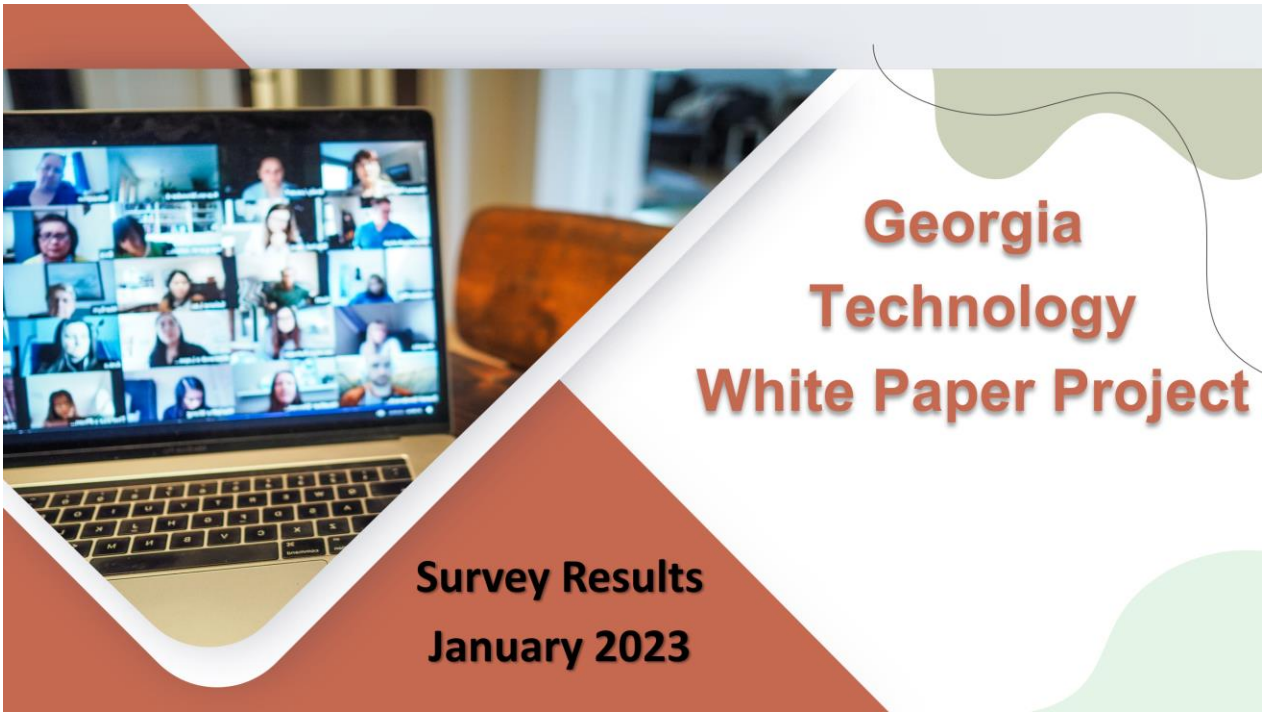

Georgia Technology White Paper Project

Policy Brief #1

Survey Results of People with Intellectual Disabilities

Submitted to

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

Submitted by:

Dr. Mark Friedman and Dr. Ruthie-Marie Beckwith

Blue Fire, Inc.

March 27, 2023

Executive Summary

This Policy Brief presents the survey results of 170 people, including 97 people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), on their use of technology. The survey was conducted as part of the Georgia Technology White Paper Project aimed at identifying barriers for people with I/DD to using technology and develop recommendations to overcome these issues. The report highlights the results of the survey focusing on the 97 individuals with I/DD. The survey identified four key barriers to technology adoption and utilization, including Access to Devices, Access to the Internet, Support and Assistance, and Training. Key findings from the survey indicated the continuing importance of families (49%) and Direct Support Professionals (47%) in providing technology support and assistance.

The most compelling results from the survey were the comparison of technology usage by the survey respondents with the general US population. This revealed limited access and use of technology by people with I/DD.

This included:

- 55% of people with I/DD use email vs. 91% of Americans.
- 12% of people with I/DD use Telemedicine vs. 80% of Americans.
- 27% of people with I/DD use the Internet to buy things vs. 74% of Americans.
- 64% of people with I/DD watch YouTube vs. 70% of Americans.
- 57% of people with I/DD make video calls vs. 65% of Americans.
- 73% of people with I/DD listen to music over the internet vs. 60% of Americans.
- 24% of people with I/DD watch sports over the Internet vs. 40% of Americans.

The report provides useful data and information on the current technology use by 97 individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. However, the survey respondents were self-selected, many were involved in self-advocacy groups, and may not represent the broader population of individuals with I/DD in Georgia.

The Georgia Technology White Paper Project is aimed at identifying barriers to technology adoption and developing recommendations to overcome these issues for people with I/DD in rural and underserved areas. This is often referred to as the Digital Divide, the gap between those who have access to digital technology and those who don't.

The project includes several components, including conducting surveys, focus groups, and interviews with people with developmental disabilities, their families, and experts in Georgia, as well as interviews with state officials from the ten most advanced states in implementing new technologies. The project also involves providing clear, action-oriented recommendations regarding policy and programmatic proposals that the Council can act on during the current 5-year plan.

The full report below, highlights the three key barriers to technology adoption and utilization identified in the survey, including: 1) Access to Devices, 2) Access to the Internet, and 3) Support, Assistance, and Training. The report also emphasizes the importance of families (49%) and Direct Support Professionals (47%) in providing technology support and assistance. The findings from the survey can be used to inform policy and programmatic proposals to improve technology access and utilization for people with I/DD in rural and underserved areas. Future

reports from the project will focus on the findings from the four focus groups and interviews with state officials from the fifteen most advanced states in implementing new technologies.

Introduction

The White Paper project is part of the Council's State Plan, Objective 2 to increase access to technology for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in rural and underserved areas. The overall purpose of the Georgia Technology White Paper Project as stated in the Council's RFP is to "create a research based White Paper to identify barriers for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to using technology and to develop recommendations to overcome these issues, particularly in rural and underserved areas by 2027."

The RFP specifically asked for national comparisons, and possible solutions for how the Council could increase access to new, emerging, and current assistive/adaptive technology for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The national comparisons will be addressed in a separate report on the findings from the fifteen state interviews currently underway.

