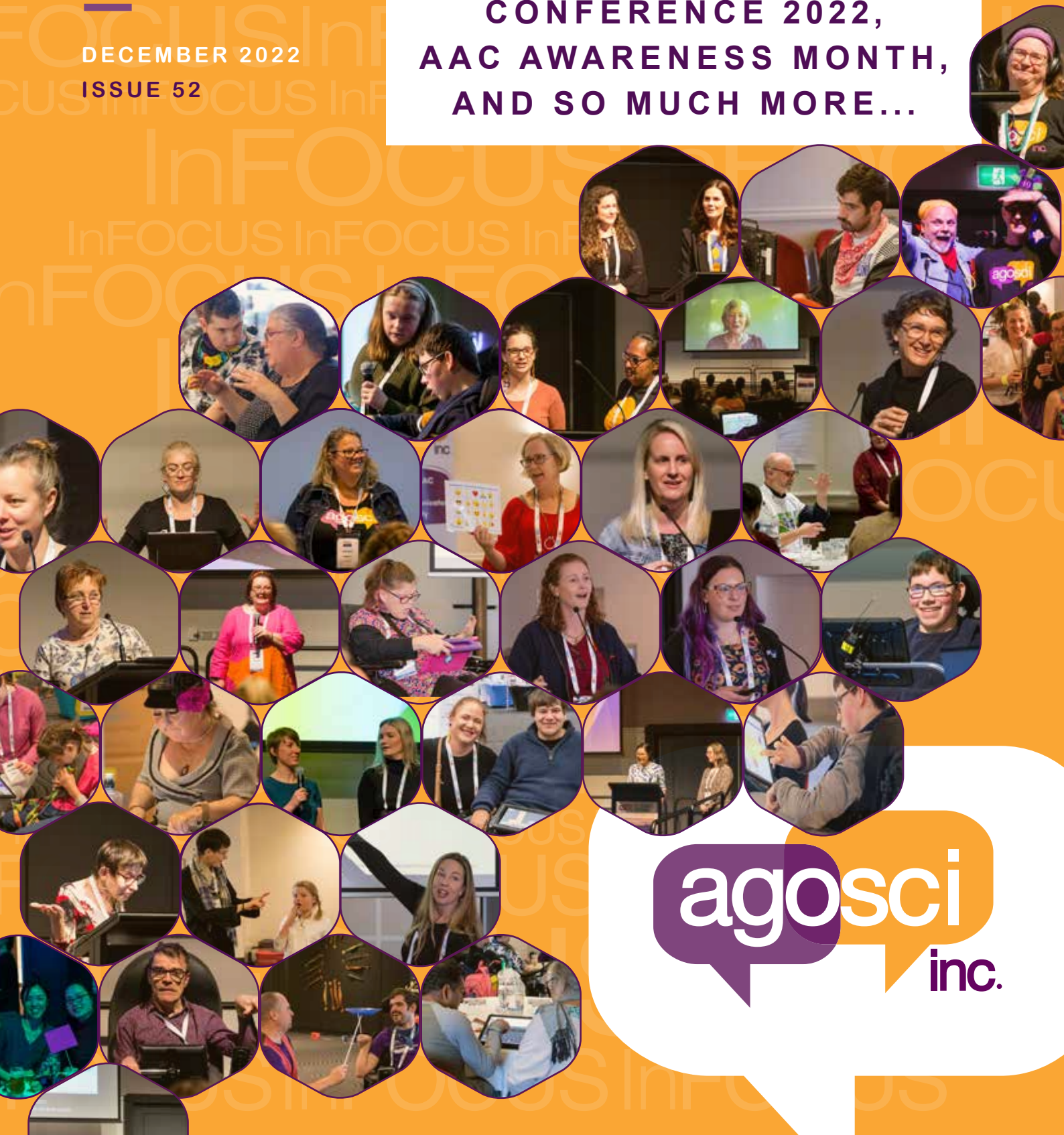


InFOCUS

DECEMBER 2022
ISSUE 52

CONFERENCE 2022,
AAC AWARENESS MONTH,
AND SO MUCH MORE...



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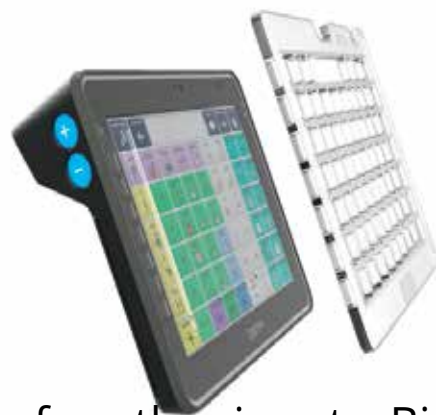
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AGOSCI In Focus is the National Magazine of the AGOSCI Inc. (formerly Australian Group on Severe Communication Impairment). AGOSCI In Focus is a bi-annual magazine and is available to members of AGOSCI. It contains information from and about national seminars, research, new communication technology, resources in the AAC field, news from overseas, and contributions from people who use AAC.

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COVER PICTURE



AGOSCI Conference 2022 in Hobart
Explore. Engage. Emerge.

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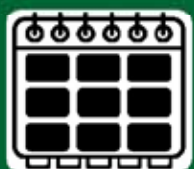
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CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Welcome to the final edition of AGOSCI in Focus for this year. What an amazing year it was, with our recent conference culminating four years of planning. It was fantastic to be able to take our conference to Tassie for the first time and share our love over the waters. The keynotes were a highlight as usual, with Erna Alant, Joseph Reynolds and Paige Schultz, and Jane Farrall presenting inspirational addresses. We had record numbers attend, so we will have to start to look for larger venues next time! We also enjoyed the presence of a large group of conference goers who use AAC and/or are diverse communicators. We hope you enjoy a taste of the conference in this edition.



In other news, since our AGM, AGOSCI has appointed Steph Weir to the role of Vice Chair, Laura Ferrie and Fran Liepa as NT co-reps, Harriet Korner as NSW co-rep, Anthea Naylor as Vic co-rep, Simone Kendall-Robertson as Qld co-rep, and Amelia Edwards as SA co-rep. We welcome back Jess Dethick into the ACT rep role, now bringing her gorgeous young boy to our zoom meetings! So, all in all, we are nearly full, and

this is so important to helping to make AGOSCI the effective organisation it is. Rob Wong had to step down from the Vice Chair role, and we thank him for his strategic focus during his time with us. However, we still have a vacant exec role for an AAC User co-rep, so please contact me (or Lisa Lehmann) if you are interested. Volunteers make the AGOSCI world go around, so when you see them, remember to thank them.

We recently rejuvenated some of our portfolios and have added Early Career Professionals portfolio to the mix, and look forward to rolling that out in 2023.

The AAC Mentors program has now officially started, and we look forward to seeing an increased role for AAC users in AGOSCI and Australia.

Looking ahead, next year AGOSCI will host a National Tour, more professional development, and looking further afield - put Adelaide March 2025 in your diary for our next conference. Thanks to Ria Ferris for keeping us all moving forward, stronger each year. Our membership numbers have hit a record high of over 700, so the Australian AAC community is seeing the benefit of joining AGOSCI.

Have a Happy Christmas and holiday season.

:: DARREN TRENTEPOHL

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to December 2022. This edition follows the 15th Biennial AGOSCI Conference held in Hobart with the theme Explore, Engage, Emerge. The conference was a time of highs and lows. The keynotes by Erna Alant, Joseph Reynolds and Paige Schultz, and Jane Farrall captivated the audience. The presentations generated so much thought, with live and recorded. local and international presenters and contributions. The horrible event of a ramp collapsing on the last day, injuring one of our valued members and shocking deeply the organisers and participants, bought anger and sadness.

It is all emotions that bind us as human beings. We share an immense capacity for joy, inspiration, curiosity, frustration, and, at times, despair.

Many of us shared the sadness of the passing of Michael O'Leary in November. Lisa Lehmann has put to words the grief for a great man lost, alongside the smiles and gifts that he brought to many of us in the AGOSCI community. Earlier this year, at the Speech Pathology Australia conference, Michael and I chatted

about the human condition of health changes, alongside joyous memories of fun and laughter.

Mental health was spotlighted at the conference. People with complex communication needs have both shared and distinct needs in wellbeing. Some may have specific needs of understanding and expression of emotions. They may have unique experiences making them more vulnerable to mental illness. Let's continue the conversations that recognises all emotions.

The next edition has the theme Past, Present, and Future. This opens scope for recognising people and practices, changes and aspirations.

Yours in recognition of the joys, sadness, and importance of community to all of us

:: SHERIDAN FORSTER



EDUCATION & EVENTS

Here we are at the end of another year, and a big year for AGOSCI it was! It was wonderful to see so many new and familiar faces at our conference in Hobart. Our events calendar in 2022 has been busy and steadily growing busier!

I would like to give a big thanks to all our speakers, presenters, volunteers, hosts, and of course our wonderful members for your ongoing support of our AGOSCI events.

This year saw us introduce the new self-paced online learning modules for becoming a better communication partner. We extend our warm thanks to Jane Remington-Gurney for allowing us to steward that course moving forward as a wonderful addition to our AGOSCI educational resources.

We are thrilled to have announced Cynthia Cress as our 2023 National Tour speaker and can't wait to see you all at capital cities around Australia for her workshops in May and June.

We are compiling our 2023 events calendar, and so we ask that if you would like to present your story to our audience, or you know someone who would be great, please email and we will schedule a time to chat about options! Lastly, we know this year has not been easy for many. So, we extend our thoughts to all in our AGOSCI community this summer season, and hope that 2023 brings many rewarding opportunities for you all.

:: RIA FERRIS

TREASURER'S REPORT

Hello everyone, it was lovely to catch up with many of you face to face at our conference in Hobart this year. I look forward to connecting again in Adelaide in 2025!

I have been continuing to work behind the scenes, paying AGOSCI's bills and ensuring that our finances are kept in order. With our ever-growing offering of learning opportunities, this has kept me very busy! It has been fabulous to get some additional support in this role from our bookkeeping firm, to ensure that this voluntary position remains manageable.

Thank you as always for being part of our wonderful AGOSCI community. I hope you all get a chance to relax and refresh over the Christmas break.

:: TRACEY HANIGAN

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Hi again to Everyone, We have had a really great year so far for memberships with around 722 members, which is an increase of 145 members from this time last year. I know I have said it many times before but wow, this is the most members we have EVER had! Special thanks to Ria for all her hard work in organising the many webinars and events which we have all learnt from. Today was a great example with the webinar presented by Chris Bugaj and Rachel Madel on Coaching Communication Partners. It was fantastic.

It was great to catch up with many members at our recent Hobart conference. It was a long time to wait but it was worth it. Thanks to the Hobart Conference Organising Committee for a wonderful conference. I look forward to seeing everyone in Adelaide in 2025. It was great to also catch up with the AGOSCI Executive for part of our Strategic Planning meeting. This is an opportunity to discuss the direction of AGOSCI to take us into the future.

We have continued our regular meetings as the Executive and the completion of our Hobart Strategic Planning meeting via Zoom. It is not quite the same as meeting in person but a lot of discussions around steering AGOSCI for the future. I have been busy typing up minutes and answering member enquiries.

Many thanks again to all the members who have joined this year. We value your membership and strive to provide an organisation that you wish to belong to. Thanks to everyone who continues to support AGOSCI and keeps it going for everyone.

:: MELISSA BAKES

STATE REPORTS

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

After a year off on maternity leave, I am back and keen to hear what members would like for the ACT. Workshops? Picnics? Let me know :)

:: JESSIKA DETHICK



NEW SOUTH WALES

Dear all. It has been an exciting year for NSW AGOSCI. We gathered in person for the National Tour, along with others online, to attend amazing training from Fiona Beauchamp on 'Understanding Movements for Accessing Technology and Communication' on the 31 March and 1 April 2022 at the new Liberator Offices.



From September, I was joined by Harriet Korner to be the co-rep for NSW. We recently celebrated AAC month with an AAC Working Lunch on the 24 October. Therapists and families joined together in an online gathering to hear Di Backhouse, mother of Timmy, who uses AAC, and a special educator, speak about her journey with AAC. Parents gave positive feedback about the opportunity to meet others as they continue their AAC journey. Clinicians found Di to be an inspiring speaker, sharing key ideas about what helps when implementing AAC with her son.

On the 3-4th November the Introductory two-day PODD Workshop was run by Harriet Korner and attended by people from around NSW, including Sydney, Blue Mountains, Newcastle and Albury. Participants shared that they were encouraged to have high expectations, make sure systems are available at any time and that modelling receptive language is such an important part of intervention.

We will be hosting an AGOSCI AAC Picnic on the 3 December at Livvi's Place in Ryde to celebrate International Day of People with Disability 2022. We invite families, therapists, teachers, support workers, carers, and anyone with an interest in AAC to join us. Musical activities and cold drinks will be available.

:: STEPHANIE WONG & HARRIET KORNER



NSW in person attendees at National Tour event



2-day introductory PODD workshop NSW attendees



AAC working lunch

STATE REPORTS

VICTORIA

The second half of this year has been busy for Victorian members. Keen to be out and about again after our extended lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, many Victorian members enjoyed the opportunity to congregate in Hobart for the 2022 AGOSCI Conference. This was a trip which was, for many of us, the first time we have left Victoria and seen our interstate colleagues and friends in 2.5 years! In amongst the many Conference highlights, we were also very proud to see three Victorian members acknowledged for their service to AGOSCI and Australian AAC. Congratulations to Louise, Sheridan, and Libby, and a particular thank you from Victorians for your years of service and dedication to the Victorian disability and AAC communities.



