

Scope's first CommuniCamp a winner for children with AAC devices

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In April, Scope hosted the inaugural CommuniCamp – a camp for children aged 7-14 who communicate using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices. CommuniCamp aims to connect young people using AAC devices and support them build the confidence of both AAC users and their families.

Thirteen children and their families travelled from across Victoria to attend CommuniCamp in the Gippsland region. Participants were supported by Scope Speech Pathologists, an Occupational Therapist, Allied Health Assistants, and a team of wonderful volunteers.

Many great experiences were had across the weekend, from participating in a scavenger hunt, painting camp t-shirts, and dancing the night away at an Australian Bush disco. Scope AAC Mentor, Lisa, also shared her lived experience of using AAC with participants.

Melanie, a parent who attended the camp with her young daughter Ella, has shared her experience in CommuniCamp:

"My daughter Ella was diagnosed at 3 weeks old with Cri Du Chat.*

Along with the many challenges this presented, one of the most heartbreaking was when I was told Ella would never be able to communicate. She was 6 months old at the time. After a few years of using Key Word Sign, and gestures we were introduced to an Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC) in the form of LAMP which we fondly refer to as Ella's 'talker'.

We have been using Ella's talker for 5 years now and she really enjoys being able to communicate! Unfortunately, the last few years it has become hard. It's like we hit a wall. We were struggling with ways to implement it in the home, and Ella was resistant to using her talker in front of other people, as she has never met anyone that uses an AAC like her before.

As a mother, all I want is for Ella to be able to use her voice, in whatever form that takes. I want to hear her hopes and dreams, her favourite colour, and what she did at school. I was desperate to hear her 'chat.'

When I saw the post about CommuniCamp I was very excited and signed up right away!

We were both blown away by the amount of knowledge and care everyone at the camp had, and Ella was very excited to see others using similar ways to communicate!

At first Ella was hesitant to use her talker, but by the end she was turning the volume up and telling everyone her name!

Ella really took to Anna [one of the speech pathologists] who let everyone paint her face. Anna could be found in every crowd - signing 'silly Anna' every time.

Most invaluable for Ella was seeing so many people using 'talkers'. The staff and the other participants.

It has really built her confidence in using her voice, and as a mum, it has been absolutely heartwarming to hear it.

I have also gained confidence in being able to support my daughter with her AAC journey, thanks to the kind and helpful words of all the staff.

We learnt so much at the camp, not only from the people there but also from the parents. I learnt new ways to help Ella communicate in her own words, and I am so, so excited.

I drove home on a high, making a mental list of all the new words I can give Ella, and all the new strategies we can put in place.

Since returning home Ella has re-found her voice! She has told everyone about our dog Lucy, and how she laughs when Lucy licks her.

She has told me about her favourite TV show characters, and asked me questions about my favourite colours and animals. None of which was possible just a week prior to camp.

This camp has truly changed Ella's (and my!) life. It has helped her find her voice, and the confidence to use it.

We can't wait for the next camp!"

Planning is now well underway for CommuniCamp in April 2024, and we are actively recruiting participants, staff, and volunteers!

Follow this link to find out more about CommuniCamp 2024:

<https://www.scopeaust.org.au/events/specialised-family-camp-for-children-using-communication-aids>.

*Cri du chat syndrome is a rare genetic disorder. The impact can vary from one child to the next, but most will have delayed development and some degree of intellectual disability.







