

- 1) Welcome to this presentation of the AAC RERC webcast series
- 2) My name is David McNaughton, and along with Anthony Arnold, we will be presenting on Successful Employment for Individuals who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or AAC.
- 3) Employment is a key issue in the lives of many individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Our job is part of how we define ourselves; for many adults, including individuals with disabilities, what we do is who we are (Rifkin, 1995).
- 4) Michael Williams is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. He has worked in a variety of jobs throughout his life - as a writer and editor, as a technology consultant, and as a news radio journalist. He is also an individual who uses augmentative and alternative communication. Michael describes the importance of employment in this way : "Having a job may mean you can determine where you live, what you eat, how you spend your leisure time, how you feel about yourself, and how your neighbors and community see you as a person. In short, having a job means more control over what you do with your life."
Despite the importance of employment, we know that obtaining and maintaining employment poses many challenges for individuals who use AAC. Only a small percentage of individuals who use AAC are employed despite their efforts to obtain and maintain work. For example, a nationwide survey by Light, Stoltz, and McNaughton identified 25 individuals who used AAC and who worked more than 10 hours per week in community-based employment settings. Negative societal attitudes, inadequate educational preparation, and the lack of appropriate community supports prevent many individuals who use AAC from participating in the workplace.
- 5) Clearly it is a challenging situation, but there is much we can learn from those who use AAC and who are employed. As part of the work of the AAC-RERC we have worked with individuals who use AAC, and who are employed, in order to better understand their successful employment experiences.
We have conducted a series of studies over the past 10 years - a full list of references is provided in the final slides of this presentation. We also have used this information as the basis for a recent book in the Brookes AAC series, Transition Strategies for Adolescents and Young Adults Who Use AAC.
- 6) So, what can we learn from these success stories? In this presentation, we will share what we have learned from speaking with individuals who use AAC. We will talk about the types of jobs held by individuals who use AAC, and we will share with you what they've told us about the benefits, and the challenges, to employment. We will discuss what they describe as the key components to successful employment, and will provide some information on what we think this all means for educational programs that provide services for individuals who use AAC.
- 7) So the first question is, what jobs are held by people who use AAC? We have seen a very wide range of successful employment experiences. We have seen individuals who use AAC work as teachers, as consultants, as clerical staff, as laborers, as lawyers, as analysts, as counselors, and as artists. We have seen

individuals with cerebral palsy, autism, developmental disabilities and other challenges work in a wide variety of employment settings.

- 8) We have already spoken a little bit about why employment is important, but it's worthwhile to look a little more deeply at the impact of successful employment experiences because it can help us to understand why some employment situations are successful while others are more challenging.
- 9) One of the most important benefits of employment is the financial support it provides. Many individuals with severe disabilities receive some income from the government, however typically this is a minimal amount of money, and comes with restrictions on how the money can be spent. As individuals who use AAC have become more active participants in society, we've seen new expectations for participation and independence, and also a greater awareness of the financial demands of living in the community, of being involved in a long-term relationship, and of getting married and raising a family.
- 10) For all of us, employment is more than just a paycheck. It's an opportunity to interact socially, and to be involved.
- 11) Let's take a closer look at the role of social interactions in the workplace, and consider how strong social interaction skills contribute to employment success. Haylie is a young woman who takes orders and delivers lunches once a week to clients who work in local businesses. You will see a video clip in just a moment. I should probably mention here that this lunch delivery business is just one of three different activities that Haylie participates in each week.
Hayley and her team have worked hard to make this employment situation a success. Hayley has learned how to use the Prentke-Romich Corporation Vantage Plus, and she also reads about 200 words. These skills, and her enjoyment of people, help to make this job a success. Let's watch the clip of Hayley collecting lunch orders.
- 12) (video)
- 13) As you can see there are important supports to Haylie's employment success. Her mother and vocational rehabilitation staff act as support personnel and assist Haylie in transportation, money management, collection of orders and delivery, and also in recruiting new clients. The business started while Haylie was in high school, and has now been in operation for over five years.
- 14) It is interesting to read about how others see Haylie's participation in the workplace. This is what her mother had to say: Haylie thrives on interaction with people. She likes what she does has a sense of purpose [helping others]. She also likes to be "on the go". She would be miserable idling her time away at home, or "killing time" in a segregated setting.
- 15) A third benefit of employment is the enhanced self-esteem for the individual that comes from the sense of having made a contribution to society.
- 16) The self-esteem associated with employment was perhaps best summarized by one of the individuals who participated in one of our employment studies. When asked to speak about the importance of employment, he described the