The White Paper project has several components. These are:

1. Conduct surveys, focus groups and interviews with people with developmental disabilities, their families and experts in Georgia.
2. Conduct interviews with State Officials in the ten states most advanced in implementing new technologies to determine what has worked best, what are the barriers, and how can Georgia most effectively move forward.
3. Provide clear, action-oriented recommendations regarding policy and programmatic proposals that the Council can act on during the current 5-year plan.

Each of the White Paper components are illustrated in the infographic below (Figure 1):

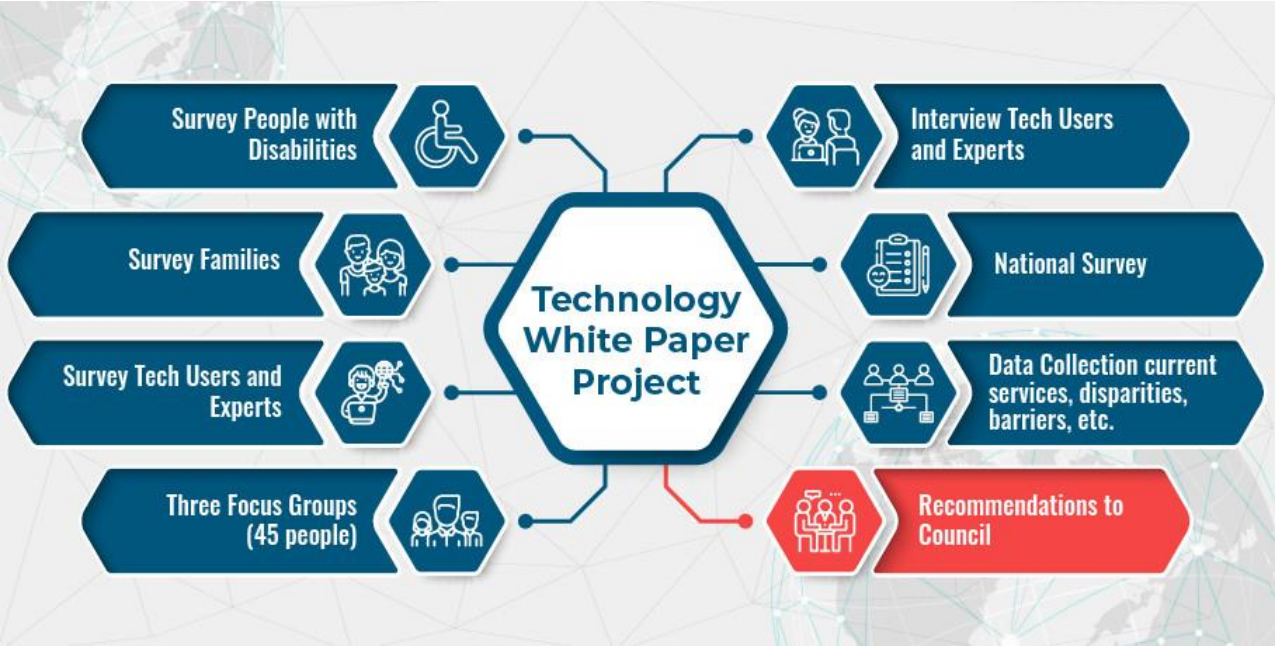

Figure 1

Methods

The initial survey questions were developed by the two study directors, Dr. Friedman and Dr. Beckwith. A Project Advisory Committee had been formed consisting of twenty people with disabilities, family members, advocates, professionals and Assistive Technology experts. The Committee reviewed the draft initial survey. Revisions were made and the survey was placed on an online survey platform, Survey Monkey, and field tested with ten members of the Advisory Committee. Additional revisions were made, and the survey was posted on an online platform, Survey Monkey. Responses were gathered from November 2022 through January 2023. A flyer and marketing materials were widely distributed by the Advisory Committee. Additional distribution was done by the Georgia DD Services Division Service Coordinators to the people they support.

A total of 170 surveys were collected (see figure 2). This included responses from:

1. 97 people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
2. 27 family members and guardians
3. 37 Direct Support Professionals
4. 9 other

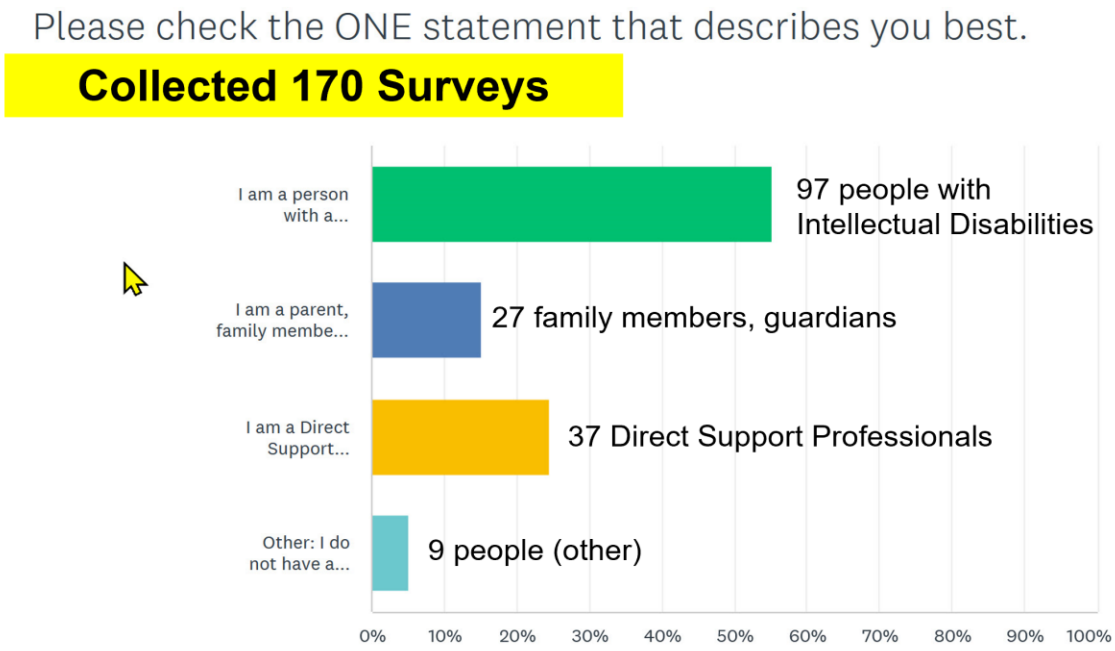

Figure 2

This report presents the survey results from the 97 people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The survey results were also used to inform the questions used in the four focus groups.

