

# COMMUNICATION *MATTERS*

APRIL 2007 Volume 21 Number 1

THE JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION MATTERS / ISAAC (UK)



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COMMUNICATION MATTERS JOURNAL

VOLUME 21 NUMBER 1  
APRIL 2007

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## COMMUNICATION MATTERS JOURNAL

ISSN 0969-9554

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### Copy Submission

Preferred text format: Microsoft Word  
Preferred graphics/photo formats: JPEG, TIFF  
Copy deadline: 15 June 2007 (Vol 21 No 2)

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

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Printed by Crowes of Norwich

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# Role Models: Who Needs 'em?

**KATHY CLAXTON & TAMSIN CROTHERS**

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This 'Role Model Investigation' came about when the Y12 class we were working with at Mere Oaks School, heard about an isolated child in mainstream using AAC. They were outraged to hear that this child had been told that Role Models were not important and would not be beneficial to them. As a special school with over 20 pupils using AAC, our students were also surprised that some children have never met another person who uses AAC.

1Voice is an organisation supporting families using AAC and it recognises the value of Role Models for children using AAC. They were a valuable resource for support and for making links with some of the Role Models.

We were interested to learn to what extent our pupils had benefited, if at all, from the role models in their environment. We had plenty of anecdotal evidence from school and from the 1Voice Role Model projects. Benefits were obvious but unquantified. Role Model type activities were just something that pupils took part in on a daily basis and were an intrinsic part of school life.

As part of the Post 16 PSHCE curriculum, in partnership with 1Voice - Communicating Together, and as part of pupils' Speech and Language Therapy management, we decided to run a year long 'Role Model Investigation' to look at and hopefully provide evidence supporting the importance of AAC-using Role Models for our pupils.

We jointly planned and delivered our lessons together to work a project that met educational and therapeutic aims.

## THE PRE-INVESTIGATION

At the beginning of the investigation, the Y12 pupils rated their attitudes to using AAC by agreeing or disagreeing with statements such as,

"If you use AAC you don't have anything to say."

"If you use AAC you can be a role model to younger pupils."

"I would like to meet more adults that use a communication aid."

"Seeing older pupils using AAC helped me when I was younger."

Talking Mats™ were used to explore student attitudes to a range of communication situations and imminent transitions. They rated their confidence in talking with friends, talking with strangers, saying what they thought, using high and low tech systems, going to college and getting a job.



## THE INVESTIGATION

Pupils and staff thought of a wide range of people to invite to discuss the issue



of being and having role models in general. At first we invited students and visitors to school who did not use AAC and discussed the issue of role models and what they mean to us. We then turned our attention to Role Models using AAC.

Students had prepared a list of questions for our visitors which reflected their own attitudes to using alternative forms of communication. For example, one pupil who was struggling to come to terms with not having speech asked, 'Did you cry when you got your communication aid?' Another asked, 'Did you want to throw your aid in the bin?'

## SPREADING THE WORD

As well as meeting role models, we were aware of the role our older pupils played in motivating younger members of the school. We wanted to raise the whole school's awareness of AAC and to raise Y12's profile as role models in the school. We set about this in a number of ways.

**Assembly** - In our school assembly, treasure was stolen by one dubious character,



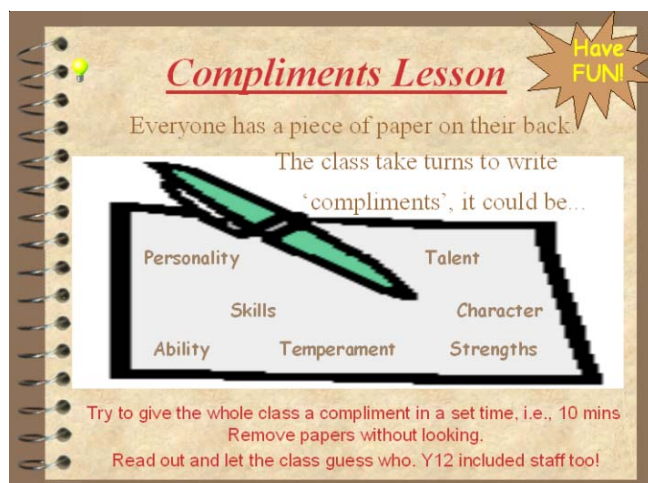


(with enormous eyebrows or a moustache or hat). Class groups had to agree on a question to ask in a 'Guess Who' style to eliminate suspects from their enquiry.

#### LESSON PLANS IN 'COMMUNICATION WEEK'

Lesson plans were made available to raise the issue of all types of communication. These included:

1. Make a poster entitled 'Communication'.
2. 'Drop a sense' lessons, where pupils had to forgo hearing (wearing earplugs), sight (blindfolds) or speech. Pupils then reported back their experience of the lesson when communicating differently to usual.
3. 'Compliments' lesson, where pupils had to write down compliments about other pupils. The compliments were read out and people had to guess which pupil they applied to.



4. 'Dreams' lesson, where pupils described a dream to other class members.

**Dance Workshop** – Alan Martin, a successful dancer and workshop leader who uses AAC ran a dance workshop for class groups

**Party** – we invited everyone who had helped us with the project back for a party.

We also invited other children using AAC via the 1Voice network.

#### EVALUATION

We repeated the Talking Mats and True/False questions. The main trend was that responses changed from negative to positive.

In the initial exploration, it was the pupils using AAC who *didn't* want to meet AAC-using Role Mod-

els. In fact, out of 15 negative attitudes expressed towards AAC and the future, 13 were from AAC users. By the end of the project, all students wanted to meet adult role models (a 33% increase).

The largest change in attitude from both was to the statement, "Seeing older children using AAC helped me when I was young." Students went from over 50% feeling that it *didn't* help when they were young to 100% feeling that it *did*. Again it's interesting to note that all but one of the AAC users gave negative responses to this question the first time they were asked it.

After completing the project pupils seemed to feel more positive about the value of role models for them, and about themselves as role models for others.

Once pupils had agreed that Role Models were important, we asked them, "Why?" and they told us:

- They can make you think about the future.
- They make me want to be independent.
- They make me feel happier about my communication aid.
- [They] have helped me to use my DynaMyte.
- They make me feel happy and confident.
- I have learnt from them and admire them.
- Good. Alive. Interesting. Brilliant.

#### DISCUSSION

We started by considering medical and social models of communication. In a medical model, someone may not be able to walk ('impairment'). However, the social model recognises that because the world is not adapted, if this person uses a

wheelchair and can't get into a building, reach top shelves, if they get stared at, or people don't expect much from them, then they face disabling barriers, and it's these barriers which are their disability. If the world *were* adapted and inclusive, not being able to walk wouldn't stop a person from participating on an equal level to people who could walk.

When taking a social approach to working with our AAC-using pupils, we need to identify and work towards getting rid of barriers to communication.

We saw the main barriers as being:

- partner awareness
- partner skill
- expectations of staff, family & pupils
- motivation

Motivation is a huge issue for our pupils. They are not Toby Hewsons, Katie Caryers and Alan Martins...yet.

We see the involvement of role models as being an important branch of supporting students learning AAC. The following describes some of the ways we have tried to promote AAC-using Role Models in school and the community and the factors which we feel have really helped make this possible.

#### RECOGNISE AND FORMALISE

We think it is important to formalise this type of support. It is much more difficult to quantify, and is not a traditional type of 'therapy'.

Having a formal approach means that working with, and being Role Models, is recognised as an important part of the pupils' communication support.

Good planning and documentation also means that successful activities can be repeated by others. Comparisons can be made and progress measured, which is important in evidence-based practice.

Making the Role Model Investigation part of the curriculum meant that it could be prioritised by the whole team, not just Speech and Language Therapy, and that it could be worked on in different lessons and in a more flexible way.

Planning is a the biggest part of joint working, so formalising the Role Model project means that planning time can be built in more easily.

#### BEING A ROLE MODEL TO OTHERS

Projects or activities that encourage AAC-using children to be Role Models or to meet others who may act as role models for them can be easily built into the curriculum if the school and staff are willing to collaborate and work across 'Health' and 'Education' boundaries. Then ideas can be incorporated into any aspect of

school life. At Mere Oaks we ran our project through the Post-16 curriculum and the accredited routes that the students were taking, ASDAN and 1st Skills Profile, but a project could just as easily be built into any area, with PSHE / Citizenship / English being the obvious ones.

### ASSEMBLIES

Interactive assemblies have worked best and have given pupils using AAC a leadership role in the eyes of other pupils. Assemblies are a place to articulate issues and make it okay to talk about AAC. Interactive assemblies requiring contributions via AAC are something we hope to continue.

### SPEAKERS AND VISITORS

Outside speakers show pupils what they may be able to achieve in the future. It is common for schools to invite verbal speakers into school. Inviting AAC-using speakers sends out the message that they have equally important contributions to make, so that verbal and non-verbal pupils benefit. Staff also benefit because it raises everyone's awareness and expectations. We found it important to invite a cross-section of role models to find someone that all pupils can identify with (male/female, direct accessing/using switches, and with a range of interests).

### STORY TIMES/QUESTION TIMES

AAC-using pupils volunteer for activities such as reading to the nursery or younger children in school or offer sessions where younger pupils can ask and answer questions (about any subject). We also hope to arrange visits to other schools so that pupils using AAC are given the opportunity to mix with and support one another and to raise awareness in children in mainstream schools who may not have seen a communication aid before.

### BUDDY SYSTEM

There are different interpretations of 'buddy systems'.

At Mere Oaks, pupils moving into Year 7 had a buddy from Y11. At the beginning of the new school year, both Years met up and chose whom they would like to pair up with.

During the project, we used the term 'role model' very loosely as someone who influences others, intentionally or not. Further reading about role models revealed that there is a difference between role models and 'mentors' or one-to-one 'buddies' (Whelley et al, 2003) but that it is critical that young people and positive role models are linked at the latest by the transition age of 14 (Massachusetts Transition Initiative, 1996, cited by Snowden,

2003). Mentors and Buddies are people who specifically meet with a pupil to guide and mentor them. There is huge scope for mentoring and this could be through peer mentoring or through having an external mentor. There would be big training implications for schemes like this. They do exist in the USA, and we would be interested to hear if there are schemes like this set up in the UK.

### STUDENT COUNCIL & INTERSCHOOL COUNCILS

The student council in recent years had a high proportion of AAC-using reps when compared with the number of AAC users in school. AAC users were voted as reps by their classmates, showing that they were considered 'worthy'. The fact that they were non-verbal was not considered to be a disadvantage.

Communik8 is an initiative in Wigan whereby pupil reps from all the high schools meet termly to discuss issues affecting Wigan school children. Our AAC users have taken an active part in the forums. Last term one Y11 pupil gave a talk at the town hall to reps from all over the authority using his DynaVox which was linked to a large screen.

### A FINAL WORD ON ROLE MODELS AND MOTIVATION

Most of the pupils we work with don't opt into organisations like 1Voice. With many of them, our fight as 'professionals' is often to get them to keep their machine on their wheelchair, let alone use it, when we know they are capable of doing so much. Why *don't* many pupils want to use AAC? Is it because it is hard work, slow, a 'second language', unlike their speaking peers and with limited vocabulary? Yet our pupils are usually so ready to face a challenge. What do we need to do to motivate pupils with a negative attitude towards their communication systems?

There is a place for 'therapy' in learning AAC because children and young people do need to learn new skills. But motivation isn't something that can be taught in isolation as a therapy goal. Seeing Role Models has, in our pupils' own words, been "brilliant", made them "happy", "more confident" and "want to be more independent", and "made me happy about using my communication aid".

In carrying out this project we have found some qualitative evidence but there is a need for measurable research.

What has been thrust into the forefront in our minds again and again though, is that ALL children need Role Models that they can identify with.

One of the pupils has asked us to tell you what Role Models have meant to him, an apt way to end this article. 'M' had had

several heartfelt therapy sessions when he started to refuse to use his DynaVox. It was never charged and he wouldn't have it mounted on his chair. When we explored this, he kept looking at the bin, to ask when he would develop speech and throw his DynaVox away. All the adults he knew could speak, so logically, when he became adult, he would too.

He says:

*"When I was younger I thought that when I grew up I would be able to speak because I had never seen a grown up using a DynaVox. I then met Alan Martin. I thought he was a really good role model and I wanted to be like him."* \*

Kathy Claxton, Teacher  
Tamsin Crothers, SLT & Trustee of 1Voice

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**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.

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# Sheffield AAC Project for Children in Mainstream with Severe Speech and Language Impairment

## If every child matters, how will we join in?

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, Sheffield SLT Agency (SSLTA) has been reviewing the service provision to children with severe Specific Speech and Language Impairment (SSLI) to bring the service we provide in Sheffield into line with emerging national and international models of service for people with disabilities. This paper will present the new model of SSLI service we have planned in Sheffield with particular emphasis on the alternative and augmentative communication dimension which is a 'project within a project'. It will show what tools we plan to use to look at evaluation and outcomes and outline what we feel are the implications for the future.

### THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS INCLUSION AND EMPOWERMENT

As this movement has gained momentum, important statements and legislation have been developed. In 2001, the World Health Organisation revised their international classification of functioning, disability and health to change it to a social model of disability, recognising the impact of contextual factors as a root cause in disablement alongside the individual's original health condition. In Britain there has been a whole series of acts which have strengthened the push to remove disabling barriers within the environment, in attitudes and in the way things are done - these include the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, Education Acts in England and Scot-

land 2001, 2002, 2004, and the Children's Acts 1989 and 2004. Government policy makers have also recognised that a huge barrier to implementation of these laws is the lack of collaborative working between social services, education and health. To this end, the Every Child Matters framework was introduced in 2004 to encourage a structure of common outcomes between them.

### EVERY CHILD MATTERS

The paediatric teams in Sheffield SLT Agency have looked at the Every Child Matters headings to relate them broadly to the impact communication difficulties may have on children's long-term development:

- **Be healthy** - improved communication development across the population means more children can stay mentally and emotionally healthy.
- **Stay safe** - it has been established that feelings of exclusion and failure due to 'difference' lead to bullying and discrimination. Once a child feels excluded s/he is more likely to be led to participate in crime and anti-social behaviour. Being unable to speak up puts the child in danger of abuse and maltreatment.
- **Enjoy and achieve** - much of today's national curriculum for schools is based on successful speaking and listening, reading and writing skills - without support for com-

munication skills development, the child with SLI is likely to develop associated learning difficulties.

- **Make a positive contribution** - it is hard to see how a child could contribute an opinion, put in a creative idea, or ask a question when their environment has accepted that their communication is too limited and does not look to give additional support. We feel that ensuring AAC strategies are readily put in place would mean many more children could have an 'equal' voice.
- **Achieve economic well-being** - many after school opportunities are closed to the young person with severe communication difficulties and possible associated learning difficulties - they will lack qualifications and find it hard to gain entry to obtaining further skills.

