have as their primary focus telephone communication, nothing will prevent use of a device for face-to-face communication as well.

In sum, one or several funding sources are likely to be available to all children with severe communication disability who are identified with SGD need. For further information, parents and SLPs should see www.aacfundinghelp.com.

**Literacy Program Produces Exciting Results for Children Who Struggle With Speech**

Jackson, like most 5-year-old boys, has a lot of energy. Like most 5-year-olds, Jackson also likes books about Curious George, Clifford the Big Red Dog, and the latest Disney movie. When Jackson started school there were two things that made him a little different from the other kids in his kindergarten classroom: Jackson was able to read entire books by himself, and Jackson also has Down syndrome.

Like many children with Down syndrome, Jackson had difficulty producing speech at an early age. Reading expectations are often low for children who struggle with speech. However, Jackson had the opportunity to participate in an innovative reading instruction program at Penn State University, headed by Dr. Janice Light and Dr. David McNaughton. The program has produced exciting results for many children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and other disabilities – children who, like Jackson, have difficulty using speech to communicate.

“Children who have difficulty with speech often do not participate in the same early reading activities as their speaking peers. Teachers and parents are sometimes unsure about what they can do to help their children learn to read,” says Dr. Janice Light, Distinguished Professor in Communications Sciences and Disorders at Penn State University. “Our work at Penn State has focused on how we can adapt early literacy instruction so that everyone, even children who have difficulty with speech, can learn to read.”

Working with Dr. David McNaughton (Professor of Special Education at Penn State), Dr. Light has used existing research on “best practices” in literacy instruction for children without disabilities to develop a reading program for children who struggle with speech. Research on this new reading instruction program shows that it has a very positive impact for children with a variety of disabilities. “In reading instruction activities, children are often expected to say the sounds that letters make, and to sound out words. Parents and teachers have a hard time figuring out what to do with reading instruction when a child has difficulty producing speech,” said Dr. Light. “Our goal has been to develop ways to use signs, pictures, and computers to help children participate in reading instruction so that they can learn the same skills, and enjoy the same reading success, as their speaking peers.”

Light and her colleagues used the recommendations of the National Reading Panel (2001) as the starting point for their intervention program. They developed strategies and techniques to teach children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other disabilities key reading skills: letter-sound correspondences, sound blending, phoneme segmentation, decoding words, sight words, and reading simple age-appropriate books. “We have shown that when children with special needs receive appropriate instruction, they can learn to read just like any other child,” said Dr. Light.

Examples of the adapted instructional strategies, and videos of the instructional activities are available at http://aaliteracy.psu.edu. The site also features videos of some of the children who have participated in the instruction, and documents the gains they have made from the instructional approaches.

Krista is a young girl with multiple challenges, including hearing, visual, and motor impairments. Using the Penn State literacy curriculum, she has learned to read and write simple texts about her favorite TV and movie characters, and to participate in her classroom curriculum with her peers. Michael is a young boy with autism who began the Penn State literacy instruction program at age 3. Prior to the intervention, he made use of only a limited number of signs and pictures to communicate, and was frequently frustrated that he could not express himself more fully. The literacy program not only helped Michael to learn to read and type, but also lead to significant gains in his use of speech. He started school in a regular kindergarten with reading skills ahead of most of his peers.

The Penn State literacy research project is part of the work of the AAC-RERC, and was funded by National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), under grant #H133E080001. Augmentative communication manufacturer Mayer-Johnson is helping to distribute the Accessible Literacy Learning (ALL) Curriculum, written by Drs. Light and McNaughton. The ALL curriculum includes a curriculum guide, instructional scripts, and response plates for use with children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other disabilities. Additional information is available at http://www.mayer-johnson.com/ProdDesc.aspx?SKU=F1MJ338.

Lewis Golinker is an attorney in Ithaca, New York. He has been an advocate for people with disabilities for the past 30 years. He is responsible for the content at www.aacfundinghelp.com and the Medicare funding information posted at www.aac-rerc.com.

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