Of the 97 survey respondents, 51 were completed on paper at three self-advocacy meetings and 46 were completed online. The data analysis was done using the statistical features built into Survey Monkey. The limitations of the study should be noted from the beginning. The survey respondents were not a representative sample of everyone with a developmental and Intellectual Disability living in Georgia. It is what's called an opportunistic sample in that the survey respondents were self-selected. None-the-less, the results provide very useful data and information on how 97 people with I/DD are using technology in Georgia.

The most compelling results from the survey were the comparison of the amount and types of technology used by the 97 survey respondents with developmental and intellectual disabilities and the general population of the United States. Using data from the Census Bureau we can compare the average American's use of technology to the survey respondents as follows:

- 91% of Americans use email vs. 55% of people with I/DD
- 80% of Americans use Telemedicine vs. 12% of people with I/DD.
- 74% of Americans buy things over the Internet vs. 27% of people with I/DD
- 70% of Americans watch YouTube vs. 64% of people with I/DD
- 65% of Americans make video calls vs. 57% of people with I/DD
- 60% of Americans listen to music over the Internet vs. 73% of people with I/DD
- 40% of Americans watch sports over the Internet vs. 24% of people with I/DD

Figure 3 shows this data in a bar chart format:

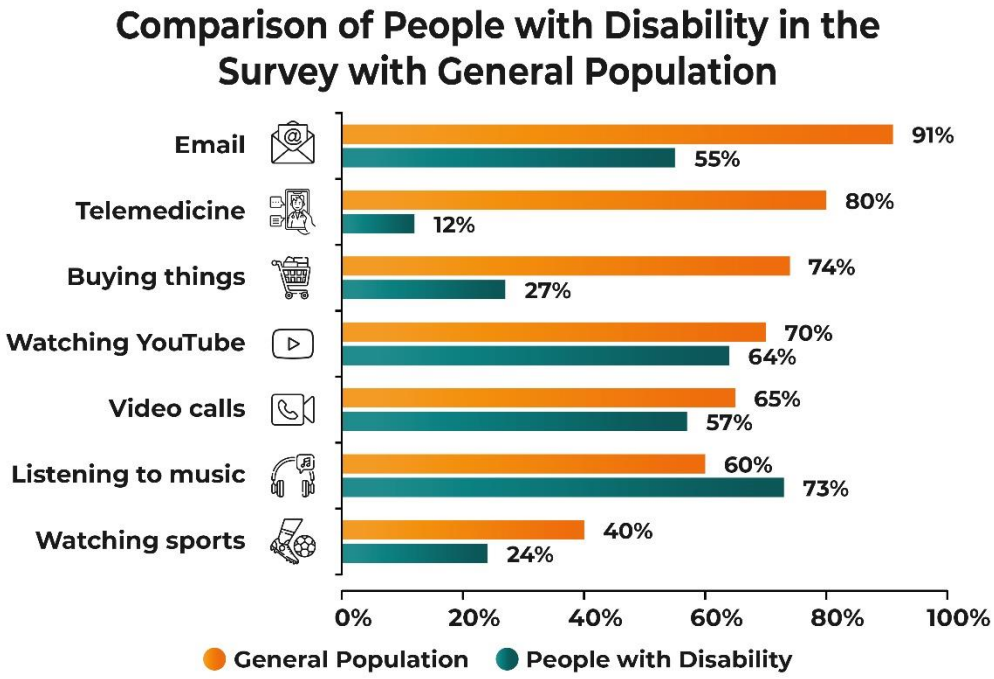

Figure 3

Source data: US Population Use of Internet, Census data, American Community Survey, 2021.

The survey identified the major barriers to adoption and utilization of technology as:

1. Access to Devices
2. Access to the Internet (includes both access and usage)
3. Support, Assistance and Training

1a. Access to Devices (See Figure 4)

The majority of people have access to a computer or tablet (71%). 88% of people use either a smart phone (63%) or a cell phone (25%). 17% use an Apple Watch or Fitbit. 15% use Siri which comes preinstalled on most Smartphones.

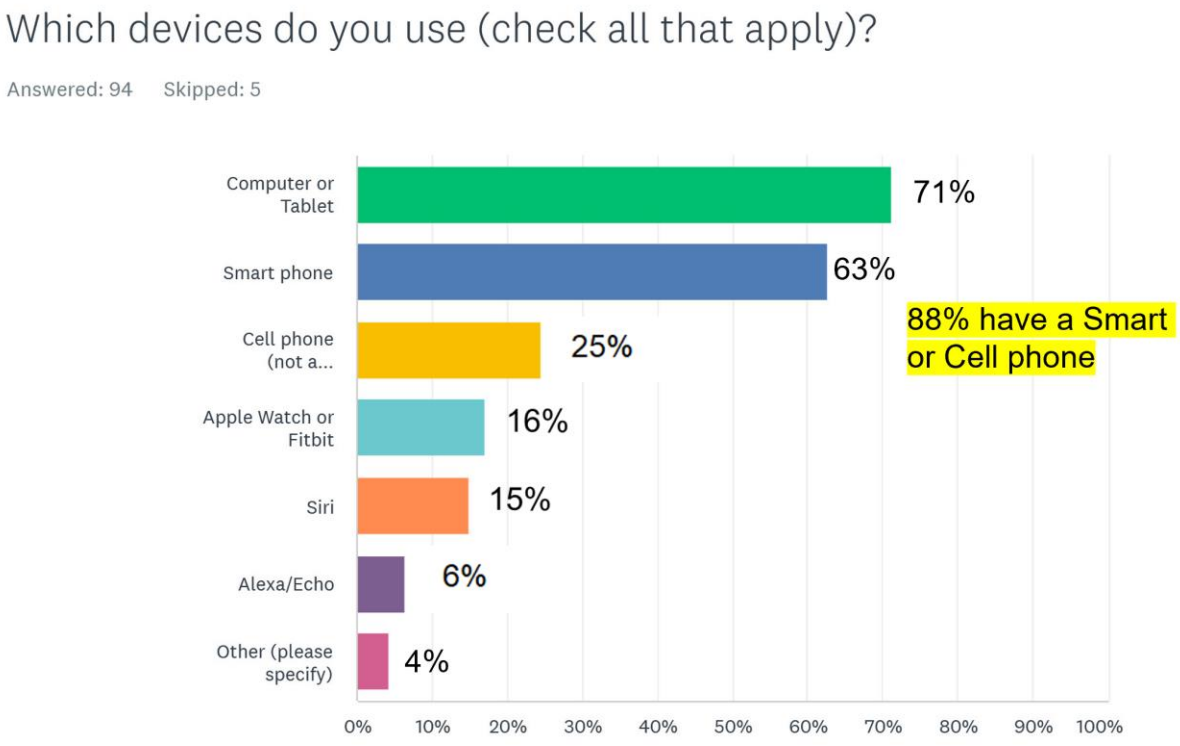

Figure 4

1b. Device Acquisition (See Figure 5).