As a service we have used the model of a pyramid of needs to work towards devising best uses of our resources and skills to work at each level (Figure 1).

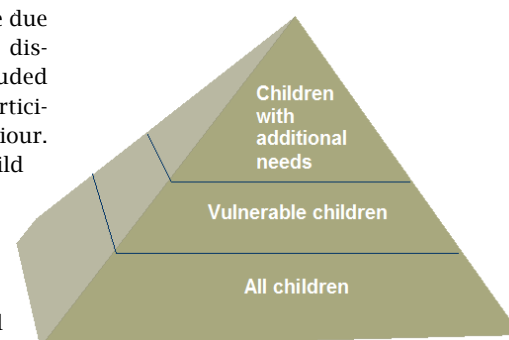


Figure 1 Pyramid of Needs



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Children with speech, language and communication difficulties are now being identified earlier and supported by SLT and education from pre-school. The children with SSLI identified who had long term needs were a source of concern in relation to provision of SLT. Appropriate support for this 'high risk' group of children needed to employ AAC strategies as well as more conventional direct SLT work. Children with Specific Speech and Language Impairment form a well-identified proportion of at least 5% of children in the UK (Law et al 2000) and are now known to experience long-term academic and social difficulties that can continue into adulthood. Beitchmann et al 1994 found that 72% of children with SSLI at 5 years still had problems at 12 years.

#### REASONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SSLI SERVICE IN SHEFFIELD

- Educational settings were changing to allow more children to be placed in mainstream
- More SSLI children were being identified early, therefore starting in mainstream nurseries. The LEA, schools and parents wanted them to continue their schooling in mainstream.
- Following a joint ICAN / Sheffield SLT Agency project run for early years children, Sheffield Support (teaching) Service agreed to aim for setting up an enhanced service for these children as they reached school age. In the past, these children would have had specialist input in segregated school setting, with specialist teachers, support assistants and SLTs. There was a need to work towards providing an equivalent support in mainstream.
- SSLTA mainstream caseloads mean that only 30% of children referred are able to receive direct contacts. This means direct SLT work is only provided for short blocks with input being focussed on assessment and enskilling staff in schools. New developments would aim to provide a more intensive and collaborative way of working with SSLI children with severe needs to ensure that their communication development was supported in an inclusive way.

#### THE ENHANCED SERVICE PROGRAMME OF SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION

It was agreed that children would be identified by a rigorous process of assessment agreed between the clinical lead SSLI SLT and the Educational Psychology Service. SLT, school staff and parents would use the amended Surrey Profile to provide an overview of the child's receptive and expressive language, their speech production and their interaction, checking their functional abilities, impacts on

learning and socialisation and behaviour. This profile could then be used to provide a comparative scale to compare needs with other children as well as providing the criteria for entry to the 'enhanced' service.

The enhanced service would provide weekly input from a speech and language therapist and specially trained teaching assistant to enskill school staff in therapy and support techniques. This would include classroom staff incorporating communication targets within everyday activities and teaching, staff developing and using strategies to support communication and socialisation, visual teaching materials and individual learning programmes. Whole school training would be offered if appropriate.

#### THE NEED FOR AN ADDITIONAL AAC ELEMENT

As stated above, visual strategies were very much part of the approach required to ensure inclusion. Schools were advised to purchase symbol and picture producing software. For some children, this could be used to produce symbol timetables, PECS materials, behavioural prompts. For certain children, whose communication and social progress was slow, it was noted that they might need to learn to use an AAC system to ensure participation. This approach to communication development is generally not widely used in mainstream schools so the clinical lead for SSLI approached the clinical lead for physical disability for advice on its introduction and use.

#### AIMS AND RATIONALE OF USE OF AAC FOR CHILDREN WITH SSLI

The aim of speech and language intervention is to ensure that natural interactive communication development takes place. If the child is non-verbal or unintelligible, alternative and augmentative communication support should be provided as early as possible. By doing this the goals are to:

- Minimize communication avoidance and sense of failure and exclusion.
- Maximize learning potential.
- Minimize risk of learning, socialisation and behavioural difficulties.

By introducing AAC approaches at home and on a whole class/group basis, the child's inclusion and sense of independence should be better assured.

The SSLI children selected for inclusion on this AAC extension of the enhanced project were ones with high ratings on the Surrey Profiles with severe speech, expressive and sometimes receptive language difficulties. They were showing

little progress with 'conventional' therapy support and appeared at great risk of learning and socialisation difficulties. After SSLI SLT referral, assessment by the PD clinical lead and/or the AAC specialist assistant took place. This included observing the child's response to low-tech symbol communication materials and a communication book and an observational assessment of the school environment. A rating scale for the child's level of participation across a range of settings in school might also be completed. If a child was accepted as able to benefit from AAC, discussion took place with home and school giving clear estimates of therapy and staff time requirements for training and resource provision. A block of 4-5 sessions specialist SLT assistant time was then put in place to provide training, sample resources and demonstration and teaching to the child alongside the child's school support assistant. It was found in the first 2 years of the project that of 105 children identified for SSLI enhanced service provision, 18 were referred on for additional AAC assessment i.e. 17% required some level of AAC intervention.

#### LEVELS OF AAC INTERVENTION

Three levels of intervention were planned that could be supported by Sheffield Speech and Language Therapy Agency:

- **LEVEL 1 – initial school training for children with a wide range of visual support/AAC need.** This would include introducing school staff to use of visual supports to communication and AAC approaches, giving training in using specific software to produce resources, giving advice on specific ways AAC in the environment could be used following observation and 4-5 sessions for child and school assistant with specialist AAC SLT assistant using low tech aids and child's personal communication book.
- **LEVEL 2 – second stage of training to address a child's or school's specific needs, particularly in relation to using technology with speech to support communication.** At this stage, SLT would have advised the school to purchase computer-based software such as Clicker 4/5 or The Grid. Training in programming and use of the software would take place. SLT and/or specialist AAC SLT assistant would work in the same way as described above to assist in devising classroom activities and individual targets for the child to help develop individual and classroom communication.
- **LEVEL 3 – third stage of training – for the child who has been provided with an individual high tech communication aid.** Input would be offered as at previous lev-



els but it is envisaged that an ongoing 2-3 blocks a year would be required from SLT. Parents would be advised that a level of commitment from them would be required to support school and child in practising use and programming additional topical vocabulary.

During the two years of the project to this stage, 6 children had Level 1 needs, 10 had Level 2 needs and 2 had level 3 needs.

#### STAFFING NEEDS

From speech and language therapy - this service development project required time from the physical disability/communication aid clinical lead for assessments, some staff training and covering 1-2 children at Level 3 requiring on-going blocks. The specialist AAC SLT assistant provided:

- Two sessions for Level 1 - two SSLI contacts with school-based training and planning for a school assistant.
- One session for Level 3.
- Two sessions for preparation of resources and administration and additional sessions for planning and running training sessions with the clinical lead SSLI SLT for SLTs, SLTAs and enhanced service and school assistants.

From schools - a clear definition of the support time required for a statemented child with severe SSLI needs is not available. The project aimed to gather more specific evidence of staffing levels required to provide good AAC support within a school. Clinical lead SLTs aim to use this during the annual review process to help schools put the case for realistic funding to support the child with high level communication needs effectively in an inclusive classroom.

#### VISUAL SUPPORT AND AAC RESOURCES

At Levels 1 and 2, the success of the project so far has been highly dependent on introducing effective use of symbol software to produce a wide range of low-tech classroom and personalised communication resources. These have aimed to provide materials to support social, language and speech and language for learning needs. They are generally devised to be able to provide classroom communication resources rather than individualised ones, apart from the communication books which are produced to match the child's personal and communication development level needs. The SLT assistant enskills the school assistants to obtain information from observation, questionnaires and personal contact with the child to act as the

basis for AAC communication to use in class, the playground and at home.

#### TRAINING PACKAGES

We feel the project has allowed us to extend the reach of AAC to support many more children and settings. In school, staff, SLTs and enhanced service support assistants have had opportunities to observe the introduction of AAC resources over 3-4 weeks, they have learned more uses for symbol and speech software and produced resources and some schools have begun to work with VOCAs (Voice Output Communication Aids) for the first time. School support assistants have had opportunities for training together outside school 1/2 day in the first year, 1 day in the second year to extend their knowledge of SSLI, use and production of visual and AAC resources - and have been encouraged to build their own support network.

#### EVALUATION AND OUTCOMES

**The children:** of the 18 children assessed for AAC, 6 who received low tech communication books and support now only require visual support strategies. 2 were identified as requiring communication aids which the LEA has funded.

Seven children assessed by the clinical lead SLT for physical disability and communication aids had additional software and hardware provided to their schools by the LEA.

Children can be happier and more confident **now** because of their increased role in class and at school and their ability to express their feelings, needs and choices more clearly.

**SLT development:** two training sessions on AAC were run for Early Years and schools team SLTs, several have had opportunities to work with the specialist SLT assistant and a rotation post now created with the enhanced SSLI project will include sessions working alongside her on AAC development.

**School staff development:** there have been opportunities both in school and for INSET as described.

**Overall assessment:** initial assessment by the amended Surrey profile is being repeated at review and we are beginning to acquire comparative data which will allow us to look at impact of intervention on progress and function in communication, learning and socialisation over time. This evidence will allow us to make improved recommendations relating to staffing needs and school placement and thus reduce the predicted impact of long-term SSLI on behaviour and learning.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Given the positive outcomes so far, we hope to continue to effect change that contributes to improvements for children as described in the Every Child Matters framework, in relation to:

- **LEA policy level** - provide evidence relating to the needs of children with severe SSLI which will improve planning and provision related to staff time, equipment, training needs for school staff etc.
- **School level** - we hope that reviews of the needs of SSLI children are activators to trigger extension of whole school policy in relation to inclusion and communication - planning for training, production of resources, support staff, classroom planning, provision of technology.
- **Classroom level** - the project should continue to help teachers and assistants increase their knowledge of use of technology for special need support. We hope we have also facilitated use of technology to build networks within and between schools to reduce duplication of resources. Their increased awareness of how even children with severe SSLI can be included should help extend inclusion of all children with communication difficulties.

In addition, we feel there is a need for more sharing of work being done around the country on extending inclusion by using visual support and AAC. This could encourage research to build the evidence base for further use of these ways of reducing children's risk of failure and exclusion due to communication difficulties.

Liz Holmes, Alison Mackenzie  
& Wendy Wellington  
*Speech & Language Therapists*

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# Communication in Romania: A Two-way Process

## Introducing AAC in Bucharest and parallel projects

**DOROTHY FRASER**

dotfraser@hotmail.com

**Spring officially started in Romania** yesterday on 1 March 2007. It is a national day of celebration when people give red and white gifts to symbolise the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Children and adults make brooches and bracelets for presents and the streets are full of flower sellers as everyone prepares to celebrate. I was at Special School 6 in Bucharest, working with staff and pupils so it was a nice end to a busy week.

I then travelled by train to Sibiu, in the centre of Romania, where I also have work connections. The train journey from Bucharest to Sibiu takes five hours so, to pass the time, I listened to a local radio station called 'Magic FM' which plays non stop ballads, mostly in English. For the second half of my journey I watched a film, on my laptop, with Romanian subtitles, a useful way to learn the language.

8<sup>th</sup> March is Mother's Day, and this year I have been invited to join the celebrations at a rural schools near Sibiu where the Kindergarten children will do a show for parents and friends. The last time I was there, in February, the Kindergarten teacher was off work because she was ill and I was asked to cover for her.

The children know me from previous visits as it is one of the schools that I support with materials. When they arrived in their class they started their morning routine as normal. One girl, aged about 4, was reluctant to come in and her father stayed with her until she felt confident enough

to join the others. We had a good session and just before the end the same little girl came up to me and invited me to her house. It made me realise that Romanian hospitality starts at a very young age. Everywhere I go I am always made to feel welcome, and language does not seem to be a barrier to communication.

Romanians like to chat and so do I. In some ways I miss the old style of train, although the new ones are much quicker. In the old trains there are six seats in a compartment. A typical journey, with six strangers sitting together, starts with everyone discussing where they are going. They then talk about their families and this is usually followed by a conversation about the latest gossip/news on television, especially about politics, a favourite topic. I have had some great journeys, listening and when possible joining in the general chat. I travel with a lot of luggage and someone always wants to help me to get off the train. Sometimes I have had to refuse help as my travel companions have told me all their health problems, a regular result of telling people I'm a physiotherapist, and I really don't want anyone with a back injury lifting my bags.

Working in Romania, I sometimes give lectures but most of the time I prefer informal workshops as a practical way of instructing, not just explanations of theory.

When I am talking to a large audience I have to speak through a translator as my

knowledge of Romanian is not good enough in a formal situation.

I remember on one occasion there was a question from the audience and my translator replied, "Sorry, Dorothy doesn't do politics." I could see disappointment on some faces but when I'm explaining 'sensory integration' or some other topic related to communication I have to stay focused and not be distracted. I am interested in politics and find it fascinating hearing about the history of Romania but preferably with a glass of wine or beer and time to relax.

As a physiotherapy instructor I have taught courses to students in Britain and therapists abroad, always in situations where the participants understand English, either as a first or second language. Over the years I developed an informal style. I would give notes or overheads on my topic and could then explain through case studies/ stories and also demonstrate hands on with therapists. Depending on the interests of participants I could bring in relevant information, without keeping to a structured plan.

In Romania there are many people who understand English but some don't feel confident enough to speak. Others, who studied French or Russian at school don't know any English. Fortunately for me I can always find someone willing to explain to their colleagues. If I do have to talk to a large group I can plan the topic beforehand with a local therapist so that he or



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she can explain what I'm saying. I find this works much better than with a formal translation, stopping the flow as it is repeated in Romanian and then having to pick up where I left off, a laborious procedure, making it more difficult for participants to follow the subject.

Sometimes we have conversations where I speak in simplified English, they reply in simple Romanian and we can all understand each other, which is quite satisfying.

All of my Romanian colleagues are working to promote a better quality of life for Romanian children and young adults, through education, with concerns about their future. Many of the children that I know have no parents or families to guide them, while others do have the support of loving families. Parents worry about what will happen when they themselves are no longer able to provide care, and also what the future holds for their children when they are too old to attend special schools. Staff are concerned about all aspects of education including social behaviour. One of the fears is that some children may end up in a life of crime, others may not be able to fulfil their potential and escape from existing poverty.

One thing that unites everyone I know is the determination to make changes for a better future. Romania may be considered an under-resourced country but there are many very resourceful people who put their skills and imagination to good use to try to overcome the lack of teaching materials.

