

COMMUNICATION READINESS PROGRAM



"Kangas" Group.

2015 Report



Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area

Overview

The Communication Readiness Program (CRP) completed the third year of its seven-week summer program in 2015, and continues to provide follow up to the participants who entered school in the fall. CRP provides young children, their parents, and their teachers with the necessary preparation, tools, and training to be able to communicate their needs and become ready for the upcoming school year from a communications, literacy and socialization standpoint.

In 2015 we had 15 students enrolled in CRP—nearly twice as many as when we began offering the program in 2013. The ages ranged from three to seven, and students were divided into two classes by age: The Kangas included eight children going into kindergarten to second grade, and the Roos included seven children going into Preschool or Transitional Kindergarten.

Each class had a lead teacher, co-teacher, and two classroom assistants, as well as two Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs)/Alternative & Augmentative Communication (AAC) Specialists who rotated into the two classes, and one

SLP who provided Oral Placement Therapy three days per week in both classes. We also utilized 12 volunteers and two SLP student interns who used CRP as their off-site clinical internship. The

CRP is becoming a “training center” for graduate and undergraduate college students in education and Speech Pathology, as well as high school students interested in going into education.

“I think the program and staff are phenomenal! It really felt like every single person was ‘on board’ and truly there for the kids.”

-Parent

“This is a highly targeted program for their age and challenges, one that we could not find anywhere else and so grateful for. His confidence to spontaneously communicate verbally and with AAC went to the roof.”

-Parent



“Roos” Group.

Communication at the Core

The high number of volunteers and staff in each class allowed for one-on-one opportunities for targeted, consistent communication and learning to take place. In all activities, communication is at the core. For example, if a child needed a crayon for a project, they were encouraged to ask for the crayon, or the color of the crayon. As the weeks progressed, the students began using longer sentences to request what they wanted, such as “I want the purple crayon.”

Choices were always given so that students not only got to make a choice, but also needed to verbalize that choice (or show it on a chart). Even at recess, communication was a major component of learning to play with peers, asking for equipment, etc. At snack time students were requested to ask for help if they needed it (opening a yogurt, for example). For those learning to use a communication device, they had to request the snack of their choice (for instance, choosing between grapes, cheese, or crackers using their device).

Literacy

While the CRP puts primary emphasis on communication, it does so while utilizing standards based curriculums. Throughout the summer we worked on a pets theme developed by Unique Learning System®, which was developed specifically for special learners; the Play & Learn curriculum, which is motor based and designed to integrate social interaction, music and movement, and the Handwriting Without Tears curriculum. In addition, guided reading of leveled and personal books occurred daily as did the sharing of morning news, a read aloud period, and a calendar lesson that focused on vocabulary (days of the week, yesterday, today and tomorrow).

Results

All participants improved in areas of communication and expression (including responding to prompts, making choices, appropriate classroom behavior, listening and following instructions, social skills and interaction with peers and adults, oral motor function, literacy, and use of AAC where applicable), as well as their fine and gross motor skills. All of these improvements will lead to achieving greater independence. A specific “before and after” assessment and overview was conducted of each child by the CRP staff, and a detailed analysis of the child’s growth and development, along with recommendations for continued support, was provided to each child’s parents. Themes emerged from these reports in terms of specific areas of improvement, including the list on the following page.

“His progress is so evident that his speech therapist wanted to know what we were doing that caused this huge leap.”



Elijah using an iPad to learn how to write and spell his name.

“My son’s ability to narrate his experiences definitely increased.”

Some Changes We Saw

Communication

- Increased verbalizations in students who are verbal
- Increased used of AAC in students who are non verbal
- Increased joint attention acts (relaying information, commenting)

Social Skills

- Improved turn taking and sharing

School Readiness

- Improved listening skills
- Improved impulse control

Literacy

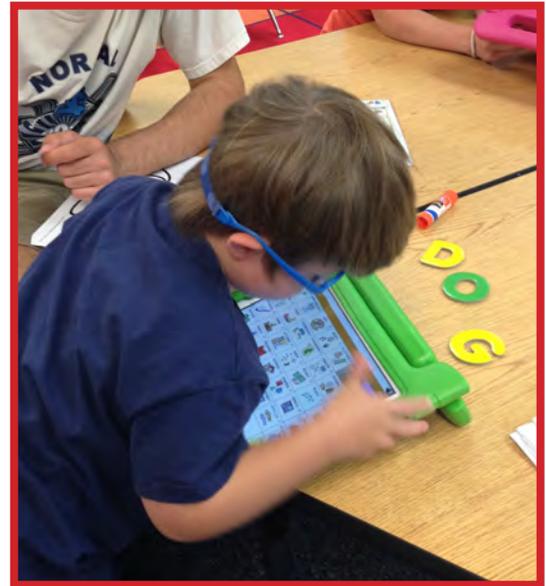
- Improved site word recognition
- Improved name writing skills

