated that they operate in areas with few or no similar service providers

Key findings from Ancor

WAITLIST TIMES FOR HOMES AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES:

Medicaid Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS)1915(c) waivers represent the primary funding for LTSS for individuals with I/DD in the United States (Friedman, 2023b).

Despite a notable increase in HCBS waivers incorporating remote support services—from 7% in fiscal year 2013 to 18% in fiscal year 2021—the utilization remains low, with only 0.35% of individuals with I/DD receiving these services (Friedman, 2023b). According to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 692,000 individuals were on waiting lists for HCBS across 38 states at the time of the survey (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2023).

Addressing these critical gaps, the Biden administration has proposed a $150 billion increase in Medicaid HCBS spending over the next decade (Park, Gardner, Kaneb, Schneider, Mondestin, & Guest, 2024). Simultaneously, the Center for Health Care Strategies and its partners, through initiatives like the Medicaid Innovation Collaborative, are aiding states in exploring and promoting the adoption of technology-enabled solutions in both Medicaid and managed care (Brykman & Joseph, 2024). These efforts acknowledge the immediate need to change existing care models through innovative, technology-based approaches.

THE SOLUTION: REMOTE SUPPORTS

WHAT ARE REMOTE SUPPORTS?

Remote supports are designed to empower individuals by customizing services and reducing dependence on in-person staff. These tech-driven solutions help maintain routine adherence, alerting nearby staff or remote call centers as needed.

Remote supports are often incorrectly percieved as strict video-monitoring and surveillance tools, rather than empowering, person-centered communication methods. Instead of being confined to a singular product or technology, remote supports typically integrate with various technologies like smartphones, environmental controls, medication dispensers, sensors, and communication devices. These supports frequently include app

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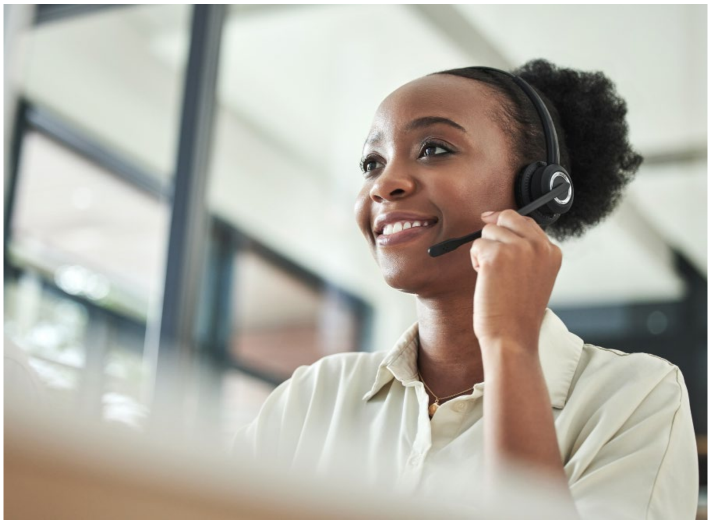
and phone functionalities for tasks such as managing medication adherence, ensuring cooking safety, and preventing wandering or falls. They offer customizable alerts and prompts tailored to individual preferences, ensuring timely and effective assistance.

OPERATIONAL BENEFITS FOR LTSS PROVIDERS

Remote supports are significantly more cost-effective than in-person and on-site staff (Wager, Tasse, Davies, & Stock, 2018), making it feasible to efficiently serve a larger population without increasing personnel or overtime hours for staff.



REMOTE SUPPORTS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE COST-EFFECTIVE THAN IN-PERSON AND ON-SITE STAFF.

SAVINGS EXCEEDING $50,000 PER PERSON THROUGH SIMPLYHOME'S REMOTE TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION.

In South Carolina, over 9,000 individuals with I/DD faced a waiting list for residential support due to insufficient funding. In response, The Carles Lea Center (CLC) took proactive steps by partnering with SimplyHome, a leader in enabling technology and remote support consulting services. By integrating SimplyHome's technology, CLC reduced the cost of providing client support to approximately $100 per day per individual, compared to $200 per day without technology (SimplyHome, 2016b).

This initiative resulted in annual savings exceeding $50,000 per person through SimplyHome's remote technology implementation. These positive outcomes significantly improved accessibility to care, ensuring individuals received timely and effective support.