#### INTRODUCING AAC

I first visited Special School 6 in Bucharest in 2004. I was introduced to the school manager, who also teaches. She took me on a tour of her school to meet staff and pupils and to see the classrooms too. The manager and I then had a discussion, through an interpreter, about the improvements that she wanted to make for the benefit of everyone involved in the school: pupils, staff, parents and others. She told me she wanted to find out about education systems in other countries in order to make changes in Romanian education and asked me if I could bring information from Scotland. That was the start of a link which has grown over the years.

One topic of particular interest is autism, so I joined the National Autistic Society (NAS) in Britain and, at School 6, we have gradually built up a small library with a collection of books and articles about autism for staff and parents to refer to.

At the end of 2006 I brought a set of books from HMIE (Inspectors of Education) in Scotland for assessment and evaluation of quality of education, main stream and special needs. In February of this year I

bought the most recent publication which is about autism and education.

With this supply of reference books the school manager has access to written information to use in her overall aim for changes in the system to suit the needs of pupils at all levels of education. I can also use the materials as support for my practical courses and less formal discussions.

I live near Edinburgh and am very fortunate to have access to excellent sources of information about AAC. I am extremely grateful to Sally Millar at the CALL Centre (Communication Aids for Language and Learning) University of Edinburgh for her advice and support.

When I first started explaining about AAC I used the set of yellow *Focus on* booklets 'What is AAC? Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication' published by Communication Matters, and 'Communicating with Pictures and Symbols' which is a collection of papers from Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Study Day.

In this case, 13 is a very lucky number as it is an extremely readable book with many practical ideas which can be used to introduce AAC and references for people who want to understand more.

In February 2006 I was invited to take part at a symposium in special school 11 in Bucharest. The meeting was for teachers and therapists from all over Bucharest with a theme of special needs education. The presentations were almost all on power point showing interesting examples of different disciplines in the school plus two video presentations, one from America and one from England. The schedule did not include any time for discussion.

When it was my turn to present I took a different approach as it was an opportunity to show a more interactive method to a wide audience, including school inspectors. I had prepared the story of the three pigs and the wolf as it is known internationally. I used the *Story Bag* idea from Keycomm in Edinburgh. With a door mat and laminated images (printed from Widgit Software's *Communicate in Print 2*) of the three pigs, their houses and a wolf I was able to explain an example of using symbols to encourage interaction and participation. I chose this because it is one of the papers in the book of Augmentative Communication in Practice Scotland's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Study Day - it gives continuity and it is important to have written information for schools to refer to. Romania has a tradition of story telling so I could show this as a way for teachers to involve pupils who for a variety of reasons might not be able to enjoy books by themselves.

At the end of the meeting the school inspector gave the final speech and said she really liked my way of interaction and recommended that teachers should include this method in classrooms and also at future teacher meetings.

#### RESOURCES

Going back a bit in time - in September 2005 I attended the Communication Matters Conference in Leicester.

Earlier in 2005 I was involved in a project supplying rural schools and some of the materials we used were down loaded from [www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com)

At the Leicester conference I was introduced to Tina Detheridge, International director of Widgit Software. She offered to support my projects with Widgit software, initially *Communicate in Print 2* and later she also supplied *Communicate by Choice*. Thanks to her involvement and generosity, Romanian children now have access to technology.

This was a breakthrough for me working in Romania and came at a time when there was a real surge of interest in using computers but a lack of suitable programs.

The project started in the autumn of 2005 with permission from Widgit for me to install the software in selected schools in Bucharest.

These schools were places where I already had contacts and we set up workshops for teachers and therapists to learn how to use the software. First I demonstrated on my laptop and then staff practised on the school computers. The English version of *Communicate in Print 2* was installed, with demonstrations/ explanations from me about making word lists in Romanian. This gave staff opportunities to use the programs in many ways, using images with and without words on screen.

The impact in the schools was great as children found they could create their own pictures and staff found the manual very easy to follow, to be able to use the various features of the software. *Communicate by Choice* was also supplied to these schools by Widgit, giving even more opportunities for interactive communication and supporting the school curriculum.

I used to travel between schools but Bucharest is a large city and this was time consuming. I now have Special School 6 my base and teachers from other schools can meet me there.

The materials that I provide for projects are from private funds with support from friends and family, so I have to plan my budget carefully to make best use of the money.

In 2006 I could provide materials for printing from *Communicate in Print 2* and

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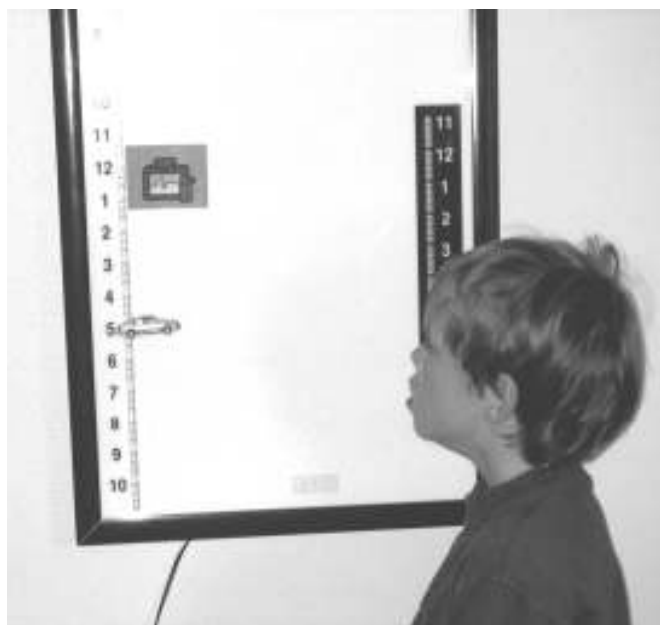


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teachers were able to start making books in Romanian.

In preparation for the workshop in summer 2006, I visited centres in Scotland to get practical ideas to make inexpensive boards and displays. Using suggestions from Keycomm and FACCT, I adapted the ideas to suit Romania and we started to produce sets of Widgit symbols.

I rely on Romanians who can also speak English as they can make translations and build up a Romanian wordlist in the Resource Manager file. When a Romanian version of the software can be created it will be wonderful, but I am aware this will involve a lot of work.

The materials currently in use for preparing material from Widgit software are: a laptop and printer plus a laminator. Laminated pages with symbols are made into spiral books. Sets of separate laminated images are also made, in black and white or colour, plus Velcro friendly boards and pockets for pupils to use.

Laminators are cheaper in Britain so I supply them from home, but laminating pouches are cheaper in Romania. Whenever possible I buy materials locally but otherwise I search in charity shops in Scotland, especially for indestructible developmental toys as these are really difficult to find in Romania.

The school has some desktop computers and I supplied a laptop so that it could be taken into classrooms for staff to work with pupils.

A teacher who understands English makes the translation into Romanian text and then prints. This way they can create material relevant to their own needs, using symbols with and without words, pictures for stories and images of emotions for use with the Talking Mats™ system from Stirling University.

One of the problems I have met is that material available to download from the Internet is in English and the content of stories is often not relevant to Romanian culture.

The school manager and the teacher currently preparing the materials attended an AAC conference in America in 2006. They came back to Romania with fresh enthusiasm but had no materials to put what they had learnt into practice. I bought them a digital camera which can also make short movies, as this was one of their favourite workshop topics at the conference and it is now in regular use.

#### THE BENEFITS OF SYMBOLS

During discussions with staff last week, they told some of the benefits they are seeing using symbols with their pupils. These are a few examples:

- One teacher told me that children in her class could now understand what they are reading, and were not just repeating the words. Other comments related to the flexibility of the Widgit's *Communicate* programs with the opportunity to personalise material for individual children's needs.

- Children who previously were not able to communicate their thoughts or take part in classroom activities now can be included by using symbols.

AAC is still at a very early stage in Bucharest, partly through limited supply of materials and also the time needed to provide training opportunities for staff. The good news is that there is enthusiasm and progress is happening. Teachers and therapists have told me they would really like to exchange ideas with people using low technology AAC and would appreciate being involved in discussions with people working in special schools in other countries.

Below are some photographs to show symbols in use in various ways in the school.



The girl in the above photo with small soft toys has a problem understanding mathematics when the teacher writes numbers on the blackboard. I knew from a previous conversation with her mother that she loves animals and going to the countryside, so we used these toys as a way to encourage her to count.



The boy in the photo has a mat with a happy face at the top left hand corner and he is choosing black and white symbols to put on the mat. From this simple exercise I found out that he likes bicycles and the sound of ambulances. Taking it further I found out that he is frightened of going on buses.

I am going back to Bucharest for a brief visit on my way home in March 2007 and will discuss with teachers the stages we are at with AAC and plans for my next visit, which will include a workshop with some parents who are interested in preparing symbols for use at home as well as in school.

#### SIBIU PROJECT 2007

It is an important year here in Sibiu as together with Luxembourg the two cities are Cultural Capitals of Europe. Sibiu is attracting many international visitors to a very busy cultural programme.

Out in the villages surrounding Sibiu there is also a very exciting programme called 'IT for ALL' provided by an NGO called Ascensium, based in the city. Ascensium has many projects related to health and education.

Last summer when I was here I received the following proposal for an education project, which is now established having started in autumn 2006.

*Aim of Project:* To train children from isolated and outlying communities in the basic use of computers.

*Outline of Proposal:* The reason for starting this project is because over 90% of pupils from these outlying communities have never touched a computer -something which will put them at a considerable disadvantage should they wish to pursue higher education or even find a job. The target group is pupils aged between ten and fifteen and the project is vital if these children are to fulfil their basic human rights to health and education.

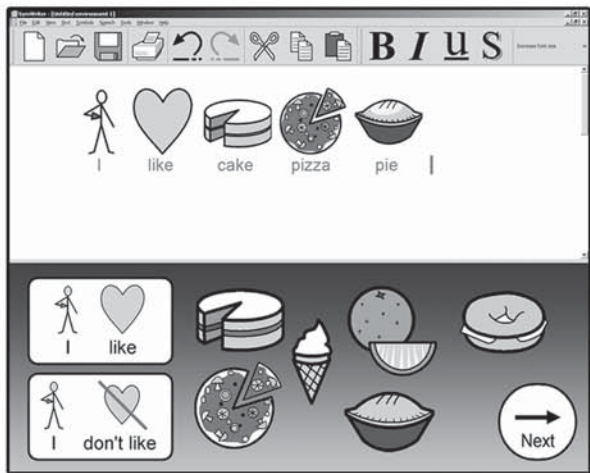
It is a sad fact of life that many rural schools are using teaching methods which are over 50 years old and this, coupled with the absence of Information Technology, leaves many children seriously disadvantaged. The difficulty of the situation is emphasised by the fact that less than 30% of children from these communities and villages actually leave the village to attend either a high school or an occupational school. A better education is pivotal to them being able to support themselves and their community in a better way in the future. The project, if successful, will raise this percentage of children accessing higher education from the low figure of 30% up to a target level of 55%. The percentage of pupils able to use a computer from the selected schools will rise from a maximum of 10% now to a target figure of at least 45%. If these two figures can be met that will be good news. At the end of each course the participants will be required to sit an examination to prove a basic level of competence on a computer and demonstrate that they can cope with Windows XP, Microsoft office, etc.



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The project consists of courses provided for two villages at a time. The course lasts for between ten and twelve weeks, one day per week in each location, with a follow up after two months to review their skills.

The aim of the project is that in this first year up to a dozen communities will be involved. As the project develops, a database will be created and made available to the schools. This will offer them the chance to form partnerships for collaboration on future projects. At the end of each course the schools will keep a desktop computer for their own use.

Initially I donated six laptops and four desktop computers plus a projector. The two teachers who run these courses are so enthusiastic and knowledgeable it is a pleasure to be able to sponsor their project.

The course for the first two villages has finished and I was invited to go on the last day to hand out the certificates. In one village the local priest had asked if he could attend the course with his daughter

and he has now bought a computer for his own home.

Children are so quick at learning to use computers and I'm impressed with their IT skills, here in the villages and also in the schools in Bucharest and realise that with their new ability they have opportunities for their future which would otherwise not be possible.

The village priest is an example of an adult new to computer technology. When I started teaching Widgit software in Bucharest I was also impressed with the teachers who were not computer literate but, for the sake of the children's education, were prepared to learn and use computer programs. What comes naturally to children is not so easy for older people and I could really relate to the priest's tentative use of the key board as he watched to see what would appear on screen. Also, it is so good to see his delight as his skills develop.

One major factor for me as I work with Romanians on projects is the contacts we have developed over the years. When

I get a request for help, advice or information I can put people in touch with each other to sort things out locally. This is also useful for me when I need to contact someone by phone and can ask a Romanian colleague to speak for me or to translate emails that I can't read. \*

Dorothy Fraser, Physiotherapist  
Previously at Headway, Edinburgh, UK

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the help given by Romanian contacts and the following contacts in the UK:

CALL Centre, University of Edinburgh,  
[www.callcentrescotland.org.uk](http://www.callcentrescotland.org.uk)

FACCT, Fife Assessment Centre for Communication through Technology

KEYCOMM, Edinburgh  
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# Policy for the Provision of Communication Aids in England

ALEXIS EGERTON

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This article is the author's personal reflection and does not represent the views of Communication Matters

**The British Education Communication Technology Agency** (BECTa)'s *Communication Aid Project* started in 2002 and ended at the end of March 2006 when government funding terminated. The CAP fund ran for four consecutive years and provided funding for assistive technology for 4,000 children with communication difficulties in England.

Commentators in many publications saw this CAP funding as something to feel optimistic about, and it initiated new vibes within the area of assistive technology (AT) and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Four years on, the positive legacy is that strategic partner links formed by BECTa's CAP within the local education authorities still remain in the areas that set them up, and some essential interdisciplinary teams are still effectively working together. These are vital so that speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, teachers, parents and the child can have collaborative input into the individual case. However, time will tell as to what extent these working relationships will stay together without the involvement of a strategic national lead organisation. The fundamental major concern will be that without some overarching national planning and ring-fenced funding a slow degradation of working relationships will take place.

In spite of the fact that local authorities have a legal obligation to provide what the child needs to engage in education, especially if it is identified on the child's statement, this does not always happen in the case of AAC equipment. Not all children needing VOCAs have a statement and even then an authority can say it doesn't have the money.

Other agencies that may have a role to play in the provision of AAC in England are the Integrated Community Equipment Services (ICES)<sup>1</sup>, managed by Social Services and the Department of Health (2006) and the Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) run by the National Health Service (2005). However, although ICES does have the essential infrastructure to manage and track stock items, AAC devices are seen as a very specialist, minority area. This is not bulk-buying that could foster the creation of economies of scale (Porter 1989) making the unit cost cheaper. From a budgetary point of view the present system is not sustainable in the long-term and seems to show a lack of foresight and commitment from the authorities.