- following incident after receiving his first paycheck. I cried at the checkout counter because this is the freedom a paycheck will give me... picking out my own stuff will add value because nothing will feel like a handout, I won't have to wonder what medical assistance will and won't get for me.
- 17) As we talk about barriers, it is important to talk about how to overcome them as well. A closer look at some of our success stories shows that many of these individuals had to overcome three major barriers: attitudinal barriers, inadequate educational preparation, and a lack of appropriate community supports, including poor transportation and poor supports for activities of daily living. I'd like to introduce Anthony now, because I think his story helps to illustrate how through hard work and perseverance, many of these barriers can be overcome over time.
 - 18) I'm Anthony Arnold, an augmentative and alternative communicator from Grand Forks, North Dakota.
 - 19) I'm remote troubleshooter for the Prentke Romich company, and I also do a lot of the beta testing on their newer communication device such as the new ECO-2. Working for companies such as the Prentke Romich company is a great goal to have in mind, but it did take years of preparation to get to this point. I'd like to believe my transition to adulthood, independent living, and employment started to happen on the day my parents learned of my diagnosis of cerebral palsy, because the longer you put off the educational and rehabilitation, the less likely it is that you will achieve the goals you want.
 - 20) After my parents learned about my cerebral palsy, they started taking me to therapies and a preschool program. One of the first developments was the creation of a communication board with six symbols. Communication is a very important element for employment and independent living, so you want to start laying the groundwork as early as possible, or again you will witness fewer results and the result will not be the one that you want.
 - 21) In elementary school, I was fortunate to have a resource room teacher who was determined to teach me how to read come hell or high water. I must say that reading is a necessary skill to attain if you're hoping to obtain employment some day - I can't name a job where they don't require basic reading skills. During elementary school they also taught me how to spell and write, which is a skill I have to use everyday at the Prentke Romich company.
 - 22) I was fortunate to have had a communication device in second grade, and I must say it really allowed my teachers and my parents to not only educate me, but to prepare me for independent living and employment someday. When I first received my Touch Talker, I remember that was the happiest day of my childhood. I finally had a way of communicating without having somebody always there reading my board.
 - 23) After graduating from high school, I tried college at the University of North Dakota because I thought that was the traditional thing to do beyond high school. But I quickly found out that it wasn't for me, so I left after my second semester and started looking for employment.

- 24) I took a part-time job at the library of the University of North Dakota. They had me cataloging books on their online system. The position only lasted for nine months because of a cut in funding.
- 25) Right after I left the library, I learned that the Prentke Romich Company was basically on the ground floor of employing augmentative and alternative communicators to be remote troubleshooters in the technical service department. I had always been interested in working for an assistive technology company someday.
- 26) After seeing how much independence my touch talker gave me for things like school, socializing, going shopping, ordering food at a restaurant and talking on the phone, I decided that there must be others like myself that might need this gift more than I do. So I made working for the Prentke Romich company or somewhere else where I could give people these same opportunities, part of my career goal.
- 27) I had to go through some hard-core training both through PRC distance learning on the Internet and some in-house training right at the Prentke Romich company's headquarters in Wooster, Ohio. Since I started remote troubleshooting I feel that I've gotten some great feedback from customers that we have helped. Here is a sample call.
- 28) F: Hello?
A: Hello. This is Anthony Arnold with Prentke-Romich Company. Please understand I am using a communication device to communicate with you. How may I help you?
F: Well, my son got told by, I don't know, it must have been his speech therapist that...somehow or another...he could sing with his device? But, I don't know how to do it. Do you have to do something special to get it to sing. What do I do?
A: Ok. Do you have the 128 program?
F: How do I know I've got a 128?
A: How many (keys)?
F: It has got a VG, and it has got a lot of small keys.
A: OK, just a minute.
- 29) Since I have started remote trouble shooting, I feel like I have gotten some great feedback from customers that I have helped.
I am most excited about working with parents of young children who are just beginning to use a communication device and other assistive technology. I feel and know that when they hang up after being helped that they have a better outlook on their child's future, and probably begin working much harder to get more accomplished than they did before. To me that's really the reward of the job I do.
- 30) So, clearly challenges exist, however we know enough about successes that we can start to identify key components for employment. In addition to overcoming the barriers mentioned earlier, we need to develop employee knowledge and skills that are valued in the work place, identify and develop jobs that are a good match for the skills and interests of the AAC user, and ensure that needed supports are available to maintain employment success.

