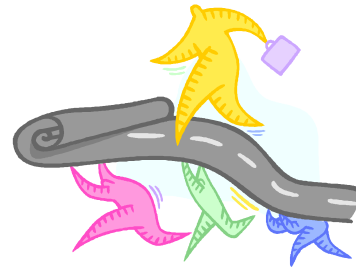


## IDEA 2: SMOOTHING THE WAY: COMMUNICATION AND PHYSICAL SUPPORTS



### **IN A NUTSHELL:**

Many of us use some sort of device to assist us in doing the things we want to do in life. Some of us wear glasses to see better. Some of us wear hearing aids to hear better. Some of us use a computer to talk. Some of us use a wheelchair to get around. It's hard to think about what our lives would be like if we didn't have the devices we needed. Would we be able to participate as well in the activities we love? Would we be able to do our work? Would we be confident in our abilities? Would we be able to make friends as easily?

This idea paper has thoughts and ideas about supporting people who use communication and other devices to have the support and tools they need to live their lives.

### LIVING IT: A SUCCESS STORY Cari's Story

"My name is Cari Carlston. I am a Navajo Indian. I have a medical diagnosis of cerebral palsy. I use my Liberator when I make cell phone calls.

Writing poetry is a good release for me. I write it to express my feelings and get them out. When I write poetry, I feel better."

-Cari Lynn Carlston  
from *Poems from My Heart*.

Cari says that because of her Liberator, she is able to do the things that are truly meaningful to her: to write poetry, to teach, to be an advocate and a friend.

## **BRINGING IT TO LIFE:** **THOUGHTS AND IDEAS**

### **Create Space to Talk for Ourselves**

- If you use a communication device, don't be shy about letting your direct support staff or others who assist you know that you want to talk for yourself when you choose. This includes when ordering a meal, talking on the phone, in a meeting, or checking out at the grocery store.
- If you assist a person who uses communication supports, encourage direct communication between the person and others she meets. If a community member asks *you* a question about the person, instead of answering, simply look at the person and wait for her to answer the question herself.

### **Sometimes the Only Communication Device Needed is Time**

Sometimes people can communicate more than others assume if simply given the time and space to do so. Consider this,

some people need up to *twenty* seconds to process a question before they respond. When we talk with each other, are we giving people the time they need to participate in the conversation?

### **Reducing the Specialist Bubble**

Can the person's communication device allow her to have conversations with another person *without* an interpreter or can others learn the communication technique easily?

Sometimes a person uses a communication technique that requires another person to interpret what he is communicating. For example, Gabe does not speak or use his hands. Using his eyegaze, he communicates by spelling out words on board containing the alphabet and some short words. He uses his eyegaze to indicate which letter the board he is choosing. A second person must be able to understand Gabe's eyegaze and point accurately to the letter Gabe is choosing and then tell others what Gabe is communicating. It takes some training and a lot of practice to be Gabe's interpreter. While this system is effective, it limits Gabe's ability to have a conversation with

## **Selection 1, Idea 5, Page2**

someone who isn't trained on his communication sheet.

If you support someone who uses a communication device or technique that requires an "interpreter," look for ways to make it simple for others to learn the communication style.

### **Simple is Sometimes Best**

While there are lots of high tech gadgets out there, sometimes the basic ones are the most effective. For ideas of simple, inexpensive ways to meet a person's assistive technology needs, contact the DDSD Clinical Services Bureau. The Bureau's contact information is contained in *Check it Out*.

### **Did You Know There's a way to Try out Some Devices Before Buying Them?**

For information about New Mexico's *Augmentative and Alternative Communication Loan Bank* look in *Check it Out*.

### **✓ CHECK IT OUT: GOOD RESOURCES**

- **For Information on *Assistive Technology Resources in New Mexico***, contact the Office of the Clinical Services Bureau (CSB). The CSB is

located at 5301 Central Avenue NE, Suite 203, Albuquerque, NM 87108-1514. Call (505) 841-2948 or toll free 1-800-283-8415 or fax at (505) 841-2987 or email [AT.Coord@state.nm.us](mailto:AT.Coord@state.nm.us).

- **For information about device loans**, contact the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Loan Bank (800-283-8415 or 505-841-5254) located on 1000 Main Street NW, Los Lunas, NM 87031 or email us [AT.Coord@state.nm.us](mailto:AT.Coord@state.nm.us).
- **For information about small grants for adaptive technology**, contact the Office of the Clinical Services Bureau (CSB) is located at 5301 Central Avenue NE, Suite 203, Albuquerque, NM 87108-1514. Call (505) 841-2948 or toll free 1-800-283-8415 or fax us at (505) 841-2987 or email [AT.Coord@state.nm.us](mailto:AT.Coord@state.nm.us).

- **For Tips on Supporting a Person Who Uses a Communication Device to Speak for Himself,**

consider reading, "On Being a Communication Ally" by Mayer Shevin. Available at <http://suedweb.syr.edu/the/ci/7-4she.htm>

- For other exercises about supporting people to communicate for themselves, take a look at Mayer Shevin's paper, *On Being a Communication Ally* available at <http://suedweb.syr.edu/the/ci/7-4she.htm>

### **TRY IT OUT: ACTIVITIES, EXERCISES AND COMPELLING QUESTIONS**

- Pretend you are asking a question to a team. Now count to 20. Is this typically the amount of space people give each other to process a question before jumping in to "fill the space?"
- If someone you know uses a communication system, ask her to explain how it works. If it isn't clear to you, talk to the person and those who support her about how to make the instructions simpler so that other can talk to her more easily. Help create this simpler method and ask the person to try it out.

## **Selection 1, Idea 5, Page4**