October also saw Victoria host the very first Hanging Out Cafe in celebration of AAC Awareness Month. Organised and run by Victorian member Sheridan Forster, in collaboration with the Hanging Out Program, the Hanging Out Cafe was rated an outstanding success by all who attended. For more information about the aims and outcomes of the event, see Sheridan's report in this issue.

Finally, Victoria welcomes a new State co-representative to the National Executive Committee, Anthea Naylor. Anthea is a Special Education Teacher and Lecturer at the University of Melbourne, and we are very excited to have her join the team! Please join National Executive in welcoming Anthea - we look forward to working with you!

In other Exec news, following the resignation of Rob Wong from the Committee in September, Victorian co-representative Stephanie Weir will be acting in the role of Vice-Chair until the next AGM. We thank Rob for his year of service to AGOSCI in the Vice-Chair role.

:: STEPHANIE WEIR & ANTHEA NAYLOR



Hanging Out Cafe flier

TASMANIA

Our Tasmanian members and community were bolstered by the vibrant AGOSCI conference hosted in Hobart for the first time in September 2022. Many projects and practices in communication support and diversity across the State have benefitted from the post-conference injection of new ideas and enthusiasm!



For example:

- the Variety Tasmania Motor Mouth AAC Camp (a report is in this AIF issue)
- projects supporting teachers in schools to develop their skills and confidence with multimodal communication
- Nell MacMillan's new book project (stay tuned for more info in coming AIF issues!)

The Taste of Summer festival is coming up at the Hobart waterfront over the new year period and is a chance to sample some local food and beverages and engage with a range of entertainment options. AGOSCI has been invited to join Hobart city council and other organisations to take part in the Taste of Summer stall holder briefing. This will include sharing information on making the event as accessible as possible for everyone, including more communication accessible. We are excited to take part in this fabulous opportunity.

:: FELICITY LOVATT & TRACEY HANIGAN



Felicity at Conference 2022

STATE REPORTS

NORTHERN TERRITORY



With the Wet Season upon us in the Top End, the air is heating up and everything else is starting to slow down. I am excited to announce that I have become the newest edition to the NT branch's team and will be based in Darwin. Both Fran and I are working to support people with complex communication needs across the Northern Territory.

AGOSCI ran an AAC awareness month event in the Darwin Botanic Gardens this October, which provided an opportunity for people in the AGOSCI community to connect. Over the next 6 months the AGOSCI team are working to increase awareness of AGOSCI in the Top End and run some more events for people with complex communication needs, friends, families, and professionals.

:: LAURA FERRIE & FRAN LIEPA



Maroochydore Botanical Gardens AAC Awareness



Using PODD at the picnic



Having a chat



AAC Awareness at Darwin Botanic Garden



PODD workshops in Brisbane

STATE REPORTS

QUEENSLAND

Our AGOSCI Queensland team has grown, with Simone Kendall-Robertson joining on board as Queensland co-representative in September at the Tasmania conference. Simone is a speech pathologist in Toowoomba and is excited to bring AGOSCI into the Darling Downs.



We had a family picnic in the park for our first Toowoomba AAC Awareness Month event and were joined by 50+ AAC lovers, who chatted the afternoon away at the Queens Park All-Abilities Playground. It was awesome to see a lot of smiling faces and even a bit of dancing! Hannah, Helen, and Simone also ran a stall at the Toowoomba Farmers Market, giving away free balloon animals and introducing some people in the community to AAC for the first time.

The Sunshine Coast AGOSCI crew also celebrated AAC Awareness Month with lunch, games, and chats at the Maroochydore Botanical Gardens organised by Lisa.

Emma has been busy facilitating PODD workshops in Brisbane, including a 5-day advanced PODD workshop in July and a 2-day Introductory PODD workshop in October.

:: EMMA GOLDSTON AND SIMONE KENDALL-ROBERTSON



Queen's Park All-Abilities Playground was a great spot for our AAC Awareness Month celebration

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Hello Everyone,



I would like to introduce and welcome Amelia Edwards as the new co-rep for AGOSCI SA. Amelia is a speech pathologist with over 10 years' experience working with individuals with complex communication needs. Amelia is currently a Speech Pathology Clinical Lead at Novita in SA and is also passionate about supporting the inclusive education of students with complex communication needs.

AGOSCI SA recently held their annual AAC Awareness month picnic at a local playground. It rained on and off throughout the day, however two families braved the weather to attend. The picnic started with a catchup as it had been a while since everyone had seen each other. After the chatting Aiden and Ruthie went to the visual boards to choose the activities they wanted to play with. The visual boards were recently installed in a joint project between the City of Marion and Autism SA and as you can see, they were endorsed by Aiden and Ruthie. Amelia asked each person their opinion of the picnic and Aiden said, "I feel happy playground" and Ruthie said the picnic was "fun." The picnic ended with Ruthie sharing some very funny jokes!

:: JODIE WHITFORD & AMELIA EDWARDS



More sharing in Toowoomba

STATE REPORTS



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Greetings from sunny WA! AGOSCI WA celebrated AAC Awareness Month in style, with a trip to the ice rink! Yvette and Freya welcomed some of our members and their families to an all-abilities skating session, where there were lots of opportunities to communicate, as well as many giggles and only a few stumbles! Thank you to all our members who came down and celebrated with us – we loved seeing you all have so much fun on the ice!



:: YVETTE THEODORSEN & FREYA ALLEN



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IN MEMORY: MICHAEL O'LEARY

By Lisa Lehmann

Recently Australia lost a legend in the assistive technology sector; Michael O'Leary - or Mr Specs as some of us knew him as - started tinkering in his garage and making up switches and devices for friends with acquired injuries.

Michael, who was born in England, and migrated to Australia as a child, he was the oldest boy with two younger brothers and two older sisters. His early years in Australia were not exactly easy. But these formative years led to the character we come to know and love, being the tenacious and passionate man he was, Michael started his first career in telecommunications, with stories of him climbing the highest towers at Mount Coo-tha in Brisbane's Hinterland region, with no harness because "it just got in the way". Saying to his colleagues "if I fall put a harness on my body before the inspector comes."

This is just one of many stories he regaled telling, along with how he realized that what he was doing in his spare time, tinkering with tech - was actually a form of advanced occupational therapy.

Michael then embarked on a new career and graduated with honours from University of Queensland. Not long after that, he realised there was no one in Australia retailing some of the earliest high- and low-tech products that were available in other countries. His oldest two children often say Spectronics was his golden child. For many of us, he was our gold standard in finding exactly what we needed.

The first time I met Michael I was getting my first brand new wheelchair, I was fourteen, and he gave me all the possible choices I could have! Price seemed to be no issue, because he knew how to write up the best prescriptions for such equipment back in the day, when his company was the roller-chair distributor in Queensland. This was such a world opening meeting for me personally, which led to a 31-year friendship. Michael shared many parts of his life with many different people, and all of us make up the rich tapestry that he leaves behind in the sector. Spectronics has always been supportive of AGOSCI and Michael's dedication to the sector and his sponsorship of the 2015 conference, held in Brisbane is yet to be beaten in terms of quality, the first conference to have an AAC Communicator present a pre-conference workshop, and financially successful, allowing AGOSCI to offer more opportunities of professional development between conferences.



Michael's larger than life personality will be dearly missed, and I personally wonder if any conference will be the same again, without Mr Specs laughter and daggy dancing, after a few Chardonnays, of course! Michael was an atheist, but in recent years he had pondered if there was an ever after, what it might be. If there is, in Michael's ever after, you'll be met with a glass and ac/dc playing loudly, with him daggy dancing, watching the kookaburras from his back deck, feeding the wildlife, and growing beautiful exotic and native flora.

Since being asked to write this tribute I've been trying to think of the perfect words, and like Michael would do, I turned to music, and this is the best way I could describe, and do justice for a great man, a rascal, frustratingly stubborn, yet so gentle and caring, passionate and romantic. His jolly laughter will be dearly missed booming through conversation and breaks at conferences like we all reminded ourselves of how lucky we were that we all got to spend one last conference with him in Hobart this year!

I came to these words, taken from "to sir, with love" from the movie of the same name. As Michael was my mentor, teacher, business advisor at times, a relatable 'stigmatised' parent, we'd often offer advice to each other. But from the moment we met he was my friend, he wrote my first letter of recommendation for my paper submission for the ISAAC consumer lecture, which I feel launched me into the world of AAC, and I will now cherish those kind and respectful things he wrote back then. But I'll cherish most of all that I had a small window of the kaleidoscope of Michael's rich life of great yarns and Oliver Twist like tales.

'To Sir, With Love' from the movie of the same name, I dedicate these words to Michael Christopher O'Leary, vale to another great legend taken before he was ready.

"Those schoolgirl days
Of telling tales and biting nails are gone
But in my mind
I know they will still live on and on
But how do you thank someone
Who has taken you from crayons to perfume?
It isn't easy, but I'll try
If you wanted the sky
I would write across the sky in letters
That would soar a thousand feet high
"To sir, with love"


The time has come
For closing books and long last looks must end
And as I leave
I know that I am leaving my best friend
A friend who taught me right from wrong
And weak from strong
That's a lot to learn
What, what can I give you in return?
If you wanted the moon
I would try to make a start
But I would rather you let me give my heart
"To sir, with love"

AGOSCI Parents and Mentors Group

Did you know AGOSCI have a free Facebook group for families and AAC users?

Ask questions and get support from your peers.

Speech pathologists, perhaps you might like to let your families know about it too?

 www.facebook.com/groups/agosciparentsmentors

Sheree Henley is our new AAC Communities Coordinator. She has great plans for the future. She is working with a team of state committee members: Jane Hudson (Qld), Bec Watson (WA), and Kate Smith (Vic). You can contact her on:

 communities@agosci.org.au

MENTAL HEALTH FEATURED AT THE CONFERENCE

By Margie Charlsworth

The issue of mental health is finally being acknowledged in all facets of society, and it was pleasing to know that AGOSCI has picked this up, and started the conversation within the Complex Communication Needs (CCN) community. It was good to be able to join other panelists with either a lived experience of CCN and living with mental health

or those working in the field. Mental health is a daily proposition, for everyone, regardless of who you are or your abilities, however it is imperative that we keep the conversation going, if we are ever going to conquer it.

- ☎ Lifeline 13 11 14
- ☎ 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)



HOLY GRAIL OF AAC

By Janelle Samson

Jane McGonigal (game designer and future thinker) says that “Every time you remember a future that hasn’t actually happened, you rate that future as more likely and the more vivid details that you describe about this future that has never happened, the more likely you are to really start to believe it could totally happen.” . So, as I prepared my presentation for the AGOSCI conference 2022, I tried to imagine the future based on the title of the paper: Holy Grail of AAC services - Creating bespoke services for people with CCN by design rather than the NDIS price guide.

A handout from the presentation is available on the Two Way Street website (<https://twowaystreet.com.au/insights/>) but the images below are the ones I created during my future thinking exercises. I think it is important that we all keep imagining the future we'd like to see so that we get closer to thinking it can happen. When we believe it can happen, then we can design our services around these beliefs rather than those which are a reflection of the past or the way we've always done things.

Reference: McGonigal, Jane. (2016). The future of imagination. Aspen Ideas Festival Lecture. <https://youtu.be/BeoHGw-BvXhY>



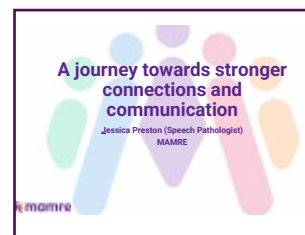
CONFERENCE 2022 WRAP UP

Kim Nguyen and Tracey Hanigan, Conference Convenors 2022

And that's a wrap on another AGOSCI conference! AGOSCI 2022 Engage Explore Emerge was an incredible showcase of innovative practice and leading research. We had wonderful feedback from delegates who enjoyed hearing from engaging speakers, exploring the exhibition, getting involved in Base Camp activities, and ripping up the dance-floor at AGOSCI's 40th birthday dinner celebration. Thank you to everyone who joined us down in Hobart and helped to make it happen. We look forward to seeing you all in Adelaide!



Tracey, Kim, and friends 80s style



AGOSCI AWARDS 2022

AGOSCI Award for Service to Australian AAC

Louise Dunne

The AGOSCI Award for Service to Australian AAC honours individuals who has made an outstanding contribution to AGOSCI. At the Hobart conference in 2022, this honour was awarded to Speech Pathologist, Louise Dunne. Over a career that has spanned more than 40 years Louise dedicated her practice to working with people with complex communication needs.

Louise joined Scope, formerly Spastic Society of Victoria, in 1978 and retired from there as a team leader and speech pathologist in October 2021. Louise worked at the Scope during a time of great change and innovations in AAC and was a key player in some of the greatest changes. Louise was an integral part of this team and was a key mentor and supervisor to many clinicians that continue to contribute to the field of AAC today.

She trained many therapists, of all disciplines, in working with AAC. She was a pioneer in implementing a transdisciplinary model of education and therapy in the early 1980s. During this time, Louise was a driving force behind the movement to develop new service delivery models that put the person at the centre of planning and saw therapists working in classrooms and in transdisciplinary teams. Louise created guidelines and training to ensure that a child using AAC was supported in all aspects of their learning and their life – well beyond speech pathology.

Louise was part of the team that created VOCRISS – the first and only speech generating device made in Australia. She was one of the key people in making this happen. Louise was also a key member in forming the COMPIC development association. She helped to facilitate the development of communication boards that people were able to print and produce. This was ground-breaking, in the days before other programs were available.

