

CM2026

Communication
Matters International
AAC Conference

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University of Leeds

Book of Abstracts



Communication
Matters

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MONDAY

S01 Looking at AAC Through Time and Interaction

Jeff Higginbotham – Author

Submission ID

124

Format

Keynote Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Esther Simpson, LG08

Abstract

In this presentation, Jeff Higginbotham discusses a simple but powerful idea: communication technologies don't just help people say things—they shape how quickly, smoothly, and naturally people can take part in everyday conversation. Social interaction is the foundation of relationships, identity, and community. Yet, one of its most underappreciated ingredients is time: the timing of turn-taking, the pauses that carry meaning, and the time it takes to compose a message. The first part of the presentation introduces the interwoven nature of time and interaction and will show how delays and timing mismatches in conversations between oral and augmented speakers can create misunderstandings, reduce participation, and shift control of the interaction. The second part traces the history of AAC through an interactional lens, asking: if conversation is central to being human, how have AAC tools evolved to support better real-time connection with partners—and what priorities should guide what comes next?

Level

General

Age

All Ages

1.1 More than words: How AAC opened the door to dreams and decisions

Kylie Barsby - Co-Author, Lachlan Barsby - Author, Lee Holden - Co-Author

Submission ID

21

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

This co-presented session shares the lived journey of a parent and her son, an AAC user, and the profound impact Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) has had on their lives. Like many families, the early goal was simple: to better understand wants and needs. Over time, that goal expanded. Communication became about more than requests — it became about accessing dreams, humour, opinions, and having genuine input into decisions that shape a life. Grounded in the principles of presuming competence (Jorgensen, 2005) and recognising communication as a fundamental human right, this presentation explores how access to robust AAC systems can support autonomy and self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2005). All forms of communication contributed to connection, but the introduction of electronic AAC brought new depth. With access to generative language and a broader vocabulary, this young person was able to move beyond basic exchanges and participate more fully in the world around him. AAC enabled involvement in supported decision-making — helping select support staff, contributing to medical decisions, and determining who supports him and when (Kohn et al., 2013). It allowed him to advocate in everyday moments, including telling his football coach he wanted to get back on the field. It also supported identity development (Light & McNaughton, 2014): being cheeky, testing boundaries, and confidently announcing that in his final year of primary school he wanted both a detention and to be school captain. The journey has not been linear. It has included grief, resentment, growth, and deep appreciation — experiences commonly reflected in parent accounts of AAC implementation (Moorcroft, Scarinci, & Meyer, 2019). This session highlights both the emotional and practical realities of the AAC journey and reinforces an important message: when we presume competence and provide robust aac, we are not simply supporting speech — we are supporting identity, choice, and inclusion across the lifespan.

Level

General

Age

Child

1.2 Evaluating FunVis: A Functional Vision Assessment for Non-Vision Specialists Working with Children with Cerebral Palsy

Michael T. Clarke - Author, Tom Griffiths - Co-Author, Jenefer Sargent - Co-Author, John Swettenham - Co-Author

Submission ID

73

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

For children with cerebral palsy (CP), vision, and especially controlled looking behaviours such as eye-pointing, can be a powerful means of sharing attention and communicating (Sargent et al., 2013). However, these children are at increased risk of difficulties with all aspects of vision (Ghasia et al., 2008). Documenting how they use their vision can also prove challenging for non-vision specialists, increasing the possibility that functional vision difficulties may go unrecognised (Colenbrander, 2003; Deramore Denver et al., 2017). This session presents an evaluation of a brief functional vision assessment (*FunVis*) designed for non-vision specialists working with non-speaking children with CP. *FunVis* assesses three key abilities: fixation, gaze shifting, and tracking a moving object. To test if *FunVis* could be used reliably we compared how these skills were scored by vision specialists and school staff on 44 children with CP. Because these visual skills underpin eye-pointing, we also examined if *FunVis* scores were related to performance on the *Eye-Pointing Classification Scale* (EpCS; Clarke et al., 2022). To provide context, we explored relationships between *FunVis* performance and children's gross motor ability, language, non-verbal cognition, and age. We also examined whether outcomes differed for children with identified visual impairments. Level of agreement between the school staff and the vision specialist ranged from substantial to fair. *FunVis* performance was significantly associated with EpCS functional levels, as well as with language and non-verbal cognition. No associations were found with age or gross motor ability. Children who showed difficulty on one or more *FunVis* items were more likely to have clinically identified visual impairments. These findings suggest that *FunVis* may be a useful tool for helping school staff recognise and describe functional vision, and for supporting consistent documentation of visual behaviours. The session will include a demonstration of the *FunVis* protocol and outline directions for future work.

Level

General

Age

Child

1.3 Limitless and Limiting?: My daughter's access to communication, tools, teaching, time and togetherness.

Holmes Joanna - Author

Submission ID

93

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Abstract

Our family has been immersed in alternative communication since our daughter Lucy was born 11 years ago. This has taken many forms, and has evolved as she has grown and as we have understood her better. In this presentation I will talk about this evolution. We've made chat boards, visual timetables, social stories and more all with the goal of bringing her into our linguistically dominated world, to make our language comprehensible and useful to her. Not all of these tools have had a liberating effect on Lucy's communication. We do not have a transformation story. We have a story about learning together to find a unique way that suits Lucy. Describing how we have made choices about what tools are supportive of her life, learning and participation I will also reflect on those we popped on the shelf. Importantly I will share how our daughter has taught us, through her considerable skills, to develop an alternative way. How she shows us the limitations of the tools we provide and how we create communication through a more nuanced approach focussed on wellbeing, participation and connection. How we shifted from a focus on tools and teaching towards time and togetherness. Finally, bringing together learning from Sensory Engagement (Grace, 2017), Philosophy (Simmons and Watson, 2014), History (Unwin, 2025), Intensive Interaction (Nind And Hewitt, 2005) and The F Words (Can Child, 2022) have provided a more liberating framework for us to decide what supports are best. From this learning and lived-loved experience comes bigger more challenging questions for the AAC community to consider. References: CanChild (2022) F-words for Child Development. Available at: <https://canchild.ca/research-in-practice/f-words-in-childhood-disability/> (Accessed: 26th March 2026) Grace, J. (2017) Sensory-Being for Sensory Beings: Creating Entrancing Sensory Experiences. London: Routledge. Nind, M. and Hewitt, D. (2005) Access to Communication: Developing basic communication with people who have severe learning disabilities. 2nd Ed. David Fulton. London. Simmons, B. and Watson, D. (2014) The PMLD ambiguity: articulating the life-worlds of children with profound and multiple learning disabilities. London: Routledge. Unwin, S. (2025) Beautiful Lives: How We Got Learning Disabilities So Wrong. London: Wildfire.

Level

General

Age

Child

1.4 Giving Voice to Identity: Ethical AI for Preserving, Creating, and Expanding Access to Personal Speech with My-Own-Voice

Nicolas Mazars - Author

Submission ID

130

Format

Exhibition Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G11a&b

Abstract

Advances in AI-driven voice technologies are transforming how individuals preserve and use their voice, particularly for people at risk of speech loss such as those living with ALS/MND. My-Own-Voice (Acapela Group service) is a clinically grounded, user-centered voice banking solution designed to capture identity, dignity, and autonomy through personalized synthetic voices. This session explores the evolution of My-Own-Voice from its initial focus on ALS/MND to a broader, more inclusive approach now extending into pediatric use. For children born without a voice or with conditions affecting speech development, My-Own-Voice enables the early creation of a personal voice, supporting identity building, social inclusion, and long-term continuity of communication. These use cases introduce specific challenges around consent, guardianship, voice evolution over time, and the involvement of families and clinicians in the creation process. A key breakthrough is the integration and bundling of My-Own-Voice with Tobii Dynavox communication devices. This partnership reduces funding barriers, simplifies access pathways, and expands market reach by embedding voice banking directly into AAC solutions already supported by funding systems. By aligning with existing procurement frameworks, the service becomes more accessible to both adults and children who would otherwise face delays or exclusion. Central to this expansion is a strong commitment to ethical and legally responsible AI. The presentation will address informed consent (including parental consent), voice ownership, data protection (GDPR compliance), long-term storage, and safeguards against misuse or voice replication abuse, especially for vulnerable populations such as children. Drawing on real-world insights, this session highlights best practices for deploying AI responsibly in assistive communication, ensuring every voice, whether preserved or created, can be protected, owned, and truly representative of the individual.

Level

General

Age

All ages

1.5 Kerbcut: Making Assistive Technology Universally Discoverable. A natural language platform to support the growth of AT, its adoption and the role disabled people play in its success.

Hector Minto – Author, Lee Blemmings – Co-Author

Submission ID

131

Format

Exhibition Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

The knowledge about what works, for whom, in which context, already exists. It lives in mainstream devices, supplier catalogues, in professional assessments, in the daily experience of AAC users and their families. But it is fragmented, inconsistent and almost impossible to navigate. People are still making life-changing decisions about technology based on incomplete information.

Kerbcut is built to fix that. A natural language platform that brings together supplier product data, professional practice knowledge and the lived experience of AAC users, and makes it searchable, comparable and useful in real time.

Ask Kerbcut a question in plain language. Describe a situation, a goal, a context. Get back something specific, current and grounded in what actually works, not just what is marketed. For practitioners, Kerbcut also transforms how AT recommendations are documented, generating consistent, evidence-based reports that support assessments, funding applications and organisational reporting.

And for AAC users, Kerbcut offers something new. The chance to contribute what they know, share what works and be recognised as the experts they already are. Not as research subjects. As Kerbcutters. And for organisations, you can build your own Kerbcut chat experience into your digital environments, internal or public facing. You then drive your own data intelligence on assistive technology.

This session introduces the platform, shows it working with real examples, and opens the floor. Delegates will be invited to challenge the model, stress-test the approach and help shape what Kerbcut should be doing for the AT and AAC community.

Level

General

Age

All ages

1.6 Musketeers for AAC, Filmmaking and Storysharing!

Mascha Iegel - Author, Jelle van Kleef - Co-Author, Chris Norrie - Co-Author, Annalu Waller - Co-Author, Nicola Grove - Co-Author, Gloria Soto - Co-Author

Submission ID

66

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

When access to natural speech is limited, as for learners with Complex Communication Needs (CCN), communication relies on multimodal resources. While Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) provides essential support, additional approaches are needed to foster narrative competence, shared understanding, and meaningful participation. This interactive workshop introduces Film as Observable Communication (FaOC), an evidence-based teaching method co-developed with AAC users, their families, and an international network of researchers, including Prof. Dr. Annalu Waller, Prof. Dr. Gloria Soto, Dr. Nicola Grove, Dr. Stijn Deckers, Dr. Hans van Balkom, Dr. Chris Norrie, Dr. Ronald Spanjers, and Prof. Dr. Bert Steenbergen. The FaOC method will be freely available in 2027. Central to FaOC are Personal Video Scenes (PVSs): short films created (filmed and edited) by children and young adults who use AAC. These are not merely videos; they are intentionally designed as resources for communication and conversation. Evidence-based research shows that the use of self-created films in daily interactions supports mutual understanding and promotes topic development. The method is currently being tested in six special education schools, focusing on AAC, language education, and digital literacy. These audiovisual narratives enrich AAC by supporting conversational structure, topic development, repair and maintenance strategies, and overall narrative growth. During the workshop, participants will view films created by young filmmakers who use AAC and explore how FaOC can be applied to share personal stories. Through hands-on activities, participants will gain practical, evidence-based strategies to create and use PVSs in educational, therapeutic, and home contexts, supporting language development, AAC use, and digital literacy. The workshop also briefly highlights practices from Com in Beeld Studio, where young people with and without disabilities collaborate in filmmaking and support others in using film as a communication tool.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

1.7 Co-constructing Communication with Emergent AAC Users: An Interactive Workshop.

Euan Robertson – Author, Rachael Langley – Co-author, Erin Sheldon – Co-author

Submission ID

128

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

Emergent communicators often rely on familiar partners to interpret their non-verbal communication and determine communicative intent. As communication skills develop, communication partners traditionally rely heavily on modelling as a means of implementing AAC. In this hands-on workshop, we will demonstrate strategies that support co-construction of meaning, shared attention, and increased symbol awareness. We will present a resource developed by the presenters, designed to support clinicians in describing emerging communication skills in a strengths-based way.

Level

General

Age

Child

1.8 "Just Because I Can't Talk, Doesn't Mean I Don't Understand" by Harchie Sagoo

Harchie Sagoo - Co-Author, Bob Sagoo - Author

Submission ID

19

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location: Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

Abstract

In January 2026, Harchie's dad, Bob, delivered a posthumous presentation that Harchie had intended to present himself at ATIA. It was his wish, so like any parent would do, you make sure that it is fulfilled. Having delivered Harchie's session, the outpouring of messages was immense, with a number of them relating to whether it was recorded, if so where could they watch it. That responsive along with how much CM Conference meant to Harchie means, that the "not to be repeated" presentation will be coming to CM Conference! This will be a full circle moment, and should CM accept Harchie's presentation, it will be something that I know it would mean so much to him. So here is the basis of Harchie's presentation:- Join us for a posthumous presentation from an amazing young man called Harchie, co-presented by his Dad. "Just because I can't talk, doesn't mean I don't understand", Harchie will share his insights on his AT/AAC journey, his thoughts for the future, and what innovations he would like to see, all narrated by him, via his GridPad 13 eyegaze communication device. There will be laughs, giggles and probably a few tears! Bob will also give an insight into the work Harchie's foundation The Harchie Way will be doing to promote innovation and inclusion.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

LT 2.1.2 AAC and Multimodality are Central to How I communicate – They're necessities, not skills to Tick off

Llinos Mock - Author

Submission ID

37

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences (AAC User)

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

In this talk I will share my lived experience as an autistic Speech and Language Therapy professional who uses AAC part time as part of my own multimodal communication toolkit. Using an autoethnographic reflective approach, I will explore how navigating different communication modes—speech, AAC, gesture, written language, and regulated silence—has shaped my understanding of communication. My lived experience challenges traditional assumptions about what communication “should” look like and highlights the value of multimodality for all communicators. Key themes include embracing AAC as a valid and empowering communication method, recognising diverse communication profiles, and understanding how lived experience strengthens empathy, clinical insight, and inclusive practice. By presenting from both sides of the therapeutic relationship—as practitioner and AAC user—I aim to promote a broader, more flexible, and authentically human view of communication that supports individuals to express themselves in the ways that work best for them. In sharing this work, I highlight that AAC and multimodality are not competencies to be checked off, but essential elements of communication that must be recognised, valued, and centred within our practice.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

LT 2.1.3 What factors make AAC users limitless: Findings from semi-structured interviews with professionals

Beth Moulam - Author

Submission ID

55

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

This qualitative study was undertaken as part of an MRes in social policy to evaluate the extent to which current policy supports the provision of AAC for children in England. The original study aimed to compare different realities in implementing national augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) policy in schools, at a local level and in regional specialised settings. This paper was presented at CM2025 and subsequently elsewhere. Due to the dissertation wordcount data, the data collected about policy factors that made individual AAC users successful was not included but received full ethics approval. These responses have now been evaluated. This data was collected prior to the recent publication of the school's white paper (DfE, 2026a) 'Every child achieving and thriving' with the associated SEND consultation (DfE, 2026b). Yet, the study findings speak to the proposed government policy focus of the importance of early support, local learning with all schools being inclusive, new statutory documentation, effective practice grounded in evidence-based approaches and the need for shared responsibility between education, health, care and families for educating all children, including AAC users. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with experienced professionals (n=15) working in special schools, local services and regional specialised assessment centres. These findings were analysed thematically across all responses to all interview questions, but specifically '.....what are the key factors that have contributed to [AAC user's] success. How much of this is down to the policy of your service/school?' This session will be of interest to policymakers in central and local government, commissioners, education and health practitioners, and families working with children who use powered AAC. References DfE (2026a) Every child achieving and thriving DfE (2026b) Send Reform: Putting children and young people first ext

Level

General

Age

All ages

2.2 Limitless communication: A dual perspective on augmentative and alternative communication through lived experience and professional practice

Zoe David - Author

Submission ID

12

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

This presentation will explore the contrast between *knowing* augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) as a professional and *experiencing* it as a parent, and how this dual perspective reshaped my understanding of what “limitless communication” truly means. In my teaching profession, AAC existed within routines, symbol sets and communication boards. I learned quickly, adapted constantly and created a communication board for every activity. I believed I understood AAC and felt confident with its purpose, and how to help a child feel heard. Everything shifted when my son joined our family. Adopted at almost six years old and with no prior AAC exposure, he entered our lives during enormous transition, carrying experiences and emotions that he communicated through body language and behaviour. I assumed my professional confidence would guide me, but living AAC at home was profoundly different. Very quickly, I realised that the confidence I’d built in helping children express their needs at school was far more structured and surface level than I had appreciated. I wasn’t yet offering limitless communication. The limits were unintentionally imposed by my choices and my focus on fringe vocabulary: I chose the symbols. I chose the activities. I chose the food on the snack board. Ultimately, I provided choice - not voice. At home, without the structure of school, it became painfully clear that my son needed autonomy, not access. So, we did away with fringe-based communication boards. We focused on giving him a rich core vocabulary and we modelled more than requests - we modelled comments, reactions and shared moments so he could learn to generate his own language. As a parent and a professional, I am on the cusp of this journey, and I invite you to join me. We will explore shifting from choice to voice, the power of confident communication partners, coordinating approaches across settings, and how to create environments that invite autonomy.

Level

Introductory

Age

Child

2.3 From Hype to Help: Building Responsible AI Service Guidance for AAC Professionals

Francesca Sephton - Author

Submission ID

1

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Purpose Artificial Intelligence (AI) enables machines to emulate human intelligence through learning, problem-solving, and adaptation (Sennott et al., 2019). Its integration into Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) offers new possibilities for people with complex communication needs but also raises ethical concerns (Scarinci, Holm and Hemsley, 2024). Key issues include authorship, data privacy and ableist bias in training data (Griffiths, Slaughter & Waller, 2024). This study explores the benefits, challenges, and ethical concerns AAC professionals associate with AI in AAC, alongside AAC users' views on what professionals should consider when engaging with AI-powered AAC. The project aims to develop preliminary, co-produced guidance to support AAC professionals in the responsible and ethical use of AI-powered AAC within clinical practice. The scope of this project is primarily on linguistic and rate-enhancement tools as a key area of AI integration. Methods A qualitative, exploratory design was employed, incorporating semi-structured interviews with AAC professionals (n = 4) and a co-design workshop with AAC users (n = 4). Data collection was conducted remotely and analysed using a deductive reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019), informed by theoretical concepts from the literature while remaining responsive to new and unanticipated insights emerging from the data. Results Eleven overarching themes were identified. Participants recognised AI's potential to enhance efficiency and linguistic support but emphasised the need to preserve user agency, authorship, and diversity of communication. AAC users highlighted inclusion, transparency, and control as priorities for responsible design. Discussion The guidance developed through this study promotes the ethical, transparent, and user-centred implementation of AI-powered AAC. The study offers a foundation for future professional guidance and policy development to ensure AI in AAC is implemented responsibly. References available on request

Level

General

Age

All ages

2.4 Introducing Evo Intelligent eye tracking designed around real-world AAC use

Mathias Anhalt – Author, Rebecca Atkinson-Coyle – Co-Author, Oliver Waite – Co-Author

Submission ID

119

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G11a&b

Abstract

In this session, we will explore the development of Evo, Smartbox's new eye tracker, and examine how machine learning is being used to improve eye tracking performance. Unlike traditional approaches that rely on more rigid tracking models, Evo's algorithms have been trained on a wide range of real-world scenarios, enabling the camera to respond effectively to variations in lighting conditions, head position, movement, eyewear and other factors that can affect eye tracking performance.

