CM2025

Communication Matters International AAC Conference

8-9 September 2025

University of Leeds

Book of Abstracts

Communication Matters

Contents

MONDAY

Keynote: Identity and Connections: Who Am I, Who Are You, and Who are We Together? AAC, Artificial Intelligence, and Authorship

Hemsley, Bronwyn - Author

Submission ID

121

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Reflecting on the abstract and multifaceted concept of ‘identity’ raises many issues that need to be considered carefully in the design and use of AAC systems. How we identify as individuals, members of multiple groups, and in relationship with others all affect how, when, and with whom we communicate. For something so central to communication, identity is often assumed, taken for granted, left out, or overlooked when considering a person’s communication and AAC needs. As technologies advance, some longstanding and unresolved issues in the field of AAC need to be considered. One of these is how much control and influence the person who uses AAC has over message produced with the assistance of or by a communication partner. In this presentation, Professor Hemsley will outline a way for identity to be explored in AAC conversations at any point in the clinical pathway from referral to assessment and AAC.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

1.1: Parent perspectives on their children's use of aided communication and the language environment

Kawamura, Anna - Author; Stadskleiv, Kristine - Co-Author; von Tetzchner, Stephen - Co-Author

Submission ID

67

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

A small group of children develop language using communication aids due to severe speech and motor disabilities, and face unique challenges in acquiring language (von Tetzchner et al., 2025). The present study is part of the Becoming an Aided Communicator project (von Tetzchner, 2018) and explores parents' perceptions of their children's competence in using aided communication, the partners that make up the children's aided language environments and factors contributing to establishing accessible aided language environments. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 parents of children aged 5–15 years developing aided language. Thematic analysis revealed three primary themes: 1) Features of aided communication, 2) Child's aided communication system, and 3) Interaction with parents and other communication partners. The parents highlighted the importance of the communication partners' attitudes, strategies and adaptations in supporting the aided communicators, and described how their children adapted their communication strategies to different partners and settings. The parents' answers revealed that their children's effective use of aided language relied on partners' patience, appropriate questioning, and recognition of aided communicators' need for time and space to express themselves. They emphasized the necessity of a communicatively accessible environment with aided language across settings and where partners promote meaningful interactions and adapt to the children's needs. Despite challenges in integrating aided language into daily life, the parents' dedication in supporting their children's communicative autonomy was evident. The findings have implications for interventions promoting aided language competence in children and partners.

References (Optional)

von Tetzchner, S. (2018). Introduction to the special issue on aided language processes, development, and use: An international perspective. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 34, 1–15. von Tetzchner, S., Martinsen, H., & Stadskleiv, K. (2025). Augmentative and alternative communication for children, adolescents and adults with developmental disorders. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

1.2: AAC, Aphasia and the Role of the Communication Partner

Blandford, Hannah - Author; Flood, Vicki - Co-Author

Submission ID

47

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Around one third of people who have had a stroke will have difficulties with communication (Stroke Association, 2025). These difficulties with communication can impact people in lots of different ways and may be caused by aphasia, dysarthria or a combination. AAC is a common tool used to support people with aphasia, with both aided and unaided methods being used as part of a total communication technique. Whilst aided AAC can provide vocabulary and phrases to support message construction, it can often be still be challenging for the person with aphasia to participate in functional, two-way communicative exchanges. This session aims to explore co-construction and working closely with communication partners to implement AAC and facilitate meaningful conversation in people with aphasia. We will use the research base and our clinical experience to discuss assessment and implementation of AAC with this client group. We will, in particular, focus on how co-construction should be viewed as an iterative process within a collaborative communication partnership, helping to shape the AAC through discussion, review and re-design. We intend for this to be a practical session with opportunities to think about what co-construction really means and how we can empower people using AAC and their communication partners to utilise this to facilitate dynamic and socially satisfying conversations.

References (Optional)

Stroke Association (2025) Communication problems after a stroke [Online]. Available at https://www.stroke.org.uk/communication_problems_after_stroke_guide.pdf (Accessed 22nd April 2025)

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

1.3: Let's look before we leap: a thoughtful approach to AI and AAC

Zisk, Alyssa - Author; Niemeijer, David - Co-Author

Submission ID

52

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

"Artificial Intelligence," or AI, is a hot topic in the world and specifically in AAC – but "AI" implementations vary widely. We took a broad view to identify different types of "AI," their uses in AAC, and considerations around these uses. The uses of machine learning techniques for brain-computer interfaces, personal voices, and large language models (LLMs) differ – but all fall under "AI." By addressing these cases separately, we identified key considerations. First, we consider authenticity. Professionals express concerns about authorship: LLMs may alter or invent content. AAC users have concerns about message style and tone (Valencia et al., 2023) but also about undue judgment regarding authorship (Holyfield & Williams, 2025). Second, we consider privacy. "AI" models often involve cloud processing in their creation, adaptation, and/or use. This has trade-offs with authenticity: models tuned with specific user data (neural signals, audio, or text output) can be more effective and authentic, but they then include that data and may reveal it in unintended ways (Valencia et al., 2023). Third, we consider barriers to learning. A literate user can check LLM-generated text and make decisions about speed, effort, and tone. However, much like calculator use elides the math skills to effectively use a calculator, LLM use elides the language skills to check and edit LLM output. Finally, we consider availability and accessibility – some "AI" applications are ubiquitous. Others may be touted as the future of AAC while remaining inaccessible (e.g. voice banking, Preece et al., 2024) or rarely available (e.g. brain computer interfaces, Sellwood et al., 2024). Addressing "AI" in AAC effectively involves considering each of its use cases on its own merits. It also involves addressing these considerations – not as issues unique to the intersection of AAC and AI, but as applications of broader issues to this intersection.

References (Optional)

Holyfield, C., & Williams, K. (2025, March 15). Predictive Text: Who Controls the Conversation? ASHA LeaderLive. https://leader.pubs.asha.org/do/10.1044/leader.FTR1.30032025.FAAC-predictive-text.36/full/ Preece, J., Sullivan, E., Tams-Gray, F., & Pullin, G. (2024). Making my voice and owning its future. Medical Humanities, 50(4), 624-634. Sellwood, D., McLeod, L., Williams, K., Brown, K., & Pullin, G. (2024). Imagining alternative futures with augmentative and alternative communication: a manifesto. Medical Humanities, 50(4), 620-623. Valencia, S., Cave, R., Kallarackal, K., Seaver, K., Terry, M., & Kane, S. K. (2023, April). "The less I type, the better": How AI language models can enhance or impede communication for AAC users. In Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-14).

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

The presenters work for AssistiveWare but the session does not discuss AssistiveWare products.

1.4: Development of a nursing training intervention based on the views of AAC users and nursing staff

Paterson, Helen - Author

Submission ID

32

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Despite the essential role that nursing staff play in supporting individuals with communication difficulties who use AAC, particularly in long-term care settings, there is a distinct lack of evidence on best practice training for AAC use and very little that explores the views of nursing staff and AAC users. This presentation will present the research and discuss the findings from a 7-year mixed methods research project aimed at exploring effective training strategies for nurses and health care assistants in supporting AAC use within long-term care environments. The study involved two phases. In Phase 1, the perspectives of AAC users, nurses and health care assistants were gathered through interviews, focus groups, and Talking Mats, focusing on the use of both low and high-tech AAC systems. Data were analysed and the results were triangulated with existing literature on nurse training and behaviour change, forming the foundation for a tailored training intervention. A training intervention was developed from these results and as per Medical Research Council guidance a programme theory was developed which contained methods for training including videos, competency checklists and AAC user feedback. In Phase 2, the training program's acceptability and feasibility as well as the impact on nursing staff's knowledge and confidence in using AAC were evaluated. The methods used were surveys, interviews, and Talking Mats. The outcomes of Phase 2 will be presented, highlighting the implications for improving AAC support in long-term care settings. The findings will also explore the potential for applying these results to broader healthcare contexts, offering insights into effective strategies for training staff and enhancing communication support for individuals with complex needs.

References (Optional)

Altschuler, T., Santiago, R., and Gormley, J. (2021) Ensuring communication access for all during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: supporting patients, providers, and caregivers in hospitals. Augmentative and Alternative Communication 37(3) 155-167. Bartlett, H., Blais, R., Tamblyn, R., Clermont, R., and MacGibbon, B. (2008) Impact of patient communication problems on the risk of preventable adverse events in acute care settings. Canadian Medical Association Journal 178 (12) 1555-1562. Braun-Janzen, C., Sarchuk, L., and Murray, R. P. (2009) Roles of Speech-Language Pathologists and Nurses in Providing Communication Intervention for Nonspeaking Adults in Acute Care: A Regional Pilot Study. Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology 33 (1) 5-23. Santiago, R., Gormley, J., Altschuler, T., Howard, M., and Pressman, H (2021) Promoting System Change for Communication Access in Acute Care Hospitals. Assistive Technology Outcomes Benefits 15(1) 100.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

1.5: Improving AAC users autonomy using the Quality of Life indicators

Campbell, Tracey - Author

Submission ID

90

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Even AAC users' strongest allies can make assumptions, albeit with good intentions, about how people want to be supported. Robust AAC systems are not usually set up to permit people to have control over their life or identity. Nor do they contain vocabulary for the user to discuss their rights and needs. Despite this, AAC users must learn not only how to navigate an AAC system, but also how to navigate a life. People who cannot reliably use spoken words to talk have much to teach us about how this may be achieved. As the mother of an AAC user, I became passionate about it over 10 years ago. Having completed some extra study in the area, I now manage the Communication and Education Team for Rett UK, work for Microboards Australia, and run my own business consulting with AAC users and facilitating training and support for families and professionals. I work with people who share their insights through their bodies, AAC devices, spelling, and Talking Mats™

(2023), both commercial and my own versions. I have developed a simplified version of the short Quality-of-Life questionnaire (2004) by the World Health Organisation as a way for people to talk about how they feel things are going in their life. This workshop will discuss what I have learned supporting people to consider what they want and what is important for them. The practical element will allow participants to consider the people they support and how they may use the Quality-of-Life resources with them.

References (Optional)

Hayden, N. K., Bradshaw, J., Hayward, S., Murphy, J., Boa, S., Eden, V., Mischo, S., Pampoulo, E., Macrae, A.-M., Reid, J., Darvell, C., Auer, N., Mundt, I., Clark, L., Nagawa, M., Duner, A., and Talking Mats Research Network (2023). Summary of Talking Mats Studies. Talking Mats. https://www.talkingmats.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Summary-of-Publications-Featuring-Talking-Mats.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwjhrMCO5ryIAxXlmq8BHaOuOzQQFnoECBgQAQ&usg=AOvVaw29ZO1jAN5yJwY7m7Pay_yz World Health Organization. (2004). The World Health Organization quality of life (WHOQOL) - BREF, 2012 revision. World Health Organization. https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/77773

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

1.6: AAC on the Page and Screen: What Can We Learn?

Whitfield, Kristin - Author

Submission ID

53

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Recently, I watched "Out of my Mind" with my daughter. The movie, based on a book of the same name, tells the story of a young girl with cerebral palsy who used several different forms of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). A few weeks later, during a conversation about my work as a speech and language therapist focusing on AAC, a friend mentioned a book she had read recently. One of the characters had a disability and was non-verbal and she made the connection between the character and my work. While watching or reading, it is easy to celebrate the victories the characters experience and also be enraged by the missed opportunities for communication and connection with others! But if we look a little deeper, can we as AAC professionals and supporters learn from both

memoirs and fictional experiences? In this session, we will explore what we can learn from select books, TV shows, and movies about people who use or could benefit from using AAC. These works, whether fiction or non-fiction, present valuable information for AAC professionals and supporters in a variety of areas, including:

1. Professional advocacy. How is the profession of speech-language pathology viewed by characters in the media?

2. Client advocacy. Are myths about AAC and the people who could use it limiting access to communication?

3. AAC assessment practices. Are a variety of AAC systems being considered when appropriate?

4. AAC implementation practices. How are family members and caregivers included in learning about new AAC systems? Are teachers and classmates provided with training on how to interact with people using AAC?

Be prepared to share your thoughts during this fun and interactive session!

References (Optional)

Ablenet. (2025). “Out of my Mind” movie: Key insights for speech-language pathologists. https://quicktalkerfreestyle.com/blog/out-of-my-mind-movie-slp-insights/ Adomat, D. S. (2014). Exploring issues of disability in children’s literature discussions. Disability Studies Quarterly, 34(3), 1–17. https://dsq-sds. org/article/view/3865/3644 https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v34i3.3865 Arner, L. & Van Echo, J. (2025). Movie ‘Out of My Mind’ points to need for AAC inclusion in schools. The ASHA LeaderLive. https://leader.pubs.asha.org/do/10.1044/2025-0228-school-slps-aac-inclusion/full/ Davis, K. (2016). A word about the new show 'Speechless'. The ASHA LeaderLive. https://leader.pubs.asha.org/do/10.1044/a-word-about-the-new-show-speechless/full/ Deussing, L. (2008). Unlocked: A review of "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly. The ASHA Leader, 16(6), 18. https://doi.org/10.1044/leader.FTR3.13062008.1 Heumann, J. E., Salinas, K., Hess, M. (2019). Road map for inclusion: Changing the face of disability in media. Ford Foundation. www.fordfoundation.org/media/4276/judyheumann_report_2019_ final.pdf Kim, A. (2024). Happiness falls: A novel. Random House. Mason, A. (2021, December 18). Representation for people with disabilities in film and television. Partners for Youth with Disabilities. https://pyd.org/blog/2021/12/18/representation-for-people-with-disabilities-in-film-and-television/ Nielsen. (2022, December). Seen on screen: the importance of disability representation. https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2022/the-importance-of-disability-representation/ Ostrosky, M. M., Mouzourou, C., Dorsey, E. A., Favazza, P. C., & Leboeuf, L. M. (2015). Pick a book, any book: Using children’s books to support positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities. Young Exceptional Children, 18(1), 30–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250613512666 Pistorius, M. (2013). Ghost Boy. Thomas Nelson. Smith, E.J. & Arthur, D.T. (2024). Representation of aided AAC in contemporary young adult fiction. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 40:4, 314-327, DOI: 10.1080/07434618.2024.2355459 Maxm4ss. (January 23, 2011). SELENA GOMEZ lost her voice--interview on GEORGE LOPEZ SHOW [Video]. YouTube. URL https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KAV72fBdzY Schnabel, J. (Director) (1997). The diving bell and the butterfly [Film]. Pathé Renn Production. Sealey, A. (Director) (2024). Out of my mind [Film]. Disney. Zhang, L., & Haller, B. (2013). Consuming image: how mass media impact the identity of people with disabilities. Communication Quarterly, 61(3), 319–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2013.776988

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

I am an employee of Control Bionics, a manufacturer of AAC and access products.

1.7: Singing using eye gaze technology: identity and the potential for wellbeing impact.

Dunn, Sarah - Author

Submission ID

6

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

As a parent/carer of an eye gaze AAC user who loves music I am always looking for ways for my son to engage in high quality music making opportunities. However, due to him being non-verbal, non-mobile and unable to use his hands and arms in a functional manner, finding an accessible instrument to play or singing is challenging. As a music educator I am passionate about music making for all, which has led me setting up a charity to provide accessible and inclusive musical opportunities for children and young people (www.accessibleinclusivemusic.org.uk) and more recently embark on PhD research in this field. This presentation will focus on my research as a first year PhD candidate at The University of Leeds, exploring the potential impact of eye gaze 'singing' on the wellbeing of disabled AAC users. Specifically, I will look at how singing can be used as a form of communication to represent both individual and collective identity (Heydon et al., 2020; Norton, 2015; Russo et al., 2020), therefore emphasising the need for eye gaze AAC users to have the opportunity to 'sing' as well as speak using their devices. I will also share how my son and I have explored eye gaze 'singing' and how advancement in technology, such as the use of artificial intelligence may lead to greater possibility of eye gaze singing. Furthermore, I will examine how singing as medium of expression and way of sharing identity may lead to enhanced wellbeing and quality of life for eye gaze AAC users (Heydon et al., 2020).

References (Optional)

Heydon, R., Fancourt, D., & Cohen, A. J. (Eds.). (2020). The Routledge companion to interdisciplinary studies in singing, volume III: Wellbeing. Routledge. Norton, K. (2015). Singing and wellbeing: Ancient wisdom, modern proof. Taylor & Francis. Russo, F. A., Ilari,

B., & Cohen, A. J. (Eds.). (2020). The Routledge companion to interdisciplinary studies in singing, volume i: Development. Routledge.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

1.8: Embracing Total Communication: Challenging Ableism in AAC and Empowering Communication Choices

Howard, Elisabeth - Co-Author; Clarke, Zoe - Co-Author; Moran, Charlie - Co-Author; Darley, Sally - Co-Author

Submission ID

25

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This presentation will explore the concept of total communication and how we can better value and empower individuals' right to choose their preferred communication methods. We will explore total communication, considering the opinion that non-powered communication is often overlooked, and undervalued due to societal norms of conformity, cognitive biases, and professional expectations that prioritize technology-driven or ableist approaches. This links to the growing repertoire of research suggesting that adults with significant physical disabilities who use AAC, prefer non-powered and person-type modes of communication (Ripat et al., 2019). Case studies and lived experiences will be shared where individuals choose to focus on their total communication methods which demonstrate their skills as resourceful communicators. Benson-Goldberg et al. (2025) recently highlighted the need for more consideration around the ways that partners interdependently collaborate to achieve effective communication. During the session, we will consider the widespread emphasis on independence in communication, proposing a shift towards interdependence as a valid and equally important approach. By recognising that individuals should have the autonomy to make choices regarding their own communication style, we aim to discuss a more inclusive environment within the arena of AAC, where people feel comfortable using a range of communication methods without stigma. Through this presentation, we hope to ignite discussion and inspire change in how we support and empower individuals in making communication choices that truly reflect their needs, preferences and identity. This presentation will address the key questions of:

1. What value is placed on different modalities of AAC?

2. What is inter-dependence in a communication context?

3. Why is inter-dependence important?

4. How do we support inter-dependence in AAC?

References (Optional)

Benson-Goldberg, S. Gullion, L & Erickson, K. (2025). The role of the body in SGD-mediated interactions, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 41:1, 1-16, DOI: 10.1080/07434618.2024.2398436 Ripat, J., Verdonck, M., Gacek, C., & McNicol, S. (2019). A qualitative metasynthesis of the meaning of speech-generating devices for people with complex communication needs. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (Baltimore, Md.: 19)

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.1: Voices of Change: An AAC User's Journey in Shaping a School Community's Attitudes Toward Communication, Disability, and Inclusion

Moreno, Mateo - Author

Submission ID

11

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Meet Mateo Moreno: a confident, quick-witted AAC user whose empathy and relentless drive to connect are clear from the moment you meet him. But his journey wasn't always this seamless. Growing up in a small, suburban school district, Mateo was the only AAC user, which meant he and his parents had to take the lead in educating teachers and classmates about augmentative and alternative communication. Fast forward to today, and Mateo is still championing AAC and inclusion – now as a presenter. Partnering with school districts across the U.S. to create more inclusive, supportive learning environments for AAC users, Mateo shares his experiences, delivers advice for communication and talks about his pet peeves related to attitudes toward and treatment of AAC users. In this engaging session, Mateo will share his transformative work alongside speech-language pathologists in a rural

school district, revealing how they built capacity, shifted mindsets, and created meaningful connections while challenging limiting beliefs about disability. Drawing on his personal experiences, Mateo will explain why AAC users must play an active role in the conversation about disability and inclusion. His candid talks with parents, teachers, administrators, and therapists not only helped make the professional advice from the speech-language pathologists stick but also paved the way for a compassionate environment where all voices are heard. In this session, Mateo will share some of the feedback he's received from parents, teachers, speech-language pathologists and the 2,000 students who've heard his story. He will talk about the importance of mentorship for AAC users at all levels. Through his presentations to educators and heart-to-heart conversations with students about being supportive communication partners, Mateo helps foster real change—ultimately shaping new opportunities and ensuring that every student feels understood.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT2.2: Developing Self-Identity and Collaboration through the AAC Mentoring Qualification

Bird, Emily - Author

Submission ID

106

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This Lightning Talk will discuss how the Level 1 Award in Mentoring for AAC Users has been introduced with a group of students at Treloar College, using example learning materials and comments from the students. The talk will focus on how the course delivery has been adapted through collaboration between the Speech and Language Therapist, College Tutor and an external Volunteer (a previous Treloar College student) in order to:

- Link the course content to the students' current interests and skills to enhance motivation and engagement;
- Present coursework in accessible formats via use of apps to enable students to work as independently as possible and at their own pace;
- Use the AI feature of the Kahoot Quiz software to create engaging ways of checking understanding and progress;
- Work as a group, providing opportunities for peer feedback;

- Foster self-reflection skills and understanding of students' individual identities as AAC users, including how they have developed their skills and confidence communicating with AAC;
- Provide space for students to share their experiences, including honest reflections on previous feelings of frustration, resistance and even outright dislike towards AAC systems that they felt didn't match their identities.