Louise also worked as part of an early childhood service in the 1990s in the conductive education team with Jann Kirkland, Gayle Porter and others. It was here she worked collaboratively to problem solve how to incorporate AAC into the conductive education program. Louise supported Gayle and Jann in the publication of their book – AAC and Conductive Education.

During this time, Louise was also involved in creating



Louise and Bronwen Jones celebrating

the first multi-level dynamic display communication books – the pre-cursor to PODD. She is credited in the PODD resource manual for her contributions. She supported children and families to use these books and to develop systems particularly for auditory scanners.

Louise continued to work 1:1 with children and adults with complex communication needs for her entire career. She was dedicated to keeping up with evidence-based practice, new and ever-changing technology and finding the best solutions for every person. Louise had many clients who she supported through their childhood into adulthood, highlighting her passion and commitment.

Louise programmed auditory scanning into the first Dynavox speech generating device in her earlier career and continued to learn to use new technologies as technology developed. Louise was programming and editing in the Grid 3 at the end of her career. She worked tirelessly and often in her own time to find solutions for users with complex access requirements and to create fun and creative ways for her clients to learn to communicate.

Louise was a skilled clinician with many, many clients keen to utilise her expertise and knowledge. She had a passion for ensuring every person had a voice and for providing comprehensive literacy instruction for all.

Above all, Louise was incredibly generous in sharing her passion and knowledge with others. Louise held a variety of leadership positions over her career including Chief Speech Pathologist for a state wide service, team leader in early childhood intervention services, and later in the delivery of NDIS services.

Louise has taught many speech pathologists about AAC, inclusion and ensuring that every person has a voice. She has had a fundamental influence on both the lives of many AAC users, and speech pathologists that work in the sector. Louise has enabled many others to achieve their goals and evoked a passion in many junior therapists.

The AAC community has benefited greatly from Louise and her experience, knowledge, deep passion and commitment. Congratulations on this award Louise and thank you for your outstanding contribution to AAC in Australia.

Citation by Gemma Holleran.

AGOSCI Award for Service to AGOSCI

Sheridan Forster

The AGOSCI Award for Service to Australian AAC honours individuals who has made an outstanding contribution to AGOSCI. At the Hobart conference in 2022, this honour was awarded to Dr Sheridan Forster. Sheridan is a speech pathologist and researcher with a special interest in adults with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities who has made an outstanding contribution to AGOSCI.

Sheridan has passion for improving the quality of interactions had by people with profound intellectual

and multiple disability. Sheridan's simple question "how do I need to be in order to be with you?," has driven a research and practice career that has impacted the lives of people intellectual disability and complex communication access needs across the world profoundly. Sheridan's by-line "attentive engagement" represents what she sees as the primary focus of her work and the core of interaction.

Sheridan's services to AGOSCI have spanned her speech pathology career. She has been editor of AGOSCI in Focus for over 15 years, a task that requires incredible dedication, attention to detail and skills in the art of gentle persuasion, all attributes Sheridan has in spades. Sheridan is a frequent contributor to AGOSCI social media pages and with her gentle skills in persuasion encourages participation from others.

Sheridan has also made a significant contribution to the peer reviewed academic literature that assists the AAC sector to better understand and support people with severe and profound intellectual disability.

The AAC community benefits from Sheridan's skill, passion, and dedication. We congratulate Sheridan on this award and thank you for your ongoing outstanding contribution to AAC in Australia.

Citation by Jo Watson



AGOSCI AWARDS 2022

The Award for Outstanding Contribution to Unaided AAC in Research, Clinical Practice, Teaching or Mentoring – The Karen Bloomberg Award

Libby Browlie

In 2022, AGOSCI also conferred the inaugural Award for Outstanding Contribution to Unaided AAC in Research, Clinical Practice, Teaching or Mentoring – The Karen Bloomberg Award. This award was established in acknowledgement of the fundamental and foundational contribution that Karen made to AGOSCI throughout her long and prestigious career, and to our vision to enhance the participation of all diverse communicators in Australia.

Established in collaboration with Key Word Sign Australia, this award was designed to reflect Karen's work, leadership, values, and interests in the practice of speech pathology and AAC with individuals who communicate in diverse ways. As such, the award will be presented biannually at every AGOSCI Conference to nominees who have demonstrated an outstanding contribution to the practice, profile or evidence base informing the use of unaided AAC in Australia.

This year, the inaugural recipient of the Karen Bloomberg Award was speech pathologist and National Coordinator of Key Word Sign Australia, Libby Brownlie. Libby has been a passionate advocate of Key Word Sign and unaided AAC throughout her career.

Libby has worked across early intervention and adult disability services, through to community capacity building services as part of the Communication Access Network in Victoria. She has worked tirelessly to inform people about Key Word Sign in all contexts in which people with communication difficulty might benefit from it. In addition to her many years of voluntary service on State Committees, in 2010, Libby worked closely with Karen, along with Teena Caithness, to establish Key Word Sign Australia and develop the Getting Started with Key Word Sign vocabulary. Together with others, Libby, Karen and Teena also developed the long-standing national Key Word Sign basic training package, and Key Word Sign trainer accreditation process.

With numerous publications and conference presentations, Libby has worked hard to raise the profile of Key Word Sign in Australia. As National Coordinator of Key Word Sign Australia since 2017, she has overseen ongoing collaboration during a time of significant change with the introduction of the National

Disability Insurance Scheme.

Libby took a lead role in attracting national funding for Key Word Sign Australia through the Information, Linkages and Capacity-Building scheme in 2019, which resulted in more training options, resources, and a national website for the Key Word Sign community.

On behalf of the AGOSCI National Executive Committee, Key Word Sign Australia, and all AGOSCI members, we wish to acknowledge Libby's many years of leadership in the practice of Key Word Sign, and her service to the Australian disability, AAC and Key Word Sign communities. Congratulations, Libby, on your extremely well-deserved receipt of this award, and thank you from us all.

Citation by Stephanie Weir



Libby receives The Karen Bloomberg Award at the 2022 Conference

MESMERISED BY DR ERNA ALANT'S KEYNOTE

By Cath Fernando

I was quite mesmerised by Dr Erna's keynote presentation and additional lecture on Making and Maintaining Friendships.

What I took from Dr Erna's presentation was not necessarily the intent behind the presentation, and she was talking more generally about meaning making, not just for the autistic population.

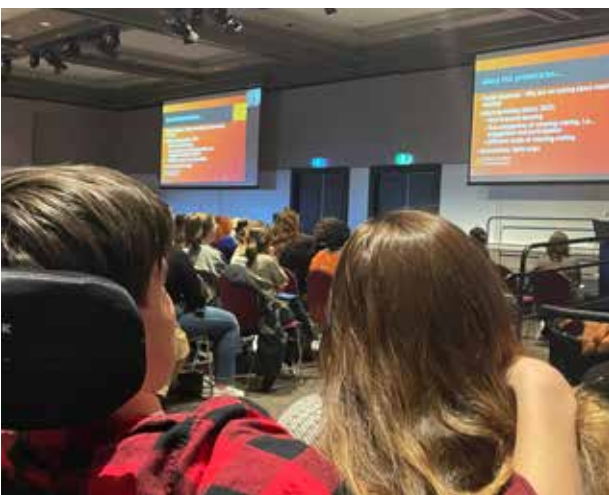
As an advocate for the neurodiversity movement, one of the goals people often have for children with autism is "developing social skills" and "building friendships." Dr Erna's presentations gave me a wonderful "aha" moment, when I realised that "social skills", the way we sometimes teach them in speech pathology programs, will not build friendships and may do more harm than good.

What I realised was that teaching kids the rules of how to have a conversation, how to pay attention to a speaker, how, essentially, to "fit in" actually encourages masking. Masking means that kids are trying to look like they fit in by following these rules. It is quite the opposite of being authentic. It is also exhausting and leads to children being confused about their own

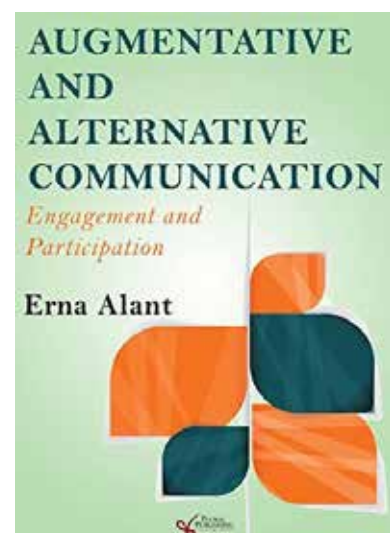
identity. We never ask neurotypical children to try to emulate or adapt to autistic children. And why?

Dr Erna talked so eloquently about "meaning." She talked about how to see nuanced meaning in true friendship. The definition she provided for what real friendship is: voluntary, two-way, evidence of enjoyment, and that essential element of nuanced meaning. To me the nuance is the little exchanges of eye contact when friends are both thinking the same thing, an in-joke perhaps, a little nudge, just being near each other. She said that information does not have to be exchanged verbally. I have seen this myself. I have seen non-speaking people who attend a daycare program having real friendships, without "conversation skills" or learning "social rules."

Finally, I realised that there is no speech pathology "intervention" that can create a true friendship. We need to help kids to be authentic, communicate naturally and, most importantly, find their tribe and give them time with kids who are accepting. What Dr Erna helped me to realise is that meaning making is not only for kids with disabilities. Meaning making, as an aim in a school setting, will allow children of all abilities and backgrounds to learn to get along. What a hopeful idea...



Social closeness while watching Erna's keynote



Special **20%** discount code for AGOSCI members for Erna's book from our friends at Pro-Ed. Promotion code: **FORSTER**



<https://www.proedaust.com.au/augmentative-and-alternative-communication-engagement-2>

UPDATES FROM KEY WORD SIGN AUSTRALIA

By Libby Brownlie

Key Word Sign Australia (KWSA) was at the AGOSCI Conference, and we had a fabulous time! It was great to be back face to face with the AGOSCI community. We delivered one of the pre-conference workshops, talked with many interested people at the KWSA stand and launched the new KWSA website (<https://kwsa.org.au/>). You may be aware that KWSA received one of the NDIA Information, Linkages and Capacity building grants, which has allowed us to create that, as well as a new suite of training packages and many new resources.

The new Basic Workshop has been rebuilt and will be available nationally from the beginning of 2023. It will be available as a full workshop, either face to face or online. The Basic workshop will also be available in the 'blended' model, with the online eLearning module covering the theory elements of the workshop (1-1.5 hrs), plus the practical or sign teaching component (5 hrs) which can either be face to face or virtual. KWSA delivered the practical component of the new Basic workshop at the conference, giving participants an early experience of the new workshop in a 'blended' format.

We are excited to be expanding our range of courses to include Intermediate and Advanced qualifications for those who wish to continue formal training in key word sign. The Intermediate workshop 'Teaching Others to Use Key Word Sign' is in the final stages of development and will be available in the first half of 2023. That will be followed by the Advanced workshop 'Teaching Key Word Sign to Others.' Both the Intermediate and Advanced workshops will be available in the blended model, that is an eLearning module plus a face to face or online practical session. These three courses will be the pathway to the new Presenter Training. You can read more about each of the courses here: <https://kwsa.org.au/training/>.

Many people have expressed interest in becoming an accredited Key Word Sign Presenter. We anticipate that Presenter Training will be ready to offer in the second half of 2023. We have been keeping a list of people interested in our future workshops, including Presenter Training. Please get in touch with us if you want to receive updates as we progress with this work.

Have you seen the new KWSA website www.kwsa.org.au? It contains information about key word sign and its implementation, KWS training and the new workshops, and information and resources about including funding



What sign is Libby doing?



A busy time at the Key Word Sign booth

for KWS training and supports in an NDIS plan. There is an expanded Resources section with suites of resources under the topics of 'Chat and Sign', 'Learn and Sign', 'Read and Sign', 'Sing and Sign' and 'Topics of Interest'. A new suite of resources for the early childhood population under 'Play and Sign' has recently been added. We have completed the upgrade of what was known as 'Nursery Rhymes to Sing, See and Sign' and they are listed under the 'Sing and Sign' section. A set of resources targeted at the adult population is underway, and when completed they will be in a new 'Work and Sign' resource section. And work has begun on resources targeted at people working with primary school children. Many of our resources include sign guides as well as symbol boards.

