

Leaders in the disability community worldwide have taught us much about communication, power, and politics. From South Africa, we have heard the cry “Nothing About Me without Me.” From the United States we have heard, “Get into politics as if your life depends upon it, because it does!” From Australia we have heard, “Just because I can’t speak, doesn’t mean I have nothing to say.” From AAC users all over the world, we have heard that “Communication is power!” and “Silence is Never Golden!” However, while these slogans and cries are right on target, they have yet to be fully realized neither among the AAC community nor within ISAAC.

Access to an AAC device or system does not automatically result in becoming a powerful communicator. Nor does becoming an effective communicator automatically result in the development of leadership skills or the opportunity to become a leader. A graduate of ACES (Augmentative Communication and Employment Supports) once stated, “Just because I can use my AAC device well doesn’t mean that I can communicate effectively”. Rick Creech, an early user of AAC and a writer from the United States remind us that “if people always talk at you and to you, but never with you how can one learn to communicate”.

Through survey and feedback during the past several years, ISAAC has recognized the need for leadership development of people who use AAC. ISAAC has also identified that as an organization, it has a role in this development and a goal to have a person who uses AAC as the ISAAC president in the near future. ISAAC is interested in identifying the skills, opportunities, and supports needed by people who use AAC to become leaders; to compiling the many resources around the world that already exist to aid in developing leadership skills; and, to recognizing those who have developed these skills.

In response to this challenge, as part of ISAAC’s operational plans for 2007-2008, three action groups were formed – one of them being LEAD-AAC (Leadership Project by and for Persons Using AAC). The two objectives of Project LEAD are;

Objective 1: “Persons who use AAC, their families and carers will participate actively in ISAAC, thus strengthening ISAAC’s ability to advocate for full participation in society.”

Objective 2: “Develop and implement a Leadership Training Programme for persons who use AAC to enhance their skills in promoting their rights as full members of society.”

By 2008, outcomes of Project LEAD would include the following:

1. increased skills and participation by persons using AAC in leadership positions;
2. identification of leadership training programmes for specific skills needed; and,
3. participation in international disability conventions.

The purpose of this presentation is to learn more about Project Lead with a discussion of why leadership development is important to individuals who use AAC and why this leadership development is important to the future of ISAAC. In addition, evidence-based and promising approaches to leadership development throughout the world will be described. Finally and most importantly, emerging leaders within ISAAC who use AAC

will address a few important questions regarding leadership and people who use AAC. Questions include:

- Are people “born” to be leaders; or are leaders “made”?
- Is the development of leadership skills important for people who use AAC?
- What and how are leadership skills developed by people Who use AAC in the early years? In school? As adults?
- How can ISAAC’s Project Lead and ISAAC’s membership support the development of leadership skills among people who use AAC?
- Why is it important for the future of ISAAC to have individuals who use AAC who are effective leaders?

References

2006, ISAAC Board of Directors Meeting. Report from Leadership Project Committee. Dusseldorf, Germany.

2006, ISAAC Membership Meeting. Report to the membership. Dusseldorf, Germany.

2007, ISAAC Executive Committee. Report from the Leadership Project. Toronto, Canada.