We will aim to highlight how students have self-advocated for their needs and identified the bespoke elements of their AAC systems that have helped to create a stronger sense of self as a person who communicates effectively using AAC. The talk will end with a brief overview of planned next steps, including considering how the Mentoring course could link best with students' future work experience opportunities whilst at college and potential future career aspirations.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT2.2: Introduction to AsTeRICS AAC: a free multilingual resource

Bhoola, Ereshini - Author

Submission ID

75

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Asterics AAC is a versatile web-based app for tailored AAC solutions. It was developed within several research projects at the UAS Technikum Wien, Austria, funded by the City of Vienna. A collaboration with ARASAAC, the creators of a big free AAC symbol set from Spain, led to worldwide success and use of Asterics AAC. It's free, open source, and runs on all platforms (e.g. iOS, Android, Windows), aiming to keep the barrier to its use as low as possible. This resource could support professionals in the field by offering adaptable options that cater to different linguistic and cultural contexts for the AAC user. This lightning session will provide a brief overview from the developer, demonstrating the features, potential applications and ability to be customised to individual needs.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT2.2: Creating AAC Systems that can evolve from Childhood to Adulthood

Lawrence, Jenny - Author

Submission ID

54

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

As people move from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood, their communication needs, interests, and social roles can change dramatically. This lightning talk will cover ways we can systematically update and adapt AAC systems to reflect this. The presentation will explore practical strategies for refreshing vocabulary (e.g., evolving from classroom topics to employment, independent living, or community engagement), updating page layouts or symbol sets to reflect more mature interests, and fine-tuning device features for authenticity and self-confidence. By regularly updating and personalising an AAC system, we can make sure it grows with the person - supporting their communication and reflecting who they truly are as they move into adulthood. During this presentation, I will use Liberator products to demonstrate the features I will discuss. However, the ideas can also be implemented with other AAC supplier products.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

I work for Liberator

LT2.2: What impact have we had? Exploring the Use of Talking Mats as a PROM Tool in AAC Services

Paterson, Helen - Author

Submission ID

42

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Measuring outcomes is a vital part of delivering high-quality services within NHS Specialised Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). While Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs) are currently used to assess clinical outcomes from the clinician's perspective, there remains a gap in capturing the patient's own view of their AAC experience. Patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) are widely used across the NHS for this purpose, yet no standard tool exists for PROMs within AAC hubs. At the Compass AAC Hub, we set out to address this gap by combining TOMs with Talking Mats—a visual communication tool which supports individuals to express their views effectively. Our goal was to develop a PROM approach that was accessible and meaningful to AAC users, particularly to assess the impact of AAC at both face-to-face and remote communication levels, and across the TOMS domains of activity and participation. We designed Talking Mats with tailored top scales reflecting relevant outcome areas, administered pre- and post-AAC trials. To analyse change, we used a quantitative approach previously validated in Talking Mats research. Each top scale was transformed and weighted numerically, allowing us to assign percentage scores. Descriptive statistics were then used to compare outcomes. This lightning talk will describe the development process, share initial findings from our year-long trial, and open the conversation around the potential for broader application of Talking Mats as a PROM tool in AAC services. We hope to explore with the AAC community whether this method could be adapted for use in other Specialised AAC services and healthcare teams across the UK.

References (Optional)

Enderby P. & John A. (2015) Therapy Outcome Measures For Rehabilitation Professionals-3rd edition. J & R Press. Croydon UK. Hayden, Nikita; Bradshaw, Jill; Hayward, Sarah; Murphy, Joan; Boa, Sally; Eden, Viktoria; Alm, Norman; Pampoulou, Eliada; Mischo, Susanne; (2024) A narrative review on analysing and reporting research conducted using Talking Mats® , an inclusive communication tool Technology and Disability , 36 (3) pp. 69-84. Available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3233/TAD-230024 Talking mats (2025) https://www.talkingmats.com/ (WHO, 2025): https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/international-classification-of-functioning-disability-and-health

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.3: Are we proud AAC users at university? An integrated framework of environmental affordance and positive identity for AAC users in English-speaking tertiary contexts

Hu, Jing - Author

Submission ID

66

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

What our research is about: We are interested in looking at what AAC strategies students use in universities when they can't speak or read and write in the typical way. We also wanted to understand how they use AAC strategies to communicate with staff and peers in their university lives. Finally, we would like to know what makes these students feel good (or bad) about being AAC users in higher education. We studied three AAC-using university students in Australia. Two of them are from multilingual and cross-cultural backgrounds. The key idea was that when students have the right support and tools they could use in their environment, they're more likely to develop a positive sense of who they are. The researchers wanted to see what specific things helped these university students feel proud of using AAC - or not proud. How we did our research:

- We videoed the AAC students in classes, group discussions, and presentations
- We interviewed the students about their experiences
- We made sure everything was accessible for the students to participate

What we found: All three students actively chose different AAC strategies in English-speaking environments depending on what they thought would work for them in each situation and who they were interacting with. The students felt most proud when they felt in control of their communication tools and could successfully handle the demands of university-level work and social activities.

References (Optional)

Biesta, G. (2021). World-centred education: A view for the present. Routledge. Edwards, T. (2024). Going Tactile: Life at the Limits of Language. Oxford University Press. Kockelman, P. (2006). Residence in the world: Affordances, instruments, actions, roles, and identities. Semiotica(162).

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.4: How Can Voice Output Phonemes be used in Assistive Technology?

Lee, Andrea - Author; Wade, Will - Author; McNaught, Kirsty - Author; Graz, Heather - Author

Submission ID

102

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Andrea Lee, Will Wade, Kirsty McNaught and Heather Graz have collaborated through a shared exploration of the clinical applications of speech synthesis using phonemic input. To date, speech synthesisers use text, either from keyboard input or from text attached to symbol messages, as the source to be converted to speech. Recent advances have meant that phonemes can now be blended synthetically to form intelligible connected speech. Andrea Lee is exploring how symbolised phonemes can be used communicatively as an addition or alternative to AAC approaches using symbolised words and messages. Vocabulary choices are integral to a person's social, cultural and linguistic identity. Standardised symbol vocabularies based on frequency of use or perceived importance do not support individualised vocabulary needs. Symbol AAC users are restricted to retrieving pre-stored, pre-empted vocabulary. Andrea's research explores how using symbolised phonemes might impact user's vocabulary choices. Kirsty McNaught and Heather Graz have been working with voice output phonemes to support literacy for an adult AAC user with literacy difficulties persisting into adulthood. Access to symbolized phonemes enabled the user to create an intelligible version of words she was unable to spell. The errors that may have been made in the phoneme selection were found to be less harmful than alphabetic errors. The ongoing use of symbolised phonemes to support generalisation to conventional spelling skill is currently being trialled. Will Wade's research explores efficiency and rate enhancement of AAC for text-to-speech users. This has two strands relating to phoneme use; firstly, the use of alternative coding systems such as the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) to reduce the number of keystrokes and consequently increase efficiency and secondly, the learnability and gamification of coding systems to improve engagement and adoption. The session will involve demonstrations of prototypes and video examples of clinical use of the methods presented.

References (Optional)

Goodenough-Trepagnier, C., & Prather, P. (1981). Communication Systems for the Nonvocal Based on Frequent Phoneme Sequences. Journal of Speech, Language, and

Hearing Research, 24(3), 322–329. https://doi.org/10.1044/jshr.2403.322 Trinh, H. (2011). Using a computer intervention to support phonological awareness development of nonspeaking adults. The Proceedings of the 13th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility, 329–330. https://doi.org/10.1145/2049536.2049632 (Black et al., n.d.) Goodenough-Trepagnier, C., & Prather, P. (1981). Communication Systems for the Nonvocal Based on Frequent Phoneme Sequences. Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 24(3), 322–329. https://doi.org/10.1044/jshr.2403.322 Preece, J., & Lee, A. (2023). Jamie: Who Chooses my Words? THE JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION MATTERS / ISAAC (UK), 37(3), 4–7.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.5: Finding Your Voice: The potential of speech technology for communication

Fryer, Kate - Author; Moran, Charlie - Co-Author; Preece, Jamie - Co-Author; Hewson, Toby - Co-Author; Judge, Simon - Co-Author; Hawley, Mark - Co-Author; Palmer, Rebecca - Co-Author; Cunningham, Stuart - Co-Author

Submission ID

82

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

For many people with speech difficulties, being understood is a daily struggle. Only close friends and family learn to understand their unique way of speaking, which limits how they can express themselves when speaking with different people (1,2). The INVITE Project (INcorporating Voice actIvated communication aids inTo Everyday communication) studied how voice recognition apps can help. The voice recognition apps used were VOCATempo and the Voice Itt app. We worked with 24 people with speech difficulties who used these apps for six months. These apps can be trained to recognize specific words or sounds someone says and then speak out stored full sentences. One participant explained: If I want the app to say, 'Please, can I have a coffee?' I use the app to record how I say 'coffee' five times to program it. Then when I say 'coffee,' the app says the whole sentence for me." During this session we will share:

- Details of how we completed this study

- Information about who took part and successfully used the apps
- Examples of how people used the apps
- Feedback about how people found using the apps
- Feedback from healthcare professionals about use of these apps

While the specific apps we tested are no longer available, our findings show how important voice technology can be for helping people express themselves in different ways, increasing participation and independence, and will guide the development of better tools in the future.

References (Optional)

1. Scholderle T, Staiger A, Lampe R, Strecker K, Ziegler W. Dysarthria in Adults With Cerebral Palsy: Clinical Presentation and Impacts on Communication. J Speech, Lang Hear Res. 2016;59:216- 229. 2. Jacobson DNO, Löwing K, Hjalmarson E, Tedroff K. Exploring social participation in young adults with cerebral palsy. J Rehabil Med. 2019;51(3):167-174. doi:10.2340/16501977-2517

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.6: Developing identities, from mentor/mentee to colleagues. How mentoring can provide real world opportunities for a career.

Gilmour, Gregor - Author; Holmes, Aiden - Author; Murphy-Mann, Saffron - Author; Sephton, Francesca - Author

Submission ID

117

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

The ATmentor team at ATtherapy will explore how mentoring relationships can support identity development for individuals who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), particularly as they transition from mentees to valued colleagues in the workplace. Identity formation is a complex and deeply personal process, shaped by social, cultural, and communicative experiences (Murphy, 2025). Mentoring offers a powerful, real-world context

where AAC users can explore professional identities, build confidence and engage in meaningful careers. Drawing from personal experiences, this session highlights how mentoring fosters a sense of belonging, increases visibility, and challenges limiting assumptions about disability and communication. Through reciprocal mentor/mentee relationships, individuals using AAC gain access to career-relevant skills, networks and a growing understanding of who they are. The presentation will feature stories of mentees becoming mentors, and ultimately, colleagues illustrating how mentoring can shift perceptions and create pathways toward employment, leadership, and full participation.

References (Optional)

Murphy, T.F. (2025) Identity Formation, Available at: https://psychologyfanatic.com/identity-formation/ (Accessed 17th April 2025)

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.7: AAC users vs the Criminal Justice system: the support available and how to make sure AAC users are their own best witness

Sharples, Andrea - Author

Submission ID

38

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

AAC users face unique challenges when they need to report a potential offence that has been committed against them. Recognising an offence may have occurred, reporting this incident and then engaging in the stages of investigation require very specific skills on the part of the AAC user and also on the part of the many solicitors, police, barristers, judge and jury members that they may need to communicate with during this process. Support is available for AAC users who find themselves needing to communicate within this challenging environment in the form of a Registered Intermediary. Registered Intermediaries are independent communication specialists who are neutral and fair in their role. They have specialist skills in communication and play a crucial role in the criminal justice system, assisting with police interviews and court proceedings. They facilitate two-way

communication between the witness and professionals who need to speak with them, to ensure the questions are asked in the best way and to enable a witness to give their best evidence. This presentation will look at the statistics that show AAC users at a higher risk of being in this situation. It will then outline each step of the way to progress through recognising, reporting and giving evidence for the court. It will link back to the profile of skills AAC users need to develop to be their own best witness. The presenters will examine how these skills can be acquired and then used effectively by their communication partners. This presentation will also look at the training and experience of professionals in the criminal justice system in relation to AAC users and people with communication differences. The presentation will be given by Andrea Sharples (Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist) and Alison Cousins (Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist and Registered Intermediary)

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

2.8: Affirming Multilingual Identities in AAC

Bettany, Ruth - Author

Submission ID

70

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

The Barnsley Assistive Technology Team are committed to providing equitable AAC solutions for our multilingual clients. We believe that everyone should have access to their home language; without it, people lose their linguistic identity and have reduced participation in their cultural and family life. It can be particularly challenging to support clients who require symbol-based AAC systems in languages other than English, and most of all languages that do not have a written form or are otherwise marginalised. The presenter has developed a clinical specialism in this area and has contributed to the National Specialised Services Working Party development of a resource-sharing platform. The presenter will briefly highlight some of the practice guidelines, assessment tools and AAC products currently available to support multilingual AAC users. Most of this session will be an open workshop to discuss the limitations of existing products, how we can do better with imperfect tools and why we need to drive change forward for this client group. Solutions shared will include paper-based AAC, phrase/ message banks, creative bespoke editing, using lesser-known products and utilising mainstream translation apps. The speaker will share case

studies from current clinical practice, discussing how currently available products have been used to positively affirm multilingual identities within the limitations of existing products.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT3.1: Empowered by Connection: How AAC Camps Foster Lifelong Mentorship and Community

Moreno, Mateo - Author

Submission ID

12

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

For Mateo, the moment he met another AAC user at the age of seven at an AAC camp was a pivotal turning point - one that reshaped his understanding of communication and his own future. At camp, he didn't just meet peers who used AAC; he also learned from inspiring adults who were navigating independence, higher education, and even dating experiences all influenced by their AAC journeys. Mateo will share how attending AAC camps not only shaped his personal and professional development but also how these camps fostered a supportive community that lasts a lifetime. From overcoming early camp challenges to embracing his role as a mentor, Mateo will highlight the profound impact these camps have on building confidence, promoting independence, and offering a natural space for mentorship, something vital for continued growth and ongoing achievement in areas such as education, employment and independent living. He'll explore how these camps provide a unique opportunity for participants to step out of their comfort zones, take risks, and enjoy classic summer camp adventures, all while supported by skilled counselors who understand the power of communication. Through his own story, Mateo will demonstrate how AAC camps create lasting connections, not just between campers, but among families as well. These friendships have endured long past the camps themselves, continuing to provide crucial support and understanding. Today, as an active member of the AAC community and the U.S. Society for AAC, Mateo still stays connected with camp friends and mentors, sharing insights at national conferences and through online communities. The relationships that began at an AAC camp when Mateo was just 7 years old remain a vital part of his life nearly 20 years later, and his journey is a powerful reminder of the lifelong impact these camps can have on building a supportive, empowering community for AAC users.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT3.1: If my Gridpad is a part of my self-identity, then why do I choose sometimes, when I go out to leave it at home?

Bates, Patrick - Author

Submission ID

17

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Everyone knows how vital AAC is to the users to enable us to communicate effectively, but Self-choice is a part of self-identity. Sometimes, I choose to leave my Gridpad when I go out with my Carer; and just use my low-tech eye board, why, you may wonder? Find out here...

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

LT3.1: What do my labels mean for me?

Campbell, Tracey - Author; Campbell, Leia - Co-Author

Submission ID

93

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

I was diagnosed with Angelman syndrome when I was 2.5 years old. I cannot remember this time, but I went for a paediatric appointment as I couldn't talk and didn't babble. It is thought that 1 in 15,000 people have Angelman syndrome, so it is rare. NHS UK state that "Angelman syndrome is a rare genetic condition that affects the nervous system and causes severe physical and learning disabilities." (NHS UK, 2025). The term "challenging behaviour" is not used as much as it once was, but behavioural difficulties and a requirement of behavioural support are often mentioned in association with Angelman syndrome. Both the terms severe learning disability and challenging behaviour have been associated with me and have meant that people have treated me in a certain way. With the support of my mum, I am going to discuss what happened as a result of the labels and what the labels mean for me now.

References (Optional)

National Health Service. (2023, March 9). Angelman Syndrome. NHS. Retrieved from https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/angelman-syndrome/

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

3.2: 10 years on: To what extent does policy support the provision of powered AAC in England for children

Moulam, Beth - Author

Submission ID

59

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

In 2015 NHS England (NHSE) implemented the current 'hub and spoke' model of provision for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) establishing 13 regional specialised services for children with the most complex communication disabilities. There was an expectation that Clinical Commissioning Groups (now Integrated Care Boards) would provide local services for all AAC users not meeting the eligibility criteria for specialised assessment. This qualitative study evaluates the extent NHSE policy, combined with other

policy impacting children's rights, has achieved the goal of supporting every child who needs powered AAC to communicate. The study aims were to compare different realities in implementing national augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) policy in schools, at a local level and in regional specialised settings. Then to identify gaps in current policy understanding and implementation to make recommendations for the next steps relating to policy and provision of AAC. A scoping literature review identified and synthesised existing published and unpublished research evidence along with identifying relevant grey literature. This provided context around the complex and often competing social, economic and political pressures impacting the provision of AAC for children. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with experienced professionals (n=15) working in special schools, local services and regional specialised assessment centres. The questions focused on current policy and practice regarding assessment, funding and provision of AAC. The analysis adopted established policy analysis frameworks to look at the factors facilitating and challenging AAC policy implementation, the impact on early identification and ongoing support. The study makes recommendations for policy makers in central and local government, commissioners in education, health and social care, and for practitioners around the next steps to reduce inequality in the provision of powered AAC.

