

COMMUNICATION *MATTERS*

APRIL 2006 Volume 20 Number 1

THE JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION MATTERS / ISAAC (UK)



IN THIS ISSUE

Feature: AAC Suppliers Update

The Appropriate Use of PECS?

AAC Strategies: Tools for Success Across Environments

BETT 2006 & The Special Needs Fringe

Find A Voice: Celebrating 10 years of supporting people with communication needs

Successful Literacy for Children with Severe Communication Difficulties

"What Communication Matters means to me"

REGULAR COLUMNS

CASC News

Diary Dates

Press Releases

Trustees' News



COMMUNICATION MATTERS JOURNAL

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 1
APRIL 2006



Cover: Fun with toys at the *Find A Voice* Loan Library
(page 7)

COMMUNICATION MATTERS JOURNAL
ISSN 0969-9554

Communication Matters / ISAAC (UK)
c/o The ACE Centre
92 Windmill Road
Oxford OX3 7DR, UK
Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211
Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
Website: www.communicationmatters.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 327500
Company Registered in England & Wales No. 01965474

Editors, Design & Production

Sally Millar Email: sally.millar@ed.ac.uk
Patrick Poon Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk

Advertising and Overseas Subscriptions

Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211
Email: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk

Copy Submission

Preferred text format: Microsoft Word
Preferred graphics/photo formats: JPEG, TIFF
Copy deadline: 16 June 2006 (Vol 20 No 2)
27 October 2006 (Vol 20 No 3)

The Communication Matters Journal is the official publication of Communication Matters / ISAAC (UK), and is an ISAAC affiliated publication.

This Journal provides a forum for discussion, and views expressed in any section of this publication are the views of the writer(s) exclusively; publication in this journal does not constitute endorsement by Communication Matters / ISAAC (UK) or ISAAC of those views expressed. This is in no way affected by the right of the Editors to edit all copy published. Publication of advertisements in this journal is not an endorsement of the advertiser nor of the products and services advertised. Communication Matters reserves the right to reject or cancel without notice any advertisement. Copyright for all published material is held by Communication Matters / ISAAC (UK) unless otherwise stated.

Printed by Crowes of Norwich

CONTENTS

- 2 **The Appropriate Use of PECS?**
Ann Gresswell & Rachel Moore
- 5 **Successful Literacy for Children with Severe Communication Difficulties - Review of AAC Study Day**
Katie Clarke
- 7 **Find A Voice: Celebrating 10 years of supporting people with communication needs**
Joy Butcher
- 11 **BETT 2006 & The Special Needs Fringe**
Janet Larcher with Maggie Wagstaff
- 13 **AAC Strategies: Tools for Success Across Environments - Review of AAC Study Day**
Kate Laws, Jo Weaver, Mike Sissions, Alison Galvin, Julie Tarn
- 17 **"What Communication Matters means to me"**
Liz Moulam

AAC SUPPLIERS UPDATE FEATURE

- 23 **Introduction to Feature & CM Road Shows**
- 24 **Crick Software Ltd**
- 25 **DynaVox Systems Ltd**
- 26 **Richard Hill & Associates**
- 27 **Inclusive Technology Ltd**
- 29 **Liberator Ltd**
- 30 **Madhouse Software Productions Ltd**
- 31 **Mayer-Johnson**
- 32 **Modemo Ltd**
- 33 **Possum Controls Ltd - AAC Division**
- 35 **Prentke Romich International Ltd**
- 37 **Smartbox Assistive Technology Ltd**
- 38 **SRS Technology Ltd**
- 39 **Toby Churchill Ltd**
- 41 **Widgit Software Ltd**

REGULAR COLUMNS

- 19 **Trustees' News**
- 19 **CASC News**
- 20 **Press Releases**
- 22 **Diary Dates**

The Appropriate Use of PECS?

ANN GRESSWELL & RACHEL MOORE

The ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7DR, UK Email: gresswell@ace-centre.org.uk

Having presented 'Moving on from PECS' at the CM2005 Communication Matters National Symposium, we would like to open further debate on the subject of PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and the way in which it is often used indiscriminately throughout our special schools.

When preparing our presentation we tried not to be confrontational. However, because of the way in which PECS has been vigorously marketed and taken on board by schools, often without consideration for the differing needs of individual youngsters, we feel that debate within this area is now essential.

When we visit schools, we often see PECS being used inappropriately for youngsters, who either do not need it, or who, if provided with appropriate communication tools, could have moved on to more effective communication. It is clear that the youngsters' individual needs have not been carefully considered. The situation has not been helped by the publication of articles supporting the use of PECS for all youngsters with communication difficulties (e.g. Stevens, 2006).

Our presentation 'Moving on from PECS' was written in response to increasing numbers of referrals of autistic youngsters to the ACE Centre in Oxford. These referrals requested communication technology as well as advice on how to progress the communication of youngsters already using PECS.

We have considered the roots of PECS and what it was originally designed to do. The PECS literature indicates that:

- PECS was developed to support non-speaking students with autism where other communication systems had failed.
- Youngsters learn to give a picture of a desired item to a communication partner in exchange for that item. In this way a youngster learns about one-to-one interaction as a basis for communication. We acknowledge that for some youngsters this step is essential in learning to engage in social interaction.

The PECS literature also provides criteria for giving up PECS as follows:

- Speech vocabulary is as large as PECS vocabulary.
- Initiation with speech is intact.
- Length of spoken utterance is as long as PECS utterance.
- Speech is intelligible to an untrained listener.

This list excludes a significant number of young people for whom we contend this system is no longer appropriate or may never have been appropriate in the first place. There are youngsters, who have not developed functional speech or who continue to need visual support in order to produce speech, with the potential to produce far more creative expressive language than PECS allows. These are young people who need to

be able to question, to reason, to evaluate, to describe events, to predict, to plan and to negotiate. For these youngsters, alternative AAC resources are needed.

Alternative AAC resources may include communication books, communication charts and speech output devices. The following points need to be considered:

- The use of a consistent core vocabulary to combine with and modify topic vocabulary can allow a youngster to significantly expand their communication potential.
- The young person will need to understand that these resources are directly accessed by pointing and that a communicative message can be delivered in this way.
- Communication partners need to use the young person's resources as a two-way system in order to model how it can be used functionally and in context. There are significant benefits, which result from using a pointing system. For example:
 - Speed of communication is likely to be increased.
 - The cognitive and physical load involved in building up a sentence on a message strip and handing it to someone is removed.
 - Resources accessed by pointing (where no building up of a message on a message-strip or exchange is needed) enables greater creativity of language and a wider range of linguistic concepts.

- Fluency can be significantly increased.
- A growing PECS system adds significant bulk and weight as more vocabulary is added. A low tech pointing system tends to be less bulky.
- Parents and teaching staff report that maintenance of the PECS system can be difficult as symbols can be lost, wrongly re-positioned or destroyed! These maintenance issues are reduced where vocabulary items are not individually attached using Velcro.

Concerns are often expressed when considering moving on from PECS which need to be addressed:

- Typically, concerns are expressed over the loss of a system with which the young person has become familiar. However, the transition between the two systems can be managed in a number of ways. These include:

- Maintaining two resources for a time.
- Maintaining elements of the PECS system within the new resource e.g. a timetable.
- Incorporating the new system within the PECS book initially.

- There may be concern that the youngster is not building up a complete sentence when communicating and that this aspect of language development may be neglected. While developing sentence structure is an important part of language development, the emphasis during face-to-face communication needs to be placed on the meaning of the message being communicated.

- A telegrammatic sentence is acceptable during face-to-face interaction.
- A full grammatical model of the youngster's message can be supplied at the time by the communication partner.
- Targeted and structured sessions on the computer and elsewhere can be used to further develop language structure.

IN CONCLUSION

We wonder whether, in the light of the heavy marketing of PECS in this and other countries, we should be more vigorous in questioning the efficacy of its generalised and inappropriate usage. Surely, we should be promoting a culture where the needs of the young

person are paramount, and whatever communication system they use is developed as a result of careful consideration of their individual needs. For some youngsters PECS can be an essential first step towards social interaction. When this first step has been achieved, other methods *should be considered* for further developing their communication. For others, PECS is simply not an appropriate communication tool and should never be used. *

Ann Gresswell, Teacher & Physiotherapist
Rachel Moore, Speech & Language Therapist

REFERENCES

- Frost, L.A. & Bondy, A. (2002) PECS The Picture Exchange Communication System. Training Manual. Pyramid Educational Consultants UK Ltd.
- MacDuff, G.S., Krantz, P.J., & McClannahan, L.E. (1993) Teaching Children with Autism to use Photographic Activity Schedules. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis* 26, 89-97.
- Krantz, MacDuff and McClannahan (1993) Activity Schedules for Children with Autism'.
- Latham, C. (2005) Developing and using a Communication Book. *Communication Matters* Vol 20 No 1.
- Mirenda, P. (2001) Autism, Augmentative Communication, and Assistive Technology: What Do We Really Know? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities* 16(3), 141-151.
- Stevens, N. (2006) Beyond autism: the Picture Exchange Communication System. *RCSLT Bulletin* Jan 2006, Issue 645.



Augmentative and Alternative Communication

The Official Journal of ISAAC

Editor: John Todman, UK

The only publication integrating AAC theory, research and practice. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* is of special value to speech therapists and professionals who have a clinical, educational and research interest in this growing field. Each issue includes:

- Tables and illustrations show valuable research data
- Related studies sections list topical articles and their abstracts
- Valuable sub-heads guide you quickly through the article

International in scope and transdisciplinary in approach, the AAC Journal presents articles, case studies, position papers, conference abstracts, with direct implications on program development, assessment and intervention. This Journal stimulates development and improves service delivery in non-speech communication.

Published Quarterly: March, June, September, December

CM Members rate (per year): £42 airmail (£28 student/retired)
(£63 ISAAC Institutional/Corporate)

Members of Communication Matters (ISAAC UK) must send their orders to CM (address at bottom of page)

Readers outside the UK can order in local currency from their local Chapter of ISAAC, or in dollars directly from

ISAAC, 49 The Donway West, Suite 308, Toronto, ON M3C 3M9, Canada Tel: +1 416 385 0351

Email: info@isaac-online.org Website: www.isaac-online.org

When ordering from Communication Matters, make your cheque payable to **Communication Matters**, and send to:

**COMMUNICATION
MATTERS**

c/o ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7DR

CM Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211 E: admin@communicationmatters.org.uk W: www.communicationmatters.org.uk

AGOSCI News

AGOSCI News is the newsletter of the Australian Group on Severe Communication Impairment. It is an ISAAC affiliated publication and is published twice a year.

CM Members rate (per year): £21

ISAAC Israel Newsletter

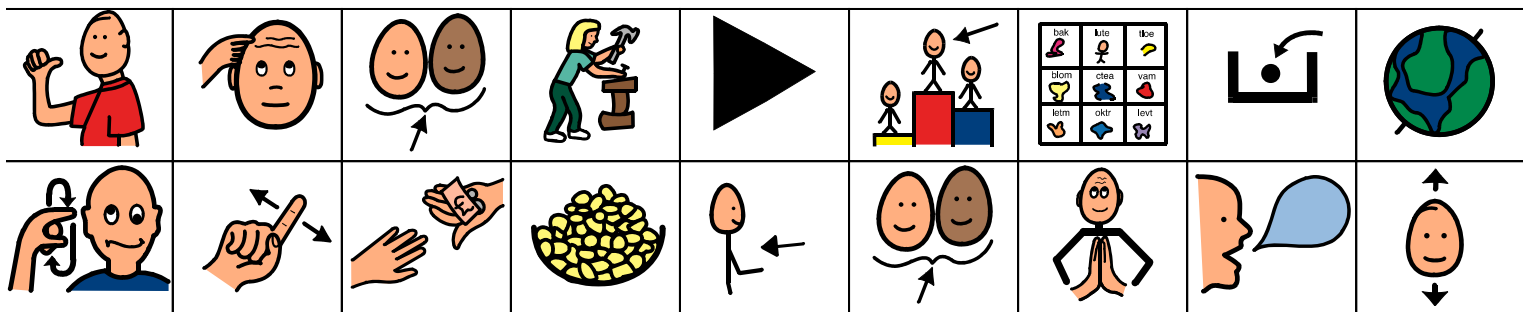
ISAAC Israel Newsletter is an ISAAC affiliated publication. Published annually in the spring of each year, in Hebrew with a few English abstracts.

CM Members rate (per year): £19 (airmail)

Unterstützte Kommunikation

This ISAAC affiliated publication is published four times a year in German by ISAAC-GSC.

CM Members rate (per year): £36 (airmail)



Looking for the right symbol?

We now provide

OVER 15,000

*FREE SYMBOLS**

...on EVERY DV4, MT4, MightyMo & MiniMo



***From April 1st we are providing all DynaSyms and PCS symbols free of charge on all relevant DynaVox products (excludes Dynamo Original)**

***includes DynaSyms Classic, DynaSyms, PCS and addendums 1998-2004, PCS UK addendums and Virtual symbols**



Tel: +44 (0)1384 446789
Fax: +44 (0)1384 446799

For more details contact:
DynaVox Systems Ltd,
Sunrise Building
High Street, Wollaston,
West Midlands DY8 4PS
www.dynavox.co.uk



Tel: +44 (0)1384 446869
Fax: +44 (0)1384 446799

Review of AAC Study Day presented by Karen Erickson

Successful Literacy for Children with Severe Communication Difficulties

KATIE CLARKE

1Voice Communicating Together, PO Box 559, Halifax HX1 2XT, UK Email: info@1voice.info

Communication Matters and Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland held very successful AAC Study Days in Dunfermline, London and Manchester during November 2005. These were presented by Dr Karen Erickson who is the Director and Literacy Specialist Teacher based at the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, North Carolina, USA.

I went to the Manchester workshop with Angie McCormack and was pleased to see some other 1Voice members and catch up with their news over the breaks.

Karen was a dynamic speaker – hardly pausing for breath – and gave us lots of valuable information on successful literacy for children with severe communication difficulties. I am sure those who attended were inspired and motivated to take some of the ideas back to their homes, schools or working place.

As we know our children and young people who use AAC face many barriers in learning to read. We had also been looking at these issues on our 1Voice chat group during the latter part of the year and know that our children and families as well as teachers do struggle. We felt it would be a good opportunity to run a parent workshop at our 1Voice

family weekend to look at ideas around literacy and give parents a chance to hear one another and share ideas.

Although we ran only a one hour workshop it did give us time to get lots of suggestions and practical tips onto a flip chart after spending discussion time in groups. Overall the feeling was that this is a huge area with little expertise that is vital to our children's development and education.

Below are some of the ideas we had:

- Write things down constantly – keep showing our children written words. Some of us scribble down easy to read notes during meal times to encourage children to understand the importance of reading.
- Remember it is so much harder for our kids and will take much longer – it takes non-disabled children 5 years before they can begin to read sentences easily.
- When writing letters walk or drive around the letter formation with their hand on your hand (i.e. your hand *under*, not hand over).
- Use word walls and put them somewhere very visible like near to the tea table.
- Give plenty of time for everyone involved.

• Phonic work is good but blended sounds do seem to be a problem.

• *Planet Wobble* series (using Clicker) on computer – www.planetwobble.com

• Read out loud together signs, e.g. shop names, street names, traffic signs

• *Cloze-Pro* software is really helpful for school and homework.

• Finding time is hard – use grandparents if they are available!

• Try and find time for bedtime reading and stories.

• Scan books into the computer

• Be creative in giving access to text via any means.

• Listen to tapes and follow the text in books.

• Put key words around the house and stick to objects.

• Appropriate text for age, e.g. do not stay on the same book over and over again.

• Write down lists, e.g. shopping, itinerary.

• Visual sequential memory games (e.g. I went to market and bought...) or putting a recipe from a book into the right sequence.

• Let our children make mistakes – it is OK to be wrong.

- Use less symbols and more of the written word.
- Have high expectations from Day One and insist staff working with our children do the same. Raise their awareness.
- Have the days, week, month chart visible and use as a daily activity.
- Have an alphabet frieze in the bedroom.
- Ask for specialist support and advice and say you feel you this is important - your child has a right to literacy.
- Resources - look on the Institute for Brain Injury website.
- Also - the Institute for the Achievement of Children with Potential, Philadelphia.
- Have a long term vision.

We really wish to keep this topic alive so if anyone else has any good suggestions please do e-mail 1Voice so we can print them either on our web site or in the next newsletter. To contact 1Voice, email: info@1voice.info

Good luck and do enjoy the reading together! *

Katie Clarke
1Voice Communicating Together

Below are some further parent comments on the Karen Erickson day, first published in the Feb/March 2006 issue of the 1Voice Newsletter.

FROM LIZA CLEMENTS:

This is second hand parent feedback as I didn't go but two members of school staff did. They felt encouraged that they had been on the right track with the approach they had been using but that they had learnt so much more at the day and came away with more ideas. They were very glad that they had gone together because the day was so packed and there was so much to take in.

FROM LOUISE SMITH:

(Mum to 13 year old daughter with Worster Drought Syndrome. L. uses a communication aid but prefers sign and use her voice, but very limited by both.) Our local professional attended. Just writing to encourage any parents who attended the Study Day to write in, especially if it can give help and support to any parents who were unable to attend any of the Study Days - it certainly seems as if an interesting and informative time was had by both professionals and parents.