The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) has been cited by Government as a potential supplier of AAC equipment and services (at least from contracted companies), but in reality this agency has

limited experience in this area, and anyway the present contracts end in March 2007. Furthermore, from 1 October 2006 the PASA's logistical management (NHSBSA 2006) was outsourced and contracted out to the private sector (DHL) and the status of communication aid equipment via the DHL supply route is currently unclear. This may represent cost savings to the NHS in the short-term however it is doubtful that this service provider will be capable of providing a specialised service that the delivery of AAC equipment requires, such as mounting the equipment onto wheelchairs or the initial training component that needs to go with this type of equipment (Mason 2006). Within both ICES and PASA currently, services seem fragmented and there seems a lack (or poor coordination) of organisational leads. Continuing technological advancements in Assistive Technology, along with changes in users' needs and aspirations

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<sup>1</sup> ICES is now incorporated within the Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) - Older People and Physical Disabilities section, which has a non ring-fenced budget for telecare. The budget of £82m (a nominal £230 per head) is to maintain independence, but is possibly aimed primarily at smoke, gas, water detectors, nurse call alarms, etc.



and their competence in using AAC methods, means that regular reassessments are required for the person's AAC needs. There is a concern that these needs will remain unattended by the proposed equipment distribution channels. This leaves only the route of referral for assessment to one of the two regional ACE Centres or other regional Communication Aid Centres (CACs) as the only route for many children. In reality, generally only the more complex cases end up being assessed by ACE or CACs - and they can only recommend AAC equipment, not fund its provision. Success is also dependent upon the local speech and language therapists' ability to make appropriate referrals, and to support AAC equipment effectively.

Although equipment provided by CAP should not be taken from an individual, AAC equipment provided by a local authority may on occasion be taken away from pupils who move to a different local education authority, or school leavers. This would be a huge and frustrating barrier for the individual that does not make for a smooth transition into the next stages of their life and further progress with communication. Upon leaving the education system, someone who needs or uses AAC is significantly disadvantaged. The structures for referral, assessment, provisional and support for adults are completely different from those within education. Individuals who need AAC may have to start all over again from scratch. Many are defeated by the complexities of the system and by the lack of support, thus losing out on social development and, potentially, opportunities to enter Further or Higher Education.

Having no easy access to available funds is bad enough, and this can be compounded by an element of 'postcode lottery'. Obtaining funding for adults with AAC needs is very arduous. Effectively this can leave the older AAC user begging for vital funds from charities, digging deep into their own, family or friends' pockets to purchase their communication aid. As many who use AAC equipment are on a low income, they potentially face social segregation and isolation. This could cause behaviour problems and mental illnesses in later life (Department of Health 2006).

The advancements in modern medicine means we can keep people alive for much longer than ever before and the medical profession can save more premature babies. At both ends of the spectrum there will be a greater probability of disabilities and speech impairments occurring. Thus there will be an even bigger need for assistive technology and augmentative and

alternative communication, creating a cost burden for all of society that would be not only monetary but also a social cost of not having these groups of people being included and socially and economically active within their local community.

The current government has made reference to AT and AAC in a whole raft of national initiatives and legal frameworks such as; The National Service Framework, the Prime Minister's policy document on Improving The Life Chances of Disabled People, the Human Rights Act, the Every Child Matters Framework, The Children's Act, the Health Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, and the Special Educational Need and Disability Act, the White Paper Our Health Our Say Our Care, E-inclusion (which is an European Union initiative) and three United Nations' Resolutions relating to the area.

However, in spite of all the words, there is today still a distinct lack of strategic lead, purpose, scope and direction, and no ring-fenced or direct funding for AAC, leaving this area of need under-funded and overseen by a fractured policy. \*

Alexis Egerton, *Postgraduate Student*

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## DVDS AVAILABLE

### The Power of Communication

This film by Communication Matters delivers a powerful message that communication really does matter. The DVD is an introduction to AAC, and celebrates and promotes communication in all its forms. It is of general interest, and in particular to service managers and purchasers who have responsibility for AAC services.

Preview it online:  
[www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

DVD available (£8) from:  
Communication Matters  
c/o The ACE Centre, 92 Windmill Road,  
Oxford OX3 7DR Tel: 0845 456 8211  
[admin@communicationmatters.org.uk](mailto:admin@communicationmatters.org.uk)

### How Far We've Come, How Far We've Got to Go: Tales from the Trenches

Written and Performed by  
Michael B Williams

This is the extraordinary story of the life of Michael B Williams. See the potential of AAC as you journey through the past with Michael.

Preview it online:  
[www.aac-lerc.com/pages/news/webcasts2005.htm](http://www.aac-lerc.com/pages/news/webcasts2005.htm)

DVD available from:  
Augmentative Communication, Inc.  
Tel: +1 831 649 3050  
Email: [sarahblack@aol.com](mailto:sarahblack@aol.com)  
[www.augcominc.com](http://www.augcominc.com)

## WEB RESOURCES EQUAL JUSTICE

**Augmentative Communication Community Partnerships - Canada (ACCPC)** are developing a range of web resources for the legal community to provide access to the justice system for people who use augmentative and alternative communication.

Check out the free, useful resources for people who use AAC, their families, legal professionals, service providers and other professionals at:

[www.accpc.ca/equaljustice.htm](http://www.accpc.ca/equaljustice.htm)

### YOUR HELP NEEDED TO COMPLETE SCOPE'S COMMUNICATION AIDS SURVEY

The *Scope* Communication Aids Survey aims to record the experiences of people with communication impairments so this evidence can be used to improve communication aid provision and support.

If you or a family member have a communication impairment, *Scope* would like to hear from you. The more people who get involved, the more information can be gathered, so if you know other people who have communication impairments please tell them about this survey.

The survey is for people with a communication impairment, who use, or would like to use, a communication aid. *Scope* would also like to hear from parents and family members or people that work with people with communication impairments.

Please help by downloading the form and returning the questionnaire by 1 July 2007 from: [www.scope.org.uk/disablism/communication.shtml](http://www.scope.org.uk/disablism/communication.shtml) You can complete this survey in three ways:

- Download the survey in Word, save your answers and email to: [communication.aims@scope.org.uk](mailto:communication.aims@scope.org.uk)
- Print a PDF version and post it back to: *Scope*, The Communication Aids Survey, FREEPOST 17 LON8654, London N7 9BR
- On the phone with a member of *Scope* staff. To arrange a time, please ring 020 7619 7254.

If you do not meet the above description, but have an experience to share, *Scope* would still like to hear from you. Please ring 020 7619 7254 or email: [communication.aims@scope.org.uk](mailto:communication.aims@scope.org.uk)



## 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**

### New Product



The **Vocally Diallers** are hardware devices that recognise speech to dial the telephone. (Speaker Dependent, therefore a constant sound can be used)

On recognition they will dial up to 35 digits, permitting the user to make Local, National and International telephone calls. Versions available **Freedom £135.00** and **Infinity £155.00** see website for fuller description

[www.madhousesoftware.co.uk](http://www.madhousesoftware.co.uk)

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

For more Information and Free evaluation versions of the software go to [www.madhousesoftware.co.uk](http://www.madhousesoftware.co.uk)

Alternatively contact: T / F: +44 (0) 1226 390 000 M: + 44 (0) 7788 515 161

E-mail: [info@madhousesoftware.co.uk](mailto:info@madhousesoftware.co.uk)

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



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## TRUSTEES' NEWS

### FINANCIAL UPDATE

At the AGM in September the Board of Trustees shared with you their concerns about Communication Matters' current financial situation. The Board undertook to review this and come back to you with plans for both the short term and longer term.

The good news is that we are not actually as badly off as we thought in September 2006. In 2005 we spent £25,000 more than our income. In 2006 we worked really hard to get our finances under control - we were aiming for a breakeven budget for 2006. However, we did even better - the pre-audit figures show that we ended the year with a surplus of around £9,000 (including several donations amounting to around £6,000). Turning the finances around to this extent was not easy to achieve - but we felt that we were in an emergency situation and drastic measures were required. Many of the decisions we had to make in the course of 2006, and prior to last year's conference, were not very popular even amongst the Board of Trustees. We made these changes to improve the CM2006 Symposium income and expenditure:

- increased registration fees by 25%;
- capped the number of subsidised places at the Symposium available for people who use AAC and family members;
- raised exhibitor stand prices by a large amount;
- removed the subsidy for speakers;
- reduced audiovisual requirements;
- no AA signage;
- alternative arrangements for accessible loos.

In addition we:

- increased the membership fees by a minimum of 25% and removed the free subscription for students;
- increased the advertising rates (in the Journal) significantly;
- doubled CM Road Show fees to suppliers;
- didn't reprint the Focus on leaflets;
- didn't give out any Small Grants;
- didn't give help to members to attend the ISAAC conference in Germany.

Towards the end of last year the Board of Trustees had a very full day's meeting where we radically re-structured our finances and changed the way we look at activities before we approach them. We were very keen to try and establish a more sound financial footing without substantially altering the ethos of Communication Matters. There were lots of ideas, some immediately discarded, some which needed more thought, and some which were immediately accepted.

### Immediate Changes

#### *Symposium:*

You will be glad (I hope) to know that the conference will be much the same format as in previous years. We are heading back to Leicester - Pat Thomas managed to secure a reduction from the university. Sadly

we have had to let go of the paid Conference Organiser position, which Pat has held for the past couple of years. She worked really hard behind the scenes to make the conference run smoothly, liaising with the staff at Leicester University - she really helped make the transition from Lancaster University to Leicester painless for all of us. Thank you Pat - but we're looking forward to you being at the conference and able to enjoy it as a 'normal' punter! This will mean more work for the Board of Trustees and the CM Administrator, but hopefully we'll manage to follow in Pat's shoes without too many hiccups.

In the main, we have maintained the same delegate rates as for 2006 (we want people to be able to come to the conference and not be put off because of the cost). People who use AAC and family members will continue to pay the very subsidised rate of £75 - but reluctantly, and after significant consultation, we have had to charge PAs £45 per person, as a contribution to their subsistence costs for the 2.5 days. In addition, the rates for an exhibition stand are going up.

#### *Communication Matters Membership Fees:*

You might have noticed that there have been some changes to these. Individual, Student and Retired subscriptions remain the same as last year - all other categories have shown a slight increase. Membership is free for people who use AAC and/or their family members (one free membership per address) for the first year. Thereafter we have instituted a small fee of £10 to cover the cost of ISAAC capitation (i.e. the fee Communication Matters pays to ISAAC for membership of the international organisation).

#### *Other Activities:*

We have also looked at other ways of increasing revenue - hopefully without jeopardising Communication Matters' relationships with its stakeholders too much.

- We put in place a funding and finance group to seek grants - which already has had some success and has resulted in us setting up Gift Aid on donations (increasing the £6,000 donation by £1,680 in Gift Aid), and a successful bid to *Awards for All* for a £10,000 grant to enable more people who use AAC to attend CM2007 at a subsidised rate.
- We have asked people to consider taking part in sponsored activities to raise funds for Communication Matters. Many thanks to *Andrea Wallbank-Scales* who is joining the ACE Centre Inca Trek Challenge to raise money for CM.
- We have run some successful (and profitable!) Study Days in conjunction with the Wolfson Centre - and are actively looking at whether this shared Study Day model can be replicated in other parts of the UK.

### Longer Term

We are continuing to seek alternative sources of funding (e.g. grants) and we are working on developing a marketing/PR strand (we are looking for volunteers to help us with this).





## TRUSTEES' NEWS

The results for 2006 are a cause for massive celebration, *but* we still need to continue along this path in order to continue to be financially stable. If we had taken no proactive action during 2006 we would now be looking at similar losses to 2005. It is important for us all to remember that CM's financial problems are *not* solved in this one year; this is really just the beginning. Our 2006 surplus is not an excuse to go SPEND, SPEND, SPEND on projects no matter how deserving! We need to continue in this manner for the next few years by which time we should be able to start slowly spending any surplus. We need to be much more careful when agreeing to do things that have not been budgeted for. We also need to build up a realistic reserve to cover potential uninsurable failure of the Symposium – which could result in CM having to be shut down, unless we can cover the costs.

I hope you do not feel that we were crying wolf at last year's AGM – I think what happened was a wake up call for all of us. What has happened, it seems to me, is that everyone who is interested in Communication Matters, and wants it to survive and thrive, has really pulled together. We have all been far more successful than we could have hoped for. A great big, heart-felt thank you to everyone who has donated money and/or time over this past year, to everyone who is planning a sponsored walk/run (and loads of good wishes for your event!) – for your ongoing support both to Communication Matters the organisation and to those people who belong to it.

I would not be able to write this positive update without everyone's support. There are certain people whose efforts and commitment must be acknowledged – the entire Board of Trustees have worked really hard to help re-organise the charity's finances in a prudent manner; Neil Hansen, our Treasurer, has worked tirelessly producing Excel spreadsheet after spreadsheet and patiently explaining to the less numerically gifted what they mean (I'm sure that there have been times when Neil has felt like the 'wicked' step-father always having to say NO! – but without his vigilance we wouldn't be where we are now); and Patrick Poon, CM Administrator, who has worked with Neil to make sure that we were getting the best price we could for everything and has cast his watchful eye over Trustee and Charity activities.

### NEXT CM CHAIR & DEPUTY CHAIR

At our recent meeting on 1 March, the Communication Matters Board of Trustees elected *Liz Moulam* into the position of Chair and *Toby Hewson* as Deputy Chair. Liz and Toby will take up their new positions at the Annual Meeting this September.

Liz comes to the office of Chair with many years of experience in the commercial sector and marketing behind her. She is in an ideal position to drive Communication Matters forward and promote its position as a major player in the field of AAC in the UK and on an international stage. Liz has been a Trustee of Communication Matters for three years (including one year

where she was co-opted onto the Board), and over this past year Liz has been the driving force behind our comprehensive review of Governance. She is currently studying for a Masters degree in Psychology / Psychological Research Methods with a specific focus on AAC issues, and has a daughter who uses AAC. Liz is in a unique position of being able to bring both a personal perspective on AAC combined with a well-honed business and marketing mind to the position of Chair.

Toby is a recognized role model for other people who use AAC, championing the cause at every opportunity. He has been a Trustee of Communication Matters for four years and during this time has chaired the Increasing Involvement working party. He has made several videos raising awareness of disability and AAC issues, and has presented papers at a number of national and international conferences. Toby lives independently, travels extensively and has just started up a new charitable organisation. He brings a wealth of personal experience to the new position of Deputy Chair.

We are extremely delighted with their appointments and feel that this heralds in new and exciting times for Communication Matters. The position of Deputy Chair is a new one and we are particularly pleased that Toby has taken on this challenge!