- 31) Individuals who use AAC are employed in a wide variety of full- and part-time jobs, including working as clerical staff, laborers, public educators and teachers, technology consultants, policy analysts, counselors, writers, and artists. So a variety of skills and abilities can result in successful employment.
- 32) The greater a person's physical and cognitive challenges, the greater the need for employment support teams to think creatively about how to identify a variety of employment opportunities, how to work with employers to modify job activities, and how to ensure the ongoing provision of supports. However, some skills and knowledge are common to all employment situations and can help smooth the transition to the workplace. These include communication skills, personal areas of expertise, and a strong work ethic. Next we will discuss each of these in more detail.
- 33) The ability to communicate effectively in the workplace is frequently described as a key skill by both individuals who use AAC and their employers (Bryen et al., 2007). Individuals with disabilities who are perceived as competent communicators earn on average more than 3 times as much as employed individuals who are only able to participate in limited conversations (Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 1997). It is inappropriate to think that there is some threshold of communication skills required for employment. However, compared to their counterparts who can communicate effectively, individuals with limited communication skills are more dependent on the availability of skilled communication partners and more limited in their job options. Adding to the challenge of preparing for communication in the workplace is the fact that whereas some vocabulary is easily anticipated, some is job specific. Rick Creech uses AAC and once worked for the Pennsylvania department of education. He noted, "The workplace requires an expanded vocabulary because in the workplace employees use words they do not use anywhere else". Additionally, the speed of workplace communication can often be a challenge for individuals who use AAC. Frequently identified ways of dealing with this challenge include the use of preprogrammed vocabulary and also the use of communication techniques such as e-mail to take the place or augment face-to-face communication. As Haylie's and Anthony's stories made clear, strong social interaction skills are also critically important. The ability to show an interest in others and to be a positive social presence in the workplace goes a long way towards making employment of success. Finally our research provides evidence that strong literacy skills are important, especially for those individuals with more severe physical disabilities. Literacy skills are important not only for obtaining a job, but literacy skills can also support an individual in moving between different jobs at a work site once they are employed. In today's changing economy, it may be unrealistic to think that an individual is going to be performing the same task for years and years and years. Instead what we more frequently see is an individual moving between a number of different work activities or projects while maintaining employment. The ability to read and write goes a long way toward

- supporting this movement between different activities while maintaining employment with a single employer.
- 34) Something that's important for anyone who is seeking the job is that they've developed a personal area of expertise that is of interest to an employer. For Pam Kennedy, that meant taking advantage of her high school experiences when it came time to look for a job.
- 35) Pam Kennedy is a young woman who uses augmentative and alternative communication. She uses the V Max with series 5 software and Speaking Dynamically Pro and Co:Writer in order to communicate with others. Pam also works as the editor and project manager for the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade.
- 36) I am going to take a moment to talk about the AAC RERC Writers Brigade because I think it's an interesting example of how individuals who use AC can learn important employment skills while making meaningful contributions to society. The AAC RERC Writers Brigade is a project that helps individuals who use AAC learn new writing and editing skills. So far over 14 people have been involved in the AAC RERC Writers Brigade and written over 140 publications. These publications have appeared in wide variety of journals. More information is available at the AAC-RERC website (aac-rerc.com)
- 37) It's interesting to see how Pam's experiences while in school prepared her for her job as the project manager of the Writers Brigade. While Pam Kennedy was in high school, she was an active contributor to her high school's newspaper, and was the editor during her senior year. Shortly after graduation, she was hired to write a newsletter for her school district. She now makes use of those same skills in supporting the writing development of the participants in the AAC RERC Writers Brigade.
- 38) Another way of developing personal areas of expertise is on the job training. As I mentioned, in today's rapidly changing economy, it is difficult to think that an individual will perform the same task throughout his or her work life. Instead, that individual is more likely to have a career—a series of work activities joined by a common interest. Thus, it really doesn't make sense for an individual to spend a large amount of time in prevocational training for a specific task. Rather, the best place to learn most skills is on the job, where the individual learns to deal with the wide range of work requirements and supports that exist in the real world (Mirenda, 1996; Wehman, Brooke, & West, 2006). I think Anthony's story provides a good example of this. Prior to working for the Prentke Romich Company, Anthony had used PRC technology personally and also had some experience in working with computers. But the highly specialized skills that he needed to work as a PRC tech support were best learned both through a brief period of intensive training, and through the mentorship and support that he received in the early weeks of his new job.
- 39) Finally, a promising new approach To ensuring that a job taps into an individual's personal area of expertise is the use of job carving. Job carving