FROM LIZ MOULAM:

The whole day was fabulous. Karen Erickson has amazing energy and passion. Her thoughts and ideas were inspiring - I came home with a list of things to try out and then talk to others involved in my daughter's literacy development. B. already read age appropriately but this was very slow, as

she liked to vocalize words, even if only by mouthing them - Karen made me realise we needed to make a step change and after discussion at home and lots of practise B. is now reading silently though still not fast enough for her own liking, but she's getting there.

A whole day on developing reading and literacy skills for those young people who use AAC and already have the basics or at least a good grounding would be really welcome.

CM EDITOR'S NOTE

If anyone has responses to this article or further suggestions on developing literacy in AAC users, please copy them to us for the CM Journal as well as to 1Voice, to reach a wider audience and to ensure that professionals and parents and all concerned are 'reading from the same hymn sheet'.

REFERENCES

Software and websites:

- For general Clicker information: www.cricksoft.com/uk and Planet Wobble www.planetwobble.com UK
- Cloze Pro: www.cricksoft.com/uk/products/clozepro/default.asp
- Center for Literacy and Disability Studies: www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds
- British Institute for Brain Injured Children: www.bibic.org.uk
- The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Philadelphia: www.iahp.org



National Network Family Day Sunday 16 July from 10am

Hothorpe Hall, Near Market Harborough, Leicestershire

Fantastic venue, huge grounds, good access, just off the M1

**Adults £10, Children £5 including buffet lunch, face painting, fun and games
Meet other users, role models and families to share ideas and information**

Make it a weekend and also join us for

Role Model Workshop - First Impressions Count

Friday 14 July from 1pm

AAC Role Models (aged 16+) free for participants,
book early - limited numbers

Teenager's Workshop - Be Confident, Be Cool

Saturday 15 July from 10am

AAC users (secondary school age) with role models,
free incl. 1 parent/carer, book early - limited numbers

Annual General Meeting - Saturday 15 July at 8pm

All members welcome. Dinner, Bed and Breakfast £25 pp including Network Day

For full details of how to attend and further information Contact: 0845 3307862 www.1voice.info Reg Charity No: 1087615

Find A Voice

Celebrating 10 years of supporting people with Communication Needs

JOY BUTCHER

Find A Voice, 49 Beaver Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 5NU, UK

Tel & Fax: 01233 640443 Email: joy@findavoice.org.uk Website: www.findavoice.org.uk

Find A Voice was first registered as a charity in 1996, at first using the name 'The Kent Language And Communication Centre', later changed to 'Find A Voice.'

STARTING THE CHARITY

Joy Butcher, a parent of a young person with a speech and language disorder and learning disabilities, was the founder of the Charity. It was at a very early stage in her son's life, that Joy recognised that Adrian really needed the assistance of alternative and augmentative communication to enable him to be an active participant in society. When assessments for a communication aid were sought, Joy discovered that the Kent Authorities needed additional resources and services. From this point Joy has not stopped working to assist with this need across the county and indeed across the country.

The Charity started its life in Joy's home where she began to network with a number of organisations locally and across Kent, gathering experience and expertise from being a steering group member of *Partnership with Parents*, and from the experience of other Trustees. In 2000 the Charity had the opportunity to expand. At this stage Joy stood down as Chair of *Find A Voice*, and became the full time Executive Director in charge of the daily running and strategic direction. The Charity's Trustees and office bearers brought a wealth of experience, having variously worked with *AFASIC*, the Board of Governors of a special school, and one as a lecturer and author in special educational needs.

HELPING PEOPLE

Find A Voice supports people of all ages with severe communication needs and provides a range of services. Clients seeking assistance from *Find A Voice* have a range of disabilities, including learning disabilities, strokes, brain injury, autism, MS, MND and cerebral palsy. There is no age restriction; the Charity provides help for pre-school children right through to senior citizens. Importantly the doors of the charity are also always open for parents/carers and all professionals.

SERVICES PROVIDED AT FIND A VOICE

Integrated Community Equipment Funding via A Direct Payment

Find A Voice thoroughly researched the procedure for applying for communication aids through the Integrated Community Equipment Funding (held by local Government and Primary Care Trusts, 2002) and established that communication aids were covered by these budgets. The research involved many hours of liaising with PCTs and Social Services, other professionals and Members of Parliament. Through these efforts *Find A Voice* was able to establish the foundations for a Direct Payment for communication aids provision in Kent. With the Becta funding from Government for school aged children in place, the main focus of this work currently is in assisting adults, although this may change as the Communication Aids Project (CAP) funding ceases at the end of March



Fun with toys at the *Find A Voice* Loan Library

2006. Like a number of other communication organisations, *Find A Voice* is supporting the *Scope* 'Speak for Yourself' campaign, trying to highlight the need for people to have statutory rights to receive communication aids.

Resource loan library at Find A Voice

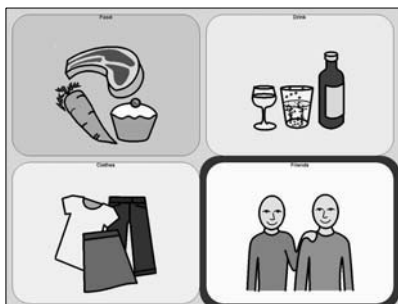
Find A Voice has a free loan library available to parents, carers and professionals across the County of Kent and Medway. Loan equipment includes switch access toys, simple communication aids, training videos and reference book and a number of very popular Makaton Parent Packs. Wednesday is library morning and children and adults visit the Centre. Other times to visit can be arranged to suit the client, parent or professional, as necessary. Many referrals to the library come from the Portage service, Specialist Nursing Team, schools, students studying health and social care courses. One local secondary school runs a child-care course and the girls have the opportunity to join the library. Professionals have been pleased to ac-

broaden your communication...



Sensory Software
International Ltd

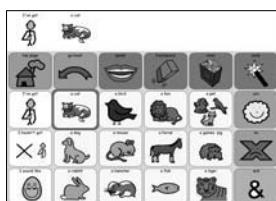
...all around the world



From basic symbol communication...

The Grid

...to advanced text communication



The Grid software is sold all over the world. Considered to be the most powerful and flexible communication software available, The Grid is used in over 20 countries, translated into 10 different languages and available in every continent (except Antarctica!).

- easy to edit and customise grids to an individual's needs
- ready made grid sets for symbol communication
- sophisticated word predictor for text communication
- directly access Microsoft Word and other applications
- surf the internet and send emails around the globe

The Grid £240

cess the service, as some of the equipment is not available elsewhere, as evaluations show: "very helpful service", "staff very friendly and welcoming", "life-line to my daughter".

The resource library is taken out to many community groups and statutory organisations, and conferences. Grants from several organisations have helped build the *Find A Voice* Library.

IT and Communication Training

Find A Voice also provides students with communication tuition through the use of IT. Students come from a variety of establishments locally; residential centres, day centres and private homes, for 45 minute sessions. Students vary in age; the youngest so far was 11, though the average age is 33 years. Most students are taught on a one-to-one basis making learning both more personal and more finely tuned to meet their needs, but some others are taught on a 2 to 1 basis, supporting their learning through competition and group interaction. An individual assessment is made on each student prior to formal attendance at the centre, through a 'Come and try it out for yourself' session. Each student is given a Portfolio of Skills attainment and in some cases an Individual Learning Plan; presently some students are making a lifestyle portfolio.

Students who come to the centre have various communication difficulties and we try to support them to communicate in different ways through the use of IT, for example by the use of the Internet, email, and software promoting the use of communication skills and literacy. Several students find it difficult to communicate verbally, others find reading and writing problematic and another student, despite the fact he can understand a number of languages and use a PC, lacks everyday social communication skills.

To date, we have taught 14 students and some have been with us for over 3 years. Several students have attained a level of communication that is identifiable with the National Core Curriculum Milestones: whilst another student is learning to use her own laptop to acquire new communication and literacy skills. Other students are now using Email and the Internet to converse, not only with faraway relatives but within their own social groups too.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND VOLUNTEERS

We offer valuable work experience in office administration on a regular basis to school and university students and to adults with a disability including learning disabilities and visual impairment.

We have two valued long-standing volunteers.

Training in Symbol Use

Developments in technology make it feasible to use symbols routinely in the home, in classroom activities and in residential care settings. As people become more computer-literate they can prepare, for example, laminated cards for a menu-board or a communication book. However, dedicated software for printing or displaying symbols (such as *BoardMaker* and *Widgit's Writing With Symbols* and *Communicate in Print*) is not learnt at school or college. It can be daunting to tackle this software just from the manuals, and many become discouraged.

At *Find A Voice* we became aware of the following challenges that included:

- Care home groups investing heavily in symbols programmes for their computers which were then unused because staff did not know how to access them.
- Teaching staff able only to print out lines of symbolised text without knowing how to change wordlists or make grids.
- A child being supplied with a VOCA with one overlay- staff unable to make a new overlay for another activity.
- Voluntary organisations sending out newsletters with misleading symbols as the typist was not selecting correctly from the symbols available.

Through our experiences with young people looking for communication aids we also became aware of the close link between effective access to symbols and effective use of communication aids.

FIND A VOICE COURSES

Since 2003 we have delivered 38 courses to 262 people, 2 off-site and the rest in Ashford, on *Writing With Symbols 2000*, *Communicate in Print*, *BoardMaker*. Soon we will also offer *Communicate by Choice*. Considering that some of these provide symbols for whole schools, departments, day centres or classes the number of service users ultimately benefiting must run into hundreds. Although the vast majority of those attending work in Kent, we have had delegates from as far a field as Belfast! (Our courses are open to all, but parents and those working in Kent/Medway pay a reduced charge.)

Our courses were initially led by outside trainers, but we were gradually able to develop in-house expertise to run the courses. This has allowed us to move from large-scale groups of up to 20 participants to small groups of up to four

participants who can be assured of time and attention to address any needs and challenges they may encounter.

Feedback shows that participants find the courses helpful or very helpful, frequently commenting that they now have the confidence to make grids, change wordlists, design newsletters, import symbols into *PowerPoint* and so on. It is heartening to hear that many come on our courses with the aim of becoming a 'symbols resource person' or enabler for their own workplaces. An invaluable part of the training is networking over lunch and exchanging ideas and experiences of how symbols are being used in a wide variety of settings across education, social services, speech and language therapy and in the home.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

It is our impression that the symbols software product range is both expanding and diversifying. While *DynaVox* is working to expand UK curriculum content in PCS symbols, *Widgit* is expanding the scope of its new *Communicate* series, but offering only *Widgit Rebus* symbols with this new generation of software. These developments may benefit many users, but it also leaves many carers and professional users uncertain as to which software best meets service users' needs. Some organisations appear hesitant to commit to any programme.

PUBLICATIONS

The *Find A Voice* newsletter is published four times a year. Our website www.findavoice.org.uk provides up-to-date information about alternative and augmentative communication and the day to day work of the charity.

SPONSORSHIP AND SUPPORT

We are very grateful for the support and sponsorship of a number of local companies and individuals. Many fundraising activities are planned to celebrate our 10th Anniversary. Further details of the events are available on our website.

THE FUTURE

Reaching ten years old is a great success for *Find A Voice*, but its real achievement is enabling people with speech, language and communication needs receive the equipment and support they need to be able to communicate and to be active and included members of society. As Ashford continues to grow, *Find A Voice* will continue to do the same, working with more partner organisations, and building a service needed for the County of Kent and hopefully beyond. *

Joy Butcher, Executive Director

QED

INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Select your Access Technology requirements from QED

As well as our own products we supply equipment from:

AbleNet

Adaptivation

Attainment

Mayer Johnson

Penny & Giles

Sensory Software

SpaceKraft

Tash

Toby Churchill

Unique Perspectives

Zygo

Don't Limit
Your Choice!

Our NEW 76 page catalogue includes: Assessment Resources, Input Switches, Interface Devices, Communication Aids, Music Products, Page Turners, Games, Software, Alarms, Intercoms, Simple Remote Control, Mounting Systems, Mobile Arm Supports, Head Pointers, Collars, Environmental Controls and Life Skills Resources.

Call us to request a catalogue or to arrange a visit:

QED

Unit D16, Heritage Business Park, Heritage Way
Gosport, Hampshire PO12 4BG

Tel: 023 9258 0600 Fax: 023 9252 8666

E-mail: sales@qedltd.com Internet: www.qedltd.com

BETT 2006 & The Special Needs Fringe

JANET LARCHER WITH MAGGIE WAGSTAFF

Email: janet@larcher.co.uk

BETT 2006



The huge *British Education Technology and Training* exhibition takes place at Olympia, London every year in January. If you want to know about anything to do with using computers in an educational setting then this is the exhibition to go to. It's free, but if you are thinking of going next year remember that it's important to register in advance www.bettshow.com to pre-book seminars and avoid the long queues to get in, also and maybe to hear about special offers, etc.

The exhibition is packed with massive stands from all the big names in computers, software, whiteboards, government (BECTA), and computer furniture but there are also hundreds of other stands representing small and specialist suppliers and agencies with a wealth of useful bits and pieces and information. Suppliers tend to try to have all their new and exciting products ready to 'launch' at BETT.

There has always been a 'special needs village' area but it has always been controversial and this year was no exception. This year it was placed beyond the refreshment and sitting out space and despite the crowds in the main exhibition it was virtually deserted when I visited it. If Inclusion is really at the centre of educational thinking the special

needs area needs to be by an entrance or on a main thoroughfare so that everyone is exposed to it as they negotiate their way around the exhibition, not tucked away in some far flung corner.

SPECIAL NEEDS FRINGE



In recent years, Inclusive Technology has hosted a separate exhibition five minutes walk away in the Hilton Hotel. Most of the Special Needs hardware and software suppliers known in the AAC field take a stand in this *Special Needs Fringe* exhibition. Several companies take a stand in both exhibitions and put the staff most interested in Special Needs aspects of their business in the Special Needs Fringe exhibition. Some suppliers have to make a choice between the two exhibitions (or a 'third way' - Don Johnston set up across the road). This might be confusing for people attending for the first time.

Sadly Widgit Software and Don Johnston were not at the Special Needs Fringe this year, and neither were any of the specialist Visual Impairment suppliers. Nonetheless this exhibition is representative as well as being quieter, friendlier and with people having time to talk, answer questions and demonstrate their

equipment and software to any interested individual without their acquiring the battered elbows and a hoarse voice which can be features of BETT. There are also a number of one hour seminars each day, presented both by suppliers and practitioners, all on very relevant and interesting special needs topics.

The Special Needs Fringe exhibition is family as well as teacher and therapist friendly and provides a good opportunity to compare different products 'face to face'. There is obviously some overlap with CM/CASC Roadshow days. On these days you typically attend six presentations by different suppliers and while there is time to ask questions there is not a lot of time for one-to-one discussions. At the Special Needs Fringe there is plenty of time for in-depth discussions of issues and problems being experienced.

HIGHLIGHTS

Some of the products that particularly caught my eye this year are given below.

Software

Sherston have updated much of their software to include features to make it accessible to children with physical and visual difficulties via what they have titled the 'Inclusion tab' in the teacher's options. They now have switch access as well large pointers, and a choice of colours both for the pointers and the backgrounds. *123-CD Special Edition* and *Stripy Tiger & Spotty Shark's Picture Box* were good additions to the early numeracy and painting activities for switch users. Visit: www2.sherston.com/sen

Widgit Software have extended the resources available for *Communicate: in Print 2* so that symbols and icons are available for curriculum topics. They have also produced printed resources

for children with learning difficulties so that they too can have books on curriculum topics like their peers. The use of *Communicate in Print* to make a wide range of resources quickly and easily is difficult to surpass. Ready-made resources can be purchased as *Communicate by Choice*. Visit: www.widgit.com

Resource have always been a source of good quality software and *Number Bunnies* extends the repertoire for early number work. It is not only well presented, but fulfils the numeracy requirements as well. *Albert's Paintbox* has immense potential not only for painting but also for setting targets in following instructions and using a windows environment, all with very visual end results. Visit: www.resourcekt.co.uk

Inclusive Technology have extended the *Choose IT* range (if you haven't seen Nursery Rhymes and Legends, do so!) with *Fairy Tales*. *ChooseIT maker* and *SwitchIT maker* are both in their second version now and easier to use, with more choice, supportive of more multimedia and with more ready made content. Visit: www.inclusive.co.uk

2Simple have expanded their range of software enormously without losing

their ethos of clear simple presentation. For the oldies amongst us they have also have resurrected *Developing Tray*. Visit: www.2simple.com

Cricksoft's Clicker5 has many great features. If you know Clicker4 really well it takes some getting used to (voice of bitter experience) but it is worth it. The new Food and Weather resources produced with Espresso are very well presented with enough text and excellent speech and graphics and video support. The ORT materials are also a welcome addition. Visit: www.cricksoft.com

Hardware

The stunner of the show was the Inclusive adjustable height plasma display. They were showing the larger 50 inch high definition model that gave an awesome bright, clear display unsullied by shadow (and no projector to look into, become fixated with or even hit your head on.) The adjustability is electronic and easy; as low as 39 cm from the floor and as high as 167 cm.

The structure is such that wheelchairs will be able to get close enough, and the whole thing is truly portable and wheelable, with no re-calibration and set

up at your new venue. This really does look like the touchboard we have been looking for (from £4100). It is likely to come with the Hitachi EWB software that compares well with other suppliers (e.g. Smart notebook). It's in the picture of the front page of their website under Special Needs Fringe: www.inclusive.co.uk

Access

Barry Bennett is a company that I was unaware of before BETT. It has an array of laptop stands, mice that are used with the hand in a vertical position, document holders and work stands. Demonstrations and assessments can be easily arranged with the company. Visit: www.barrybennett.co.uk

Other

QED demonstrated the switch operated still and video camera *ViviCam 10*, it worked without palaver, has a clear on-screen display, and works with any 3.5 jack switch. Visit: www.qedltd.com *

Janet Larcher, Independent AAC Consultant
Maggie Wagstaff, Warwickshire LEA

Photos courtesy of Inclusive Technology

Madhouse Software Productions® Ltd.