AFFORDABLE AUTONOMY FOR INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING REMOTE SUPPORT

The Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) sector faces significant challenges in delivering quality care due to the high overhead costs and staff burnout associated with institutional, in-person care models. These operational pressures have exacerbated workforce shortages, severely limiting the sector's capacity to meet increasing demand.

The use of remote support, particularly remote direct support professionals (rDSPs), presents a promising solution to these challenges. While still in its early stages, rDSP services show potential in enhancing the independence of care recipients, alleviating DSP staffing shortages, and expanding care capacity.

REMOTE SUPPORT HOLDS SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONIZE THE CURRENT CARE MODEL AND ENHANCE ACCESSIBILITY TO CARE FOR ALL.

In one SimplyHome case study, an individual receiving remote support realized annual savings of $78,629 by incorporating technology into their independent living arrangement rather than opting for assisted living (SimplyHome, 2016b).

Innovative Resources for Independence (IRI), a New York-based provider, saw close to 20% of residents transition to independent living after using SimplyHome's services. (SimplyHome, 2016c).

With benefits for both providers and recipients, remote support holds significant potential to revolutionize the current care model and enhance accessibility to care for all. However, the field of remote support continues to evolve with ongoing innovations, among the most notable being remote DSPs.

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rDSPs ensure comprehensive and customized care that addresses the unique needs of each recipient.

HOW REMOTE SUPPORT WORKS: FURTHERING INDEPENDENCE

WHAT IS A REMOTE DSP?

Remote Direct Support Professionals (rDSPs) integrate personalized human interaction from off-site locations with advanced, smart technology solutions. Utilizing real-time communication and information from smart technology devices, rDSPs provide 24/7 support, personalized care plans, emergency responses, and emotional support, empowering users to lead an independent life while feeling secure. Through close collaboration with individuals, families, and on-site staff, rDSPs ensure comprehensive and customized care that addresses the unique needs of each recipient.

WHAT MAKES REMOTE DSPS SO PROMISING?

1. **BENEFITS FOR INDIVIDUALS**

   Providers can expand their services by utilizing rDSP support, ensuring that more individuals receive timely assistance regardless of location, thereby minimizing disparities in service access. For individuals receiving care, rDSPs are accessible 24/7, empowering them to utilize services according to their needs. This constant availability promotes independent living with enhanced security, ensuring that support is always within reach.

2. **BENEFITS FOR DSPS**

   Due to long hours and extensive on-site duties, DSPs often experience extreme stress and burnout, leading to turnover and vacant positions (Keesler & Troxel, 2020). Remote DSP positions help mitigate burnout by reducing the need for 24/7 on-site staff and offering the flexibility to share workload responsibilities remotely. This remote work setup promotes a better work-life balance for DSPs, potentially lowering stress, improving overall mental well-being, and enhancing staff retention.

3. **BENEFITS FOR PROVIDERS**

   Remote DSPs allow providers more flexibility in their staing approaches. Proprietary technologies like SimplyHome's sensor-based technology enable providers to seamlessly integrate their existing care teams with rDSP technologies and collaborate with external personnel, thereby boosting operational eiciency and accelerating and expanding the delivery of care services. Furthermore, rDSPs can be more cost-effective than traditional on-site staffing models, allowing organizations to optimize budgets and potentially reallocate resources to further expand their capacity.

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CHALLENGES AND LOOKING FORWARD

Every innovation-seeking widespread use and acceptance faces adoption challenges, and rDSPs are no exception. Some of these challenges include limited internet accessibility and adequate training. Many individuals with disabilities encounter barriers to accessing high-speed Internet and up-to-date technology and are significantly less likely to use the Internet daily compared to the general population (Bureau of Internet Accessibility, 2022).

Integrating rDSPs into LTSS provider workflows also presents a significant challenge, as highlighted by a survey indicating that only 28% of organizations feel adequately prepared to introduce and support technology for individuals with I/DD (Tanis & ANCOR, 2021).

SimplyHome's rDSP solution has the potential to address this challenge by enabling organizations to integrate their existing care teams and infrastructure into advanced technology support systems.

Despite initial challenges, rDSPs hold promise in transforming the way LTSS providers deliver care. With continued research and investment, this solution has the potential to empower more individuals to live autonomously and securely, while also reducing costs for individuals and providers alike. ■

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