References (Optional)

Boaz, A., Davies, H., Fraser, A., Nutley, S. (2019). What works now? Evidence-informed policy and practice, Bristol: Policy Press. Knoepfel, P., Larrue, C., Varone. F., Hill, M. (2011). Public Policy Analysis, Bristol: Policy Press. Spicker, P. (2006). Policy analysis for practice: applying social policy, Bristol: Policy Press.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

3.3: Perspectives on Possibilities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence Infusion into AAC Devices, Tools, and Strategies

Rackensperger, Tracy - Author; McLemore, Lance - Co-Author; McNaughton, David - Co-Author; Jakobs, Erik - Co-Author

Submission ID

94

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

This consumer-led session will spotlight the lived experiences of 11 individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) as they navigate both the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence (AI) as a support for communication. The presenters themselves are AAC users, sharing firsthand perspectives on how emerging AI tools, especially large language models, can support (and perhaps shape) the way they communicate. Drawing on insights from a consumer-led research project, this session will feature the voices of 11 AAC users grappling with AI-driven communication support's benefits and potential drawbacks. To gather information, we made use of online surveys, as well as triadic online interviews. In the triadic interview, an AAC user who was part of the research team and a university based researcher who used speech, had a guided discussion on AI and AAC with one of the 11 users who contributed to this study. Topics discussed regarding the integration of AI into AAC will include preferences for AI personalization versus privacy concerns, as well as the complex issue of authorship when AI-generated suggestions become part of a message. While some users appreciated how AI might improve speed and participation, others raised valid concerns about losing ownership over their own words. By centering lived experience, this session calls attention to the urgent need for inclusive design and ethical decision-making in AI development. As AI becomes more deeply embedded in communication technology, AAC users must lead the conversation to ensure these tools reflect their values, needs, and rights. This project received funding support from the RERC on AAC, a federally funded AAC research and development collaboration in the United States.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

3.4: AAC outcomes in school: A new functional impact questionnaire

Shepherd, Tracy - Author; Wright, Virginia - Co-Author; Renzoni, Anne Marie - Co-Author

Submission ID

37

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

There is a lack of validated measures to help educators and communication teams evaluate communication functioning of children who require AAC and identify intervention opportunities within school settings.1 A psychometrically strong AAC outcome measure

would help teams in assessing effectiveness of students' AAC systems. We developed the Functional Impact of Augmentative and Alternative Communication–Educator Version (FIAAC-E)2 to address this gap. This educator-report 77-item measure assesses the effectiveness of a student's AAC system, allowing educators to systematically reflect on how a child/youth is doing with functional communication. It is intended as a foundation for targeted goal-setting and intervention planning with the child's school team to advance communicative functioning, associated learning and socialization and as a follow-up measure. Acceptable reliability and validity have been established3. Aim: This study investigated educator and AAC clinician teams' experiences using the FIAAC-E in a school setting through use of an active implementation framework 4,5,6. Method: The FIAAC-E was piloted with 8 educator-AAC clinician team dyads supporting a student ages 4 to 17 years with AAC needs. Feedback was garnered from study participants at various stages in the process via surveys and interviews. Results: Consolidated results from quantitative data and interviews will be shared. Quantitative data showed that the clinical utility of the FIAAC-E user (as measured by an evaluation survey) capture scores that align well with survey/interview comments made. Interview responses were thorough and candid, identifying many positive aspects about the FIAAC-E and suggestions for improvement/clarification. Overall, interviewees shared that the FIAAC-E provided a good opportunity to meet as a team and reflect on the child's communication and participation. The FIAAC-E tool and Administration Guide were revised based on study feedback and are available for free via a weblink for use across the AAC service delivery network.

References (Optional)

1. Ryan SE et al. Systematic review of educator-reported outcomes for young people who use AAC in school activity settings. Ryan SE, Renzoni A, Shepherd TA, D'Alessandro D, Smith L, Ozols G, Donohoo J. International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication Conference. Toronto, ON. August 2016. 2. Ryan SE, Renzoni A, Shepherd TA, D'Alessandro D, Smith L, Ozols G, Donohoo J. Measuring the functioning of students who use augmentative and alternative communication at school. Ontario Council for Exceptional Children Conference. Toronto, ON. December 2016. 3. Ryan, S.E., et al. Functional impact of augmentative and alternative communication scale: development of an outcome measure for educators of students with complex communication needs, Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology 2020: DOI: 10.1080/17483107.2020.1842917 4. Blanchard C et al. The Active Implementation Frameworks: a roadmap for advancing implementation of comprehensive medication management in primary care. Res Soc Admin Pharm 2017;13:922-929e 5. Fernandez MEet al. Implementation Mapping: Using Intervention Mapping to Develop Implementation Strategies. Front Pub Health 2019;7:article 158:1-19. 6. Peters DHet al. Implementation research: what it is and how to do it. BMJ 2013;347:f6753

Level

General Session

Age Group

Child

3.5: Elevating Paper-Based Resources

Voizey, Tina - Author; Small, Katherine - Co-Author

Submission ID

110

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

The importance of paper-based AAC resources is undeniable. It can be the starting point of a journey for those new to AAC, a preferred method of interaction for seasoned AAC users, a back-up to a powered system or complement to other forms of communication. All use cases are valid and important, so much so that as an industry we have moved away from the use of the term “low-tech” to impart the message that it is not a lower form of AAC. Yet, due to factors such as limited capacity and competing priorities, access to and funding of appropriate tools, and disparity of support within environments AAC users move between throughout their lives, the creation and maintenance of paper-based systems can get lost in the shuffle or given low priority. Since the first edition of the Developing and Using a Communication Book guidebook in 2004, the Ace Centre, as part of its charitable service, has been developing and sharing paper-based resources alongside guidance on their creation and use. In this session we will discuss the reflective and iterative process we go through to improve Ace Centre resources, so they are accessible to a wider range of AAC users regardless of their age, physical and sensory needs, or the number of languages they use. We will share our decision-making process to ensure that the resources we publish can be personalised and updated by as wide an audience of AAC professionals, families, and carers of AAC users as possible. All whilst we consider the availability and access to technology which enables the creation of paper-based AAC alongside financial and environmental impact. All shared within this session is with the goal of supporting others to elevate their creation, maintenance, efficiency, and dissemination of paper-based AAC resources.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

Ace Centre

3.6: Holistic assessment of AAC for those with a sensory impairment

Elm-Robinson, Olly - Author; Sutherland, Caireen - Co-Author

Submission ID

35

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

We all know that the gold standard for AAC assessment is to involve the whole team around the person. When the person has sensory impairments, they often have a bigger team of people working with them including Qualified Teachers for Vision Impairment, Multi-sensory Impairment and/or Teachers of the Deaf which can seem daunting to manage effectively. This is a practical solution focused workshop. There will be the opportunity to watch a video of a person with sensory impairment and to consider the value and role of observation from different perspectives. We will ask you to analyse the video from the viewpoint of your role and then share this with people in other roles in a small group discussion. This will be a personal opportunity to see what value and perspective you and others offer to a holistic assessment. We will discuss what each person can bring to an AAC assessment with a particular focus on the area of sensory impairment and the specialists this brings with it, the AAC user themselves and their family/caregivers. We will then ask you to fill in some of Manchester Metropolitan Universities I-ASC AAC decision making resources for the child in the video, first giving your perspective and then discussing the different perspectives in your group. We will think about the many variables which can influence the success of AAC such as the AAC user's culture, identity and sensory needs and how to take these into account when making decisions.

References (Optional)

Manchester Metropolitan University. 2025 I-ASC Explanatory Model of AAC Decision Making [Online] [Accessed 07/04/2025] Available from: https://iasc.mmu.ac.uk/i-asc-explanatory-model-of-aac-decision-making/

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

3.7: The AAC Exams Access Group - progress in external assessments for AAC users

Murphy-Mann, Saffron - Author; Leckenby, Katy - Co-Author; Ebbage-Taylor, Meaghan - Co-Author; Stanton, Marion - Co-Author; Day, Rebecca - Co-Author; Kilvington Smith, Laura - Co-Author

Submission ID

62

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

The AAC Exams Access Group is a group of professionals, parents/carers and suppliers of AAC equipment from across the UK, who have experience of AAC exams access arrangements for a range of key-stages. We publish Exam Access Guidance documents to help start conversations to enable our students who use AAC to gain the best access arrangements for external exams. Each year we hear success stories of how students have been enabled to gain qualifications, from extra time, to having exams adapted into a student's communication programme to having a final mark assessed on mock exam. We would like to share some of these success stories, along with exciting news of our new website with you today.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

3.8: Introducing High Tech AAC in a High Secure Environment: A Case Study

Callander, Gillian - Author; Quigley, Laura - Co-Author

Submission ID

27

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

High secure services provide care and treatment for adults who present a high risk of harm to themselves and/or others. In these environments, therapists have to be innovative and work within the constraints of the security and hospital procedures in place. Within our setting it is unusual to have a client whose expressive communication provides such a significant challenge to meeting their needs. This case study describes the process that has been undertaken to meet the needs of this complex individual and to provide a high tech communication device to support communication. Safe and effective care and treatment of patients who can be violent and aggressive is challenging and this case study highlights the importance of multi-disciplinary working and of person centred treatment. In additions it demonstrates how challenges around security policies can be overcome due to the commitment of a range of professionals to ensure the appropriate care and treatment needs of this individual are met.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

4.1: Empowering AAC users with new AI features in Grid

Fry, Becky - Author; Reichelt, James - Author

Submission ID

126

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

In this talk, we will introduce the latest AI-powered features in Grid, designed to make communication smoother, faster, and more authentic for AAC users. At Smartbox, we believe AI should be a tool for enhancing self-expression, ensuring that everyone can communicate in a way that truly reflects their identity. Research conducted by Smartbox, in partnership with the ALS Association, highlighted that a major challenge for people using text AAC is correcting typing errors. Our research found that fixing mistakes took up as much as a third of the time people spent composing their message, significantly slowing down communication. We will explore how our new Fix tool helps to remove common frustrations in text communication, making it easier for users to express themselves with greater confidence and less effort. By reducing the barriers that slow down conversations, AAC users can communicate more freely and authentically in any situation. We will also share

how AI voice technology is evolving, with the integration of new, high-quality ElevenLabs voices that provide more choice and personalisation. Having access to a voice that feels right is a vital part of identity, and our latest developments ensure that users have more options than ever before. Beyond the technology, we will discuss our responsible approach to AI, ensuring that every feature we introduce is built with user control, transparency, and ethical implementation in mind. AI should support and empower, not take over, and we are committed to making sure these tools respect the individuality of every AAC user. Join us to discover how Smartbox is bringing new AI innovations to Grid, helping to create more seamless, natural, and personalised communication experiences - and improving conversation and participation for AAC users.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

Adult

4.2: Connecting and Communicating; AAC users share their experiences of mentoring and communication clubs

Elliott, Verity - Author; McDonald, Tom - Co-Author; Tarn, Julie - Co-Author

Submission ID

29

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

AAC users who have participated in a variety of opportunities funded by the National Lottery project for England, will share their experiences of mentoring and supporting other AAC users along with sharing the benefits and opportunities of being part of a Communication Club. This year's theme for the conference is 'identity'. As often expressed by AAC users, there can be a real sense of isolation and lack of opportunities (for learning and social interactions) all of which can have an impact on our sense of self and our identity. This session will highlight a range of experiences and how these have had a positive impact on AAC users and others. As part of the National Lottery funded Peer Support & Mentoring Project, there are a number of positive opportunities to ensure AAC users can connect, communicate and share. Verity Elliott will highlight the objectives for the project and the funding we have available for the next few years. We are delighted that AAC users will present their experiences from: Northallerton Communication Club – Tom McDonald and Julie Tarn along members from the club, will present what they have been doing and what has worked well. There will be opportunities to ask questions as well as make connections with other AAC mentors and communication clubs.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

4.3: Expressing your individuality Via AAC

Davies, Mick - Author; Lawrence, Jenny - Co-Author

Submission ID

95

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

Since its debut in 2021, our Via range has redefined what it means to personalise AAC, empowering users with unparalleled choice and flexibility. Designed to reflect individual needs, preferences, and styles, Via has opened the door to bespoke communication solutions like never before. Now, with the expanded Via lineup including the new pocket sized Via Nano - customisation reaches new heights. With iOS familiarity, crystal-clear amplification, a selection of device sizes and durable, vibrant casings, and the freedom to use any iOS AAC app, Via breaks boundaries, setting a new standard in AAC personalisation. This Communication Matters Conference, join us for an exploration of the Via range. See firsthand how these powerful device options can transform communication for diverse users. Plus, discover how we can support you with free device loans, expert training, and hands-on guidance - helping you unlock the perfect AAC solution you never knew you needed.

References (Optional)

N/A.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

4.4: Acapela Group: Voice Banking and AI

Magnusson, Susanne - Author; Mazars, Nicolas - Author

Submission ID

120

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

Acapela Group is a text-to-speech company (fully owned by Tobii Dynavox AB Publ) with more than 30 years of experience in the speech industry. My-own-voice™ is a service developed by Acapela Group to re-create voices that may have otherwise been lost to disease. More than 5,000 users per year take advantage of the service to create a copy of their digital voice in one of the 25 languages offered. The digital voice can be used in multiple applications/products. The presentation will focus on my-own-voice v4 and related AI.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify two or more reasons voice preservation may be helpful to a user.

2. Describe the three-step process to create of your digital voice.

3. Describe one or more benefits of recording 10 minutes to create your digital voice.

Content Disclosure: Acapela Group has developed a voice banking cutting-edge service under the name my-own-voice, MOV. Because there are no other like-kind products available, course will only cover information that pertains to the effective use of the above product. Target Audience Accessibility Professionals; AT Specialists; Caregivers; Communication Specialists; Consumers/Individuals with Disabilities; Consultants/Trainers; Disability Services; Educators; Family Members; Government/Non-Profit Agencies; Media Specialists; Occupational Therapists; Physical Therapists; Rehabilitation Counselors; Speech-Language Pathologists

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

4.5: Symbla - Widgit's New Learning App

Attree, James - Author; White, Sue - Co-Author

Submission ID

123

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

Symbla is an activity based App designed for language stimulation and early literacy development which can help to build knowledge and reinforce learning. Symbla contains ready-made exercises that follow a clear progression through vocabulary, phonics, early reading and writing development. Exercises include sorting, matching, memory games, spelling, true or false, find the meaning, and more. They can be played directly or assigned to users who can then play them offline. You can also create and customise new interactive exercises using Widgit Symbols with custom vocabulary for the individual needs of each user or profile. Symbla accesses the entire Widgit Symbol set, with the same customisation you can expect from other Widgit products. This includes Smart Symbolisation, changing skin tone, swapping to black and white Symbols, editing the colours of a Symbol, choosing the Symbol line colour and changing the Symbol text. Developed initially for use in Sweden, through extensive research into pedagogy, we will discuss the application of Symbla in the UK for practitioners, parents, and in school. We will showcase Symbla as both a student user and practitioner, demonstrating how to set up profiles, find and create activities, edit the layout and pages of an activity, choose how actions are read out, and show how activities are played.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

4.6: Success is a Journey: The comprehensive support that goes beyond just the device

Vonica, Maria - Author; Osmond, Dee - Co-Author

Submission ID

128

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

Navigating the world of AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) can be challenging, but with the right tools and resources, success is achievable. In this session, we will go into all the guidance we provide to support you on your AAC journey. AAC refers to any form of communication used in addition to or instead of speech for individuals with communication disabilities. It ranges from no-tech and low-tech options to high-tech devices operated through touch, eye gaze, or other body movements. AAC enables users to communicate, browse the internet, engage on social media, play games, and even control their home environment. A successful AAC journey goes beyond securing a device - it requires comprehensive, personalised solutions. This includes hardware, software, language systems, and support resources tailored to individual needs. Join us to learn how to effectively implement AAC and empower communication for all.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

4.7: What's New from Jabbla UK: A glimpse into the future of AAC

Foulger, Ian - Author; Dale-Rourke, Jake - Author

Submission ID

124

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

At Jabbla UK, innovation never sleeps and this year we are ready to unveil some very interesting developments. Join us for an exclusive showcase where we lift the curtain on the future of AAC, designed to empower and surprise. Mind Express 5 like you've never seen it before. We're introducing Drive Control, a revolutionary new addon that enables eyegaze users to control their wheelchair just by using their eyegaze. Developed to demonstrate precision access in an immersive way, this new feature combines fun, freedom and function. Also making its debut: our much-anticipated iOS solution. You've asked - we've listened. For the first time ever, Jabbla UK is bringing the power and flexibility of our AAC ecosystem to iPad. We're keeping the details under wraps so come see our step into this world. That's not all. We're expanding our content library with brand new additions to Mind Express 5, including Alternative Access PODD Books - accessible communication like you've never seen it before - and a magical new collection of Candle Books, beautifully adapted to support engagement, language development and storytelling for AAC users of all ages. Whether you're a therapist, teacher, parent or technophile, this is your chance to explore

what's next and what's possible. You'll see live demos, discover new tools and hear what's coming next in the Jabbla pipeline.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

4.8: Customizing Access to AAC: Unique Scanning Scenarios

Whitfield, Kristin - Author

Submission ID

130

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

For many years, access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices has been relatively unchanged. Individuals use their fingers, pointing devices, or eye gaze to directly select messages on their communication devices (called direct selection). If this does not support functional communication, clinicians might introduce a form of indirect selection called scanning. While scanning opens up the option of using a communication device to more individuals, scanning tools and settings have not seen many changes over the years. In this session, we will discuss software and hardware innovations from Control Bionics that can help make scanning accessible to more individuals, including some who were previously unable to use communication devices in all environments. Specifically, we will:

1. Briefly review wearable electromyography (EMG) and accelerometry technology as a means of creating a "switch" for use to access augmentative communication devices and other programs.

2. Demonstrate software settings that can modify what signal parameters are interpreted as a switch for use with scanning (e.g., sensitivity, limits for large movements).

3. Demonstrate additional software settings that change traditional scanning patterns in specific environments (e.g., stopping scanning during periods of uncontrolled/unintentional movement).

Case studies will be used to demonstrate both the need for additional solutions as well as the possible solutions. Relevant research references will be provided but not discussed in

depth to provide more time for scenarios. At the end of the session, participants will leave with a better understanding of how hardware and software innovations can support communication and participation for individuals with complex communication and motor needs.