"I bought them myself" was the highest response (49%) showing the importance of technology with people spending their own funds. Family was a close second in importance (44%.)

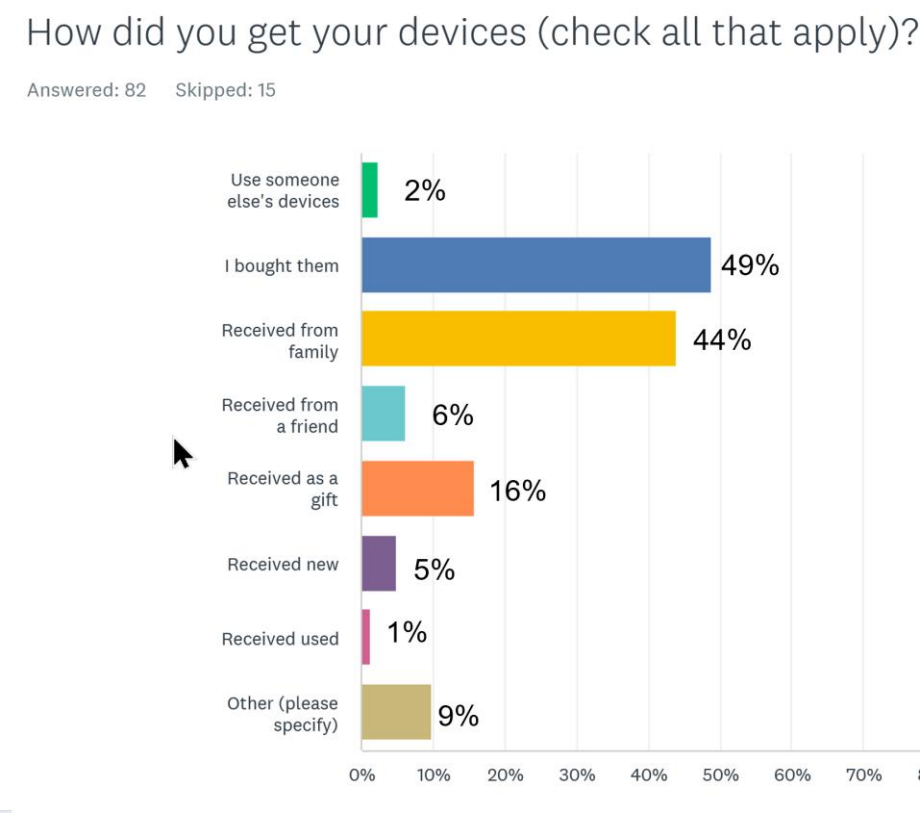

Figure 5

1c. Assistive Technology Use (see Figure 6)

This was a most interesting question with 16% saying they did not have Assistive Technology but wished they did. 19% were using Siri and saw it as Assistive Technology. It should be noted Siri is available free on many phones. Added together 25% of people are using voice assistants (Siri 19%, Google Assistant 5%, Alexa 1%).

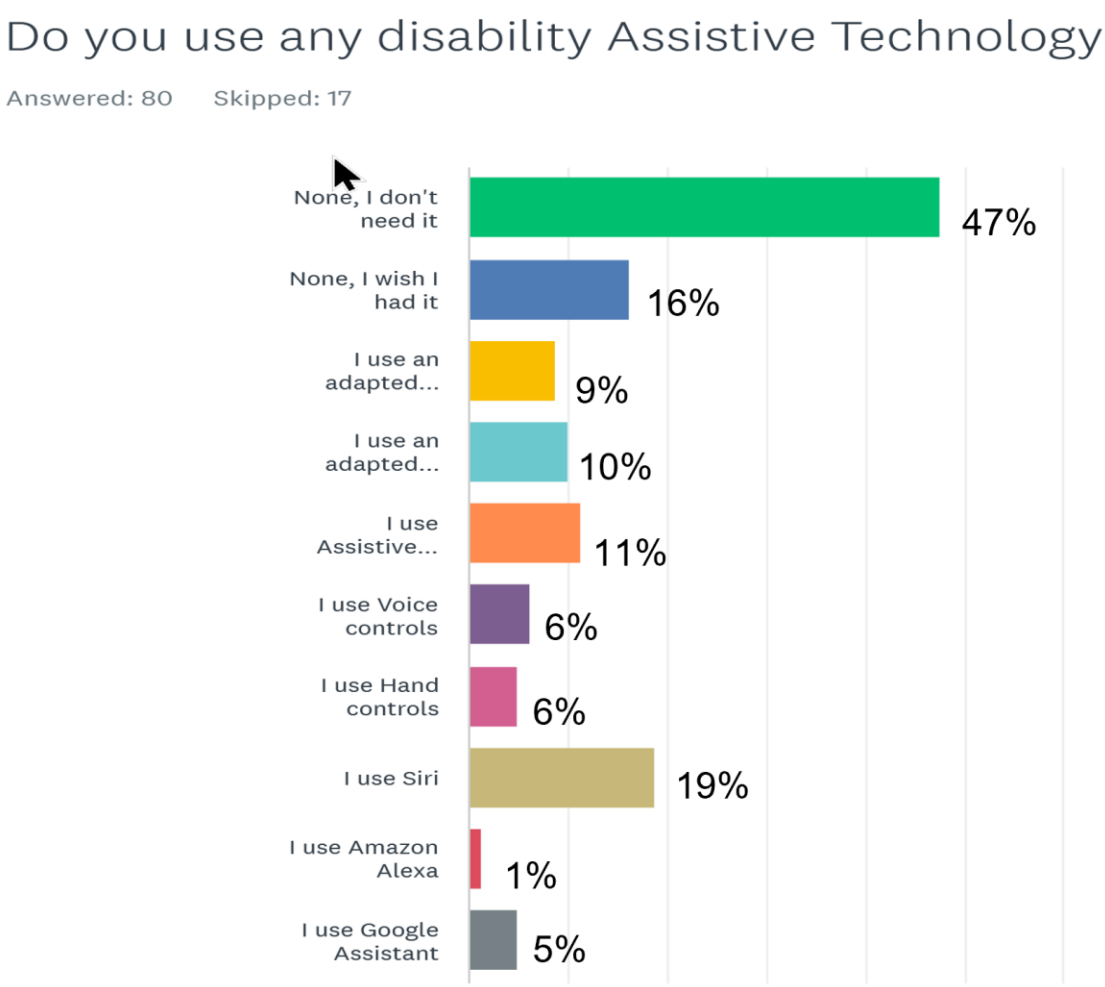

Figure 6

1d. Technology Needs (See Figure 7).