Work is also progressing on other areas of the website

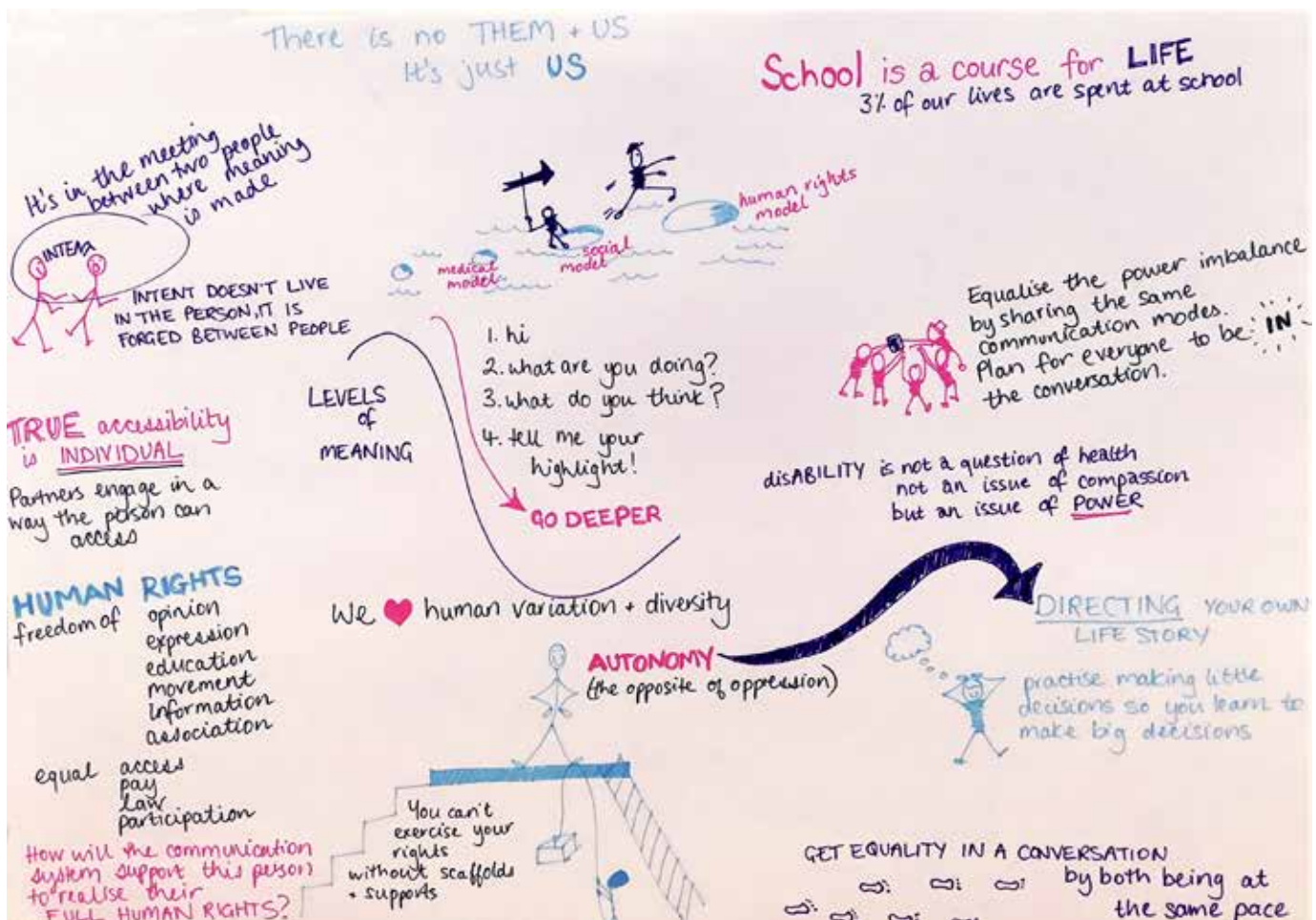
in preparation for the launch of phase 2 later in the year. This will include the long awaited KWSA App replacement. The upgraded Sign Library will have all the line drawings and descriptions of the signs previously contained in the app, along with some useful additions. We are excited to be including a video library for all vocabulary items, as an additional support to the accurate learning of signs. The creation of individualised resources using the line drawings of signs and PCS symbols will be via a subscription to "KWSCreate".

We are committed to a co-design process and invite expressions of interest from anyone who wants to be involved in reviewing and providing feedback on subsequent eLearning modules, the new website, or

any of our new resources. In return we will be giving you a discount on any products and resources in the KWSA shop. So, these are exciting times in the KWS world. Come us join us on the journey on supporting KWS and communication for all!

- keywordsignaustralia@scopeaust.org.au
- www.kwsa.org.au
- <https://www.facebook.com/KWSAustralia/>
- [kws_au](https://www.instagram.com/kws_au)
- <https://www.youtube.com/c/KeyWordSignAustralia>

FELICITY'S MINDMAP OF CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS



Felicity's mindmap of conference reflection

AACONNECTION FOR ALL

By Jenna O'Brien and Rachel Harkin, Speech Pathologists at Kids +

“There was no one else in adult services that I knew of that was using AAC devices. No peers to learn with either and no one to help” (Leah, parent of young adult AAC user, Nicole)

Increasingly at Kids +, we are finding that connection through group and peer sessions has benefits that the traditional service model of one-to-one speech pathology cannot provide. Our presentation at the recent AGOSCI conference posed the challenge to speech pathologists and service providers to rethink their individual AAC services, particularly for young adults. Upon reflection and following discussions with delegates who attended our presentation, this is a challenge we should pose across all age groups for individuals with complex communication support needs.

Researchers emphasize that typical communication skills are not a prerequisite to experience the intimacy and subsequent benefits of friendships and connection. We know the benefits of friendships and social interaction are substantial at any age. We need people in our lives, we need close relationships, people we can call on when we really need them. Research found that for AAC users, friendships fulfilled their need to be understood, not just their basic needs, but also their emotional needs. Therefore, AAC users need opportunities to develop connection and belonging, and what better way, than through participation in groups?

About 2-3 years ago, a group of young adults who were receiving individual speech pathology sessions with us, approached us to support them in a group. They wanted to have more opportunity to use their communication devices across the week, and in a way that was meaningful and social. It was a no brainer for us, we were on board. Since then the group has evolved significantly, from the number of participants, to how the group runs.

Our role as facilitators of this group has changed over time, and we have learnt the subtle yet important tasks that make the group work. These tasks consider many factors including:

- Physical proximity and space so group members can enjoy sharing looks to each other, but have the space they need to feel comfortable.
- Creating an atmosphere to promote comfort and connection (expectation, lighting, quietness/

reducing distraction, giving time).

- Understanding group members emotional state as group begins, and throughout so adjustments can be made to support as much connection and/or learning moments as possible.
- Language and communication support needs so this can be provided for within the group.

The group runs weekly, for 2 hours, and focuses on different topics or themes that are decided on by the group. Some of the activities and events worked on as a group include:

- Special events, such as Valentine's Day, Halloween: Choosing some of these big events has been great for social interaction within the group and works on using language when it is relevant, to build capacity for those conversations outside of group.
- Advocacy: We put together tips for our local shopping centre and arranged visits with the centre management to train all shop assistants about communicating with an AAC user.
- Connection: One of the ways we have connected with the AAC community is through submissions to AGOSCI In Focus magazine. So far, we have contributed two pieces to AGOSCI In Focus, around being social and relationships. It has been a great way to support the group to share their thoughts and provide a way to show that to a larger audience. It is also a space that understands and values their communication. We are very mindful of these opportunities to showcase their communication skills, to not add to or extend their words. Exactly what they say when creating these pieces, is exactly what is published in the magazine.
- Decision making: Choice, and the opportunity to make choices about our lives, significantly impacts our wellbeing as does the absence of decision-making power. Decision making Talking Mats made by Indigo solutions have been completed by the group. They allowed group members to consider how they best make decisions. These were then captured and provided resources for their support teams.

In general, the goal is for the group to have fun together...although we know that it is more than that

of course. Everyone in the group has intentions for their time, including the speech pathologists and support workers. This is to reflect the two-way nature of communication. It is not just about the young adults developing their communication skills, but it is about the people around them enhancing their ability to receive communication in diverse ways. Some of the communication partner focus areas are around increasing wait time, not being the first one to respond to allow time for group members to have back and forth conversations, trying to be present in the moment to read cues and understand the AAC user's needs. One of the other outcomes of the group is the connection made between support workers. The support workers learn from each other and reflect on their shared experiences.

For us the group means a lot, and the young adults and support workers have expressed that it means a lot to them too.



We now have an AAC Chatters group that is run monthly by an AAC user. We also have a group for primary school aged AAC users, who connect weekly. The value that these sessions bring to families, and young people is immense. They enjoy finding commonalities in the way they communicate, the way they eat, the way they move and think. It is something that speech pathologists cannot provide. It speaks to the far reaching and immeasurable impact these kinds of groups can have for young people.

Over time, we have learned some important lessons in facilitating groups which we will share:

- We need to be guided by the group, if the group runs exactly as planned, then we have not listened.
- It is ok for the therapist's agenda for communication skill development to take a back seat, so connection and interaction can be the focus.
- All group members need to feel valued and have a role, this includes support workers, siblings in the room, family members.
- Groups will change and evolve over time.

We are extremely grateful to all the young people and their supporters who attend group programs, because they have taught us so much, and continue to do so. They will forever shape the way we provide services for AAC users.



Communication Access Symbol

AGOSCI has been awarded the Communication Access Symbol. This means we have met the standards that make our business or service communication accessible. We are committed to communicating effectively and respectfully with customers who have communication difficulties, and we use strategies and resources to support successful communication.

MOTOR MOUTH CAMP - TASMANIA 2022

By Tracey Hanigan

In October this year, the Tasmanian AAC community celebrated AAC awareness month with our inaugural Motor Mouth Camp. This camp was organised by Variety Tasmania and funded through a generous donation from the Motors Foundation. The camp was based on the successful Motor Mouth Camps which have been held for over a decade in Western Australia.

The key goal of the camp was to support families to increase their skills in supporting their children to use their AAC systems, as well as building a sense of community amongst our AAC users and their families. To kick off our first year, the camp was piloted with students and families from Southern Support School in Hobart. Seven families and eight AAC communicators attended the camp along with Variety staff, a team of fabulous volunteers and two mentors – Joseph Reynolds and Nell McMillan.

The camp included a parent education program and activities for the children who use AAC and their siblings. Some favourite activities included a Taiko drumming session, archery, and of course good old rice play. The camp shop was also a highlight with Joseph our shopkeeper negotiating some tough deals with the camp customers.

It was great to see everyone using their AAC systems throughout and families making meaningful connections during the parent sessions and social opportunities. We have already planned a catch-up in December at the Zoo Doo Zoo to reconnect and continue supporting

and encouraging the use of AAC in everyday life.

Some feedback from families included:

'Being able to connect with other AAC users and families like ours has been so valuable'

'We are already seeing noticeable differences in our child's communication at home too – both verbal and AAC'

'Our child's siblings are trying to learn more about how he communicates and how to understand him more clearly'

'It brought families together and helped us not to feel so isolated and socially awkward'

'There really was just so many gains from this camp for our family and they keep on coming'

'Variety Motor Mouth was what I dreamt of and more. A place where not only AAC was understood but celebrated. A place where everyone was welcome with open arms and able to be themselves.'

'There are no words I can say to articulate just how grateful we are to you all.'

The camp will be back bigger and better next year! We will be opening it up to families across Tasmania. Look our next year in around April when we open applications.

Photo credits to Variety Tasmania/Richie Ho.



The Big Mouth Tasmania 2022 participants



HANGING OUT CAFE IS A SUCCESS

By Sheridan Forster

The Hanging Out Program (HOP) is an approach and attitude to being with people with severe and profound intellectual disability (or anyone really). Originally, it was about committing to spending 10 minutes with a person, giving your full attention and engagement, and making brief notes about it. This year we extended HOP to a two hour Hanging Out Café in collaboration with AGOSCI for International AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) Awareness Month in October 2022.

Too often people who do not use voice or communication books/boards or devices, miss out on attention and engagement. In the alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) community there is some argument whether people who do not use symbolic systems are included as AAC users. With this knowledge, an event was decided to be run in conjunction with AGOSCI (the Australian group focusing on people with complex communication needs) that directly targeted the people most likely to miss out. That is people who did not use any formal means of communication, but used lots of unique ways to communicate and to explore and understand “how do I need to be in order to be with you?”

A single Hanging Out Café event was created for people who did not use and did not seem to understand speech, alongside experienced communication partners, and people interested in spending time with this group. A venue was booked, a time set (worried over the time crossing over when “shift-changes” occur for staff), and then the event was advertised.

Finding experienced communication partners to come along was the easiest task. People who knew about HOP and knew the event organiser, immediately signed up. The other groups were not so easy to engage.

The challenge was how to bring together people who require someone else to make the choice for them to join in? The first person with a disability to be signed up was a sibling of a speech pathologist who knew about HOP. The next few came from speech pathologists who spoke to families and encouraged them to sign up.

Fliers were distributed to service managers, service contacts, service newsletters, and via group home door stops. The difficulty remained of the distance between the person who would benefit from the Hanging Out Café and the hurdles inherent in organisations. A flier sent to managers could not be assured of getting to

houses; a flier to a support worker could not be assured to get to the house supervisor who might not make the decision to sign up to something and allocate a support worker, particularly if they did not know who was “on shift” on the day (essential signing up the support worker as well). Unfortunately, no easy solution was found. A few more people came along after direct approaches were made to service managers the day before the event, when it was highlighted who and why they may enjoy the event, as they asked the question “so... what exactly will be happening?”

For some people, it is difficult for them to imagine someone who they perceive as “nonverbal and doesn’t communicate” to be signed up to a social event focusing on communicating with a whole new group of people. Some staff may have perceived the person as not interested in interacting and have labelled the person as “wanting their own space.” Overcoming this sort of thinking presented another challenge.

Nevertheless, the day came. There were no prepared activities as the aim was for people to informally interact with each other with no pressure on how to interact (but rules to be mindful of anything perceived to be as personal touch). It was not an event to teach any of the participants about any theories or knowledge about interactions, although there were a handful of fliers (e.g., AGOSCI, PMLD-Link, NAC, Sensory Stories, Changing Places Australia) available. Food was planned and the coffee maker packed.

A decision was made not to bring equipment/sensory materials/switches/ and other stuff. While these things could be used in interactions a resolution was made to set up interactions in an equipment-free way. The opportunity was provided for people to experience great interactions without special equipment, just like might happen if a person was waiting for an appointment or going to a café.

As the time arrived the organizer set up their own sensory equipment (aromatherapy, half room lighting, open doors to fresh air) solely for their own regulation. People began to arrive and. the magic happened!