**Janet Scott**, Chair of Communication Matters  
Email: [janet.scott@sgh.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:janet.scott@sgh.scot.nhs.uk)

### GOVERNANCE REVIEW UPDATE

As you know, the Board of Trustees has been undertaking a thorough review of Communication Matters' governance procedures, including bringing our Memorandum and Articles of Association (the 'Constitution') up to date. We are very grateful for all the help you have given us in this process via the Membership Guidance Group established at CM2006. We embarked on this governance review to ensure that we were a well run, best practice organization. In going through the documentation with our charity lawyer, we discovered that there was some confusion about who/what Communication Matters' membership actually consists of, and that some practices had crept in which had acquired a kind of 'legality' even though they were not actually within the Constitution.

I would imagine that you all thought, as I did, that you were members of Communication Matters. Having taken expert legal advice the Board of Trustees now knows that at any time the members of Communication Matters are *only* the current members of the Board (who are listed as Company Directors with Companies House and are the Trustees of the Charity). Now that we know that this is the case we have no choice but to adapt our practice. We have taken advice as to whether the members of Communication Matters can be redefined as what we had all understood to be the membership, but have found that this is not legally possible.

In many ways this does not actually alter your relationship with Communication Matters. The Board of



## TRUSTEES' NEWS

Trustees will continue with custom and practice of holding an Annual Meeting in September as part of the Symposium, where we will update the attendees on the activities of the Board of Trustees in the previous year and bring to the meeting new initiatives for feedback. In addition the Board of Trustees would ask for approval of the Annual Accounts being a true and fair reflection of activities, the finances of the charity, the reappointment of the Auditor/Accountants and the election of Trustees/directors. We very much value your views and will not make decisions unless we feel that they are in the best interests of the Charity. You will continue to have a very important role in advising the Board of Trustees.

To protect your role, we have written in the new safeguard that any decisions made at the Annual Meeting will only be reversed by the Board of Trustees if there is an adverse legal or financial implication for Communication Matters, and if this is agreed by a two thirds majority of the Board.

The Board of Trustees have identified various categories of **Associate** membership of Communication Matters - these tie in with the categories used up to this point e.g. 'Individual members', 'People who use AAC', 'Commercial members in the field of AAC', 'Institutional members who work professionally in the field of AAC', etc. The benefits of belonging to Communication Matters will remain as before, and there will continue to be an annual fee linked to the different categories to cover ISAAC capitation, the running of Communication Matters, the publication of the Journal, and so on.

With this new discovery comes perhaps an added responsibility - if you are at all concerned about how Communication Matters is run, what its future direction should be, or if you feel strongly about Communication Matters, then this is the impetus you might need to stand for election as a Trustee. It is now perhaps more important than ever that the make up of the Board of Trustees is representative of the Associate membership i.e. *YOU!*

We are well underway with the whole governance review - and the revised Memorandum and Articles of Association (the constitution) are with the solicitor and are ready to go to the Charities Commission for their approval. We will be making this document and a whole range of 'best practice' documents available for you to read before we meet up at the Annual Meeting in September. We hope that when you read these you will realise just how much the Board of Trustees have worked hard to maintain the status quo for the new Associate membership, and have tried to put in place safeguards to ensure the views of the whole of the Communication Matters community continue to be taken into account.

If you have any queries or concerns about this please feel free to contact either me or Liz Moulam (Chair of the Governance Review Committee).

**Janet Scott** Email: janet.scott@sgh.scot.nhs.uk

**Liz Moulam** Email: lizmoulam@aol.com

## eCAT

## NEWS

**At the last eCAT/BHTA meeting, one of the** discussions was about the new WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) regulations, which means we, as suppliers, have to accept all scrap electronic items back from customers *and* we have to pay for the disposal. The immediate concern was stated by one member who said, "...knowing the state we get some products back in for repair because people don't clean them first, I hate to think of the state of products that we will receive for scrap!" The discussion soon descended into exactly what had been found on or in devices that had been sent back for repair, and we soon became like a bunch of 'Grumpy Old Suppliers' discussing the subject!

A representative from the BHTA, in the meeting as an observer, reminded us that we all have a duty, under the Health and Safety Act, to protect our staff, and if that means refusing to accept returned goods until they are clean, then that is not just our right, it is our duty as an employer. Another supplier pointed out that it is illegal to ship contaminated products through the post or via a courier, without prior agreement from that courier.

And so the Grumpy Old Suppliers started to hatch a plan! They would agree that in future they would expect all products to be sent back in a clean state, and if they were not, regardless of whether they were being returned for repair or disposal, they would consider either returning them, with a polite request that they be cleaned first, or even charge a cleaning fee. We also decided that a light-hearted article should be written for the CM journal. It was then that we became more like *argumentative* Grumpy Old Suppliers, as, even after three versions of the article, we couldn't agree on the tone of the article. So in the end we decided not to mention it in the Journal at all - so please don't read the preceding paragraphs! But don't be surprised if you get charged by some companies if you send back products covered in 'grunge' (well, what else am I supposed to call it?!).

On a much more positive note, we discussed the funding issues that faced the industry, again, and the public disgrace of so many children and adults who cannot get funding for a communication aid. All the members present agreed that it would more be helpful if we, as suppliers, could pool our knowledge of what funds are available, what legal rights people have, how groups or individuals can fight for funding, etc. instead of each supplier doing their own thing. The idea progressed into all suppliers also agreeing to have the information on their websites, and approaching both CM and the RCSLT to publicise the information. The BHTA also offered to produce fliers to hand out at exhibitions, etc., once all the information was gathered together, with the printing being paid for jointly by all suppliers.

So, watch this space...and perhaps we're not so grumpy after all since we can agree on some things!

**Dave Morgan**, Chair of eCAT section, BHTA

Email: david.morgan@dynavox.co.uk



## DIARY DATES

28 April 2007 Edinburgh

### Family Technology Fun Day

CALL Centre: 0131 651 6235 [www.callcentrescotland.org.uk](http://www.callcentrescotland.org.uk)

1-4 May 2007 Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Waterford

### CM Road Shows in Ireland

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

9 May 2007 Bristol

### Dynamic AAC within the Curriculum

Contact PCAS: 0117 924 7527 [www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk](http://www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk)

10 May 2007 Oldham

### Getting Started with AAC

Contact ACE Centre North: 01457 829 444 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

11 May 2007 Brighouse

### CM Road Show in Brighouse

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

17 May 2007 Oxford

### Developing Low Tech Communication Resources

Contact ACE Centre: 01865 759 800 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

17 May 2007 Birmingham

### Assessing and Developing Emerging Communication

Contact ACT: 0121 627 8235 [www.wmrc.nhs.uk](http://www.wmrc.nhs.uk)

21 May 2007 Bristol

### What a Tellus can do for you! (Techcess)

Contact PCAS: 0117 924 7527 [www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk](http://www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk)

22-25 May 2007 Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh

### CM Road Shows in Scotland

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

5 June 2007 Worcester

### CM Road Show in Worcester

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

13 June 2007 Bristol

### Using AAC & Computers at Home

Contact PCAS: 0117 924 7527 [www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk](http://www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk)

21 June 2007 Oxford

### Maths Recording for Students with Physical Disabilities

Contact ACE Centre: 01865 759 800 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

26 June 2007 Oxford

### AAC SIG: AAC Assessment Tools

Contact PCAS: 0117 924 7527 [www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk](http://www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk)

27 June 2007 Oxford

### CM Road Show in Oxford

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

12 July 2007 Oxford

### Fixed Overlay Communication Aids

Contact ACE Centre: 01865 759 800 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

12 July 2007 Oldham

### Recording Module (Accredited)

Contact ACE Centre North: 01457 829 444 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

20 September 2007 Oldham

### PowerPoint

Contact ACE Centre North: 01457 829 444 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

## DIARY DATES

23-25 September 2007 Leicester

### CM2007 National Symposium

University of Leicester

Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

COMMUNICATION  
MATTERS

27 September 2007 Oxford

### Voice Recognition: Who, why, how and when

Contact ACE Centre: 01865 759 800 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

9 October 2007 Oldham

### Clicker 5

Contact ACE Centre North: 01457 829 444 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

10 or 11 October 2007 Oxford

### Eye Control and Disability: What's all the fuss about?

Contact ACE Centre: 01865 759 800 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

6 November 2007 Oxford

### AAC SIG

Contact PCAS: 0117 924 7527 [www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk](http://www.pcas.claremont.bristol.sch.uk)

7 November 2007 Oldham

### Playing with IT

Contact ACE Centre North: 01457 829 444 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

14 November 2007 Bristol

### CM Road Show in Bristol

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

15 November 2007 Oxford

### Creating Motivating Activities for Users of AAC

Contact ACE Centre: 01865 759 800 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

16 November 2007 Portsmouth

### CM Road Show in Portsmouth

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

22 November 2007 London

### CM Road Show in London

FREE Tel: 0845 456 8211 [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk)

CM  
ROAD SHOW

28 November 2007 Oldham

### Prepare to Play

Contact ACE Centre North: 01457 829 444 [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)

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# Evaluation of Joke-Creation Software with Children with Complex Communication Needs

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## BACKGROUND

Jokes such as punning riddles provide a playground for language acquisition. Punning riddles (verbal wordplay) form a natural part of children's discourse. They provide opportunities to practise the normal rules of language and to explore the ambiguity of words. The pragmatics of punning riddles with their question-answer structure provide a template for turn taking and initiation. Puns support vocabulary acquisition by enabling the child to play with word ambiguity and they help in the development of phonetic and semantic awareness.

However, children with complex communication needs (CCN) often lack the opportunity to practise and explore language in this manner. These children often rely on communication aids which do not give them the opportunity to explore new vocabulary easily. Non-text communication aids are usually based on the retrieval of pre-stored linguistic items. Jokes are sometimes added to the pre-stored vocabulary and provide the opportunity to practice turn-taking skills in a fun way. However, pre-stored jokes do not give the user the possibility to generate jokes and thus to explore novel vocabulary independently.

The aim of the STANDUP project was to provide a language playground through the generation of novel puns! The main research question was to investigate whether joke generation software could be designed specifically for use by children with CCN which would enable them

to generate novel jokes and tell them to an audience.

## HOW STANDUP WORKS

The STANDUP software comprises two main components – the joke generation software and the user interface which allows the user to generate and use punning riddles.

### From the Inside

The joke generation software is based on the ideas in JAPE which was developed to generate a variety of punning riddles (Binsted et al, 1997). The puns are based on a question-answer structure and use the ambiguity and phonemic similarities of words. The underlying STANDUP database has been built from a number of existing resources, principally the WordNet lexicon (Fellbaum 1998), and holds information about more than 130,000 words to generate novel puns by combining them according to their phonemic and semantic properties. In order to generate a novel joke, the software first chooses some dictionary entries which are related in specific ways, e.g. "bizarre bazaar" (words which sound the same, i.e. homophones).

STANDUP has about ten recipes for doing this selection of clusters of related words. Once these are selected, it has further rules for how to construct related phrases – for example, in Figure 1 from "bizarre bazaar" it might form "strange market", or "odd mall". There are then templates which indicate where to place these words or phrases within standard

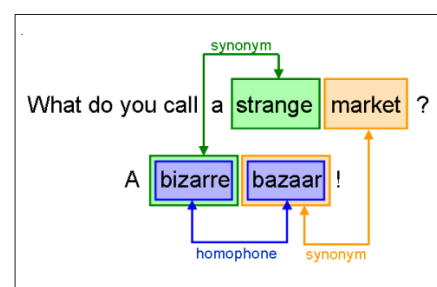


Figure 1 STANDUP creates jokes by finding related words or phrases and then building a question and answer around them

pieces of text such as "What do you call...". Hence a complete riddle might be "What do you call a strange market? A bizarre bazaar". Starting from two rhyming words, such as "calm palm", the same template could yield "What do you call a tranquil tree? A calm palm.

### From the Outside

The user has access to the joke generation software through a graphic interface which accepts touch screen, mouse and keyboard input. For switch users a scanning mode allows for single switch scanning.

The graphic interface displays buttons in the form of clouds in the sky that are used to choose the different options available to generate and tell a joke. A jester with a speech bubble outputs program messages and the jokes. Additionally a landscape showing a progress map can be displayed on the screen. Here the jester travels along a path representing the progress of the joke generation. Text output can be sup-

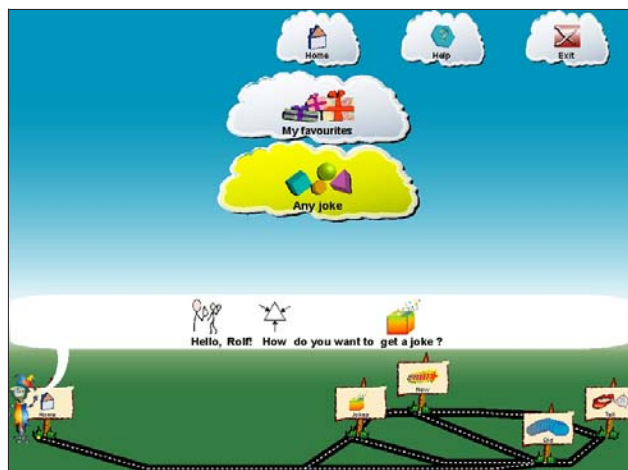


Figure 2 In this simple setup of the interface the user starts with two options to generate a joke: "Any joke" for a joke without the need to select any further option influencing the joke generation and "Favourites" to list previously saved favourite jokes.

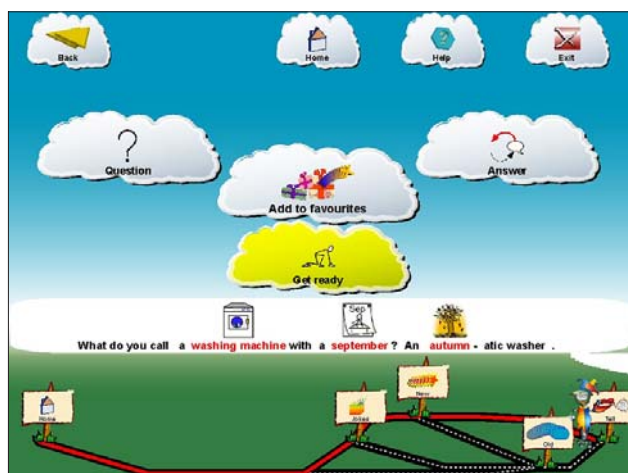


Figure 3 Once a joke has been generated it can be told to an audience using three options: "Get ready" to seek the audience's attention, "Question" and "Answer" to tell the actual joke - preferably without giving the punch line away too early.

ported by symbols (Widgit Rebus or/and Mayer-Johnson PCS) and speech output. The complexity of the screen, i.e. the number of options available to influence the joke generation can be adjusted according to the needs and skills of the user. Figures 2 and 3 show the basic interface.

#### THE EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The STANDUP evaluation was designed as a single case study. It was divided into five phases. The Baseline and Post Intervention Phase at the beginning and end of the evaluation were used to collect information about and from the participants. These two phases framed the Introduction, Intervention and Evaluation Phase during which the participants used the STANDUP software with varying support by the researcher.