Increased independence with:

- Toileting
- In-seat behavior

Improved fine motor skills:

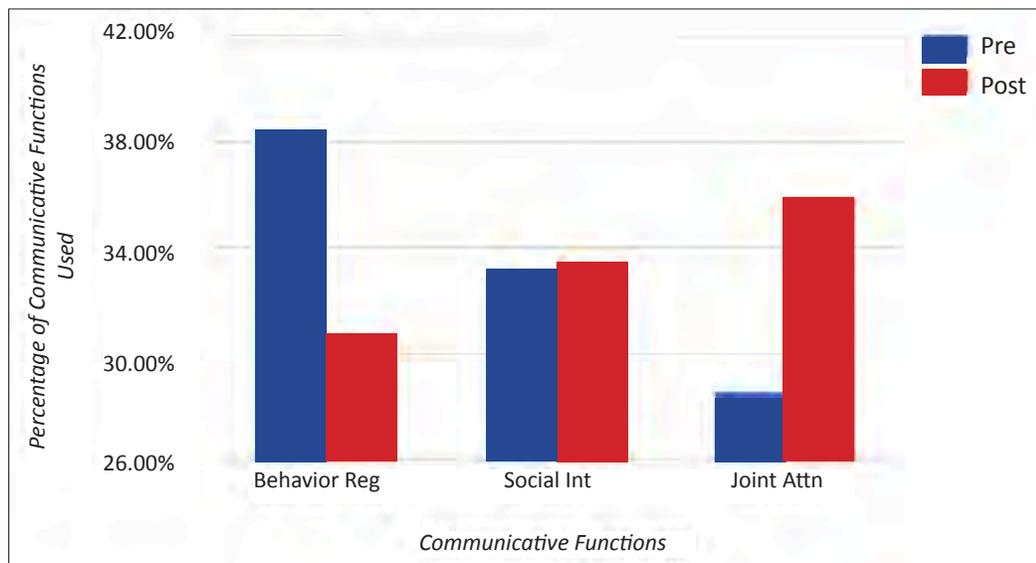
- writing
- cutting
- stylus use



Andre is using an iPad with TouchChat during a literacy activity to read words.

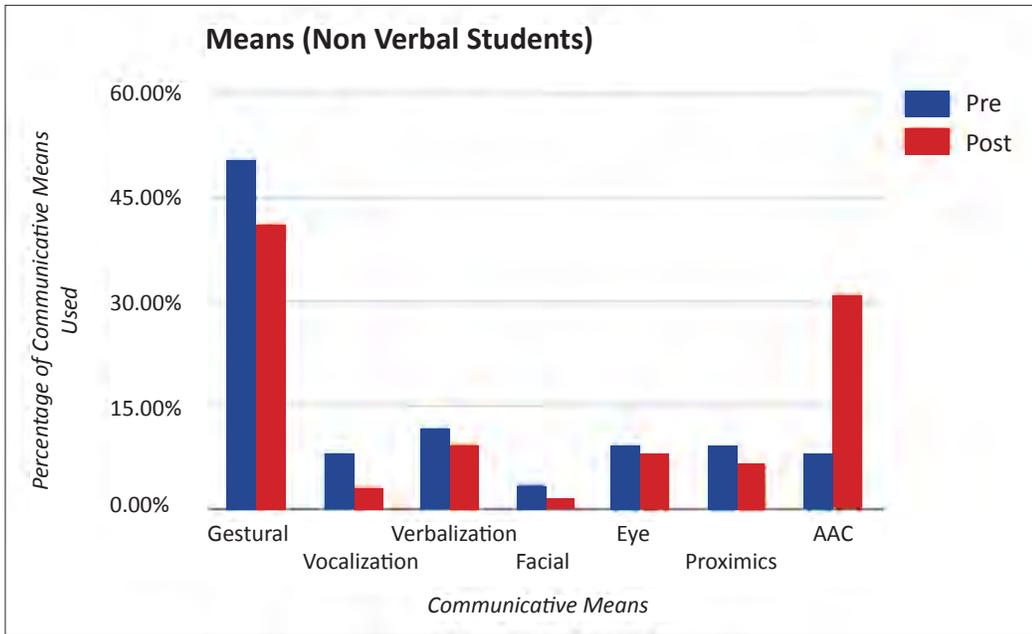
Communicative Improvements

DSCBA hired an independent SLP to collect communication sampling and analysis (CSA) data and to ensure its objectivity to the greatest extent possible. The following graphs show increased communication on several levels.