The audience will gain an in-depth understanding of the technology behind Evo, including the engineering decisions and user-centred development process that shaped its creation. We will share insights from internal testing and field evaluations, demonstrating how our in-house eye gaze team is using data, user f

eedback and ongoing iteration to continuously improve performance and accessibility. Alongside the technical perspective, Evo user Oliver will share his personal experience. Oliver will reflect on his experience using Evo with tinted Irlen glasses, managing facial and neck motor tics, and making use of customisable eye gaze-accessible Smart Buttons to support everyday communication and device control.

Rather than positioning one camera as a solution for every user, this presentation will explore the importance of choice within eye gaze access and explain why bringing eye tracker development in-house enables faster innovation, closer collaboration with users, and more responsive product improvements.

You will leave with a deeper understanding of modern eye tracking technology, practical insights into evaluating eye gaze performance, and opportunities to contribute to the future development of AAC access methods through ongoing field testing and feedback.

Evo is available exclusively with Grid Pad 13 and Grid Pad 16, our dedicated communication aids powered by Grid software.

Level

General

Age

All ages

2.5 Readapt and Engineering Excellence: How Thoughtful Mounting Design Enables Reliable AAC Access Across the Whole Day

Shaun McCormack - Author

Submission ID

120

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

Reliable access is fundamental to successful augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). While advances in AAC software and access methods continue to accelerate, these innovations only translate into meaningful communication when users can physically access their device consistently, comfortably, and safely across environments. This presentation explores how engineering excellence in AAC mounting design, as practiced at Readapt, enables communication to move from technical possibility to everyday participation.

Drawing on real world case examples and clinical perspectives, the session illustrates how well engineered mounting solutions support independence, reduce physical effort, and preserve dignity for AAC users throughout the rhythm of daily life at home, at work, in education, and in the community. The presentation highlights core engineering principles such as stability under dynamic loads, repeatable adjustability, modularity, and safe workflows, and demonstrates how these principles directly influence communication outcomes rather than functioning as peripheral hardware considerations.

The session also examines mounting from a holistic, whole day perspective, emphasizing the need for solutions that adapt to changing postures, environments, and activities without requiring constant re alignment or third party assistance. Regulatory considerations, including safety, durability, and consistency of performance, are discussed to underline the responsibility engineers and clinicians share in ensuring reliable access to communication.

By reframing mounting as foundational infrastructure rather than an accessory, this presentation aims to support clinicians, engineers, and AAC professionals in making informed decisions that prioritise access, autonomy, and long term success. Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how engineering excellence in mounting directly empowers AAC users to communicate when, where, and how they choose.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

2.6 Expanding Global Access to Professional Learning Through User-Led Online Education

Tracy Rackensperger - Co-Author, Lance McLemore - Author, David McNaughton - Co-Author

Submission ID

43

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

This presentation will highlight the structure and goals of the AAC Learning Center and demonstrate how its resources are being used by learners across the United States and internationally. Presenters will share examples of webcasts, training modules, and continuing education opportunities available through the platform and discuss how these materials support professionals, families, and AAC users seeking to expand their knowledge. The AAC Learning Center was developed to address limited access to AAC knowledge by providing free educational resources while intentionally centering the leadership and expertise of AAC users. The AAC Learning Center offers several interconnected platforms designed to expand access to AAC education. The website hosts a large collection of webcasts presented by AAC users, researchers, clinicians, and advocates. The AAC Learning Center Moodle provides free, self-paced learning modules on key AAC topics, allowing learners to engage with content at their own pace. All learners can earn a Certificate of Completion for successful completion of a module. It is now used in over 14 countries, and over 27,000 students at more than 125 colleges and universities have registered and completed at least one module as of March, 2026. In the United States, Speech Language Pathologists can earn free professionally recognized continuing education units (CEUs), reducing financial barriers to professional development. A defining feature of the AAC Learning Center is the active leadership of AAC users in the creation and delivery of educational content. AAC users present many of the webcasts available through the platform, sharing their experiences as well as their professional expertise in areas such as advocacy, assistive technology, education, and research. Beyond presenting, AAC users also contribute to the development of training materials, help shape curriculum topics, and provide guidance on how content should be designed to be accessible and relevant.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

2.7 It's not about Mastery: Writing Quality Goals for Emergent Communicators

Rachael Langley – Author Erin Sheldon – Co-Author Euan Robertson – Co-Author

Submission ID

129

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

Emergent communicators often pose the biggest challenge to classroom teams. These students are often learning language through AAC and they need learning goals that are both relevant and attainable. Students with emerging skills often make progress in small increments, so we need tools that capture those smallest gains. Instead of relying on mastery criteria, we will discuss goals that target increased duration of attention, increased engagement, or improved levels of participation in classroom activities. We will explore goal-writing from a supportive, strengths-based lens while offering tools and resources for participants to share with their teams.

Level

General

Age

Child

2.8 Talkin' Tricky Bodies. Developing Communication Partner Skills to support conversations about pain, fatigue and emotions

Amy Neville - Author

Submission ID

30

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

Abstract

Pain and fatigue are a common experience for individuals with complex physical medical conditions; these are often unacknowledged or misinterpreted due to barriers in communication. Pain is not limited to the sensory phenomena, but shaped by social context, emotional responses and vocabulary available. (Aydede, 2017). Communication Partner discomfort, a lack of confidence in their own communication skills and uncertainty about what is the 'right' thing to say are barriers to these discussions, alongside which vocabulary is available to aided communicators. I would like to deliver a platform presentation to discuss these topics:

- discuss how language influences expression and experience of chronic pain and fatigue,
- discuss the development of *Talkin' Tricky Bodies*
- share practical strategies to support communication partners in validating and responding to pain.

The Talkin' Tricky Bodies project was developed collaboratively by a multidisciplinary team within a specialist educational setting for students with neurological disability. This project was initiated by Lead Communication Assistant, Lead Speech and Language Therapist and Physiotherapist. Students completed an initial survey discussing their experiences and confidence discussing chronic pain and fatigue. Individualised intervention was provided to support students, e.g., Talking Mats, bespoke editing to AAC systems. Intervention targeting differentiating types and intensity of pain, recognising fatigue, and generating resources needed to support communication needs. Training sessions were delivered to staff, emphasising language choice, validation, and rephrasing practices. This project highlights the importance of accessible, shared vocabulary in reducing communicative effort and supporting specific expression of bodily experiences. Metaphors were found to be valuable tools rather than communicative failures, supporting existing evidence that pain language is often indirect (Bending, 2006). Acknowledgement, acceptance and affirmation of lived experiences were shown to demonstrate how language directly influences pain experience (Koban et al., 2017). *Talkin' Tricky Bodies* highlights the impact of consistent validation, shared vocabulary, intentional use of language from communication partners, and AAC resources can support these conversations.

Level

General

Age

Child

3.1 Communicating Choices _ An AAC User's experience to making complex choices when they have very minimal movement

Marion Stanton - Author, Dan Stanton - Co-Author, Steve Halse - Co-Author, Ian Malinson - Co-Author

Submission ID

104

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

Dan Stanton inspired Communication and Learning Enterprises (Candle), which supports 100+ AAC users and schools across UK with learning, Assistive Technology (AT) and communication. Dan is 38 and has cerebral palsy with very little movement. He is physically disabled, not learning disabled. Day-to-day communication with personal assistants is yes/no. He can sometimes head-point with expert support, has slight, partly controlled eyebrow movement, and recent switch-access innovations are being explored. Recently, Dan faced issues with only an inconsistent eyebrow raise: Lasting Power of Attorney; banks and institutions requesting formal authority; capacity doubts; demands for proof, control and defensible paperwork; and pressure towards institutional convenience rather than personal lifestyle preference. The aim is supported independence: keeping Dan central, heard and in charge. Dan may know the issue, and possibly the solution, but others may not. Dan's PAs developed a two-stage system. First, paper decisions and feelings forms use five-point scales that different people can ask independently, on different days, building a picture over time. The forms work circularly: a decision may raise a feeling; a feeling may point back to a decision; either can lead to stage two, a software navigation and problem-solving tool. It takes Dan's yes-or-silence responses through structured decision paths, using AI-generated options and independent contributors. Simple input produces complex, structured output, so AI or people unfamiliar with Dan can identify the problem and what he wants done. Every step has a full audit trail. Candle is exploring wider use with other AAC users. The approach works alongside other AAC access and responds to systems that start from doubt, shutting the person or process down, or giving organisations an unfair advantage. Its audit trail documents the person's reasoning. This presentation demonstrates the approach and software, considers wider application, and opens discussion on complex decision-making for people with minimal movement.

Level

General

Age

All ages

3.2 Recognizing Overlooked AAC Skills Through Technology-Driven Multimodal Communication

Amy Besecker - Author

Submission ID

107

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

This session explores how the meaning of multimodal communication has expanded in a digital world and how AAC users naturally weave everyday technologies into communication, learning, and social connection. While multimodal communication has traditionally included speech, symbols, signs, gestures, and low-tech tools, today's communication landscape is also shaped by digital, visual, spatial, and interactive media. Drawing on multimodal literacy frameworks and research on technology-mediated communication, this presentation redefines "multimodal" to include the dynamic mix of images, videos, emojis, avatars, text, and asynchronous communication that AAC users encounter across platforms. These modes influence how individuals express identity, negotiate meaning, and participate socially.

Using real anonymous usage patterns from Tobii Dynavox devices and confirmed by expert opinion, we highlight the three most frequently accessed digital tools: YouTube, web browsers, and messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp). Each functions as a meaningful communication environment where AAC users demonstrate skills that extend well beyond traditional page sets, for example: Sharing preferences and participating in joint attention through YouTube, Exploring interests and gathering information via web browsing, Engaging in authentic back and forth conversations through messaging, Using camera and photo tools to initiate interactions and share experiences. These behaviours are linked to competencies within the Dynamic AAC Goals Grid-3 (DAGG-3) as one of the sources of AAC goals, illustrating progression across operational, strategic, social, and linguistic domains. Case examples show how AAC users creatively combine tools, plan ahead, manage partner interactions, generate novel language, and contribute independently in conversations. The session positions digital communication not as an "extra," but as an integral part of AAC. Attendees will gain practical strategies for identifying meaningful skills through everyday technology use, writing participation-focused goals, supporting independence, and leveraging familiar digital tools to promote engagement. Ultimately, this presentation reframes daily technology as a powerful and authentic space for communication, identity expression, and social connection for AAC users.

Level

General

Age

All ages

3.3 WITHDRAWN

3.4 Symboloud: Applying 20 Years of AAC Experience to Practical App Development

Russell Smith - Author

Submission ID

145

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G11a&b

Abstract

This presentation will introduce Symboloud, an Android symbol-based AAC app developed by Dad In A Shed to provide a practical, flexible and accessible communication option for children and adults.

Drawing on more than a two decades of experience supporting AAC users, families, schools, therapists and healthcare services, the session will explore how real-world needs have shaped Symboloud's development. It will consider common barriers to setting up and maintaining AAC systems, including complex editing, difficult navigation, limited vocabulary organisation and the time required to create personalised resources.

The presentation will demonstrate Symboloud's approach to core and fringe vocabulary, sentence building, customisable grids and downloadable vocabulary packs. It will also introduce Symboloud Maker, an AI-assisted tool designed to help users, families and professionals generate personalised vocabulary grids more quickly. The session will explore how AI can reduce the workload involved in developing relevant vocabulary while keeping people involved in reviewing, adapting and making decisions about the final communication system. The session will briefly introduce Articuloud and show how it complements Dad In A Shed's wider work. This includes supplying and configuring communication devices, providing managed tablet solutions, supporting app deployment and helping organisations maintain reliable AAC systems over time.

Rather than presenting technology or AI as solutions in themselves, the session will focus on how thoughtful design, appropriate vocabulary, personalisation and ongoing practical support can improve access to communication. Attendees will gain insight into the decisions behind Symboloud and the lessons learned from turning lived and professional experience into practical tools for the AAC community.

Level

General

Age

All Ages

3.5 Accent 1400 to the Next Generation: Supporting Confident AAC Transitions and new possibilities

Mick Davies – Author, Amy Smyth – Co-Author, Jenny Lawrence – Co-Author

Submission ID

121

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

Innovation can feel most powerful when it grows from something familiar, opening up new possibilities while keeping trusted foundations in place.

As we say goodbye to the Accent 1400, this session explores the next generation of our AAC solutions arriving in late 2026, shaped by insights from AAC users, clinicians, and real-world practice. Built on what already works, these developments focus on enhancing access, flexibility, and everyday communication across a wide range of environments and needs.

Attendees will be introduced to key innovations including expanded screen options (13" and 16"), advanced access methods such as improved eye tracking, enhanced outdoor performance, and partner display functionality designed to support more natural, connected conversations. Improvements in intuitive controls and surround-style audio will also be explored, supporting clearer and more efficient communication in everyday contexts.

Alongside these advancements, the session will highlight what remains consistent. Familiar software platforms, Windows-based experiences, and trusted vocabulary systems such as Unity®, LAMP Words for Life®, WordPower®, easyChat and LLL ensure continuity for existing users, helping to reduce disruption and support confidence during transition.

This session will address not only the technology, but the human side of change. Presenters will share planned strategies for supporting individuals, families, and services through the device transition, with a focus on maintaining confidence, consistency, and meaningful communication outcomes.

New possibilities can feel easier to embrace when they grow from something familiar and trusted. This session will highlight how thoughtful innovation can support confidence, continuity, and meaningful communication outcomes. This session is ideal for speech and language therapists, people who use AAC (PWUAAC), educators, support staff, and families.

Level

General

Age

All ages

3.6 Coaching Without Limits: a workshop exploring effective coaching methods for communication partner training

Kate Reader - Author, Deborah Little - Co-Author, Kate Laws - Co-Author

Submission ID

80

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

Intended audience: AAC users, AAC advocates, SaLTs, OTs, Education professionals. Abstract: In this workshop, Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapists from ATtherapy will review evidence around effective communication partner training, including the 8 Stages of Communication Partner Instruction developed by Kent-Walsh & McNaughton (2005). The 8 Stage model outlines an evidence-based approach to communication partner skill development which continues to underpin successful AAC introduction across client groups. Twenty-one years after the conception of this communication partner coaching model, the presenters will share recent applications from clinical practice, reflecting on their own adaptations, updates and extensions. Discussion will include further tools now available in communication partner coaching. Participants will be encouraged to contribute their own reflections on effective coaching approaches and will be invited to share experiences of those which they have found to be most impactful. This will inform the creation of a shared resource, showcasing and signposting to tools that can be helpful in training and coaching.

Level

Specialist

Age

All ages

3.7 Is Modelling Enough? - Balancing Implicit and Explicit Instruction in AAC.

Euan Robertson – Author, Rachael Langley – Co-Author, Erin Sheldon – Co-Author

Submission ID

126

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

The field of AAC has become increasingly comfortable with the idea of "Modelling without Expectation" as a primary strategy for implementing AAC. Whilst modelling is critical, is it enough to "model, model, model" and expect our learners to develop meaningful communication skills? Join us in this interactive workshop, where we will examine the balance between explicit and implicit instruction. This will include in-depth discussion on the role of a well-designed vocabulary in leveraging opportunities for learning. We will demonstrate a range of strategies and supports to ensure communication partners have access to the tools required to provide AAC implementation.

This workshop is suitable for anyone implementing AAC, including teachers, speech and language therapists, and parents. You will have the opportunity to get hands-on with all the tools and resources discussed via an iPad, which is available to borrow for the duration of the session.

Level

General

Age

Child

3.8 Developing Supportive Communication Environments in Education: A Multidisciplinary Appreciative Inquiry in Fife

Cordelia Manson - Author

Submission ID

16

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

Abstract

Across Scotland, public health data indicates rising numbers of children beginning school with delayed SLC - a timely opportunity to reconsider communication environments in education. It began with focus on AAC supportive environments, yet AAC can only be effective when embedded within highquality, inclusive communication environments. AACT has long played a role in advancing practice in Scotland, in legislation, capacity building, and inclusive pedagogy across SLT and education. As a multidisciplinary service, recognition that meaningful improvement required combined expertise of SLT, ASN professionals, and educational psychology, brought these practitioners together as the core team. The Appreciative Inquiry retained AAC as core, while broadening the scope to the communication environment holistically across universal and enhanced provisions. The project sits in Scottish legislation and policy (AAC law, UNCRC, HGIOASL, CIRCLE and BalancedSystem) In phases, the cross sector team conducted surveys and worked with leaders across education and SLT to gather extensive data. Although challenging, the Appreciative Inquiry approach ensured a strengthsbased, participatory process involving over 200 contributors. The result: a suite of practical, sustainable resources aligned to national quality indicators. These support collaborating SLT & education practitioners to evaluate and strengthen five pillars: Physical Environment, Social Environment, LiteracyRich Environment, Communication Opportunities, and Staff Knowledge & Skills - to influence the consistency, visibility and effectiveness of AAC. Children's voices, central to the improvement planning process are explicitly supported throughout. Impact will be evaluated through uptake of these resources within school improvement plans, staff participation in training, observed implementation during visits, and the quality of professional reflections and discussions. Feedback from link SLTs will inform assessment of consistency, confidence and practice change. This session will share early findings, lessons and next steps from the pilot, offering practical insights into strengthening communication environments in a scalable, collaborative and meaningful way.