References (Optional)

Burkhart, L. (2018). Stepping stones to switch access. Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups SIG 12, Vol. 3, 33-44. Eskin, N., Pope,L., Slowey, A., Eck, A., O'Rourke, K., Caron, J. (2017). AAC Switch Scanning: Balancing task and technology demands. Poster presentation at the Pennsylvania Speech-Language Hearing Association (PSHA) Convention in Harrisburg, PA. Accessed on April 30, 2024 at https://bpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.psu.edu/dist/5/135916/files/2017/04/PSHA2017_Tech-Lab-Scanning_Final.pdf Koch Fager S, Fried-Oken M, Jakobs T, Beukelman DR. New and emerging access technologies for adults with complex communication needs and severe motor impairments: State of the science. Augmentative and Alternative Communication. 2019; 35(1):13-25. doi:10.1080/07434618.2018.1556730. Accessible at https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07434618.2018.1556730 Koester H.H. & Simpson R.C. (2017) Effectiveness and usability of Scanning Wizard software: A tool for enhancing switch scanning. Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology, 14(2), 161-171. doi: 10.1080/17483107.2017.1406998. Pitt, K. M., & McCarthy, John. W. (2023). Strategies for highlighting items within visual scene displays to support augmentative and alternative communication access for those with physical impairments. Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology, 18(8), 1319–1329. https://doi.org/10.1080/17483107.2021.2003455 Sowers D.J. & Wilkinson K.M.(2023). Demands associated with an augmentative and alternative communication system in relation to alternative forms of access for individuals with motor impairments. American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 32(1), 37-54.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

4.9: What's new at Talking Mats?

Mackay, Margo - Author; Loaring, Melita - Author

Submission ID

85

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

This session is to update our Talking Mats community on three key projects we have been involved in throughout the year: 1. 'Let's Talk about play!': Joining Dr Lynsey Burke from

Dundee University this project co-created a developmentally appropriate Talking Mat resource that supports children's communication, decision making and self-reflection in the early years. It is a tool for educators to use to ensure that children are valued and listened to, a focus of Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC. Within Scottish education, self-evaluation for self-improvement is viewed as being at the heart of quality education. There are challenges for educators, however, with listening to the views of younger children in a developmentally appropriate, non-tokenistic way. Therefore, this new resource allows educators in early years settings to gain a fuller appreciation of children's emerging capacity for decision-making. It provides a visual framework for capturing children's views and hearing insights about their play and learning, without solely relying on expressive communication. 2. 'Talking about Spirituality': Talking Mats joined Dr Leon Van Ommen, from The Centre of Divinity and Religious Studies at Aberdeen University, to create this resource in order to provide an accessible and inclusive way to understand the views of people with communication difficulties about spirituality and religion. Representatives from different faith groups met together to develop the Topics and Options before piloting it in different contexts. 3. 'Supporting Forces children': This resource was co-created with children and young people from armed forces families. It is designed to support meaningful conversations about the unique challenges that they may face. It features newly developed symbols which have been designed to support children in expressing their thoughts and feelings about issues such as coping with deployments, changes in routines, frequent moves and the emotional impact of forces life.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

5.1: Employment of AAC Users

McLemore, Lance - Author

Submission ID

33

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

This session discusses the challenges that AAC users face in obtaining and maintaining employment. Good quality employment opens the door for many opportunities and improves the quality of life for AAC users. Possible challenges that may be discussed include access to reliable transportation, discrimination in the hiring process, access to needed accommodations, gaps in work history or absence thereof, effects that employment might have on access to Medicare or Medicaid, negative self-perception, and inadequate transition planning. The session will also try to present possible solutions and strategies that may include fostering an AAC user's ability to self-advocate, improving interviewing skills, remote

work, self-employment, and formulating a transition plan well in advance. At its most fundamental level, the purpose of any type of communication is to build relationships, and AAC is no different. Employment is a major rite of passage into adulthood. It is the key to opening many opportunities, choices, and having a decent quality of life. However, despite all the progress that has been made in the Disability Rights Movement, the overwhelming majority of AAC users face significant challenges in finding employment. For many of them, so many doors remain firmly closed and so much potential remains unrealized. According to ASHA, there are approximately 5 million AAC users in the United States. In 2010, a study from Penn State found that only 10% of AAC users work 10 hours a week or more. This means that AAC users have an extremely high rate of unemployment and underemployment. This is not because AAC users are unwilling or incapable of working; it is the result of significant barriers that have yet to be torn down. It is my hope that this session can spark discussion on ways to remedy this problem.

References (Optional)

Light, Janice, Betty Stoltz, and David McNaughton. 1996. "Community-Based Employment: Experiences of Adults Who Use AAC." AAC Augmentative and Alternative Communication (International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication) 12: 215-229. McNaughton, David, and Anthony Arnold. 2010. "Supporting Positive Employment Outcomes for Individuals Who Use AAC." Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association) 19 (2): 51-59. McNaughton, David, and Laura Richardson. 2013. "Supporting Positive Employment Outcomes for Individuals Who Use AAC." Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association) 164-172. McNaughton, David, Anthony Arnold, Sam Sennott, and Elizabeth Serpentine. 2010. "Developing Skills, "Making a Match," and Obtaining Needed Supports: Successful employment for individuals who use AAC." Edited by David McNaughton and David Beukelman. Transition Strategies for Adolescents and Young Adults Who Use AAC (Brookes) 111-127. McNaughton, David, Gregory Symons, Janice Light, and Arielle Parsons. 2006. ""My Dream to Pay Taxes": The Self-Employment Experiences of People who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication." Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 25 (3): 181-196. McNaughton, David, Janice Light, and Stephanie Gulla. 2003. "Opening Up a 'Whole New World': Employer and Co-Worker Perspectives on Working with Individuals who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication." Augmentative and Alternative Communication (Taylor & Francis Health Sciences) 19 (4): 235-253. McNaughton, David, Tracy Rackensperger, Dana Dorn, and Natasha Wilson. 2014. ""Home is at work and work is at home":Telework and individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication." (IOS Press) 117-127. doi:10.3233/WOR-141860. United States Department of Transportantion, Bureau of Transportantion Statistics. 2024. "Travel Patterns of Adults With Travel-Limiting Disabilities." Washington, D.C. doi:https://doi.org/10.21949/1530555. United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. 2003. "Job Applicants and the ADA." US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. 10 7. Accessed March 30, 2025. https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/job-applicants-and-ada.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

5.2: Connecting diverse marginalised communicators through a co-created arts and activism festival - an AAC community consultation

Soreny, Cathy - Author; Preece, Jamie - Author; Tanti, Melissa - Author; Sullivan, Emma - Co-Author

Submission ID

68

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

The AAC community and Communication Matters have done much work to champion awareness and acceptance of alternative ways of communicating in wider society. Communication pride in non-normative voices is also growing across other disability communities, such as stammering. There is even a new sub-field of disability studies called ‘dysfluency studies’ that seeks to engage and embrace all types of non-normative speech, to make positive change. We believe that by bringing together people with common experiences related to being marginalised communicators, across diverse communities, we can do more to challenge ableist societal expectations around voice. With this goal in mind, our collective is planning a co-created festival that celebrates non-normative voices through art, activism and research. A one day pilot festival will be held in Spring 2026, working towards a multi-day festival in 2027. This workshop at Communication Matters invites you to add your voices and experiences as the AAC community to the vision and ethos of the festival. The project started in 2024. To develop a cross-community vision, we held 3 co-design workshops. We established a ‘leadership circle’. This founding group brought together performance makers, poets, writers, comedians, designers and community activists. We bring our lived experiences of AAC, dysarthria, stammering, Deafness, traumatic brain injury, neurodiversity, chronic illness impacting on fluency, multilingual diaspora, and linguistic minorities. We are actively seeking connections with other communities too. We are coming to Communication Matters to explore how this festival can best engage and include the AAC community. We will facilitate discussion around key issues such as representation, meaningful access and how different communities can connect to each other to become effective allies in a broad movement for communication justice. Bring your ideas, AAC and voices and get involved!

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

5.3: Fighting fake emotions: an AAC users' plea to spread awareness about pseudobulbar affect

Güney, Omer - Author

Submission ID

30

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

My name is Ömer Güney, an AAC user with cerebral palsy. "Do you ever laugh when you don't want to?" a friend once asked me. This simple question sparked eye-opening research and inspired this presentation. As a child, I was often described as someone who always laughed - a description that stayed with me into adulthood. In my teenage years, I frequently felt embarrassed when I laughed at things that weren't funny at all. No one had explained pseudobulbar affect to me - a neurological condition that causes involuntary and unintentional episodes of highly elevated emotional expressions. Similar to how cerebral palsy causes involuntary movements due to brain damage, it can also trigger involuntary emotions. Although PBA caused only mild embarrassment in my case, it can lead to much more serious consequences, such as a negative self-image or even social isolation. Through this presentation, I aim to share my AAC journey - focusing on emotional expressions - to raise awareness about pseudobulbar affect and its impact on individuals like me.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

5.4: Being Heard: Implementing Individualised Mental Health Support for AAC Users – Insights from Practice and Research

Rees, Kirstie - Author; McMillan, Claire - Co-Author

Submission ID

104

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This presentation explores the planning, implementation, and evaluation of individualised mental health support for four adults with cerebral palsy who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). The therapeutic support was provided by a consultant psychologist in collaboration with a speech and language therapist, both part of the multi-agency team at Cerebral Palsy Scotland. This was developed in response to referrals and service-user feedback, which identified a gap in mental health provision for adult AAC users. The session will begin with an overview of relevant literature on AAC and mental health. Consideration will also be given to the early development and life experiences of AAC users with cerebral palsy, including the impact of communication barriers, reduced autonomy, and social exclusion on their emotional wellbeing. This will be followed by information about how the 9 therapeutic sessions were planned and delivered, alongside an analysis of the evaluation. Common themes emerged, including the importance of being listened to, the need for sufficient time to explore issues, and the value of flexible, individualised approaches. Reflections from the psychologist and speech and language therapist highlight the importance of understanding an individual's developmental history, communication style, and therapeutic needs, as well as the benefits of collaborative working. Outcomes of this intervention inform early recommendations for developing professional training and adapting mental health support for AAC users that promotes autonomy and meaningful communication. Delivered jointly by the psychologist and speech and language therapist - and with input from an AAC user - this presentation foregrounds the lived experiences and emotional needs of AAC users. It is relevant to all professionals supporting mental health and wellbeing in clinical or community settings.

References (Optional)

Mental health and mental health problems among users of AAC: a scoping review Østvik, 2024. Theory of Mind in Children with Severe Speech and Physical Impairments: Nakken et al., 2010. Loneliness Experiences of Young Adults with CP Using AAC, Cooper et al., 2009. Communication Partners' Experiences with Adults Using AAC, Hanley et al., 2023. Mental Health Assessment for Individuals with Communication Needs, Di Marco & Iacono, 2007. Fuller references can be provided if requested.

Level

General Session

Age Group - Adult

5.5: Measuring AAC User Linguistic Competence: A Novel Approach

Niemeijer, David - Author; Zisk, Alyssa - Co-Author; Sheldon, Erin - Co-Author

Submission ID

46

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

This session explores how to measure multiple dimensions of linguistic competence for language produced with AAC systems. Light (1989) distinguished four forms of communicative competence in AAC: linguistic competence, operational competence, social competence, and strategic competence. Linguistic competence includes managing the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic aspects of language and their expression within the language organization of the AAC system. Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) (Rice et al., 2010) has long been used to capture language proficiency, including for AAC use. However, MLU is not sufficient or robust for language produced with AAC systems (Binger et al., 2020; Niemeijer & Sheldon, 2023). We therefore explore how to measure the multiple dimensions of linguistic competence robustly while maintaining privacy. We analyzed anonymous language use data from over 30,000 symbol-supported and text-based AAC systems. We identified several potential methods to measure the syntactic, semantic, morphological, and phonological components of linguistic competence while respecting AAC user privacy. Measures were compared to factors such as grid size, vocabulary level, percentage of words typed, and symbol-based versus text-based systems. We found inconsistent patterns and low correlations for the density measures compared to the diversity measures, which showed significant higher correlations. The most robust measures were based on the lexical diversity (Covington & McFall, 2010; Charest et al., 2020) and syntactic diversity of spontaneous novel utterances (not including pre-programmed phrases, Hill, 2014). Further measures for morphology and phonology should continue to be developed and tested, but there is some value to considering morphological diversity and the percentage of correctly spelled unique words for these aspects of linguistic competence.

References (Optional)

Binger, C., Kent-Walsh, J., Harrington, N., & Hollerbach, Q. C. (2020). Tracking early sentence-building progress in graphic symbol communication. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 51(2), 317-328. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_LSHSS-19-00065 Covington, M. A., & McFall, J. D. (2010). Cutting the Gordian Knot: The Moving-Average Type–Token Ratio (MATTR). Journal of Quantitative Linguistics, 17(2), 94-100. https://doi.org/10.1080/09296171003643098 Hill, K. (2014). Achieving Success in AAC: Assessment and Intervention. AAC Institute. https://aacinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Achieving-Success-In-AAC.pdf Light, J. (1989). Toward a definition of communicative competence for individuals using augmentative and alternative communication systems. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 5(2), 137-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618912331275126 Niemeijer, D. & Sheldon, E. (2023, Nov 17). Beyond MLU: Using Lexical Diversity to Measure AAC User Linguistic Competence [Conference Presentation]. ASHA 2023 Convention, Boston, MA, United States. https://plan.core-apps.com/asha2023/event/519b79a2279abf51f2a245ec7a7447fc Rice, M. L., Smolik, F., Perpich, D., Thompson, T., Rytting, N., & Blossom, M. (2010). Mean length of utterance levels in 6-month intervals for children 3 to 9 years with and without language impairments. Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research, 53(2), 333-349. https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0183)

Level

Specialist Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

The presenters work for AssistiveWare, and AssistiveWare paid for the presented research, but the session is not about any products

5.6: Overcoming barriers when creating a multilingual AAC system with the use of code switching

Ebbage-Taylor, Meaghan - Author; Hodgson, Megan - Co-Author

Submission ID

45

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

As part of our role at Ace Centre we are often faced with multilingual clients who require AAC. It is important for us to consider the client's home language as this is part of their identity and culture. One of the clients we have supported recently moved to the Isle of Wight from Ukraine. The ultimate goal for the family is to return home. We were conscious to establish a robust AAC system to support the development of both his English and Ukrainian. When first meeting him and the team around him, we completed the 'Language exposure and attitude questionnaire' (Pert, 2023) to establish his language background, exposure, and attitudes in Ukrainian. Following this questionnaire, it was apparent there was a need to create a bespoke AAC system, enabling him to code switch between both languages. Code switching naturally occurs using speech, however using AAC to do so can often be challenging (King & Soto, 2022). Sadiku et al., (2023) identified that rarely AAC systems allow page-by-page codeswitching between languages. We experienced this challenge first hand so worked closely with Jabbla to create a bespoke version of Picture Word Power. Although Google translate was used to facilitate this, we gained advice from native speakers to ensure this was appropriate. We worked with the client's team, and his mother to ensure they were confident in implementing the vocabulary. Mitchell and Baker (2024) highlighted by using the client's home language, this can increase care giver involvement in supporting AAC use, which we experienced. In this presentation we will discuss the process of overcoming the challenges to develop a bespoke bilingual AAC system in English and Ukrainian for this client.

References (Optional)

King, M. R., & Soto, G. (2022). Code-switching using aided AAC: toward an integrated theoretical framework. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 38(1), 67–76. Mitchell, S., & Baker, C. (2024). Bilingualism, augmentative and alternative communication, and communication disability: a scoping review. Journal of Clinical Practice in Speech-Language Pathology, 26(1), 30–41. Pert, S. (2023.), Working with Children Experiencing

Speech and Language Disorders in a Bilingual Context: A home Language Approach. Oxon: Routledge. Sadiku, L., Small, K., and Martin, S. (2023). Augmentative and Alternative Communication. In S. Pert (Ed.), Working with Children Experiencing Speech and Language Disorders in a Bilingual Context: A home Language Approach (pp. 182-196). Oxon: Routledge.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

5.7: Developing an Assistive Technology Competency Framework

Slaughter, Rohan - Author; Griffiths, Tom - Co-Author

Submission ID

105

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

This presentation summarises the findings and areas of future development from a research project undertaken in 2024 by the presenters and their partners at The Ace Centre, Natspec TechAbility and the Karten Network. This work was commissioned by the DfE (Department for Education) with the aim of developing an Assistive Technology Competency Framework to identify what skills across the AT implementation pathway (assessment, provisioning, ongoing support and review) are needed by staff members in various pupil or student facing roles. The presenters will highlight aspects relevant to the CM community, including computer access and AAC. Provision of AT in specialist education contexts is often dependent on localised expertise, or on individuals with an interest and enthusiasm for the topic. To date, no formal training pathways exist for the majority of learner-facing staff who support AT, and no agreed framework of skills and competencies informs the training that does exist. This has been cited as a barrier to the development of new AT training pathways for learner-facing staff. This work addresses this gap by proposing a competency framework of knowledge and skills required by different job roles across the AT implementation pathway. This framework is the result of a comprehensive review of published literature in the field, combined with exploratory work conducted by the research team with participants from specialist schools and colleges in England. Expert sources (staff working in various roles in ‘AT mature’ special schools and specialist colleges) have been consulted to determine what current AT professionals in specialist schools and colleges see as the minimum required standards for staff working across the AT implementation pathway. This

work supports and builds on previous DfE funded research by Edyburn (2020) , whose recommendations directly informed the project. In particular, this report highlights the benefits of increased AT training provision.

References (Optional)

1. Edyburn, D. (2020) Rapid literature review on assistive technology in education', Department for Education. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/937381/UKAT_FinalReport_082520.pdf 2. Vabulas, G. (2023) Frontline Accessibility: Building ATech Awareness and Confidence Among Public Service Professionals. ATech Policy Lab. Available at: https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/frontline-accessibility-building-atech-awareness-and-confidence-among-public-service (Accessed: 3 October 2024). 3. Austin, V. et al. (2023) Assistive Technology Changes Lives: an assessment of AT need and capacity in England. Cabinet Office, HMG. 4. European Standards, Competencies and Occupations Database for Assistive Technologist: https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification/occupation?uri=http://data.europa.eu/esco/occupation/4e82464b-e9d7-4d51-9116-294ab40c5169 5. Natspec TechAbility Standards: https://www.techability.org.uk/techability-standards/

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

5.8: Introducing AAC within ALD team

Williams, Ruth - Author

Submission ID

28

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This presentation will discuss the changes made to the care pathways within a Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Adults with Learning Disabilities Team, focusing on the AAC pathway. This is a local SLT team at Guy's and St Thomas' covering three low socio-economic boroughs in London with limited resources of staffing, funding and equipment. The team is community-based providing lifelong therapy support for communication and dysphagia (eating and drinking difficulties) for Adults with Learning Disabilities. A client group which is infrequently discussed in relation to AAC, however 90% of this population have communication difficulties (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2000). The commission for social care inspection, (2007) found that at least 45 % of adults with a learning disability have significant communication impairments. About 60% of people with

learning disabilities have some skills in symbolic communication, such Makaton or symbols (Foundation for people with learning disabilities, 2000), meaning AAC could support this group's communication. The AAC pathway includes assessment at a local level as the majority of the Adults with Learning Disability team's caseload do not meet the eligibility criteria for specialist AAC services. Due to clients not meeting this eligibility criteria for provision of electronic AAC and our service not having funds to provide these devices the AAC pathway had to include approaches to support AAC provision through other means. The development of the AAC pathway will be shared. Case studies reviewing the practical implementation of this pathway will be discussed; covering outcomes and challenges faced by working within the above Adults with Learning Disabilities team. Lastly, reflection on learnings and the adaptions required will be presented.