In a representative sample, joint attention and social interaction communicative functions increased, meaning the children were going beyond choice making to comment, relay information, and request social routines.

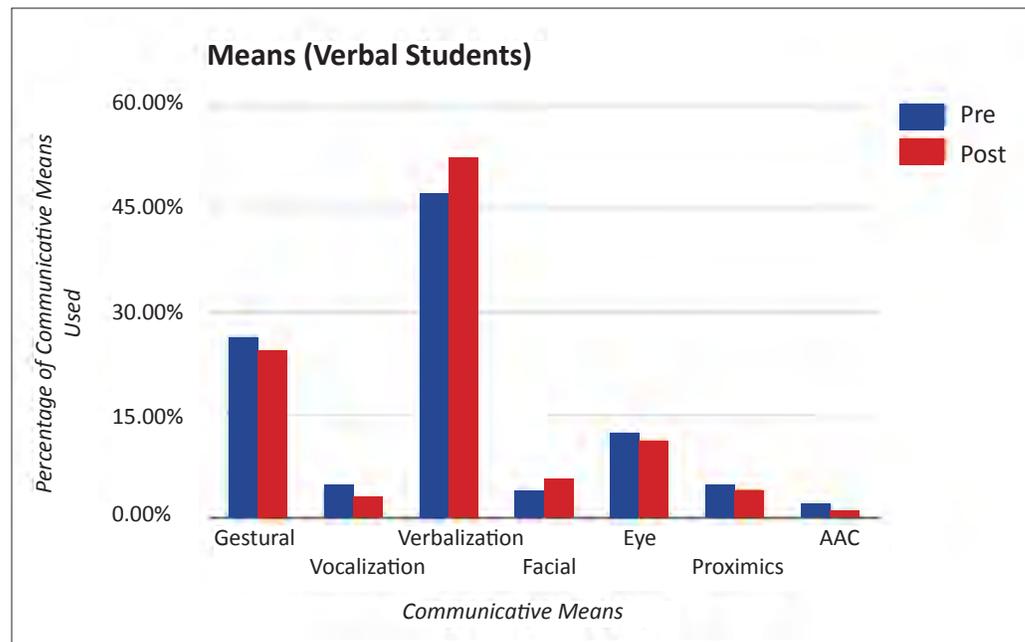
“Naya really enjoyed the routine of recording what she did at home to share at school as well as sharing her school news with us at home. [The Step-by-Step Communicator] was an extra tool Naya had to share about her day.”



Non-verbal students had a significant increase in AAC use, and for students who were verbal, their verbalizations increased.

“She started to use more words and signs at home!”

“Will was in a loving, nurturing environment where he learned skills that are applicable in his Kindergarten class.”



Parent Feedback

A total of 13 parent survey responses were received. Of these, all 13 (100%) believed that their child benefited from the 2015 summer CRP program. All parents also said that they saw improvement in their child’s communication as a result of the program (with the majority—nearly 70%—indicating a dramatic improvement). Nearly 70% (9 respondents) said that they have definitely gained a better understanding of which AAC might work best for their child. All respondents said they felt that the Oral Placement Therapy (OPT) portion of the program was useful for their child, and 12 out of 13 said they would continue OPT at home following the program.

Follow Up is Critical

CRP is more than a summer intensive program. The critical second step in the program is to follow each child into school, working directly with and training district personnel (teachers, therapists, aides, etc.), and ensuring a smooth transition that incorporates inclusion whenever possible.

By early November 2015, we will have met with each participating child's education team; provided transition binders with recommendations and assessments to nine participants; attended two different students' education team meetings; provided consultation with AAC and inclusion specialists for two participants; assisted with the acquisition of AAC devices for two students through their school districts; loaned and provided training in use of AAC devices (iPad with apps) to one student; and provided low tech devices (books and boards) for two participants to enable greater participation in their class. Based on each individual child's and teacher's needs, DSCBA is providing additional tools to further assist the teams with helping their students, including the *Handwriting Without Tears* curriculum; iPads for name writing; adapted scissors and writing utensils; *See & Learn* reading curriculum; and *Numicon* curriculum.



Step by Steps with recordings of books were used as a model and to provide the children opportunities to read aloud.



The iPad provides Casey with food choices during snack time. The keyguard helps her accurately select the button she wants with her fingers.