Empowering the individual through Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT)



The Ultimate Switching Environment (USE) is an all in one package. USE includes, Speech, Environmental Controls, Writing and Mouse Control.

In addition, USE includes new scanning methods which, should increase the users productivity. **USE £490.00**



Just Talk (JT) is an AAC aid, which shares the characteristics of the "Ultimate Switching Environment" (USE). JT is able to import the "Speech" items created within USE and visa versa. **JT £125.00**



The Virtual Keyboard (VK) is an on screen keyboard, which maximises the users ability to output text using the layered scanning method also used within USE and JT. **VK £61.00**



www.madhousesoftware.co.uk

All above prices exclude P & P. UK delivery is £5.00 and International is £12.00 per item.

Free evaluation versions are available from www.madhousesoftware.co.uk/products.shtml

Alternatively contact: Tel: +44 (0) 1226 390 000 Fax: + 44 (0) 8707 065 489

E-mail: info@madhousesoftware.co.uk

P. O. Box 460, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, UK. S75 5ZT.



All rights are Reserved by "Madhouse Software Productions Ltd. Register Number 4936483 Copyright Madhouse Software Productions Ltd. 2006.

Review of AAC Study Day presented by Carol Goossens'

AAC Strategies: Tools for Success Across Environments

KATE LAWS¹, JO WEAVER¹, MIKE SISSONS², ALISON GALVIN² & JULIE TARN²

¹ Speech & Language Therapy, The Children's Centre, Durham Road, Sunderland SR3 4AF Email: kate.laws@chs.northy.nhs.uk

² The Dales School, Morton on Swale, Northallerton, North Yorkshire DL7 9QW Email: speech@thedalesschool.org

KATE LAWS AND JO WEAVER, SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS, WRITE:

As recently qualified Speech and Language Therapists completely new to the field of AAC and physical disability, we were faced with a steep learning curve in our first year of work. Having survived our first year, we continue to encounter daily challenges related to the successful implementation of AAC within the school/home environment.

Thankfully, Carol Goossens' Aided Language Stimulation (ALS) scheme has come to the rescue! In February 2006, we attended a workshop led by Carol Goossens' entitled 'AAC strategies: Tools for Success across Environments'. The day involved explanation of the ALS approach, including theoretical and practical aspects, using real life examples on video.

We have chosen four key points from the day that address some of the challenges we encounter.

1. As therapists we constantly face the challenge of getting children to use their AAC system frequently and interactively throughout the day.

Learning to use AAC is like learning a foreign language. Carol stressed that the only way to become fluent in a language is to be totally immersed in it. ALS aims

to do just that. The approach is based on a facilitator (therapist, teacher, etc.) pointing to/showing picture symbols as he/she speaks.



In this way, children are constantly exposed to a stream of visual stimulation and simplified language during interaction.

ALS slows down the speaker as he/she selects the correct symbols to display. It simplifies the language being used by breaking down sentences into words; e.g. "We've got to OPEN (pointing to the symbol for OPEN) the juice and POUR it IN (pointing to the symbol for POUR IN) the CUP" (pointing to the symbol CUP).

Using ALS provides a positive model for symbol users. After all, how can we really expect our AAC users to become fluent symbol users if we, as key people in their environment, seldom model the interactive use of symbols?

Having tried ALS with a group of children (half of whom use aided AAC), it seemed to have a positive impact on all children's attention levels and their understanding of activities.

2. Trying to run an AAC group where each child is functioning at a different level has been difficult.

With ALS, the facilitator uses one of four 'zones' when modelling symbols. They can: (1) show individual symbols to a child, (2) point to symbols on a large board (16 or more Velcro symbols), (3) point to a smaller number of symbols on a vest he/she is wearing, or (4) point to symbols on the child's own expressive communication device. The 'zone' you use depends on the abilities of the child you are working with. Within groups of different ability levels we've found it useful to switch between different 'zones', e.g. having several symbols on a large board for some children (facilitator board) and pulling off individual symbols to show others (hand-held zone).

3. As therapists working and learning together, we have jointly led groups for AAC users. We often find ourselves distracted by each other as we try to verbally prompt individual children to respond.

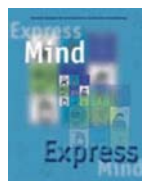
Carol explained the difference between a 'multiple facilitator' model (where several adults are interacting with individual children) and a 'primary facilitator' model (where one adult runs the show). She pointed out that the 'multiple facilitator' model could be chaotic, as children continually have to switch their point of

Tellus 3+

The Ultimate Integrated AAC/PC

Powerful Communication Device

- Mind Express for communication with Symbols (*supports various symbol libraries, different vocabularies available*)
- Eurovocs Suite for text based communication and PC control
- High Quality voices
- 12.1" multi angle viewable LCD screen



Access

Touchscreen, headmouse/mouse, switches, joystick or stylus

3 Year Warranty

As standard. Optional extension to 5 year warranty

LCD Screen Replacement Insurance

As standard (3 years)

Optional SMS Module

Take full control of your mobile phone - Send and receive text messages, Make and answer calls.



Wireless Printing

Integrated Bluetooth (requires Bluetooth Printer or Bluetooth Printer Module)



Optional Long Life Battery

N Charge external battery gives all day use.

Wireless Network Access

Integrated Wireless Network allows you to join existing PC Networks to browse the internet, access files, etc.



Powerful PC

- **NOW** Intel Pentium-M 1.1Ghz ultra low voltage Centrino Processor
- **NOW** 512Mb RAM 40Gb Hard Drive
- Wireless Network IEEE-802.11 b/g
- 2 x USB 2.0
- Mouse, Keyboard, Memory Stick, DVD/CD-RW, Windows XP



Available in RED or BLUE

Environmental Control

Built in GEWA Prog enables infrared control of TV, HiFi, DVD, etc



Programmable Buttons

Use for volume control, messages, windows functions etc.



Optional Camera Module

Control a Logitech Webcam with Mind Express to take pictures, see through your Tellus screen to drive, etc.



For more information, demonstrations or equipment loans, contact us at:

TechCess Ltd

9/10 Willow Park, Upton Lane,
Stoke Golding, Nuneaton,
Warwickshire, CV13 6EU

T: +44 (0)1455 213708
F: +44 (0)1455 213709
E: admin@techcess.co.uk
W: www.techcess.co.uk

focus between speakers. We immediately identified with this and saw some of our own groups in this description.

In the primary facilitator model, one person presents all activities and uses ALS in full view of the children, while supporting staff position themselves behind the children and non-verbally prompt responses where appropriate (and join in with any singing activities!) Optimal seating arrangement is also crucial:

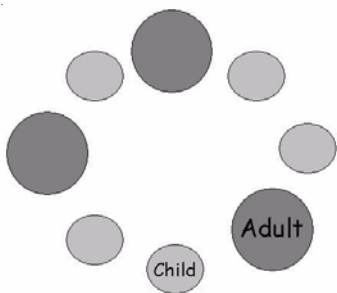


Figure 1 Seating arrangement before workshop

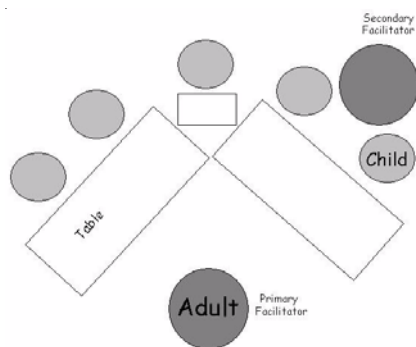


Figure 2 Seating arrangement after workshop

By making these small changes, our groups have been much calmer, and the children appear more focused and attentive.

4. An ongoing challenge in the group setting is the amount of time children spend waiting for a turn, while another child is responding.

In groups, when each child is given a turn to speak, a large amount of waiting time is created for the other children e.g. if each child in a group of six were individually asked a question and took approximately one minute to respond, child X would have received one minute of target time and 5 minutes of non-target time. Carol explained that the key is to engineer activities where all children are engaged most of the time (e.g. singing to the whole group, or engaging non-targeted children's attention to the visual displays).

In addition to the key points mentioned above, we also picked up a number of 'easy once someone's told you!' practical tips from the workshop, which have made a huge difference to our practice:

- Agreeing on Velcro rules (i.e. always use the rough sided Velcro on the symbols – "hard on the card!").
- Deciding on symbol size, type and colour between therapists wherever possible to allow sharing of materials:



Figure 1 Before workshop: Symbols in colour on white background; colour-coded borders



Figure 2 After workshop: Symbols in black and white; colour-coded background

There is no doubt that ALS requires lots of time to make and organise resources. However, with resources in place, the potential benefits are likely to be well worth the effort.

We still have a long way to travel on our road to finding the secret of successful implementation of AAC. However, our small foray into the world of ALS has already made differences to the children we work with. We intend to continue employing ALS strategies when working with children using AAC, and hope to begin using this approach within our mainstream settings.

Thanks to Philippa Robinson and the team at Communicate, Newcastle upon Tyne, for organising an excellent training event. Also to Carol Goossens' for her inspirational presentation.

MIKE SISSONS, TEACHER, WRITES:

Carol Goossens' illustrated her work with video clips which gave a real sense of the energy and commitment she brings to her teaching and the enthusiasm she inspires in others. This evident passion for the work, combined with organisational skills and a clear sense of direction, came across as a powerful motive force in bringing about the increased attention, motivation and involvement of her pupils which she was able to record over time.

Carol outlined principles which apply across the curriculum in what she called an 'engineering approach'. This engineering of the learning environment aims to facilitate access for all children through differentiated instruction. Here are some of the main points. Firstly the roles of the adults are clearly defined with one person – the 'primary facilitator' – leading the session and

establishing the focus of attention for the children whilst other adults, or secondary facilitators, play a discreet role, supporting pupils quietly so as not draw attention from the primary facilitator. The primary facilitator has a wide range of visual stimuli to hand, mostly in the form of pictures and symbols, and (this is crucial), she is *mobile* – Carol uses an office stool on castors which enables her to scoot back and forth between pupils picking up resources as she goes. Carol also mentioned several general points of good practice including seating arrangements for pupils, involvement at all stages of the lesson or activity and the reduction of waiting or 'holding time' for pupils.

All the resources are designed to give maximum visual support and are delivered across four 'zones'. These zones range from actively moving an object directly in front of the child and catching his attention with sound and action, through to constructing meanings by pointing sequentially at symbols on a board at some remove from the child.

Nominally, these zones cover a developmental range of around 2 months to 2 or 3 years. Interim zones involve the use of proximal pointing (i.e. pointing in which the finger makes contact with the object of regard) and here, memorably, Carol wears an apron to which symbols are attached with Velcro. In combination with the office chair this allows Carol to bring a flexible array and choice of symbols directly to the pupil. The apron also allows the facilitator to keep her hands free and to stay in the pupils line of vision whilst the symbols are in use. All four zones can be used in the same session, with the same group of pupils, enabling effective differentiation.

This kind of visually supported learning environment demands a large number of resources in the form of objects, pictures, symbols, picture boards and displays. To ease the burden of producing these resources Carol advocates a cluster approach, with schools selecting a single theme, identifying the curriculum opportunities which it presents and then pooling their time and effort in order to make the required materials.

The principles which underpin Carols work (inclusion, differentiation, active learning, building upon prior knowledge and skill, assessment for learning etc.) will resonate with teachers and her techniques offer one way of implementing them in the classroom. They also raise challenging questions about curriculum, staffing levels, training, and groupings of pupils within a school. Specifically (and these were the questions on my

mind after the close of the day): how do the National Curriculum schemes of work and units of work sit with a thematic approach, is the number of secondary facilitators sufficient to ensure the success of a lesson, have all facilitators received adequate training in the relevant principles, and how, if at all, should pupils be grouped for lessons?

ALISON GALVIN, SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPIST, WRITES:

I tuned in to Carol Goossen's voice and was hooked for the rest of the day! The information presented was quite easily followed and the video clips of the practice brought the theory to life. She did seem to skip around on the topics, however, and the section on Thematic Planning was not covered. There was plenty of information for one day, though, and enough to return with to feel that you could begin to make some realistic changes.

The idea of using visual support is not new within our school; every classroom already uses symbols to a great extent alongside Makaton signing. What was new, however, was the way in which teachers could effectively 'talk' through using symbols to supplement the key words in the language used. A core vocabulary is used and extended to reinforce every aspect of familiar activities and routines, for example snack time and story time. It was great to see snack time become much more of a structured activity rather than simply a quick break in the day and to see genuine interactions take place between the teachers and the children to encourage two-way communication.

The materials used were amazing and it led me to wonder where the time would come from to make such resources. Eventually, it would be expected that centres could share resources, but initially the time investment would be huge. I thought that perhaps it would be best to make a few displays and stories, then share them around the school to see how the staff felt that they could use them. It may then be possible to make some more specific storyboards as requested with the help of the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant and Teaching Assistants.

My next thought was which of the teachers would be prepared to wear a vest to attach the symbols onto and would also scoot around the classroom on a wheelie stool? I had a couple in mind and certainly one has taken me up on the challenge! With other teachers, we've chosen to focus on specific aspects of Carol's philosophy, for

example adopting a mat for snack time and using a board for news and literacy sessions to encourage the children to be more active in their involvement. It has been great to see how the new ideas have been accepted and how the teaching staff have been willing to try something different. As a member of an outside agency, it is sometimes difficult to introduce alternative ways of working into a school, but I am fortunate in that I have a good working relationship with the staff and we can negotiate on new ideas. I feel very positive that the day with Carol will affect the work carried out with many of the children in our school and will undoubtedly lead to greater communicative experiences for a lot of children.

JULIE TARN, SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY ASSISTANT, WRITES:

The morning sessions were set at a good pace. I was surprised when it was time for a break and even more surprised when the lunch items were being prepared. Carol is a very easy person to listen to, an expert in her field. I soon found myself writing notes and thinking of pupils at school who would benefit from aspects of her work. The video clips were very powerful, providing excellent representation of examples of her work.

There were several highlights of the day for me. The use of a 'non time dependable line' immediately made me think of a young pupil I am currently supporting with a tactile communication board. I am struggling with temptations to make him want to use it. Several thoughts struck me as I was listening to Carol. I am guilty of constantly giving verbal prompts to 'encourage' the pupil to press the switch, but I am now going to take a step back and stop nagging! Giving this pupil a 'non time dependable line' would enable him to access a cause and effect situation with his aid without feeling under any pressure AND be able to be part of the literacy lesson in class.

I currently work in a special needs school as an Advanced Teaching Assistant and a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant I enjoy both roles and feel that they complement each other. Through this unique position, I can see the benefit of two of Carol's work practices - the use of the primary and secondary facilitators in class and the immersion approach to using symbols. I would like to use these in my work and hopefully inspire others!

The final highlight and the one I am currently working on at school, is the use of a 'snack mat' based on Carol's Break-

fast Mat. I am introducing a pupil to the use of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) with temptations based on activities she has shown interest in. With the support of the class teacher I am creating a 'snack mat' for the pupil to use in class appropriately during snack time, creating and using as a communication opportunity with an activity that happens every day. The symbols will not only include the choice of food and drinks, but also 'more' and 'open'. I am going into class to support the pupil and to work along side the class team, hoping to develop the vocabulary over time.

I was looking forward to the information day with Carol Goossens' as I had heard only positive thoughts on her work. It met all my expectations, giving me ideas, inspiration and also the reassurance that the work I do in communication within both my roles at school is well on track. *

Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) are copyright Mayer-Johnson LLC, PO Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA 92075, USA



1 Voice is run by a team of families, role models and professionals in consultation with children to provide a network of information and support for children and families using communication aids.

1 Voice takes a family and social perspective on communication and recognises the great need for adult role models to inspire children and families alike. 1 Voice promotes families supporting each other to overcome the isolation that being unable to speak can bring.

For more information please contact:

1 Voice

PO Box 559, Halifax HX1 2XL

Tel: 0845 3307861

Email: info@1voice.info

www.1voice.info

“What Communication Matters means to me”

LIZ MOULAM

Email: lizmoulam@aol.com

Again this year I have been lucky enough to have a three day ‘guilt-free’ break away from my normal daily routine. During this time I’ve been motivated, inspired, relaxed and lost a few pounds. Where is this health spa? The Communication Matters *CM National Symposium*, of course! So how can one short conference for people involved with alternative and augmentative communication provide all this?

It is such a pleasure to meet passionate people who have the same focus, making the world a better place for people who use AAC. For over 2 days I listened, networked and discussed challenges and opportunities with like minded people, the whole time thinking “I can use that information later, WOW that will be useful, what excellent ambassadors the people who use AAC make”.

So why does it mean so much to me? I like to think I’m the inexpert parent, admittedly like all Mums I know a fair bit...but with an 11 year old AAC user in our house we have spent 7 years learning a considerable amount about alternative ways of communicating, and still discover more every day. When we started out I had a general thirst for any knowledge relating to how ‘this’ would affect our lives, how we would facilitate our daughter’s daily life and just as



importantly how we should help other people to help her communicate. At 4 she got her first DynaVox, we learned about programming, facilitating searching through pages to learn where information was stored, asking one question at a time, waiting for a response. When school (mainstream) didn’t appear to find it easy to include the use of the device in class, preferring to let a teaching assistant who understood my daughter’s challenging speech translate, we started using the device daily at home. Then as she got older we started asking questions about techniques she could use to initiate conversations, how we could help her to be a pro-active communicator? I would have loved to have known about CM in those early days but for whatever reason I didn’t know or didn’t think it was for me. How wrong was that!