##### Baseline Phase

During the seven weeks prior to the STANDUP sessions information regarding

each participant's classroom setting, literacy level, computer use, accessibility needs and interests was gathered. The speech and language therapists (SLTs), teachers and teaching assistants were interviewed for information about each participant's requirements, literacy level and other relevant information.

##### Introduction Phase

During the first two weeks of the evaluation the STANDUP program was introduced to the participants. The setup of the hardware and software was adjusted to the individual needs of the children.

The tasks during this phase primarily consisted of:

- generating a new joke
- telling a joke to an audience and
- saving to or retrieving jokes from the favourite jokes collection

The researcher supported the participants with extensive explanation during these sessions, allowing plenty of practice time and repetition for completing the tasks.

##### Intervention Phase

Once the participants were confident in using the software at its given level, new tasks were introduced and the interface expanded accordingly. Tasks in the level 2 group consisted of:

- generating jokes about a specific topic or sub-topic (e.g. about the topic 'animals' or its sub-topic 'bugs')
- retrieving an 'old' joke that had been generated during earlier sessions;
- generating a joke of a certain type (e.g. "What do you get when you cross...", "What do you call...")
- generating a joke containing a keyword selected from a number of keywords of a certain topic

##### Evaluation Phase

During the last two weeks, the participants used the software without any support from the researcher when possible. A



Figure 4 DA, 11y3m, using head switch/scanning access, after generating a funny joke during the intervention phase

number of tasks such as generating a new joke or telling a particular joke to an audience were asked of the participants. Their performance was recorded using two video cameras with different viewpoints and data logging software recorded all the participant's interactions with the STANDUP system.



Figure 5 LE, 10y2m, using touch screen/direct access to interact with the software

##### Post Intervention Phase

During the week after the evaluation phase semi-structured interviews with all participants and with the speech and language therapist were conducted. Parts of the initial literacy and language tests were repeated.

##### PARTICIPANTS

Nine participants took part in the study. Informed consent was gained from both participants and their parents.

All nine participants have Cerebral Palsy and use a wheelchair. All participants had emerging literacy and were able to read with some assistance, e.g. symbol or speech support. Table 1 records the age, gender, level of speech and type of device access for each participant.

##### STANDUP IN USE

All introduction and intervention sessions were videoed using a single video camera focusing on participant, tablet computer and researcher. Additionally the interface screen could be viewed on a separate monitor. Due to space restrictions of the SLT room available it was difficult to include the 'audience' for the joke-telling in the picture.

All nine participating children were able to generate jokes and tell them to an au-

dience by the end of the first introductory session.

After each session the participants chose their favourite joke of the session. This was written into a special joke folder (The question on the front, the answer on the back of a page). The participants could take this folder away with them to use it to tell their jokes to their peers or to ask their therapists to transfer them onto their preferred communication device (e.g. DynaVox) or a device that could be easily taken home (i.e. a Step-by-step, BIGmack, etc.).

### PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The impact the project had on school life was unexpected.

Not only did most of the participants want to tell their favourite jokes to peers, teachers and therapists, but one class extended their project wall with a section where the favourite jokes of all participants were displayed on a weekly basis (Figure 6).

Participants who met in between sessions spontaneously used their folders to tell each other their favourite joke.



Figure 7 EM telling AL her favourite joke in between sessions using her favourite joke folder (with the help of her speech & language therapist)

A preliminary viewing of the video recordings illustrated several aspects of the use of the program and its effects on the participants.

- A phenomenon observed in typically developing children could be seen during the sessions. Some children told the punch line of the joke before asking their audience the initial question - this is typical for children who are beginning to tell jokes and is a pragmatic skill which children have to learn through experience.
- Some participants chose jokes that were not regarded as funny by others as their favourites and proceeded to tell them to others. This too can be observed when typically developing children learn to tell jokes.
- Some participants were able to choose their jokes by keyword or subject suitable for the conversation topic e.g. when looking for an appropriate joke topic a participant was asked whether she would like

to make a joke about her present SLT. She then proceeded to choose the topic "people" with its sub-topic "adult, female" to generate an appropriate joke.

Questionnaires were sent out to parents, teachers and classroom assistants. Additional to the general positive feedback received from parents, some remarks suggested some major positive impact on the pupils' day to day life. One child in particular wanted to tell her favourite joke to the whole neighbourhood once she was home from school.

A semi-structured interview with the SLT team was conducted. In this the therapists reported a number of very positive effects the project had on the self-esteem and communication skills of the participating children and a number of ideas for future work were raised.

### PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK USING TALKING MATS™

All participants were interviewed with the support of the Talking Mats™ technique (Murphy & Cameron 2002). Main issues covered included the attractiveness of the jester, the quality of the access method (i.e. scanning or touch screen), the jokes and the voice output.

The interviews supported our observation of the bad intelligibility of the voice output and problems with the access method. Children who were used to row-column-scanning seemed confused by the implemented circular scanning and

Level	Participant	Communication	Head switch	Direct access
Early Primary	NI, female age: 8y4m	Dynavox DV4 user, PCS	✓	
Middle Primary	AL, female age: 10y10m	Intelligible speech, diff. articulation		✓
	SA, female age: 10y9m	Communication book, gross fist & eye gaze	✓	
	EO, male age: 10y3m	Communication Board PCS, TechSpeak		✓
	LE, male age: 10y3m	Clear speech		✓
Senior Primary	DA, male age: 11y3m	Dynavox DV4 user PCS	✓	
	OW, male age: 12y9m	Speech with poor intelligibility, PCS	✓	
	ST, male age: 11y10m	Dynavox DV4 user PCS		✓
	EM, female age: 11y3m	Intelligible speech		✓

Table 1 Participants in the STANDUP evaluation



Figure 6 Project wall with a display of the participants and their favourite jokes of the week (answers covered by orange sticky notes)

children using the direct access method reported difficulties with the sensitivity of the touch screen. The jokes received mixed marks although the jester character was generally perceived as very positive.

All children enjoyed their participation in the project and would want to use the STANDUP software again.

### DISCUSSION

The results of the practical evaluation and the conducted interviews suggest that the present interface provided children with CCN with successful access to complex underlying technology.

Using STANDUP the children displayed aspects of natural language development. The structure of the interface allowed

amongst other things the children to tell the punch line of a joke first, a phenomenon usually displayed in typically developing children. The generative capabilities successfully allowed novel explorative learning, as seen with several participants when searching through the given topics.

All children benefited from the project. There was an enhanced desire



Figure 8 Talking Mat™ showing the results for judging voice output, touch screen access, jester and jokes (from left)



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to communicate, with a knock-on positive effect on other AAC usage demonstrated. These findings are important for any ethical consideration since the project directly interfered with the children's day-to-day living.

Finally, STANDUP illustrated the use of technology within a wider environment.

#### FUTURE WORK

The main issues noted during the project concerned the interface design. The scanning method initially confused the participants who were used to row-column-scanning. The voice output of the system was not very intelligible and the rough voice sometimes startled the participants.

The database underlying STANDUP uses lexical resources which are not designed for children. Some of the vocabulary used by the software to generate jokes remains inappropriate for young children despite attempts to restrict the large vocabulary using spelling lists and symbol sets. Further work is needed to develop child-friendly lexical resources.

The possibility of generating, retrieving and telling topic appropriate jokes raises future research questions. These include STANDUP's impact on interactive conversation, joke comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Overall, the intervention study showed that users with CCN were able to use the software to generate novel jokes using a variety of methods, e.g. by subject.

However, one question to be considered is whether the system should be enhanced to generate better jokes? The use of 'bad' or 'not funny jokes' were used by the children in similar ways to jokes produced by typically developing children. The answer is possibly that the telling of bad jokes still seems to be one of the best ways to learn how to tell good ones. \*

Rolf Black, Annalu Waller, Graeme Ritchie,  
Helen Pain & Ruli Manurung

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the children and staff at Corseford School, Renfrewshire (Capability Scotland), without whose contribution the project would not have been a success.

The research is funded by two EPSRC grants GR/S15402/01 and GR/R83217/01.

We would like to thank Widgit Software Ltd and Mayer-Johnson LLC for allowing the use of their pictorial symbols in the STANDUP software. The Widgit Rebus symbols used in STANDUP are the property of Widgit Software Ltd and were used under licence from Widgit Software Ltd; the Pic-

ture Communication Symbols used in STANDUP are the property of Mayer-Johnson LLC and were used under licence from Mayer-Johnson LLC.

#### SOFTWARE AVAILABILITY

The STANDUP program can be downloaded free of charge from the Software page of our website, <http://www.csd.abdn.ac.uk/research/standup>. We will ask the user to supply some contact and background details to help in monitoring interest in the software. Although users do not need to supply this information for the download they can gain from doing so by receiving information about later releases of STANDUP and about the project. Users are also encouraged to send any feedback or comments to the contact address given on the website.

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# 1Voice Wins National Awards

## KATIE CLARKE

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It has been a busy time for the voluntary committee at 1Voice during the last six months. In between organizing our Eighth Annual Family Weekend in Blackpool at the Norbreck Castle Hotel we were dashing down to London for two award ceremonies, all in the month of December - with little time for Christmas shopping!

1Voice - Communicating Together was delighted to be one of the five Guardian Charity Award Winners. This had been a rigorous process which had started before the summer holidays 2006 when applications were due in. From over 700 we were then short listed to 30 which meant a further application process. In November we were told that our Teenage Project was one of the winning entries!

Katie Caryer and Gregor Gilmour represented our role models and teenagers. Our Teenage Project enables young communication aid users to come together to look at issues around being non-speaking teenagers. We have run two weekends since 2005 where teenagers have been able to discuss barriers to communication and ways to overcome them with our team of role models.

With our Guardian Charity Awards we are now inviting teenagers to join us over the weekend of July 14<sup>th</sup> at a beautiful, very accessible venue in Derbyshire. We will have a team of artists, film crew, dance workshop leader (of course our very own Alan Martin), drama facilitators and a musician. Together we have our fingers crossed and will be making a highly innovative DVD on the young people's Top Tips on how to be listened to.

Katie and Gregor both gave terrific speeches at the Award Ceremony which was made even more exciting by Katie's

rather dramatic late entrance just as the awards were taking place! We had a wonderful dinner upstairs in the Tate Gallery restaurant with the other award winners and various people from the Guardian newspaper. The views were outstanding!

A week later it was back to London this time represented by Toby Hewson and Ruth Martin to attend the Community Care Awards. We had been short listed to the last three of the Teenage and Young People's section which was a fantastic achievement. To our credit we were the only organisation attending both awards who were completely run by volunteers.

### COMMUNITY CARE AWARDS 2006

*Martin Price writes:*

"On 14 December, Ruth (a member of The Teenage Project) and I, along with trustees, volunteers and other Teenage Project members and their enablers, had a day out in London at The Community Care Awards.

The event was billed as 'The biggest date in the calendar to celebrate social care'.

I am not sure that Ruth fully understands the standing Community Care has amongst Health and Social Care professionals but this is what she said:

"We went to London. When I met all those important people I was both excited and scared.



1Voice members know how to have fun

I met Tony Robinson, he was very nice with me. We got a picture together.

I was scared before they said the winner's name, we didn't win but I felt good because at least we were there."

When you consider that 1Voice was up against IDK (I Didn't Know - a ten week educational project covering racial, sexual and religious intolerance in a way relevant to young people) and the Impact Project (Nottingham Domestic Violence Forum working with excluded and vulnerable young people), I can only echo Ruth's words that it felt a real privilege just to be there with one of the short listed teams.

In between the London trips our 1Voice family weekend was our best yet, though each year we say that! We had a fantastic team of volunteers who ran drama and music workshops with the young people (12 communication aid users between 6 and 13 years old) with a Circus Theme. The Saturday night we were able to see the thrilling performance with various jug-

gling acts, the human cannonball act, the trapeze and even a lion tamer! Amazing what you can do with 20 children of very mixed abilities - never mind the adult volunteers.

Parents attended their own workshops and the highlights were talks by role models and the group discussions.

Andy, our musician, mixed a hit record (well we think it is) by recording messages from young users and role models on why they thought 1Voice is important. He then went upstairs to his room and returned a couple of hours later with a track he had mixed which we were able to play at the disco! Everyone was amazed and you can now hear it on the Internet at MySpace [www.myspace.com/equalvoices](http://www.myspace.com/equalvoices) - do have a listen. We are selling copies at £5 if you are interested!"

#### 1VOICE EXPERIENCE

*Alli Gaskin has recently joined our committee and is now our volunteer co-ordinator. She writes:*

"I first became aware of the 1Voice organisation through work. As a speech and language therapist, I knew that there was an organisation in existence, which aimed to support families with AAC users. I decided to the best way to find out more about this organisation would be to join a 1Voice weekend in Blackpool as a volunteer. I duly packed my bags for Blackpool with my five year-old daughter in tow. Little did I know, that it would be the start of regular visits that my daughter would pester me to attend!

The 1Voice weekends have enlightened me both personally and professionally. Professionally, I have enjoyed the opportunity to observe users in a natural context. I have seen how these young people use their devices functionally to participate in activities, but more importantly to interact with their peers, family and volunteers. The weekend activities are so interesting that the children are motivated to use their devices without hesitation.

Personally, it has been fascinating to witness the bonds develop between our AAC users and their able-bodied peers. In particular, I have seen how my own daughter has become great friends with AAC users without seemingly noticing their device and the differences they face. Seeing these children work together to develop such creative performances during the workshops is a highlight - X-factor tribute acts, fire eating displays, wild animal taming acts and many more... The volunteers facilitate this process, but the children provide the ideas and show their artistic talents. It is a very rewarding experience.

Being a 1Voice volunteer is an excellent opportunity to see the "real" AAC user. It has informed upon my clinical practise, highlighting the importance of motivating experiences to encourage device use and the need for social opportunities.

I would recommend being a 1Voice volunteer to any of my colleagues. My daughter wants all of her friends to go next time. She feels they have missed out on a great weekend too!"

#### BLACKPOOL 1VOICE FAMILY WEEKEND

*Beryl and Nathan both attended our weekend and write:*

"We attended the 1Voice Family Weekend in Blackpool last December and had a fantastic time.

My nine year old son, Nathan, who is a communication aid user, said he really enjoyed the children's workshops where he could get away from his parents for a bit, and he had lots of fun taking part in music and circus activities. Nathan thought it was very funny that the parents went to workshops to work hard!

Nathan loved to spend time with the other children and adults who use communication aids. The adult role models have been a huge inspiration to Nathan and have encouraged him in both his ability and confidence in using his communication aid.

As a parent, I am always overwhelmed by the 1voice weekends. I love to listen to the adult role models, and hear of their experiences and ideas. I always feel very inspired by the things they are doing and how successful they are. It gives me a vision for where I want Nathan to be, although he might disagree with me at some point!