References (Optional)

Commission for Social Care Inspection. 2007. Growing Up Matters: Better transition planning for young people with complex needs. London: Commission for Social Care Inspection. Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. 2000. Everyday Lives, Everyday Choices. London:The Mental Health Foundation. Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. 2008. Parliament, Joint committee on human rights website. [Online] [Accessed 14th April 2025] Available from: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200708/jtselect/jtrights/40/40we104.htm?utm

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

P1: The Evolving Landscape of Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT) Research

Clarke, Zoe - Author

Submission ID

74

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

The specialism of Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT) remains relatively new. Early developments in the 1960s introduced environmental control (EC) technologies, followed by the emergence of the first communication aids in the 1970s. Since then, there has been significant progress in device innovation, service delivery models, and the broader

understanding of the role and purpose of EAT. Alongside this evolution, a growing body of research has emerged—led by key pioneers in the field—laying the foundation for ongoing enquiry. The role of the clinical academic is increasingly recognised within the NHS, but pursuing this path poses challenges, particularly related to time and funding. Nevertheless, clinical academic models ensure that research remains closely aligned with real-world clinical needs. Research also forms a critical component of continuing professional development (CPD). This has led to the establishment of groups such as Clinical Academics in AT, EC Research Group, and the AAC Research Group. These communities provide peer support, foster collaboration, and help solidify the identity of clinical academics and professionals engaged in EAT research. EAT research has been at the forefront of integrating lived experience into academic enquiry. Importantly, the field has moved beyond simply involving individuals with lived experience in research as participants. There is now a growing emphasis on empowering these individuals to lead and conduct research themselves. Initiatives such as Voice Up, Research Matters, and Straight Talking, exemplify this participatory approach. This poster introduces the EAT Research Forest model, which conceptualises the current research environment. Within this metaphor, individuals and contributions are represented as seeds, saplings, trees, and mature trees, alongside “wise owls” and “squirrels”—symbolising the various roles people play in EAT, not limited to formal research activities. This model helps identify less-developed areas within the field and encourages exploration into the causes and opportunities for growth.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

P2: Local AAC Service Improvement Project

O'Boyle, Eleanor - Author

Submission ID

80

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

To support service improvement within our trust, the organisation funded a new short term role: AHP Clinical Practice Educator. Within Adult Speech & Language Therapy, it was decided that the funding (for one day a week, for one year, January - December 2024) would be used to improve our AAC service provision in order to provide excellent, person centred care that gave more service users a voice. In 2023, NHS South Yorkshire ICB funded a project (Broomfield et al, 2023) exploring the local services that support and provide

Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT). They identified “current gaps in pathways” and made key recommendations around workforce development and centralising resource management across the region - our local service improvement project was developed in response to this work. The service was benchmarked against 30 standards, identified using national, regional & service user guidance; and a staff questionnaire was completed, including quantitative and qualitative data collection. The data collected supported the refining of project aims, which were categorised into 3 strands for improvement; Workforce development, Resource management and Patient involvement. The project facilitated staff training and improved equipment management, organising resources and developing robust systems. Regular engagement with staff, liaison with other services to share best practice and the completion of a patient interview helped to maintain focus on improvement that benefitted service users and the workforce. Overall, the aims of the project were achieved and quality improvement was more embedded in the service. Local SLT services support the majority of AAC service users and often refer into the specialist services; it is vital that we strive for service improvement to upskill our workforce, improve the management of local resources and include patients in our service development and provision.

References (Optional)

Broomfield, K. 2023. ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES. Exploring local services and pathways to access technology for health and care in South Yorkshire. NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

P3: Empowering Voices: Creating a holistic approach for pupil voice initiatives in special schools - A case study from Moorcroft school

Jackson, Sophie - Author; Aubrey, Danielle - Co-Author

Submission ID

39

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Pupil voice in schools represents a commitment to listening to the wishes, views, and experiences of all children and young people, empowering them to understand and express

their identity. It is crucial that pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) have a platform where they feel seen, valued, and understood. At Moorcroft School, we have embarked on a journey to establish multiple pupil voice initiatives, including a school council that is inclusive and accessible for all, that reflects the diverse needs and identities of our pupils. After some research, we discovered limited resources and guidance for setting up a meaningful school council for our cohort of SEN pupils. It appeared that they were predominantly designed for a mainstream school cohort. Our ethos was to ensure that every pupil has a voice that is heard and an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their school's development. We want every pupil to actively participate in decision-making processes focusing on our five core values of the school council: friendships, environment, health, community, and opinions. In turn, we aimed to create guidance and resources that can be shared with other school councils. We created activities and resources that can be differentiated to each pupil's communication strengths and needs. By ensuring Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is embedded into the culture of the school, we support pupils to participate fully. Additionally, our multi-sensory approach ensures that all pupils can effectively engage with the topics. This method fosters inclusivity and empowers pupils to express their identities and contribute meaningfully to their school community. Through our case study, we demonstrate how a truly inclusive school council can ensure that all pupils, regardless of their communication style or ability, can shape their school environment. We concluded that this has a positive impact on the pupils' sense of identity and belonging.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

P4: Introduction to L&H AAC and AT Solutions

Ritchie, Laith Thomas - Author

Submission ID

72

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Introducing myself, I am Laith Ritchie, Founder and owner of L&H AAC and AT Solutions. As an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and assistive technology (AT) user myself, I understand and empathise with other individuals with AAC and AT requirements. With this in mind and having some background working as an AAC Mentor with AT Therapy, I realised there is a major gap for a service that was user-led but also with a real drive of ambition and focus on AAC and AT solutions for those with complex communication needs

and/or physical needs. In this presentation I would like to share an introduction to L&H AAC and AT Solutions as well as sharing with you information on our services. Following this, I would like to discuss and break down how we work with the clients, their families and the support teams around them. Following our discussion on services and the business model, I will spend some time discussing why user-led and experience focused engagement with our clientele allows us to deliver a tailored and professional approach with respected outcomes. Given the market and its nature of high demand and little supply, the appropriate networking groups and I understand that without the foundation of trust to deliver, a service such as ours is not going to be desired and sought by the necessary individuals who would benefit from what we offer.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

Details of sponsorship

L&H AAC and AT Solutions

TUESDAY

Plenary: How my words work

Knight, Jamie - Author

Submission ID

122

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

I'm Jamie and this is Lion, we bounce around being helpful & making things. So many things… accessibility things, crime fighting things and sometimes even things in space. Millions of people use things we made everyday. We're also semi speaking. Helping my communication flow has been a lifetime of experimentation and learning. In recent years we stumbled on some very subtle, but very useful questions; Am I unable to speak? Am I incapable of speech in this context, or am I out of speech capacity for the day? Distinguishing between my ability, capability and capacity opened the door to new ways for me to communicate. This talk presents a deep dive into our experience of communication. We'll share the map we're using to find our way and some of the tools and techniques which enable us to understand and to be understood.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

AssistiveWare are paying for my speaker's fee

LT6.1: Can AAC be cathartic?

Keane, Ally - Author; Bates, Patrick - Co-Author

Submission ID

16

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Oral histories have been used to help democratise history and access voices often hidden from history. AAC users' experiences have been missing from the history of AAC, and more widely, disability history. This paper will focus on how we conduct oral histories with AAC users, the benefits of conducting these oral histories, and highlight that these opportunities can be cathartic for people who take part. We will focus on Patrick's experiences of sharing his memories from his childhood onwards. "When I read in Friday's announcements that Ally was looking for participants for this research, I wanted to share my historical AAC experience over my 57-year life and the various AAC devices I have. I have loved it, and the multiple questions Ally has asked me have triggered memories, so this project has definitely been cathartic." We hope that this opens a wider discussion around allowing AAC users to share their historic experiences, with each other and wider society.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT6.1: I am who I am – a journey of self-identity across cultures

Graz, Heather - Author; Qi, Huiwen - Co-Author

Submission ID

113

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

“I’m just a Chinese girl, not Superman!”. These were the words of a Chinese assistive technology user who has cerebral palsy whilst successfully completing a postgraduate degree in Britain last year. We presented the communication- and education-related experiences of this student in a previous presentation. This student’s decision to study a full-time postgraduate course that was taught in a new country and in a second language also highlights the role of self-identity in making life choices and realising future plans. Knowing and being comfortable with who we are as individuals is one of the foundations for being able to be the best that we can be as individuals and within our broader communities, and contributes to quality of life, sensemaking and decision-making. Developing self-identity is a dynamic and lifelong process. It is a journey where internal resources such as personality, expectations and capacity for resilience interact with external influences such as environmental support, cultural norms and societal rules. We present a first-hand account of the process, challenges and outcomes of the journey of re-defining self-identity as an adult with cerebral palsy with experience of living in different countries. We cover topics including the influence of different cultures on translating self-identity into practice; adjusting expectations when moving between different societies and cultures, and working towards self-advocacy and career progression in more restrictive environments. Finally, we present key learnings about prioritising self-identity and using it as a tool to achieve career and life goals.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT6.1: How AAC has changed my life: An inspirational story of AAC Success

Madera, Annamaria - Author; Rota, Stefania - Co-Author; Henderson, Deborah - Co-Author

Submission ID

87

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

This lightning talk will focus on the inspirational personal story of Debra, an 18-year-old student originally from Uganda, who has cerebral palsy and uses eye gaze technology as her primary method of communication and learning. In Uganda, despite limited access to assistive technologies, Debra's determination and the dedication of her mother enabled her to develop literacy skills using low-tech methods. The pivotal moment in Debra's life came when she received a donated eye gaze device. Adapting to the technology required patience and persistence, but over time, it became a transformative tool. This talk will highlight the life-changing power of accessible technology, inclusive education, and the resilience of young disabled individuals when given the right support.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

Communication and Learning Enterprises

6.2: Becoming a critical user… A Workshop on Influencing the Design of AAC Technology

Waller, Annalu - Author; Griffiths, Tom - Co-Author

Submission ID

99

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Active involvement of end users at all stages of development is crucial for the design of systems which meet real-world needs and are easy to use. User-Centred Design (UCD) is a

process that aims to consider the whole user experience by including multiple stakeholders in the design process. Crucially, UCD proposes that the user is involved in all phases of design; from problem specification, through solution prototyping and evaluation (Norman, 2013). Although UCD has become good practice in the development of mainstream software, the involvement of users in the design of AAC systems remains less common (Tönsing, et al. 2022). This may be due in part to the challenges of adapting design tasks for disabled designers, but may also link to the difficulty design teams encounter when recruiting skilled users to act as critical subject matter experts and co-designers, a subtly different role from that of an “expert by experience”. One way to encourage the involvement of more users in the design of AAC systems is to equip people to be more critical in their feedback on products. It is often difficult for users to “think outside the box” when considering the challenges they face, or the potential of technology to solve these: users need to be able to identify and describe their needs without being limited to what they think technology can and cannot do. This workshop will provide participants with insights into the design process so that they can provide critical feedback on AAC systems, as well as being able to identify areas where technology could support unmet needs. By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to: i) identify aspects of good and poor design; and ii) describe a need for technology in a structured way.

References (Optional)

Norman, D.A. The Design of Everyday Things: Revised and Expanded Edition; MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013; ISBN 978-0-262-52567-1. Tönsing, K., Bartram, J., Morwane, R.E., & Waller, A. (2022). Designing electronic graphic symbol-based AAC systems: A scoping review. Part 2: Application of human-centred design. Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology. https://doi.org/10.1080/17483107.2022.2148188

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

6.3: Communication Freedom

Thompson, Grace - Author

Submission ID

20

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

How do we create an environment that supports people with unreliable and insufficient speech, and who find speech exhausting? Speech requires a high level of processing, something which can be difficult and exhausting for Disabled and Neurodivergent people. However, using multi-modal communications and incorporating Universal Design, communicating can stretch beyond speech to make it accessible for everyone. Having access to equipment like an AAC device and learning BSL has changed my life, because it makes communicating easier and means I can better express myself, without becoming exhausted by trying to speak or process speech from others. My workshop will demonstrate the difficulty many people experience in processing speech, and show how this is exhausting, so that people who may not find it such themselves can understand. Advocating for others to have access to what they need to communicate is also incredibly important, because it gives individuals the tools they need to then advocate for themselves and ensure their needs are met. Similarly, people with unreliable speech need support from other people both in encouraging the use of communication aids, and in advocating for them. Reducing the stigma around the use of communication aids will also lead to communication freedom, because people who would benefit from these aids would not feel pressured out of using them, or be reluctant to utilise these highly useful tools. Speech is always seen as superior, but challenging this assumption shows that AAC, BSL and other communications aids can actually support and add to communication and speech, these methods do not take away from speech, but supplement it. Furthermore, I will highlight how creating an environment that encourages communication from everyone, not just from those who speak, is key to creating an inclusive space where everyone can thrive and participate, regardless of disability.

References (Optional)

https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8992808/#:~:text=speech%20to%20communicate.-,Autistic%20people%20who%20use%20speech%20may%20experience%20intermittent%2C%20unreliable%2C%20and,their%20preferences%20or%20intended%20meaning.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

6.4: Research Matters Workshop

Preece, Jamie - Co-Author; Sullivan, Emma - Co-Author; Oppenheim, Matt - Author; Broomfield, Katherine - Author; Moran, Charlie - Author; Toogood, Jon - Co-Author

Submission ID

36

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

This workshop is for AAC users and others to come along and see how easy and interesting it is to be involved with research. Researchers don't always know where they are going and need people who are interested in their work to guide them. As an AAC user you don't need to know anything about research to be a valuable participant and help push forwards the future of AAC. Recently, the Research Matters group was set up. This is hosted by Communication Matters with the goal of supporting the charity's strategic objective to "support productive research connections". The aims of this group are:

- To raise awareness about research with the AAC community, including knowledge of best practise.
- To connect people who are interested in research with one another to support research with the AAC community
- Provide an opportunity to share research with both the AAC community and the wider research community.

Membership is open to anybody who has an interest in AAC research. Members include AAC users, researchers, technologists, speech therapists and other interested people. Research Matters has four meetings a year. The group has identified the need for creating resources to enable researchers to be involved with AAC research e.g. resources to help with obtaining ethical approval prior to conducting research. The aim of holding a workshop at the Communication Matters conference is to invite anyone who is interested in the future of AAC research to join us at an interactive workshop. This workshop will explore how to build better relationships between the AAC community and researchers. We will use the feedback from this workshop to:

- Develop ideas for research projects.
- Identify what Research Matters can do to connect people to research and opportunities
- Build connections with people interested in research.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

6.5: Empowering Inclusive Play and Communication through AAC: A Relational Practice Based Approach at Saltersgate School

Gourlay, Rea - Author; Marr, Keela - Co-Author

Submission ID

58

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Children with profound learning and mobility differences often have limited access and choice in play- posing a potential barrier to inclusion. At Saltersgate School, we are committed to enhancing communication through inclusive play. This presentation explores how AAC can be used to enhance access, agency and communication through play. The case study was a class of learners who fall into the aforementioned group. Using a transdisciplinary, enquiry-based approach grounded in relational practice, we focused on recognising and responding to intentional communication—often expressed subtly through facial expressions and eye-movements. By allowing time and space to 'be with' each child, we explored music and toys together, uncovering each child's unique communicative responses and preferences. Guided by individual knowledge of our children, we identified preferred stimuli, then introduced head switches and Bluetooth speakers for independent activation of favourite music. This progressed to the use of switch-adapted toys then dual head switches, thus offering a choice. Using Curricular Continuum of Engagement and Lundy's model of participation, we reflected on space, voice, audience—and crucially, influence. Rather than relying on the limited selection of adapted toys, we used our observations alongside input from families, to adapt the specific toys that mattered most to each child. This allowed them to activate their preferred toys rather than us- resulting in increased engagement and progression such as intentionally switching between effects. We noticed parallel play and cognitive understanding, such as listen and response skills we hadn't previously- allowing progression in communication- such as the potential for a yes/no switch to be introduced. Our journey highlights the importance of listening differently and adapting creatively. By embracing individualised communication we can remove barriers and support every child as an active participant in play and communication. We invite reflection on how this approach might be applied more widely to enrich inclusive practice.

References (Optional)

Lundy L 2008, 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child -Article 12—Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. Grace J, 2025- Recognising the belonging of people with PIMD in research through a collaborative exploration of identity and belonging. Rausch et al 2021- transdisciplinary practice to maximise inclusion. Money, D., & Thurman, S. (1994). Talkabout communication. Coll. Speech Lang. Ther. Bull, 504, 12-13.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

6.6: Knowing Me, Knowing You: Expressing Identity through Personal Communication Passports

MacGregor, Ceanna - Author; Courtney, Joanna - Co-Author

Submission ID

96

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This presentation will explore the role of Personal Communication Passports (PCPs) in supporting individuals who use AAC. PCPs are collaboratively created, personalised, user-centred tools designed to share essential information about a person's communication preferences, needs, and strengths to help people get to know them. PCPs empower the AAC user (author) to express themselves more fully and engage meaningfully in social, educational, and healthcare settings. However, the key concepts of PCPs often get lost in translation and are instead, used as a more impersonal document shared between professionals. In this session, we aim to share what makes an effective, personalised PCP. Drawing on real examples and experience, this session will highlight how well-designed PCPs contribute to improved understanding, respect, and support for AAC users. Attendees will learn best practices for creating and updating PCPs in collaboration with AAC users, families, and those who support them, ensuring that each passport reflects the person's unique identity and communication style. There will also be an interactive section where attendees will reflect on what they feel is important to them and what they would consider essential information to share in their own PCP.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

6.7: FUNctional Switching

Danger, Charlie - Author; Hesketh, Kezia - Co-Author

Submission ID

34

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This session presents a highly practical, activity-led approach to developing switch access for AAC, rooted in the work of Linda Burkhart, Ian Bean, and Jones & King. Central to the model is a customisable activity book designed to engage learners in meaningful, motivating tasks that drive rapid progression from cause-and-effect to purposeful scanning - always with communication in mind. Each activity is crafted to build motor and cognitive readiness while keeping learning fun and accessible. Designed for use by teaching assistants, parents, and educators alike, the materials work across home and school environments, making switch development a shared, consistent experience. Framing this process is the "gears" analogy: a way to understand how learners shift between levels of access depending on task demands, energy, and context. Rather than a rigid sequence, this flexible model supports moving up or down through “gears” to match the learner’s moment-to-moment needs - while maintaining momentum toward AAC use. Attendees will leave with a structured yet dynamic toolset, grounded in established frameworks but adapted for real-world application. The focus is on empowering teams to deliver motivating, purposeful switch activities that support autonomy, engagement, and communication from the very first press.