- involves determining a person's skills and interests, and then matching these skills to some portion of duties in an existing job (Griffin & Targett, 2006). I think Haley's story provides a very good example of this - although it would be very challenging for to complete her whole job independently, she is still able to participate in the work force by completing the portion of her job activities that takes advantage of her strong social skills, and by working with a strong support team.
- 40) Employment, especially full-time employment, is going to present many challenges for individuals with severe disabilities. There's not only the difficulty of obtaining the job, but ongoing issues such as scheduling transportation, arranging personal assistance services, and dealing with negative societal attitudes. To obtain and maintain employment is going to require a strong commitment on the part of the person who uses AAC.
 - 41) I think the strength of the work ethic that's often observed for individuals who use AAC can be seen in the following quote. This quotation was provided by an individual who uses AAC and was employed full-time at the time of our research study. He said the following: If somebody asked me why I work full time, I would ask him or her the same thing. Why wouldn't I work? I'm not rich. Everybody works. Yes, I have disabilities. However, it does not mean that I'm not a human being. Why did I go to school? Why does anybody go to school? It is to learn. Me, too. If I did not go to school and did not want to work, what is the difference between a dog and me? Last time I checked, I was still a human being.
 - 42) We have talked about developing employee knowledge and skills that are valued in the workplace. We are now going to carry on and discuss identifying and developing job that are a good match for the skills and interests of the individual who uses AAC.
 - 43) When discussing the components of a good job match, individuals who use AAC go beyond simply talking about the money (although that is important!). They describe their interest in participating in a fulfilling work activity, having a job that involves appropriate time requirements, and also the importance of a committed employer.
 - 44) When thinking about identifying a fulfilling work activity, clearly first of all the work activity should be a job in which the individual either alone or with support is able to meet the work demands. However as with anyone, these work goals are most easily addressed if the job is one that is intrinsically motivating, and incorporates the individual's interests and skills.
 - 45) Solomon Rakhman is a full-time employee at the US Department of Navy. He uses an ECO 14 to communicate, and he assists in the development of a document database for technical records. Some of his work is done from home, some of this work is done from his office at the US Department of the Navy. The database he is creating is used by Navy maintenance personnel at their job sites via a secure Internet network.
 - 46) Solomon's story is an interesting one. Solomon and his brother, his parents, and his grandparents immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union when Solomon was 15 years old. Both Solomon and his family are

- enormously proud of his service to his new country, and he has received numerous awards for his work with the US Navy.
- 47) Another important feature of a good job match is that there is an appropriate time requirement for the work activity. Individuals with severe disabilities often speak of the challenge of creating a balance between workplace activities, and everything else that is needed in order to make employment a reality: transportation, and the time needed to prepare and eat meals, get dressed, personal hygiene, etc. Some individuals have dealt with this challenge by telework (e.g., working from home and communicating with fellow employees via email).
- 48) As we talk about employment for individuals who use AAC, it is important to realize that part-time work or volunteer work can often provide many of the same benefits as a full-time job. For example Haley participates in three different workplace activities each week. This gives her more variety and an opportunity to interact with a wider circle of people. It also provides some redundancy, so if one job goes into a slow period and her work isn't needed, she has other work activities as options. Rebecca, a young woman with physical and cognitive challenges, also participates in a variety of activities, however in her case these are volunteer activities. Each week she volunteers in an elementary school classroom, helps as a guide of the local museum, and also performs as a member of a dance troupe. These are all volunteer activities but provide many of the same benefits as paid employment, including an opportunity to contribute to society and to interact with others. For more information please visit Rebecca's website.
- 49) Just as in any employment situation, a committed employer is critical to a successful work experience. What is perhaps unique about the hiring of an individual who uses AAC is that there will be a need for increased effort both at the beginning of the employment process, as well as the provision of ongoing supports (e.g., setting up assistive technology, assistance with mealtimes). Employers who have not had experience with individuals with disabilities sometimes express concerns about the costs associated with hiring an individual with disabilities, the need for additional supervision, and the possibility that the individual might not have the essential job skills (Wehman et al., 2006). The good news is that employers who have hired individuals who use AAC typically describe it as a very positive experience and express their interest in hiring additional individuals who use AAC in the future (Bryen et al., 2007; McNaughton, Light, & Gulla, 2003).
- 50) I think the importance of a committed employer, and how to develop that commitment over time, can be seen in Paul's story. Paul is a 31-year-old man with a diagnosis of autism. He uses a HipTalk which is preprogrammed with a small number of phrases as part of his AAC system. He works as a bagger at a local grocery store.
- 51) (video)
- 52) What is interesting about Paul's situation is that his employer was initially very reluctant to hire an individual with autism. A trial employment period

