

Children's Health

The Voice Of The Voiceless

(NAPSA)—There are more than two million Americans who can't say "good morning" to a neighbor. Who can't ask for a cup of coffee. Who can't read bedtime stories to their children. The reason? These people are unable to speak.

Severe speech disabilities can stem from medical conditions including amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), cerebral palsy, autism, Down's syndrome, muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease. Mental retardation and traumatic brain injury can also cause someone to be unable to use speech as a primary means of communication.

Alternative and augmentative communication allows these people to interact with others. People with severe speech and language problems rely on standard techniques such as facial expressions, gestures, writing and drawing for communication. In addition, special augmentative techniques and devices have been developed specifically to help them communicate.

These techniques and devices include sign language, special gestures, Morse code, charts, language boards and electronic devices called AAC systems that can speak in response to entries on a touch-screen keyboard or other methods of input. These input methods can include the push of a button, the blink of an eye, a wrinkle of an eyebrow or a puff of air, depending on the needs and capabilities of the



Electronic devices help people communicate who are unable to speak.

user. The majority of people who use AAC systems are under 18.

Companies such as DynaVox have created quality tools that help people with speech, language, learning and physical disabilities communicate and take control of their lives. These devices are generally covered by medical insurance, medical assistance or Medicare, and students are often able to get a device with the help of their school, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

For more information on getting and using AAC devices, or to share your or your child's experiences or interact with other people with speech deficiencies and their caregivers, go to www.dynavoxtech.com.