It was great to meet up with other parents and carers and swap ideas and frustrations, and our workshops were very interesting, and not hard work at all.

The weekend goes so quickly and I always wish it could go on longer. The chance to be with families like mine is just fantastic, refreshing and keeps us going until the summer network day."



#### UPCOMING EVENTS

This summer we are holding our National Network Day on 15 July 2007 at the Hayes Conference Centre in Derbyshire. This venue is extremely accessible, has plenty of space and is set in its own grounds. Families are welcome to make it a weekend and to join us on the Saturday afternoon in time for our Annual General Meeting and family disco. The Network Day begins around 10am with coffee and refreshments; lots of networking and opportunity to meet other families, chat to teenagers and role models; share ideas and information; plus sports sessions and arts and crafts. We are having a lunch and the day will end at 4pm with a home-made afternoon tea.



Do please encourage families to come along and soak in the 1Voice atmosphere for this highly successful annual event.

We are always looking for volunteers, role models and new trustees so please get in touch with us for more information if you are interested in being part of our organisation.

For more information contact 1Voice - Communicating Together on Tel: 0845 330 7862 or Email: [info@1voice.info](mailto:info@1voice.info) Website: [www.1voice.info](http://www.1voice.info) \*

Katie Clarke  
Chair of 1Voice

# Beyond The Symbol Chart

## Chatbooks and Want Cards

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### INTRODUCTION

In order to provide continuing support for adults with learning disabilities, who also use AAC, a communication aid users group programme was set up in 2000 at Queen Margaret University College. Initially this was funded by a grant from Communication Matters (MacDonald and Siggs, 2002).

Three particular issues emerged over time which lead us to shift the focus of the group to a more Total Communication approach:

#### 1. Message location

Less cognitively able users were struggling to locate messages on their communication aids (mainly from the Dynavox range). It seemed clear that people with significant learning disabilities were having difficulty in navigating semantically organised dynamic systems.

#### 2. Ambulant users' access

It was increasingly evident that ambulant users were not using their communication aids in everyday life. The inconvenience for an ambulant person of holding up a VOCA undoubtedly works against extending its use into the wider community. Support workers frequently forgot to ensure that the user took their aid on outings, suggesting that they also were unconvinced of its effectiveness.

#### 3. Non-interactive use of aids

We felt that several of the users, particularly those on the autistic spectrum, continued to use their high tech aids in a repetitive rather than interactional way. Despite a very good ability to locate messages they were not moving forward in their communicative interaction.

### ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

In order to look at the difficulties with message location a final year speech and language therapy student undertook a BSc Honours project to look at semantic organisation in ALD (Bennie, 2006).

To address the other issues it is useful to examine the use of augmentative communication within different environments (Figure 1) and to consider whether the mode of communication that is most successful in one environment is necessarily the most appropriate method in another.

#### Family

Within the user's family individual methods of communication have often evolved, backed up by formal AAC. Shared knowledge provides a basis for successful communication which is less demanding on the individual with learning disabilities.

#### Trained Carers/Professionals

While most professionals will aim to extend the use of a formal communication



Figure 1 The Communication Environment

system to all situations, inevitably there will be a major focus on developing a system with which users can interact within educational/social care settings.

#### Peers

Users with learning disabilities are often hindered by a 'staff/client' mind set from which they find it difficult to move on. Augmentative communication requires cooperation and adaptation on both sides and this can be problematic when their peers also have learning disabilities.

#### Wider Community

AAC users with learning disabilities are likely to have had reduced opportunities to interact with the general public



and are likely to lack confidence as communicators in these circumstances. The ability to adapt communication to accommodate untrained communication partners is therefore going to be difficult for people with learning disabilities.

Success within the comfortable communication zones, i.e. within the family and with AAC trained staff, can bring huge benefits in terms of improved self-esteem, social skills and linguistic abilities. Use of an AAC system can allow more control and balance within interactions and facilitate life-skills and educational progress. Many professionals, however, will struggle to extend the users' competence at levels 3 and 4.

We should like to suggest that what works well at Level 2 may not always be the most successful approach at the outer levels and that perhaps we need to make non-conventional communication easier and less threatening for untrained communication partners.

*'There is simply no doubt about it; the availability of genuine and motivating communication opportunities in inclusive settings is at least as important to the success of a communication intervention as the availability of an appropriate access system.'*

Beukelman and Mirenda, 2005, p 271

A further group programme was therefore set up with the following revised aims:

- To focus on successful interaction regardless of modality.
- To explore a wider range of communication options.
- To move this into the wider community.

## INTRODUCING CHAT BOOKS AND WANT CARDS

Some useful ideas from a video produced by the Yooralla Society of Victoria, Australia gave us some ideas on how we might begin to address these issues.

The first of these was the use of "Chat Books", the main purpose of which is to convey news and to engage people in interaction. These are small books with transparent pockets such as an A6 photo album. Each time the user does something they may want to talk about their supporter writes a note of what has happened and includes some sort of signifier that the user can recognise, whether this be a ticket, programme, shop logo, drawing or symbol. The book should always be written in the first person and be kept by the user as a means of engaging others in an interaction. The

pages should be changed regularly by anyone involved with the user and this should only take a few minutes. These do not replace the use of symbol charts and passports but would be used complementarily.

The second was the use of 'Community Request Cards' to ask for services in the wider community, e.g. in shops, hairdressers, libraries etc. The user and their supporter negotiate the message that the user wishes to convey using all their shared methods of communication. The supporter then writes down the message and the user hands it to the untrained communication partner thus prompting them to interact with the user rather than the supporter. The members of our group decided to call these messages 'Want cards', as this was more meaningful to both the users themselves and their support workers.

We introduced these strategies to the users and their support workers and spent some time practising their use through role-play as part of the sessions, eventually moving on to use them in the real world.

## OBSERVATIONS AND OUTCOMES

### People who use AAC

The people who use AAC were all very positive about all aspects of the group. We realise this could be partially accounted for by acquiescence but it did seem to be reflected in their enthusiasm for the group.

Our observations and the ratings given by support workers suggest that all users had gained in confidence and were interacting more spontaneously with both their peers and with others.

In using the Chat Books they all showed more confidence and interest in exchanging news. By removing their formal communication system from the interaction it appeared to allow them to appreciate the interactive exchange more fully and freed them up to use more appropriate non-verbal interaction. We were pleased to observe that this also seemed to be true for the two clients with suspected ASD and in addition the content of their communication became more relevant.

All the users appeared to really enjoy the positive experience of using Want Cards during a shopping trip. It was striking to note the increased confidence with which the users approached untrained communicators in the wider community and the obvious benefits they gained from this success.

## The Support Workers

Using a questionnaire we found that the support workers all felt that their knowledge, facilitation strategies and confidence had improved considerably and that they had gained abilities to extract information from users without undue influence.

We observed that they all quickly learnt how to fill in the Chat Books using imaginative signifiers and became skilled in helping the user to present their news in a manner that included the user him/herself.

All the support workers were very enthusiastic about using Want Cards as it allowed them to use skills in which they already felt confident, i.e. communicating with the user on a one to one basis. It also helped them to support the user to communicate in the wider community without the challenge of having to manipulate the interaction between the user and the member of the public.

## CONCLUSIONS

For adults with learning disabilities informal methods such as these contribute greatly to successful interaction in the wider community by enabling them to interact with people who do not have specific experience and skills with this population.

The support workers in this group felt comfortable with this approach and so are more likely to implement it and to encourage their colleagues to do so.

These strategies encourage and enable people in the wider community to respond more directly and naturally with the user making it a pleasurable and successful experience for both of them.

Alison MacDonald

Lecturer and Speech and Language Therapist

Mary Siggs

Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

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# Communication Aids Funding

## Perspectives from a Meeting of Communication Aid Users

PETER ZEIN<sup>1</sup> & DAVID WEATHERBURN<sup>2</sup>

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Feedback from the Town Meeting discussion on communication aid funding at the CM2006 National Symposium

One of the very positive aspects of the Communication Matters annual symposium is the active involvement of a large number of people who rely on AAC to communicate, many of whom also attended the 'Town Meeting'. The open-forum discussion format of the Town Meeting has been part of the CM conference programme for the past three years and was modelled on the Town Hall Meeting held during the biennial Pittsburgh Employment Conference (PEC). PRI Liberator sponsored Dawn Seals and David Gault to attend PEC in 2005, and we are pleased to be able to sponsor Peter Zein and Stuart Meredith to attend PEC 2007 in August. We hope they will report their experiences later in the year.

PEC is a three day conference that attracts 80-100 augmented communicators, and is the only conference in the world focused on employment outcomes for people who use alternative and augmentative communication. The American Town Meeting has been run on 14 occasions, 10 times in Pittsburgh at PEC, and also in Los Angeles & Toronto. Employment is the primary focus at PEC, but the UK Town Meeting has also focused on other areas, such as funding for communication aids and closure of special schools.

Funding was the main topic of last September's discussion at CM2006 National Symposium, which was chaired by Peter Zein. The frustration over lack of Government understanding and commitment to this area is something I am sure we can all relate to; and if you have a feeling of déjà-vue as you read these comments noted

during the Meeting, perhaps the last comment says it all:

- Do we know why funding has been cut?
- Do you think we can do more to help ourselves, by getting government to understand that we need the communication aids to talk with?
- Do they know what AAC is actually about?
- I think that it is apparent how it can change someone's life. How do we do that?
- I don't think that they know how important it is to us.
- I want to ask Prime Minister to come in.
- I think they think that we are not important.
- I think we want the money. We need special money for communication aids itself.
- I bought my own, but I know I was fortunate – I know it was difficult.
- They would want one if something happened to their voices.
- I think two people should go on Corporation Street – one with a communication aid and one without – and see who gets a beer first!
- I want to move to the USA.
- We are just starting out here and we need to know how to go about getting funding because we don't know where to go.
- I don't know who and where – I am sorry.
- I think we should demonstrate.
- I think that is where the problems are, because government don't see communication aids every day. You were correct saying that.
- I am not being terrible here but, ok, now you may see one on that television show but it does not show the true potential of what it can do for a user.

- Why should we suffer because of their stupid cut downs?
- I know it for twenty years.
- The government are not informed.
- I was a young boy when I was talking about funding!

### WHERE NEXT?

The UK Town Meeting has generated interesting debate and some very positive outcomes. For example, Paul Webster was inspired following the Town Meeting held at CM2004 to start his own grounds maintenance business in Exeter, and secured a grant from the Prince's Trust to help him purchase the necessary equipment.

We are currently discussing how we can build on the Town Meeting's success and make it more accessible to a larger group of people. If you would like more information, please email David Weatherburn at [david@pri-liberator.com](mailto:david@pri-liberator.com) or Peter Zein at [peterzein@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:peterzein@tiscali.co.uk)

### VIDEO AVAILABLE

A short video has been compiled to provide a users' perspective of the importance of funding for communication aids, using clips from the Town Meeting and some interviews filmed afterwards at CM2006. See it on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_1QlhWa\\_4\\_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1QlhWa_4_A)

The video is intended to support the case for better funding. If you would like a copy, please contact PRI Liberator on Tel: 0845 226 1144 or Email: [chris@pri-liberator.com](mailto:chris@pri-liberator.com)

PRI Liberator are pleased to have to sponsored the Town Meetings. \*

Peter Zein & David Weatherburn



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# I want this one!

## Is it possible to formalize the decision-making process when comparing communication aids on trial loan?

**GILLIAN TOWNEND**

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### INTRODUCTION

As Clinical Lead for communication aids across the adult service in Sheffield, I support a broad caseload across all adult groups – congenital and acquired conditions, static and progressive disorders – in hospital and community settings.

As part of my role I oversee a small loan pool of equipment for assessment or short-term loan. In addition many communication aid suppliers offer the chance of free trial loans. In an area where technology is constantly developing and devices can be expensive, and especially where resources to fund their provision are scarce, the importance of identifying the most appropriate device for the AAC user is obvious. Crucially then, the question is who makes that evaluation? My work in considering this in the last 18 months has been to develop ways of giving the user a voice in the process, enabling each person involved in the choice to make and communicate value judgments about the available devices.

This paper describes the process that I have developed for conducting trial loans.

### QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

In the context of viewing my role as that of *expert facilitator* rather than sole decision-maker several questions are raised for me:

- How can best use be made of short-term trial loans, from both user and supplier perspectives?
- How can users and carers best be supported during the trial process?
- How do we make judgments about the suitability of a particular device?
- What features lead us to accept/reject a device?
- Can an evaluation format be developed that allows consistent comparisons to be made between devices?
- Can the process enable users, carers and therapists to contribute jointly and equally to the decision-making?
- Can the format be sensitive yet flexible enough to use across a broad spectrum caseload?
- How can we be sure that we are making the best choice in competition for limited resources, and how can we show adequate evidence for such accountability?

### THE PILOT STAGE

Two central themes emerge from these questions: (1) the need for support for users and carers, and (2) empowerment in decision-making.

Initially, my focus was on the second of these themes, that of evaluation and decision-making. My attempts to develop a framework were influenced in part by a

study day I had attended at Communicate in Newcastle, led by Marcia Scherer of the Institute for Matching Person and Technology in the USA.

Following the study day I was keen to see whether the Matching Person and Technology Process could be of benefit to users on my caseload. I worked with two users, who differed in many key respects (age, sex, aetiology, communication skills and needs) and who were trialling very different devices, to test out a selection of the MPT forms.

### PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The MPT forms are designed for use in the USA by Assistive Technologists, helping in the identification of appropriate assistive technologies in their broadest sense, and taking account of users' strengths and needs in all areas of their lives. In a UK setting the process potentially offers a tool for assessment of how a number of agencies would provide for the user's needs. Our single question within that assessment, namely which communication aid would be most appropriate, is only one part of the whole MPT process. Therefore, working as a single discipline we found that we had to cover a large number of questions and details that were not directly relevant to our immediate purpose and task. Further, because they were set in a more general



context the relevant questions when comparing devices left some of our detailed enquiries unanswered.

We then supplemented the MPT forms with a further rating chart which I designed specifically around aspects that the two users and their carers felt were relevant to the devices on trial with them. In practice, however, we found that some comparisons offered a more meaningful contribution than others. For example, for computer-based devices we compared memory size, and type and speed of processor. Once documented, however, we were left wondering just how this information affected use of the device on a practical, day-to-day basis. Furthermore, it proved extremely difficult for each of us (users, carers, therapist) to complete my 1-5 rating scale for all of the features. This was intended to produce an overall score for comparison of devices (an idea taken from MPT).

