

Kids Chat 2 You Project evaluation: plain language summary

About Kids Chat 2 You

Kids Chat 2 You was a Scope service, from July 2017 to June 2020. In this summary we talk about Kids Chat.

We supported children with complex communication needs across Victoria.

- We visited each region in Victoria as children started to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and
- We provided information and resources to support the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). This included low-tech communication aids and key word sign resources.

What did we do?

From July 2017 to July 2019 Kids Chat delivered:

- 35 workshops
- 307 consultations
- 770 low-tech communication aids and key word sign resources
- consultations for customisation support for 349 of the low-tech communication aids.

The communication resources included cards, posters, visual timetables, targeted aided language displays, and apps to create low-tech communication aids.

Research findings

We did research about changes with children using AAC, after using Kids Chat. We called people nine months after the end of their service and asked them to do a survey and an interview.

We wrote two journal articles:

- 'Capacity building outcomes of the Kids Chat 2 You service', published in the Journal of Clinical Practice, Speech Pathology Australia, in October 2019.
- 'Parents' perspectives of an Australian Augmentative and Alternative Communication service: "I clapped for my child.'" currently under peer review.

What we learned

Multiple communication aids

Nine months after Kids Chat more children used communication aids than before (from 59% to 74%). The children who were using the communication were:

- using more than one low-tech communication aid (98%)
- using a combination of low-tech, high-tech and unaided, such as key word sign, AAC strategies (56%).

During the interviews, parents said high-tech devices came with challenges, including use in the different places their child went, maintenance, and the risk of damage. Children who used high-tech AAC devices also used use low-tech AAC.

Parents said sometimes school had different AAC to home, which was confusing for them and their children. They were concerned about how schools supported AAC; most parents said they did not get information from the school or receive support from a school speech pathologist.

NDIS

Most research participants said they attended Kids Chat to learn how to access funding for AAC and had achieved this outcome. They said Kids Chats information had been valuable in their NDIS planning meeting.

Generally, NDIS funding for AAC improved after Kids Chat, but not all were successful. The surveys showed:

- 30% of participants who had NDIS plans in place before coming to Kids Chat had AAC funding
- 60% of participants who had NDIS plans after Kids Chat had AAC funding. Sixty percent was still lower than Kids Chat speech pathologists would have expected, as the children who came Kids Chat were all considered to require some form of AAC. The funding in plans was inconsistent. Some children received AAC funding but not speech pathology support, and conversely, others received speech pathology support and not AAC.

In the interviews, parents said they were unsure if their child would receive ongoing, timely and coordinated support. Parents spoke of a need to remain up to date with the sector-wide changes.

Age groups

The survey results showed that nine months after Kids Chat, children under six years old:

- had the most uptake of AAC,
- were the most likely to receive funding for AAC and speech pathology support, and
- had greater success in accessing a service that provide AAC supports.

The survey results also showed changes for school age children:

- for children aged 7–12 years there were no changes in the uptake of AAC
- for children aged 13–18 years there was a reduction in use (this means more had used AAC in the past than at the time of the surveys).
- School-age children had the worst NDIS planning outcomes. Just over half of school-age children received AAC funding.
- Given that the children who came to Kids Chat would benefit from AAC, it was concerning to see so few granted funding for AAC resources or speech pathology support.
- School age children were not accessing the supports when they had been funded. This included two-thirds of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and 90% of children with intellectual disability.

How the Kids Chat project has shaped the future Non-Electronic Communication Aid Service (NECAS)

More children accessing communication aids

Before Kids Chat, children could not access funded low-tech communication aids in Victoria. Kids Chat participants have become NECAS customers, using their NDIS funding. Children made up 55% of NECAS customers in the 2019-2020 financial year. Schools, private practices, disability services and other organisations have returned to the service for additional information and support.

Tailored support options

To support people with their AAC, NECAS now provides:

- Information consultations
- Communication aids (generic)
- Communication aids with customisation support
- AAC training
- PODD book library for trials before purchase.

We're sharing our resources

NECAS still offers a Kids Chat AAC package. It includes information resources, a workshop and coaching sessions. Early Years Services have accessed the package with Victorian Inclusion Agency funding.

There will be a range of Kids Chat AAC resources on the Scope website, linked to a series of blog posts. Resources include; videos, handouts and a printable non-electronic communication aid. The long-term aim of the website is to provide a hub of information to support speech pathologists, allied health professionals, caregivers and educators.

We continue to value customer connection

Ongoing engagement is critical to effective AAC support. NECAS follow up with customers at three and 12 months after getting a communication aid. NECAS can provide children with tailored AAC support at the key times in their lives or when there is a change, such as transitioning to school.

The big picture

In the interviews, parents spoke about future services and described what they needed. Parents liked the idea of a targeted short-term service, like Kids Chat. They spoke of accessing services when their children's communication needs changed. Parents also spoke of Kids Chat providing practical information to negotiate the new disability system (NDIS).

Capacity-building is about educating and empowering the child's support network in the present and for the future. Kids Chat aimed to connect caregivers with AAC information and resources via workshops and consultations. A worry is AAC capacity-building services, that support communication in the child's day-to-day life, are not funded under the current NDIS funding model for individuals. This means it is harder to integrate AAC into a child's world. The research showed people still lacked knowledge about accessing funding and services.

There is so much more to do to support caregivers and NDIS planners, to understand the value of AAC, and how to support AAC to work for children with complex communication needs.

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