



Press release – For immediate release

NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHES TO EMPOWER AAC COMMUNITY

- First of its kind website will empower AAC (communication aid) users, parents, carers and professionals to use cutting edge evidence and information to improve support and services for people with speech difficulties.
- www.AACknowledge.org.uk brings together current knowledge, information, research and case studies on AAC in variety of formats to make it clear and accessible to all.

Communication Matters, the lead UK organisation dedicated to supporting children and adults who need augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), has launched their AACknowledge website bringing AAC information and evidence together in one place for the first time.

Commissioned as part of its three year AAC Evidence Base Research Project, the groundbreaking website has been funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund and been developed by Manchester Metropolitan University in association with Communication Matters.

The AACknowledge website will increase awareness of relevant evidence through a bibliography of published research into AAC. Shaped by the AAC community, the website presents case studies, frequently asked questions, factsheets, glossaries, summaries of articles in plain English and links to other sources of information helping people who use AAC and the people supporting them to make informed and independent choices about support needed.

David Morgan, Communication Matters' Research Lead, says: "Every person has the right to a voice, yet many people are not being empowered to access the equipment, information and support services they need to enable them to communicate. AAC makes a monumental difference to the lives of children, young people and adults giving them a means to communicate and the ability to make effective choices in their lives. For too long, people who use AAC, professionals and family members have not had easy access to AAC information and evidence and this had to change.

"The AACknowledge website will make a tangible difference to users of AAC and their families, professionals including speech and language therapists and GPs, AAC suppliers, the research community and voluntary organisations. More content is being added to the website in the New Year and we welcome feedback as the website will be regularly updated."

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Dr. Janice Murray, Head of Speech Pathology and Therapy at Manchester Metropolitan University, says: "The AACknowledge website is a welcome addition. The website infrastructure and content was developed through consultation and collaboration with AAC stakeholder groups. This makes the content relevant and of immense benefit, filling a void that has existed around access to AAC information and knowledge.

"Manchester Metropolitan University is delighted to have been the key collaborator with Communication Matters in this development. This initial content will be regularly updated and continue to be responsive to the needs of the visitors to the site. The case stories and academic research information has been very positively received thus far."

AAC is a specialist service, however traditionally there has been a lack of information, evidence and funding to support the complex needs of people who use AAC. In the UK today, it is estimated that 305,000 children and adults will need AAC at some point in their lives. 10% of them, 30,500, have the most complex needs, which demand access to specialised AAC services and equipment.

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For more information

For more information or to arrange an interview with a Communication Matters spokesperson, please contact Laura Smith or Della Bolat at Consilium Communications on 07766651366 / lsmith@consiliumcommunications.co.uk or 07841 763833 / dbolat@consiliumcommunications.co.uk

Notes to editors

About the AAC Evidence Base research project

- The AAC Evidence Base research project is a three-year project funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund.
- The Big Lottery Fund distributes half of the National Lottery good cause funding across the UK. The Fund is committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need.
- Communication Matters is leading the project and working with three research partners: University of Sheffield, Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and Manchester Metropolitan University.
- The project will produce fundamental evidence of the need for, and provision of, AAC which can be used to improve services across the UK. It will provide access to current knowledge in an online AAC Evidence Base which will present information in a variety of accessible formats.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is the term used to describe methods of communication which can be used to add to the more usual methods of speech and writing when these are impaired. AAC includes unaided systems such as signing and gesture, as well as aided techniques ranging from picture charts to the most sophisticated computer technology.
- The research project will culminate in a final research report, due to be published in April 2013
- For more information about the project, visit www.communicationmatters.org.uk/page/aac-evidence-base-project

About Communication Matters

- Communication Matters is a charitable organisation which covers the whole of the UK. We work to achieve a world where all individuals have a right to a 'voice' through the provision of equipment and on-going support services.
- Communication Matters values people who use any form of communication and promotes 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.
- The term AAC is used to describe the different methods that can be used to help people with disabilities communicate with others. As the term suggests these methods can be used to supplement or as an alternative to speech.
- People (children or adults) may have difficulty expressing themselves in a way that is understood by others. This could be due to lack of speech, difficulties with speech intelligibility, motor speech difficulties (controlling the physical movements necessary for speaking), and can result from many congenital or acquired difficulties e.g. cerebral palsy or stroke.
- For more information, visit www.communicationmatters.org.uk