Level

General

Age

Child

4.1 Beyond fear of becoming locked in: Using technology to survive loss of vision and dexterity as a full-time AAC user.

Alex Gowing Cumber – Author

Submission ID

4

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

I need you as my community to write this story with me - I have hereditary spastic paraplegia gene mutation 15 in its complex form - or as my partner says, I have all the things. I'm deaf blind, non verbal, autistic and paralysed, amongst other things. As optic nerve atrophy degenerates I'm fearful of becoming locked in. This is especially challenging as I've made my living for a number of years as an artist. Fortunately, I spent my student days at Cambridge studying cyborgs, cyberfeminism and connected ethical dilemmas - partly in preparation for the journey I knew lay ahead. Yes, being hereditary I've read notes going back to the 1850s about what my ancestors lived and died with. I need to become a robot but my heart has stopped under anaesthetic, so the neural interface needs to be non invasive. Health and social care can lack holistic treatment, and I slowly realised that my inner robot was struggling to fully transition as SALT and neurologist, ophthalmologist, audiologist, environmental services and computer scientist, and the augmented communication team at Addenbrooks were disconnected, underfunded, keen to help yet unsure where to turn. Before Covid I'd spent years running workshops and one-to-one sessions in supported living projects, enabling non verbal people to communicate and use creativity especially to deal with life's journey from the traumatic to the mundane. Covid, then a degeneration in my disability and the consultant preparing me for death four years ago changed everything. This is my cyborg story: what I have and what I need to more than exist. It's a story of AI, future technology and a refusal to let the tech giants monetise my hope.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 4.2.1 Embedding Robust Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) for All: A Whole-School Journey Using Partner Assisted Scanning

Aoife McCaffrey – Author

Submission ID

91

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

Craighalbert is a specialist centre in Scotland supporting children and young people with neurological conditions. Services include a specialist school provision catering for a small cohort of learners with complex communication, learning, health and care needs. At present, all learners attending the school are non-speaking, with the majority also requiring alternative access methods for AAC. Historically, access to robust communication was inconsistent. There was uncertainty around how best to support learners with the most complex access needs, alongside a reliance on inaccessible communication approaches that many pupils could not use expressively. Expectations around communication, cognition and literacy were therefore variable. This session shares our ongoing whole-school journey towards more robust and accessible AAC for all learners. Central to this has been a shift in how access is understood and supported across a multidisciplinary team. As staff confidence in AAC has developed, partner assisted scanning (auditory, visual and combined approaches) has become established as a core access method, rather than as a last resort. Early success with learners previously considered to have the most complex needs was pivotal. These moments challenged assumptions, shifted expectations and opened up new possibilities for communication, literacy and learning. This was further supported through the introduction of a comprehensive literacy approach, strengthening recognition of learners' potential. Changes in staff confidence, consistency of AAC use and increased learner participation have been key indicators of impact. The process has not been without challenges, including supporting staff and families to move beyond more familiar but less accessible communication approaches. We will reflect on key elements that supported this shift, including developing staff confidence, embedding alternative access and building a more consistent and accessible communication culture. The session will offer practical insights, alongside honest reflections on challenges, for settings working to create more inclusive and accessible communication environments.

Level

General

Age

Child

LT 4.2.2 Literacy Without Limits: Building a National Alliance for Inclusive Literacy

Chantal Bryan – Author

Submission ID

85

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

For too many AAC users and learners with complex needs, access to literacy remains limited not by ability, but by systemic barriers, low expectations, and inconsistent provision. The Alliance for Inclusive Literacy was established in 2025 to challenge these limits and to unite organisations, AAC users, families, educators and therapists behind a shared mission: ensuring that every learner has access to meaningful, progressive literacy teaching. This presentation will introduce the work of the Alliance and explore why a national, cross sector movement is urgently needed. Drawing on evidence from member organisations, practitioners and AAC users, we will highlight the key issues facing learners today — including the continued use of curriculum disapplication, the absence of a clear literacy entitlement, and the impact of labels such as “complex needs” and PMLD on expectations and access. We will also share how the Alliance is influencing the current SEND reforms to ensure literacy is recognised as a fundamental right. Aligned with the 2026 theme “Communication without limits”, this session will show how removing limits to literacy is inseparable from removing limits to communication. Literacy expands voice, agency and participation — and AAC users have been clear that literacy matters for relationships, independence, employment and citizenship. We will share the Alliance’s roadmap, early impact, and how organisations and individuals can get involved. Attendees will leave with practical ways to contribute to a national movement that places AAC users’ rights, expertise and lived experience at its heart.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

LT 4.2.5 Developing a method for enhancing autonomy through AAC: Supporting autonomy and self-determination in individuals with Rett syndrome

Gerna G. Scholte - Author, Irena Drasković - Co-Author, Stijn R.J.M. Deckers - Co-Author, Kaylee van Huijgevoort - Co-Author, Sanne Nieuwenhuis - Co-Author

Submission ID

65

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

Motor impairments significantly constrain communication development and possibilities for expression, particularly in individuals with complex communication needs such as Rett syndrome. As most people with Rett syndrome are non-verbal, they rely on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to be heard. Townend et al. (2020) developed Communication Guidelines to promote access to communication for individuals with Rett syndrome worldwide. A combination of AAC approaches -- such as Best-Yes, Yes-No communication, E-Tran frames, Eye Gaze devices and others -- are regarded as best practice. However, individuals with Rett syndrome are often excluded from decision-making processes, most likely due to (wrong) assumptions about limited cognitive and communicative abilities (Ahonniska-Assa et al., 2018). Emerging evidence suggests that when appropriate AAC supports are provided, individuals with Rett syndrome demonstrate more advanced communicative and cognitive abilities (Ahonniska-Assa et al., 2018; Townend et al., 2020). Nevertheless, AAC is still underutilised in facilitating participation in everyday decision-making. This study explores how AAC can be used to support adolescents and young adults with Rett syndrome in expressing preferences and contributing to decisions about their daily lives. In the first phase of this project, qualitative interviews were conducted with eight individuals with Rett syndrome and thirteen communication partners, using tailored AAC strategies (e.g., eye-gaze devices, structured choice-making supports). Interviews focused on experiences of influence and personal preferences. Preliminary findings indicate participants leveraging the opportunities for supported agency by expressing meaningful preferences, aligning with theories of self-determination that emphasise autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core human needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Bandura, 2018). Building on these findings, a practice-based methodology and training programme for parents and professionals are being developed and piloted in the current phase of the project. This work contributes to a shift in AAC from compensating for impairment towards enabling agency, with implications for broader populations with communication support needs.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 4.2.6 Getting Chatty with WordPower for the UK with Widgits!

Nancy Inman - Author, Darlette Navrotski - Co-Author, Lisa Timm - Co-Author, Mick Davies - Co-Author, Jenny Lawrence – Co-Author

Submission ID

79

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

Let's get chatty with WordPower! This session will introduce the new WordPower dialect feature, customized for the UK with Widgit symbols. While WordPower was originally created for American English speakers, the new "Dialect Tool" has allowed for the creation of geographically appropriate vocabularies for UK English, Australian English, and Canadian English. And the UK file is available with Widgit symbols as well as Symbol Stix and PCS. Communication is fun and necessary for daily living and engagement. This session will explore WordPower's intuitive language, and efficient communication strategies to enhance AAC user success. Participants will be guided through the fundamentals, advanced features, and real-world applications of WordPower. Discover the core guiding principles of WordPower and uncover lesser-known features to optimize its full potential. The Widgit symbols have recently been incorporated into the WordPower vocabulary with the UK in mind. Our goal is to demonstrate meaningful communication opportunities that can be used in daily life using the features built into WordPower. Attendees will leave with a basic understanding of WordPower's organizational framework, built-in efficiency tools, and practical strategies for supporting meaningful, spontaneous communication using an AAC system designed for growth and real-world connection.

Level

General

Age

All ages

4.4 Creating custom AI-powered tools in Grid with Smart Prompt

Will Wade – Author, Becky Fry - Author

Submission ID

142

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworkers South, G11a&b

Abstract

This presentation introduces Smart Prompt, a new feature in Grid that allows AAC users, clinicians, educators, and communication partners to design customised AI-powered tools without programming knowledge. Using simple prompts, attendees will see how Smart Prompt can be used to create tools that generate vocabulary, adapt language for different audiences, translate text, summarise information, support writing tasks, and much more. By removing the technical barriers to creating AI-powered tools, Smart Prompt enables personalised solutions that can evolve alongside an individual's communication goals.

Through practical demonstrations and real-world examples from AAC users, the session will explore how Smart Prompt can support clinical practice, personalised intervention, multilingual communication, education, employment, and everyday conversations. Attendees will gain ideas for creating their own AI-powered tools, while considering how these can complement existing AAC strategies and promote greater independence.

The presentation will also discuss the responsible use of generative AI in AAC, including transparency, safety, reliability, and maintaining user choice and authorship. By putting flexible AI tools directly into the hands of the people who use and support AAC, Smart Prompt demonstrates how generative AI can enhance communication while ensuring the individual remains in control of their own voice.

Level

General

Age

All Ages

4.5 Beyond the Device: Connecting the Pieces of Powered AAC

Dee Osmond - Author

Submission ID

134

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

Successful AAC implementation depends on far more than selecting the right AAC app. Communication outcomes are shaped by multiple components working together in a cohesive system including hardware, software, access method, voice, positioning and ongoing support. When any element is overlooked, the effectiveness, useability and long-term adoption of AAC can be significantly compromised.

This session explores the concept of AAC as a complete ecosystem and examines how each component contributes to successful communication outcomes. Attendees will gain practical insights into the interdependence of technology, access, and environmental supports, and how thoughtful consideration of the whole system can improve participation, independence, and quality of life for AAC users.

Level

General

Age

All Ages

4.6 Developing an AI-Enabled Tool to Support Language Learning by Children who use Speech Generating Devices: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead

Michael Clarke - Author, Syed Billah - Co-Author, Richard He - Co-Author, Ehtesham UI-Haque - Co-Author, Gloria Soto - Co-Author

Submission ID

96

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

Many children who use speech generating devices (SGDs) face persistent barriers to language learning as a consequence of the motor and learning demands of SGD use and limited access to timely, developmentally appropriate intervention¹. Adult reformulations (recasts) of child utterances are a well-recognized mechanism for scaffolding language learning in everyday interaction. This is seen most clearly when children repair their prior turn to incorporate elements of the adult's reformulation: 1. Child: I runned fast 2. Adult: wow, you ran really fast 3. Child: yeah, I ran fast Our prior research has shown that for children using SGDs, self-repair following an adult reformulation is particularly facilitative of language learning². Given the robustness of adult reformulation and child self-repair in supporting language learning, we have been exploring whether, in the context of intervention, an AI-enabled tool can: (1) support speech language pathologists, educators, and caregivers in providing and modelling developmentally appropriate reformulations of SGD generated utterances in real time, and (2) sensitively guide children to self-repair using their SGD based on the adult reformulation. The aim is to scaffold language learning for children and support adults in providing effective reformulations without requiring extensive training. A central challenge of this work is developing a language model that reflects how SGDs are used in real interaction. General purpose large language models are unsuited to this task because they produce fluent, grammatically complete output, and do not account for factors such as the symbol layout of the device, the physical demands of symbol selection, and the user's current linguistic level. A second challenge concerns designing effective interfaces for both children and adults. For example, should support for child self-repair be built on existing SGD architectures, or should it be offered through novel interface designs? In this presentation, we discuss our methods and progress toward these aims, along with challenges encountered and lessons learned. ¹ Soto & Clarke (2017). *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*. ² Soto et al. (2020). *Journal of Child Language*.

Level

General

Age

Child

4.7 Increasing learning opportunities for all students: a hands-on iPad workshop

Erin Sheldon – Author, Rachael Langley – Co-Author, Euan Robertson – Co-Author

Submission ID

127

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

This hands-on workshop will explore new, innovative tools and strategies to make teaching easier, while increasing the learning opportunities for all students, including AAC users. These tools and strategies are designed to help you deliver lessons to effectively support students with diverse learning support profiles. Together we will walk through a sample lesson and the resources required to differentiate instruction.

Participants will explore 'hands-on' how these tools and strategies can be applied to lessons across a range of different subjects. They will also discover how to embed language and literacy in a consistent way across a range of developmental profiles.

This workshop is suitable for any professional supporting learners in the classroom. Parents are welcome to attend and explore how the tools and strategies we explore may support their learner. You will have an iPad to borrow for the duration of the session allowing you to follow along with the presenters.

Level

General

Age

Child

5.1 A Critique of Facilitated Communication From an AAC User's Perspective

Lance McLemore - Author

Submission ID

42

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience (AAC User)

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

The purpose of this session is to bring attention to the problems of facilitated communication using video examples and scientific studies. Facilitated communication (FC) is a communication technique wherein an individual's arm or hand is physically supported, and there are also no-touch variants. Two forms of FC that are now common are Spelling to Communicate (S2C) and Rapid Prompting Method (RPM). These communication techniques, along with their numerous facilitator-reliant variants, are all based on the work of Douglas Biklen in the early 90s.

On October 19, 1993, Prisoners of Silence was aired on PBS as a part of a series on FC. In my opinion, the documentary was damning. It showed some of the problems with FC, such as non-speaking autistic individuals making criminal accusations against people which were later proven false. Numerous studies showed that the communication produced using FC was generated by the facilitator rather than the AAC users themselves. To this date, I am not aware of any controlled study which validates any form of FC. Discussion There are many negative consequences of this technique such as prompt dependency and lost time and opportunities caused by forgoing evidence based AAC interventions. In 1995, ASHA released a position statement recommending that its members not use facilitator-reliant communication techniques. It reaffirmed its position in 2018, and there are many other organizations that similarly discourage the use of FC.

I have created this presentation to bring to the attention of the audience the downsides and dangers of this thoroughly discredited technique which has been rebranded and marketed to the public as something wholly different. I believe that the goal of any AAC intervention should be to foster the development of truly independent communication, but FC actively undermines this goal.

Level

Specialist

Age

All ages

5.2 Experiences of Augmentative and Alternative Communication use in School: Findings from a Qualitative Evidence Synthesis

Ciara Byrnes - Author, Geraldine Moran - Co-Author, Dr. Michael T. Clarke - Co-Author, Dr. Jessica Caron - Co-Author, Dr. Emma Smith - Co-Author, Prof. Rose Galvin - Co-Author, Dr. Aoife Lily Gallagher - Co-Author

Submission ID

24

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

Abstract

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to a range of communication methods used by children or adults to enhance or replace oral communication. Studies show many children with communication needs who require AAC do not have access to appropriate supports, and that embedding AAC interventions in the classroom is challenging and impacts meaningful participation, engagement and independence. There is a critical need for AAC research that educates and empowers stakeholders in education. The aim of this qualitative evidence synthesis is to explore stakeholder experiences of the use of AAC in the classroom.

A comprehensive literature search of the following electronic databases was completed: PubMed, CINAHL Complete, EMBASE, EBSCOhost and Scopus. A manual search of the grey literature was also carried out. Qualitative data on the perspectives and experiences of AAC users, their families, and educators and healthcare professionals who support AAC users in education settings for children 3-18 years were included. Methodological quality of included papers were appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist; and study quality was evaluated using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation (GRADE) - Confidence in the Evidence from Reviews of Qualitative research (CERQual) approach. Qualitative content analysis was undertaken using constructs from Normalisation Process Theory.

Preliminary findings indicate there are several interacting factors at an individual and systems level which contribute to a gap in AAC services and supports. These range from difficulties reported with useability, to a lack of expertise from support persons. Understanding contextual factors that shape classroom AAC implementation is crucial for optimising AAC users meaningful participation. This qualitative evidence synthesis summarises findings from empirical international literature to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of AAC use from a range of stakeholder perspectives. Findings will inform the development of pathways to support implementation of AAC for children with communication needs within schools.

Level

General

Age

Child

5.3 Informal leadership and the commissioning of local AAC services in England: Exploring perceptions of influence and priority

Suzanne Martin - Author

Submission ID

71

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Abstract

Equitable access to AAC remains highly variable across England despite national guidance outlining a hub and spoke commissioning model. Local AAC services, responsible for supporting the majority of AAC users continue to lack consistent structures, ownership, and investment. Informal leaders, who operate without formal authority but hold significant frontline expertise, are frequently required to navigate these gaps, yet their insights into commissioning influences are largely absent from existing literature. This study explored how informal leaders perceive, interpret, and prioritise the factors shaping the commissioning of local AAC services in England. A qualitative design informed by Participatory Action Research enabled collective reflection and meaning making. Five informal leaders working in health or education took part in two online participatory focus groups, with optional follow up reflections and a validation and preference ranking stage. Data from focus groups, digital bulletin board activities, emails, and ranking tasks were analysed inductively using reflexive thematic analysis. Five themes were identified: (1) fragmented systems and structural ambiguity; (2) invisible needs and limited awareness of AAC; (3) strained informal leadership; (4) system inequities affecting AAC users; and (5) delayed access and compromised outcomes. The absence of clear commissioning structures and accountability emerged as the most influential factor and was consistently prioritised by participants. Informal leaders described operating within an unclear commissioning landscape, with limited mechanisms to channel their expertise into decision making. A cycle of low visibility, limited workforce confidence, and inequitable resource allocation further reinforced systemic fragmentation, contributing to inconsistent provision and long term impacts for AAC users. The study highlights the need for clearer local commissioning structures, systematic engagement of informal leaders, and the development of formal AAC leadership pathways. Strengthening cross sector coordination is essential to ensuring that AAC users are visible in commissioning decisions and receive equitable, needs led support. This study was undertaken as part of my MSc Healthcare Leadership programme at the University of Warwick.

Level

Specialist

Age

All ages

5.5 Jabbla UK – Entering a New Chapter

Ian Foulger – Author

Submission ID

141

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

Join Jabbla UK as we introduce an exciting new direction in our AAC journey. For many years, Jabbla has been recognised for delivering powerful Windows-based communication solutions. At this year's Communication Matters Conference, we're delighted to officially announce our first step into the iOS world with the launch of **the HeyPad**.

Built around the familiar Allora 3 communication software, **the HeyPad** brings Jabbla's AAC experience to a lightweight iPad platform, offering a portable solution with clear, powerful audio and a simple, practical design. During this session, we'll demonstrate **the HeyPad** in action, explore its key features, and discuss how it expands the range of communication options available to AAC users, therapists and education professionals. We'll also share how **the HeyPad** fits within Jabbla's wider vision of providing greater flexibility and choice for individuals who rely on AAC. While this session marks the launch of an exciting new product, it also represents the beginning of a broader journey as we continue to explore new ways of supporting communication across different platforms and technologies.

Alongside the demonstration, we'll provide an overview of our current AAC solutions and discuss how they can be tailored to meet a wide range of communication needs in clinical, educational and everyday settings. Whether you're already familiar with Jabbla or are discovering our products for the first time, we'd love you to join us to learn more about our latest developments, ask questions and hear about the direction we're taking. Following the session, delegates will have the opportunity to experience **the HeyPad** firsthand and continue the conversation with the Jabbla UK team at our exhibition stand.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

5.6 I-ASC, You-ASC, We All-ASC: A practical session exploring collaborative AAC decision-making across the lifespan

Katy Latham - Author, Yvonne Lynch - Co-Author, Amy Boatwright - Co-Author, Matthew Davidson - Co-Author, Thea McIntosh - Co-Author, Stuart Meredith - Co-Author, Helen Whittle - Co-Author, Janice Murray - Co-Author, Liz Moulam - Co-Author, Simon Judge - Co-Author

Submission ID

76

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Best Research

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

The Identifying Appropriate Symbol Communication (I-ASC) project (Murray et al., 2016- 2025) led to the development of an evidence-based explanatory model designed to support decision-making around augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

This current project represents the next phase of that work. Pronounced 'I-ask', it focuses on evaluating the real-world impact of the I-ASC model five years after its original publication, taking on board the perspectives of speech and language therapists, AAC users, families, support staff and researchers. Informed by this impact review, the project has included the redevelopment of I-ASC resources and the creation of a new dedicated website designed to support decision-making across the lifespan. The I-ASC platform provides flexible and accessible tools, summaries, and training materials for AAC users, their support networks, and professionals, to use wherever they are in their AAC experience. These updates aim to ensure that the I-ASC model remains relevant, accessible, and adaptable, supporting a personalised and collaborative approach to decision-making as technology and AAC systems continue to evolve.