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Becoming a member of Communication Matters has opened up a whole new world of education and information. This has come from simple things, created by being around other people who use AAC to the complex learning available by attending not just beginner level family targeted presentations but also listening to research findings. I’ve enjoyed best practice sessions in teaching, reviewing materials/equipment in the exhibition, listening to therapists and so importantly talking to other parents. This wealth of information has given me the courage to try out different strategies and approaches at home, then when it works to share it with others to use in school and extra-curricular activities.

Firstly, just by being involved and observing competent users of different communication systems I realised that communication using an augmentative device is no different from the way in which we all communicate, it just needs planning, extra time and most importantly a high level of expectation of whoever you are interacting with. Watching a young man, who has subsequently become an important role model for my daughter, enter a room and without hesitating greet people and ask them about their journey to the event made me appreciate that this social skill is one we

all learn. The result was we began at home to talk about an forthcoming events and plan as a family what we all might say to people when we arrived. Next I observed another user asking good open questions to engage others, so at home we started to work on asking questions that start with who, what, where, when, how and why. There is no chance now of someone getting away with a one word yes or no response in our house! Likewise we stopped using closed questions apart from a few for functional reasons which absolutely need yes and no answers. This means our daughter has to talk, explain and justify her responses – just like the rest of us, remember the two year old who only asks what is that and why, why, why?

READING

Reading has always been a challenge, our daughter's reading is age appropriate but very slow; she prefers to sound out everything. This may be because of a hearing impairment, but who knows? I picked up literature from one of the exhibition stands, saw that one way of moving dyslexic children on with reading was the use of taped material whilst reading a book which helped them with pace, intonation etc. So for the girl desperate to read Harry Potter we bought the tapes, she now happily sits and reads/listens to any material for up to an hour at a time. She doesn't need to stop at a new word because she can't pronounce it and at the end of each session we do questions and answers to check her understanding including going back to the relevant page in the book to demonstrate she read the words as well as listening. We know it works because she page turns on time and points to words she didn't understand for us to explain their meaning.

Our next challenge is to move her on from wanting to vocalize to silent reading. And thanks to last year's Karen Erickson Study Day on literacy (see review on page 5), I now have even more food for thought.

BEST PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The best practice and research sessions have provided so many 'sound bites' to make me think about how we tackle day to day issues. I find myself writing little notes like try this for science homework, good one for visiting the GP, think about this for the future, do we need environmental controls for around the home!

One example is that for the last couple of years whenever we visit the GP my daughter pre-plans and lists her symp-

toms into her device, then when we get to see the doctor she says, "Hello Dr A, I don't feel well, I have x,y,z." She may need to repeat this but the practice are all very patient and know to respond to her. She has been encouraged to question the pronouncements of every professional (and with cerebral palsy we seem to see a lot) and regularly astounds people by asking "why" or saying, "I don't understand what you mean." As parents we take a keen interest in a spot on the floor or the tree outside the window so she gets her explanation directly.

INSPIRATIONAL

Meeting with, and hearing other people, who use AAC is inspirational. I know my daughter will achieve in life whatever she sets out to do - how can she fail with role models like Alan Martin and Toby Hewson? She believes role models have already contributed to her success as a user and whilst she doesn't come to conference, yet, she has already asked when she can attend. My answer so far has been only when she is old enough to stay up in the bar with me and still get up for the first session in the morning.

I think I'm safe enjoying my 'guilt-free' break for a few years still!

GIVING AND RECEIVING

You might ask why I called this a guilt-free break. At home I'm the main carer, coming somewhere like CM is a bit like a holiday! I know I won't have to get up in the night, put the meals on the table or deal with the daily routine. I am having a break from home, all my meals are cooked and my bed made, but it's guilt-free because I'm working at learning things that will benefit everyone at home.

Like many people who receive so much help from others, I also try to give a little back. During the last year I was a co-opted trustee for CM and having enjoyed the experience this year became a trustee. So my losing a few pounds (which probably isn't true as I didn't get on the scales) is from all the rushing around I seemed to do between sessions, chatting to other parents, people who use AAC and professionals, attending ad-hoc meetings, manning the CM stand, chairing a couple of sessions and generally socializing.

What could be better than going to a conference, learning loads by networking, attending sessions and discussions with people you like.

Thank you Communication Matters!

Liz Moulam, *Parent & CM Trustee*

JOINING COMMUNICATION MATTERS & ISAAC

Communication Matters is the UK Chapter of ISAAC (International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication), so members of Communication Matters are automatically members of ISAAC.

What are the benefits of Membership?

Members of Communication Matters receive this Journal three times a year, reduced delegate rate at the Annual CM National Symposium, and all the benefits of ISAAC membership, including ISAAC publications at substantially reduced rates (AAC Journal, ISAAC-Israel Newsletter, AGOSCI News), and special delegate rates for the Biennial ISAAC International Conference. You also receive quarterly issues of the ISAAC Bulletin and, if you join early in the year, the ISAAC Membership Directory.

What is ISAAC?

Formed in 1983, ISAAC is a multidisciplinary organization devoted to advancing the field of augmentative and alternative communication. ISAAC has over 3,000 members in more than 50 countries, including 15 national chapters in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, French speaking countries, German speaking countries, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands-Flanders, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the USA. The Mission of ISAAC is to promote the best possible communication for people with complex communication needs. The vision of ISAAC is that AAC will be recognized, valued and used throughout the world.

How do I become a Member?

If you live in the UK, you can become a member of Communication Matters (and therefore of ISAAC) by contacting:
Communication Matters
c/o The ACE Centre
92 Windmill Road
Oxford OX3 7DR
Tel & Fax: 0845 456 8211
admin@communicationmatters.org.uk
www.communicationmatters.org.uk

If you are outside the UK, you can become a member of ISAAC or subscribe to this Journal by contacting:
ISAAC
49 The Donway West, Suite 308
Toronto, Ontario M3C 3M9
Canada
Tel: +1 416 385 0351
info@isaac-online.org
www.isaac-online.org



TRUSTEES' NEWS

The Trustees are very pleased to announce the availability of our new DVD, *The Power of Communication*, and a leaflet about the vision and aims of Communication Matters and membership information. We are grateful to *Possum Controls – AAC Division* for their sponsorship of the leaflets. The yellow *Focus on...* series of leaflets continue to be much in demand – and we are getting them reprinted, with sponsorship from Madhouse Software Productions, Prentke Romich International and Widgit Software. Please visit www.communicationmatters.org.uk to find how to obtain copies of the DVD and leaflets.

At this time, with the demise of CAP (in England) funding for communication aids, assessment and support continues to be on a postcode/age/diagnosis basis, it is important that we all use whatever influence we have locally to raise awareness of the right of individuals to have their communication needs met – and to show what can be achieved. We hope that you will find these resources useful when talking to colleagues, groups, funding agencies, etc. about communication and AAC.

By the time you read this you may have caught a mention of one of CM's Trustees, Toby Hewson, on the BBC 1 programme *Newsround*. Toby was successfully nominated for one of the BT ChildLine Awards by Beth Moulam for being such a positive role model for her. Congratulations to Toby – you certainly deserve this accolade – and well done to Beth for nominating him. What excellent PR for people using AAC!

FUNDRAISING FOR CM

Those of you who attended the AGM last September will have realized that CM's finances are not as rosy as they have been in previous years. While we are very far from being 'skint' (a good Scottish word with a similar usage in this context as 'broke'), the Trustees – under the careful stewardship of Neil Hansen the new Treasurer – have put in place some measures to try to build up some funds again.

We are actively seeking grants and donations from organisations, and Bernie Henderson, a CM Trustee, is running the London Marathon in aid of Communication Matters (and the Muscular Dystrophy Society) – dressed as Rupert Bear! You can donate online at www.justgiving.com/cmrupert – your donation, however small, would be much appreciated. You will also have noticed the Gift Aid form with your renewal notices, and there is a section for donations on other CM forms (e.g. membership, conference registration).

In previous years we had managed to build up rather an embarrassing excess of funds – which we had very successfully (maybe too successfully?) taken positive action to reduce by funding additional projects



TRUSTEES' NEWS

such as the DVD, and increasing the funds available for Small Grants. For now, we have suspended the Small Grants scheme, but hopefully this will be reinstated in the not too distant future.

CM NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM & STUDY DAY

Plans are well under way for the CM2006 National Symposium at the University of Leicester – make sure you have the dates in your diary: 24-26 September. Don't forget about the CM Study Day 'Continuum of learning' to be given by Dr Tracy Kovach on 27 September. Tracy is a speech and language therapist and is currently the president of the United States chapter of ISAAC. Her presentation will give us all lots of practical ideas about supporting and enabling children who use AAC. Hopefully there will also be a strong UK presence at the ISAAC Biennial conference in Düsseldorf (29 July – 5 August). It would be great to see you at all three events – or even just one of them!

Janet Scott, Chair of Communication Matters
Email: sctci@sgh.scot.nhs.uk Tel: 0141 201 2619

CASC NEWS

First there was 'The Man who broke the bank in Monte Carlo'. Then there was 'The Man who would be King'. Now there is 'The Man who closed down CASC'. That's me! I think I would like Pierce Brosnan to play me when they make the film version!

Yes, it's official: CASC is closing! (Did I hear cries of "Shame!" or was it "At last!?"?) But before anyone sheds too many tears (or shouts too many "Hoorays!") let me explain. As I said last time, the CASC members were seriously looking at joining the BHTA (British Healthcare Trades Association) – the biggest Trade Association for Healthcare products, which has been in existence since 1917, has over 1,500 members, has a full and official code of practice, is recognised by the NHS (and soon hopefully the Office of Fair Trading) and has access to influential people at Government level. Well, the decision has been made, and rather than just transfer CASC as it stands into the BHTA, the decision was also made to call the new section of BHTA 'Electronic Communication and Assistive Technologies' – or 'eCAT'. We hope this will encourage other EAT suppliers to join us.

We have had a very positive response to the idea with all of the companies who are really active in CASC (those that attend the meetings and those that exhibit at CASC road shows) wanting to be part of the new structure, and even one or two of the less active members also giving positive signs.

WHAT WILL CHANGE?

Well, it might be worth starting with what won't change! We are encouraging all existing Commercial Members of CM to continue to maintain their commercial memberships and continue to support the Journal



CASC NEWS

...continued from previous page

with adverts and articles, and the September CM National Symposium by exhibiting, sponsoring and doing all the other things they get involved in. We also want the CASC Road Shows to continue under Patrick Poon's expert guidance, which has worked so well over the years (why fix something that ain't broke?). The main change here will be that in future they will be called 'CM Road Shows' (there are a few other suggested changes but they are not directly linked with the move to BHTA but more as part of the ongoing learning and honing process).

So the main changes are really to do with the AAC, EAT, ECS and related industries 'coming of age' and being part of the 'bigger picture' of health care provision. As a section of BHTA it makes us independent of CM, which is good for CM's Charity status and answers a few questions that have been posed in the past regarding the closeness of the Trade Association with the Charity. It also gives the Trade Association an independent body round it that will govern it and operate its disciplinary procedures, rather than being inward looking and self governing as before.

And of course it helps make us (hopefully) more influential through its contacts, which we may be able to use to progress such topics as funding (Oh Joy!)

"But what happens to any CASC members that decide not to join BHTA?" Well, if there are any, obviously they will not be able to attend the BHTA meetings, will miss out on the BHTA benefits, and will no longer be kept informed of Trade Association matters under discussion. But if they continue their links with CM then they can continue to benefit from the CM side of the industry. But again, bear in mind what I said earlier – *"We have had a very positive response to the idea with all of the companies who are really active in CASC"* – so it may well be that if any companies do decide NOT to join BHTA they are likely to be the ones who are not actively involved in CASC now, anyway.

I believe this is a positive step forward in our industry. Possum/Gewa are already members of BHTA, as were DynaVox when we were still part of Sunrise Medical, and all those that have had involvement with BHTA over the years know of its integrity and value.

There are lots of things still to be addressed, including electing a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson for the new BHTA eCAT section, and decisions to be made by the Trustees of CM whether they want whoever is elected to this position attending their Trustees meetings as a 'contributing observer' as I have done as CASC Chairman over the past three years. Hopefully the eCAT Chairperson will also continue to update members of CM, through a column like this, with what is happening in the industry from a supplier's point of view.

In the meantime, for the very last time, I will sign off as CASC Chairman!

Dave Morgan

Chair of CASC (Communication Aid Suppliers Consortium)

(You can find more information about BHTA from their website www.bhta.com)

PRESS RELEASES

The publication of these press releases does not constitute endorsement by Communication Matters

AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION IN PRACTICE: SCOTLAND HAS NEW WEBSITE

Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland has recently launched its new website at www.acipscotland.org.uk. You will find information there about the group and its activities and publications. Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland is an open group composed of people in Scotland who use AAC, families, carers and AAC professionals from a variety of different disciplines. The Organizing Committee consists of individual members of staff from AAC centres in Scotland: the CALL Centre, FACCT, KEY-COMM, SCTCI and TASSCC who are all members of Communication Matters (indeed it includes the current Chair of CM, a serving Trustee, two ex-Trustees and this Journal's Editor!) - ACIP:S is distinct from but very much a Scottish 'partner' and 'arm' of CM.

The group's main activity is the organization of an annual Study Day, held every year since 1991. For most of the Study Days there is also a book published of the papers presented at the Day. Over the years these books (available from the CALL Centre, some downloadable 'tasters' available) have helped to build up a body of highly accessible literature in AAC.

Often, there is a 'conference-type' Study Day one year, with multiple presentations, and then a 'Special Speaker' type Study Day in alternating years. In recent years, ACIP:S has teamed up with CM to bring in speakers from overseas, aiming to ensure sure that their talks can be accessed by people from all over the UK. In 2004 we mounted an innovative 'Arts' Day for AAC Users (see 'Art AttAACK' article in CM Vol 19 No 3), and every so often we get together with many other colleagues, friends and family to put on a Saturday 'Family Technology Fun Day'. ACIP:S also offers small project grant awards for AAC users in Scotland.

This year's event – the 16th Annual Study Day – will be a conference-type event to be held on 7 November 2006 in the Stirling Management Centre, University of Stirling. This Study Day will consist of plenary sessions and also concurrent workshops/seminars with an emphasis on the practical use of AAC.

For further information, visit: www.acipscotland.org.uk



INCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY LAUNCHES NEW WEB PRESENCE AT THE SPECIAL NEEDS FRINGE

Inclusive's new website was launched at a reception at the Special Needs Fringe at the Olympia Hilton in January 2006. (Two minutes away from the gigantic BETT Show, the Fringe, sponsored by Inclusive Technology and Special Children Magazine, offers an intimate and specialist atmosphere, a full seminar programme, free refreshments and somewhere to sit and chat with colleagues.)

The company, which is also celebrating its tenth year, also launched several 'microsites' to provide educa-



PRESS RELEASES

tors, therapists and parents with extra support for using software titles in the *Let's Go* series, *Choose and Tell* series, *SwitchIt! Maker 2* and *ChooseIt! Maker 2*.

Managing Director Martin Littler said, "Our customers now increasingly look to the Internet to buy products and we are serving a wider network of professionals from education, health and social services as well as those with an inclusion role in the world of work and the universities. We have now created a more complete web offering for communication aids, learning aids for dyslexia, computer access and early learning, as well as pages to support those working with children who have severe and complex needs."

For more information visit: www.inclusive.co.uk



WIDGIT SOFTWARE HELPS CHILDLINE WITH NEW SEN RESOURCE

Widgit Software has contributed to the development of an innovative new teaching resource - *All About Me* - from children's charity ChildLine. Meeting Citizenship and PSHE criteria for KS2-3, this classroom resource uses Widgit Rebus Symbols to support face-to-face communication for children with little or no speech. Using a range of music, art, multimedia and drama activities, *All About Me* aims to build children's self-esteem, help them understand their feelings, improve their communication skills, and enable them to identify people whom they trust and would talk to when they are feeling unhappy or unsafe.

Widgit Software is proud to assist ChildLine with this project which should help children with SEN achieve a better understanding of themselves and how they interact with others. ChildLine's Jenny Parry says: "ChildLine is delighted to be able to offer teachers of SEN pupils this fantastic classroom resource. It's so important that all children gain the skills they need to stay safe and live fulfilling lives, and we wanted *All About Me* to be as accessible as possible to a wide range of children with different special educational needs. I would like to thank Widgit Software for helping to make *All About Me* a reality. I hope it proves to be an invaluable tool for teachers, as well as an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for children."

A PDF version of *All About Me* is available for schools across the UK to download at www.childline.org.uk/extra/allaboutme.asp.



CLICKER 5 RELEASE 2

Crick Software are pleased to announce that the upgrade to Clicker 5 Release 2 is now available. In this release, the extensive switch accessibility options are fully implemented, plus new accessibility options for visually impaired users. This release also includes a child-friendly spellchecker, plus a number of minor updates. This is a free upgrade for Clicker 5 users. Visit their website at www.cricksoft.com/support to download the update.