- demonstrated that not only was Paul able to complete the essential job requirements of bagging groceries in an efficient manner, but he also had the best on-time record of any of the store's baggers, and, as you heard on the tape, he was the only bagger that consistently remembered to thank the customer for shopping at the grocery store.
- 53) Another way of ensuring a committed employer is by being your own employer, so a number of individuals who use AAC are exploring self-employment and micro- enterprise activities as ways of participating in the work force.
 - 54) Micro-enterprises are a relatively recent development, so it might be interesting to talk about them for a few moments. A micro-enterprise is a small business that is a form of self-employment, and requires the support of other people in order for it to be a success. So as with Haley, she needed the assistance of vocational rehabilitation personnel, and her family, in order for her lunch delivery business to be a success. The business is based on the interests and talents of the individual with a disability, and some of the priorities in the creation of the business include an emphasis on participation in the community, interaction with others, and gaining a sense of self worth. While making money is always nice, making a profit is not the number one priority of the micro enterprise.
 - 55) Ben's story provides an interesting example of the development and operation of a micro-enterprise. Ben is 28 years old and has a microenterprise that raises chickens for their eggs, the eggs are then sold to local stores and restaurants. Ben uses a Dynavox 4 with a single switch and an auditory scanning system.
 - 56) (video)
 - 57) We have been talking about developing employee knowledge and skills that are valued in the workplace, and identifying and developing jobs that are matched with the skills and interests of the individual who uses AAC. We're now going to discuss ensuring that needed ports are available to maintain employment success.
 - 58) There really three key areas of support for individuals to use AAC in the workplace.
 - 59) So as we have spoken about, just getting to the workplace, and receiving appropriate supports in the workplace, can pose enormous challenges.
 - 60) As I mentioned earlier, telework can provide a creative solution to this problem. Both Solomon and Pam do most of their work from home, and interact with their coworkers via the Internet. Our research tells us that the use of telework for individuals who use AAC has both benefits and drawbacks. Benefits include that through the use of telework individuals can often participate in work activities that would be extremely challenging if daily transportation to and from the workplace was required. Individuals who use AAC also appreciate the increased flexibility with respect to the coordination of work and other activities such as medical appointments, that is possible with telework. Drawbacks include the concern that there may be reduced social contact with coworkers when telework is used, and also the

blurring between home and work environments - It can be hard to get away from the office, when the office is at home. However, for all individuals in our study, they describe the benefits of telework as outweighing the drawbacks (Rackensperger, Arnold, McNaughton, Baker, & Dorn, 2005).

- 61) AAC and other forms of Assistive Technology enables many individuals with severe disabilities to demonstrate their competence in the workplace (Burgstahler, 2003). The effective use of assistive technology, however, requires more than merely the provision of a device. Randy Horton, an individual who learned to make effective use of an AAC device after 96 hr of training, described the importance of organized instruction: "People without disabilities receive 12 years of writing and language teaching during school...Usually the consumer is given 2 to 6 hours of teaching how to use the device. Extensive, intensive teaching during implementation is the key to success" (Horton, Horton, & Meyers, 2001, p. 49). In addition, while an AAC device can be very helpful in the workplace, it is important to remember that every device at some point is going to break down. It is important to ensure that there is always a backup to the backup, typically a "low-tech" option, perhaps a paper communication board, so that when a device does break down the individual still has a way to communicate and participate in the workplace.