This interactive workshop will combine a brief project summary with practical activities. Workshop participants will be invited to reflect on the elements that influence AAC decision-making in their own experiences, which will then be linked back to the I-ASC model. To support the model's practical application, participants will discuss case-based scenarios in small groups, considering potential facilitators and barriers to AAC decision-making.

Participants will also explore the website and resources from different perspectives (e.g., AAC users, family members, professionals), using guided questions to consider how useful, accessible, and relevant they are for individuals. Opportunities for interactive whole-group discussions will be included throughout the workshop. Live polls and QR code feedback will be used to gather attendees' views on the current I-ASC resources. The workshop will end with a summary of key points and reflections for practice.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

5.7 Teaching Generative Language Through Therapy Routines

Euan Robertson – Author, Rachael Langey – Co-Author, Erin Sheldon – Co-Author

Submission ID

125

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

Children with developmental disabilities often pose challenges for speech and language therapists. Limited intelligibility, such as from issues with motor speech, often mask a child's emerging cognitive and communication capabilities. It can be difficult for clinicians to determine a child's speech and language skills when they struggle to communicate using spoken words. Research indicates that many of these students produce longer and more complex utterances when AAC is implemented. But few assistive technology teams can easily acquire AAC for all students who may potentially benefit.

This hands-on workshop will explore innovative new tools and strategies to support speech and language goals for children with developmental disabilities. We will work through a series of direct child-focused interventions to develop receptive and expressive language, including grammatical morphology. These tools and strategies support children with a broad range of speech and language difficulties, but are also an effective add-on for students learning to use a variety of AAC technologies. Best yet, these new tools and strategies are provided at no-cost to all clinicians through their free AssistiveWare professional license.

Level

General

Age

Child

TUESDAY

PL01 My Voice, My Words, My Choice: Authenticity and Agency in AAC

Gavin Clifton – Author

Submission ID
123

Format
Plenary Presentation

Submission Topic
Personal Stories and Preferences

Location
Esther Simpson, LG08

Abstract

What does it really mean to communicate? Not just to be understood, but to be heard as yourself?

I am Gavin Clifton, The Disabled Writer. I am a writer and bestselling children's author, lyricist, disability advocate, and AAC user born with cerebral palsy, from South Wales. I have spent decades navigating the gap between what I want to say and what the world allows me to say. At the heart of Augmentative and Alternative Communication lies a tension that rarely gets named. Authenticity asks: Does this communication genuinely reflect who I am, whether it's my voice, my vocabulary, my identity? Agency asks: Am I in control of what I say, when I say it, and how? This is where the misjudgment happens. People hear a robotic voice and make assumptions. They assume that because my words come slowly, my thoughts do too. They talk to the person next to me instead. They mean well, but they get me wrong. These two questions are deeply connected. You cannot fully have one without the other. For many AAC users, neither is fully achieved regularly.

I will take you through my own journey. From a love-hate relationship with a robotic voice that didn't feel like mine, to the real-time exhaustion of typing while conversation moves on, to the slow erosion of self-worth that comes from being spoken over. I will share how I found my way back, through self-acceptance, creativity, and through a communication setup that finally lets me speak on my own terms. Today, I use an AI voice I have chosen to represent me, one that finally feels close enough to my identity. It is rare. But it shows what is possible. When authenticity and agency come together, something extraordinary happens. Communication becomes more than functional; it becomes an expression of who you truly are. I may not be able to communicate in the most conventional way, but that doesn't mean I don't have anything to say. Remember, it's okay to be different, accept yourself, and others too.

Always Be You!

Level
General

Age
All Ages

6.1 GenAI in AAC systems: Developing approaches to using GenAI enabled AT and AAC systems in exam contexts

Rohan Slaughter - Author, Tom Griffiths - Co-Author, Saff Murphy-Mann - Co-Author

Submission ID

88

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

An underexplored aspect of AAC systems that include Generative AI (GenAI) tools is how such systems are used in exams or assessments. This session will briefly describe the inclusion of GenAI in AAC systems to contextualise their current availability, and will outline the wider debate around the use of GenAI-enabled assistive technology in exam conditions. It is expected that some of the guidance developed for the use of AT tools that utilise AI features in exam conditions may be applied to the use of AAC systems that also include GenAI features. This workshop will be of interest to AAC users who are planning to access accredited qualifications and those who support them. AAC developers may also be interested in attending to consider how they can develop their products to be suitable for use in exam or assessment conditions, e.g. developers of AAC systems could include an 'exam mode' in their software that prevents access to external tools, internet searches and GenAI systems, when this mode is activated. We would like to capture the views of the CM community on this important aspect of the use of AAC systems that include AI features. This workshop will pose a set of focused tasks to those who attend with the aim of exploring:

- How AAC systems that are using AI features are being used now in education, schools, colleges etc.
- Perceived barriers or enablers to using AAC and AT tools that include GenAI features in exams or assessments.
- Possible solutions or approaches to the use of AAC tools that include GenAI tools in exams and assessments.

The workshop outputs (e.g. identified priorities, barriers and solutions) will be recorded by the UoD team to produce an article for inclusion in the CM journal and will be used to inform future work.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 6.2.1 Designing an AAC Language System for a Morphologically Rich Minoritised Language: The development of Geabaire the first symbols-based AAC app for Irish

Julia Cummins - Author, Emily Barnes - Co-Author, Neasa Ní Chiaráin - Co-Author, Ailbhe Ní Chasaide - Co-Author

Submission ID

97

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

This study examines the co-design, development, and formative evaluation of Geabaire, a symbols-based augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) app with a language system specifically created for autistic children in Irish-medium education by the ABAIR research group at Trinity College Dublin. Although AAC provision is growing worldwide, most language systems remain English-focused, with limited attention to the linguistic and cultural needs of morphologically rich and minoritised languages. This project seeks to address this gap by exploring how the structural and cultural features of Irish can be systematically integrated into AAC language system design. A participatory, design-based research approach was utilised, involving autistic children (n=7), an adult AAC user (1), parents (n=4), and professionals (n=8) in Irish-medium educational settings. Usability testing and qualitative interviews guided system development and evaluation. Data were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis, focusing on (1) linguistic representation, (2) user-perceived affordances and constraints, and (3) cultural and linguistic responsiveness. Findings show that designing for Irish requires reconsidering core AAC principles. Morphological complexity (e.g., inflection and initial mutations) calls for rule-based generation with automatic grammar correctors rather than a static vocabulary representation. The system layout aligned with Irish verb–subject–object structure and emphasised prepositional pronouns. Participants indicated that features such as consistent grid layouts, high-frequency phrase access (“gob gasta”), and self-advocacy tools (“stad”) enhanced communication efficiency and lowered cognitive load. However, tensions arose between preserving linguistic integrity and ensuring ease of access. Cultural relevance, including dialect representation and vocabulary aligned with identity, was seen as essential for user acceptance and engagement. This study advances AAC theory by broadening existing frameworks for language systems to include morphologically complex and idiomatic languages. It introduces Geabaire as a transferable conceptual model, redefining efficiency as language-specific and viewing AAC as a tool for linguistic and cultural participation rather than just functional communication.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 6.2.2 Applying the Rights of the Talker: Manifesto for Chattering (Hackett et al., n.d.) to those who use Alternative Communication Styles

Andrea Lee - Author, Danielle Diver - Co-Author

Submission ID

105

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

The Rights of the Talker is a manifesto for chattering, whispering, translanguaging, not-speaking, non-verbalising, screeching, signing, clicking, twirling, stimming, assistive technology-ing, jumping, shouting, grasping, gasping, dancing, drawing, repeating, refusing, gesturing, glancing, smirking, eye-rolling, whistling...(Hackett et al., n.d.) This manifesto emerged from a team of contemporary researchers and social justice activists from a critical disability, childhood studies and speech and language therapy background sharing perspectives on child language development. The manifesto underpinned a book (Badwan et al., 2025) which sought to open conversations about current language teaching practices and illuminate the importance of place, the body, and movement in opening space for young children's improvisatory, creative, playful language practices. (Hackett et al., n.d.) The lead presenter contributed a chapter to this book which explored applying the lens of social justice to AAC practice in education. The second presenter has a clinical specialism supporting adults with learning disabilities using AAC and comes to this work from a perspective of seeing the challenges following the transition from school to adult services. The following pointers from the manifesto will be exemplified with clinical examples and video demonstrating the importance to AAC users.

1. Right to time
2. Right to silence
3. Right to be listened to
4. Right to choose how
5. Right to movement and gaze
6. Right to (not) express oneself

The premise of 'for their own good', the perspective of what is valued or not valued as communication success and practices which shape AAC use in narrowly controlled ways will be discussed. The manifesto will be related to the Five, Good Communication Standards report (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2013) and the oracy framework being developed as part of the 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' government white paper (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version>, 2026). Attendees will be called to action to consider how the Rights of the Talker manifesto can be applied to their role in supporting children using AAC.

Level
Introductory

Age
All ages

LT 6.2.3 AAC Support – A Creative Approach

Bethany Cook - Author

Submission ID

106

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

Target setting, in-class support, and staff training are all essential components in supporting AAC users as they begin and pursue their journey with voice output communication. But could we do more? This was the question we asked ourselves within the Kent and Medway Communication and Assistive Technology Team. Should our focus just be on enabling users to meet targets within highly structured learning environments, or should we aim to also support them in becoming functional communicators within their local communities, able to build friendships, engage with the public, and develop independence? With this in mind, we have developed a programme of support within our pathway that emphasises the use of voice output communication aids in real-world contexts. Initiatives such as library drop-ins, virtual parent groups, and community awareness events are just some of the ways we are extending support beyond traditional settings. The impact has been significant: flourishing friendships between AAC users, peer support networks among parents at different stages of their AAC journey, and increased awareness and understanding of AAC across communities in Kent. While we continue to deliver target-based interventions and provide training for staff and families, our work demonstrates that there is far more we can offer. By thinking creatively and working beyond the classroom, therapists and therapy assistants can enable richer, more meaningful communication experiences for the children and young people we support. Through this presentation we hope to share the process of developing these support offers, the experiences of our young people and their families and the positive outcomes we have witnessed.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 6.2.5 Bilingualism and Augmentative and Alternative Communication: a case study

Rachael Baltrusaitė - Author

Submission ID

110

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

The UK is increasingly multilingual. In 2024 over 20% of pupils spoke English as an Additional Language; compared to just 7.6% in 1997 (Department for Education, 2024), reflecting an ever diverse population. This presents a change, and a challenge, to the SLT profession. As the multilingual population grows, the intervention that SLTs provide will need to adapt to meet their clients' needs. In the field of AAC this means that clinicians need to invest time in sourcing/producing paper-based and powered AAC in languages with which they themselves are unfamiliar. In theory, intervention based on bilingual AAC is best practice and essential for equitable service provision (McNamara, 2018), however there exists a gap between theory and practice. In this session I present a case study of a bilingual Russian-English man who was referred to CASEE for an assessment for a powered AAC device. I explore the complexity of assessing a bilingual client, including the collaboration with interpreters. I discuss the decision-making process around the vocabulary package and the supplied device. I explain the process of setting up a bilingual device through joint work with family, interpreters and the software supplier. Lastly, I consider the impact that our intervention had on our client who was extremely low in mood at the time of referral. This successful case study provides tips for how to effectively develop a bespoke bilingual AAC system within the context of the NHS. I will highlight some of the barriers I faced including linguistic differences, cultural differences, the commercial availability of resources, and the availability of interpreters. An increasingly multilingual population needs culturally competent SLTs (Leadbeater & Litosseliti, 2014, RCSLT, 2018) who will promote the benefits of linguistic diversity and not restrict their clients to monolingual AAC.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 6.2.6 AAC as communication, not an accommodation: Making AAC central in family life

Hayley Leonard - Author

Submission ID

115

Format

Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

From the beginning of our AAC journey we didn't want communication in our home to centre on speech alone, with his way of communicating treated as something separate or secondary. We have worked hard to create a multimodal home environment, using symbols, multiple AAC devices, Makaton, and clear points of reference for communication because it is important to us that we respect his method of communication and embrace the things that AAC can bring to all our lives that speech can't, and use it to improve all of our communication skills. To support this, we have several AAC devices accessible to everyone not just my son. We use Makaton across the household and make a conscious effort to ensure that communication is not something that only shifts when we are speaking directly to him but that he can walk into any room where a conversation is being had and get an understanding. This approach has been particularly important because our son has difficulties understanding spoken language, yet AAC supports his comprehension and engagement. This session explores how we have embedded this approach into everyday family life, including how it works alongside our 3 year old daughter and within typical daily routines. We will share what has worked well, the challenges we have encountered, and how adopting a shared communication approach has shaped our family dynamic for the better. Most importantly, we will reflect on the impact this has had on our son. Creating an environment where his communication is respected and shared has supported his confidence, sense of belonging, and understanding of the world around him. It has also broadened all of our communication skills, encouraging us to be more flexible, intentional, and connected as a family.

Level

Introductory

Age

Child

6.3 Understanding 'Inconsistent' AAC Use in Adult Social Care: A Realist-Informed Study of Everyday Practice

Katie Dooley Cawley - Author, Simon Hackett - Co-Author, Katherine Broomfield - Co-Author, Helen Stringer - Co-Author

Submission ID

5

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Abstract

Adults with intellectual disabilities often rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to participate in everyday life. In adult social care settings, including supported living services, domiciliary care, day services, and respite provision, access to AAC depends not only on communication tools, but on how communication is understood, supported, and prioritised in practice. AAC use is often described as “inconsistent”, but there is limited understanding of how and why communication support is sustained, adapted, narrowed, or paused in real-world contexts. This study explored how paid care staff support AAC in everyday practice. Interviews were conducted with 16 paid care staff working across five adult social care settings in North East England, UK: independent living, domiciliary care, day services, respite services, and complex needs provision. Data were analysed using a realist-informed, framework-based approach to identify the processes shaping AAC implementation across contexts. The findings showed that AAC implementation in adult social care is dynamic, flexible, and responsive rather than fixed. Staff supported communication by responding to the person’s emotional and physical state, learning what worked through experience, embedding AAC within everyday routines, and drawing on shared team knowledge. AAC was more likely to be sustained when staff perceived that it helped people feel understood, regulated, and able to participate. At times, AAC was simplified or temporarily reduced to protect wellbeing, reflecting context-sensitive and values-based judgement rather than a lack of commitment to communication. These findings suggest that apparent inconsistencies in AAC use across adult services often reflect skilled, context-sensitive decision-making rather than inadequate implementation. The study highlights the importance of service structures, team support, and values-based approaches to communication in sustaining meaningful and achievable AAC use in everyday adult social care.

Level

General

Age

Adult

6.4 Exploring Children's Views about Play using Talking Mats

Laura Holmes – Author

Submission ID

33

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G11a&b

Abstract

This workshop will explore a co-development project undertaken by Dr Lynsey Burke (University of Dundee), Talking Mats Ltd, and children in the Early years of education in Falkirk. Children were placed at the centre of the design and development process for a Talking Mats Resource focusing on exploring views about Play. Following ethical approval, they were active participants from the outset—sharing ideas, expressing preferences, and shaping key design decisions. The process was inclusive and accessible, and care was taken to close the feedback loop by demonstrating how children's contributions directly influenced the final resource.

The resulting resource is a universal AAC tool which can be used across Early Years settings to enable children to share how they feel about play. The pilot feedback evidenced how the resource was used to support children's communication, decision-making, and self-reflection. The resource provides a visual framework for capturing children's views about their play and learning, without relying solely on expressive verbal communication, and enables educators to gain a richer understanding of children's emerging decision-making capacities.

Workshop Objectives

- To share examples of effective co-development of a universal AAC tool in early years practice
- To enhance understanding of playful pedagogies
- To evidence the impact of including children's voices in early years education

Participants will:

- Understand how co-development with young children can be achieved in practice
- Explore playful methodologies that support children's communication and decision-making using AAC
- Recognise the value of children's voices in informing self-evaluation and practice improvement

Expected Outcomes and Impact

While Talking Mats are widely used within disability contexts, they are less commonly used in mainstream early years environments. This workshop will show how Talking Mats can be used universally as an AAC tool across all contexts to build self-evaluation skills.

Level

Introductory

Age

Child

6.5 AAGI: Augmentative and Alternative Gesture Interface Ver.2

Ikushi Yoda – Author

Submission ID

122

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

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, playing games, controlling indoor environment, and maintaining contact in-house.

To this end, we utilized commercially available RGB-D or UVC cameras, and developed a non-contact, non-constraint interface. We collected effective 1745 gestures from 80 people with motor dysfunction and classified voluntary movements based on body parts. 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.

For the spread of the software in Japan, we have held classes for Japanese Association of Occupational Therapists and lend PCs and RGB-D cameras in free to many facilities. Over fifty hospitals, district nursing service and special needs schools, are now utilizing the software for people with motor disabilities. The users use the software for controlling Windows PCs, games (PC games, Steam, Nintendo Switch, etc.), home electric appliances, etc. AAGI can be used in conjunction with existing switches and Tobii devices.

AAGI is already in use in the UK, Denmark, Finland, and France, where it is used to control devices such as Grid 3, games and etc. We plan to begin releasing AAGI Version 2 this fall. In Version 2, all settings are configured via a wizard, which significantly simplifies the setup process. To promote the adoption of Version 2, we are also seeking partners in the UK.

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

Level

General

Age

All ages

6.6 C-SMILES in Practice: An Early Service-Evaluation of a Co-Produced AAC Intervention for Special Education Settings

Laura Hrastelj - Author, Jo Clark - Co-Author, Yvonne Wren - Co-Author

Submission ID

45

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

C-SMILES (Collaboratively Supporting Multi-modal Interactions and Listening in Education Settings) is a structured, manualised Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) intervention. Developed with the support of Advancing Researcher Award funding from Health and Care Research Wales, C-SMILES was shaped through extensive stakeholder engagement with children and young people with complex communication disability, educators, speech and language therapists (SLTs), and clinical academics. Engagement in early stages of intervention development aimed to maximise relevance, acceptability, and feasibility in real-world education and health settings. This presentation will detail an early service evaluation exploring whether C-SMILES can be delivered as intended within routine NHS practice. C-SMILES is delivered by each child's treating SLT in collaboration with the classroom education team. The intervention includes: (1) an introductory planning session incorporating pre-recorded perspectives from children and young people who use AAC; (2) three structured, video-supported collaborative reflection cycles focused on classroom interactions and opportunities for communication beyond requesting; (3) implementation periods where agreed interactional and environmental adjustments are embedded within daily routines; and (4) a post-intervention review to consolidate changes. The manualised format supports fidelity while allowing contextual tailoring across diverse special education settings. This presentation reports findings from the first service evaluation of C-SMILES, examining feasibility and implementation from the perspective of NHS SLTs delivering the intervention. Preliminary clinical outcome data from two cases will be presented, exploring changes in communicative functions; Communication Matrix (Rowland and Fried-Oken, 2010) and classroom communicative participation; Functional Impact of Augmentative and Alternative Communication-Educator Scale, FIAAC-E (Ryan et al, 2023). If C-SMILES can be integrated into routine practice, it may support richer and varied communication opportunities for learners who use AAC. Implications for planning a future trial will be discussed, including considerations for refining training, data collection processes, and implementation based on initial learning from this small-scale service evaluation.