References (Optional)

Burkhart, L. (2018). Teaching Switch Use for Beginning Communicators and Learners with Multiple Challenges. ASHA Perspectives. https://lindaburkhart.com Burkhart, L. (2012). Stepping Stones to Switch Access. https://lindaburkhart.com Inclusive Technology & Bean, I. (n.d.). The Switch Progression Road Map. https://www.inclusive.co.uk/articles/switch-progression-roadmap Jones, T., & King, J. (n.d.). Stages in Switch Development. ATcourse. https://atcourse.org/resources/Stages_in_Switch_Development_Jones_and_King.pdf CENMAC. (n.d.). Developing Switch Skills – Activity-Based Learning for AAC Access. https://cenmac.com/resources/developing-switch-skills

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

CENMAC and Ace Centre.

6.8: An introduction to 3D printed communication symbols and reflections on the journey so far

Harrison, Claire - Author

Submission ID

76

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This session will explore the development of a set of new resources as part of the ‘CALL Core Word Kit’ Project. The Core Word Kit is a toolbox of Assistive Technology, communication supports, lesson plans, and resources that are available to schools in Scotland through the CALL Scotland Loan Bank. The Core Word Kit includes a variety of printed communication boards - ‘Core Word Boards’ - and, inspired by the Centre for Literacy & Disability Studies set of 3D-printed Core Words and the 'Volksswitch' resources, we have been exploring and developing 3D-printed versions of the Communication Boards available in the Core Word Kit. The session will offer a general introduction to the world of 3D Printing, exploring the process, practicalities, and possibilities of using 3D Printers to create resources to support communication. We will outline the steps in creating the Core Word Kit 3D-Printed Communication symbols and explore the lessons learned in the development process and changes made along the way. We will share reflections from schools that have been piloting these resources in classrooms with children and young people who have complex communication support needs and consider the next steps for developing these resources further.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Child

7.1: More Than Words Per Minute: Perception of Speed in Eye Gaze Text-Based AAC

Vonica, Maria - Author; Diener, Bethany - Author

Submission ID

129

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

The efficiency of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems is influenced by various factors and can be measured in multiple ways. Words per minute (WPM) is a common metric, but it doesn't capture communication efficiency due to individual language use variations. Error rate calculation also provides incomplete information as not all errors impact function communication. Factors affecting communication speech with eye gaze AAC include processing speed, working memory, cognitive-linguistic impairments, and literacy/language abilities. Physical eye-tracking skills also play a role. Self-rating questions can assess these factors and compare functional outcomes. Alternative speed measurements, such as the Keystroke Saving Rate (KSR), reflect the economy of keystrokes needed to produce an utterance (Cai, S. et al., 2023). A negative KSR indicates significant editing and corrections suggests a high cognitive load and a perception of slowness despite the final output speed. The use of pre-composed phrases by the AAC users indicates that relying on real-time typing speed underestimates the overall communicative output. Utterance repetition due to conversational dynamics also impacts the perceived flow and speed. Eyetracking performance studies highlight that typing speed is influenced by age and learning, and adjustments to dwell-click time can balance speed and error prevention. Efficiency in AAC is also impacted by working memory and processing speed. Targeting or treating these issues results in some improvement in speed, but there is no evidence that training generalizes to language production. Simplifying language-based tasks may improve processing speed. A proposed measurement method, based on the format of the ASHA Quality of Communication Life Scale, collects information about speed and effort by eye tracking users. Understanding these factors is important as the industry integrates AI features and large language models. Improved visual feedback, efficiency features, and customization options can enhance individuals' perception of their speed and efficiency when using eye gaze AAC.

References (Optional)

Cai, S., Venugopalan, S., Tomanek, K., Kane, S., Morris, M. R., Noel, R. J., … & Beavers, J. (2023). SpeakFaster Observer: Long-term instrumentation of eye-gaze typing for measuring AAC communication. CHI23 Case Studies of HCI in Practice, Caligari, M., Giardini, M., Arcolin, I., Godi, M., Corna, S., & Colombo, R. (2021). Writing with the eyes: The effect of age on eye-tracking performance in non-disabled adults and a comparison with bimanual typing. Computational Intelligence and Neuroscience, 2021, Article 9365199. https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/9365199 Calvo, A., et al. (2008). Eye tracking impact on quality-of-life of ALS patients. In Miesenberger, K., Klaus, J., Zagler, W., & Karshmer, A. (Eds.), Computers helping people with special needs. ICCHP 2008. Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Vol. 5105). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-70540-6_9 Hamid, A., & Kristensson, P. O. (2024). 40 years of eye typing: Challenges, gaps, and emergent strategies. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 8(ETRA), Article 222, 19 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3655596 Paul, D. R., Frattali, C. M., Holland, A. L., Thompson, C. K., Caperton, C. J., & Slater, S. C. (2004). Quality of Communication Life Scale (ASHA QCL). American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

Level

General Session

Age Group
Adult

7.2: AAGI: Augmentative and Alternative Gesture Interface

Yoda, Ikushi - Author

Submission ID

131

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

Augmentative and Alternative Gesture Interface (AAGI) is the gesture interface software for individuals with motor dysfunction who cannot use normal interface switches. These users have cerebral palsy, quadriplegia, or traumatic brain injury and experience involuntary movement, spasticity, etc. Our aim is to provide these individuals with an easy and low-cost interface for operating Windows PCs, controlling indoor environment, playing games, and maintaining contact in-house. To this end, we utilized commercially available RGB-D cameras, and developed a non-contact, non-constraint interface. We collected effective 1745 gestures from 80 persons with motor dysfunction and classified voluntary movements based on body part. Based on this data, we researched and developed seven recognition modules dependent on body parts and two independent recognition modules. The seven recognition modules are Head, Around-Eyes, Mouth-Tongue, Shoulder, Finger, Knee, and Foot. The two recognition modules are Front object and Slight movement. AAGI can now utilize two cameras simultaneously. Please check our HP. If you install our software and only connect the designated camera to your Windows PC, the gesture interface is available. We have started the spread of software in Japan. We have held classes for Japanese Association of Occupational Therapists and lend PCs and RGB-D cameras in free to hospitals and care centers for introduction of the software. Over fifty medical facilities are now utilizing the software for inpatients. The users use the software for controlling Windows PCs, games (PC games, Steam, Nintendo Switch, SONY PlayStation and MS Xbox), home electric appliances, etc. AAGI is already in use in practice in the UK and Denmark.

References (Optional)

http://gesture-interface.jp/en/

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

7.3: Motor Automaticity in AAC: Enhancing Communication Efficiency and Social Connection with LAMP

Halloran, Cindy - Author; Halloran, John - Author; McLemore, Lance - Co-Author

Submission ID

97

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

This presentation examines the development of motor automaticity in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and its benefits, such as enhanced communication rate, reduced cognitive load, and improved speech segmentation. Motor automaticity occurs when consistent motor execution and sensory feedback of a goal-directed activity are repeated over time, allowing for faster and more efficient motor skills. Research by Thistle et al. (2018) demonstrated that consistent icon placement improved preschoolers' symbol location rates after just five practice sessions. When using AAC to communicate, automaticity allows individuals to focus on other aspects of communication, such as thought formulation and social cues. While typical speech rates are 2-3 words per second, AAC users often produce less than 15 words per minute. Achieving automaticity in AAC "articulation," the motor movement required to activate sound—can significantly enhance communication rates allowing users to communicate more efficiently, directing their attention to the content and social aspects of interactions. Typical speech and language development relies on the convergence of somatosensory, auditory, and visual inputs, beginning in infancy. Consistent pairing of motor and auditory inputs strengthens neural connections, as illustrated by Hebbs' principle: "neurons that fire together wire together." This integration plays a crucial role in auditory processing and speech perception. Studies by Wilson et al. (2004) and D'Ausilio et al. (2009) highlight the involvement of motor areas in speech perception, suggesting that consistent motor movements paired with words can enhance auditory discrimination and segmentation in AAC users. Lance McLemore will share his experiences with various AAC systems and encoding methods, highlighting their impact on his conversational abilities. Social isolation can be a significant issue for AAC users, and Lance underscores the role of AAC in fostering connections.

References (Optional)

Thistle, J., Holmes, S., Horn, M. & Reum, A. (2018). "Consistent Symbol Location Affects Motor Learning in Preschoolers Without Disabilities: Implications for Designing Augmentative and Alternative Communication Displays." American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 1-8. Wilson, S. M., Saygin, A. P., Sereno, M. I., Icaboni, M. (2004). "Listening to speech activates motor areas involved in speech production." Nature Neuroscience. 7 (7), 701-702. D'Ausilio, A., Pulvermuller, F., Salmas, P., Bufalari, I., Begliomini, C., and Fadiga, L. 2009. "The motor somatotopy of speech perception." Current Biology. 19, 1-5.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

7.4: Mounting Made Easy

Quick, Christian - Author; Tennent, Matt - Author; Causemann, Robert - Author

Submission ID

132

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

A proper mounting solution is a critical component for the success of assistive technology systems. Most computers, access methods, or communication aids will only be successful if mounted and positioned appropriately. However, those making assistive technology recommendations often overlook the importance of mounting. Fortunately, mounting does not have to be stressful or complicated. There are many universal solutions designed to work with virtually any switch, tablet or speech-generating device. And there are specific and individualized solutions tailored to meet the needs of all users. Most importantly, there are resources, technologies, services and support to help! Rehadapt is making it easier than ever to ensure your assistive technology is mounted perfectly. Join us in this session to examine the needs and requirements for mounting different assistive technologies with a focus on mounting speech generating devices, access methods (ie: switches), iPads, tablets, and phones. Explore different mounting solutions that allow users to access assistive technologies both in and out of wheelchairs in multiple environments. Utilize the latest in technology to find the exact solution for your specific needs. Our promise: Mounting made easy!

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

7.5: Practical solutions for digital accessibility

McIntyre, Fil - Author

Submission ID

133

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

There are many quick and simple adjustments you can make to ensure the technology in your organisation is accessible. This session will focus on a few of these and discuss the benefits for people who need alternative access. Some of these solutions are in technology you already own and will be able to implement next week. Some are not hardware or software but require simple changes in your practice. Other solutions may require you to take biscuits to the IT team! All of the solutions discussed will make a difference to individuals using technology and ensure that AT and AAC users have access to resources. Some solutions may even enable people to access technology where they previously could not. The training, consultancy and webinars available from TechAbility will also be outlined. Training and consultancy from TechAbility will enable exploration of these topics and others in more depth and will ensure all staff in your organisation have the knowledge and skills they need.

References (Optional)

https://www.techability.org.uk/

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

7.6: AAC Everywhere: bringing communication into everyday life

MacRae, Jess - Author; Smets, Eva - Author

Submission ID

127

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

In this talk, we will explore why communication is a fundamental human right and how AAC must be embedded into everyday life - not just as an accommodation, but as a standard for inclusion. Too often, non-speaking individuals face barriers in education, healthcare, and public spaces, limiting their ability to fully engage in society. AAC is not just a tool, it's a bridge to autonomy, participation, and equality. We will share how Smartbox is working to make AAC everywhere a reality through innovative products and services that empower non-speaking individuals. Our new Communication Boards are designed to integrate symbol-based communication into public spaces – playgrounds, libraries, transport hubs, hospitals, and schools - ensuring that AAC users can navigate the world with greater independence. We'll discuss how our boards were developed in partnership with Widgit, their impact on accessibility, and why integrating symbols into mainstream environments benefits everyone, not just AAC users. We're also excited to introduce our latest solution for creating personalised Communication Books with new print-ready grid sets. These ready-to-use grid sets allow AAC users to access familiar, personalised vocabulary, as part of their communication toolkit. Whether at school or on the go, customisable Communication Books provide an easy way to keep AAC everywhere. We believe that when AAC is everywhere, society becomes more accessible, inclusive, and connected. By the end of this session, you'll gain insights into why communication access is a shared responsibility and learn some practical tips to help normalise AAC in daily life. Join us as we explore how AAC everywhere isn't just a vision - it's the future of communication access for all.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT7.7: Empowering AAC Professionals: Clinical Supervision and Mentoring at Ace Centre

Leckenby, Katy - Author; McNeilly, Samantha - Co-Author

Submission ID

134

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

Ace Centre now offers Clinical Supervision and Mentoring services to support professionals working in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). These services are designed to help practitioners reflect on their work, build confidence, and develop their skills in a supportive and structured environment. Ace Centre's Clinical Supervision service offers a supportive space to take a deeper dive into your AAC user caseload. Facilitated by experienced speech and language therapists or occupational therapists, these sessions help you reflect on your current practice, explore new strategies, and gain fresh perspectives. Designed to complement your existing clinical supervision, they provide focused time to develop your AAC knowledge and confidence. In parallel, our Mentoring service connects practitioners with knowledgeable AAC consultants for tailored, one-to-one support. Whether you're just starting out or seeking to expand your expertise, mentoring provides practical guidance, confidence-building, and up-to-date insights to help you deliver the best possible support to AAC users. In this lightning talk, we'll introduce the structure and benefits of both services, share feedback from participants, and highlight how these offerings can enhance professional resilience and improve outcomes for AAC users.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

LT7.7 "I want to do what the others are doing" - 1Voice, AAC, and Identity

Cope, Jo - Author; Carroll, Dominic - Co-Author; Morris, Becky - Co-Author

Submission ID

125

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

"A world where the voice of every child and adult, however they communicate, is listened to and heard". Wanting to do what everyone else is doing and to feel included is a universal experience. Many AAC users are the only AAC user they know in their community, which can lead to negative feelings and experiences associated with their identity; and can contribute to AAC abandonment. Our charity organises social events for individuals and families who use AAC, to be part of an AAC community, meet role models, and access regional, national and online events. This provides social connection and networking for AAC users and those who support them, at any stage of their communication journey, to learn from and inspire each other. Our talk explores the ways that 1Voice's work focuses on,

and is influenced by, our identities: Our charity brings AAC users and their families together to socialise and support one another to normalise AAC, and how this helps them to feel safe and accepted in their identity. Our online parent/carer discussions provide a safe space to explore ever-changing identities in the face of ongoing challenges throughout parenthood in their unique circumstances. This reassures families that they aren't alone. The identities of our volunteers, all of whom have a passion for AAC that influences, and is influenced by, their professional or personal lives, including shared frustrations and shared learning. Finally, we touch on how our identity has evolved as a charity over 25 years, including the ways that we are continuing to grow.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

7.8: CandLE Books powered by Mind Express: Reimagining Accessible Reading Through Assistive Technology

Madera, Annamaria - Author; Stanton, Katie - Co-Author

Submission ID

136

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

'CandLE Books' is a new digital reading platform with built-in accessibility features, enabling users to independently control their reading experience. We have partnered with Jabbla to provide software compatible with eye-gaze, switches, joysticks, and touch-screen devices. Additionally, we have collaborated with several publishers across the UK to make commercially available books more accessible to people with physical disabilities. CandLE has spent many years developing strategies to remove barriers to learning for students who use AAC, with a strong focus on literacy skills. Developing reading and writing abilities allows for future participation in a broader curriculum, expands communication freedom, and encourages imagination. Reading also improves cognitive development, fosters emotional growth, boosts language skills, and strengthens connections with family members, friends, and classmates. The goal of CandLE Books is to empower users to independently access their reading - from selecting a book and turning pages to controlling audio output, highlighting text, bookmarking pages, and closing the book. In our session, we will discuss our journey to CandLE Books, demonstrate the software's functionality, and explore future goals for the project. We will be discussing our journey to CandLE Books, demonstrating the functions of the app and the accompanying literacy and AAC resources, as well as talking about future goals for this project.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

7.9: Tech Without Barriers: Real-Time Demos of Webcam-Based Access with SensePilot

Hazlewood, Mike - Author

Submission ID

137

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Abstract

SensePilot is a new software that allows computer control and gaming hands-free using only a person's head and face. It works with a regular webcam and helps people stay connected, independent, and in control. The hardware-free solution adapts to a wide range of needs – from everyday tasks, simple browsing, AAC apps to playing complex computer games. We demo some of the options of what's possible with SensePilot.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT8.1: Getting My Own Accent

Trowell, Wesley - Author

Submission ID

77

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Hi, I'm Wesley Trowell. Service User Representative at Barnsley Assistive Technology. I have Athetoid Cerebral Palsy. I have used communication aids for 27 years with the 144LLL which I can use without looking and counting the beeps. I have had various communication aids over the years from the DeltaTalker which I could only communicate with, to the Accent 1400 which I can communicate with, as well as using my mobile phone to call and text, use the television, e mails, Social Media and browsing the internet. When I haven't got access to my communication aid, I do have a Mega Bee which is very useful, I can communicate using my eyes and looking in the direction of what I am wanting. I had a child's voice up until I was 18 then I changed my voice to Tom after the SLT nagged me to change it. This was extremely hard for me to do, but one day I just decided to change it for good. After a few years of me having Tom, I saw someone on Look North that had the same condition as me and he had his own accent. That was when I wanted to get my own accent so I could gain my own identity. After a quick chat with my SLT she came back with a selection of voices for me to pick two from. Speak Unique would blend the two together. They sent me three different blended voices for me to pick one, which I did. I installed it onto my communication aid, and I changed my voice for good. The day I changed my voice I felt excited but emotional because I felt like I finally got my own identity.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT8.1: What I did for TV

Norman, Maddy - Author

Submission ID

3

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

In this paper I am going to talk about the experience of filming my mini ITV documentary, the inspiration behind it and how it came to action. The film is a short news report on how the technology works and what impact it has had on my life.

Level

General Session

Age Group
All Ages

LT8.1: The impact between AAC and esports

Holmes, Aid - Author

Submission ID

4

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

My name is Aid and I am really passionate about esports and AAC. I am hoping to gain qualifications in esports and in a few years, I am hoping to set up a business when I tell schools, colleges, universities, work industries, etc that how they involve AAC and esports in their line of work. I want to talk at CM about how esports could be really impactful on AAC users' lives and how speech and language therapists could involve esports in their sessions and their SLT plans. Esports is not just a game, esports impacts so many young people's lives, both mainstream and SEN. Esports is player vs players gaming. This session will explore the different types of accessible gaming equipment, accessible esports and how speech and language therapists can use gaming as a tool in their sessions with clients.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

8.2: Exploring the Intersection of AAC and Assistive Technology: Working Towards More Integrated Support

Voizey, Tina - Author; McIntyre, Fil - Co-Author

Submission ID

81

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This interactive workshop aims to open discussion around how organisations supporting Assistive Technology (AT) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) can and should work more collaboratively. As AAC and AT increasingly intersect in the lives of individuals with complex communication needs, it becomes essential to understand where they align, diverge, and can be better integrated to provide holistic support. Through discussion including polling, positioning exercises, and lived-experience storytelling, this session will invite participants to reflect on the current state of collaboration between AAC and AT services. We will delve into the question: where does AAC stop, and AT begin? Or should they stop and start at all? Participants will map out the knowledge and skills required across disciplines and explore the real-world frustrations and successes of users navigating both AAC and AT systems. By uncovering both the overlaps and gaps in provision, the workshop will encourage the sharing of practical examples and insights from those who have attempted to integrate these support systems effectively. Key themes will include the identification of systemic limitations, competing priorities between services, and barriers that often inhibit closer integration. Attendees will work together to brainstorm and prioritise solutions that could help bridge these divides - whether through changes in training, policy, service delivery models, or user-led advocacy. This session is suitable for AAC professionals, AT providers, educators, clinicians, and AAC users alike. By the end of the workshop, participants will have a deeper understanding of the synergies between AAC and AT, as well as actionable ideas for fostering more joined-up approaches in their own settings.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

8.3: Part-time AAC Use: What does it mean and why does it matter?