Six people with intellectual disability came along, with three family members, four support workers, and a speech pathologist. Three “experienced interaction partners” spent time with everyone. Families and support workers mingled with each other and the people they support. Many different forms of communication were used. The means of communication were broader than anticipated with a

number of people understanding and using some speech, and those who had them pulled out their iPads with ProLoQuo2Go and LAMP to support conversation. Some people showed their support workers and families what they could do with the help of these ways of communicating. There was body language, muscle tension, sounds, smiles, touch, wiggles, jiggles, and shakes, walking (and knee walking to matching the height of one lady), being guided in and out and all around the room, eyes looking at people, places, and sometimes away. There was “talking” hands, feet, noses, snuggles, sounds, words, and pictures. There were questions, comments, aghast joy, and at times a little reserved confusion. There were poems shared, stories recited to familiar delight, and a duet of “So Long, Farewell” as one woman headed home.

The unanticipated outcome was how everyone interacted with each other. The curiosity of individuals to wonder of and look at another person, the delight in seeing the pictures on someone else’s communication device, the trips to the coffee bar with other people, and the occasional clambering around and over other people as individual’s led where they wanted to go. Even the exploration of the neighbouring art exhibition at the community venue.

The event was a great success. A family member commented, “I can see in the future that the Hanging Out Café, with its relaxed atmosphere will be a fun and easy environment for all who attend to learn from and look forward to.” An experienced partner stated that it was “A perfect way to spend a Saturday afternoon, making some fabulous new friends, hanging out in the moment.” The photos capture what those folks who do not use words or symbols (or use minimal or unclear words/ symbols) thought of the Hanging Out Café.

The first of many!

(Originally published in PMLD-Link, a publication about people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities in the UK. Modified for AGOSCI readers.

Consent has been provided for the photos by individuals or their nominee).



Gulaka Buma ‘Hunting for Yams’: Developing AAC Systems in Yolŋu Languages

By Rebecca Amery & Julie Gungunbuy Wunungmurra

Yow bukmak, “Hello everyone”. It’s Rebecca Amery writing, with Julie Wunungmurra. We were excited to travel to Lutruwita, Tasmania in September to share our research journey with conference delegates there. We have been working together with Julie’s extended family to develop AAC system prototypes in Yolŋu languages for Yolŋu living with Machado-Joseph Disease (MJD) in northern Australia.

Right now, we are writing this from Larrakia land in Darwin. We pay our respects to them, their elders and families and the ways that they have cared for country through their language and culture. It’s the hot, humid build-up season here, *Dalirrgang* in Larrakia language. There are box jelly-fish in the water again, and you can hear thunder and lightning in the distance. King tides occur at this time and the wind is blowing mainly from the north-west. The ground is hot and when the winds die down, there is a tenseness in the air.

My name is Rebecca Amery, I’m a *Balanda*, non-Aboriginal speech pathologist. I have a partner Kris, and two children. I was born in Adelaide, but I’ve lived most of my life in the Top End of the Northern Territory. Julie Gungunbuy Wunungmurra is a Yolŋu woman from the *Dalwangu* clan.

Julie is from Galiwin’ku community in northeast Arnhem Land, and she speaks *Djambarrpuyŋu* as her first language. In Balanda culture Julie has five kids and five grandkids, but in her own Yolŋu culture, she is a mother and grandmother to many. In Balanda culture we are colleagues, but in Yolŋu culture we call each other *ŋandi* “mother” / *waku* “daughter”. In Yolŋu culture, everyone is connected through *gurruŋu* “kinship”, and knowing who you are, and how you are related to everyone and everything - that is the first thing you need to know.

At AGOSCI we were lucky to have a full session to share lots of stories, photos, and a few videos from our work up here in Darwin and Galiwin’ku. To those of you

who were there at our presentation - thank you for your interest in our work, for your engagement and openness to hear about AAC from a Yolŋu perspective. We believe that this work is important, not just for Yolŋu families living with MJD, or other Yolŋu with complex communication needs who cannot communicate with their voice. We believe that there are important learnings here for all of us, to reflect on our own culture and see how most of us use a white, Western cultural lens in AAC. It’s good for all of us to reflect on that, to listen to each other, and work together so we don’t unintentionally keep imposing our English language and white ways of knowing and communicating on other people. Other families and cultures have different ways of communicating that are important to them. Our communities, and our field of work and research is richer for having many perspectives, ideas, and ways of communicating.

Northeast Arnhem Land is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world. Approximately 12,000 Yolŋu speak at least one of more than 40 clan languages as their primary language. Currently, more than 250 Yolŋu are also at risk of developing MJD. This makes Yolŋu one of the largest cultural and linguistic groups at risk of the disease in Australia.

Machado–Joseph disease (MJD) is a rare, autosomal dominant neurodegenerative disease with very



high prevalence in remote Australian Aboriginal communities. MJD causes damage to cells in the cerebellum and results in ataxia. It impacts walking and moving about, use of your hands and arms, speech, swallowing, vision, and other functions, but cognition is not affected. Slowly, people with MJD notice that they lose the volume in their voice, it starts to sound slurred, and they can only say one or two words at a time. Even though many Yolŋu know some sign language, MJD affects your arms and hands and it's hard to communicate that way too.

When we started this work with Yolŋu families, we could see that they found English AAC systems a bit confusing. They weren't going to meet the communication needs of Yolŋu. Julie's Yolŋu family members needed ways to communicate in their first language, *Djambarrpuynŋu*. Yolŋu ways of being, knowing and doing are relational, performative, multi-perspective and narrative based. In Yolŋu knowledge sharing, stories are used to emphasize, negotiate, and encourage many connections, perspectives, possibilities, and expressions of meaning.

We knew from the research literature, that AAC must be developed by and with Indigenous peoples within the extended family context to enable authentic communication. It's not ok for a (well meaning) speech pathologist to just pull out a dictionary and put some Indigenous words on a language board. Assistive technologies are more readily adopted when developed collaboratively with First Nations people to address their own concerns, incorporate Indigenous languages, and enable creative, culturally responsive, diverse uses.

To make sure that our research was culturally responsive, we employed a team of Yolŋu researchers, to work flexibly and learn together using Yolŋu languages and ways of doing research. We considered factors such as the Yolŋu sound system, grammar, vocabulary organization, icons, writing and cultural outlook. We tried to develop systems that emphasize identity and relationships; allow for the sharing of narratives; many cultural connections, and expressions of Yolŋu language, identity, and culture.

Developing AAC is like Hunting for Yams

Through our research we developed four Yolŋu AAC system prototypes for Yolŋu with varied Yolŋu literacy confidence. We identified cultural and linguistic considerations related to all aspects of conventional

AAC design, including vocabulary representation, layout, and access. We also identified a Yolŋu metaphor to represent the research process and findings from a Yolŋu worldview. Here are some of the things we learned...

Gadaman Yolŋu ("working with wise, knowledgeable people")



"That knowledgeable person knows where there are yams - if it's the right season, looking at the colour of the leaves and where the sand is soft to dig. That wise person knows where to go, how far, what to bring, what to look for." Julie, Yolŋu researcher

In AAC, you must work with knowledgeable people. The person living with complex communication needs, their family, community workers, interpreters, speech pathologists, teachers, researchers. All together. You often work with people who have disability knowledge,



but you also must work with people who really know the linguistic and cultural context for each person.

Gulaka Buma ‘Hunting for Yams’ Continued



Yaka Bakmaran (“don’t break the vine”)

“Follow that vine right to the end where you see the head (of the yam) and start digging. If you break the vine, if you cut it half-way, then you are lost, you won’t be able to see where the yam is” Julie, Yolŋu researcher .

In AAC, you must work carefully, systematically, strategically. If you are careless and just rush around and throw things together then what you do will be useless. You need to think carefully, think together. Who is this for? What is our purpose? You need to always keep that in your mind.

Badak Belam (“keep digging (to the full extent)”)

“You have to keep digging through to the end, then you get it. You pull the yam with the roots on it, then you know they’ve gone right down” Julie, Yolŋu researcher

“She had a solid, heavy duty, pointy yam stick that she used with tenderness. She got it through careful digging” Gurimaŋu, Yolŋu researcher

Developing and implementing AAC is hard work. It takes time. You must keep at it - talking together, listening to each other, trying things, again and again. You must work rigorously, respectfully and see it through to the end. Then you will be proud of what you have achieved and everyone will be able to see that you have worked together as a team.



Gänydjij Djäma (“digging a bigger hole for yourself”)

“When you dig, you start to see how big the yam is,

what type, where it goes, what colour, how old it is” Julie, Yolŋu researcher

“You have to dig a bigger hole for yourself to position yourself so that you can keep digging.” Helen, Yolŋu cultural advisor

When you are working on something hard that is going to take a long time, you must be strategic and work sustainably. Think about what to start with and focus on. Look after yourself. Have fun together. How will you look after yourself and each other through all the hard work?

Gaykarrangum (“The way that is clear of any roots or obstacles”)

“Dig this side, not that side because I can see there are roots blocking the way, we should dig this side. This way is clear, then you can see the food” Julie, Yolŋu researcher



There will always be different ways of doing things. People don’t always agree. When we are working together as a team, we focus on what we have in common, what we agree on, and we keep listening to each other.

Dholkum Yiŋarray’ (“Cover and mark your findings, come back to it later”)

“We’ll leave it now. The pigs are coming all the time. Leave it, we’ll cover it up, I’ve marked it, and come back another day when we’ve got enough time and everything we need.” Helen, Yolŋu cultural advisor

When you work together in AAC and you work hard on something for a long time, sometimes you need to take a break. Have a rest, and come back together the next day, or next season after the rains have been and you can come back together and try again and see what you will discover.

If you’re interested in learning more about the Yolŋu linguistic and cultural considerations of our AAC prototypes, keep an eye out for our academic journal articles coming out in the AAC Journal very soon. If you can’t access AAC journal articles, contact us and we

can send you a copy. For more information about the MJD Foundation check out: <https://mjd.org.au/> If you have specific questions or want to collaborate with us on intercultural AAC research in the future, we'd love to hear from you.

 Rebecca.amery@cdu.edu.au

 [@RebeccaAmery](https://twitter.com/RebeccaAmery)

This story is derived in part from an article published in AAC Journal on 08/11/22, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07434618.2022.2129782>



THE AGOSCI AUSTRALIA COMMUNITY FORUM

(PRIVATE GROUP ON FACEBOOK)

DO YOU USE FACEBOOK?

HAVE YOU LOCATED OUR AGOSCI PAGES?

On Facebook we have AGOSCI Inc that is our public page for promoting special events and public campaigns.

We also have our AGOSCI Australia Community Forum that is a private group which members and non members can join. AGOSCI aims for this group to provide a safe and inclusive space for all people to have conversations about communication and complex communication needs.

(Please note that our Listserve is no longer being used)

 www.facebook.com/AGOSCI

 www.facebook.com/groups/agosci.forum

ENGAGING IN EYE GAZE: ACCESS ALL LEARNING AREAS

By Tanith Brien

Indigo has been excited to continue exploring the use of eye gaze technology to enable curriculum access. A current 2022 project, funded through a Telethon grant, seeks to pilot a model to build knowledge and skills within regional WA schools to implement eye gaze technology through a hybrid model involving in-person and remote telehealth support. This project builds on the work of the organisation's 2019 project which collaborated with two Perth metropolitan Education Support Schools to increase use of eye gaze technology to meet students' Individual Education Plan goals and develop resources linked to the curriculum.

Why focus on eye gaze access and the curriculum?

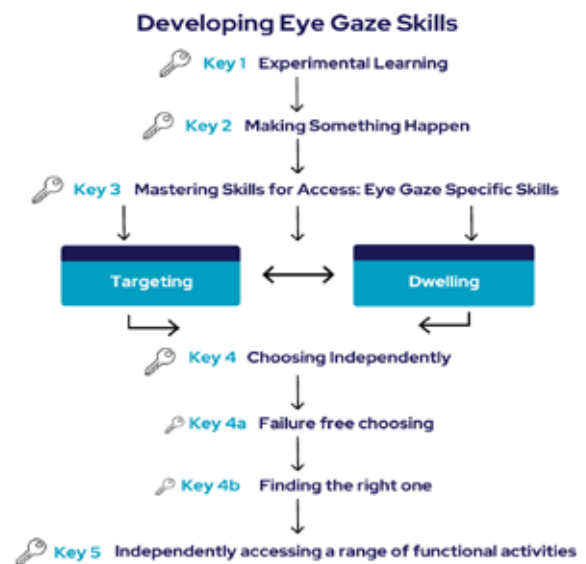
Thinking beyond communication - Communication is the most frequently discussed area for goals and outcomes within eye gaze research (Perfect et al., 2020). We recognise that developing students' ability to communicate is important in enabling learning and demonstrating knowledge across curriculum areas as well as other areas of life. We'd also like to broaden awareness of how eye gaze technology can be used in meaningful and motivating ways for education, recreation and more.

Active participation – Students with complex communication and access needs may have a more passive role in the classroom or experience learned helplessness (Burkhart, 2012). While the potential of utilising eye gaze technology is that “children may learn to participate in activities not previously possible, and research indicates that the opportunity to experience new things and discover new abilities leads to increased possibilities to learn and develop” (Holmqvist, 2017).

School responsibilities – Disability Standards for Education (2005) highlight that schools are required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure students with disability can access and participate in education on the same bases as students without a disability. These adjustments can include assistive technologies and, for some students' needs, other access methods may not be able to allow the same level of independence and participation as eye gaze technology.

Regular practice – When developing early eye gaze skills, short, frequent sessions embedded into current routines are recommended (Eyes on Communication Research Group, 2021). Within busy school environments it becomes easier to incorporate such regular practice into school routines if it has a link to the lesson or allows the student to participate in the same topic as peers.