Level

Specialist

Age

Child

6.7 Mounting Made Easy: Rehadapt's Virtual Mounting Service in Practice

Shaun McCormack – Author

Submission ID

138

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

Getting a wheelchair-mounted device right — securely, safely, and compliant — has traditionally meant guesswork, multiple site visits, or products that don't quite fit. This session introduces Rehadapt's Virtual Mounting Service (VMS): a streamlined process where customers simply send photos of a wheelchair, and our in-house engineering team designs a bespoke, MDR-compliant mounting solution in return.

We'll walk through how VMS works end-to-end — from photo submission to final solution — and what it means for AT professionals supporting clients with complex mounting needs, including reduced lead times, fewer errors, and full regulatory compliance built in from the start.

The second half of the session gets hands-on. Attendees will work directly with a range of Rehadapt mounting hardware, exploring how components combine to solve real-world positioning challenges. Bring your trickiest mounting scenarios — we'll use the kit on the table to talk through how VMS would approach them.

Whether you're a clinician, seating specialist, or procurement lead, you'll leave with a clear understanding of how VMS can simplify your mounting decisions and a practical feel for the hardware behind the solutions.

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 7.1.1 Developing AI features WITH AAC users: A participatory approach

Will Wade - Author, Paul Pickford - Co-Author

Submission ID

90

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

Artificial intelligence offers significant potential to enhance augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), yet evaluating AI-powered features remains challenging. Technical performance metrics alone fail to capture the multifaceted and nuanced desires people have for their communication systems (Frisch et al., 2025). Too often, AI features are designed and tested using efficiency metrics without first asking users what matters to them. This presentation argues for a fundamental shift in how we develop AI features for AAC: asking users what is important to them before we build, and testing iteratively with end users throughout development. We describe an adapted double diamond approach where AAC users are partners throughout the discovery, definition, development, and delivery phases, not merely evaluators at the end. We demonstrate this approach through our MVP (minimum viable product) process for AI feature development at Smartbox, showing how real end users shaped prototypes from initial concept through multiple rapid iterations. Paul Pickford, an AAC user and co-presenter, shares his experience participating in this development process, discussing what worked well, what felt meaningful, and where companies can do better in genuinely centring user voice. The presentation addresses practical questions: How do we ask users what they want before we know what is technically possible? How do we iterate quickly enough to maintain momentum while ensuring genuine user participation? How do we balance the perspectives of different users with different communication needs? We conclude with recommendations for companies and researchers seeking to move beyond metrics-driven development toward truly participatory AI design in AAC (Light & McNaughton, 2013; Judge et al., 2013).

Level

General

Age

All ages

LT 7.1.2 Don't. Walk. Away.: A Young Researcher's Continuing Work to Improve AAC Support in Schools

Esme Lewis-Tubb - Author, Lisa Rees-Renshaw - Co-Author, Laura Hrastelj - Co-Author

Submission ID

98

Format

AAC Lightning Talk

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

My name is Esme, and I use AAC to help me communicate. At school, adults sometimes forget to wait, listen, or stay with me while I finish what I want to say. When that happens - learning and joining in become much harder. I wanted teachers and other adults to understand what really helps children and young people like me, so I worked with a researcher called Laura on a new project called C SMILES. It teaches school staff how to support AAC users better.

The question guiding my work was:

“What do children who use AAC need from school staff so they can join in, feel heard, and communicate confidently at school?”

I wanted adults to understand that small actions make a big difference—like giving us time, looking at us, and making sure our AAC devices are charged and ready.

With my teacher, I created a presentation called “Don't. Walk. Away.” I shared simple but important ideas:

- look at me
- wait
- help me get my device ready

I presented this to Laura, who designs programmes that support AAC use in schools. She listened carefully and asked questions so she could fully understand my perspective. My ideas helped shape the first session of the C SMILES training for teachers and speech and language therapists.

Adults told me my presentation helped them see AAC support in a new way. Knowing that my words are helping other children who use AAC feels amazing.

Next, I'm helping design and record a lived experience training session for the C SMILES programme. I'm looking forward to sharing my ideas at the Communication Matters conference so even more people can learn from me. I want educators to understand that children who use AAC can speak up—we have the technology; we just need the right support.

Level

General

Age

All ages

7.2 How does early play for the AAC user underpin lifelong effective communication?

Tom McDonald - Author, Beth Moulam - Co-Author

Submission ID

53

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

For AAC users, play is one of the most powerful contexts for communication development. Yet for many children who use AAC, play often remains underused. Play underpins every child's development through hearing and exploring the world around them. It is vital in supporting cognitive and language development, problem solving and encouraging creativity. Importantly it is not just about the spoken word, but supports communication using body language, facial expression, sign, eye movement, touch and vocalisations. In turn it supports physical coordination and wellbeing. All attributes AAC users need to be limitless in achieving their own potential. Grounded in the EYFS statutory framework (2025) and Development Matters (2023), the session offers practitioners and families a practical framework for thinking about play as a teaching context for supporting necessary skills for becoming confident AAC communicators. Key themes include: modelling without expectation; adapting resources for physical access; building vocabulary through real activities; and supporting families to sustain AAC practice at home. Drawing on practitioner case studies, including a child using eye-gaze technology who began communicating through an adapted board game, and the lived experiences of an adult AAC user. The session explores how play-based AAC intervention can be structured, responsive and genuinely child-led. We will consider how the teaching-led cycle of Assess, Plan, Do, Review, informed by tools such as the DAGG-3, can be embedded into motivating everyday activities including shared reading, role play, board games and music. The session draws on two perspectives: a teacher and assistive technology specialist with experience supporting children with complex communication needs, and an adult AAC user who reflects on what play looked and felt like growing up using AAC. Together they aim to leave delegates thinking differently about play for AAC users and its importance.

Level

General

Age

Child

7.3 Limitless Technology, Limitless Potential: Eye Gaze Assistive Technology for Wellbeing and Quality of Life

Sarah Dunn - Author

Submission ID

7

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Abstract

This presentation draws on my experience as a parent carer of an eye gaze AAC user and PhD researcher at the University of Leeds exploring the potential impact of eye gaze 'singing' on the wellbeing of disabled AAC users. Following on from my platform presentation at last year's Communication Matters conference introducing my PhD research, this presentation will share insights from my first study exploring the impact of eye gaze assistive technology on wellbeing and quality of life for disabled AAC users. Clinicians and practitioners who work with or have worked with eye gaze assistive technology users were recruited to take part in this study. Fourteen participants from across the UK and two participants from Denmark- speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, researchers, assistive technologists, software designers and engineers (NHS and private sector), completed an online interview. Interviews explored the experience of clinicians and practitioners; uses for eye gaze assistive technology and its impact on daily life, wellbeing and quality of life, with a focus on how this access method might be used for leisure time pursuits, including music. Barriers and challenges of accessing eye gaze technology, the potential impact of eye gaze technology on those who support users, how eye gaze users might engage in research best and clinician and practitioner understanding of the terms wellbeing and quality of life were also explored in the interview process. Interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2019, 2021). Preliminary results from this study will be shared in this presentation, considering how these findings will inform next stages in my research with disabled AAC users, specifically exploring the potential impact of eye gaze 'singing' on musical opportunity and wellbeing.

Level

General

Age

Adult

7.4 Getting The Most from Your AAC Trial: Practical Strategies Before, During and After

Niamh Bridges - Author

Submission ID
143

Format
Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic
Exhibitor Session

Location
Clothworkers South, G11 a&b

Abstract

The trial of any AAC device is one of the key steps in AAC assessment and therapy. What happens before, during and after the trial is paramount to success of the trial and the AAC journey. Many professionals and communication partners face barriers in planning, implementing and evaluating the trials. This session will explore actions you can take to give the user the best support for success.

This practical session will explore what common barriers are faced around trialling AAC devices, and evidence-based strategies to overcome them. During the presentation we will provide practical tools, available resources and supports to prepare communication partners. We will discuss evidence-based and adaptable ways create opportunities for a user during the trial. We will also discuss how using the evidence gathered can support specialist referrals and funding applications.

The goal is for delegates to leave with new ideas and increased confidence in structuring effective AAC trials.

Level
General

Age
All Ages

7.5 Cultivating Growth: Embedding Coaching and Mentoring Across AAC and AT Services

Rachel Stevens – Author, Tina Voizey – Co-Author, Suzanne Martin – Co-Author, Natasha Kay – Co-Author

Submission ID

132

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

This presentation will explore how Ace Centre is shifting towards embedding coaching and mentoring skills across its entire service spectrum to enhance support delivery and stakeholder empowerment. Moving beyond traditional service models, Ace Centre is actively finding new ways to integrate collaborative coaching and mentoring into its core work, drawing inspiration from experts such as Anthony Grant, Jonathan Passmore, Sarah Douglas, Sam Brydon, and Harriet Korner. The presentation will detail how this integration manifests across four key areas:

Collaborative Partnerships: Ace Centre employs a "side-by-side" approach when working with schools, health services, and companies. This method moves away from mere consultation toward helping organisations build their own bespoke AAC/AT policies through guided reflective practice and skill development. **Integrated Learning:** Within Ace Centre Learning, coaching is now a structural component of training. Specifically, at the Specialist learning level, the curriculum focuses on developing interdisciplinary expertise through consultation, collaboration, and coaching to support others. **Supervision and Mentoring:** These services are inherently coaching-oriented, offering a collaborative process for professional learning. Clinical supervision provides a dedicated space for practitioners to reflect on the "how and why" of their work, while mentoring offers personalised guidance and tailored strategies to build confidence and competence. **Enabling Self-Sufficiency:** Our Advice Line and Information Appointments support independent problem-solving rather than providing out of the box answers. Helping professionals and communication partners build the confidence and skills to manage their own journeys, becoming active, capable problem-solvers.

Attendees will gain insights into how a coaching and mentoring-led model fosters professional accountability and sustainable skill development, ultimately leading to more effective, long-term outcomes for individuals with complex communication needs. Acknowledging that this is an evolving journey, the session will share practical examples of how coaching and mentoring principles can be embedded into everyday clinical and educational practice.

Level

General

Age

All Ages

7.6 Treating People With Respect in Healthcare: Eliminating Stereotypes

Tracy Rackensprger - Author

Submission ID

34

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

This session offers a critical examination of how healthcare systems and professionals interact with individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Delivered by an AAC user, the session uniquely centers personal experience alongside research evidence, providing an authentic and authoritative perspective that is often missing in traditional clinical training. The presenter draws from both personal healthcare encounters and empirical research on patient-provider communication to illustrate how assumptions about disability, competence, and communication can negatively impact care. The session explores the intersection of health and disability, emphasizing that disability does not equate to poor health, while also highlighting systemic disparities in access to care. Particular attention is given to communication barriers faced by AAC users in medical settings, including being ignored, misunderstood, or mischaracterized. Through real-world examples and research findings, the presentation identifies common misconceptions, such as equating communication differences with cognitive impairment, and demonstrates how these biases shape clinical interactions. A key strength of this presentation is its global relevance. Healthcare inequities, stigma, and communication barriers experienced by people with disabilities are not confined to one country; they are pervasive across international contexts. By focusing on practical, strengths-based strategies, such as speaking directly to AAC users, allowing adequate response time, and respecting individual communication preferences, the session provides actionable guidance that can be applied across diverse healthcare systems, regardless of resources or infrastructure. Additionally, the presentation underscores the ethical responsibility of healthcare providers to ensure accessible and respectful communication, framing this not as optional, but as fundamental to quality care. For international audiences, this session offers both a reflective and practical opportunity to examine local practices, challenge entrenched stereotypes, and advance more inclusive, person-centered approaches to healthcare delivery.

Level

General

Age

Adult

7.7 Children's Voices at Acapela Group: From First Words to Lifelong Identity

Nicolas Mazars- Author

Submission ID
139

Format
Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic
Exhibitor Session

Location
Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

What does it mean for a child who cannot speak to finally be heard—with a voice that sounds like their own age, their personality, their identity?

This session explores the journey of children's voice development at Acapela Group, from the early days of text-to-speech to today's AI-driven, identity-centered voice technologies.

In 2012, Acapela pioneered the first genuine child synthetic voices, addressing a critical gap in AAC: children were previously forced to communicate using adult voices. Today, Acapela offers a rich and diverse portfolio of child and teen voices across multiple languages, enabling young users to express themselves authentically and engage more naturally with peers.

The talk will highlight how advances in deep neural networks and AI have transformed voice creation—from studio-recorded voices to scalable, expressive, and highly personalized speech synthesis. These same technologies now power voice banking solutions like My-Own-Voice, where just 50 sentences can generate a unique digital voice, preserving vocal identity with unprecedented accessibility.

Level
General

Age
All Ages

7.8 A network perspective on communicative competence in AAC: exploring the socio-neurocognitive model

Myrthe E. Vermeiden - Author, Stijn R.J.M. Deckers - Co-Author

Submission ID

63

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

To realise the full benefit of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) interventions for individuals with communication support needs, the choice of AAC and intervention goals needs to be tailored to their strengths and weaknesses (Neil & Jones, 2018). Clinical decision-making in AAC should be based on a theoretically and clinically driven model that helps integrate information about underlying and contributing factors that may affect communicative competence (Rowland et al., 2012). Van Balkom developed the socio-neurocognitive model of communicative competence as a reasoning and explanatory model for assessment and clinical decision-making in AAC (Deckers et al., 2025; Van Balkom et al., 2017). The model describes how communicative competence and language development are the outcome of interactions in a network of different underlying developmental domains: attention, perception, cognition, memory, orientation, socio-emotional development, and motor skills. While this model has guided AAC clinical practice in the Netherlands for over 15 years, empirical validation has been limited. To address this, a screening instrument was developed to assess these domains in clinical practice (Deckers et al., 2025). Secondly, to validate the assumption of interconnectivity between the domains as posited in the socio-neurocognitive model, a network analysis approach was used based on the screening instrument (Vermeiden et al., *in prep*). We compared the network of children with typical development between 1 and 4 years old ($n = 377$) and the network of children with communication support needs between 1 and 12 years old ($n = 379$, based on clinically gathered data) in an exploratory study. Preliminary findings support the assumption that communicative competence can be understood from a socio-neurocognitive perspective, as an interconnected network of developmental domains. The findings highlight the importance of taking multiple developmental domains into account in AAC assessment and provide initial empirical support for a theoretically grounded model to inform clinical decision-making.

Level

Specialist

Age

Child

8.1 Limitless freedom of communication for individuals whilst ensuring privacy and independence in a world dominated by Big Tech

Rachel Clare - Author

Submission ID

68

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

Many AAC users use apps from Big Tech companies such as Meta's Facebook and Instagram, Google's YouTube, and Musk's Twitter/X. These social media apps can provide individuals with communication difficulties an opportunity to connect with others. However, these apps are not without problems and are provided on NHS devices. Whilst we make it explicit to not use the AAC devices for other purposes such as looking at porn, some of the apps we provide spread misinformation, far right propaganda and enable users to view and create your own illegal content (e.g. X's Grok creating child sex material). These apps also data harvest and share user's personal information with third parties, with Meta and X both being accused of election interference. I wish to discuss the issues with us providing potentially harmful technology whilst still supporting freedom of speech and personal choice for patients. I wish to discuss whether we are doing enough to ensure that patients know what they are consenting to when downloading an app on our devices, whether we understand fully what we are providing to patients (and looking for alternatives to offer) and whether we are ensuring that users are resilient in being able to communicate with others (e.g. if all Meta products were not functioning, would the individual still be able to communicate with others?).

I will draw upon a small exploratory piece of service improvement work investigating what apps are typically provided to patients in our service. I will share information from suppliers about what alternatives are available, e.g. apps with increased security. I will draw upon work from investigative journalists, such as Carol Cadwalladr who broke the Cambridge Analytic scandal. I will also refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1988 and data protection laws.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

8.2 Clinical action: How do we support adults with acquired communication disabilities to use AAC effectively?

Amy Hanschell - Author, Tom Griffiths - Co-Author, Jenna Breckenridge - Co-Author

Submission ID

78

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

Adults with acquired communication disability move from a life of seemingly limitless communication to one shaped by sudden or progressive change. Many people can be supported to maintain or regain their ability to communicate — and, by extension, their involvement in everyday life — through using AAC. Despite this, we know that many people make limited use of AAC after it is introduced. This often happens because they need more than just the tools — they need support in learning how to adapt and integrate AAC into their daily interactions and relationships. But what should that support look like? As an SLT working alongside this population, I frequently feel unsure about what clinical action to take beyond the provision of equipment and operational instruction. I am particularly interested in the therapeutic dimensions of AAC support, including how to address the psychosocial aspects of AAC use such as acceptance, behaviour change, identity, and relationships. I am currently in the early stages of a PhD fellowship, which aims to codesign a psychosocial intervention to guide SLTs in supporting adults with acquired communication disabilities to use AAC effectively, integrate it into their daily lives, and adapt to their identity as aided communicators. In this presentation, I will share findings from my early research, including a scoping review of therapy related AAC interventions for adults with acquired conditions. The review identified a limited evidence base, with a predominant focus on linguistic and operational competencies for basic message exchange, and little attention to psychosocial or relational aspects of communication. I will also outline the next steps for my project, including exploring current clinical practice, involving AAC users early in the process, and sharing my learning to date from examining literature beyond the SLT field. Throughout the presentation, I will encourage discussion, sharing of experiences, and collaborative thinking.

Level

General

Age

Adult

8.3 A new framework for the dynamic assessment and implementation of AAC

Shani Ackford - Author, Alice Wakefield - Co-Author

Submission ID

26

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Theoretical frameworks aim to organise the wide range of concepts and considerations into a structured approach. AAC assessments should be guided by key principles including using a person-centred approach, aiming for improved functional outcomes, and using an evidence-informed process. Frameworks can provide this structure to guide assessments to ensure they meet these principles, are comprehensive and effective, and support practitioners to make informed decisions. Models and frameworks that are used to support AAC intervention include Light's model of communicative competence (Light & McNaughton, 2014), Beukelman Participation Model (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013), and I-ASC Explanatory Model of AAC Decision Making (Murray et al., 2020). Although these provide valuable guidance for clinicians, each addresses only selected components of AAC assessment and intervention. AAC WEST identified there was a need for a framework that incorporated all the core concepts of AAC assessment and implementation, and that a comprehensive framework could be beneficial for training professionals. We therefore have developed a new comprehensive framework for dynamic AAC assessment and implementation. We will share this new framework, present the content and the collaborative development process, discuss the intended clinical application and how it is currently being used. We will explore next steps and invite discussion.

