

REFLECTIONS ON PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This document summarizes qualitative input gathered from site program directors and AT liaisons about the extent to which the project met its intended goals, and the implementation factors/recommendations to consider for replication.

MAIN PROJECT OUTCOMES:

AT knowledge increased: All four sites saw increases in AT knowledge; personnel with AT knowledge grew from a few staff to about half of the program's service providers/teachers or more. One director said, "most if not all" staff were knowledgeable about AT by the end of the project.

AT use expanded across disciplines: Personnel responsible for AT services at all three EI sites and one Preschool site expanded from just SLP/OT/PT to across disciplines. One director said: "That has changed dramatically." Another director explained that AT became part of training for new staff who then "immediately could incorporate AT as part of everyday practice."

AT consideration increased: The population of children using AT has broadened...from children with low incidence disabilities having complex medical needs to include those with more common delays with language, sensory, attention, behavior issues. One director said this was the "biggest change" she's seen as a result of the project—staff can now "think outside of the box to help families in new ways." Another director described this expansion to using AT with children without any diagnosis as a "different approach than we had before."

Wider range of AT devices used: EI and Preschool sites are using more sensory items than before the project, as well as more low-tech and handmade items to support positioning, learning, behavior and communication. AT is also used in additional settings, such as on-site EI group (play) sessions, as well as in home visits. Another reported change is that staff "start off using AT rather than waiting until there's a big problem."

No change in AT policy: None of the sites saw formal policy changes. Program practice has shifted and some guidelines have changed. AT is recorded slightly more frequently on the Massachusetts EIS form but not on the IFSP/IEP because there is no designated place for it. No changes occurred in program resource allocation for AT.

Improved outcomes for infants, toddlers & preschoolers: Directors of EI and EC programs agreed the LP Project "gave children access to activities they would normally not have been able to do without AT." Staff felt they had more resources and strategies to try out. One director said the project was "tremendously helpful," explaining that since staff improved their skill levels with AT, they had "increased comfort levels and knowledge" and "introduced strategies and resources earlier on." Another commented that staff coming up with alternative strategies for using AT in different settings was "supportive to families (and teachers) in meeting outcomes." One AT liaison commented that the project was very effective for children who used AT. In terms of families, caregivers have "a better understanding of AT and want more of it." AT liaisons in both EI and Preschool programs saw that staff quickly increased their independence in considering and selecting AT which led to better outcomes for children.

Post-project AT borrowing is tracked: Sites are using an online google doc to track AT lending library borrowing with one designated person for managing the lending library.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION:

MAIN FACTORS THAT HELPED PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION:

- Having an AT liaison who visits sites regularly; joins staff meetings, goes on home visits, comes to group sessions. The trust/relationship that was built between staff and the AT liaison make staff feel comfortable asking questions.
- The AT lending library helped “expand the team’s ideas and gave parents/teachers opportunities to try out items.”
- Communication between AT liaisons and Program Directors was key in order for LP staff to know if anyone needed training or was interested in learning about the project, or if there were additional items needed for the lending library.
- Respecting the service provider/teacher workload— not inundating the team with data collection, meeting with them on their terms at convenient times, and providing shorter, more frequent trainings

MAIN BARRIERS TO PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION:

- Not having the initial face-to-face training for team members as planned (Note: a major snowstorm led to training cancellation) meant some staff to were slower to come on board and lacked confidence in selecting and using AT for individual children.
- Staff turnover (an ongoing issue in both Part B and Part C) made keeping up with training a challenge.
- Limited amount of time staff had with the AT liaisons.
- Perception that completing the AT plan was time-consuming.
- Spotty internet access for team members to access AT plans or the online AT lending library.

AT LIAISON LESSONS LEARNED:

- The number of staff who already knew about/used AT was higher than expected. This was underscored by the project’s AT definition which emphasized that “AT was any thing that can help a child do something they can’t do without it”.
- Documentation will not happen without some support unless it is required. The AT liaison role involved more hand-holding for developing AT plans and ordering AT through the lending library than we had envisioned.
- Developing relationships and trust with team members was crucial – this enabled team members to feel comfortable asking questions and trying out new AT items.
- Classrooms and Early Intervention toddler groups make excellent venues for staff to learn about AT and UDL, in ways that are not always available in a training or on a home visit.

AT LIAISON RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Have one dedicated person as an AT liaison who has a regular presence in the program.
- Document all AT use including apps—will only help to identify the child’s necessary supports once he/she becomes school-aged.
- Conduct a baseline survey at the beginning of the project to get a sense of people’s knowledge of AT and use this to tailor instruction.
- Create a good online communication presence to share info across sites and maintain regular contact.

- Provide official professional development hours for taking part in training—this depends on program/district policy but if AT is included in their PD, there is an more of an incentive for AT use for increased participation.
- Prioritize funding AT liaison activities (as appropriate to the setting) over acquiring lending library items; staff knowledge and buy-in have to come before they will use a library.
- Acquire a variety of less-expensive lending library items first, as a tool for training and experience. Other more expensive items can be added over time (this also re-engages staff with new items).



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