Developing eye gaze skills



A number of similar learning pathways outline the process of operational skill development involved with eye gaze technology. This one is from the Unlocking Abilities resources available on Indigo's website searching **Indigo Unlocking Abilities: Keys to Developing Eye Gaze Skills** (indigosolutions.org.au).

The speed with which a student progresses with these skills is highly individual but research indicates that extended periods of months or years help to build higher level skills of speed and accuracy (Borgestig et al., 2016). As students progress their eye gaze key skills and further develop their speed and accuracy over time, they may be able to demonstrate more of what they know, participate in a wider range of



functional activities and access different software and programs with smaller targets.

Factors for success

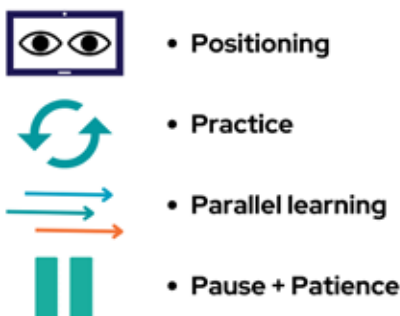
Components which supported successful implementation of eye gaze technology within the school environment have been collated into the 'Factors for Success' booklet available at [Successful Implementation \(indigosolutions.org.au\)](https://indigosolutions.org.au). An accompanying 'Eye Gaze Workbook' collating key information about eye gaze use for an individual can be a valuable accompaniment to ensure a shared understanding and consistent approach [Eye Gaze workbook \(indigosolutions.org.au\)](https://indigosolutions.org.au).

Training for support teams

Training and education resources have been identified as facilitators for successful use of eye gaze technology (Perfect et al., 2020). Indigo has been building a collection of online resources on our website at [Engaging Eye Gaze Technology Develop Eye Gaze Skills Indigo \(indigosolutions.org.au\)](https://indigosolutions.org.au).

This current project has enabled further reflection on some of the key learning areas for people who support an early eye gaze user regularly, such as Education Assistants or Teachers within the school environment whose role is crucial to supporting setup, access to and use of the technology. The '4 Ps' have emerged from frequent discussions. While these are introduced here, links to handouts and Microsoft Sway resources will be made available on the Engaging in Eye Gaze website by the end of the year.

The Four 4 Ps of Developing Early Eye Gaze Skills



Positioning

Positioning is key to successful operation of the eye

gaze system. Supporters need to be familiar with setting up and checking the positioning feedback guide within the device (Walker, 2016). Devices will have their own type of feedback guide regarding positioning in terms of height and distance.

Check the screen position for:

HEIGHT - aim for eyes in middle of track status
 DISTANCE - triangle marker in the green
 ANGLE - face parallel with device



Check the environment for:

LIGHTING - Reduce glare
 OTHER FOCUSES - What else dose the person need to see?

Practice

As a student is developing their eye-gaze skills, it is important to cater the time they are practicing to their skills by:

- Short, regular sessions
- As skills develop, gradually increasing the amount of time a student uses their eye- gaze.
- Regularly check-ins in with the student about how they are feeling.

Eye-gaze users will develop operation skills at an individual pace, and it is important we aren't causing frustration by expecting them to complete tasks on their device that are beyond the skills they are currently developing. The eye gaze skills monitoring sheet may be used to keep track of the skills a student is demonstrating. This can help staff and other stakeholders understand the progression of skills. [See our Eye Gaze Skills Monitoring Sheet.](#)

Parallel learning

For many students with complex physical and sensory needs, they are needing to manage whole host of skills. 'Juggling' all these areas at once can explain inconsistencies in performance we may observe. For students newly learning to use eye gaze technology, learning a new communication system at the same time results in a large learning load. The way we can manage this is through parallel learning (Burkhart). The team plans the long-term direction and works on skills in parallel.

When planning an activity, we need to consider our

ENGAGING IN EYE GAZE CONTINUED



Red - Challenging or new

Yellow - Moderate challenge or review

Green - Limited challenge



intended focus and reduce load in other areas. We've found Karen Erikson's traffic light analogy useful. If one area is 'red' we ideally want to design the task so the others are 'green'.

If working on a new or challenging eye gaze skill, keep level of cognitive challenge low, use comfortable positioning, and reduce distractions. If introducing a new or challenging curriculum concept, consider the easiest access method for the student to use to contribute or participate and reduce sensory demands where possible.

Pause + patience

We need to allow plenty of wait time for a new eye gaze user to process what they want to do and initiate their reaction. Encouraging, attentive wait time can be used before considering any more intrusive prompts.



Taken from K10 outline - Western Australian Curriculum (scaa.wa.edu.au)

Curriculum areas

Across different projects and different students and schools we've explored or approached this area from different perspectives.

- Considering the different curriculum areas,

comprehensive literacy approaches and student individual education plan goals.

- Considering the level of eye gaze skill the students were demonstrating and wanting to provide more repetition with variety to help them progress through the 'keys'.
- Working with what may have been available on a student or school system and looking at how it could be maximised to address different learning areas and meet different levels of operational eye gaze skills.

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REVIEW: BECOMING A BETTER COMMUNICATION PARTNER TRAINING COURSE

By Sharon Horan (mum to AAC user)

My adult son is an AAC user. We spend a lot of time training support workers to be competent communication partners. I purchase the *Becoming A Better Communication Partner* training course for all my son's support workers.

There is so much useful information in this course and workers can complete it online at their own pace. The five modules cover lots of different tools and strategies for communication partners to know.

They have been so helpful and made a big difference to the communication partner skills of all my son's support workers. I highly recommend this training course.



By Matt Horan (AAC user)

"I need support workers who are trained to help me communicate. If my support workers are not trained then I have no voice."





Becoming A Better Communication Partner



5 online and self paced courses with everything you need to get started on your journey to becoming a better communication partner.

www.agosci.org.au/Online-modules





Reflections on AGOSCI Conference 2022



Claire Gutke

AAC Communicator
Aged 12. QLD



Shared Reading

Claire received a generous scholarship from AGOSCI, allowing our attendance at the conference this year. We all had an amazing time connecting with the AAC community and learning together.

In preparation to create our own InFocus article, Danielle & Claire read past magazine articles together.



Claire and her support worker, Annabell shared a poster presentation.



Claire particularly enjoyed an article by Jess & Cathy (June 2022). When reading about Jess' Cert III course about animals and about Jess winning an award, Claire said "clever" and navigated to her animals pageset.

With the support of her team, Claire has used comprehensive literacy strategies to reflect on the incredible experiences we shared in Hobart.

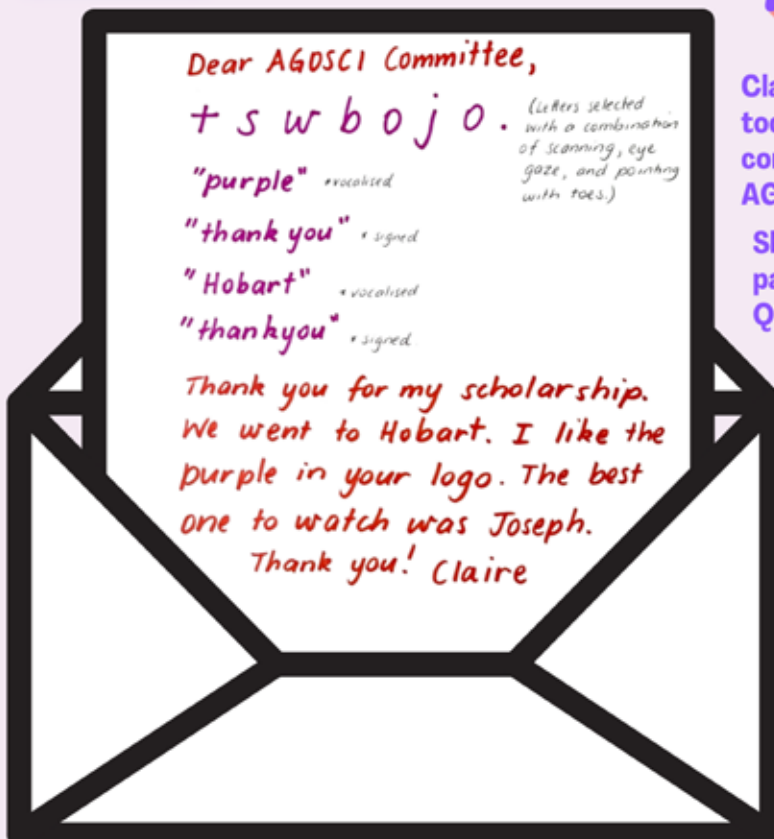
Independent Writing

Claire used a combination of writing tools and access methods to complete a thank you letter to the AGOSCI Committee.

She used a PODD alphabet page via partner-assisted scanning, and a QWERTY keyboard via eye gaze.

During writing, Claire vocalised a number of words, and signed "thank you" many times. Claire's meaning was co-constructed with familiar communication partners (Mum and Danielle).

When communicating and writing with Claire...



Shared Writing



We invited others who travelled to Hobart from Toowoomba to add to our shared writing experience by texting us a photo and a sentence.

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed interacting with people who use AAC to communicate.
(Helen Buchanan, Speech Language Pathologist)

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed listening to all the speakers, especially those using AAC.
(Noosha Hodgen, Advisory Visiting Teacher)

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed seeing people wearing Barry & The Bear t-shirts.
(Hannah Gutke, Parent and Teacher)

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed being Claire's communication partner.
(Annabell Tonkin, Support Worker and Teacher)

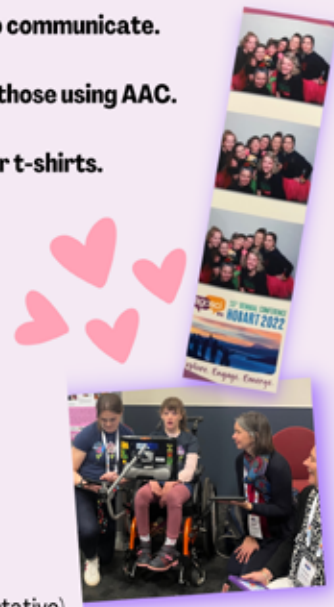
At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed learning how to better support Claire.
(Emily Gemmell, Support Worker)

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed sharing about my classroom.
(Danielle Chapman, Teacher)

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed the view from the conference room.
(Claire Andersen, Speech Language Pathologist)

At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed learning from experienced people.
(Julie Franklin, Head of Special Education Services)

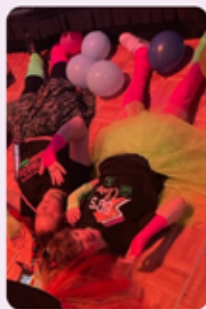
At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed meeting other people who love AAC.
(Simone Kendall-Robertson, Speech Language Pathologist & QLD AGOSCI Representative)



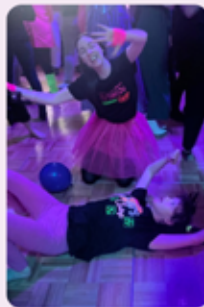
Claire selected her favourite photos from the conference. Every photo she selected was from the Conference Dinner, the much-anticipated 80s "party"!



At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed dressing up in my 80s costume.
(Claire)



At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed dancing with mum.
(Claire)



At the AGOSCI Conference I enjoyed listening to Dancing Queen.
(Claire)



Thanks AGOSCI!
from Claire,
Hannah,
Annabell &
Emily



Independent Reading

The images and sentences from our shared writing were added to a Pictello book for Claire that she can read independently and with others.



NATIONAL TOUR 2023: CYNTHIA CRESS

Dr. Cynthia Cress is an Associate Professor at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, specialising in language, AAC, and early intervention. She has provided workshops internationally helping professionals provide communication services to some of the more puzzling children on our caseloads: early communicators, autistic communicators, and infants, toddlers, and children with a variety of complex communication needs (CCN). She researches patterns of communication in infants/toddlers with CCN and has provided clinical service for children and adults who rely on AAC for 30 years. Her research has been to develop new communication assessment tools to screen and assess basic communication in very early communicators of all ages, including children and adults. She brings a wealth of clinical as well as theoretical experience to her workshops about services for early communicators, and she loves to be interrupted with practical questions that help you provide better service tomorrow - like, "But I have a child who..."

Cynthia will be presenting two full-day workshops, across several sites throughout Australia in 2023.

Workshop 1: Augmenting communication interactions for early communicators of all ages: object-directed to symbolic communication

Although there are no prerequisites to AAC, it is difficult for us to plan AAC interventions for early communication interactions. Switches or symbols can be introduced into interactions for the earliest communicators if they are used in ways that support and enhance the child's or adult's existing interaction strategies. Introducing new communicative functions or complexity of interactions can address too many "hard things" at once, so we may introduce new strategies, functions or symbols through behaviours, tasks, and partner behaviours at first.

This session will present a variety of strategies for assessing and facilitating augmented communication in children and adults, from partner and behaviour-based strategies to symbolic skills. Case studies and videotapes will illustrate these processes. We will include specific strategies for getting past situations where we may feel stuck or experience unexpected difficulties in meeting communication goals of early communicators and their partners.

The focus will be on multimodal interaction and meeting the communicative goals of the communicator and



Cynthia in early communication with a baby

partner, rather than on matching specific modalities to children or purposes. Participants will apply information from the handouts and presentation to live demonstrations and videotaped samples of communication in a variety of children with complex communication needs.

