



Let's Talk Communication Access Initiative
Communication Access for All
A 501(c)3 Nonprofit Organization

"In an emergency, clear communication saves lives."
-Kyle Clark, 9NEWS Denver

-The Let's Talk Initiative's Alert Decal Pilot Program Overview-

The Let's Talk Communication Access Initiative is a national 501c3 nonprofit organization located in Aurora, Colorado. Our mission is to support communication access for all by supporting children and adults with complex communication needs to actively participate in their lives at home, at school, at work and in the community via Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems. Our goals are to build meaningful relationships, to support inclusive participation and to grow our community's awareness of how AAC systems support our neighbors, friends and family to engage, learn and grow.

In 2019 we began a pilot program in collaboration with the City of Aurora, Colorado's First Responders including Aurora Fire Rescue, Police Department and Falck EMS called the **Alert Decal Program (ADP)**. We were able to establish an extensive Advisory Board for this project including community members with communication needs secondary to sensory, motor/physical, behavioral/safety, cognitive/learning, and/or neurological needs and community partners from a variety of agencies including the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, Centura Health, Aurora Police Department, Aurora Fire Rescue, Falck EMS, Cherry Creek Public Schools, Aurora Public Schools, Colorado Department of Motor Vehicles, Circles, Ltd., Colorado Department of Human Services, Emergency Medical Services for Children and the Let's Talk Communication Access Initiative.

The concept for the Alert Decal Program arose from conversations with many of our Let's Talk participants about poor interactions that they have experienced due to ineffective communication with medical professionals and first responders in emergency situations leading to unfortunate outcomes. We discussed possible solutions to address this issue and decided that a two-tiered educational approach supporting both our community members with complex communication needs and our first responders would be beneficial. The ADP is a prepared and proactive approach designed to improve interactions and outcomes in an emergency.

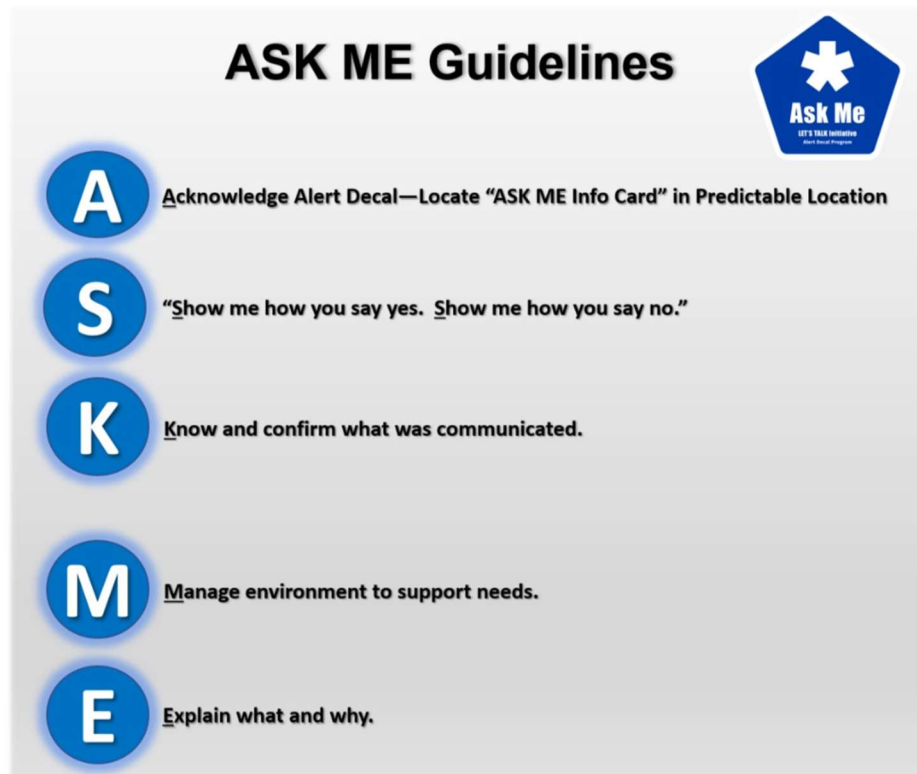
Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, we were able to work with the City of Aurora's First Responders and community members with communication needs to identify areas we could support through education. We surveyed Officers with Aurora Police Department, Firefighters with Aurora Fire Rescue and EMTS/Paramedics with Falck EMS and found the following:

