Augmentative Communication Employment Training and Supports (ACETS): Some Employment-related Outcomes


Article Summary

As the employment rate for the general population hovers around 80%, that of individuals with disabilities dropped during the 1986-2000 period to 32%. Little research has been published specifically dealing with employment rates of individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication. These figures are of particular concern since the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should have demonstrated a trend toward increased employment for these individuals.

The authors describe Augmentative Communication Employment Training and Supports (ACETS) and a pilot study to show the results of this program. ACETS is an intensive one-week employment training program with one-year online follow-up while seeking employment. This program focused on the following:

- Identification and pursuit of career paths
- Negotiating workplace culture
- Personal finance management
- Transportation issues
- Workplace communication
- Information technology skills

None of the six participants had worked full-time prior to ACETS, and only one had worked part-time. In addition, four of the six individuals had mobility as well as communication needs. The authors examined monthly online reports posted by the participants as well as a survey conducted at the end of the year by researchers from the Institute on Disabilities who had not been associated with ACETS. Results related to ways in which ACETS had improved the following employment-related skills:

- Job hunting
- Managing work with a disability
- Communication skills
- Information technology

Improvements in each of the above were shown with the most significant increases in job hunting and information technology skills. Two additional individuals had achieved regular part-time employment, and four of the six reported an increase in monthly earnings on an irregular basis.

While the current study's look at employment outcomes for six participants may not have wide-ranging implications due to the small sample size and reliance on self-reports, it points the way for strategies and future research to enhance employment for those who use AAC, a group that may be grossly unemployed.