Another key area of support, and perhaps most challenging, is support for activities of daily living in the workplace. Many individuals with severe disabilities will require assistance with feeding and toileting routines, and it can be difficult to access reliable and professional attendant care services. While some individuals who are employed full-time in the workplace have received professional personal care attendant services, some individuals have been forced to rely upon the assistance of family members. Challenges of obtaining appropriate personal care attendant service in the workplace, have led many individuals with severe disabilities to consider part-time employment or self-employment. This remains an area in need of social policy change.

- 62) Communication in the workplace is about more than negotiating work activities. It is also about being able to participate in the social interactions that maintain a positive work environment (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). In order to establish and develop positive coworker relationships, it will be important that the individual who uses AAC as the communication skills and social skills needed in the workplace. Often this means the individual who uses AAC will need to take responsibility for initiating a positive coworker relationship.

- 63) Jim Prentice has provided an excellent example of how to do this. Jim Prentice communicated using a TouchTalker (Prentke Romich Company), a dedicated voice output communication device. He worked as a statistical record keeper for the Westinghouse Corporation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He described the importance of establishing a positive social climate: (Prentice, 2000, p. 209): When I started to work, I'm sure that all the employees surrounding my workstation probably thought I was someone

from Mars. I rode in on my motorized wheelchair and had some sort of device attached to my chair. I rode past them, and they really didn't know whether I was able to talk. If they did talk to me, they weren't sure I was able to answer them. They never saw someone coming to their work with a communicator

- 64) I stopped them in their tracks, before they were frozen on the spot, and said, "Good morning, my name is Jim. How are all of you doing today?" Big smiles came on their faces, and they seemed to answer in unison, "We are fine, and it's nice to have you working with us." That sure broke the ice, I felt like one of the team then. I made sure I programmed a few jokes into my communicator so that it would make my conversations more friendly and comfortable for them. It worked!
- Jim Prentice had the communication and social skills needed for workplace success before he started work at Westinghouse. Clearly these skills played a key role in his developing positive coworker relationships at his worksite.

- 65) We've talked about key components for employment success for individuals who use AAC: developing employee knowledge and skills that are valued in the work place, identifying and developing jobs that are a good match for the skills and interests of the individual who uses AAC, and ensuring that needed supports are available to maintain employment success.
- 66) For those of you who work with children and young adults who use AAC, clearly these key components have important implications for educational programs. These include the need to ensure that we teach skills that are valued in the workplace, that we support the development of effective and efficient communication skills, and that we help individuals who use AAC develop a strong work ethic.
- 67) When we think about developing valued skills, clearly it's ideal if there is a close match between the interests of the individuals and the targeted skills. In Pam's case, for example her interest in writing supported her in the development of the writing skills needed for her work with the AAC-RERC Writers Brigade. In Anthony's case, his interest in computer technology positioned him for an employment opportunity with the Prentke Romich company. While the development of skills that are related to a particular job are very useful, it's also interesting to think about skills, like literacy, that are usable in a variety of jobs settings. Literacy should not be considered a prerequisite for employment—48% of the participants in the Light et al. (1996) study, all of whom were employed individuals who used AAC, were unable to read a newspaper and so would be considered to have limited literacy skills. However, participants in the Light et al. study who demonstrated better literacy skills frequently enjoyed jobs with better pay, reported higher levels of satisfaction, and had more opportunities for advancement. Finally, it should be clear from many of the examples used in this presentation, social skills play a critical role in employment success. Key

