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**KiwiChat Camp: Experiences and Perceptions of Children  
with Complex Communication Needs and their  
Family/Whānau**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Speech-Language Therapy

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## **Abstract**

Children with complex communication needs (CCN) who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) require a significant amount of intervention to achieve communicative competence. This study explored the perceptions and experiences of 16 children with CCN and their families who attended KiwiChat Camp, an intensive 5-day camp focused on using AAC in everyday contexts. Very few studies have explored the perceptions and experiences of camp interventions. KiwiChat camp involved explicit training sessions for parents and small group intervention for children who use AAC. All of the family members (parents, siblings and children who use AAC) were immersed in aided language stimulation throughout the day. They interacted with other families of children who use AAC and older AAC mentors. Pre-and-post data were collected through camp surveys for parents and children who use AAC and semi-structured interviews with parents and siblings. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were analysed using a general inductive approach. The results indicated that families enjoyed the camp experience and parents experienced increased motivation, inspiration and empowerment following camp. However some felt overwhelmed during camp. They also perceived an increase in a range of communication outcomes (increased AAC use, confidence and knowledge) and sociocultural outcomes (connections with others who use AAC, a sense of belonging and development of identity). Recommendations for future camps and research studies are outlined.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Appendices .....	ix
List of Figures and Tables .....	x
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Rationale for this Study.....	5
The Research Aims .....	7
The Structure of this Thesis.....	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	8
Language Development in AAC.....	8
Communicative competence .....	8
Challenges .....	9
AAC factors.....	10
Environmental barriers .....	11
Cultural considerations .....	13
Identity .....	15
Aided Language Stimulation .....	16
Definition.....	17
Summary of studies.....	17
Family Centered Practice .....	19
Family support needs.....	20
Technical skills.....	21
Language learning .....	21
General training recommendations.....	22
Motivation and empowerment.....	23
Service provision constraints .....	25
Sibling training.....	25
Effects of Group Intervention .....	26
Benefits of peer-to-peer learning .....	27
	iv

Challenges of peer-to-peer learning .....	28
Group mentoring.....	29
AAC Camps .....	29
Camp format .....	30
Camper information.....	31
Camp methods .....	33
Camp results.....	36
Appraisal.....	36
AAC Camps and the New Zealand Context .....	38
Chapter Three: Method .....	40
The Research Question .....	40
KiwiChat Camp 2016 .....	40
Participant Recruitment.....	42
Positionality.....	43
Methodological Approach.....	44
Surveys .....	45
Interviews.....	46
The voice of children who use AAC.....	47
Triangulation .....	48
Instrument Design and Procedures .....	49
Overview of instrument development.....	49
Data collection for parents .....	50
Content.....	50
Format.....	52
Process .....	52
Data collection for children who use AAC .....	54
Content.....	54
Format.....	54
Process .....	54
Data collection for siblings.....	55
Content.....	55

Format .....	55
Process .....	55
Data Analysis Framework.....	56
Quantitative data – Likert questions.....	56
Qualitative data – open-ended survey data and interview data.....	56
Ethical Considerations.....	59
Informed consent.....	60
Conflict of interest.....	60
Risk of harm .....	60
Privacy and confidentiality.....	61
Access to data .....	61
Non-participation .....	62
Conclusion .....	62
Chapter Four: Results.....	63
Participant Information.....	63
Findings – Parents .....	63
Expectations .....	67
Perceptions and Experiences .....	72
Emotional Response.....	74
Motivating .....	74
Inspiring.....	75
Empowering .....	76
Overwhelming.....	77
Communication Outcomes .....	79
Increased AAC use.....	79
Increased confidence .....	80
Increased knowledge .....	82
General awareness of AAC.....	82
Technical skills.....	84
Aided language stimulation .....	85
Sibling knowledge .....	87

Increased expectations .....	87
Sociocultural Outcomes .....	89
Enjoyment .....	89
Connections.....	92
Families .....	93
Mentors.....	94
Staff .....	95
Sense of belonging .....	96
Developed identity.....	97
Findings - Children who use AAC .....	97
Findings - Sibling.....	99
Enjoyment .....	100
Camp in general .....	101
Activities .....	101
Connecting with others who use AAC.....	101
Connecting with mentors.....	102
Outcomes .....	103
Increased AAC use.....	104
Increased confidence .....	104
Motivated to learn more about AAC .....	105
Increased knowledge .....	106
Conclusion .....	108
Chapter Five: Discussion .....	109
Participants .....	109
Enjoyment .....	110
Emotional Impact .....	110
Communication Outcomes .....	113
Sociocultural Outcomes .....	116
Sense of belonging .....	117
Holistic family-centred practice .....	117
Mentors.....	118

Identity .....	119
Conclusion .....	120
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	121
Purpose, Design and Rationale .....	121
Trustworthiness of Findings.....	124
Limitations.....	125
Lack of maintenance and generalisation data .....	125
Interconnectedness.....	126
Method and instruments .....	127
Self-selection bias .....	127
Clinical Implications.....	128
Implications for Future Research .....	129
Cost-effectiveness .....	129
Voice of individuals who use AAC.....	130
Challenges of interviewing siblings .....	130
Other stakeholders.....	131
Assessment.....	131
Concluding Thoughts.....	132
References.....	133
Appendix .....	147

## List of Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of AAC Camps .....	148
Appendix B: KiwiChat Camp Timetable 2016.....	154
Appendix C: Information Sheet for Parents .....	155
Appendix D: Information Sheet for Older Siblings.....	159
Appendix E: Consent Form – Parents.....	161
Appendix F: Consent Form – Older Siblings.....	162
Appendix G: Verbal Assent Script .....	163
Appendix H: Pre-camp Survey for Parents.....	164
Appendix I: Post-camp Survey for Parents.....	167
Appendix J: Interview Questions for Parents.....	172
Appendix K: Post-camp survey for Children who use AAC .....	173
Appendix L: Interview Questions for Siblings .....	178
Appendix M: Codebook: Siblings .....	179
Appendix N: Codebook: Parents .....	181
Appendix O: Ethics Approval.....	187
Appendix P: TalkLink Confidentiality Form .....	188

## List of Figures and Tables

### List of Tables

Table 1: Data Collection Methods .....	45
Table 2: Example of Coding and Data Analysis Process .....	59
Table 3: Demographics of Children who use AAC .....	64
Table 4: Pre-camp Likert Responses from Parents .....	68
Table 5: Post-camp Likert Responses from Parents .....	69
Table 6: Post-camp Survey Results of Children who use AAC .....	98

### List of Figures

Figure 1: The Experiences and Perceptions of Siblings of Children with Complex Communication Needs about Attending KiwiChat Camp: Themes.....	73
Figure 2: The Experiences and Perceptions of Parents of Children with Complex Communication Needs about Attending KiwiChat Camp: Themes .....	100