This is one of the most interesting responses to any of the questions with the highest answer to the question 'what technology would you benefit from,' being, "All of the above." (36%).

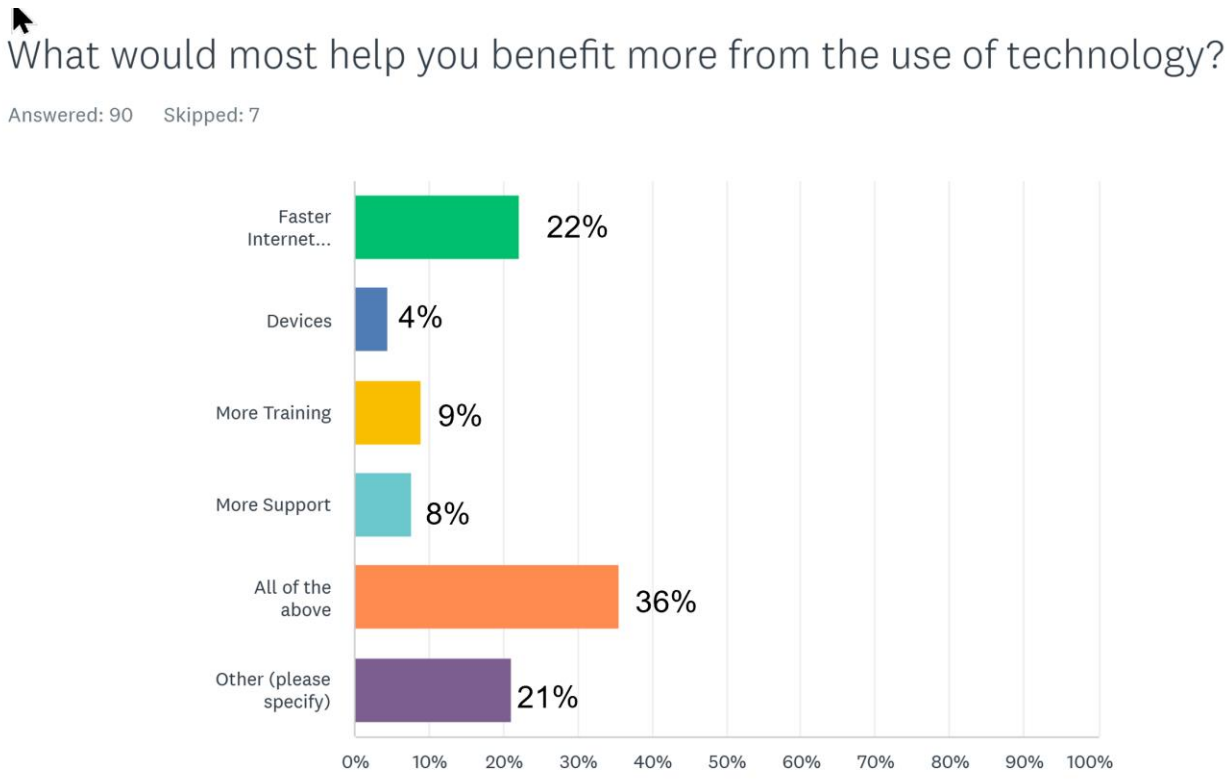

Figure 7

2a. Internet Access (See Figure 8)

Not surprisingly, the majority of people (86%) accessed the Internet at home like the general population. WiFi access was 21% which most likely represents the lack of access at home. Work was 20% which fits with the low rate of employment of people with disabilities. Library use was 13% which we expected to be higher. This could reflect the issues people report in using library computers with limits of 1-2 hours of time allowed per day and often long waits to use them.

There findings are in keeping with usage of the Internet by the general public.