PRESS RELEASES

SEMERC LAUNCHES *THINK ABOUT! 1*

Inclusion software publisher, SEMERC, has unveiled a new CD-ROM and accompanying photocopiable workbook for children who need additional support improving memory, attention, listening and specific literacy skills. *Think About! 1* is designed for children aged seven and above, including learners who may have specific learning difficulties associated with dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorders, language disorders, and concentration and memory lapses. The engaging and motivating presentation of animations also make it appealing for older and more reluctant readers.

Scenes in the life of two characters, Jasmine and Harry, form the centrepiece of the program. The real-life settings are age-appropriate, including scenes about a recycling centre, gardening, camping, the supermarket, the library and skateboarding. After viewing each scene, the learner is asked different kinds of questions designed to encourage memory recall. Learners can then move from the computer to the paper-based materials in the workbook. Teachers can go on and explore various subjects introduced in the stories.

Think About! 1 includes a range of accessibility options, such as switch access and voice input. Clip art and student records are also available via teacher settings so that the resource can be used to suit the individual's interests, learning styles and curriculum requirements. The accompanying workbook provides full and simplified text of the stories, together with inferential questions.

For more information, visit www.semerc.com



LIFE SKILLS RESOURCE PACK FROM POSSUM CONTROLS - AAC DIVISION

The Life Skills package is a fun, inclusive and exciting way for people of differing abilities to combine a range of special needs technologies.

Written in conjunction with the Fitcher School, the exercises and resources found on the Life Skills CD, covers areas of the National Curriculum and City & Guilds such as science, geography, PSHE, music and a number of others. Exercises are structured for Pre-school, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and home use, incorporating turn-taking and cause and effect and also provide 4 different levels of difficulty at each stage.

The CD provides an integrated and well thought out scheme to allow the practice of a range of Life Skills in a safe environment. Once learned, these skills provide individuals with a pathway towards the transition to more independent living.

Life Skills Centres are typically located in schools and colleges. They provide access to a range of Environmental Control System (ECS) functions, either via EC controllers or communication aids, and allow the structured practice and useful implementation of technology within the curriculum for future planned transitions to independence.

For further information about the Life Skills Resource Pack visit: www.possum.co.uk



DIARY DATES

25-27 April 2006 Glasgow, Perth, Edinburgh
ICT and Inclusion: Exhibition & Seminars
FREE CALL Centre: 0131 651 6235 www.callcentrescotland.org.uk

27 April 2006 Newcastle upon Tyne
Kith, Kin and Co: Training Communication Partners
Contact Communicate: 0191 219 5640

17 May 2006 Brighouse, W Yorks
CM Road Show at Kirkdale House
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

22 - 23 May 2006 Bolton
SpecialneedsIT North Exhibition
Contact Inclusive Technology: 0800 975 6090 www.inclusive.co.uk

24 May 2006 Newcastle upon Tyne
The Practicalities of Introducing a VOCA
Contact Communicate: 0191 219 5640

26 June 2006 Oxford
CM Road Show at the ACE Centre
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

27 June 2006 Ipswich
CM Road Show at the Suffolk Showground
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

28 June 2006 Worcester
CM Road Show at Perdisswell YP Leisure Club
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

DIARY DATES

14-16 July 2006 Market Harborough
1 Voice Family Day & Workshops
Tel: 0845 330 7862 www.1voice.info

29 July - 5 August 2006 Düsseldorf, Germany
ISAAC Biennial Conference - Communication Bridges
www.isaac-online.de

25-26 August 2006 University of Dundee
Language, Play and Computers
FREE standup-project@inf.ed.ac.uk Web: groups.inf.ed.ac.uk/standup

24-26 September 2006 University of Leicester
CM2006 National Symposium
Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

27 September 2006 University of Leicester
CM Study Day - Continuum of Learning
Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

7 November 2006 University of Stirling
ACIP: Scotland 16th Annual Study Day
Tel: 0131 651 6068 www.acipscotland.org.uk

8 November 2006 Newcastle upon Tyne
CM Road Show at The CastleGate, Turbine Hall
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk

22 November 2006 Scarborough
CM Road Show at the Scarborough Spa Complex
FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 www.communicationmatters.org.uk



12th Biennial Conference of the
International Society for Augmentative and
Alternative Communication

July 29th - August 5th 2006

www.isaac-online.de

CALL FOR PAPERS

ACIP:Scotland 16th Annual Study Day • 7 November 2006 • Stirling

The 16th Annual Study Day of ACIP:S is to be held in the Stirling Management Centre, The University of Stirling on 7 November 2006.

The Study Day will consist of plenary sessions and seminars with an emphasis on the practical use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).



Abstracts are now invited for seminar papers on any topic relating to the practical use of AAC. Seminars can take the form of traditional platform presentations, video presentations, interactive workshops, case studies, etc.

Contributions from people who use AAC and their family members would be particularly welcome.

For more information and guidelines for abstract submission, please visit:

www.acipscotland.org.uk

Feature

AAC Suppliers Update

The section that follows is an unusual special feature giving manufacturers and suppliers of communication aid technology a voice (outside of their usual advertising).

These short articles are all very different. Some suppliers are showcasing new developments and products, and sharing case-stories, while others have taken the chance to discuss an issue close to their heart, or to pass on news about the company and its staff. We have given this part of the Journal over to the suppliers in recognition of the important role that they play in Communication Matters. It must be unusual in any charitable organisation to have such a productive synergy between consumers and suppliers.

I think that professionals and parents may sometimes be naïve, take the commercial suppliers for granted a bit, or even disparage them, unwarrantedly. I have heard sneering talk about how commercial companies don't do anything if there is no profit in it for them. Well, if they could not make a profit, they would go out of business and then where would we be when we were looking for specialised information, technical support, training - as well as devices, software and other material? The suppliers have a great deal of knowledge, and support an underfunded field/profession with free training. In a way, I wish, actually, that there *were* more profit in the field, because only then might we see more development work on innovative concepts and new AAC technology – a vastly expensive area.

And maybe many people are unaware of just how much financial support has been freely given by some AAC suppliers, over the years, to people who use AAC and to impoverished professionals wishing to attend conferences or other AAC related events - not to mention the free CASC Road Shows, sponsoring CM leaflets and conference delegate bags.

It is my impression that while our UK suppliers do try to listen to what professionals and parents want, and try to provide it, they themselves are sometimes constrained by US perspectives and business models. I wonder whether we should be worried by the persisting (increasing?) domination by US companies apparently leading to lots of competition between essentially very similar devices? However, congratulations to those UK companies that *have* managed to influence development in the US and who are making their mark on the US market, or collaborating with European partners.

READER FEEDBACK - MORE SPECIAL FEATURES?

Please let us know if you like (or don't like) this kind of special feature with a focus on one particular side of AAC. We are open to doing more of this in the future. If you have an idea about any area of AAC that you think would benefit from this kind of approach, please contact us with your ideas.

Sally Millar, *Editor*
sally.millar@ed.ac.uk

INTERESTED IN HOSTING A CM ROAD SHOW IN YOUR AREA?

The CM Road Shows are great opportunities to learn all about the latest communication aids and software from some of the UK's leading AAC suppliers. About 10-15 CM Road Shows are held every year at various locations in the UK and Ireland - and they are free! At each Road Show, there are usually 10 or so companies presenting workshops. The workshops are given in parallel and repeated six times during the day - participants choose which of the six companies they wish to hear during the day. Registration is 9.00-9.30am; the day begins at 9.30am with a short introduction from each company, followed by 3 sessions in the morning and three in the afternoon, and finishing at 3pm.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN HOSTING A ROAD SHOW?

We are always looking for new venues to hold CM Road Shows, so if you would like to host one in your area, here are a few things to consider. Don't be put off by the long list of requirements – we will offer you a lot of help and advice along the way!

The Venue: You will need to find a wheelchair accessible venue that can accommodate 40-70 delegates, and provide a separate workshop space for each presenter. Ideally, each presenter should have their own room, but the size and number of rooms will depend on what is available in your area – for example, it could be a single large hall, or a largish room with several smaller breakout rooms. The cost of room hire will be met by CM (shared by the presenters attending).

Catering: You will need to find a local caterer to provide lunch and refreshments. At the moment, catering costs will be met by CM (shared by the presenters).

Advertising: To get a broad cross-section of delegates, you will need to advertise the event to speech and language therapists, teachers, social work staff, people who use AAC and their families, voluntary organisations and other professionals involved with communication aids. CM does not normally pay for the cost of advertising or mailshots.

Bookings: CM will provide you with a master copy of a flier/booking form to duplicate and send to your local contacts, the local press, professional magazines, local newsletters, etc. Anyone interested in attending has to complete and send the booking form to CM. CM will be responsible for sending delegates a booking confirmation immediately, and joining instructions (map, directions, timetable) two weeks prior to the Road Show.

On the day: You will be responsible for the smooth running of the day, including: setting up workshop spaces, signage, registering delegates (CM will provide you with a delegates list, name labels and other information).

STILL INTERESTED?

Patrick Poon would be delighted to hear from you - please contact 0845 456 8211 or admin@communicationmatters.org.uk

Crick Software Ltd

What's new?

JOHN CRICK

Crick Software Ltd, Crick House, Boarden Close, Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6LF, UK
Tel: 01604 671691 Email: info@cricksoft.com Website: www.cricksoft.com



CLICKER 5

Since the first version of Clicker was released in 1994, the product has gradually evolved and now Clicker is used with pupils of all abilities in over 90% of UK primary schools.

Version 5, a complete rewrite, was released last June, with a subsequent update in November to complete the accessibility features. There are significant new features in Clicker 5 that give switch users access to a much wider range of activities, and accessibility options have also been included for visually impaired users.

Creating talking books in Clicker 5



Switch users have been able to manipulate the pages of talking on-screen books within Clicker for some years, but with Clicker 5, *creating* talking books has been made fully accessible too. This is done through pop-up grids that enable users to add words and pictures to the page.

It's also really easy for users to add their own voices through a sound recording pop-up (also fully switch accessible). Pop-ups also enable the creation of many other innovative accessible activities, including all kinds of labelling activities.

Other new features include:

- New, natural-sounding British English speech.
- Single file format (XML) for a complete set of grids, with all associated

sounds, graphics and video. This makes it much easier to email Grid Sets to others, or move them between computers. Other improvements include:

- New graphic library – the entire library has been redrawn in a new style making it suitable for a wider age range.
- Direct access to LearningGrids (see below).
- More scanning options.

LEARNING GRIDS

LearningGrids.com is our website of free resources for Clicker, ClozePro, Wordbar and Jigworks. We add new resources to the site every two weeks, and there are now hundreds of free materials available. With Clicker 5, you don't even have to open your web browser – you can connect to the site directly within Clicker Explorer and run the materials straight from the site. This is a really popular new feature that saves teachers hours. All the Grid Sets on the site have been set up with scan groups for easy scanning. A new service we are offering is Community LearningGrids, where a group of schools or other organizations have their own LearningGrids site where they can upload their own materials.

OXFORD READING TREE FOR CLICKER

The Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) is the most popular reading scheme in primary schools, and ORT for Clicker, released in January, has been overwhelmingly well received. Because they are built within Clicker, the talking books, wonderfully narrated by Tony Robinson, are fully accessible, as are all the activities that come with each story.

Thirty books from the UK's most widely used reading scheme are now fully switch accessible.

TRACKERS FOR CLICKER

Another Oxford scheme, *Trackers* is for 7 to 11 year-old struggling readers.

The cartoon-like graphics make this series very popular with this age group, and again the books and activities are fully accessible within Clicker 5.

CLICKERVISION

This is a new series that has been developed with Espresso Education. It focuses on speaking and listening skills and is aimed in particular at children with special needs. The series includes many short video clips using simple language to stimulate all kinds of activities. *Food* and *Weather* are the first two titles in the series.

FIND OUT & WRITE ABOUT

This is our award-winning fully accessible series that helps children to find out information and then write about it. We have recently updated almost all of the 14 titles to give them enhanced performance in Clicker 5.

PLANET WOBBLE

We have just completed an update on all the titles in our award-winning reading series for early readers. This inclusive series has been very popular with struggling students and switch users, who can access all features of the talking books and activities.

USBKEYS2

Finally, we have recently updated USBKeys2, the software that ships with the Crick USB Switch Box. The software detects which program is running and sets itself up automatically. The database of software titles and settings is updated regularly at SwitchIndex.com, and is automatically updated on your computer. There are a number of improvements in the new Windows version; we are currently testing a new Mac version.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more details of what's new at Crick Software, visit www.cricksoft.com *

DynaVox Systems Ltd

We need resources - not just equipment!

DAVE MORGAN

Dynavox Systems Limited, Sunrise Medical Building, High Street, Wollaston, West Midlands DY8 4PS, UK
Tel: 01384 446789 Email: enquiries@dynavox.co.uk Website: www.dynavox.co.uk



How often do we hear professionals (therapists, teachers, etc.) say, "It's all very well suppliers telling us how good their equipment is, but without adequate training its value is halved, and with appropriate resources and ideas, its value could be doubled!"?

We at DynaVox, have always made a big play of our training. For the synthesised DV4 and MT4 products, ALL training is FREE (or included in the price) regardless of how much is needed. We even welcome new carers/support staff onto subsequent courses, at no charge, even if some time after the original purchase/training session.

And for products like *MightyMo* and *MiniMo*, there is an excellent Introduction CD that includes a presentation overview of the device (hardware and software) and self paced tutorials.

There are even regular virtual training classrooms using Webex that are run out of the US (www.dynavoxtech.com), especially relevant for older devices e.g. 3100 where personal courses are becoming more scarce and for individuals who want training at home.

But we have been trying to provide more than just training, in that we have been building up more resources for professionals to use.

The first extra resource DynaVox ever produced was *Page Sets*. The number has grown, to include US and UK based packages, but the original Gateway has been augmented for the Series 4 products with new versions and new facilities to make it even more useful.

Gateway to Language and Learning® (Gateway®) is a series of page sets designed by Joan Bruno, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. It targets individuals with complex communication needs who use AAC technology. Created in 1997, Gateway® was the first single word vocabulary

designed for use on a dynamic display device and continues to be the only communication page set designed from a developmental perspective. Gateway® is available exclusively in the DynaVox Technologies line of products

In addition, Joan has now produced an excellent resource website which includes the History of Gateway, the various page sets 'at a glance', user profiles, therapy tools (including "Activities and Materials to Teach Vocabulary Contents and Location"), and resources (e.g. alpha sorts by set, practice sentences and even conference and workshop handouts). And this is all FREE! For more information please visit: www.gatewaytolanguageandlearning.com

Another great source for professionals is DynaVox's own US website www.dynavoxtech.com - this has a Resource Library including published papers and archived presentations (there are currently three published papers and 18 different presentations) and a full recommended reading list (to access, select Education on the right hand side, then Resource Library).

Also available from the Education list section are three self paced training tutorials that can be downloaded, one for *DynaWrite*, one for 3100 and one for Impact software (as used on Palmtop).

There is also a wealth of information in the 24/7 Tech Support section (including some Mini Training Modules - also available from your Product Specialist) and even more tools and downloads in the 'Resource Centre' - you will need to register for this. There are 108 different downloads currently listed, including free page sets (both designed by DynaVox and customers) such as Maths, Astronomy, Games etc. and a User Forum.

Then of course there are the seminars that DynaVox run, at least annually. In the past we have run seminars on Com-

puter Access (Linnea MacAfoose), Gateway (Joan Bruno) and 'Using DynaVox to Communicate: Strategies to Promote Interactive Communication and Language Learning' (Stephanie Williams). This year's seminars, held in March, were on Integrating Beginning Literacy and Adults with Acquired Disorders (Kristin Whitfield). And these are (again) free. You even get lunch thrown in!

Then, of course, under the general heading of 'resources' we could also list free 'software upgrades', which are regularly made available. For instance did you know there is now a free downloadable Gateway Scanning version on the 24/7 website?



It would be remiss not to mention the help line team and the area Product Specialists - often a great source of resource information - even if they don't know where you can get what you are looking for, they often know someone who does!

Last, but not least, is DynaVox's own newsletter 'Dynamic Voices'. Designed as a means to pass information to clients, users and professionals, there is often a mixture of user stories, product updates and information and resource data.

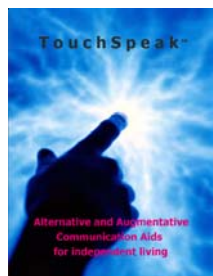
If you would like further information on any of the above, or would like to receive 'Dynamic Voices', please contact the helpline on 01384 446789 or speak with your local Product Specialist. *

Richard Hill & Associates

Case Studies

RICHARD HILL

Richard Hill & Associates, 33 Shamrock Way, Southgate, London N14 5SA, UK
Tel: 0208 361 0918 Email: info@touchspeak.co.uk Website: www.touchspeak.co.uk



TOUCHSPEAK AND TYPESPEAK

Rather than just extol the virtues of TouchSpeak and its new complementary partner TypeSpeak for the higher-functioning

clients, there follows some illustrations of how this technology has enhanced the independent living experience of three of our recent users.

CASE 1

Tim is a young man in his mid-thirties who has had a total laryngectomy and glossectomy. Despite his condition Tim is a very sociable young man and prior to TypeSpeak, could only communicate via a writing drawing pad. His therapist decided to try to convert his writing into TTS text output, using TypeSpeak on a small handheld PDA. It is worth mentioning that he had absolutely no experience of computers, either at work, or at home; but adapted to TypeSpeak immediately. His crowning satisfaction was when he phoned his sister in the USA and was able to type a message on to the screen and speak it directly, albeit synthetically, down the phone's handset. This was the first time they were able to speak to one another in over two years and they both cried.