Recommendations for Parents and Educators

Recommendations are individualized for each child and his or her specific interests, strengths, and challenges, but include many common themes:

- Provide total communication environments and multimodal communication systems
- Encourage literacy skill development by utilizing motivating personal books
- Assume competence of each child
- Develop daily routines and activities around communication opportunities
- Require communication exchanges utilizing defined communication systems (e.g. speech, SGD, low-tech board, etc)
- Facilitate participation
- Provide sufficient time for auditory processing (10 seconds)
- Implement visual supports for increased comprehension

CRP Staff

Teachers

Diane Caughren-Viera



Diane has taught for over 40 years at the California School for the Deaf. While there, she taught Middle School and High School science and eventually transferred over to the Special Needs Department where she had a self-contained class of

5-12 year olds. She is retired but has recently begun tutoring reading to students with Down syndrome. She also volunteers with the CA Native Plant Society and the John Muir National Historic Park.

Kathryn Cruz



Kathryn is a special education teacher at the secondary level where she focuses on integrating technology, including Assistive technology and Augmentative and Alternative Communication, into the everyday of her students while accessing the

general education curriculum. She has an M.A in Organizational Leadership and Human Resources from Chapman University where she is also completing a Credential program. Kathryn also has a certification in Assistive Technology and a B.S. in Psychology.

Amanda Pharis



Amanda has a Master's in Special Education and currently works as a Full Inclusion Specialist for Berkeley Unified. She was raised in the Bay Area and loves it here! She has worked in the private and public sectors in schools and in homes. She has a background

in ABA and is currently pursuing my BCBA certification completion in 2016. One of the moments that makes her day is when she sees that a student has a moment where something "clicks."

Susan Coulson



Susan Coulson, is a mom of four children, all born in England. Susan made a career change after helping out at her children's pre-school, and she began working in elementary school with children with special needs. Upon arriving

in the U.S. in 2008, she started working with the San Ramon Valley Unified School District as a para educator. She has been working with children now for the past 12 years. She recently has started teaching Small Steps at the Down Syndrome Connection.

AAC Specialists

Kati Skulski



Kati Skulski, M.S. has been with the DSCBA since 2011. She received her Master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology from California State University, East Bay. Kati provides AAC Assessment and intervention to children

in the home, clinic, and school settings. She also provides Assistive Technology Needs Assessments. Kati also works in the ACTS practice (www.acts-at.com), volunteers internationally with The Nika Project (www.nikaproject.org), and has presented at State, National, and International conferences on Resources for AAC Strategies and Tools (www.rastresources.com).

Celia Hughell



Born in Honduras, Celia Hughell received a B.A. in Child and Adolescent Development and a M.S. in Communicative Disorders from San Francisco State University (SFSU). While completing her M.S., she participated in the "Project

CLLASS" (Collaborating for Language, Literacy and Augmentative Services in Schools), and as a student clinical for a NIH-research focused grant on narrative skills in children who use AAC. Mrs. Hughell has worked with students of different communicative disorders and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, allowing her to implement speech and language therapy goals in both English and Spanish.

Teachers Assistants

Amanda Hall-Jackson



Amanda has been working as an Instructional Assistant/Aide for Special Education for seven years and finds it to be a wonderful experience. She is majoring in American Sign Language and working towards her goal of becoming a Speech

Therapist. It brings her joy working with children with different abilities and watching them blossom.

Jo Kelley



Jo has lived in the Bay Area for nearly her entire life. She attended the San Ramon Valley Unified School District as has her children. Jo has been a special Ed para educator in the SRVUSD district for the past three years, and her family has

been an active part of the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area for the past 10 years. Jo is an avid baseball fan, being raised an A's fan but has recently become a Giant's fan as well.

Drake Apablaza



Drake moved to the Bay Area last September after completing a B.S. in Psychology from the University of Washington in Seattle. Last year he worked as a para-educator as a 1-1 with a student with Down syndrome

and loved the experience. He also loves traveling, camping, live music, working with kids, getting outside, and Warriors basketball.

Taylor Niles-Giansante



Taylor worked in CRP last summer and was very excited to have returned. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Communicative Disorders, along with a Spanish minor, from the University of Redlands. She has worked as

a Special Services Assistant in the Lafayette Unified School District as well as a Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Intern in the Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District. Currently, she works as a bilingual Speech-Language Pathology Assistant with Rocketship Education.

Oral Placement Therapist

Heather Peterson Vukelich



Heather is a MS SLP-CCC (speech pathologist and feeding specialist) and has been part of the Down syndrome community since childhood when she volunteered in the special day classroom at her elementary

school. Her passion continued through her life volunteering for the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area and Challenger Baseball league. She has been a practicing, ASHA certified speech language pathologist since 2003. She has worked inside the doors of the DSCBA since 2008.

“Words truly cannot explain how amazing the Communication Readiness Program is, how knowledgeable and hard working the staff is, and how undeniably adorable the children are! ... I now understand why everyone continues to say that being a part of the DSC is like being a part of an incredible family!”

-Marylen Agbang, student SLP intern