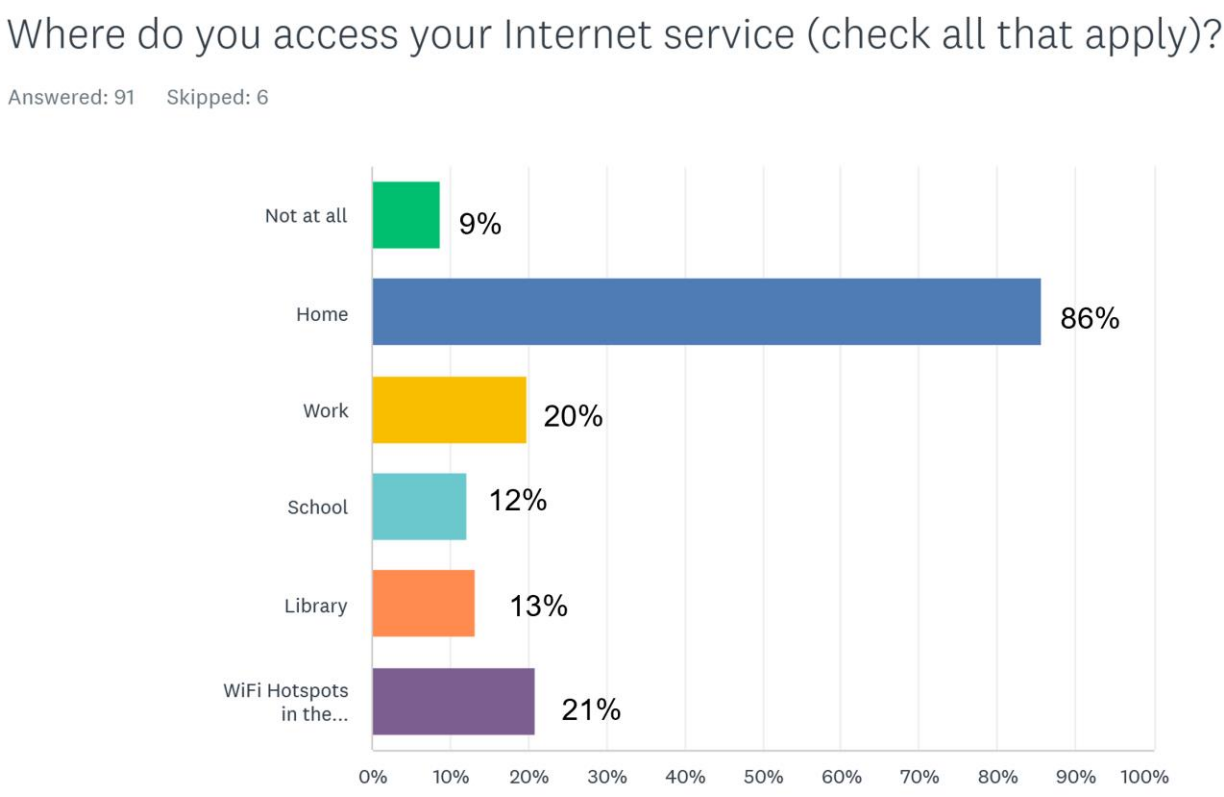

Figure 8

2b. Internet Usage (See Figure 9)

The surprising result for the use of the Internet was how varied it was. People are using the Internet in a wide variety of different uses with many of the items rating equally high. The most highly cited uses were: Listening to music (73%), Watching YouTube (66%), Video meetings (60%), and Email (55%). It should be noted that the highest ranked uses of the Internet are for passive listening and watching uses whereas the average American number one use of the Internet is searching for information.

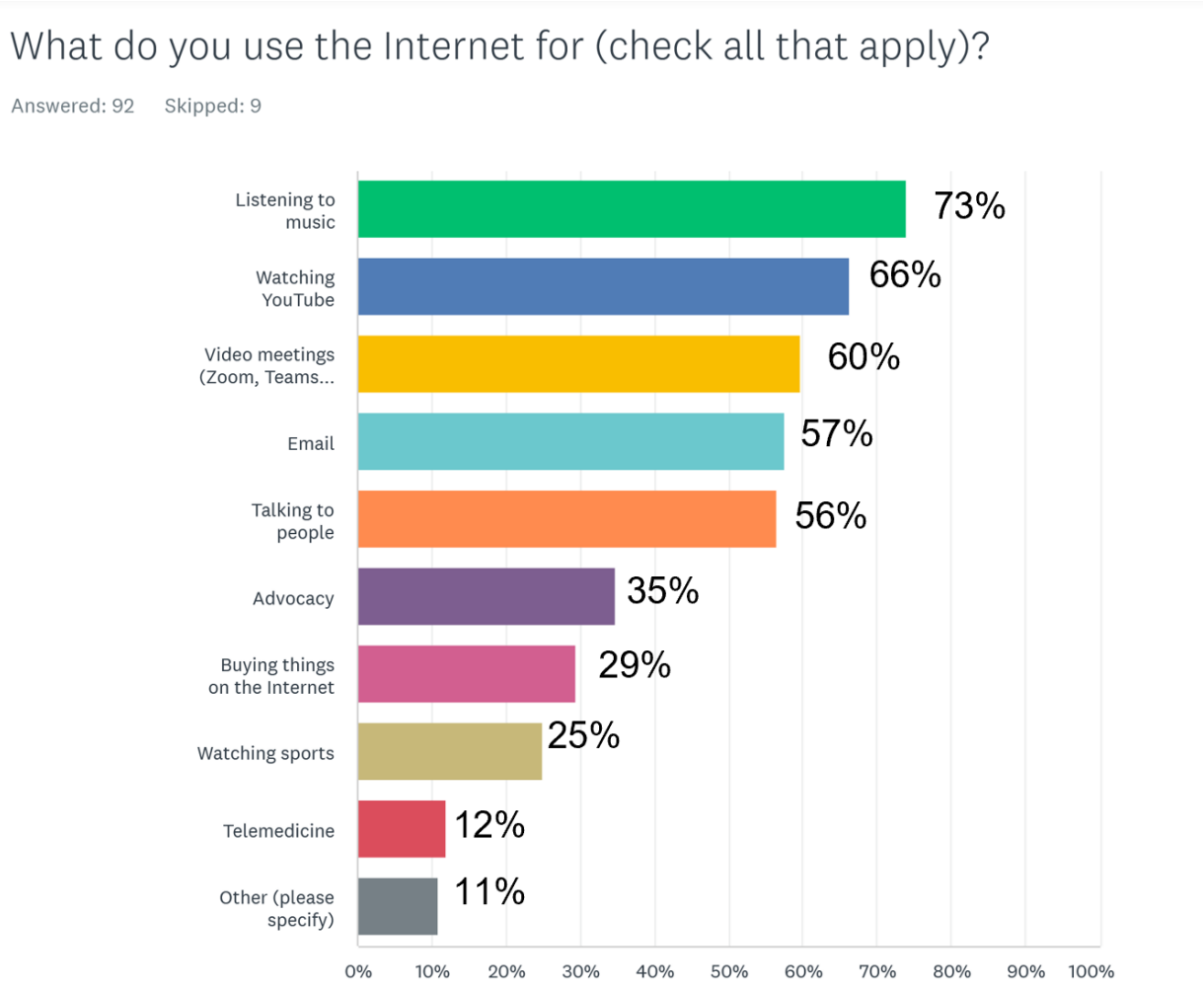

Figure 9

2c. Internet Service Utilized (See Figure 10).

51% of the people have Broadband while 36% use their own cell phone connection.