Tim's TypeSpeak was installed on a handheld Hewlett Packard rx3715 and he uses it with an external portable keyboard.

CASE 2

Tony is a very determined and sociable man who suffered a stroke in his early seventies. He lives in a village and is well known to everybody. Two amusing and affirming situations illustrate just how Tony has used both TouchSpeak and TypeSpeak to good effect.

Firstly, he wanted to buy a new car and arranged a meeting with his local bank manager to negotiate a loan – remember that Tony cannot speak a word, relying mostly on gestures. Apparently he returned home with both a huge beaming smile and the loan, having used TypeSpeak to close the deal to his satisfaction.

Secondly, his wife asked me if we could make the speed of the speech output even slower, because he wanted to speak to his mother-in-law who could not always understand what he had said. She has hearing problems, not surprising when you are 96 – now they talk to one another – a fine example of communication building.

They travel quite often and have used it in France, with an attempt at transliterated Franglais – not always successful – but we believe that the problems lie with the French!

Both Tony and his wife are computer literate and encouraged to experiment with different configuration settings. TypeSpeak was installed on a handheld Hewlett Packard rx3715.

CASE 3

John is a very determined and also a very sociable person, who despite his condition enjoys a laugh. It gives him great pleasure to walk around the village, where for many years he was the village GP. He is very frustrated that he is unable to speak to all those former patients, young and old; only communicating via a writing pad.



Now that John uses TypeSpeak, on one of the latest clamshell JAS-JAR PDAs with a swivel screen, he can communicate quickly and effectively, both in initiating a conversation and in reply. He no longer feels so isolated from his socialising habits.

John is a regular church-goer and he said that the first thing he wanted to do was to ask the vicar some questions! They live in Wales and John is delighted that the names of his local towns and villages have been intelligibly recorded for use in conversation.

He takes the TypeSpeak everywhere with him, and he will soon use the SMS telephony function within TypeSpeak to send and receive text messaging.

In each of these cases, TouchSpeak and TypeSpeak have restored at least some degree of confidence and independence into their users and carers lives.

FURTHER INFORMATION

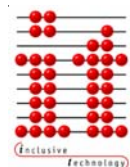
For further details, please contact us on Tel: 0208 361 0918, send us an email: info@touchspeak.co.uk or visit our website www.touchspeak.co.uk *

Inclusive Technology Ltd

New products and initiatives

ALISON LITTLEWOOD

Inclusive Technology Ltd, Gatehead Business Park, Delph New Road, Delph, Oldham OL3 5BX, UK
Tel: 01457 819790 Email: inclusive@inclusive.co.uk Website: www.inclusive.co.uk



Inclusive Technology has a wide range of communication aids and software for language development, as well as providing information and advice about using ICT to support people with special needs.

We have several new products and initiatives in the pipeline for AAC users, including our re-launched website at www.inclusive.co.uk. The site still has all the additional information and articles that have proved so popular, but now there is a dedicated area for communication aids to provide relevant products, events and information listings. Inclusive has also launched several microsites to provide educators, therapists and parents with extra support for using software titles in the *Let's Go* series, *Choose and Tell* series, *SwitchIt!* *Maker 2* and *ChooseIt! Maker 2*.

PRODUCT NEWS

Inclusive has many favourite communication aids such as the BIGmack and LITTLEmack, Partners, the latest Go Talks, 4talk4 and Scan4 as well as new additions like the Sequencer and Randomizer and new AAC devices from AMDi.

The new AMDi Tech/Touch is an AAC device with a high-tech dynamic display. Using a computer-based platform and a Windows XP Professional operating system, it can be customised to meet the particular user's needs. The 10.4" LCD touch screen is encased in a durable housing, providing one of the most stable and reliable products in the industry. The new Tech/128 has 128 message locations that allow for extensive communication. When used with its transparent top grid, it is a standard static AAC device. Without it, the Tech/128 can be used for pictorial communication; simply put a picture over the top of the device and touch items on the picture to activate the sounds beneath.

SOFTWARE

The SwitchIt! Series at Woodlawn School

Inclusive's software can also be used to develop speech and language skills. In particular, the *SwitchIt!* series has features that have been specifically designed for this purpose. Julie Richards and Carolyn Claydon are teachers in the Early Years Assessment Unit of Woodlawn Special School. They used *SwitchIt! People* and *SwitchIt! Farm* to develop listening, basic awareness of sequencing and language development:

"Immediately, the children responded with interest to the programs. They liked the clear, simple pictures and bright colours, and enjoyed the accompanying sounds and speech. They were keen to use the programs and were soon able to access them with minimal or no supervision. Classroom staff rapidly observed that the children were listening carefully to the speech on the 'flashcards' activity and repeating the words back to the computer. The children who were reluctant to repeat adult-modelled speech were happy to give the computer screen excellent attention, repeat the words and stay on task for significant periods of time."

Julie and Carolyn also found it useful to connect *SwitchIt! Farm* to a sound switch:

"Nursery child S. was very motivated by the animal images and it gave him great pleasure to influence their actions by making a variety of vocalisations into the switch. The teacher initially set the switch to respond to a very slight vocal response, but as S. gained confidence and skill, this was altered to encourage a gradual increase of effort. This resulted in his producing a satisfactory volume level, which he has been able to generalise within the classroom and at home. S. is now working on producing clear speech sounds such as 'p' for pig, to activate the switch."



EXHIBITIONS

Inclusive Technology organises three key exhibitions for ICT and special needs – SpecialneedsIT at NASEN and TES Special Needs London, the Special Needs Fringe and SpecialneedsIT at the Reebok Stadium in Bolton.

Many communication aids will be on display from Inclusive and other suppliers including DynaVox, Liberator, Prentke Romich International and QED. There will be a free seminar programme as well as the chance to visit Special Needs North, which runs alongside it.

The show will be held on the 22 & 23 May 2006. For further details, visit: www.inclusive.co.uk/exhibitions

INFORMATION DAYS

Inclusive Information Days provide the opportunity to see many communication aids in action at a location near you.

These one day events are full of ideas and inspiration and are held at venues around the country. They are run by experts in using technology to support those with special needs, including Roger Bates, who has developed numerous courses on the use of IT with pupils with communication difficulties and Ian Bean, a *BECTa* ICT in Practice Award winner.

For details, please visit website: www.inclusive.co.uk/events *

Liberator



* Mercury *



* Big Mack *



* Swan PC *



* Humming-Bird *



* Lib-Laptop *



* Sensitrac Mounts *

...For all your special needs

NEW



Introducing the Cardinal...

A 1-8 location device with 3 levels which is extremely light, and about the size of a paperback book. All for only **£128**.

NEW



Introducing the Bluebird...

The first communication aid with overlays you flip over, for faster and easier page changing.

NEW



ViP Communication software...

Now also available in 16, 32 45 and 60 locations.

Call now for a copy of our biggest ever catalogue!

- * Communication Aids
- * Switches & Access
- * Sensory Equipment

- * Inclusion Devices
- * Special Software
- * Switch Adapted Toys & Devices

and much more.

Liberator Ltd.

Whitegates, Swinstead, Grantham, Lincolnshire. NG33 4PA.

Tel: +44 (0)1476 550391 Fax: +44 (0)1476 550357

Email: sales@liberator.co.uk

More products available online www.liberator.co.uk

Liberator Ltd

Changing horses in mid-stream

TONY JONES

Liberator Ltd, Whitegates, Swinstead, NG33 4PA, UK

Tel: 01476 550391 Email: sales@liberator.co.uk Website: www.liberator.co.uk



I believe it was Abraham Lincoln in 1864 who first used the phrase "Don't change horses in mid-stream" quoting a farmer friend. Its meaning is fairly straightforward: it is best to change something only when you are in a position of security.

I have often been approached by individual communication aid users and/or their facilitators (teachers, therapists, etc) asking about changing their communication system. When that request is made by existing communication aid users, using their present system and speaking to me in real time, my response is usually the same: "Of course I'll show you our new system. However, as you have just spoken to me using your present system without delay, your present system would appear to be meeting your needs: why do you want to swap?"

It is not my position to dictate to any individual what they can or cannot do: It is an individual's right to choose what they want to use and how it is used. However, I believe there are good and bad reasons for changing systems and my ethics would want to ensure that at least one of the following were true (in no particular order and not necessarily exhaustive). The existing system is: failing to meet current needs; breaking down frequently; unable to provide rapid communication and, therefore, looking for something faster/more efficient; unsatisfactory for reasons that can be made explicit; proving too costly to maintain.

On the other hand, I am a little uneasy to hear: "Isn't able to use it"; "Isn't using it"; "Getting old now - need a more 'modern' system"; "Can't play Tomb Raider III with it"; "School doesn't understand it"; "Fed up with it."

These start the alarm bells ringing. 'Isn't using it' or 'isn't able to use it' are both very concerning: why would swapping the system necessarily change things for the better? Isn't it more likely that the cause of the problem will remain and the new system will also suffer the same fate?

Old is not synonymous with poor. There are still many Touch Talker users out there whom, I know, are using their machines on a regular basis and some, whose system has not been in for repair in years. It is a fine testimonial for the quality of the Touch Talkers and, if the user was able to speak to me in real time using it, why would there need to be a change?

Effective communication skills is the real goal: being able to do other things with the system is the icing on the cake. Often, the need to do some additional task reflects the priorities of another person for whom communication is a much lesser issue. For example, controlling Excel within Windows may be a requirement of a college course and this does not necessarily have to be provided by the communication system. It is not, in my opinion, of prime importance in the choice of a communication system.

When others don't understand a communication system and fail to make use of it (or fail to provide the necessary support), that is extremely saddening. However, for the very same reasons, these others may be unlikely to understand a replacement system. The issue is not the communication system but the system of support.

I can understand that, after a time, people become bored with one thing and fancy a change. If I had the money I would love a newer car. However, I haven't got the money and my present car gets me from A to B in comfort. Functionally, it does what I ask of it. It doesn't attract admiring glances from others but it has not yet let me down. The same is true of a communication system: while I respect a person's right to choose to change, I would feel a little uneasy if that choice were based on 'being bored' with the present system alone.

I could not and would not refuse a person the right to see, trial, and eventually purchase a system supplied by Liberator. However, ethically, I feel duty bound to point out, that some issues contribut-

ing to the 'failure' of one system may equally contribute to the failure of any replacement. Don't be tempted to change horses in mid-stream: not even old dobbie for what appears to be a young stallion. You just might end up getting your feet very wet. Much better to take your time and wait until the safety of the far bank and be assured that the road ahead is easy riding!

These reasons being accepted, then there is need to expand on what I believe to be justifiable reasons for a change. If the present system is failing to meet current need (there could be many reasons for this) and that failure can be demonstrated to be a result of the system itself; if the system spends more time being repaired than being used for communicating; if the new system can truly demonstrate a faster communication rate for a wide variety of everyday communication activities required by the user then, it may be time for a change.

Finally, we cannot refuse to demonstrate a system to an individual who is insistent on wanting to try it no matter how impressed we may be with their present level of skill using their existing methodology. The right to choose is a fundamental human right that we should not deny no matter how uneasy it may make us feel.

Fast and effective communication has always been our goal. We believe that the nearer we can come to achieving the rates set by the average person-in-the-street the more seriously the individual with a speech impairment will be taken. While technology has grown enormously and synthetic voices have continued to improve, the architecture of communication systems has not really moved on by comparison. One of our goals has been to address this issue and to devise new and exciting ways of communicating. Our new intelligent systems are exciting lots of people who may want to make a change. However, we would ask everyone concerned to be sure that they are not changing horses in mid-stream! *

Madhouse Software Productions Ltd

Communication is key and the key is USE

NATALIE CALLENDER

Madhouse Software Productions Ltd, P.O. Box 460, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S75 5 ZT, UK
Tel: 01226 390 000 Fax: 08707 065 489 Email: info@madhousesoftware.co.uk Website: www.madhousesoftware.co.uk



Information technology is a fundamental element of today's news hungry society. From educational institutions and research departments, to idly browsing the Internet, people use computers as a means to access a plethora of information.

But what happens when people cannot access computers by normal means, for example, those with disabilities, stroke victims, or elderly persons within society? The Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) in England, Scotland and Wales requires 'reasonable adjustments' to be made for disabled people (to guard against less favourable treatment for a reason related to their disability). However, 'reasonable adjustments' is often not enough to allow a large section of our society to benefit from information sources - due to its portal.

Madhouse Software Productions Ltd was borne out of the desire of Peter O'Neill (founder and managing director of the company) to make life easier for severely disabled and elderly people. Peter wanted to create and develop new Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT) for both children and adults who were unable to use a computer through conventional means. In doing so, Peter has used his own practical experience to create software that is now allowing individuals to operate computers without having to use a mouse or keyboard; instead they are using speech/writing aids and infra-red controls.

Madhouse Software Production's principle product is 'Ultimate Switching Environment' (USE). This is an application that acts, not only as a portal to information technology, but has additional key features that allow the end user to have as much control of their immediate environment, and communication with their peers, as is currently

possible through a computer. Peter developed the software after winning the 'Enterprise Challenge' for best new innovative business in 2003. USE's capabilities - unique to Madhouse Software Productions - includes the ability to switch its functionality from and to, any of the following: speech aid, environment control, keyboard emulator and computer mouse controller.

USE's multi functionality was developed with a 'Selection Method' for Assistive Technology (AT) that can increase the users' productivity through having wider functionality with fewer items than a conventional system. As with a conventional AT, a set of 100 items would enable the user to do 100 activities e.g., speak 100 words or phrases, activate 100 other sets, alter 100 status of equipment within their home, or any combination of these. USE's 'Selection Method' can enable the user to convert an interface of 100 items into a maximum of 2500 activities, 500 of which are independently selectable.

This new 'Selection Method' is referred to in USE as 'Layers', which are accessed through the continuation of a selection. For example, with conventional AT on closing the switch the item highlighted is selected and the function associated with the item is conducted. However, with USE the selection of the item is carried out in the same manner, but any one of the five activities associated within the item is selected on the release of the switch.

The USE Graphical User Interface (GUI) was also designed for individuals with little computing experience, and enables the following activities: Exporting Items, Importing Items, Adding Rows/Columns, Deleting Rows/Columns, Back-



Peter O'Neill receiving the 'Enterprise Challenge' Award

ing up the Active Sub-Set and Backing up all linked Sets from the Active Sub-Set.

This easy to use GUI promotes changes to the user's Sub-Sets, as and when they are required (other systems are often left until it becomes imperative to the users well-being, due to the difficulty of changing them).

The Ultimate Switching Environment in its most simple form is a software application for EAT, and now Madhouse Software Productions are in the process of making the USE application portable. This will enable the user or researcher to access this application in any domain where there is a standard computer portal.

Pam Enderby, Professor of Rehabilitation at the University of Sheffield, has assessed USE. She said:

"What is particularly interesting is the strengths of feeling that can be expressed through the context sensitive language functions. This is a very much wanted and desirable feature that Peter (MD of Madhouse Software Production Ltd) has managed to achieve; and as we all know, communication is much more than just words."

Additional information about USE (plus a free preview version), or other AT products available from Madhouse Software Productions can be found at www.madhousesoftware.co.uk *

Mayer-Johnson

News and developments

DAVE MORGAN

Mayer-Johnson, Sunrise Medical Building, High Street, Wollaston, West Midlands DY8 4PS, UK
Tel: 01384 446869 Email: martin.fisher@dynavox.co.uk Website: www.dynavox.co.uk



The first dedicated UK issue of Mayer-Johnson's catalogue (indeed the first dedicated MJ catalogue outside the US) has been well received since launch in September 2005. Since then we have continued to add a number of new products described below.

BOARDMAKER FOR NETWORKS

Boardmaker remains a very popular system for schools, institutions, clinics and indeed in the home and has continued to be developed by Mayer-Johnson over the years. The current version is version 5, and if you have that and haven't yet downloaded the most up to date version (5.3.5), you can do so, free, via the Mayer-Johnson US website (www.mayer-johnson.com) – 5.3.5 introduces many new features including the ability to import JPEGs as well as GIF files. But the UK market has been demanding even more – especially the school based market – and that has been a version to use on Networks.

The benefits of running Boardmaker on a network would include:

- Centralised file handling (if a school wanted standard symbols it makes it easier to control as the symbols are set up in the "My symbols" folder held on the network drive).
- Removes need for disk control (no longer necessary to have a disk in a device).
- Shared resources (created boards can be shared easier).
- Lower cost (substantial cost savings over separate versions).
- Easier access and Boardmaker becomes more productive.

So driven by this demand Mayer-Johnson UK have launched such a system. There are two licensing options – *concurrent* or *non-concurrent*.

The *concurrent* version allows you to load the software onto as many terminals as required, but *limits* the number of users at any time to the number of licences purchased. This allows the agreed number of staff to use the system from devices around the establishment. However a condition of this is that you have to maintain a register of people who are allowed access to ensure the licence count is correct.

Non-concurrent means the organisation purchases as many licences as machines it wants to have the software on. Anyone can use those terminals, but only that number of terminals can be carrying the software.

There are three versions currently available that can be used on Networks: Boardmaker; Boardmaker with addendums; and Boardmaker Plus! with addendums and animations.

These products are available *now*. Call the helpline (01384 446869) for a detailed quote. Purchasers will receive one set of disks for the Network processor and one set of manuals. Further sets of manuals can be purchased separately.

EXCITING NEW BOARDMAKER ADD-ONS

One of our objectives in creating the new UK catalogue was to introduce new products that use either Boardmaker or PCS symbols. There are a number of such products in the catalogue and we will be adding more as we move forward.