References
 Beukelman, D.R. & Mirenda, P. (2013) *Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes
 Light, J. & McNaughton, D. (2014), *Communicative Competence for Individuals who require Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A New Definition for a New Era of Communication?* *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 30(1), pp. 1-18.
 Murray, J., Lynch, Y., Goldbart, J., Moulam, L., Judge, S., Webb, E. et al. (2020) *The decision-making process in recommending electronic communication aids for children and young people who are non-speaking: the I-ASC mixed-methods study*. *Health Services and Delivery Research*, 8(45).

Level

General

Age

All ages

8.4 Predictable 8: AI-Powered Text-Based AAC for Faster, More Personal Communication Abstract

Annie Galvin and Tom Medley – Liberator Limited

Submission ID
144

Format
Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic
Exhibitor Session

Location
Clothworkers South, G11 a&b

Abstract

Predictable has long been a trusted text-based AAC solution, supporting thousands of people to communicate efficiently and independently. With the launch of Predictable 8, users now have access to a range of innovative AI-powered tools designed to make communication faster, clearer and more personalised than ever before.

This session will provide an overview and live demonstration of the latest developments within Predictable 8, including Phrase Builder for creating context-specific messages, Rewrite for enhancing the clarity of written communication whilst preserving the user's intended meaning, and Live Translate, which helps support conversations across multiple languages. Attendees will also explore new creative tools, including AI Tunes, alongside enhanced personalisation options that allow users to tailor the app to their individual preferences.

Despite these exciting additions, Predictable 8 remains rooted in the features that have made it a popular AAC solution, including intelligent word prediction, high-quality speech output, flexible access methods such as touch, switches and head tracking, and customisable communication layouts.

Designed for AAC users, speech and language therapists, educators, support staff and family members, this presentation will explore how AI can be integrated into AAC in a practical, meaningful and user-centred way. Attendees will gain an understanding of how Predictable 8 can support communication across everyday conversations, social interactions, education, work and creative expression, helping people communicate with greater confidence and efficiency

Level
General

Age
All ages

8.5 CALL Scotland Communication, Access, Literacy and Learning for children and young people with Additional Support Needs

Claire Harrison – Author

Submission ID

140

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

CALL Scotland, based at the University of Edinburgh was set up in 1983 as a Research and Development centre as well as a working Service unit supporting learners with additional needs to use Assistive Technology, including AAC. Our core funding comes from Scottish Government so our work is concentrated mostly in schools in Scotland, though many aspects of our services and resources can be accessed from across the world.

In this workshop we will describe our key areas of work, with case studies to illustrate how this works in practice.

These areas of work are:

- Strategic Leadership
- Specialist Pupil Assessment and Support
- Professional Learning and Training
- Information and advice
- Equipment Loans and Support
- Knowledge Transfer, Research and Development

We will provide information about practical tools available to download including our Symbols for All project resources, core word kits, Bookbug accessible books and communication resources and our AAC Scotland and Communication Passport materials. We will also update on new and ongoing projects and resources.

Level

Introductory

Age

Child

8.6 Taboo or not Taboo, that is the question, Empowering AAC users with unrestricted vocabulary

Becky Fry - Author, Jamie Preece - Co-Author

Submission ID

92

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

Empowering AAC users means giving them the vocabulary, freedom, and safety to explore, express, and be heard. People who speak verbally can say whatever they want, whenever they want, because they have the words, confidence, opportunity, and the assurance that their voice will be respected. But what happens when those freedoms are limited or denied? For many AAC users, full participation in life depends on access to language. Yet they are often prevented from learning and using vocabulary seen as controversial slang, swear words, or words connected to sexuality, crime, abuse, or other so called 'taboo' topics. When this vocabulary is off limits, their thoughts, experiences, and identities can be silenced. In this joint session, AAC user Jamie Preece and SLT Becky Fry explore what authentic self expression looks like through AAC. Jamie will share real experiences from his years of being interpreted by others, and how taking control of his vocabulary, his device, and his digital voice transformed both his communication and his thinking. This workshop examines the impact of restricting AAC users from expressing themselves - taboo or not taboo. Key themes include: The right to say what you want, exactly how you want. We'll discuss the ongoing debate around gate keeping certain words, and the real life consequences when individuals cannot communicate essential thoughts or experiences because others deem them inappropriate. Why restricting 'taboo' vocabulary can cause harm. Jamie and Becky will reflect on how limiting language can leave AAC users vulnerable, disempowered, and unable to report abuse, express emotions, or explore identity. This session challenges assumptions and advocates for an AAC culture where users, like Jamie, have full ownership of their words, voices, and identities. As Jamie writes: 'Words are more than talking tools; they are thinking tools.'

Level

General

Age

All ages

8.7 Future Directions in AAC: A Panel Discussion with Tobii Dynavox, Acapela, and Rehadapt

Dee Osmond – Author

Submission ID

137

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Dance Studio

Abstract

Join experts from Tobii Dynavox, Acapela, and Rehadapt for an engaging panel discussion exploring the future of AAC from multiple perspectives including clinical practice, product development, voice technology, and mounting solutions.

This interactive session will include audience participation, offering delegates the opportunity to ask questions and contribute their own views on the future direction of AAC.

Level:

General

Age:

Child

8.8 Evaluating Early Reading Skills: Intervention Effects and Test Validation for AAC Users with Intellectual Disabilities

Line Britt Ulriksen - Author, Marthe Bilet-Mossige - Co-Author, Hugo Cogo-Moreira - Co-Author, Kenneth Larsen - Co-Author, Anders Nordahl-Hansen - Co-Author

Submission ID

38

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

Abstract

Three studies were undertaken to strengthen the evidence base for early literacy instruction for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) by examining intervention effects, validating assessments, and evaluating teacher training. The first study investigated the effects of a longitudinal early reading intervention for 40 students (ages 6 to 14) with autism and/or ID, who use AAC. Using a multiple single case design with randomized baselines, students received systematic instruction in early reading components. Generalized estimating equations showed limited evidence of intervention effects compared to control phases, though scores increased over time. Significant gains were found in sound blending, and descriptive data showed that 16 students developed phonological reading skills and demonstrated phonological awareness. The second study validated early reading assessments adapted for students using AAC. The sample included 921 typically developing children and 105 children with ID across 30 Norwegian schools. Item Response Theory analyses supported good model fit and measurement invariance across sex and neurodevelopmental groups. Reliability ranged from .70 to .94, with reduced precision at higher ability levels. Effect size differences were observed for first-sound tasks between boys and girls ($d = -0.43$) and for decoding between typical and atypical groups ($d = -0.94$). Percentile norms for 6–7-year-olds enable evaluation of performance relative to age expectations. The third study is a cluster randomized control trial (RCT) investigating whether different teacher training modalities yield differential gains in early reading skills among 72 students (ages 6–14) with ID and/or autism who use AAC. Twenty-four schools are randomized to one of two conditions. The primary objective is to compare the effectiveness of online video training with in-person tutoring and to monitor students' reading development over one year. Teachers administer early reading assessments every two months across six time points.

Full results will be available and presented at the conference.

Level:

General

Age:

Child

9.1 Learning From Each Other: AAC, Mentoring and Meaningful Futures

Verity Elliot – Author, Becky Tyler – Co-Author

Submission ID

118

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Location

Michael Sadler, LG10

Abstract

As a non-speaking AAC user with cerebral palsy and dyslexia, Becky has often faced assumptions about what she could achieve. In this lightning talk, she will share her personal journey through education, the barriers she encountered when her abilities were misunderstood, and how high expectations and access to communication technology and supportive people helped her move forward, including achieving a Certificate of Higher Education at university.

As facilitators of the mentoring project at Communication Matters, we will reflect on the importance of peer support and mentoring for AAC users. Through working with other AAC users and contributing to community projects, we have seen how shared experiences can build confidence, strengthen identity and encourage self-advocacy. Mentoring is not only about providing support; it is about creating opportunities for AAC users to learn from one another and to recognise their own potential.

This lightning talk will challenge professionals to think beyond participation and consider how they can help create ambitious pathways into education, employment and community life. By focusing on possibility rather than limitation, we can support AAC users to take leading roles in their own lives and shape meaningful futures.

Level

Specialist

Age

All ages

9.2 Strengthening the connection between AAC and Assistive Technology: Emerging themes and a new planning tool

Tina Voizey – Author, Fil McIntyre – Co-Author

Submission ID

61

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG15

Abstract

At the 2025 Communication Matters Conference, we invited delegates, many of whom work primarily in the AAC space, to join a workshop exploring what helps, and what hinders, effective practice at the intersection of AAC and Assistive Technology (AT).

In this follow up we will share that feedback, along with findings from delegates who work primarily in the AT space, from a similar workshop held at the TechAbility Conference 2026. Consistent themes emerged from these cross sector findings: the need for stronger multidisciplinary collaboration, shared understanding of roles, increased confidence and competence within teams, and more flexible, integrated approaches to technology and service delivery.

We will share contributions from the previous workshops which include insights on partnership working, technology use, service design, and the day to day realities of delivering AAC and AT. We will also reflect on difficulties that arise when AAC and AT operate separately, when staff confidence is low, or when structures do not enable joined up approaches.

Rather than offering fixed answers, this session will provide attendees with tools to guide local reflection and planning. We introduce a new practical resource, designed to help teams open discussion, examine usage and shape action plans including conversation prompts, planning templates, and activities to use with colleagues, leadership or wider partners.

Attendees will leave with:

- An overview of the themes, barriers, and opportunities identified.
- A toolkit to support internal conversations and future planning.
- Ideas for strengthening alignment between AAC and AT.

This workshop builds on the explorative work and provides space for reflection to enhance collaboration across the AAC and AT communities.

Level

Specialist

Age

All Ages

9.3 Evaluating the effectiveness of the Talking Mats Licensed Trainer model in children's social care practice

Helen Grenfell – Co-Author, Cheryl Hanson – Author, Melanie Oldham – Co-Author, Suzannah Sammons – Co-Author

Submission ID

116

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Michael Sadler, LG19

Abstract

Enabling children and young people to participate in decision-making is a key part of social care practice. 'Supporting children and young people with communication needs' (Research in Practice, 2024) identifies Talking Mats as a direct work tool social care staff can use: it enables the thoughts, wishes and feelings of children and young people with communication differences to be heard and listened to more readily in assessments and planning about their social and care needs. In 2025, Stockport Family Integrated Children's Services funded one of their learning leads to become a Licenced Talking Mats Trainer. They were tasked with delivering the Talking Mats Foundation Training to the Children with Disabilities Service, and evaluating the impact of this training on outcomes for children and young people in the care of this service in partnership with the service and team leads. This presentation aims to report on: the changes in practice evidenced to date to include: increased consideration and use of Talking Mats; the process used to capture this; how access to coaching and support has facilitated practice change; the positive influence peer use has had on encouraging the whole service to adopt Talking Mats in their direct work with children and young people.

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

9.5 Service, Training And Mounting Solutions That Adapt You

Matthew Tennent – Author, Christian Quick – Co-Author

Submission ID

133

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Clothworks South, G14

Abstract

The leading UK Rehadapt Mounting specialist, Smile Smart Technology hold an unrivalled selection of Rehadapt Mounts along with our own in-house mount adaptations. We offer advice, support and bespoke solutions based upon individual requirements. Our team regularly visit schools, private homes and clinical centres providing assessments, training and other support services.

We do everything we can to build reliable solutions that make life simpler for all parties involved – in everyday life with different caregivers in varying situations. This is achieved through almost two decades of experience, a versatile system of components, and a unique service concept.

Level

Introductory

Age

All Ages

9.6 A Collaborative Design Workshop to Guide AI-Enabled Language Learning Support for Children who use Speech Generating Devices and their Communication Partners

Michael Clarke – Author, Syed Billah – Co-Author, Seray Ibrahim – Co-Author, Richard He – Co-Author, Gloria Soto – Co-Author

Submission ID

103

Format

Workshop

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

Adult reformulation of child utterances is known to be a robust mechanism supporting language learning, that is where an adult expands or corrects a child's utterance without explicit instruction; for example, when a child says "I runned fast" and an adult responds "wow, you ran really fast," providing a correct model. The child may then also self-repair: "yeah, I ran fast." This three turn sequence is widely regarded as evidence that the child is actively processing and applying new language. Our prior research has shown that this mechanism also supports language learning for children who use speech generating devices, and that child self-repair is particularly important for consolidating new language forms[1]. Providing well designed reformulations and modelling their use can be challenging for many adults. One approach to this research-to-practice gap is to explore how an AI enabled tool, such as a large language model (LLM), might support adults in using and modelling developmentally appropriate reformulations in real time and sensitively guide children to self-repair. A central challenge in this work is how to design child and adult facing supports that are genuinely useful and acceptable to the people who will use them. For example, should repair prompts be embedded within the child's existing SGD, or would alternative interactive designs better support children to engage in this language learning process? This workshop invites people who use AAC, family members, and AAC focused professionals to engage with us in exploring design concepts and sharing ideas through structured discussion and activities. We are particularly interested in what participants consider desirable, workable, and potentially problematic design options. Participants' contributions will directly inform the next phase of our research. No prior technical knowledge is required, and the workshop will be conducted in a fully accessible format. Because this workshop has been classified as a research activity, we need to obtain your informed consent before you participate. The following link will take you to the information sheet and consent form for this workshop:

https://qualtrics.kcl.ac.uk/jfe/form/SV_37ZwiBWgi3ZBJcO

Level

General

Age

Child

9.7 Implementing AAC with Confidence: Free Resources and Support for Schools

Submission ID

136

Format

Exhibitor Presentation

Submission Topic

Exhibitor Session

Location

Stage@Leeds, Stage 1

Abstract

Are you looking to implement AAC more effectively in a school setting? Join us for a practical session exploring the wide range of free resources, tools, and support available to help schools introduce and implement AAC for the students they support.

Successful AAC implementation requires more than simply providing access to a communication system. It involves creating meaningful opportunities for communication, establishing clear goals, gathering evidence of progress, and ensuring AAC is embedded throughout the learning environment. This session will demonstrate how a range of free resources can support these key elements and help educators and therapists build a strong foundation for long-term AAC success.

Discover how TD Snap can be used on interactive classroom whiteboards alongside printed communication books and AAC device loans to model language, encourage participation, and gather evidence to support AAC referrals and funding applications. We will also explore how practical tools such as the Dynamic AAC Goals Grid and Core First Learning can be used to support goal setting, measure progress, and integrate AAC into everyday teaching and learning across all stages of the AAC journey.

Attendees will leave with practical ideas, strategies, and resources that can be implemented immediately within their own educational settings. Whether you are new to AAC or looking to strengthen an existing approach, this session will provide a framework for supporting communication development, increasing classroom participation, and helping students achieve their full potential through effective AAC implementation.

Level

General

Age

All Ages

9.8 Co-designing a cross-organisational dataset attuned to people with communication support needs

Lisette van der Heijden - Author, Theresa Truax-Gischler - Co-Author, Jan Niemeijer - Co-Author, Kaylee van Huijgevoort - Co-Author, Nina Wolters-Leermakers - Co-Author, Selsela Hasami - Co-Author, Stijn Deckers - Co-Author, Margje van der Schuit - Co-Author, Emma Vaillant - Co-Author

Submission ID

69

Format

Platform Presentation

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Location

Stage@Leeds, Alec Clegg Studio

Abstract

People with communication support needs (CSN) face unique challenges. Their support needs often stem from developmental language disorders or hearing impairments combined with intellectual disability, and are frequently compounded by sensory–motor impairments, psychiatric or medical conditions. These combined difficulties create substantial communication barriers, often requiring the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), and lead to delays in learning and development. Procedures for (AAC) assessment and for evaluating intervention outcomes vary across organisations and settings. In the Netherlands, Royal Kentalis and Milo provide specialised care for people with CSN, yet have historically collected data in separate systems using different (assessment) methods. This project aimed to co-design, together with parents and professionals, a shared dataset attuned to people with CSN, by serving both clinical practice and scientific research. The goal was to align data-collection procedures during (AAC) assessment and intervention, and to establish a unified dataset that reflects the complexity of this group, the diversity of their support needs and contexts, and the effectiveness of (AAC) interventions. We began by mapping existing data in both organisations. An online questionnaire for parents ($n=33$) and professionals/researchers ($n=65$), revealed four key themes: (1) personal and health characteristics, (2) communication, (3) bodily and cognitive functions, and (4) wellbeing. Stakeholder focus explored motivations, concerns and priorities for data collection, while expert consultations and literature informed domain content. Through iterative stakeholder feedback and evaluation, a preliminary dataset was piloted with 20 professionals and 35 parents, leading to a refined dataset and implementation advice. The project is now in its implementation phase. We share practical lessons from co-designing a cross-organisational dataset for this diverse group. We address what motivated stakeholders, how competing needs were reconciled, what the pilot revealed about feasibility, and what other organisations can learn when building shared data infrastructures attuned to people with CSN.

Level

Introductory

Age

Child

POSTERS**P01 My education and beyond with AAC challenges**

Sophie Beam – Author

Submission ID

6

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Abstract

I am Sophie, a young woman who loves technology and sports, especially Boccia. As an AAC user, I have experienced first-hand the impact that technology, support, and high expectations can have on a person's opportunities and independence. My educational journey was not straightforward. During my early years in mainstream primary school, I was often made to work separately from my classmates despite being a competent AAC user. Although I had friends, I frequently felt isolated. This changed when a teacher took the time to understand my AAC system and actively involved me in lessons. Moving to a specialist school was a turning point. Alongside academic learning, I developed independence skills and proved to people that I could do many things, including learning to drive a powered wheelchair, participating in sport, and developing self-advocacy skills. However, the speed of my communication sometimes limited my ability to demonstrate my knowledge and affected expectations of my academic potential. Receiving an eye-gaze device transformed my life. It increased my communication speed, improved my participation in learning, and enabled me to express myself more effectively. I went on to complete college courses, undertake an internship, and develop greater independence, even during COVID. Today, I live independently and work with Treloar's to deliver Oliver McGowan Tier 2 Learning Disability Training. My experience demonstrates that when AAC users have access to the right technology, support, and opportunities, we can overcome barriers, achieve our goals, and lead fulfilling lives. I have become a proper eye-gaze, iPad/AAC pro!

Level

General

Age

All ages

P02 Re-imagining AAC Selection and Implementation Using the Specific Language System First Approach

Christopher Bugaj - Author

Submission ID

11

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

A Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework helps schools and organizations structure their resources effectively. In this model, Tier One supports are accessible to all learners, Tier Two supports address the needs of specific groups, and Tier Three supports are tailored to the unique requirements of individuals. Traditionally, AAC device selection often occurs through a detailed assessment process and is provided as a Tier Three support. But what if AAC devices were offered more broadly to include Tier Two or even Tier One supports? Imagine if any learner over the age of three who entered a school and did not use intelligible verbal speech as their primary form of communication automatically received an AAC device without waiting for an initial AAC assessment. How would this shift impact outcomes?

This concept, known as the Specific Language System First Approach, reimagines AAC selection and implementation. This session will explore the benefits of this approach in supporting language development for AAC users while providing strategies to ensure learners who need alternative systems or individualized Tier Three supports receive the tools they need to become effective communicators—able to express anything, anytime, in any way, to anyone.

