



Friendships, loneliness and people who use AAC

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Loneliness and friendships

- A subjective feeling
- Associated with poor health and poor academic performance
- Can staff be friends?
- Why do so many people with disability include staff as friends?



Social Connections

- Satisfying social relationships are important for good physical and mental health
- Social connectedness in later life is a key to healthy ageing
- Interacting with friends may be more important than interacting with family for the 'old old'



Loneliness

- Younger people who use AAC may feel lonely:
 - Reliance on family
 - Difficulty in forming relationships in and outside school
 - Access
 - Lack of employment
 - Difficulty in forming intimate relationships
 - GATEKEEPERS!!



Loneliness

- Many older people are lonely:
 - Retirement
 - Death of friends
 - Changes in health
 - Moving
 - Changes in finances
 - Transport problems
 - No children or family living far away



Research in loneliness, friendship and AAC

- We have an ongoing program of research into loneliness and people with cerebral palsy
- This arose from
 - Initial research with John Morgan into ageing and cerebral palsy
 - The importance of communication in developing social connections



Themes

- Communication
- Social networks
- Access to services and education
- Ageing
- Income
- Housing
- Family
- Friends
- Services
- Technology
- AAC
- Housing



What does it mean?

- Experiences of loneliness are same
 - Loss of partner, loss of independence
- AND different
- Communication difficulties make a difference
- Attitudes to disability



These are important

- Independence/Income
- Access
- Support to maintain friendships
- Support to develop friendships
- Community education
- Access
- Counseling



Projects

- **Loneliness and older adults with cerebral palsy** Berg, N. & Balandin, S.
- **An exploration of loneliness in older adults with cerebral palsy** Ballin, L. & Balandin, S.
- **Exploration of loneliness in young adults with cerebral palsy who use AAC** Cooper, L. & Balandin, S.
- **Experiences of the friends of children with CP who use AAC** Anderson, K. & Balandin, S.



Study 1 using Loneliness scale

- These are important
 - Where you live
 - What you do in the day
 - How much care and support you need
 - Loneliness scales don't always help understanding of WHY



Results

- Older people with CP are probably more lonely than older people without CP
- Loneliness scales such as University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale Version 3 tell us if people are lonely but do not help us to understand why



Ballin & Balandin, 2007

- 7 adults with Cp
- Indepth interviews
- Social Networks
- Communication
- Need for policy to support maintenance of social networks



Cooper, Balandin & Trembath, 2009

- 6 adults with Cp who use AAC aged 25-30
- Indepth interviews
- 3 themes common to all:
 - Support Networks
 - AAC System Use
 - Technology.



Barriers

- Family may be a two edged sword!
- Time, lack of skilled communication partners and low literacy skills
- Insufficient services to develop effective system use
- Experiences of other technology were mixed
- Lack of privacy



Anderson, Balandin & Clendon, 2011

- Friendship with children who use AAC
- Narratives of 6 typically developing children about their friendships with children who use AAC
 - Communication
 - Helping
 - Learning
 - Shared time



Influencing and supporting friendship development

- How much can be done?
 - Education
 - Inclusion
 - Literacy
 - Advocacy including self advocacy
 - Appropriate service provision
 - Technology and the knowledge to use it
 - Policy
 - Access



Conclusions

- We need more research
- Policy
- European studies
- Exploration of communication technology, including what this means for loneliness and friendships
- Disability awareness education
- Increased opportunities for participation

**Old friends are often good friends
because of shared experience**