The first additional products are four new Boardmaker 'add-ons':

Beyond Boardmaker Customise and Print Volumes I and II

Each has 25 ready-to-use templates to personalise, print and use in the classroom or home. The CDs also have sample activities. Templates include comment sheets, lists, games, worksheets and other activities.

Print 'n Communicate

Appropriate to children and adults, this consists of 21 ready to print communication boards, which are theme based on everyday activities.

Each board may be customised with different symbols and/or words. Alternatively blank templates can be used to produce your own communication boards/books.

Main Street: Community Science

This comprises 10 science concepts (weather, food groups, space, your body, dental health, simple machines, environment, zoo animals, exercising, plant growth) to develop community and world awareness while working on language and literacy within the context.

Each concept has 5 areas: Map it! * Learn it! * Read about it! * Practice it! * Explore it! Includes a sample book, an experiment on the topic, flash cards with vocabulary words, worksheets to reinforce the concept and vocabulary and a folder activity that reinforces the key concept.

Boardmaker Plus!

For users of *Boardmaker Plus!* there are interactive on-screen activities.

FURTHER DETAILS

In the Spring we will also be launching a new product range called 'Talking Mats'. Details of these will be in our new Mayer-Johnson newsletter called 'Chatting Symbols'.

For more details on all the above or to get your name added to the database to receive 'Chatting Symbols', please ring 01384 446869.

And – don't forget – Martin Fisher, our Mayer-Johnson Training and Support Specialist is here to help you maximise your use of Mayer-Johnson products.

Please feel free to call him on 07921 037382 or send him an email at martin.fisher@dynavox.co.uk

Modemo Ltd

Why standardisation is necessary

TUOMO RIIHIMÄKI

Modemo Ltd, 19 Overland Road, Mumbles SA3 4LP, Wales, UK
Tel: 01792 368115 Email: tuomo@modemo.co.uk Website: www.modemo.co.uk

Modemo Modemo is a small, internationally oriented company based in South Wales. The company relies on a small, international support team of highly skilled professionals. Modemo was originally established in Finland where I began working in the AAC field in the early 1990's. We still import many of the best-known AAC products to Finland, facilitate assessments working as part of the clinical teams in Finland and develop user vocabularies to all user groups who benefit from dynamic display systems.

Our UK company's main interest is research and development work in the AAC and AAC-related fields. As part of our ongoing evaluation and test marketing we do some small-scale sales work but the ultimate goal is to work with institutions and other companies in R&D and let third-parties concentrate on distribution and wholesale. Modemo's company ethos centres around a belief in inclusion. We seek to encourage and contribute towards extensive, quality research work in this area together with hands-on evaluation and have therefore been involved in various development projects in the AAC field during the years, for example www.wwaac.org.

I would like to consider an issue that everybody working in this field has surely come across: standardisation. Or, should I say lack of standardisation? I believe that the following story will sound familiar to many of you:

Mary from Oxford works for the local assessment centre and faces various demands from her clients. Today, somebody called Sam needs assessment for communication software. In fact, Sam already has a system in use but thanks to an enthusiastic speech therapist, Sam has progressed and his current software is no longer the best choice for the job, for example Sam now wants to mix short written words with symbols. Mary knows from experience

that whichever software Sam ends up using, all the current pages from Sam's old software have to be reprogrammed to new software. Mary feels frustrated: 'Why can't you transfer old user setups to another communication software? And why do you have to design the user setup from scratch in the first place?' Also, three of the symbol and picture libraries that Sam previously used are not compatible with the new software, therefore the license fees have to be paid again.

But Sam is more demanding than that. He doesn't want to drag his computer everywhere; a small communication device like MessageMate must do sometimes and so he also needs low-tech printed charts. Now Mary has a new problem: she can't find chart-making software, which has all the libraries Sam has used. There is a graphics import function in many of the software options but that would mean another time-consuming tedious job.

Sam is 11. Sometimes being in a wheelchair gets on his nerves so he wants some fun and recreation in his life. Like many of his classmates, Sam is very keen on computer games. Well, Mary would like Sam to play something that uses symbols but Sam says the few games with symbols are dull. Sam loves Hurlydoo, a game where you and somebody else from Japan land on a desert island with 12 tools and gadgets you can choose from a collection of 100. Mary likes the game too but thinks that it would be perfect if you could get symbols working with it. Sam could try building sentences and communicate with his Japanese friend. But the software doesn't use symbols. When she calls the supplier and software developer, they say that "it's not technically possible".

Mary has to confront similar problems with all her AAC clients. 'It's getting serious,' she thinks...who is going to pay for all these changes and the double workload?

STANDARDISATION

We believe that the standardisation of the communication, chart making and other AAC software products using ideas like www.conceptcoding.org would make a substantial difference to the life of the AAC users and workers. Modemo is therefore dedicated to and collaboration with all AAC parties. That could mean for example, developing methods for more standardised user vocabulary structures together with other software developers.

Modemo uses the communication software Assistant as a platform for new ideas. The software works in a Windows environment and can therefore be installed on standard PCs and on many communication aids as well. A demo version with which you are able to save user setups can be downloaded free of charge from our website www.modemo.co.uk/downloads/index.htm (you need a Broadband or other fast Internet access). Assistant supports a large collection of different symbol and picture libraries which are used by Symbol for Windows software www.handicom.nl/english/Symfw/index.asp. The search system is based on the same concepts as Symbol for Windows. Assistant offers some unique functions, like cascaded pages, and supports all the usual Windows multimedia standards for graphics, video, recorded voice and synthetic speech.

At the moment, Modemo is looking for partners to develop a high level AAC database management system, in order to make AAC software more 'intelligent' and eventually create standards for the database exchange between different software.

In addition, Modemo also does consultation work in the AAC field and related areas.

If you feel that any of this is close to your heart, I'd be interested in sharing ideas with you! *

Possum Controls Ltd - AAC Division

Seeing the whole picture

HECTOR MINTO

Possum Controls Ltd - AAC Division, 8 Farmbrough Close, Stocklake Park Industrial Estate, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1DQ, UK
Tel: 01296 461002 Email: aac@possum.co.uk Website: www.possum.co.uk



At Possum Controls AAC we have been working on an integrated approach to disability access technology ever since our acquisition of Cambridge Adaptive in 2000. The provision of a communication aid should rarely be considered in isolation. We aim to assist our clients and their facilitators to maximise the use and the impact of our and others' equipment.

THE LIFESKILLS PROJECT

The best example of this approach is the Lifeskills project which was a joint project with The Futchers School and Com.Com. The ability to control one's home has been an under-used facility on many of the devices on the market today. At Possum we saw it as a vital tool to practice, implement and provoke real life communication scenarios but also as a way to strengthen links between education and health services given the uncertainty of communication aid budgets. Since our introduction into the field of AAC we have seen many of the NHS Environmental Control providers take real notice of what is going on in education and the full functionality of communication aids. The Futchers School team developed a range of 135 role-plays which utilise environmental control, all linked to the P levels of the National Curriculum. This gives educators justification to teach real lifeskills within the timetable. The latest development of this idea utilises interactive whiteboards wonderfully. We are currently developing rooms with schools where they can run communication groups and teach symbols, communication strategies and the lifeskills role-plays all in one place.

The latest, and perhaps most exciting, Lifeskills room is at The Greenfields School in Northampton where they have a range of environmental control equipment but have combined it with Sound

and Vision technology, projector screens and an enormous backlit interactive whiteboard.



Working together we have developed some wonderful exercises for the children to carry out using the theme of a television studio. Imagine preparing a weather report using a communication aid, an infrared telephone and BBC video clips, all viewed on the interactive whiteboard. Also we have switch scanning video jukeboxes prepared in Microsoft Powerpoint. This technology allows kids to practise choices as a group before taking these skills onto their individual devices (or just have some fun!). Introducing environmental controls into a learning situation provides an opportunity to develop some real life role-playing.

SAY IT! SAM, EZ KEYS & SKYPE

The Say it! Sam range of communicators continue to offer an effective communication solution to clients with a range of disabilities. Both the pocket sized communicator and the SM1 tablet offer symbolic and text communication individually but we have recently had some success with children exploring literacy and adults with acquired spelling difficulties using the integrated sentence prediction. We now spend time in our focused training sessions developing keyword symbol pages which link into the keyboard and predict the most regularly used sentences. When used with the letter prediction and 50,000 word dic-

tionary, it could be considered the most comprehensive text based solution available on the market today.

Any of our communication aids are available to trial free of charge and that the Say it! Sam range now come with two year warranty as standard including up to two screen replacements!

In our work with many adults with progressive neurological conditions, we continue to motivate our EZ Keys users to communicate with those around them but also with the outside world via Skype, the Internet telephone, and MSN messenger. Did you know that many of our clients get technical support via Skype, talking directly to us via text? We have clients with considerable physical disability who surf the Internet, keep in touch via email and who are starting to use USB TV sticks on their laptops allowing switch access to record and watch Freeview television. With the World Cup coming this could prove invaluable!



We recently had the privilege of Princess Anne opening an adult lifeskills room at the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice in Farnham entitled 'The Rowan Room - Room Operated Without A Nurse' From this room, patients in for respite can experience use of a Possum controller, communication and computer access, supported by a pro-active therapy team there.

We believe that our knowledge from the Possum Environmental Control division has really benefited our clients in recent years and we hope that this will continue well into the future. *

Teach & Talk!



NEW communication software, with lesson plans, that helps you teach communicative behaviours, develop early communication skills and introduce language to students working at levels P2(2) to P5.

- # *Teach & Talk!* is used within a total communication policy as a whole class resource or, as they progress, as an individual's own communication aid
- # Activity-based lesson plans are set out in small, easy steps and include useful teaching and clinical tips
- # They are linked to all commonly used UK language descriptors, to help you assess the level of your students ... and measure communication success!
- # PRC's Application Support Software allows you to programme on your PC and transfer between the PC and the SpringBoard

Affordable, in a post-CAP era!

The *Teach & Talk!* package includes lesson plans, assessment materials, communication software, PCS symbols (a pure LLL version is also available) and SpringBoard communication aid with male, female and child's voices, and represents excellent value for school and LEA budgets.

For information, an appointment with one of our product specialists or details of our free loan device service, please call:

PRi Customer Services
01733 370470



Prentke Romich International Ltd
PRi House Minerva Business Park Lynch Wood Peterborough PE2 6FT
Tel: 01733 370470 Fax: 01733 391939 Email: info@prentkeromich.co.uk
Web: www.prentkeromich.co.uk

Prentke Romich International Ltd

"I will make them listen to me!"

DAVID WEATHERBURN

Prentke Romich International Ltd, PRI House, Minerva Business Park, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6FT, UK
Tel: 01733 370470 Email: info@prentkeromich.co.uk Website: www.prentkeromich.co.uk



At one of PRI's recent study days a young girl, who had just given a short presentation, was asked whether the teachers at her new mainstream school would be patient enough to listen to her. Using two head-switches to access her Pathfinder, her response left us all in no doubt that they would!

One of PRI's key aims is to facilitate the *best communication possible* and, whether they are as bright as this little girl or have a much lower level of ability, we expect our customers' communication skills to progress and that they will become independent communicators – isn't that, after all, what it's all about? The clinicians and teachers we support though are often surprised by how much *more* many students achieve than was expected of them.

But as one speech and language therapist recently said, "If I don't give my students a full language system, they've no chance of using it!". Now it may not be appropriate to give every child a Pathfinder with a 128 location Minspeak programme, but the notion of setting challenging but realistic expectations, and giving every child a chance to reach their full potential, is something we kept in mind as we *completely redeveloped* the language programmes on our devices over the past 2 to 3 years – using all three language representation methods to help people at all levels of ability, combined with effective support, to ensure that AAC users' ability is *developed, not constrained*, by the language, technology and support we offer.

Here are some of the changes we have made in these three areas:

1. LANGUAGE SYSTEMS

All three language representation methods, from P2(2) to PhD, are available.

If you still associate PRI only with static keyboard devices for people with a high level of ability you may be surprised that

the majority of PRI devices are now dynamic display machines!

The Pathfinder remains popular, but flexibility and fast programming features in the latest dynamic display devices (Vanguard, Vantage and SpringBoard) allowed us to develop programmes combining traditional Minspeak strengths – quick retrieval of high frequency 'core' vocabulary from a static keyboard (albeit in a dynamic screen environment!) – with very fast programming of additional pages for lower frequency 'fringe' (topic-specific) vocabulary. Different symbols can be used, including PCS or Rebus, Minsymbols or photographs.

Adding Picture WordPower and text-based WordCore to the mid-range Vanguard and Vantage, has established the widest range of language options available on any AAC device.

SpringBoard's new *Teach & Talk!* package, with lesson plans, helps you teach communicative behaviours, develop early communication skills and introduce language to students working at lower levels: P2(2) to P5.

New PASS Software lets you programme on your PC and transfer vocabulary between it and any of these devices.

2. TECHNOLOGY

PRI communication aids are renowned for being reliable, robust and well supported. Most 'high-tech' communication aids now offer similar technological features, e.g. environmental controls and computer access. As well as improving speed of programming and ease of use, new PRI devices include MP3 players and some have mobile phone capabilities.

3. SUPPORT

The success of any AAC system relies heavily on the support team and we have developed a range of training, teaching resources and support materials to make this task easier for you.



We can support you in various ways:

- Assessment – PRI Product Specialists support clinicians on AAC assessments.
- Trial – free loans, with training and set-up advice, to help you make effective use of the device.
- Funding – free pack with useful advice about where to obtain funding for communication aids (a useful post-CAP resource!).
- Implementation – free training on language programmes and device features.

A wide range of resources has also been developed:

- Getting started packs
- Cracking Constant Communication – a training programme for teaching assistants.
- Lesson plans – SpringBoard's *Teach & Talk!* comes fully integrated with activity-based lesson plans and new LLL128 lesson plans for Pathfinder will be released shortly.
- Wall charts, icon sets, Writing With Symbols wordlists and various other CD based resources.

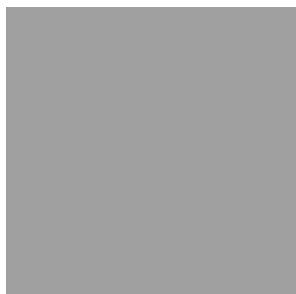
PRI has grown over the past four years, both in the UK and internationally. Prentke Romich communication aids are now available through distributors in more than 20 countries.

We have an experienced team at our Peterborough head office who will be pleased to support you. *

something to talk about...



PowerBox
wheelchair
mounted
communication



FuturePad
tough
powerful
communication



MyTobii
eye-gaze
computer
interaction



Talara
digitized
communication
solution



Cassiopeia
rugged
portable
communication



What do we do?

We supply systems that enable people with disabilities to communicate and to access computers.

What do we offer?

We produce a range of communication systems based on standard computers, and supply software that gives users access to computers. Our systems may be wheelchair mounted, such as the PowerBox, or portable, such as the FuturePad. We also supply specialised alternatives to a keyboard and mouse, including the MyTobii eye-gaze system, the SmartNAV head pointer and a range of accessories and switch adaptors. We also offer on site training and personal delivery for most products.

Smartbox Assistive Technology Ltd

What's so Smart about Smartbox?

DOUGAL HAWES

Smartbox AT Ltd, 26 Abbey Road, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 3HD, UK
Tel: 01684 578868 Email: info@smartboxAT.com Website: www.smartboxAT.com



"WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT ALL COMMUNICATION AID USERS HAVE IN COMMON?"

They are all different. Every single user of a communication aid has a completely unique set of requirements. Do they use symbols? How many cells? What is their level of literacy? What can they afford? How good is their vision? What access method will they use? – These are just some of the many variables that must be considered when creating a truly personalised communication aid.

"HOW CAN YOU CATER FOR SO MANY NEEDS?"

Flexibility is the most important aspect of our philosophy. We have developed a range of systems that are able to provide for the whole spectrum of users with many different needs.

"COMMUNICATION FIRST"

The first thing to get right is the communication strategy. Our systems use a program called The Grid to provide many different communication solutions. At a basic level some users may have just a few symbols in front of them that speak complete messages. Other users may have more symbols that are used to create the different building-blocks of a sentence. For the most advanced users we offer powerful text-based systems.

"NO – ACCESS FIRST!"

Oops! Sorry, the first thing we must look at is how the device will be accessed. Are you able to use the touch screen? Great – all our devices have built in touch screens with the option of a keyguard to help find the right cell. What about switches? All of our systems also have a huge range of switch options giving you maximum efficiency for quicker

communication. Okay – how about joysticks, mice, trackballs? Again – our systems can all be controlled by any of these by simply plugging them in! Flexible access is crucial to providing communication aids that are suitable for so many different users. Oh – and we are very excited to announce the release of a brand new technology that allows you to select cells on the screen by looking at them – the *MyTobii* system must be seen to be believed!

"HANG ON A MINUTE – I CAN'T EVEN AFFORD A COMMUNICATION AID"

Our flexible approach also means that we can offer some of the most affordable communication aids available. All of our devices are based on existing PCs – we simply run The Grid software and add things like battery power, speakers, environment control and switch adaptors. By using existing PCs we save a lot of the money required to build a specialised device. Alternatively, why not use a PC or laptop that you already own? For £240 you can buy the software to transform it into a powerful communication aid.

"SO CAN I USE THIS PC AS PART OF MY COMMUNICATION AID?"

Once we have helped you find the right communication system, with the right access on the right device – we will help you go *beyond communication*. Our communication aids allow users to use a *word processor*, to browse the *Internet* and to send *Emails*. It is even possible to take complete control of your PC and all Windows software.