- skills include the ability to introduce oneself and one's use of an AAC system, and the ability to deal with communication breakdowns.
- 68) Next it should be clear that effective and efficient communication skills are critical for the workplace. We have seen individuals be successful with a wide variety of AAC technologies, but clearly it is important that they enter the workplace already skilled in their use.
 - 69) Bryen, Slesaransky, and Baker (1995) have been active in developing and researching the impact of specialized postsecondary programs targeting employment, literacy, and assistive technology skills. The Augmentative Communication and Empowerment Supports program was developed to provide adults with significant physical and speech disabilities with training in the use of their AAC devices. These individuals had received a device through their educational or vocational programs, but most needed additional training in the operation of the device. Over a 6-year period, 17 adults with significant physical and speech disabilities participated in the intensive summer program. After a 2-week immersion program and 1 year of follow-up training and support, most participants reported that learning to use an AAC device had substantially helped them in many major life activities, including communicating with unfamiliar people or in groups, maintaining a source of income, and acquiring new skills (such as how to engage in advocacy activities; Bryen et al., 1995).
 - 70) Finally, employers frequently describe the importance of a strong work ethic, that is an employee's demonstrated interest in completing an activity to a high level of quality. For adolescents with severe disabilities, having any kind of an impact on the environment—let alone completing a task to a high level of quality—is often challenging. At the same time, some adults who use AAC and who are employed have reported that they were sometimes in their first job before they got honest feedback on their performance—as children and young adults, they had known nothing but praise and so had little experience with corrective feedback (McNaughton et al., 2006).
 - 71) For caregivers and educators who are trying to raise self-determined children, this is a challenging situation. It is important that young adults be provided with support and recognition for their effort, but it is also important that they receive realistic feedback on their performance. Some parents and caregivers have spoken of the importance of providing young children with regular opportunities to complete small activities or household chores in order to build a sense of how to begin and complete a task. In his article "Heading for Work," Michael Williams (1998) wrote about how young children who used AAC contributed to their families: L.D., age 11, had the responsibility for dusting nonbreakable areas with a feather duster and walking the dog; Candice, age 8, was responsible for helping to sort the laundry and remembering her library book on Wednesdays. The importance of early experiences in building a strong work ethic for all individuals, including those with severe disabilities, was succinctly summarized in her presentation by Faith Carlson (1994): "How can you expect to get a job if you don't start in preschool?"

- 72) An important next step is that students have an opportunity to explore job interests and matches through part-time and summer employment. Part-time and summer employment helps teenagers explore an interest in particular work activities, gives them a better idea of the time commitment associated with different jobs, and introduces them to a variety of potential future employers. Carter and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin have done some very interesting work in this area. They have developed a three-part intervention package that includes: First, intentional student planning so the development of planning a document used by the student, teacher, parents, and potential employers to identify long-term and short-term employment goals. Second, community connections so there are school employees who assist in identifying available jobs and the supports that are available there. [And] finally, an employer liaison who works to create links between the school and potential employers. This program had a dramatic effect on the summer experiences of the students with severe disabilities who participated. More than 65% of the students in the employment program participated in some type of employment during the summer. Only 18% of the individuals who did not participate in the program had a similar experience.
- 73) Scott Palm's description of his experience in applying for his 1st job, I think, does a wonderful job of illustrating how, while terrifying, it also provides a valuable learning experience for the future.
My job developer came up with the idea of me giving a speech to the City Council about my job. I was scared to death. I had just put the speech-giving program into my Liberator, but I did not know if it would work when I needed it....
- 74) The night of the speech came. My scared feeling was replaced with a blend of emotions. I was excited but nervous. I was excited because I knew I could do it. I was nervous about how it would turn out. I invited my speech language pathologist to be there, and she was in the audience. After some technical issues with the mic, I did the speech.
- 75) Something started to happen. I began to have the feeling that I was in charge of the entire room. Everybody was listening to me. It was really intoxicating. I never had a full room of people listening to me before. This speech was a huge success. Since giving that speech, Scott has gone on to create a successful business, Palmtree Enterprises. He has obtained contracts with two school districts to provide support services for children who use AAC.
- 76) We've talked about a wide variety of issues related to employment for individuals who use AAC, I'd like to close by asking Anthony to tell the story of his experiences about planning for work while still in middle school. When I think about school and my preparation for employment, I always remember a teacher who loved saying "Anthony, stop dreaming, you will never work at the Prentke Romich Company".
- 77) " And...this year, I celebrated my eighth anniversary there, so I'm proud to say "I taught the teacher something." I did meet up with her once at a conference where I was representing the company, and I received the best

- apology I have ever experienced. She thanked me for teaching her what's actually possible for people with disabilities. (Isakson et al., 2006, p. 70)
- 78) So, thank you, there is more information on employment and transition strategies for adolescents and young adults who use AAC in our recently completed text
- 79) I would also encourage you to visit the AAC-RERC.COM website, for additional and updated information on these topics.
- 80) We would like to thank NIDRR who provides funding for the AAC-RERC.
- 81) Finally I'd like to provide some additional references and resources in the following slides. Thank you and I hope you have enjoyed this presentation.