Workshop 2: Practical AAC strategies for autistic early communicators

The process of developing effective intentional and symbolic AAC is complicated in autistic communicators who may not easily initiate social interactions with partners for shared communicative purposes. We need to be aware of the implications of our intervention approaches that are applied to autistic individuals that differ in their focus on social/communication, language/cognitive, or behavioural/speech skills. Capitalizing on the strengths and limitations of each of these types of approaches can maximize the effectiveness of our multimodal interventions and provide mechanisms for adapting intervention when breakdowns or limited progress occurs (Cress, 2002).

It can be relatively easy to determine why intervention approaches have been unsuccessful, but difficult planning alternative strategies particularly for very early autistic communicators who already have limited communication strategies. While all the primary approaches to intervention for autistic communicators have effectiveness at addressing the skills for which they are designed, some of those approaches are more effective at helping autistic communicators initiate their own communicative messages for practical and meaningful social purposes. Socially-based intervention strategies can be critical for helping

autistic communicators who may wait for partner prompting or specific environmental contexts to convey communicative messages.

This workshop session will present a variety of strategies for assessing and facilitating early augmented communication in autistic children and adults, focusing on the challenging development of person-directed and symbolic communication skills. We will include specific strategies for incorporating intervention strategies that take advantage of interactive strengths of autistic communicators, including AAC strategies that take advantage of visual, predictable, and social routine aspects of early interaction. Commonly used intervention approaches for autistic communicators will be compared and adapted systematically to address specific communication goals in video and live demonstrations.

Additional intervention approaches that enhance the social interaction skills that are common goals for early autistic communicators will be demonstrated and practiced (Cress et al., 2016).

References

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AGOSCI NATIONAL TOUR

15 May - 2 June, 2023



Cynthia
Cress



"WHAT IS ONE TIP YOU WOULD GIVE SOMEONE WHO IS STARTING OUT USING AAC?"

To celebrate AAC month we asked some NSW speech pathologists -

"What is one tip you would give someone who is starting out using AAC?"

Here are our TOP 10 tips

compiled by **Stephanie Wong**

1. "For clients with challenging behaviour, in the first instance, keep the language simple and in the 'Here and Now' to improve communication fast and reduce frustration." Corinne Loomes, (Mountains Speech Pathology)
2. "AAC of all forms can and should be used as a language enhancement tool for individuals of all ages and abilities. Even the tiniest thing like natural gesture makes such a big difference" - Florence Sinn (Chat About Speech Pathology)
3. "All behaviour is communication. AAC empowers their Voice. Listen and look to hear and see what your child is saying" - Stephanie Wong (Olive Tree Therapy)
4. "It can be overwhelming at first, but it's important to take time, allow yourself to make mistakes and make learning fun. Do not give up too soon and celebrate all the small wins" - Ivania Coluccio
5. "It never hurts to try AAC" - Ami Kwong
6. "When talking to a person using AAC, model comments rather than asking questions. Consider and reflect on the language you are modelling - if you are using lots of questions, change and model more comments. Use the AAC language system to give an opinion and describe what is happening" - Harriet Korner (Harriet Korner Consulting)
7. "Just because they don't choose between two options doesn't mean they don't know how to choose. It's always a good idea to have a third option – something else!" - Teddy Pun (Olive Tree Therapy)
8. "Learn AAC like you're learning a second language - so you can immerse the client in the 'language system' during your interactions"- Mimi Lu (Olive Tree Therapy)
9. "Consistency is the Key" – Laurence Gilbert (Affinity Therapy)
10. "AAC tip - Access is a goal within itself! We should practise and plan how we will make our AAC accessible. Without access, we can't have communication" - Abbey Forster



HUGS AND FLYING GLASSES BETWEEN FRIENDS

Nic and Sheri met at AGOSCI. We moved our wheelchairs together for a big hug.



Oh no! Sheri's water cup went flying, up, up, up, and smashed on the ground!



The next day we shared the story again with our hands, and Sheri drew a picture.



It went up, up, and smash!



Nic added to our crazy story.



Let's put it up here!



Nic and Sheri will always share the hug - glass up up up - smash - get the vac story of AGOSCI 2022

CLICK TIPS FROM KATE, LINCOLN & HUDSON

This edition Click Tips are bought to you by Kate, Lincoln, and Hudson

Kate, Lincoln, and Hudson are part a great Tassie family who have enjoyed recent AGOSCI events.

As a mum of two boys with complex communication needs, we have tried several different apps, sites, and resources. Some were guided by them and others by our experiences.

Please note :: AGOSCI is not paid or affiliated with any companies mentioned below



Streaming apps – example Netflix, Prime, Disney, Kids YouTube

Lincoln and Hudson use these apps to communicate by using familiar scripts from their favourite movies, TV shows, and video clips.

They will find a movie or clip and then glide along until they find what they are trying to communicate. They will then repeat this until it is recognised by their communication partner.

Whether it be Lightning McQueen making a joke or asking where are we going or finding songs to communicate about upcoming activities or personal care activities like toileting and haircuts.



My PlayHome Plus

This app is a doll house for the iGeneration. For, Lincoln, Hudson, and I, it allows us to communicate about daily activities.

The virtual people can make trips to the hospital, doctors, supermarkets, playgrounds, school as well being at home.

For example, if the boys are attending the hospital, we would tour the virtual hospital within the app. We make them go up in elevators, they can sit on the beds and use the doctor's stethoscope.

We use this as a virtual social story to talk about what we will see when we go and things they can expect as well as put a fun spin on any concerning parts or the visit they may have.

 <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/my-playhome-plus>



Clips

Clips app on IOS devices allows us to make short, fun videos of the boys' adventures or daily activities.

Using Clips to create fun video social stories with music, keeps Lincoln and Hudson engaged with the social story and allows them to easily access parts of the social story that interest them quickly and efficiently or parts they may need more time to process.

Lincoln and Hudson also use Clips to make videos of their adventures or to make personal videos for family and friends for special occasions. They take videos of themselves using their AAC and add them to photos, other videos, and music to make fun videos which they post on Facebook.

This gives Lincoln and Hudson a way to communicate in their own time without the pressure of time and also educates our family and friends about AAC and the amazing benefits of communicating with someone who has complex communication needs.

On family outings, it can become apparent Lincoln and Hudson want to go to an unplanned destination. We will first ask them to use their Proloquo2Go to tell us where they would like to go. Sometimes it may not be preprogrammed or they may get frustrated at finding the right pathways.

If so, we open up Google or Google Maps and search familiar places nearby and Lincoln and Hudson will communicate with physical gestures and facial expressions when we find the right place.

 <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/clips>



Google and Google Maps

When going to new places, Lincoln and Hudson can become quite overwhelmed. When time allows, we will go for drives and pass or park outside the new place. This allows us to take away the element of surprise on the day which can trigger anxiety for the boys.

Unfortunately, we are not always able to do this, so this is when Google Maps comes in handy.

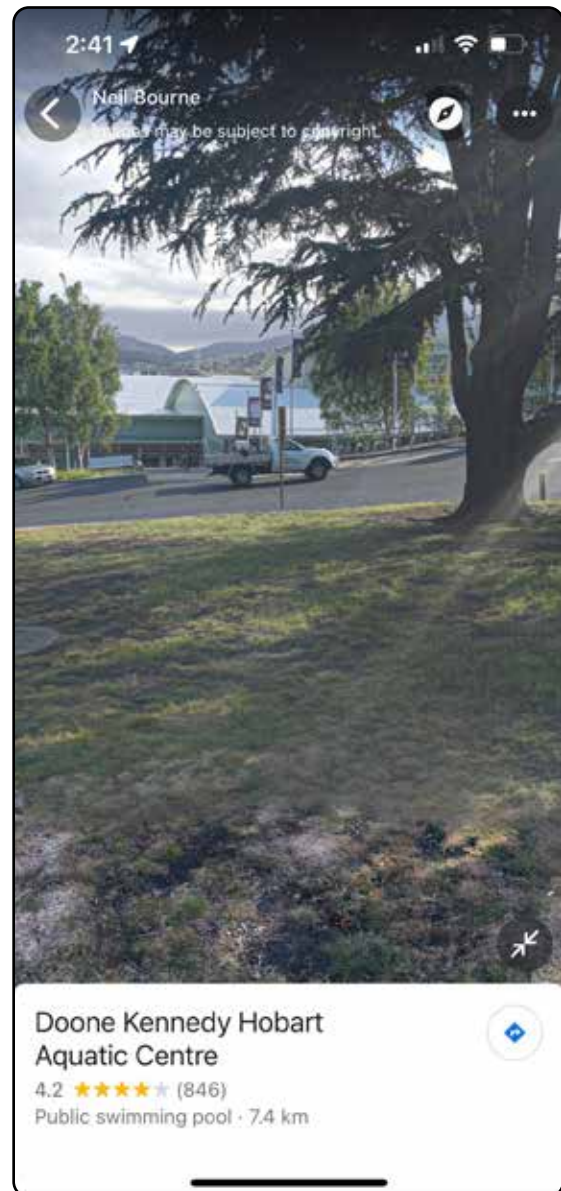
We type in the address and use street view to view the new place. This allows Lincoln and Hudson to virtually look around the street or building, allows them to predict what they may see and start a conversation about what to expect or things concerning them.

On family outings, it can become apparent Lincoln and Hudson want to go to an unplanned destination. We will first ask them to use their Proloquo2Go to tell us where they would like to go. Sometimes it may not be preprogramed or they may get frustrated at finding the right pathways.

If so, we open up Google or Google Maps and search familiar places nearby and Lincoln and Hudson will communicate with physical gestures and facial expressions when we find the right place.



<https://maps.google.com>



Checking out one of the favourite places to go in Hobart on Google Maps

CLICK TIPS FROM TANITH BRIEN

This edition Click Tips are brought to you by Tanith Brien.

Tanith is a speech pathologist at indigo solutions in Perth. She brings her interest in eye-gaze to this edition of Click Tips.

Please note :: AGOSCI is not paid or affiliated with any companies mentioned below.



Engaging In Eye Gaze Technology Develop Eye Gaze Skills Indigo

The Engaging in Eye Gaze webpage collates resources developed over a series of projects completed by Indigo (formerly Independent Living Centre WA). Handouts, videos, and links to interactive resources aim to build awareness, knowledge, and skills around eye gaze technology.

 <https://www.indigosolutions.org.au/resources/access-methods-for-technology/engaging-in-eye-gaze>



Eyes on Communication

Clinical Guidelines for eye-gaze control technology for people with cerebral palsy are designed to help people make the best decisions about use of this technology. The Clinical Guidelines could be used to help make decisions about whether eye-gaze control technology is a good choice, how to choose the right device, how to learn and teach its use, and what ongoing support is important to consider making sure that the technology is used in the best ways possible.

 <https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=EDC7P4E3TP>



Online Grids - Smartbox

An online community allowing assistive technology professionals

and Grid 3 users across the world to share grid sets for a wide range of purposes including communication, education, recreation, and environmental control. Grid sets include those designed for alternative access methods including eye gaze and switch access. Downloading grid sets can be a time saving way to

access a greater variety of resources which can be further customised if needed.

 <https://grids.thinksmartbox.com/en>



Tobii Pageset Central

An online sharing community to provide inspiration and ideas for users of Tobii Dynavox software including Communicator 5 and TD Snap. Available pagesets can be searched or filtered by software, categories, and language. A time-saver and option to broaden the range of functions the software allows the user to access.

 <https://www.mytobiidynavox.com/pagesetcentral>



Tar Heel Reader

Familiar to many as a collection of free, easy-to-read, and accessible books on a wide range of topics. Explore the range of options to enable speech output, different colour contrast and access methods to increase accessibility for different user needs. Grid sets / pagesets to enable access via Grid 3 and Communicator 5 are available on the respective online sharing platforms

 <https://tarheelreader.org/>



Eye Gaze Games

Free, accessible web games with a range of options from car racing and snakes & ladders through to solitaire and chess. A range of access settings are available. A great option for those seeking access to a wider variety of accessible games.



<https://www.eyegazegames.com/carousel>



Eagle Paint

A simple art program available for free download to the activities available to early eye gaze users. Settings are available to change colours and shapes which are painted as the which may benefit some users including those with CVI. Grid sets to launch the program are available for Grid 3 via Online Grids. user moves their gaze across the screen. There is an option for a black background



<https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=EDC7P4E3TP>



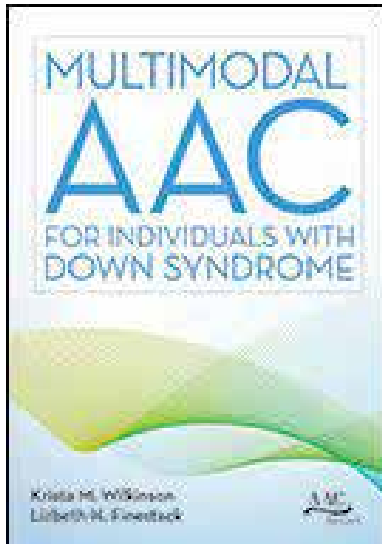
Eye Play Music

A music program available for free download. Eye Play Music allows the user to play notes on a selection of instruments by moving their gaze across the bright yellow and red targets on a dark background. Grid sets / pagesets to launch the program and adjust settings are available for Grid 3 and Communicator 5 via their respective online sharing platforms.



<https://mybreathmusic.com/en/eyeplaymusic>

BOOK REVIEWS



Book review:
Wilkinson, K. M., & Finestack, L. H. (Eds.). (2021). Multimodal AAC for individuals with Down syndrome. Paul H Brookes.

By Brittany Ashman

As the sibling of a young adult with Down syndrome, who is very much a multimodal communicator, I was interested to read Multimodal AAC for

Individuals with Down Syndrome from the perspective of our family's experiences. While this text is targeted more towards those who provide speech and other services to people with Down syndrome, particularly given the assumed knowledge of technical vocabulary and other relevant conditions, it was exciting to discover such a comprehensive volume discussing the role of AAC for people with Down syndrome beyond childhood.