This is not only for advanced users either. Our flexible approach means that symbol users can do emails, browse the Internet and write into *Word*. We also offer an environment controller that allows you to control your TV, SKY box and hi-fi.

"WHAT IF I JUST WANT A COMMUNICATION AID?"

Some users would rather keep all that separate and just use their device for communication. Not a problem as we simply override *Windows* with our communication software so that from the moment the device is switched on it will be ready for talking.

"WHAT ELSE CAN I DO WITH MY DEVICE?"

Education, education, education... our communication aids can also be used in the classroom. We have a range of educational resources ready to be used with the program but it is also really easy for teachers or parents to make their own. Just right-click on a cell to edit it – then type in the word(s) you want. When selected, the cell will write out the word or sentence ready to be spoken or printed.

"SCHOOL WORK IS BORING – CAN I HAVE MORE FUN?"

How about music or videos? Our computer based systems allow you to play different media files directly from a cell. We also have ready-made grids for games like *Guess Who?* and *Monopoly*.

"THIS ALL SOUNDS RATHER GOOD – BUT WHO ARE SMARTBOX?"

Smartbox is a brand new communication aid company that has formed from the Sensory Software team. We are concentrating all our efforts on providing the best communication aids combined with the best support and service possible. Leaving the Sensory Software geeks to carry on programming!

FURTHER INFORMATION

Our team is well informed and would be delighted to help you.

Please do not hesitate to ring 01684 578868 or email info@smartboxAT.com website: www.smartboxAT.com *

SRS Technology Ltd

Smart control and communication

LINDA REES

SRS Technology Ltd, 105 Brickyard Rd, Aldridge, West Midlands WS9 8SX, UK
Tel: 01922 456882 Email: enquiries@srstechnology.co.uk Website: www.srstechnology.co.uk



SRS Technology is a new and innovative company who are pushing the boundaries in environmental control or home remote control systems.

New advances have included the control of mobile phones, PCs and the ability to control your household apparatus via the joystick of the wheelchair. Even if you can only blink an eye you can text your friends, email and surf the net.

This new technology has revolutionised the lives of many physically disabled people giving them the freedom and independence they could only have dreamt about prior to these developments. Anthony Whitehead (pictured right), a young man left paralysed after a motorbike accident, can now move from room to room opening doors remotely, turning on lights, drawing curtains, turning on the TV or operating his laptop, all via the joystick of his chair. He even controls the waterfall in his gar-

den and his satellite dish using the Intellec controller from SRS.

The SRS *Intellec* gives up to 2,560 functions which has replaced the remote handsets for around 10 items of home entertainment such as TVs, Hi-fis and DVD players. Anthony can view who is at the front door using CCTV and then release the door remotely for people to enter. All of this independent control gives his carers the confidence to leave Anthony to have as much private time as he wishes, whilst being able to call them immediately via a pager should he need to. The SRS *Intellec* is fully portable and goes everywhere with him.

The *Intellec* also boasts a built-in voice communication aid. This allows people who have difficulty with speech to create sentences and speak/store them within the system. Phrases can also be selected from a bank of categories for speedy access to stored phrases.

People's quality of life is very important to us at SRS and we have listened to our customers and professionals



within the NHS to refine and develop products that address the needs of today's modern, technology filled society. Smart home technology has been in movies for years, now with the help of wire free connections people can actually do the things we only saw on the set of Bond movies.

The SRS *Intellec* can be seen on a DVD available free of charge from SRS - for your free copy contact the company on Tel: 01922 456882 or visit their website: www.srstechnology.co.uk *

SILENT AUCTION

to Support People who use AAC and Colleagues from other countries

To be held at the 12th Biennial Conference of ISAAC, 29 July - 5 August 2006 in Düsseldorf, Germany

RAISING MONEY

At each ISAAC conference, money is raised to support people who use AAC and those from developing countries to attend the next international conference.

We run a type of sale called a silent auction. It depends on people freely contributing articles that are displayed in the exhibition area of the conference.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- By collecting and donating articles that could be put into the auction for sale.
- By taking them to ISAAC 2006 or, if you are not attending, by getting them to a colleague or CM Committee member who is attending.

- By letting us know by 30 June if you are bringing things - to help with the planning of space. (However, if you fail to let us know, it doesn't matter - it is never too late to slip something into your case!)

- If you are attending ISAAC 2006 - by taking a few minutes to look over the articles and bidding for one or more items. There are usually some great gifts.

- If you are attending ISAAC 2006 - by offering to man the Silent Auction stand for one of the lunch times and breaks. (It is a fun way to meet up with people.) Please contact Communication Matters or Caroline Gray (details below) who will be arranging the timetable.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Caroline Gray, email: gray@ace-centre.org.uk

Toby Churchill Ltd

Factory move & product news

SIMON CHURCHILL

Toby Churchill Ltd, 20 Panton Street, Cambridge, CB2 1HP, UK

Tel: 01223 576117 Email: simon@toby-churchill.com Website: www.tobychurchill.co.uk

TOBY! CHURCHILL In June 2004 we moved all our R&D, manufacturing and service to a larger factory unit to put all these functions under one roof and give us additional space for future expansion.

The new factory is situated in Over, a small village halfway between Cambridge and Huntingdon, and has been extremely beneficial for improved internal communications and efficiency. The new factory is fully wheelchair accessible, making it much easier for us to accommodate those customers who choose to come and see us when they need their equipment repairing. It has a large meeting room which can hold up to 30 people and we have already made this available to some charities involved in the AAC field for their own meetings.

Last Autumn we appointed a General Manager to be based in our factory and co-ordinate activities within the company. Bernard Wignall has a wide range of experience in the medical industry and has most recently been involved in a Telecare project which was designed to help people with learning difficulties to live their lives more independently.

ADRIAN HIBBERT MOVES ON

Adrian has worked for us for the past four years as a Product Advisor in South Wales and Southern England and has done a wonderful job for us, and his personality and great sense of humour have made him very popular with professionals and clients alike. Before joining us he worked at a special school in Cardiff and he has decided to go back into the Education sector and is taking up a lectureship in a school in South Wales which specialises in autistic adults. We are sorry to see him leave and we wish him all the best in this new position.

CHANGE OF DISTRIBUTION IN N. AMERICA

Over the last 2 years we have had discussions with Mayer-Johnson about the possibility of including adVOCate in

their mail order catalogue which serves the Education market in North America, and with their acquisition by DynaVox, our discussions then continued with the parent company. During these discussions we raised the possibility of DynaVox also selling Lightwriters as a complementary range to the DynaWrite in the keyboard market and they were very interested. In January 2006 we reached agreement that they would become our new distributor in North America. This gives us much better coverage than we had had previously, and means that our equipment will be made available more widely in USA and Canada. This agreement does not affect the UK, where we will continue to use our own staff.

PRODUCT UPDATE

As far as Lightwriters are concerned, the uptake of British-English speech, which we released last year, has been good though some people still prefer DECTalk which still offers extremely good intelligibility despite being 20 years old, and is slightly cheaper. Speech synthesis technology has moved rapidly over the last few years and we are continuously looking at alternative speech synthesisers and evaluating different options. The balance between naturalness and intelligibility has improved significantly with more recent speech synthesis technology, but one problem remains that may never be solved: the more natural speech becomes, the more regional it sounds, and it would be prohibitively expensive for these new speech synthesisers to be made available in a range of regional accents and also a range of ages. Some of them are available in single gender only, making them unsuitable for the AAC market.

adVOCate is continuing to find a wide range of users, and across a very broad age spectrum from young children to people in their nineties. Its flexibility of configuration and simplicity of operation are among its strong points, and we

are also getting increasing demand for the Environmental Control functions provided in its sister product, adVOCate+. Here are two examples of how the adVOCate is being used:



Donna uses adVOCate in conjunction with a symbol chart on her wheelchair tray.

She writes: *My name is Donna and I'm 31 years old. I have cerebral palsy and I am also profoundly deaf. I sign with great difficulty due to problems with my left hand so I find the adVOCate extremely useful in attracting attention and communicating my needs. I consider myself a people person. The adVOCate helps me relate to other people, by being able to say "Hello, how are you?" "always triggers a response.*

N. is another user of the adVOCate. She is a 90 year old lady with Parkinson's and vision impairment. She uses the auditory prompts



in direct selection mode to overcome her difficulty in seeing the keyboard. In this mode, the first press of a location plays

the auditory prompt which tells her what that location will do if she presses it a second time. This permits her to 'fish' around the keyboard until she finds the desired location. *

Widgit Software Ltd

The Symbols Inclusion Project

TINA LAMARCA

Widgit Software Ltd, 124 Cambridge Science Park, Milton Rd, Cambridge CB4 0ZS, UK
Tel: 01223 425558 Email: info@widgit.com Website: www.widgit.com



Widgit Software, an innovative leader in the world of symbol development, is always looking for new and exciting opportunities. The Warwickshire Symbols Inclusion Project (SIP) is just that, an ongoing venture set up to create materials in which symbols are supporting inclusion in mainstream education. All those involved have been motivated and inspired by the work and unexpected findings to come out of this endeavour.

As the inclusion model has increased in profile in mainstream schools so has the interest in symbols. Warwickshire Education Authority and Widgit Software embarked on a journey in January 2003 that has taken the use of symbols to a new level. The realisation of SIP has been impacting and further reaching than the identified SEN learner.

Warwickshire DISCS (Disability Inclusion Sensory and Communication Service) provides a teaching assistant and classroom teacher, who dedicate 6 days a week to SIP. Together with the support of the Widgit office and its graphic artist, the team have been collaborating on the production of curriculum-based symbol-supported lessons and activities.

The advent of Widgit's new line of software, the Communicate: Series, has made creating classroom resources easier than ever. Communicate: In Print 2, a symbol based desktop publisher, allows the SIP team to make dynamic materials such as books, flash cards, worksheets, recipes, games and more. Widgit's design team creates symbols and clipart specific to each curriculum topic, ensuring the differentiation of these materials is both meaningful and accurate. As activity packs are completed they are taken into pilot schools to try within inclusion environments and teachers are reporting encouraging outcomes.

The stories told by classroom teachers show us that all learners benefit from the use of symbols. SEN students, struggling and reluctant readers, pupils to whom English is a second language as well as typically developing youngsters benefit from using symbol-supported resources.

The Widgit Rebus Symbols are helping teachers to bridge the gap between introducing new concepts and the absorbing of them by students.

Teachers are noting marked improvements in behaviour as learners' comprehension levels grow, which is leading to an increase in independence. Students are given more freedom and are becoming motivated to continue their work autonomously. While their curriculum participation improves, so inevitably does their learning.

IMPROVING BEHAVIOUR WITH 'WORD BOOKS'

Disruptive and avoiding behaviours often arise when feelings of frustration become associated with learning. Yet something as simple as a topic 'word book' listing new, difficult or key vocabulary with the addition of symbol support has made all the difference. Giving students basic reference material they can easily understand is minimising non-compliance and increasing confidence.

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE USING VISUAL STRATEGIES

With students' behaviour improving, mechanisms ensuring independence are put into place. Visual strategies, with symbol support, such as calendars, schedules, and 'to do' lists make expectations clear. Having an obvious reminder of what is required and methods for recording what has been completed is helping learners to stay focused and on task. Understanding what is expected of them removes the students' need for dependence on others.

ACTIVITIES INCREASING MOTIVATION LEVELS

Symbol support makes authentic participation in activities a reality. Whether it's involving a non-reader in matching, giving an ESL student the support to complete a Cloze worksheet or providing a struggling learner the visual reference for new terms in a labelling exercise. Self-esteem and motivation grows as a student gains genuine praise and the feeling that 'I know'.

CURRICULUM INVOLVEMENT THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED BOOKS

Differentiated books are providing an avenue to curriculum involvement. They're helping create momentum and are motivating learners. Symbol support is added to help learners' acquisition or removed as a learners' comprehension develops. Creating differentiated reference books, at a variety of levels, is ensuring that all students have the necessary support and feel a sense of involvement, even within areas of learning that they previously may have found difficult.

MATERIALS FOR LEARNING & ACQUISITION

Students are starting to take ownership of the curriculum and learning is becoming inevitable. Symbol-supported materials produced by the SIP team and being used by classroom teachers is proving to be one effective solution to genuine inclusion. By placing students in new learning situations where they have experience successful learning they can continue to flourish and strive.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More information on the results of SIP is featured in the brochure 'Symbols Supporting Inclusion in Mainstream'. Email info@widgit.com for a copy.

Visit www.widgit.com for access to the free and low cost resources used throughout this project. *

Say-it! SAM

**SM1 or Handheld
Tablet Communicator**



Common Family Features

- * Intuitive Programming on SAM or via PC Software Provided
- * Robust Build Quality
- * Symbol and Text Based
- * Phrase, Word and Letter Prediction!
- * Fully Customizable Dictionary
- * QWERTY and ABC Keyboards
- * Ingfield, CallTalk, Chailey or MessageMaker Vocabularies

Possum Controls - AAC
8 Farmbrough Close
Stocklake Park Industrial Estate
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire
HP20 1DQ

Get your message home!
From £1995

Tel: 01296 461002
Fax: 01296 461107
Email: aac@possum.co.uk
Website: www.possum.co.uk

Tech/Touch™

NEW!

The NEW Tech/Touch™

This dynamic, computer-based device from AMDi offers endless opportunities for communication.

It is portable and easy to use with a large, clear touch screen.

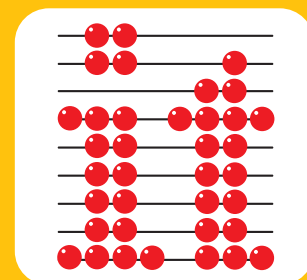
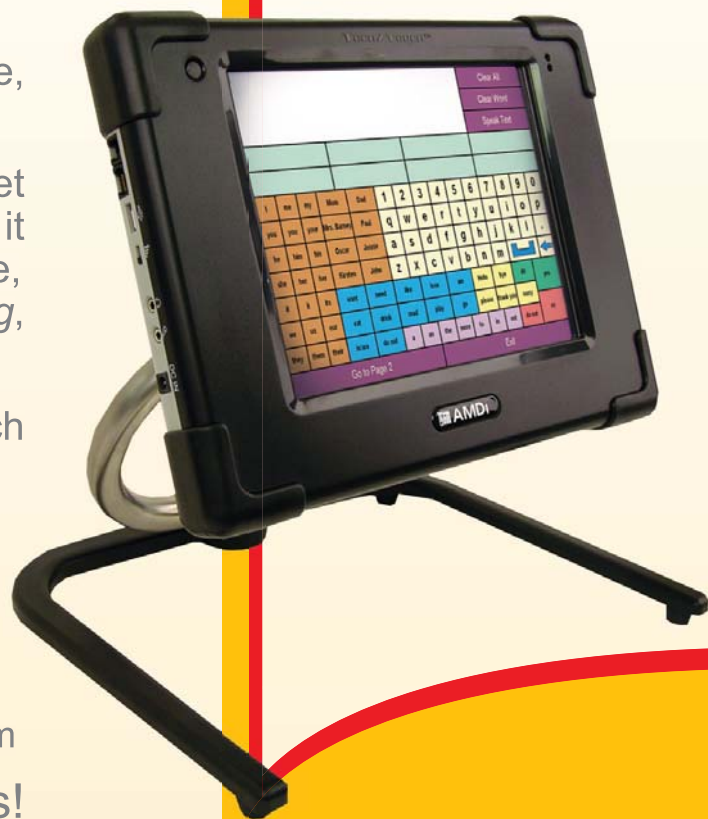
The Tech/Touch can be customised to meet the needs of the individual - simply use it with your favourite communication software, such as *Speaking Dynamically Pro*, *Viking*, *Boardmaker Plus*, *Clicker* or *The Grid*.

You can also use the Tech/Touch as a touch screen portable computer.

Specification:

- 20 GB hard drive
- 256MB of memory
- 10.4 inch LCD touch screen
- Windows® XP Professional operating system

Call Inclusive Technology for details!



Inclusive Technology Ltd

Gatehead Business Park

Delph, Oldham, OL3 5BX

Tel: 01457 819790

Fax: 01457 819799

Email: inclusive@inclusive.co.uk

www.inclusive.co.uk



Widgit Symbol Resources

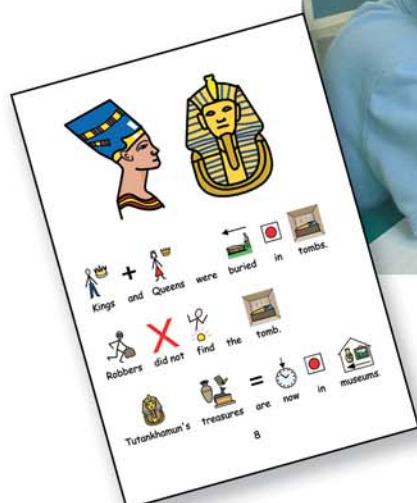
Free and low-cost symbol supported resources available from www.widgit.com/resources

Literacy | History | Science | RE | Seasons & festivals | Stories

- Curriculum Topic Packs from the Symbols Inclusion Project
- 'Ready to Go' printable activities and books
- Differentiated content
- Suitable for special and mainstream education
- Tried and tested in classrooms
- Downloads from £5



5


$$\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ +3 \\ \hline 5 \end{array}$$


Visit the resources section of our website for more detailed information and to download and order online at:

www.widgit.com/resources



Widgit
SOFTWARE