#### THE REVISED FORMAT

It was clear that further modifications to the evaluation framework were required. Such a tool needed closed questions which were simple to answer, without being leading. It needed to be comprehensive and yet clearly organized to allow for the teasing out of all relevant dimensions. I identified six areas into which the questions could be grouped:

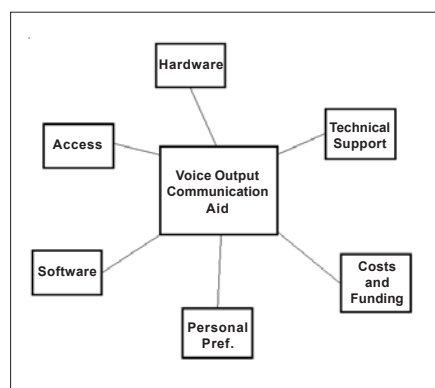


Figure 1 Comparative Elements of VOCAs

In order to make a further, more radical change to the format I also turned to the work of Joan Murphy and Talking Mats™. I must make it clear that I have not attended Talking Mats training, and the way in which I used the symbols to facilitate user responses is a modification of the Talking Mats format (particularly because, whilst the ethos of Talking Mats is to use open questions, I used closed questions as explained above). I developed a number of individual symbol cards (PCS) to represent each question and used them to create Talking Mats responses (see Figure 3). Each mat builds up a picture of part of the user's evaluation of a device. (A photo-

NAME:		DATE:		
COMPLETED BY/ WITH SUPPORT FROM:				
1. COMMUNICATION AID (DEVICE):				
	YES	NO	NOT IMPORTANT	COMMENTS
Do you like the look of the device?				
Is the screen a good size for you?				
Can you see the screen clearly?				
Can you turn it on and off yourself?				
Is it ready for use quickly enough when you need it (coming out of standby or hibernation)?				
Does the battery last long enough for you to use the device when you need it?				
Is it easy to charge up the battery?				
Is it portable - can you carry it easily or can it be fixed to your wheelchair?				
Do you like the voice (or the range on offer with the device)?				
Is the volume loud enough to be heard everywhere you need to use it?				
Can you programme/make changes to pages straight on the device (instead of transferring from a computer)?				
Is it easy if you need to use an external keyboard & mouse for programming?				
Does the device offer the range of things you may need in addition to communication (word processing, email, internet access, environmental control)?				
If relevant, is it easy to move between communication and the other functions on the device?				
2. SOFTWARE:				
	YES	NO	NOT IMPORTANT	COMMENTS
Do you like the symbols which are being used?				
Do you like the way the pages are designed/laid out?				
If relevant, can you combine preset messages with being more creative - building your own sentences or spelling out?				
Is it easy to make changes to individual cells?				
Is it easy to create new pages/layouts?				
Is it easy to find/browse for symbols?				
Are there enough symbols/ones most useful to you?				
Is it easy to use/import your own photographs?				
3. ACCESS METHODS:				
	YES	NO	NOT IMPORTANT	COMMENTS
Can the touchscreen be set up in the best way for you?				
Can switch scanning be set up in the best way for you?				
Can other ways of accessing the device be set up easily for you (e.g. joystick, headpointer)?				
Are cells highlighted on the screen in a way that helps you as you make your choices?				
Can the device be positioned so that you can see it clearly and use it easily?				
4. BACK-UP/SUPPORT FROM SUPPLIER:				
	YES	NO	NOT IMPORTANT	COMMENTS
Is training offered in the purchase cost of the device?				
Is it easy to get support/advice over the phone?				
Is there a local rep who is able to offer hands-on support when needed?				
Can the initial warranty be extended?				
Can repairs be dealt with quickly?				
Will parts still be available for repairs in the future (what is expected lifespan of device)?				
Will upgrades be available in the future?				
Will upgrades be free of charge?				

Figure 2 Questionnaire (continued on next page)

graph of the mat can be included as part of the decision-making audit trail.)

The evaluation process was not devised to offer a blanket review of the pros and cons of one device against another. I saw it very much as a tool to allow the start of an informed discussion about choice. None of the questions is intended to have a right or wrong, or even standard, answer. They are written so that personal views and individual set-up options can be expressed, and details of specific symbols or vocabularies or page sets can be recorded. The questions allow for further probing. In some cases, it is important to establish whether aspects receiving a negative response are 'deal breakers'; in other cases difficulties or queries can be identified and then resolved; in further cases issues may be raised which require additional follow up. A summary of the evaluation process is shown in Figure 4.

#### Evaluation of Device

- One rating chart per device
- Questions for user, carer, SLT
- Support from modified Talking Mats™
- Photographs of completed mats
- Follow-up questions
- Comparison of device ratings
- Where appropriate, funding applications submitted

Figure 4 Evaluation of Device Summary

#### THE TRIAL LOAN PROCESS

Developing a more user-friendly evaluation format, and thereby developing empowerment in decision-making, was only part of the process. The need for support was an equally important factor to consider.

People who use AAC, whether novice or experienced in using communication aids, cannot simply be given a loan device and left 'to get on with it' for the duration of their loan (perhaps 1-4 weeks), and then be expected to make a well-informed judgment about the suitability of the device. Adequate support has to be given alongside the loan. To my mind, 'adequate support' during a short-term loan means 'intensive support', both in terms of time and resources.

The essential second element of the process, therefore, was to establish a protocol for therapist involvement during the loan period and to produce training materials to accompany the loan. An outline of the trial loan process is shown in Figure 5.

5. OVERALL OPINION:

	YES	NO	NOT IMPORTANT	COMMENTS
Do you like this device and its software?				
Do you like it better than any others you have seen/tried?				
Is there anything you want to follow up about this device?				
Would you be happy to have this device?				

6. COSTS:

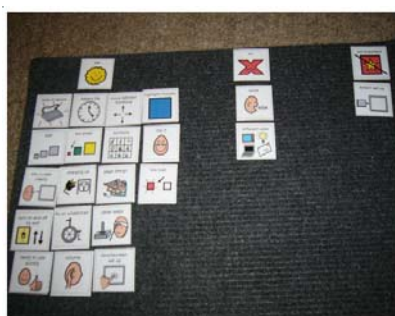
What is the total cost (device, software, switches, mounting, training, warranties, vat etc)?		
Could you buy this yourself?	Yes	No
Do you know any way to get funding?	Yes	No
Do you want help to find funding?	Yes	No

Any other comments:

Figure 2 Questionnaire (continued from previous page)

#### Completed Talking Mats: Client B

Device 1



Device 2

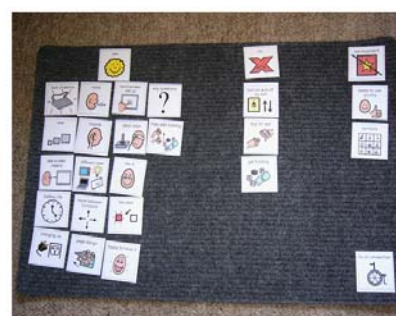


Figure 3 Talking Mats™ Example

#### Trial Loan Process

- Day 1 Device with me - (writing quick guides) basic programming/personalisation for specific user
- Day 2 Initial setup visit to user - joint with colleague and carer/keyworker (leave training pack)
- Day 4/5 Practise/support session with SLT
- Day 8/9 Practise/support session with SLT
- Day 11 Final session - practise and evaluation

Average loan = 10 days with client  
 = 4 SLT visits  
 = practise with carer/keyworker between visits

Figure 5 Trial Loan Process

The training packs were written to include a quick guide to the device (a double-sided laminated A4 sheet covering a summary of charging and safety information and an explanation of the different buttons/ports/sockets etc.); practice activities sheets; and progress record charts. Advice on programming software was included if appropriate.

In practice, I found that limited personalization of vocabulary may take place during the loan, and most certainly not all of the fine tuning will be sorted out, but the aim of the intensive support process is to foster well-informed, consensual decision-making.

#### IN SUMMARY

This complete loan support and evaluation package has been designed to offer users and carers the best possible opportunity

to get to know a device in what is actually a very short loan period. With that knowledge they can work together with the therapist to make the most appropriate decision about an expensive device that will play a fundamental role in their lives.

I have adopted this model with ten users over the past ten months. It has been a heavy demand on my time but has proved very beneficial. What remains to be seen and evaluated in the future is whether the intensity of this support during the trial results in a decrease in the level of support required to get a device up and running, to ensure it is used functionally, and is fully integrated into a user's life once it has been purchased for or by them. \*

Gillian Townend  
Speech & Language Therapist and  
Clinical Lead, Communication Aids (Adults)

#### POSTSCRIPT

I am currently in negotiation with several communication aid suppliers, with a view to integrating elements of this support and evaluation process into their loan systems.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to thank the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, DynaVox Systems Ltd, Possum Ltd, PRI Liberator Ltd and Smartbox Ltd for their joint sponsorship of my attendance at the CM2006 National Symposium.

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<http://members.aol.com/IMPT97/MPT.html>
- Talking Mats™ - Joan Murphy, AAC Research Unit, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA, UK. [www.talkingmats.com](http://www.talkingmats.com)

## JOINING COMMUNICATION MATTERS & ISAAC

### What is Communication Matters?

**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.

#### Our Vision

Communication Matters' vision is a world where speech, language and communication difficulties are not barriers to opportunity and fulfilment.

#### Our Mission

Communication Matters is all about enabling people to communicate. We value and promote the individual's right to participate in all aspects of life by using their most appropriate means of communication to express their thoughts, feelings, needs and desires.

### 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 can also access the member's area of the ISAAC website and, if you join early in the year, you will receive a 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 14 national chapters in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, French speaking countries, German speaking countries, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands-Flanders, Norway, 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:

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## PUBLICATION REVIEW

### THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

TONY ATTWOOD

ISBN: 9781843104957

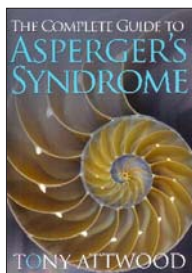
400pp, £17.99

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London 2006

Reviewed by Annie Etherington

Senior Advisory Teacher (Autism Spectrum Conditions), London Borough of Barnet

At first sight, Tony Attwood's new book on Asperger's Syndrome appears somewhat weighed down by a rather grandiose title: The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome.



Regarded by Attwood, and other clinicians in the field, as part of the Autism Spectrum, Asperger's Syndrome has only received international recognition in the last decade or so. In this extensive exploration of the condition, Attwood draws on a wealth of personal experience having worked with this

population as a Clinical Psychologist for nearly thirty years.

Attwood charts the history of our growing knowledge about the syndrome, first described by Hans Asperger in 1944, alongside a skilfully woven account of the possible pathways to diagnosis – and the complex patterns of behaviour which may lead to this. The main body of the book provides an entirely accessible and helpful account of the key features of Asperger's Syndrome, the potential impact on learning and relating and – most importantly, strategies and interventions which may help to address these concerns. Using a format familiar from his previous book on the same subject, each chapter is summarised as a series of key points – a very useful device for the reader who may wish to access information quickly and succinctly.

Importantly, Attwood writes with a broad pen. Largely based on a Cognitive Behavioural approach, the rich array of strategies for developing friendship skills, responding proactively to teasing and bullying and supporting the development of emotional literacy are excellent and could be adapted for oth-

ers pupils as well. Attwood's 'emotional toolbox' as a means of addressing anxiety and anger is powerful example of this in practice.

This book is comprehensive in its scope: Attwood looks beyond childhood to consider the adult with Asperger's, the place of long-term relationships, continuing education and the world of work. He includes a section of questions he is frequently asked, as well as providing a list of useful resources for the professional, parent or individual with Asperger's. He writes with great clarity and avoids the use of unnecessary or technical jargon. This book would serve as an extended introduction to the interested novice in the field as well as being a most worthy miscellany for the more experienced traveller in the world of Asperger's Syndrome.

At nearly 400 hundred pages in length, this is not a quick read but it does offer an encyclopaedic and detailed analysis of the issues and some possible strategies. So, could this be a 'complete' guide? Given our current state of knowledge, it comes close enough to justify the title. \*

## ESSENTIAL PUBLICATIONS FROM COMMUNICATION MATTERS

### 'The Power of Communication' DVD

This DVD has been produced by Communication Matters to provide an introductory presentation on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

The film delivers a powerful message that communication really does matter. It celebrates and promotes communication in all its forms. The film is of general interest, and in particular to service managers and purchasers who have responsibility for AAC services.

Price: £8 (£20 for 3) inc. p&p from **Communication Matters**

### Speaking Up and Speaking Out! Pathways to Self-Advocacy

This pack is intended for carers, facilitators and others concerned with the advocacy needs of people with severe communication difficulties who need AAC. It is useful for staff development, especially for those working with adults.

Price: £30 including p&p from **Communication Matters**

### Waves of Words

The challenges confronting individuals with severe communication disabilities are chronicled in Waves of Words: Augmented Communicators Read and Write.

Price: £15 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**

### Safety in Numbers: A Photographic Phonebook

This photographic phone book is for people who find reading difficult. The pack includes an information page with key information about the person, several blank pages ready to add photographs or symbols, space for additional notes for an enabler, babysitter or other adult, a tag to make the book easy to hold as well as identifying the owner, and a page of symbols for common services printed on labels ready to stick in.

Price: £3.50 including p&p from **Communication Matters**

### Communication Without Speech: AAC Around the World

This ISAAC book is a highly accessible introduction to AAC. It contains lots of questions and practical tips such as vocabulary selection, assessment, education and vocational considerations, making communication boards.

Price: £15 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**

### Beneath the Surface

In August 2000, the creative works of 51 authors and artists from around the world were published in one book, Beneath the Surface. What these writers and artists have in common is that they are unable to speak and thus rely on assistive technology to communicate.

Price: £15 plus £1.50 p&p from **Communication Matters**

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## NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

23-25 SEPTEMBER 2007 UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

The Communication Matters / ISAAC (UK) National Symposium is an annual event embracing a wide range of issues relating to augmentative and alternative communication. The two and a half day event provides a forum to meet and to exchange information with representatives from all disciplines associated with AAC, including people who use AAC and their family members.

### SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

Platform Presentations  
Practical Workshops  
Case Studies & Research Papers  
Seminars  
Trade Exhibition  
Guest Speakers  
Social Events

### REGISTRATION

All registrations allow full access to all the presentations and trade exhibition. The registration fee also includes refreshments, lunch and evening meals. Residential registration additionally covers accommodation in student halls (with breakfast). There is a substantial discount if you register and pay before 31 July. Prices from £325 for full residential registration.

There are a number of subsidised places for people who use AAC, and their family members.

### BOOKING FORM & INFORMATION

For further information and a booking form, please visit [www.communicationmatters.org.uk](http://www.communicationmatters.org.uk), or ring Communication Matters on 0845 456 8211 or email: [admin@communicationmatters.org.uk](mailto:admin@communicationmatters.org.uk)



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# How do you measure communication success?



Is it by the smiles on the faces of the people you support? Or their ability to express their basic needs? Perhaps it's how easily they can chat with their friends and family, or take part in school or employment?

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