Level

General

Age

Child

P03 HandShake — Progressing from Prototype to the Real World with a Novel Access Device

Matthew Oppenheim - Author

Submission ID

13

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

HandShake enables access to AAC software and switch-adapted devices by recognising intentional limb movement using a smart-watch. When a gesture is detected, a radio signal is sent to a receiver unit, which sends a switch trigger through a standard 3.5mm connector to a communication device or switch-adapted device. Two systems are currently in use at National Star: one for grid-based AAC control, and one for assisted gaming. One initial participant required a custom algorithm to detect their gesture. This participant can now use HandShake to operate Grid3 — demonstrating the system's flexibility to cater for individual movement profiles. This raises the challenge of how to scale deployment to others who could benefit from HandShake, at minimal cost to both developer and end-user. HandShake is built from commercially available devices, purchasable through several websites, with a total hardware cost under £100. A configuration website — currently being tested — will allow these devices to be programmed remotely, enabling the system to be purchased and set up at minimal cost. As feedback comes in from users, new gestures and features can be added to the website to extend HandShake's functionality. New smart-watches can also be added as more suitable models become available. By leveraging commercially available devices, HandShake removes the need to manufacture and certify custom hardware. The configuration website allows these everyday devices to be re-purposed as HandShake components — letting the system scale affordably for both developers and end-users.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P04 Advocacy and Empowerment. ATmentors - 10 years of a Peer-Led Mentoring Scheme which aims to Support, Represent, and Transform the AAC Community

Gregor Gilmour - Author, Saffron Murphy-Mann - Co-Author

Submission ID

15

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

ATmentors, is an innovative mentoring scheme that enables AAC users to act as advocates for their peers through funded qualifications that enable them to mentor, represent, and empower fellow AAC users. ATmentors engage in advocacy for other AAC users across multiple contexts. Through direct one-to-one mentoring, they provide peer support to individuals navigating AAC systems, life transitions, and communication challenges, drawing on their lived experience to offer guidance. As visible role models within the AAC community, they demonstrate the capabilities and potential of AAC users, challenging societal assumptions and inspiring others. They actively raise awareness about AAC user experiences, needs, and rights in diverse settings, amplifying voices that have historically been marginalised. ATmentors equip other AAC users with self-advocacy skills, providing tools, strategies, and confidence for individuals to speak up for themselves. This peer-led model demonstrates that AAC users are not merely recipients of services but are powerful advocates capable of transforming the AAC landscape for others. ATmentors create ripple effects of advocacy, with each trained mentor reaching multiple AAC users through direct support while simultaneously influencing broader professional and public understanding through their advocacy work.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P05 Communication Matters Peer Support Project: Finding a pathway for progression

Verity Elliott - Author

Submission ID
22

Format
Poster

Submission Topic
Exhibitor Session

Abstract

This session will compliment a tea time/coffee session for AAC users to meet and discuss their aspirations and next steps. Verity Elliott will lead this interactive session which will be informal and focused and will be linked to the information available in the exhibition area and the Communication Matters Mentoring Project webpages. This is an opportunity to find out more about the Communication Matters Peers Support project and the potential pathway for AAC users to gain accredited qualifications from Entry Level 1 (2 and 3) individual units through to Level 2 Employability including our popular Level 1 Mentoring qualification . We will highlight the opportunities linked to achieving an accredited unit and/or full qualification. There are opportunities for AAC users in identifying your own strengths and abilities and begin to explore what is available to help take the next steps in your learning. Communication Matters has funding to guide, support and provide all the learning resources for AAC users, professionals, parents and carers. This project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund England

Level
General

Age
All ages

P06 Motion Energy Analysis of sensitive-responsiveness in communication between parents and children with multiple disabilities and communication support needs

Mathijs Vervloed - Author, Marieke Cremers - Co-Author

Submission ID

25

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Communication between parents and children with multiple disabilities is often complex and requires parents to align their behaviour to their child's behaviour. Sensitive responsiveness, the ability of parents to notice their child's cues, interpret them correctly, and respond appropriately, is crucial in this process. This exploratory study explored the utility of Motion Energy Analysis (MEA) as an objective method for assessing alignment by looking at synchrony in movements. By comparing frame by frame changes in video pixels the relative position of the bodies of participants and synchrony in body movements can be measured and leader-follower patterns discerned (Ramseyer, 2020). Observation window and number of lags before and after an event can be filled in as parameters. Two kinds of synchrony can be measured: complete synchrony (movement at the same time in the same direction) and delayed synchrony (time delay between partners and leader-follower patterns). Video observations of two parent-child pairs were analysed with rMEA (Kleinbub & Ramseyer, 2021). A literature review and a fieldtest were performed. The poster will show two examples of MEA analyses in which are shown time series plots (visualisation of parent and child behaviour), heat maps (strength of synchrony) and lag plots (leader-follower pattern). This study shows that sensitive responsiveness can be quantified, provides tools for the identification of parent-child alignment and demonstrates that MEA has potential as an objective instrument in both scientific research and clinical practice. Conclusion: MEA was technically feasible, yielded interpretable visualisations and technical preconditions for the video recordings were met. Ramseyer F. T. (2020). Motion energy analysis (MEA): A primer on the assessment of motion from video. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 67(4), 536–549. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000407> Kleinbub, J. R., & Ramseyer, F. T. (2021). rMEA: An R package to assess nonverbal synchronization in motion energy analysis time-series. *Psychotherapy research : journal of the Society for Psychotherapy Research*, 31(6), 817–830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2020.1844334>

Level

Specialist

Age

Child

P07
WITHDRAWN

P08 Occupational Therapists perceptions and understanding of vision assessment for adults with complex needs

Julie Bradford - Author

Submission ID
29

Format
Poster

Submission Topic
Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Introduction/ Rationale: Vision plays an essential role in most occupations and our ability to adapt to the environment. It is of particular importance for those using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). It is essential to have a clear picture of someone's visual abilities when trialling and implementing AAC to ensure its effectiveness. Occupational therapists have reported difficulties in the assessment of vision in clients with complex physical, cognitive and or language impairments. Literature reveals a poor understanding of the complexity of vision assessment for adults with complex needs, and limited detail on the factors relating to occupational therapist's decision making related to vision assessment. Objectives: To explore occupational therapists perceptions and understanding of vision assessment for adult clients with complex needs, as well as the barriers and facilitators to this process. Methods/ Approach: This study used semi structured interviews following an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Qualified occupational therapists in a set geographical area self-identified as routinely considering vision with adult clients, having seen at least 3 with complex needs in the previous year. 7 participants took part in the study. Results/Practice Implications: 3 key themes emerged: the interconnectivity of deficits and clinical reasoning processes, variation in assessment methods and factors influencing the process including limited interdisciplinary working and learning. Conclusion: Vision is central to function, and particularly important for those with complex disability. Occupational therapists need a multimodal approach to vision assessment, supported by standardised tools, clear clinical reasoning and interdisciplinary working. This should be combined with access to vision specialists. The increase in remote working can limit shared learning, therefore flexible approaches to cross environment skill development can help address this. These factors highlight important implications for occupational therapy practice in this specialist area and for the benefit of adults who use AAC.

Level
Specialist

Age
Adult

P09 Automating the Design and Manufacture of Bespoke Keyguards

Benjamin Jordan - Author

Submission ID

31

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Keyguards are widely used with high-tech communication devices to support individuals with reduced fine motor control by enabling accurate touch-based selection. By transforming a flat touchscreen into a tactile, structured interface, keyguards improve access, accuracy, and reliability of communication. Traditionally, these devices have been externally manufactured at significant cost and with extended lead times; however, at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust Assistive Communication Service (GSTT ACS), in-house production using fused deposition modelling (FDM) 3D printing has been adopted to reduce costs and enable bespoke design. While this approach improves accessibility and turnaround, the design and setup process remains time-intensive due to the wide range of device, vocabulary, and accessory combinations. On average, each keyguard requires approximately two hours of design time, including time for device setup, measurements and translation into CAD software, equating to an annual design workload of around 30 hours. This project aimed to streamline the keyguard design process to improve efficiency, consistency, and service capacity. Using the Application Programming Interface (API) within Autodesk Fusion 360, a Python-based script was developed to automate keyguard generation. The script enables users to select the device, vocabulary, and accessory parameters, following which a ready-to-print design is generated using proportional scaling. Required inputs, such as screen dimensions and vocabulary layout, are readily available and do not require physical device setup. Implementation of this tool reduced keyguard design time from approximately two hours to a matter of minutes, representing a substantial efficiency gain. This approach enhances process standardisation, quality control, reduces lead times, and allows clinicians to allocate more time to direct patient care, ultimately supporting improved patient outcomes, satisfaction, and safety.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P10 AAC user driven pledges and their role in shaping policy in a Special School and College setting

Rebecca Maleedy - Author

Submission ID
35

Format
Poster

Submission Topic
Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

AAC users are often positioned as recipients rather than contributors to communication policy within special school settings. This project examines a whole school initiative in which AAC users led the creation of a series of communication pledges that articulate shared attitudes, expectations, and values around AAC use across the school and college settings. Central to the process was the use of Talking Mats, which provided a structured, visually supported framework enabling students to communicate their views and express preferences in order to prioritise the principles they believed should guide communication across their school community. Through focus groups and a series of Talking Mats sessions, students identified key themes relating to respect, autonomy, multimodal expression, and the visibility of AAC. These student generated pledges formed the basis of a revised, community wide communication policy that explicitly recognises AAC as a valid and valued communicative modality. Embedding the pledges into policy and daily practice has contributed to a cultural shift among staff, promoting greater consistency, responsiveness, and confidence in supporting AAC across learning environments. Importantly, the process positioned AAC users as active agents of change. Students reported increased ownership and empowerment in influencing school and college wide expectations, while staff shared on a deeper understanding of AAC users' priorities and lived experiences. Early evidence suggests that involving AAC users directly in policy formation supported by tools such as Talking Mats enhances the impact and relevance of communication frameworks and strengthens the inclusivity of the school environment.

Level
Introductory

Age
Adolescent

P11 Universal Symbol Activity Boards and Training Pathways: Enhancing Accessible Communication for Non Speaking and Minimally Speaking Children in Cornwall Prior to Speech & Language Therapy Intervention

Jennifer Davies - Author, Cori Green - Co-Author

Submission ID

36

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Families of children who are non speaking or minimally speaking often have limited access to symbol communication systems and training while awaiting assessment from Children's Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) services. To address this, the Cornwall Children's SALT Service has developed a range of universally accessible symbol activity boards with advice, designed to introduce children to symbols in meaningful, familiar contexts with the support of adults around them.

These boards act as a starting point for initial symbol exposure, allowing adults to model communication during everyday activities. Early modelling helps build familiarity and readiness for more targeted and personalised symbol communication systems once children reach the top of the waiting list and receive specialist SALT input. The activity boards are freely available online through our web page in PCS and Widgit symbol sets to ensure flexibility across local settings.

The resources have been well received by families, early years practitioners, Autism in Schools Advisers, and education teams, who report that the boards offer an immediate, practical way to support communication while children await assessment and intervention. Feedback highlights improved confidence among adults and increased opportunities for children to participate using symbols during play and routine activities.

Alongside the boards, we have co developed Communicating with Symbols training with the Local Authority Communication Support Team. This free, face to face training runs four times a year and is open to anyone supporting children in Cornwall. It provides guidance on best practice for introducing symbol communication, modelling strategies, and supporting progression toward more robust AAC systems.

This poster will showcase the development of the activity boards, examples of their use, the collaborative training pathway, and the evolving role of universal and targeted AAC resources in promoting equitable communication access for children and supporting the specialist SALT intervention pathway.

Level

General

Age

Child

P12
WITHDRAWN

P13 Nothing About Us Without Us — AAC Users as Research Partners in the UK

Charlie Moran - Author, Jamie Preece - Co-Author

Submission ID

49

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Blasko et al. (2025) identify that AAC users have historically been excluded from research, positioned as subjects rather than active participants and call for a fundamental shift toward meaningful inclusion. This poster is a direct response to that call, presenting evidence that here in the UK, that shift is already underway. Preece et al. (2024), 'Making my voice and owning its future' (Medical Humanities), offers a compelling illustration of what this can look like: co-authored by Jamie Preece, an AAC user and service user representative at Barnsley Assistive Technology Team. Preece et al position AAC users as co-investigators, co-authors, and co-designers. Pullin et al. (2017) argue that inclusion must extend further still: to AAC users co-writing research proposals and shaping future research agendas, not merely participating in them. Drawing on the Research Matters group (a UK-based initiative co-ordinated through Communication Matters) this poster demonstrates what this looks like in practice. AAC users within Research Matters shape meeting topics and contribute to identifying current UK research priorities, playing an active role in the wider research agenda. The poster also draws on the experiences of another UK AAC user group, Voice UP (Barnsley Assistive Technology Service) sharing further examples of AAC users actively influencing research. Together, these examples - while not an exhaustive list - build a picture of a growing movement of meaningful inclusion in the UK. Acknowledging that seldom-heard voices (Volkmer & Broomfield, 2022) remain underrepresented even within this movement, the poster reflects on both the progress made and the work still to do. Genuine, meaningful AAC user involvement in research is not only achievable — it is actively happening in the UK.

References Blasko et al. (2025). *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 41(3) Preece et al. (2024). *Medical Humanities*. doi:10.1136/medhum-2024-013021 Pullin et al. (2017). *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 33(3), 139–148 Volkmer, A., & Broomfield, K. (Eds.). (2022). *Seldom heard voices in service user involvement*. J&R Press

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

P14 Measured Activation Forces of Commercially Available Button Switches: Implications for Clinical Practice

Natasha Kay - Author

Submission ID

50

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Switches are a common access method that enable people with physical difficulties to use technology such as toys, AAC devices, computers, and environmental controls (Cook & Polgar, 2020). Button switches are the most widely used, and they vary in the level of force required for activation (Activation Force). For clients with conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease (MND), a lower Activation Force can reduce physical effort; while for clients with a tremor or Cerebral Palsy (CP), higher Activation Force can reduce accidental activations (Simpson, 2013). Many switches list their Activation Force, but these specifications can be inaccurate as they may exclude the switch casing. Activation Force can also vary depending on where the switch is being pressed (centre versus edge). Matching the right switch with the right client is more challenging without clear information about the respective Activation Forces. This project measured the Activation Forces of a range of commercially available switches using a method adapted from keyboard testing. Repeated trials were conducted to calculate average Activation Forces for both the centre and edge of each switch. Results are available in an open dataset, providing clinicians with quantitative information to support switch selection. The future plan for this project is to measure switch Travel (the distance a switch needs to be depressed before it activates) to provide additional data for clinicians. This project enhances clinical practice by enabling more informed decision-making and reducing reliance on trial-and-error when selecting switches, thereby improving the client experience. It highlights the value of measurements in Assistive Technology provision, and makes practical data available for clinicians. References - Simpson, R. C. (2013). Computer access for people with disabilities: A human factors approach. Taylor & Francis Group. - Cook, A. M., & Polgar, J. M. (2020). Assistive technologies: Principles and practice (5th ed.). Elsevier.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P15 Effective elements in the communicative treatment of children with communication support needs: Translating research insights into guidance cards

Lisette van der Heijden - Co-Author, Ellis van Dijk - Author, Margje van der Schuit - Co-Author, Emma Vaillant - Co-Author, Gerna Scholte - Co-Author, Madelon Toussaint - Co-Author, Irena Draskovic - Co-Author, Kaylee van Huigevoort - Co-Author, Sjoukje Kuipers - Co-Author

Submission ID

51

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Children with communication support needs (CSN) experience significant communication difficulties resulting from multiple disorders. They may show impairments in perceiving, processing, understanding, and/or expressing language through speech, gestures, or writing. The causes and consequences of these impairments vary widely, leading to substantial differences in the communicative development and support needs of these children. To support young children with CSN and their parents in their communicative development, specialised treatment groups are available in which Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is introduced. Communication partners have a crucial role in children's communicative development. They must apply strategies - often AAC-based - that are tailored to a child's abilities and developmental level. However, using these strategies effectively is complex for both parents and professionals. To support them, we conducted research into the effective elements of communicative treatment for children with CSN. Our study identified general elements that are essential for communicative (group) treatment, derived from the experiences, knowledge, and skills of parents and professionals, as well as from scientific evidence. During this poster presentation, we will outline the key findings of our research. A second aim of the project was to ensure that the resulting knowledge is practical and accessible for both parents and professionals. Therefore, we developed a user-friendly product that translates research insights into concrete guidance. This product offers clear tips and information to support the communicative development of children with CSN. Examples include practical tools for modelling language with and without AAC, as well as guidance on stimulating different communicative functions. We will demonstrate the first version of the product we developed.

Level

Introductory

Age

Child

P16 Autonomic state and communicative availability in Rett syndrome: A practice-informed model

Abigail Davison-Hoult - Author

Submission ID

52

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Rett syndrome is a genetic, neurological condition caused by pathogenic variants in the MECP2 gene. It has a wide spectrum of associated symptoms including severe motor impairments, loss of spoken language and noticeable autonomic dysfunction.

Variability in responsiveness, attentiveness and reliability of eye gaze is frequently noted day-to-day and moment-to-moment by parents, communication partners and practitioners alike. Whilst irregular breathing patterns, altered heart-rate variability and fluctuating state of arousal are well-documented features of the condition, there has been little attention given to their possible impact on communication availability.

This presentation will discuss the development of a practice-informed conceptual model suggesting that a compromised and fluctuating autonomic state may influence the availability of expressive communication in individuals with Rett syndrome.

Findings from an observational study of communicative availability and fluctuating autonomic regulation in two young children with Rett syndrome, along with broader insights into how autonomic regulation relates to attention, motor control, and social engagement, will be presented.

The model proposes that three autonomic states: regulated, hyperaroused, and hypoaroused, can influence communication availability and social interaction for this population. Periods of relatively stable physiological regulation appear to coincide with a more consistent eye gaze, responsiveness and improved access to AAC tools.

Contrastingly, hyperarousal (e.g., breathing irregularities, hand stereotypies) and hypoarousal (e.g., fatigue, absences) appear to limit communicative output, possibly obscuring underlying competence.

Recognising autonomic state as a potential contributor to communicative availability may assist practitioners' interpretation of behaviour, enabling creation of optimal conditions for AAC users with Rett syndrome to demonstrate their true abilities.

This supports the "Limitless Futures" theme by highlighting how physiological understanding can expand participation and expression opportunities for this population.