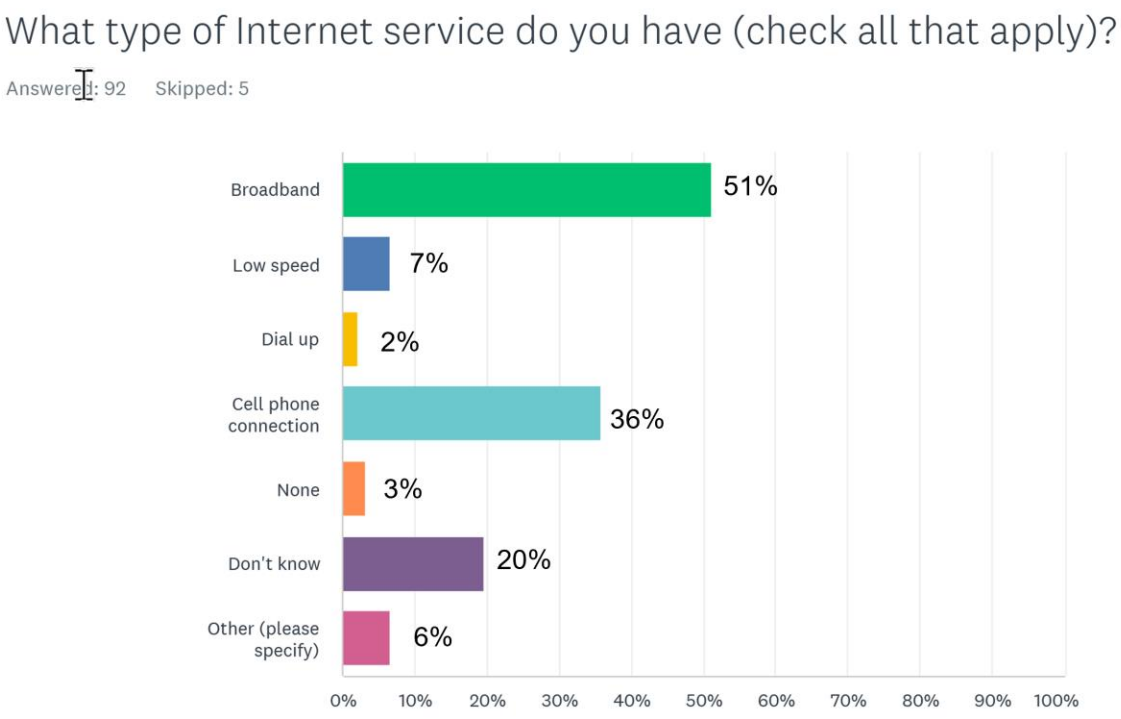

Figure 10

2d. Internet service Payment (See Figure 11).

36% of the people pay for their own Internet service while 43% of families pay. 14% of the people receive the Internet through their cell phone plan. This is a surprisingly high number of people who pay for their own Internet service. This may reflect the high value placed on Internet access by people with I/DD.

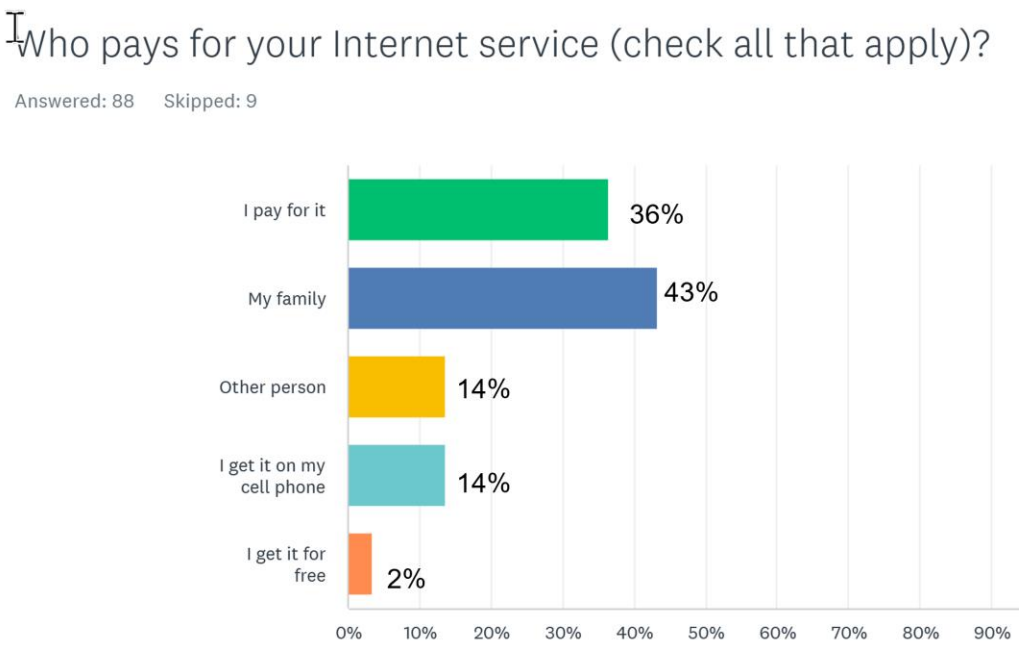

Figure 11

3a. Sources of Support and Assistance (See Figure 12).

Family was the first help (49%) but help from Direct Support Professionals (47%) was almost the same. This shows both the crucial role families play in technology adoption but also that of DSPs.

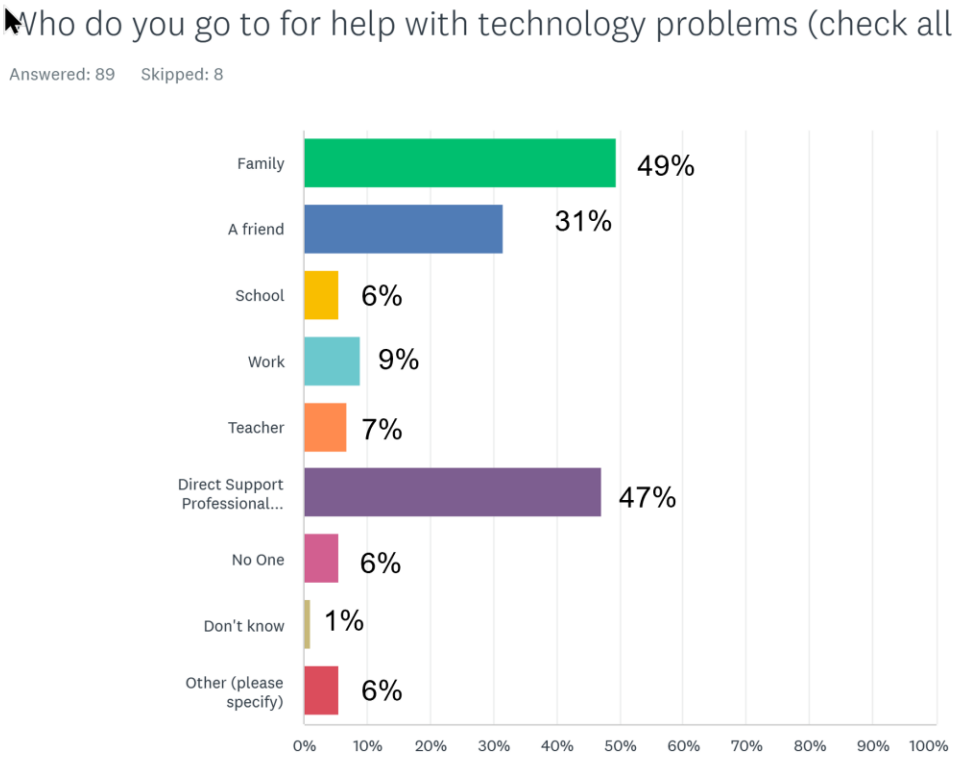

Figure 12

3b. Learning How to Use Technology (See Figure 13).

