Building an Effective Mentorship Program for Adolescents and Young Adults who use Augmentative & Alternative Communication in Alberta, Canada
Kim Adams, Averill Tate, J. River Wilson, Bruce Helmbold, Jenelle MacDonald, Chandra Round, Sheree Wyness

Background

Mentoring pairs two individuals who share similar characteristics but differ in maturity and life experience.[1] Experienced persons using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) can become effective mentors for protégés using AAC.[3]

Yet, many Albertans using AAC rarely see or meet others who “talk” like them. Available online training courses lack individualized supports and evaluative feedback to ensure participants acquire targeted mentorship skills.[2]

Methods

Recruited qualified individuals to complete the AAC Mentor Training Course.
Invited skilled mentors to become instructors of the AAC Mentor Training Course to build sustainability.
Developed a secure and reliable website platform for conducting the Mentor Training Course and connecting mentors with protégés and/or other mentors.
Developed pre-post training role-play situations with input from Albertans who use AAC.
Provided training to mentors to apply LAF and DO IT! strategies (Figure 1) [2] with individualized feedback (Figure 2).
Gathered information on provincial and local disability-related resources and services to support instruction of the ASK strategy (Figure 1).

LAF
Develop positive interpersonal relationships
L = Listen and communicate respect.
A = Ask open-ended questions.
F = Focus on what your partner is saying.

DO IT!
Support others in solving problems and setting goals
D = Describe the problem.
O = Outline different ways to solve the problem.
I = Identify the consequences of each plan & choose the best one.
T = Take action towards solving the problem.
I = Celebrate success!

ASK
Access disability related resources
A = Answer the question yourself.
S = Send them somewhere.
K = Know how to use the Internet.

Figure 1. AAC Mentor Training Course strategies: LAF, DO IT!, and ASK [2].

Results

Comparison of one participant's pre- and during training data showed improvements in using the LAF strategy (Figure 3).

Challenges were identified in implementation:
• Coding mentor responses: Detail was added to scoring criterion to ensure objectivity and reliability.
• Recruitment: Albertans who use AAC expressed great interest in the course. However, many declined to participate due to perceived time commitment.
• Web-based platform accessibility: Trade-offs in accessibility were realized in creating a secure and reliable platform.

Figure 3. Pre- and during training scores on LAF strategy usage.

Conclusion

Data collection is ongoing. After addressing the identified challenges it is expected trained mentors will be better prepared to assist youth and young adults who use AAC to:
• achieve transitional goals,
• develop relationships,
• maintain services, and
• participate in meaningful activities.

If such mentorship training meets the needs of Albertans who use AAC, it will continue to be provided as an ongoing, self-sustaining, service.

References


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