Zisk, Alyssa - Author

Submission ID

23

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Some autistic people use both augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and speech. Because both this AAC use and the terminology used to describe it come from Autistic communities, researchers and professionals have been less aware of it. Now, more people are starting to find out (see reference list). This presentation will introduce part-time

AAC use and speech experiences that some speaking autistic people use AAC about. It will compare and contrast these community-sourced terms with each other, and with more traditional clinical terms related to speech. The presentation will introduce how these experiences can affect communication. There will be a group discussion on how AAC supports can be helpful when oral speech is unavailable, in communication repair, and in supporting word by word generation of messages at times when oral speech would only support insufficient or unreliable scripts. There will be some discussion of device funding. The funding discussion will cover general strategies rather than funder-specific requirements.

References (Optional)

Barnett, R. F. (2022). Speech-language pathologists on the autism spectrum. Masters Thesis. https://commons.emich.edu/theses/1127 Biggs, E. E. (2023). Strengthening professional networks to serve students with autism who have communication needs. Intervention in School and Clinic, 58(3), 173-182. https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512221081250 DeThorne, L. S., Pierce, K., Rang, M., Schafer, S., VanRyswyk, K., & Angulo-Jiménez, H. (2024). “I Have a Different Perspective as I Am Working Through This”: Speech–Language Pathologist Reflections on Autism. Topics in Language Disorders, 44(1), 25-43. Donaldson, A. L., corbin, E., Zisk, A. H., & Eddy, B. (2023). Promotion of communication access, choice, and agency for autistic students. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 54(1), 140-155. https://doi.org/10.1044/2022_LSHSS-22-00031 Donaldson, A. L., corbin, E., & McCoy, J. (2021). “Everyone deserves AAC”: Preliminary study of the experiences of speaking autistic adults who use augmentative and alternative communication. Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups, 6(2), 315-326. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_PERSP-20-00220 Donaldson, A. L., Zisk, A. H., Eddy, B., corbin, E., Ugianskis, M., Ford, E., & Strickland, O. (2023). Autistic Communication: A Survey of School-Based Professionals. Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups, 8(6), 1248-1264. https://doi.org/doi/full/10.1044/2023_PERSP-23-00107 Fritts, C. & Hayden, C. (2023, October 13). Part-time AAC users, Full time solutions. [Conference presentation.] Closing the Gap.https://doi.org/10.1097/TLD.0000000000000333 Hughes, B. & Rezvani, T. (2023, November 18). AAC Screening for Preschool Students: A Work-In-Progress Tool for the Specific Language System First Approach. [Presentation]. American Speech Language Hearing Association. Boston, MA. https://plan.core-apps.com/asha2023/event/519b79a2279abf51f2a245ec7a64d552 Koerner, S. M., Glaser, S., & Kropkowski, K. (2023). Perspectives of Part-Time Augmentative and Alternative Communication Use in Adults and Implications for Pediatric Service Delivery. Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups, 1-14. Kudryashov, L. (2021). Participatory design of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) technology with autistic adults (Doctoral dissertation). https://dx.doi.org/10.7302/1729 Sparrow, M. (2017, November 13). Coping with a Crisis When You Have Unreliable or Intermittent Speech. Thinking Person’s Guide to Autism. http://www.thinkingautismguide.com/2017/11/coping-with-crisis-when-you-have.html Zisk, A. H., & Dalton, E. (2019). Augmentative and alternative communication for speaking autistic adults: Overview and recommendations. Autism in Adulthood, 1(2), 93-100. https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2018.0007 Zisk, A. H., Eddy, B., Donaldson, A. L., Cannalonga, S., & Strickland, O. (2024, November). School-Based Professionals' Knowledge of Autistic Speech and Augmentative and Alternative Communication Decision Making. In Seminars in Speech and Language (Vol. 45, No. 05, pp. 524-542). Thieme Medical Publishers, Inc.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

I am the AAC Research team lead at AssistiveWare. My time on research relevant to this topic and my potential registration/travel are funded by AssistiveWare. The session does not focus on specific products and may or may not even mention them depending on the audience suggestions in the case studies.

8.4: Whose identity is it anyway?: Exploring connection, community, interaction and AAC from the perspective of the parent of a child with severe learning disabilities (and maybe her child's too?)

Holmes, Joanna - Author

Submission ID

63

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

Identity has been a thread that has run through my thoughts and reflections since the day my daughter was born. My daughter has many identities, some are labels imposed on her by others (person with Emanuel Syndrome, student with SEN, the disabled kid up the street, granddaughter, niece, rugby fan and Guide). Some are those she embodies and we interpret (funny, cheeky, friendly, determined, communicative). As a former SLT and having spent time reflecting on and writing about my daughter's AAC journey, my part of the AAC community has shifted from my professional to parental identity. What I don't know with any certainty is how and whether my daughter experiences AAC as part of her identity? Because she has access to paper and powered AAC she looks the part of an 'AAC user' but still communicates most effectively using non verbal and what might be described as 'pre-intentional' (Coupe 'O'Kane and Goldbart, 1998) communication. Some of our most joyful and meaningful interactions occur this way. The support in these interactions might be more typically characterised as Intensive Interaction approaches (Nind and Hewitt, 2005) than AAC. The most extensive definition I can find of AAC (ISAAC, 2011) includes all modes but the most dominant narrative I see is focused on aided, powered and paper AAC using symbols or the alphabet. This places her in an ambiguous identity space, is she maybe a 'nonsymbolic AAC user'? This presentation draws on how identity supports finding community and reflects on the ways we encourage, choose and possibly enforce identities for people without the language skills to reflect on this themselves. I will describe the ways

shifting identities in relation to AAC show up in the ways we choose to communicate with each other within our families and out in the world.

References (Optional)

Burkhart, L.J. (2011) ISAAC – About AAC. [online] Available at: https://isaac-online.org/english/about-aac/. Accessed 14th April 2025. Coupe 'O'Kane, J. and Goldbart, J (1998) Communication Before Speech: Development and Assessment. 2nd Ed. London: David Fulton Nind, M. and Hewitt, D. (2005) Access to Communication: Developing basic communication with people who have severe learning disabilities. 2nd Ed. David Fulton. London.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

8.5: Unlocking Potential

Grayston, Aimee - Author

Submission ID

100

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

As a child, people thought I wouldn't amount to much and had little chance of success. I have Cerebral Palsy, which means I can't walk or talk. In their opinion, this meant that my life would be limited. However, how wrong they were. Despite facing many challenges along the way, I've achieved so much and lived the best life for myself. During this session, I'll share my story, highlighting how my communication devices have enabled me to unlock my potential, connect, build relationships, and advocate for myself. Throughout my school years, my communication devices were essential for expressing my learning and achieving my academic potential. Although there were challenges that were not always managed ideally, reflecting on them has identified better solutions that I will discuss. However, I also enjoyed a fulfilling social life with many friends throughout primary and high school, though forming friendships was initially difficult upon starting high school. I will explain why and how this was overcome. Furthermore, I've studied for a degree. This challenging but rewarding experience relied heavily on my communication device for accessing materials, participating, and completing assignments. I'll discuss the challenges I faced during this journey and how they were managed, and importantly, how being an AAC user shaped my identity as a student in the wider world. Moreover, through my experiences in several workplace roles,

which I will discuss along with my successes, I will explore how using a communication aid has influenced both my work and my identity as a worker. Enabling practically everything I've accomplished, my communication devices have been my lifeline. This talk aims to inspire people who use AAC to understand the power in what they can do and to use this technology to help shape their unique identities and live their best lives.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

8.6: Raising awareness of AAC with policy makers, politicians and commissioners

Moulam, Beth - Author; Waller, Annalu - Co-Author; McLaren, Robert - Co-Author; Whittle, Helen - Co-Author

Submission ID

61

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

The Communication Matters Survey in October 2025 found the majority of members who responded wanted guidance on how to engage their MPs, policy makers and local commissioners around improved AAC services, greater awareness of AAC, and the impact assistive technology and AAC on the lives of individuals with complex communication needs. Whilst there are different devolved policies around the provision of AAC in the 4 home nations, it is still important for all members of the AAC community to know how to influence policy and decision makers at a national and local level in education, health, and social care. This session will provide: Contextual information about the role Communication Matters has played in achieving existing policy. Who is Policy Connect and what is the role of All Party Parliamentary Groups in informing government and The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive and Accessible Technology (including AAC). Then, how Communication Matters and Policy Connect work together to inform future policy making and raise awareness of AAC with Parliamentarians. Practical information will include what ‘we’ need Parliamentarians, policy makers and commissioners to know about AAC. What we mean by lobbying and policy engagement. Different engagement strategies including sending personal emails and letters with suggested templates. Organising and presenting petitions and surveys. The importance of research evidence and factual information. Making a personal case in writing or by booking an MPs surgery visit. Inviting a Parliamentarian to

attend an event and planning a successful campaign. This session will be presented by Professor Annalu Waller, Dundee University; Robert McLaren, Director of Policy at Policy Connect; Dr Beth Moulam, Trustee of Communication Matters; and Helen Whittle, Chair of Communication Matters. This is an interactive opportunity for participants to share personal experiences engaging with policymakers, discuss ideas and opportunities, and ask questions.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

8.7: Tools to Enhance AAC Collaboration for Improved Outcomes and Successful Transitions

Moreno, Tina - Author

Submission ID

14

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Effective communication is critical for helping students acquire and learn to use augmentative and alternative communication systems (AAC). It is also vital for helping AAC users - ranging from novice to veteran - transition from one environment to another. However, barriers exist and inconsistent communication among assistive technology teams, school professionals and outside service providers can inhibit the progress of AAC users, frustrate families and even contribute to device abandonment. Interagency collaboration improves outcomes every step along the AAC journey, including initial assessments, re-evaluations, addressing changing vocabulary needs and planning for transitions. Teams often make an effort to collaborate when initially matching a beginner AAC user to their first communication system, but neglect to continue those conversations as learners make progress, families need ongoing support in implementation at home and new communication partners enter the scene. AAC systems need to be ready to help students meet the communication demands of new environments, often with unfamiliar caregivers, whether they are in the midst of their elementary school years, approaching secondary school or nearing graduation. During this session, we will discuss strategies to overcome barriers and share tools that promote communication and collaboration between school systems and outside agencies. We will discuss the importance of ongoing assessment to ensure that the AAC system, training and support will continue to meet the needs of the AAC user, especially when communication partners, demands and environments change. In addition to

providing tools to close the communication gap between educational teams, outside therapy providers and families, we will also outline a transition plan for students moving on to new buildings or new grades, as well as ensuring graduates have the resources they need before exiting the school system.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

8.8: Still There: Building Connection and Identity in Locked-In Syndrome

Heatley, Sarah - Author; Wiggins, Emmy - Co-Author

Submission ID

64

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

We are two speech and language therapists from NHS Tayside, and we would love to present our reflections on supporting Stuart, a gentleman with locked-in syndrome. Our presentation will highlight the essential role of AAC in his journey and explore how identity, advocacy, and attitudes shape the experience of individuals with this condition. Through a synthesis of current literature and our lived experience supporting Stuart, we will demonstrate the importance of developing a trusting therapeutic relationship early in the post-stroke period. By prioritising Stuart's identity and ensuring his voice was central to decision-making, we were able to build a foundation for meaningful communication and connection. We have gained consent for Stuart and his wife Pauline to contribute to the presentation through pre-recorded reflections, ensuring their perspectives are authentically represented. Our presentation will also explore the practical challenges of implementing AAC solutions for an individual with locked-in syndrome. We will share insights into Stuart's AAC journey, from low-tech solutions to high-tech adaptations, highlighting the creative and innovative approaches we adopted to meet his communication needs. We will discuss the support we received from Smartbox to maximise Stuart's potential to access the world via his Gridpad. Additionally, we collaborated with a range of services, including the University of Abertay's involvement in tailoring complex access to Xbox gaming. Our overarching message is that human connection underpins all successful AAC interventions. By truly knowing the person behind the diagnosis, AAC professionals can build pathways to communication that foster identity, autonomy, and meaningful participation in life. We hope this presentation will inspire others to adopt an identity-centred approach in AAC practice.

Please note we have reached out to Smartbox who have kindly agreed to fund our expenses should we be successful in the call for abstracts.

References (Optional)

Bruno, M. A., Bernheim, J. L., Ledoux, D., Pellas, F., Demertzi, A., & Laureys, S. (2011). A survey on self-assessed well-being in a cohort of chronic locked-in syndrome patients: Happy majority, miserable minority. BMJ Open, 1(1), e000039. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2010-000039 Demertzi, A., Jox, R. J., Racine, E., & Laureys, S. (2014). A European survey on attitudes towards pain and end-of-life issues in locked-in syndrome. Brain Injury, 28(9), 1209–1215. https://doi.org/10.3109/02699052.2014.920526 Hordila, M. L., García-Bravo, C., Palacios-Ceña, D., & Pérez-Corrales, J. (2024). Locked-in syndrome: A qualitative study of a life story. Brain and Behavior, 14(8), e3495. https://doi.org/10.1002/brb3.3495 Nizzi, M. C., Blandin, V., & Demertzi, A. (2020). Attitudes towards personhood in the locked-in syndrome: From third- to first-person perspective and to interpersonal significance. Neuroethics, 13(2), 193–201. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12152-018-9375-6 Voity, K., Lopez, T., Chan, J. P., & Greenwald, B. D. (2024). Update on how to approach a patient with locked-in syndrome and their communication ability. Brain Sciences, 14(1), 92–92. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci14010092 Zahavi, D. (2019). Locked-in syndrome: A challenge to standard accounts of selfhood and personhood? Neuroethics, 13(2), 221–228. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12152-019-09345-0

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult

Details of sponsorship

We have reached out to Smartbox who have kindly agreed to fund our expenses should we be successful in the call for abstracts.

9.1: Linguistic Interventions for children developing language via AAC: scoping review findings exploration of rationale and criteria for choice of intervention

Martin, Catherine - Author; Blandford, Hannah - Co-Author; Chatzidamianos, (Dr.) Gerasimos - Co-Author; Jayes, Mark - Co-Author; Murray, Janice - Co-Author

Submission ID

91

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Children who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) are often developing language users and increase their linguistic skills via AAC. Much of the existing literature focuses on how to choose an appropriate AAC system for a child and how to organise the vocabulary within the system. Less is known about how to enable children to develop their linguistic, and specifically semantic and grammar skills, whilst they learn to communicate. The impact of this knowledge gap is that children using AAC may not be supported to develop their linguistic skills in line with their potential. This can impact their ability to autonomously communicate more complex messages using AAC. This National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) funded scoping review explored the breadth and depth of the literature regarding linguistic interventions used with child AAC users. Relevant peer reviewed literature was identified using a published protocol and search strategy. Data was extracted from 41 peer-reviewed research papers that met the inclusion criteria (see the published protocol for the study on the Open Science Framework OSF) (1) Last year we presented about the process of this scoping review and the preliminary findings. This year we will present findings related to the rationale for designing and using specific linguistic interventions and the criteria for selecting which child AAC users participated. Framework analysis (2) was used to identify themes and to conceptualise how these themes related to each other. We consider how this might be useful when making clinical decisions in SLT practice about linguistic interventions.

References (Optional)

(1) Linguistic interventions for children developing language via AAC: a Scoping Review protocol on OSF https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/96SFU (2) Goldsmith, L. J. (2021). Using framework analysis in applied qualitative research. Qualitative report, 26(6), 2061-2076.

Level

Specialist Session

Age Group

Child

LT9.2: Learning to code with accessible block-based coding

McNaught, Kirsty - Author

Submission ID

98

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Digital technology is an integral part of all of our lives and is shaping our lives and our society. Individuals who use technology to access communication, work or study have a particular vested interest in future advancements, but have often been excluded from the creation process. Learning to code offers more than the ability to program, it can give individuals an insight into how technology works, and what new tools and features they should be requesting, or building themselves in the future. In recent years, coding has been introduced to the English curriculum from Key Stage 2 onwards, and is typically introduced using block-based coding such as Scratch and MakeCode to teach initial computing concepts. These tools have been completely inaccessible to alternative access methods until now. I will share new tools and prototypes for accessing block-based coding, with a main focus on eye gaze, and a brief mention of switch access and other methods. These advancements aim to empower AAC users, not necessarily to become developers themselves (although some will!), but also to understand and customise their communication grids, manage environmental controls, or automate tasks to enhance their daily lives. By gaining a deeper understanding of coding concepts, AAC users are empowered to shape their digital futures and improve their autonomy. This project is funded by the Blockly Accessibility Fund (Google).

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adolescent

LT9.2: Promoting the occupational therapy role in augmentative and alternative communication interventions using a digital learning tool

Ali, Catherine - Author; Bolland, Abigail - Co-Author

Submission ID

71

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Occupational therapists have a key role in supporting successful AAC interventions for individuals with motor and physical challenges. Often, at a local level, OTs are not part of the

team around the client who monitor and facilitate best access to their AAC systems. To address this need, occupational therapists from 5 specialist services across England collaborated to create a video learning resource outlining key considerations for AAC interventions using the International Classification for Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) as a guide throughout the process. Following this, a survey was circulated to understand what occupational therapists in local settings consider their learning needs to be within the context of supporting individuals using AAC on their caseload. Further exploration was carried out to understand the perceived barriers around occupational therapists being more involved in the implementation of AAC interventions with clients jointly known to specialist services and local teams. This resulted in bespoke training to local teams. Further aims of this project involve identifying change in confidence as a result of accessing training, ultimately aiming for increased involvement in interventions at a local level, especially for service users with rapidly changing needs.