Level

General

Age

Child

P17 #AACForAll

Beth Moulam - Author, Helen Hewson - Co-Author, Andrea Sharples - Co-Author, Jessica McRae - Co-Author, Sarah McPoland - Co-Author

Submission ID

56

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Personal Stories and Preferences

Abstract

We all know that communication is a human right (UNCRPD, 2006), and it is well documented that AAC is an effective tool to support those with little or no intelligible speech in being heard, listened to, and understood. This poster will outline the different ways in which the AAC community can influence policy and decision makers about the needs of AAC users and link to the resources on the CM website. To support this activity, there has been (will be) a social media campaign using the #AACForAll tag to raise awareness of AAC for everyone who needs it, whatever their age and wherever they live. The campaign has specifically tied into the Department for Education Schools White Paper and the SEND Reform consultation that took place in the spring, but can be used for any advocacy and influencing activity. The poster provides information on the Communication Matters advocacy and influencing toolkit, which highlights how to find the people you need to contact to make a difference in your area, with suggested letters to send to MPs, local Councillors and Integrated Care Boards.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P18 Our Futures Project – empowering AAC users and those who support them

Beth Moulam - Author, Helen Hewson - Co-Author

Submission ID
57

Format
Poster

Submission Topic
Personal Stories and Preferences

Abstract

The Our Futures Project began in 2023 and continues to influence Communication Matters' work. This came from AAC users sharing that, once they left education, their lives often stalled. The project is led by AAC users for AAC users, focused on what they want for their own futures. At CM2023, there were 2 workshops; To establish with AAC users (n=15) what training and education they felt they needed for their futures and how it should be delivered. Second to look at the themes that had emerged and prioritise these. Six themes emerged: Career development and workplace skills, Leadership for independent living, Technology and social media, Personal development including mental health, rights and funding, Relationships, and Functional skills (literacy, numeracy and independent living). At CM2024, delegates registering at the conference (n=102) were asked to prioritise the training and support they perceived AAC users needed using the themes and sub-themes established previously. The views of AAC users remained static but differed from those of families, personal assistants, professionals, and suppliers. The key findings established were:

- What AAC users want for themselves is not always what others think they need or want.
- 'There should be nothing about us without us'. The views of AAC users should always be heard and integral to any decision-making.

In 2025, the OFP was further developed by a working group of 5 AAC users. They reviewed the data collected since 2023 in greater depth, revisited feedback from events where the OFP had been shared, and then developed a plan for an in-depth discussion with the Communication Matters Board. Results have been mapped across Communication Matters' current projects: research priorities, mentoring programme, and empowering self-advocacy through conference presentation opportunities. The result is the identification of future priorities and developments needed to empower AAC users within the CM strategic plan.

Level
General

Age
All ages

P19 Artificial intelligence as an assistive tool for social communication in autistic adults: the development and field testing of EmotiBridge

Anna Letícia Soares Carvalho - Author

Submission ID

58

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Autistic adults frequently report differences in interpreting implicit social cues such as tone, sarcasm, and contextual nuance. While not deficits in themselves, these differences can create challenges in environments structured around neurotypical communication norms. Verbally fluent autistic adults often retain functional language while still experiencing communication-related challenges that affect social, academic, professional, and emotional wellbeing. As Howlin (2021) notes, autistic adults remain underrepresented in both research and assistive technology design. This poster presents formative findings informing the development of EmotiBridge, an emerging assistive technology concept for verbally fluent autistic adults. The study adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach, combining a systematic literature review with semi-structured interviews (n=5 completed, 2 scheduled) conducted with autistic adults at DSM-5 support level 1. The interviews explored experiences related to social interpretation, post-interaction reflection, social fatigue, sensory overload, and everyday communication challenges. Findings are being incorporated into the ongoing refinement of the proposed system and its future functionalities. Preliminary themes include difficulty interpreting irony and indirect speech, extended post-interaction rumination, social fatigue following sustained interaction, sensory overload, and masking-related exhaustion. None of the participants reported previous use of AI tools to support social interpretation, suggesting an unmet need in this area. Informed by these findings and by Affective Computing theory (Picard, 1997), EmotiBridge proposes a non-prescriptive assistive system that offers multiple interpretations of socially ambiguous situations alongside contextualised response options. The design avoids corrective or normalising approaches, instead supporting autonomous interpretation, self-advocacy, and reflective decision-making. This work expands discussions of AAC beyond symbol-based and non-speaking communication by centring the lived experiences of autistic adults as a foundation for assistive technology design.

Level

General

Age

Adult

P20 Enhancing Augmentative and Alternative Communication for People with ALS: Exploring the Potential of Artificial Intelligence in Communication

Ingjerd Skafle - Co-Author, Cathrine Redi - Author

Submission ID

59

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that severely impairs motor function, including speech. As verbal communication declines, individuals increasingly rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) technologies, such as speech-generating devices and eye-tracking systems. While these tools have improved communication opportunities, challenges remain, particularly concerning speed, cognitive effort, and participation in natural conversation. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI), especially in natural language processing and machine learning, offer promising avenues to enhance AAC systems. AI-driven solutions can support faster, context-aware, and adaptive communication by predicting user intent, generating relevant responses, and learning individual communication patterns. Despite this potential, little is known about how individuals with ALS, their families, and professionals perceive AI integration into AAC, particularly in a Norwegian context. This study aims to explore attitudes, experiences, and expectations regarding AI-supported AAC for people with ALS. A survey, originally developed by the Jay S. Fishman ALS Augmentative Communication Program at Boston Children's Hospital, will be translated, culturally adapted, and piloted in Norway. Participants will include individuals with ALS, family members, and professionals, targeting approximately 1000 respondents. Data will be collected anonymously and analysed using descriptive statistics. User involvement is central, with individuals affected by ALS contributing to survey development and refinement. Collaboration with user organisations will ensure accessibility and relevance. The study is expected to identify perceived benefits, such as increased communication efficiency and personalisation, alongside concerns regarding privacy, trust, and authenticity. Findings will guide the development and implementation of AI-supported AAC systems that are both innovative and user-centred, ultimately enhancing communication, participation, and quality of life for people living with ALS.

Level

General

Age

Adult

P21 Market Shaping via Digital Public Infrastructure for AAC in Low and Middle Income Countries

Will Wade - Author

Submission ID

60

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

More than 2.5 billion people need at least one assistive product, yet access in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) remains severely limited, falling as low as 3% in some settings (WHO-UNICEF, 2022). While digital assistive technology, including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), offers genuine potential for scale, affordability, connectivity, electrical reliability, service capacity, and uneven language infrastructure continue to constrain what can be deployed and maintained (Savage et al., 2021; ATScale, 2025). This presentation argues that market-shaping strategies for digital AAC should focus on the shared digital infrastructure below the application layer: representative datasets and language resources, reusable models and reference toolchains, and deployment pathways suited to constrained environments. A three-part “Market Stack” model is proposed, comprising governed data and language resources (Layer 1), reusable core models and reference pipelines (Layer 2), and localized commercialization and service delivery by small and medium enterprises (Layer 3). The central claim is not that traditional tablet and phone-based AAC should be abandoned, but that AAC markets work best when innovators and procurers can choose among mainstream, dedicated, embedded, and hybrid pathways suited to local infrastructure conditions (Muttiah et al., 2022). While the focus here is LMICs, investing in shared data, language resources, and foundational tooling as public-interest infrastructure would accelerate development and improve solutions globally, not only in constrained settings. Crucially, translation and creation of AAC tools for new languages becomes faster and more achievable when foundational data, openly available. Currently, each company or project recreates phonemization resources, pronunciation lexicons, representative vocabulary datasets, speech corpora, and aligned transcription data independently, duplicating effort and slowing progress. This presentation calls on AT companies, funders, and professionals to collaborate by sharing rich language and usage data openly where possible, treating these resources as shared infrastructure rather than proprietary assets. Such collaboration will lower barriers to entry for local innovators, improve quality and speed of AAC localization globally, and ultimately benefit the people with complex communication needs in underserved language communities.

Level

Specialist

Age

All ages

P22 Wizard of Words: AI-Enhanced AAC Project Using Self-Captured Images..and words!

Mascha Iegel - Author, Chris Norrie Norrie - Co-Author, Jelle Van Kleef - Co-Author, Stijn Deckers - Co-Author, Ronald Spanjers - Co-Author

Submission ID

67

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Wizard of Words is a currently running, two-year research and development project aimed at supporting children and young adults with Complex Communication Needs (CCN) who have little or no natural speech and may have motor disabilities. The project focuses on co-designing a non-profit AAC app in collaboration with children and youth with CCN to ensure accessibility, relevance, and usability. Participants capture photographs and videos from their daily lives, which are processed using automatic image recognition (AIR) and AI algorithms to label and organize objects and events. This creates a personalized, context-rich vocabulary resource that supports independent language exploration, real-time communication, and storytelling. During the workshop, we will present the ongoing project, demonstrate the test and trial version of the app, and provide participants with hands-on opportunities to explore the tool, experimenting with self-captured material and AI-driven labeling. The project team is actively seeking collaboration partners. Attendees will see how combining participant-generated media, AI technologies, and co-design principles can enhance communication, narrative competence, social inclusion, and autonomy for children and youth with CCN

Level

Introductory

Age

All ages

P23 Limitless Leaders in AAC

Melanie Boyle - Author, Ceanna McGregor - Co-Author, Deborah Little - Co-Author, Hannah Williams - Co-Author

Submission ID

70

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

In 2024, the Scottish AAC Geeks delivered a workshop at Communication Matters entitled; 'Empowering a positive shift in systematic mindset' We wanted to understand why in our various roles we kept being confronted by those with limiting mindsets in terms of AAC. With that understanding we explored how we could empower AAC Leaders to affect a systemic change in attitudes towards AAC. Drawing on findings from an online survey, we shared a powerful and consistent message: regardless of professional role or connection to AAC, people often feel alone in their efforts to champion the procurement, implementation and use of AAC tools and strategies. Participants reflected on the leadership roles they hold within their own contexts as therapists, educators, support staff, service leads, and advocates and considered how influence is exercised at multiple levels of the system. Together, we explored practical strategies for shifting attitudes towards AAC within everyday practice, teams, and organisations. From this workshop, the AAC Leaders resource was developed. A practical tool designed to support individuals to recognise their leadership role, build confidence and skill in areas they want to develop and take actionable steps towards systemic change. Rooted in the power of a strengths based approach from which multiple small acts of leadership create large ripples, we will share examples that demonstrate the importance of collective leadership that moves away from an expert only model. In this follow-up poster, we will share what has happened since. We will reflect on the impact of the AAC Leaders framework, lessons learned from implementation, and the challenges of sustaining momentum. We will also showcase the new AAC Leaders website and invite delegates to consider how they might connect, contribute, and continue the collective work of transforming attitudes towards AAC. This poster will be relevant to anyone who has ever felt isolated in their AAC role and is ready to move from feeling alone to leading change.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P24 Participation Through Relationship: How Sibling Co Occupation Enhances AAC Outcomes for Children with Cerebral Palsy

Joanne McGlanaghy - Author

Submission ID

72

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

This abstract examines how an occupational therapy (OT) perspective advances the Communication Matters objectives through evidence based AAC intervention for children with cerebral palsy (CP). Participation based OT approaches are supported by research emphasising the role of motor learning, bimanual coordination, and task specific practice in improving functional engagement among children with CP (AOTA, 2022). Within this framework, AAC is conceptualised not solely as a communication tool but as a facilitator of autonomy, identity, and meaningful participation across everyday activities, consistent with person centred practice guidelines (ASHA, 2026).

A growing body of literature highlights the powerful role of sibling co occupation in AAC intervention. Participation focused OT studies demonstrate that including siblings in shared play and joint routines results in measurable improvements in performance and satisfaction for children with physical disabilities, including CP, as captured through the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) and Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) (Zagacki et al., 2025). Further evidence shows that sibling inclusive approaches—such as the Sibling Participation in Occupational Therapy (SPOT) model—enhance social play, increase communication opportunities, and support generalisation of AAC use within naturalistic contexts (Zagacki & Chiarello, 2023).

These findings underscore the therapeutic value of relationally embedded AAC opportunities and align with interdisciplinary, family centred practice principles. By integrating participation based approaches, sibling co occupation, and ecologically valid intervention strategies, occupational therapy contributes significantly to advancing awareness, empowerment, collaborative knowledge exchange, and high quality research in AAC for children with CP. This evidence strengthens the case for OT as a key discipline in delivering holistic, context driven AAC interventions that meaningfully enhance children's communication participation.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P25 A Specialised AAC Service review of Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP) referrals

Vicky Styles - Author, Alice Wakefield - Co-Author, Emma Middleton - Co-Author

Submission ID

74

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP) is a degenerative neurological condition that can lead to profound communication, visual, cognitive, and movement difficulties. As the condition progresses, many individuals require Specialist Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) assessment and provision to support their communication and participation.

AAC WEST is the Specialist AAC Service for the South West of England. During 2024/25, the team observed a noticeable increase in referrals for people with PSP. In response, a clinical effectiveness study was initiated to better understand the needs of this client group and to ensure that assessment and provision remain aligned with national expectations.

The project explored six key areas:

- Prevalence of PSP within AAC WEST referrals
- Key clinical features relevant to AAC assessment and intervention
- Alignment with the National AAC Service Specification
- Review of AAC WEST assessments completed to date
- Review of equipment provided for this client group
- Explore the effectiveness of interventions via the use of Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs)

resource

Findings from the evaluation were used to develop targeted training and guidance for:

- The AAC WEST clinical team
- Local community therapists supporting individuals with PSP

This poster presents an overview of the learning gained through the evaluation, highlighting emerging patterns, clinical considerations, and implications for future AAC practice.

Level

Specialist

Age

Adult

P26
WITHDRAWN

P27 Delivering training to communication partners on how to effectively use community communication boards

Alida Roos - Author, Amelia Laurendet - Co-Author

Submission ID

83

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

Background: According to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2011), 10% of children and 90% of people with learning disabilities in the UK have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This suggests that people with SLCN make up a large proportion of the population in Guernsey. To improve accessibility, the local SLCN service has introduced 10 community communication boards across Guernsey. Organisations with a board, including the paediatric respite service and a charity that supports adults with learning difficulties, have received staff training. This was considered necessary to ensure that staff were aware of the benefits of communication boards and felt confident in using them. Aim: This study aimed to investigate whether the training package impacted people's awareness of the benefits of communication boards and their confidence in using them. Method: The training package was delivered to each organisation by a speech and language therapist. The training material focused on explaining the features of a communication board, the benefits of using a communication board and key communication partner strategies. Participants were required to complete a pre and post questionnaire. Results: 21 Participants completed the pre-training questionnaire, while 12 completed the post-training questionnaire. Overall, 50% of participants showed an increase in their belief that communication boards would be helpful in their setting. In addition, 92% of participants showed an increase in their confidence around using communication boards. Discussion: These results indicate that the training package improved most participants' confidence in using communication boards. However, improvements in participants' awareness of the benefits of communication boards was less consistent. Future questionnaires could be adapted to gather qualitative data around why participants do or do not perceive communication boards as beneficial, as this could help inform changes to the training package. Additionally, future questionnaires could be adapted to assess whether the training package enhances participants' skills and knowledge in using communication boards.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P28 One Year of TOM-PROMs in a Specialised AAC Service: Measuring meaningful person-centred impact

Shani Ackford - Author, Victoria Styles - Co-Author

Submission ID

84

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

As a specialised AAC Service, AAC West of England Specialist Team (AAC WEST) have gathered outcome measures using Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs) (Enderby & John 2025) for many years. We wanted to expand our understanding of our service's impact by gathering the perspectives of the AAC users. We explored patient reported outcome measure (PROM) tools with the aim to find a tool that met the following criteria: - Quick and easy to complete to facilitate staff engagement. - Adaptable to be made accessible to symbol users and those with complex access needs. - Appropriate to use with people with any diagnosis. - Potential to be used with adults and children (or proxies). The TOM-PROM (Enderby & John 2025) aligned with concepts that we were familiar with due to our established use of the TOM, involved just five questions and was presented on a numeric scale with some supporting visuals (faces). This poster will present: - The process of adapting and implementing the TOM-PROM. - The adapted version of the TOM-PROM that has been implemented. - The initial hurdles including which people and appointments it was appropriate for, supporting AAC users' understanding of the PROM, how we managed data from proxy reports, and concerns about using group data to draw meaningful conclusions. - The facilitators that helped to overcome these and the lessons learned. - The benefits of implementing the PROM for the AAC user and the team around them. - The benefits to the service and examples of the useful group data that we have now, after a year of using the TOM-PROM.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P29 Presuming Competence: 3D printing accessible tactile communication resources for a teenager with visual impairment and complex communication needs

Owen Zahra - Author, Gabriel Ciano - Co-Author, Mariah Amber Busuttil - Co-Author, Luana Antonella Abela - Co-Author

Submission ID

113

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Clinical and Professional Experience

Abstract

This case presentation describes the development of customised tactile communication resources for a teenage client with an intellectual disability and visual impairment of unknown degree, who did not have an established form of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Although the client had initially been described as passive and not demonstrating communicative intent, further assessment showed that he was attempting to communicate, including expressing refusal through non-conventional signs that were not always recognised by those supporting him. Therapists within a specialised Assistive Technology (AT) assessment service presumed competence in the client and explored whether he would accept AAC. Many commercially available systems for individuals with visual impairment rely on abstract symbols or braille; since this client was never exposed to these, the team sought for symbols with high resemblance to real-life objects to aid understanding and motivation. Based on recommendations from the speech and language therapist and occupational therapist within the AT assessment service, the aim was to use 3D printing to create a personalised tactile vocabulary adapted for use with a mid-tech voice output communication aid. From a technical and accessibility perspective, the resources were designed with high contrast, clear tactile features, and strong resemblance to real-life objects familiar to the client. Ergonomic considerations were also central to the design process to ensure that the symbols fitted securely, aligned well with the device, and allowed smooth interaction. Through the flexibility of 3D printing, it was possible to combine accessibility, function, and personal relevance in a way that standard resources could not provide. Following implementation, the client progressed to using more than 23 messages across a range of communicative functions and began combining symbols to form phrases. This case demonstrates the value of combining clinical recommendations, accessibility principles, and 3D printing to create meaningful communication opportunities for individuals with complex communication needs.

Level

General

Age

All ages

P30 Giving voice to understanding: the importance of receptive language assessment for children with complex physical disability and the development of the UK C-BiLLT (an online assessment of spoken language comprehension for children with severe motor disorders)

Kate Laws - Co-Author, Catherine Martin - Author

Submission ID

77

Format

Poster

Submission Topic

Best Research Evidence

Abstract

Children with complex motor and physical disability are often excluded from accessing early receptive language assessment due to difficulties in moving toys and objects. This can lead to an underestimation of their understanding of spoken language and wider language potential.

The C-BiLLT is an online assessment of understanding of spoken language that has been used internationally for several years. We will describe the development of the UK C-BiLLT* including how children with non-progressive motor disorders were involved in the trials and in rating the assessment. The UK-CBiLLT is a standardised formal assessment so it enables comparison with typical language development. Most importantly the assessment is accessible via a range of different access methods including eye gaze and switch access. We will explore the challenges of reliably assessing the understanding of spoken language for children and adults with complex physical disabilities. We will explore how the C-BiLLT fills a gap in this area.

* Pennington L, Potts L, Murray J, Geytenbeek J, Laws K, Sargent J, Clarke M, Swettenham J, Lachkovic J, Martin C, McColl E. The UK C-BiLLT: Validity and reliability of an online assessment of spoken language comprehension for children with severe motor disorders. *Int J Lang Commun Disord.* 2025 Mar-Apr;60(2):e70025. doi: 10.1111/1460-6984.70025. PMID: 40103280; PMCID: PMC11920601.

Level

General

Age

All ages