

## AAC and OPT - an Optimal Pairing

By, Heather Peterson, MS SLP-CCC, 2013

Over the past 5 years working at the DSCBA, I have learned a lot about the effective therapies for our children with Down syndrome. It has not been until this past year that I have really appreciated the marriage of Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) devices with Oral Placement Therapy. As we gear up for the Communication Readiness Program here at the DSCBA this summer, I have had the chance to evaluate eight - five and six year old children with DS. It has very surprising to me to understand that many children are without a solid primary mode of communication. Working alongside some very talented AAC specialists, it has become very apparent that while we effectively treat our children's verbal speech systems it is absolutely necessary to give them a modality of communication and learning for the classroom and at home. The options are variable and endless. The DSCBA has a grant driven program right now that is free to its members which provides AAC consultations and loaner devices. This program is called the Expression Connection program. Studies show that using AAC devices creates speech modeling opportunities that children can imitate and pair with a daily Oral Placement Therapy programs. This is an optimal therapy plan for most of our children. One of these programs on its own is wonderful, but both of these programs combined is a priceless opportunity. Scholarships are available for Oral Placement Therapy at the DSCBA. As mentioned the Expression Connection program is free of charge. Please start inquiring about OPT as early as possible and about AAC as early as 2.5 years of age.

I want to leave you with something that resonated very loudly with me this week; almost half of our children entering our summer program have behavior plans written into their IEP's, but almost none of them have AAC or OPT written into their therapy goals.

Please help me spread the word of this wonderful union and of the invaluable opportunities we have here at the DSCBA.

Please contact me with questions - Heather Peterson, OPT: [heather@happykidstherapy.com](mailto:heather@happykidstherapy.com)