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Session at USSAAC Encourages Individuals to Make Their Dreams a Reality

by Diane Nelson Bryen and Tracy Rackensperger

Dr. Diane Nelson Bryen, professor and Executive Director of the Institute on Disabilities, and Jennifer Lowe, Executive Director of SHOUT, presented a national "town meeting" for people with significant communication disabilities and their allies at the national conference of the United States Society of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (USSAAC). Held in conjunction with the international CSUN conference in Los Angeles, the town meeting was based on "Daring to Dream" – a unique process developed by the Institute's ACES program.



"Daring to Dream" encourages individuals to make goals and plans for what they want in their lives and take action in seeing them through. So often, people who use augmentative communication are strongly encouraged to engage in what professionals, society, and, sometimes, even well-meaning parents expect of them.

Tracy Rackensperger, a person who uses augmentative communication, along with 15-20 other individuals who rely on AAC, participated in the session. Since the facilitators at the USSAAC session only had a couple hours, participants went through an abbreviated procedure. At ACES, individuals have several hours to go through the full process.

At the conference, individuals who use AAC were asked to identify their dreams. Dreams included aspirations for employment, education, personal life achievements, spirituality, and so on. Participants were then encouraged to proceed with the rest of process involving planning supports, resources, and action steps for their dream.



This session's purpose was to inspire people who use augmentative communication to exercise self-determination. By "Daring to Dream", individuals can use the empowerment they have within them to oversee the direction of their lives.

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