- 74.45% of responders participating in the survey indicated that they had not received adequate training in their role as a first responder to effectively communicate with a person with complex communication needs secondary to sensory, motor/physical, behavioral/safety, cognitive/learning, and/or neurological needs.
- 60% of responders participating in the survey indicated that they were not able to successfully determine upon arrival to scene, if a person would require the use of alternative or augmentative forms of communication (AAC) such as high-tech, voice-output devices, low-tech picture boards/text boards, sign language, eye gaze, or other form of communication.
- 78.99% of responders participating in the survey indicated that a visual aide such as an ALERT DECAL placed on vehicles, residences, schools and businesses would help to increase their ability as a First Responder to effectively serve the needs of a person who had complex communication needs secondary to sensory, motor/physical, behavioral/safety, cognitive/learning, and/or neurological needs.
- 14.25% of our responders shared that they had a family member or friend with complex communication needs such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, Deafness or Hard of Hearing and Motor Speech Disabilities secondary to stroke, traumatic brain injury and Parkinson's disease. These respondents also shared that because of their relationships with family members or friends with complex communication needs they felt more comfortable supporting others with complex needs.

To supplement our data collection, we spent time with members of the Aurora Police Department, Aurora Fire Rescue and Falck EMS to assess information that they collected on scene and found that our community members with complex communication needs were not likely to be prepared to communicate effectively with first responders about their communication, mobility and medical needs.

Given all of the information we collected we worked collaboratively to design an Alert Decal that our community members with complex communication needs would be able to voluntarily display on the front door of their residence and on the window where they

sit in their primary vehicle. The decal is designed to alert First Responders that someone they may interact with on scene has complex communication needs. This alert decal signals the first responder to engage in the five-step ASK ME Guidelines that they learn as part of the educational training of the pilot study.



Our goals for the Alert Decal Program pilot study with the City of Aurora are:

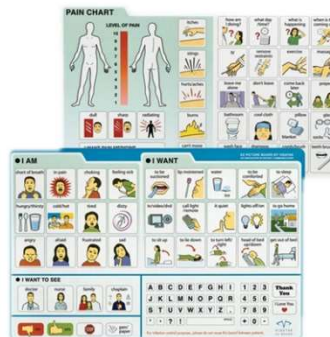
- To support our community members with communication needs secondary to sensory, motor/physical, behavioral/safety, cognitive/learning, and/or neurological needs to be proactive and prepared for an emergency through educational supports and guidance to participate in the Alert Decal Pilot Program.



- To visually alert First Responders that a person they are assisting has communication needs secondary to sensory, motor/physical, behavioral/safety, cognitive/learning, and/or neurological needs may require augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) to help support their ability to express themselves and to support their understanding of language.



- To provide the educational supports necessary to assist a First Responder's ability to successfully interact with children and adults who have communication needs by strengthening their understanding and use of low- and high-tech augmentative/alternative communication supports (AAC).



- To help First Responders gain confidence in their ability to comfortably interact with a person who uses AAC to support improved outcomes in an emergency.



- To provide education to increase a First Responder's awareness of interventions/supports they can use to manage the environment to support a person they are assisting who has communication needs.



For more information about the Alert Decal Pilot Program, please contact our offices at (978) 886-0888 or visit our website at www.letstalkinitiative.org

"The program comes with training and education and that is one of the next steps. It is a simple concept which is why we believe it will work. This really showed me that there are some situations that First Responders are experiencing everywhere that we just do not know how to deal with the right way, that is sensitive to everybody, that's actually helping. And, more so, making people feel like we are a resource to them. They can reach out to us and we will be receptive."

-Officer Crystal McCoy, Public Information Officer, Aurora Police Department