Family were the number one place survey respondents learned how to use technology (54%) but learning from Direct Support Professionals (39%) was also high. Learning from a friend was 28%. These figures show the crucial role families play in technology adoption but also that of DSPs and friends too.

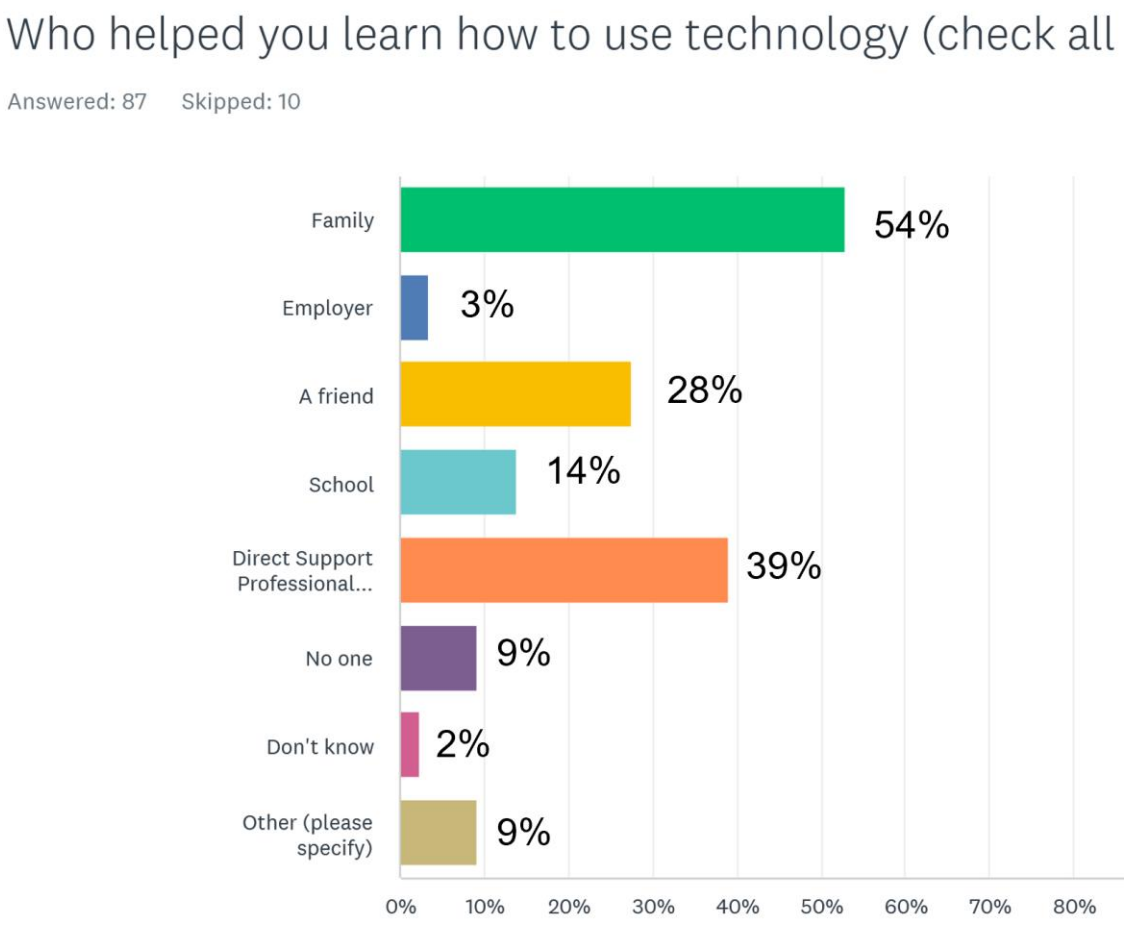
Who helped you learn how to use technology (check all
Answered: 87 Skipped: 10
Family
54%
Employer
3%
A friend
28%
School
14%
Direct Support Professional...
39%
No one
9%
Don't know
2%
Other (please specify)
9%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%

Figure 13

Conclusion and Initial Recommendation

The authors of this Policy Brief commend the Georgia Council of Developmental Disability for having the foresight to address the technology needs of people with I/DD. The technology survey results confirm that people with I/DD in Georgia do not have equal access to technology devices, the Internet and support as the general population.

The importance of technology in our lives is increasing rapidly. We are reminded of this frequently with reports of ChatGPT in the news almost daily. Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google, said recently that it took Gmail five years to reach 100 million registered users. ChatGPT reached this in five months (Amapour and Co, 2023).

While technology has both upsides and downsides, the cost in terms of missed opportunities of being left out of digital inclusion is increasing dramatically. What were once simple tasks, like banking, applying for jobs or making doctor's appointments, now require Internet access and often smart phone texting.

People with I/DD won't have full equity until everyone has full access to these critical communication technologies. While Assistive Technology, like mobility devices and Augmentative and Alternative communication devices (ACC) have revolutionized the lives of many people with disabilities, this success has yet to be translated into widespread availability and adoption of technology by the I/DD community. Most people with I/DD have little more technology than they had five or even ten years ago.

The results of the technology survey for people with I/DD highlight the need to greatly expand both the availability and access to communications technology. This will require extensive educational efforts to all stakeholders and funding. The ultimate goal is for every person with

I/DD to benefit from the use of technology. Fortunately, the recent additions to the Federal Medicaid Waiver will provide for funding for Assistive Technology as an approved service by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities for the first time.

Future policy reports from the Technology White Paper Project will cover results from the four Focus Groups and the interviews with officials from the fifteen states that are implementing technology. These project activities provide additional insights into technology adoption, acquisition, and usage along with systemic efforts to integrate technology into service delivery and individual personal lives.

References

Amapour and Company (Producer). 2023, March 23) *Former Google CEO Eric Schmidt on the Consequences of an A.I. Revolution* [Video]. Youtube. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sg3EchbCcA0&t=907s

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Project Advisory Committee

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