Level

Introductory Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT9.2: Handshake - using arm movement as an AAC switch

Oppenheim, Matt - Author; Frankowski, Tomasz - Co-Author

Submission ID

51

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Some people who need to access switchable software are unable to use existing switches such as buttons or joysticks but can still make an intentional arm or leg movement. Handshake is a system that uses a programmable smart-watch to detect intentional limb motion. When this motion is detected, a radio signal is sent to a receiver unit that sends a switch signal to an attached switch-enabled device such as an AAC unit. The receiver unit is built by modifying another off-the-shelf device. Initial testing took place at a specialist college with the intended user group with encouraging results. Feedback from this testing is being used to improve the system prior to further testing at other specialist colleges. The sensitivity of the system can be adjusted without having to touch the smart-watch. Having an adjustable sensitivity means that a range of motions can be detected, from faint motion to powerful punching movements. This project improves on a prototype that was presented at Communication Matters in 2020[1][2]. This prototype was built using the BBC micro:bit[3]. By re-implementing the system using robust off-the-shelf devices we are now in a position to safely introduce the technology to the intended user group for long-term use. Using

commercially available devices enables wide-scale uptake of the system. Details on how to create the system will be made open source which allows others to replicate the switch at minimal cost. It is anticipated that different testers may require different algorithms implemented on the smart-watch to enable reliable detection of their own unique motion. As these algorithms are identified and implemented, details will be made open source to benefit the AAC and research communities. Ethical approval was obtained from Lancaster University to carry out user-studies for this project. An unlisted video showing the system can be seen at: https://youtu.be/m8qva4VpN1U

References (Optional)

[1] M Oppenheim, 2020, “Using the BBC micro:bit as AAC – Three Solutions”, The Journal of Communication Matters, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 13-15. [2] M Oppenheim & F McIntyre, F 2020, “HandShake – Using Hand Motion Recognition to Enable Communication”, The Journal of Communication Matters, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 19-21. [3] M Oppenheim, 2021, “Devices Aid Speech for People with Disabilities”, Circuit Cellar - The Magazine For Computer Applications, vol. 1, no. 372, pp. 30-37. <https://circuitcellar.com/article-materials-and-resources/july-issue-372-circuit-cellar/>

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

LT9.2: A Longitudinal Case Study of AAC Supporting the Transition from Non-Verbal to Functional Verbal Communication

Tariq, Shabana - Author

Submission ID

86

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Case Studies

Abstract

This case study highlights the communication journey of a boy with a motor planning disorder and severe expressive language deficits. Introduced to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) at the age of 4, he progressed from being completely non-verbal to using verbal speech effectively by Grade 10. Though he can now communicate using spoken words, he continues to use AAC as needed, particularly during moments of overload or to support academic tasks. His progress illustrates the powerful, long-term impact of AAC in fostering communication development and independence. Initially, the child presented with no verbal output and limited gestures, though receptive language skills

were relatively stronger. Early intervention involved speech and language therapy and the introduction of AAC through a modelling approach. The system was used consistently across all environments, supported by therapists, caregivers, and family members. Early AAC use was limited to basic needs but gradually expanded to include choices, experiences, and storytelling. As therapy integrated multisensory activities and child-led approaches, verbal communication emerged - first as single words, later forming functional phrases. By Grade 10, the child was able to communicate with 70% verbal accuracy, respond to questions, share information, and engage in classroom activities. While his speech may not be grammatically intact, it is functionally effective. His AAC system remains accessible for communication support, particularly in academic settings like exams. This case affirms the value of AAC not only as a bridge to spoken language but as a lifelong support tool. It emphasizes the need for a neurodiversity-affirming, individualized approach to communication that respects autonomy, supports multiple modes of expression, and fosters long-term success in children with complex communication needs.

Level

Specialist Session

Age Group

Child

LT9.2: Suffolk Communication Aids Resource Centre (SCARC) - the importance of a local AAC service

Chubb, Della - Author; Healy, Vicky - Co-Author

Submission ID

8

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

This lightning talk gives a quick overview of the supporting, developing and caring for a local AAC service (one which serves the 90% of AAC users, who do not meet regional AAC hub criteria). We will explore important areas of support for serving this cohort of AAC users including Environmental modelling and engagement with AAC and working with and supporting communication partners. The aim of this session to introduce attendees to the value of a local AAC service and the differences required to support AAC for young people with a Learning Disability (LD). We aim to explore a young person with a LD's journey through a local AAC service and how we work with other local health, education and care services to best support the integration of AAC for young people with a LD. This would be of interest to anyone exploring the development of a local AAC service and/ or anyone who works with young people with AAC and a LD.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

9.3: Silent Voices, Urgent Needs: Advancing Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Paediatric and General Intensive Care Wards in Conflict Affected Areas

Havousha, Shira - Author

Submission ID

118

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

In critical care environments, effective communication is a key component of patient care and wellbeing under challenging circumstances. Patients who are unable to communicate using speech due to injury, intubation, or trauma face significant barriers in expressing communication functions such as wants and needs, thoughts and feelings, pain, worries, consent and so forth, which in turn lead to helplessness frustration and subsequent trauma (Peterson & Carpenter, 2015). This presentation explores the vital role of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in supporting particularly vulnerable populations in critical care: Paediatric patients in the PICU and individuals affected by war. Pediatric patients, especially those admitted in PICUs, often struggle to communicate due to craniofacial conditions, sedation, ventilation, neurological and neurosurgical conditions as well as other medical disorders compromising one's ability to communicate (Costello et al., 2010). Similarly, individuals injured in conflict zones may experience temporary or permanent loss of speech from traumatic brain injuries and other medical complications (Battle, 2015). In both contexts, the inability to communicate can lead to frustration, anxiety, misdiagnosis, and compromised care (LaValley et al., 2024). This session highlights evidence-based AAC strategies - from low-tech tools like symbol boards and gesture systems to high-tech speech-generating devices - tailored to high-stress, multilingual, and culturally diverse environments. Case studies will illustrate how timely AAC implementation not only improves patient outcomes but also restores autonomy and human dignity in the most dehumanizing circumstances. Furthermore, we will examine the unique challenges of AAC in war-affected conditions, such as limited resources, linguistic barriers, and rapidly changing medical settings. The presentation will advocate for interdisciplinary training, protocol development, and ethical considerations necessary for integrating AAC into emergency and critical care. By equipping care teams with AAC tools and training, we can ensure that no voice is left unheard - especially when it matters most.

References (Optional)

Battle, D. E. (2015). Persons with communication disabilities in natural disasters, war, and/or conflict. Communication Disorders Quarterly, 36(4), 231-240. Costello, J. M., Patak, L., & Pritchard, J. (2010). Communication vulnerable patients in the pediatric ICU: Enhancing care through augmentative and alternative communication. Journal of pediatric rehabilitation medicine, 3(4), 289-301. LaValley, M., Chavers-Edgar, T., Wu, M., Schlosser, R., & Koul, R. (2024). Augmentative and alternative communication interventions in critical and acute care with mechanically ventilated and tracheostomy patients: a scoping review. American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 33(5), 2667-2686. Paterson, H., & Carpenter, C. (2015). Using different methods to communicate: how adults with severe acquired communication difficulties make decisions about the communication methods they use and how they experience them. Disability and Rehabilitation, 37(17), 1522–1530.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

9.4: C-SMILES: Collaboratively Supporting Multi-modal Interaction and Listening in Education Settings

Hrastelj, Laura - Author

Submission ID

31

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

This presentation will detail the progress-to-date of the author's Health and Care Research Wales funded research project; to develop a protocol for a video-interaction intervention that is both feasible and viable for use in special education settings in collaboration with Learning Support Assistants, young people who use AAC and Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs). This 12-month project builds on the author's PhD research which suggested collaborative reflection with Learning Support Assistants in a special education setting supported them to interact differently with children who use AAC, 'listening' to their non-verbal communication, giving them more time, following their lead and creating consistent opportunities for positive interactions mediated through hi-tech AAC and other multi-modal resources (Hrastelj, 2022). Video feedback approaches are already used as evidence-based practice for some children with communication impairments, e.g., language delays (Hanen Program, 2017), autism (PACT, 2010) and attachment disorder (VIG, 2023).

However, such approaches are not routinely used with children who use AAC and their educators, and they do not focus on interactions mediated through multi-modal resources such as Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs) or paper-based AAC systems. In clinical practice, AAC communication partner training is often delivered by SLTs as an education package to groups of educators and does not always focus on real-time interactions or include the opportunity for educators to contribute their own knowledge and skills. This presentation will detail the first draft of the protocol based on stakeholder engagement sessions with Learning Support Assistants employed in special education settings across Wales. Feedback from the Communication Matters AAC community on the draft C-SMILES protocol will be actively invited in this session and is an integral part of the collaborative process in this intervention development project.

References (Optional)

Hrastelj, L. (2022) Thesis: 'AACtion Heroes': Exploring child-led interactions and practices for hearing the views of children who use hi-tech AAC available at espace.mmu.ac.uk Hanen Program, (2017). It Takes Two to Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays. The Hanen Centre. Green, J., Charman, T., McConachie, H., Aldred, C., Slonims, V., Howlin, P., Le Couteur, A. & PACT Consortium, (2010). Parent-mediated communication-focused treatment in children with autism (PACT): A randomised controlled trial. The Lancet, 375(9732), pp.2152-2160 AVIGuk, (2023). What is VIG? Attachment-Based Video Interaction Guidance. Available at: videointeractionguidance.net

Level

Specialist Session

Age Group

Child

9.5: Developing a school wide AAC vocabulary as a universal AAC support (for all learners)

Stowell, Kathryn - Author; Elliott, Emma - Co-Author; Gintare Moore, Amber - Co-Author; Robertson, Euan - Co-Author

Submission ID

103

Format

Platform

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Adopting a school wide approach to AAC has been a topic of discussion for many years in the field of AAC. There are many barriers to overcome when implementing school wide AAC for all students. Join this session to hear teachers lived experience of working in classrooms where electronic AAC is used as a true universal support for all students (not just AAC

users). Hear our experience of the benefits of using symbol based electronic AAC as a teaching tool and scaffold for learning. Often teachers are guided towards or in some cases mandated by senior leaders to use specific software or apps to enhance learning. In this session we will discuss our initial feelings on being asked to trial a symbol based instructional support for learning and AAC. We will detail our journey in learning how to implement this support alongside our learners and the results this has brought. With an increased focus on dual coding, formative assessment and differentiating learning for all pupils, join our session to hear our teachers' journey to implementing symbol supported learning. Scaffolding communication and learning opportunities was not easy, find out how we measured progress for every learner. Charlton Park Academy is a Special Academy for students with complex, low incidence special educational needs. We are a well established and very experienced local provider of quality specialised education provision and cater for young people with complex conditions. Our school is an AssistiveWare Pilot school and has access to Proloquo on a whole school basis, while Proloquo may be mentioned it will not be demonstrated as part of this presentation.

References (Optional)

Clark, J. M. & Paivio, A. (1991). Dual coding theory and education. Educational Psychology Review, 3(3), 149-170. Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. Assessment in Education, 5, 7-74

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

Details of sponsorship

The presenters are teachers in a school which is part of an AssistiveWare Pilot Project which gives them access to AssistiveWare Proloquo at no cost. This presentation does not feature Proloquo although it may be mentioned.

9.6: The Role(s) of Healthcare Scientists in AAC and EAT

Clarke, Zoe - Author; Griffiths, Tom - Co-Author

Submission ID

73

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

"Why do we need Clinical Scientists in AAC?" "What do Healthcare Scientists bring that Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, or Teachers don't?" Questions

like these are encountered frequently by Healthcare Scientists working in AAC. This workshop session will explore the many and varied roles of Healthcare Scientists within AAC and elsewhere in electronic assistive technology (EAT). The session chairs will provide background on the profession and discuss its relevance to these fields, in order to facilitate discussion amongst attendees on how the profession fits into the diverse and multidisciplinary workforce. Healthcare Scientists form a diverse and essential professional group within the NHS and beyond, with over 50 disciplines represented, ranging from lab-based Pathologists to Clinical Engineers. Collectively, they contribute to more than 80% of all NHS diagnoses, yet their role often goes unrecognised or unreported. Clinical Scientists are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), while other roles, such as Clinical Technologists, may join voluntary registers. The role evolved as one that complements existing professions but is not allied to any existing professional group, extending the MDT rather than duplicating or replacing expertise. In his blog 'Healthcare Scientists are not AHP's: Clarifying the distinction', Professor Chris Hopkins discusses this and why it is important. In the context of AAC and EAT, Healthcare Scientists play a unique and vital role within the MDT, contributing specialist expertise in areas such as engineering, data interpretation, system design and integration, manufacturing and complex problem solving. Some AAC and EAT services are led by Clinical Scientists. This workshop invites contributions from all professions on how they see the role and what Scientists contribute to the AAC landscape.

References (Optional)

Hopkins, C., Healthcare Scientists are not AHP's: Clarifying the distinction, ACHS, 2025, Feb, 12, https://www.ahcs.ac.uk/2025/02/10/healthcare-scientists-are-not-ahps-clarifying-the-distinction-professor-chris-hopkins/

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

9.7: Minspeak Users in the UK – what lies ahead?

Mars, Josh - Author

Submission ID

114

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Minspeak is the software that supports various AAC vocabularies which use semantic compaction (polysemic iconic encoding) systems to generate words. Bruce Baker, alongside PRC-Saltillo and other contributors developed these vocabularies from 1980 onwards (Baker 2017, in Minspeak Academy 2022). Since then, many people have become Minspeak Users and consider their vocabulary system key to their identity. Minspeak is widely used among powered AAC users, although exact numbers and the prevalence relative to users of non-Minspeak AAC are not readily available. However, the presenter has observed over many years of experience working in Yorkshire, England that the prevalence of new Minspeak AAC users relative to new non-Minspeak AAC users appears to be on a downward trajectory. If this is the case more widely in England, are we in danger of Minspeak gradually falling out of use in the UK and what would this mean for AAC Users? If Minspeak use is reducing in the UK there may be some key issues contributing to this, which are worthy of further investigation:

- Lack of knowledge and confidence amongst AAC professionals to prescribe Minspeak vocabularies
- Support for Minspeak is lacking due to knowledge and skill scarcity
- Literacy is a primary long-term goal for AAC users and their supporters, with the aim to replace symbolic vocabularies where possible
- Minspeak is considered complex to learn and to resource the required support.

This workshop is aimed at generating interest and discussion around the issues that both Minspeak Users and AAC professionals consider pertinent to the use of Minspeak AAC vocabularies in the UK. Contributions from those with Minspeak experiences outside the UK would also be welcomed.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

P5: Paediatric Communication Station: Improving AAC Access in the Paediatric Critical Care Unit

Glisson, Emma - Author; Mason, Emily - Co-Author

Submission ID

26

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

Background: Children in paediatric critical care units can face significant communication challenges due to acute loss of communication, ventilation requirements and in some cases tracheostomy. This project created a paediatric adaptation of the 'Communication Station', originally developed for use in adult critical care units. The project aimed to increase communication for the children on critical care and to increase confidence levels amongst staff. Method: The 'Communication Station' was adapted to meet the needs of paediatric patients, creating resources for both literate and pre-literate children. A decision-making flowchart was designed to guide parents, therapists and nurses to identify the best Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools to trial. Staff confidence ratings were taken before introduction of the communication station and again after six months. Qualitative analysis was conducted on open ended feedback, collected from multi-disciplinary staff and parents to explore the impact of the project. Results: Staff confidence in supporting communication with non-verbal patients increased. The average confidence rating rose from 3.11 before the intervention to 3.90 after (on a 1–5 Likert scale). Qualitative feedback revealed several key themes: a positive impact on patient care, improved accessibility and practicality, staff empowerment, increased confidence, and emotional/ethical importance for the children. However, feedback also pointed out challenges such as staff turnover and a need for increased visibility and ongoing training to ensure that all staff use the "Communication Station" effectively. Conclusions: The paediatric adaptation of the 'Communication Station' was highly valued by staff and feedback suggests that the project has had a positive impact on staff confidence in working with non verbal children on the critical care unit.

Level

General Session

Age Group

Child

P6: Developing approaches for self-representation of AAC and non-normative voices on film - lessons from the Stories Beyond Words project

Soreny, Cathy - Author; Preece, Jamie - Author; Sullivan, Emma - Co-Author

Submission ID

69

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Stories Beyond Words is a creative research collective. One of our key research aims is exploring new ways to co-create self-representations of non-normative voices on film. Our group includes AAC users, stammerers and people with dysarthria. We have worked collaboratively to develop immersive audio-visual installations and films that challenge societal norms around voice and communication. All aspects of the research have been co-designed, from the research ethics and methods onwards. We have been challenging the ways communication differences are filmed and represented. Often people with non-normative voices are shown from a non-disabled gaze, which can emphasise medical and ableist assumptions. Often their difference is portrayed as a stereotypical story of an individual overcoming a 'tragedy' to become a 'super-cripple' (Colin Barnes, 1991). The viewer of such films is invited to look upon the disabled communicator as someone other to them. This can foster prejudices and increase marginalisation. In this project we have considered how to challenge and change this. We have looked at all aspects of the creative process, and explored how close collaboration and meaningful access can enhance representation. We have considered camera placement, shot angles, editing approaches and creative subtitling. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall felt self-representation of marginalised communities is essential - "it is important to get people into producing their own image because… they can then contrast the images they produce of themselves against the dominant images which they are offered" (1991). One of the key research objectives has been to develop reflective resources to support and guide creatives, researchers and clinicians when planning the creation of visual resources with AAC users and other non-normative speakers. This interactive poster will offer a visual overview of some of our key learnings and approaches, with images, quotes, and QR links to video clips.

References (Optional)

Barnes, C., 1991. Discrimination: Disabled People and the Media. Contact Winter, 45–48.
Hall, Stuart, quoted in: Grahame, J., 1991. The Production Process, in: Lusted, D. (Ed.), The Media Studies Book: A Guide for Teachers. Routledge, London; New York.

Level

General Session

Age Group

All Ages

P7: A New Intervention Reco (Relaxed communication) for Aided Communicators and Their Partners

Savolainen, Irina - Author

Submission ID

57

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Service Delivery

Abstract

The major challenge in aided communication is that aided communicators often do not use communication aids, despite evidence showing that these aids can facilitate linguistic development and social participation. A key factor in encouraging the use of communication aids is training communication partners in skills that facilitate aided interaction. In this poster, we will briefly describe the development process of a new intervention called Reco (Relaxed Communication). The aim of Reco is to encourage the use of aids in everyday interactions. It is designed for children and young people who have been recommended to use communication aids, as well as their communication partners. Reco is developed according to the Intervention Mapping Protocol, which emphasizes a step-by-step approach to decision-making and is based on community-based participatory research methods and comprehensive use of theories. In this presentation, we will focus on the implementation phase, which is based on facilitating equal partnership, understanding social interaction, exploring videos from everyday life, and setting GAS goals.

References (Optional)

Bartholomew Eldredge, L. K., Markham, C. M., Ruiter, R. A., Fernández, M. E., Kok, G., & Parcel, G. S. (2016). Planning health promotion programs: an intervention mapping approach. John Wiley & Sons. Baxter, S., Enderby, P., Evans, P., & Judge, S. (2012). Barriers and facilitators to the use of high-technology augmentative and alternative communication devices: a systematic review and qualitative synthesis. International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 47(2), 115-129. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-6984.2011.00090.x Kent-Walsh, J., Murza, K. A., Malani, M. D., & Binger, C. (2015). Effects of communication partner instruction on the communication of individuals using AAC: A meta-analysis. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 31(4), 271-284. Moorcroft, A., Scarinci, N., & Meyer, C. (2019a). A systematic review of the barriers and facilitators to the provision and use of low-tech and unaided AAC systems for people with complex communication needs and their families. Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology, 14(7), 710-731. https://doi.org/10.1080/17483107.2018.1499135

Level

General Session

Age Group

Adult