Part of the Augmentative and Alternative Communication Series (edited by Beukelman & Light), *Multimodal AAC for Individuals with Down Syndrome* offers an in-depth exploration of the specific speech, literacy, and language needs of people with Down syndrome and the ways in which AAC may promote success in these areas. As each chapter has been written by various experts in the field, the volume contains a wealth of knowledge that can be read as a cohesive text or used as a reference for professionals working with clients at a particular life stage.

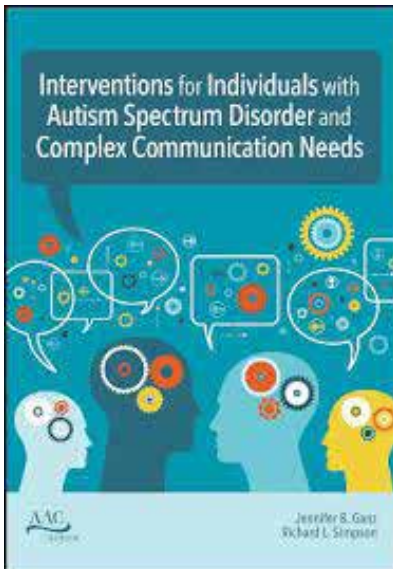
The first section of the book provides an overview of the characteristics of Down syndrome and how AAC interventions may support people with Down syndrome. Consideration is given to the cognitive, behavioural, and language profiles of people with Down syndrome; in particular, there is plentiful discussion of difficulties related to speech intelligibility and the potential for AAC to augment this. The reader is reminded that AAC must be responsive to the needs of the individual, and as a result, AAC may need to change across the lifespan in order to meet these changing needs.

The chapters in the second section of the book discuss in more detail the potential roles of AAC for people with Down syndrome at each stage of their life. From early intervention, through the primary school years, to adolescence, and eventually to a state of decline as an older adult, each chapter emphasises the ways in which AAC may support the development or maintenance of both receptive and expressive communication skills. Of note, is the discussion regarding the increase in communication partners as people with Down syndrome transition from schooling to employment and community activities. It is identified that people with Down syndrome may have difficulty communicating noncomprehension in various communicative contexts, which can pose significant problems for employment and social participation. AAC may support this area of need by providing a visual scaffold for receptive communication and providing a means of expressive communication that allows the person with Down syndrome to clarify and ask questions.

The third section explores the impact of family participation and the role of AAC in medical and educational settings. The importance of collaboration with other family members and communication partner training, particularly for siblings (who may find themselves in a life-long caring role), felt particularly pertinent to me. This section of the volume is perhaps the most disjointed, with the chapters not quite flowing into each other and feeling almost incomplete. I was left wanting more information, particularly with regards to upskilling carers and health providers to facilitate communication using AAC in these settings.

As identified in the series preface, "the field of AAC is problem driven... and all professionals in the field are dedicated to solving problems in order to improve the lives of people with complex communication needs" (p. vii). The volume identifies many areas as being in need of further research, including how AAC can most effectively be incorporated into standard phonics instruction and the use of AAC in the explicit teaching of employment skills. It is also identified that adolescents and adults are often clustered together in research involving people with Down syndrome who use AAC, and that there is an overall lack of research into the needs and best practices for these adults.

Multimodal AAC for Individuals with Down Syndrome is a comprehensive collection of current research relating to people with Down syndrome who have complex communication needs. I look forward to seeing it



Book review:
Ganz, J. B., & Simpson, R. L. (Eds.). (2019). Interventions for individuals with Autism Spectrum and complex communication needs. Paul H Brookes.

By Leanna Fox

This book provides a succinct and easy to read summary of assessment and intervention

techniques required to support Autistic people who requires AAC. Many clinicians and educators have heard of various frameworks, assessment protocols as well as intervention techniques however it is important to choose the best AAC for each person and not just those interventions that are familiar. This book explains why this is important and provides professional frameworks to guide practice.

This book is part of the Augmentative and Alternative Communication Series designed to share current research with clinicians in a practical way. David Beukelman and Janice Light have developed this series aware of the responsibility professionals have 'regarding the real-life impacts of our words on the individuals we aim to serve' (p. xix). Other titles in the series include Multimodal AAC for Individuals with Down Syndrome, Supporting Communication for Adults with Acute and Chronic Aphasia, and Practically Speaking.

There are 4 parts to the book comprising of 14 chapters. Each chapter can be read as a stand-alone chapter or as part of the book section. Throughout the book there are clear tables, graphs, line drawings, black and white photographs and boxed definitions. Frequent subheadings make it easy to navigate and find specific areas of interest.

The book starts with a summary from Richard Simpson of the historical context of Autism and AAC. There is an emphasis on evidence based practice focusing

on science and personal characteristics. This trend continues throughout the book with the individual first and foremost in mind, reinforcing that people require tailored, personalised support.

Following the historical context and introduction, Chapter 2 sets the scene for the remainder of the book summarising currently used assessment tools and clearly identifying their evidence and link to monitoring progress. A strong emphasis on team and family centred approach with a range of different assessment techniques are discussed.

The overview of evidence-based practices for implementation with individuals with autism spectrum disorder and complex communication needs includes descriptions of interventions linked with evidence both supportive and controversial. Emerging practices and the accompanying evidence base are noted including using speech generating devices as well as controversial practices such as facilitated communication.

Case studies are used to illustrate how a person presents regarding their unaided and aided communication. These case studies are woven into the chapters to illustrate how different intervention and assessment techniques can support communication development in an evidenced based and positive framework.

Types of AAC symbols as well as approaches to AAC instruction are defined and explained in easy-to-read paragraphs. This includes using low tech approaches and speech generating devices. The theme of 'an AAC device is only a tool' was well supported with practical steps to follow for success. This included examples of how to support people at different stages of their communication development through assessment, goal selection, technology identification and design considerations, identify and provide opportunities to practice and evaluation. Some of the technology solutions presented for the case studies appeared to be reducing the person's potential for further language growth as solutions were limited in vocabulary options, which highlighted the need for multimodal supports.

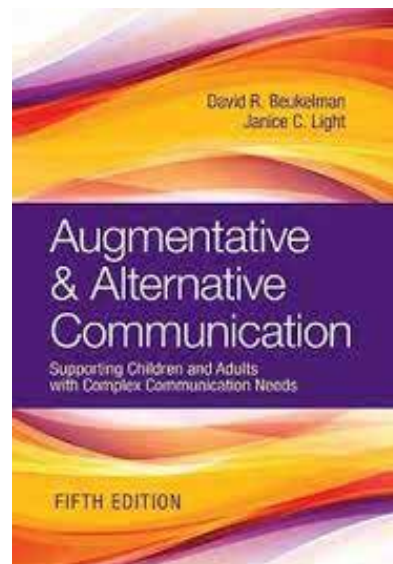
Questions are raised throughout the book that make the reader consider future research areas as well as strategies that can currently be tried. This was noted in particular during the chapter on addressing the current state of play in Functional Communication Training. The authors highlighted the positive outcomes for

BOOK REVIEWS CONTINUED

behaviour maintained by automatic reinforcement. Clear rationales and evidence for why practitioners may use functional communication training for different situations are discussed. The problems with durability of this approach raised questions regarding research to investigate changes to specific interventions for people who use behaviours that challenging. Case study examples continue to highlight how the assessment and implementation framework for this approach can support a person.

The final half of the book identifies, defines, outlines the research, provides rationales and examples of how different interventions can support children, adolescents and adults through a person-centred lens. Summaries and comparisons of intervention components help provide visual supports for a therapist to see how different interventions might be appropriate (or not) for in different contexts and with different people.

Overall, this book is an excellent summary of the state of all things AAC and Autism. Frequently while reading this book one may exclaim 'oh that makes sense now' or 'I wish I knew this when...'. The wide variety of contributing authors and their deep knowledge pool has been shared in a practical way which has a little something for everyone regardless of their knowledge or skill in this area. This book is highly recommended for anyone who works with Autistic people and/or those who have complex communication needs.



Book Review:
Beukelman, D., & Mirenda, P. (2020).
Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs (5h ed.).
Brookes.

by Shannon Hennig, PhD, MS CCC-SLP, Inclusive Communication

LTD, Wellington New Zealand

For anyone fortunate enough to have had a dedicated course on AAC during their studies, you likely are well familiar with one of the earlier editions to this foundational textbook. Those of us who have taught AAC courses, will know the importance and usefulness of this textbook. In my case, I have been carrying my well-worn 2nd edition literally around the world for a few years now.

The 5th edition builds on the strengths of the four previous editions. It is a thorough and solid foundation that readers can reach to for evidence on how to approach this essential area of clinical practice. It provides foundational background, theory, and research that researchers and clinicians can refer back to in order to ground their current and future work.

It is organised into four sections:

Section one opens with a chapter focused on people who use AAC. This is followed by chapters on assessment and intervention and centres on the voices and experiences of those with lived experience. The fourth chapter specifically emphasises the importance of collaborating with and supporting communication partners, including family.

Section two focuses on AAC systems with chapters on supporting vocabulary and messages, how to organise and represent vocabulary, access, personalization, and selection of appropriate systems.

Section three dives deeper into topics specific to developmental disabilities including cerebral palsy, autism, childhood apraxia of speech, and intellectual disability.

Section four focuses on acquired disabilities.

As would be expected, this textbook provides a solid overview of a very broad field. Some topics would require further reading, including autism and literacy. Essential concepts continue to be clearly communicated including, today versus tomorrow AAC systems, participation model, and the many factors that need to be considered in both assessment and intervention. Much of the content is the same as in previous editions, updated to reflect new publications of course, however the organisation has been updated. The text opens and closes with the words of people who use AAC. Key concepts are introduced earlier in the text.

Particularly useful to me are the numerous tables including Table 1.1 which outlines how interactions vary with the different social purposes of communication (e.g., expressing wants/needs, information transfer, social closeness, and social etiquette). For example, content of communication, tolerance of communication breakdown, number of participants, and how predictable it is, differs for each social purpose.

The Participation Model continues to be presented in the flowchart we know well, as a reminder of just how extensive assessment needs to be to ensure that we are considering the person in front of us, as well as the wider picture of barriers and opportunities in the world around them. This is further supported by an AAC assessment checklist in Chapter 2, which outlines the various factors to be considered including communication needs, person's skills, environmental factors, and who is involved in the assessment.

Communicative competence is well-described and backed with examples of goals for different clinical populations.

Chapter 4 includes a detailed table outlining strategies and skills to consider when teaching communication partners including avoiding 'test' questions, written choice conversation strategy, providing appropriate language input, providing sincere comments, and responding consistently to communication attempts. Each skill is backed with a summary of the underlying reason why that strategy is important. It included just-intime coaching and the goal of AAC users learning to

train their communication partners themselves.

Chapter 5 includes useful information about content versus function words and takes a strong stance that core vocabulary should never be the sole focus of our intervention. It also outlines the numerous things that should be considered when it comes to vocabulary and messages including small talk, procedural descriptions, and content specific conversation.

The rest of the second book section gives detailed information on the technical information of the various representational systems, organisational systems, access methods, and personalisation considerations.

Chapter 10, on beginning communicators, includes clear information about the transitions from pre-intentional to intentional communication and from pre-symbolic to symbolic communication. Topics include teaching clear signals for acceptance and rejection, choice-making, and how to teach asking questions. Chapter 11 expands on this with the next step of how to build communicative competence with details on developing semantic skills, syntactic and morphological skills. It also steps the reader through operational, social, and strategic goals that are often unique to AAC.

Chapter 14 steps the reader through various acquired disorders (e.g., ALS/MND., multiple sclerosis, brainstem stroke, etc) and what needs to be considered in the early, middle, and late phases of these conditions.

Chapter 15 focuses on aphasia and apraxia of speech highlighting Garrett, Lasker, and Fisher's continuum of AAC support and describes numerous strategies in detail with examples that are easy to extrapolate from.

The text wraps up with chapters on patient-provider communication in medical settings and then concludes with a word on advocacy.

There is so much valuable information in this text for anyone practicing in this area, even if AAC isn't one's area of expertise. I find myself using theory, metaphors and concepts from this text in other areas of my research and clinical practice.

In short, the 5th edition continues to be a key resource in our libraries summarising and organising the growing body of knowledge and evidence about how to support people of all ages with complex communication needs.

Finally, it also seems fitting to finish this review with a

BOOK REVIEWS CONTINUED

word honouring the life work of Dr David Beukelman. There already has been so much said recently as we reflect as a field, as researchers, as clinicians, and fellow humans on his passing earlier this year. He was instrumental in establishing the field of AAC and training generations of researchers and clinicians. I have decided to close on some words that changed my life which he shared during a session at ASHA several years ago. During this panel, Dr Beukelman was asked how he managed all of his writing and editing demands. He described his system of allocating dedicated time first thing in morning and a strict rule to write, or at least try to write, for 10 minutes. If it flowed, he had a full block of time allocated. If it didn't, he moved on after 10 minutes. As I reviewed this book, I thought of all those mornings plus the many conversations and collaborations between so many gifted and dedicated people in our field that ensured that we have such an extensive and useful text to refer to as the field continues to grow in strength. I also go back to the humour and respect he shared for the difficulty that is academic writing. It has helped me be kind to myself more than once.

Thanks to Brookes Publishing for the donation of books for reviews in 2022

AGOSCI IN FOCUS

DO YOU WANT TO SHARE A STORY WITH THE AGOSCI COMMUNITY?

AGOSCI In Focus is AGOSCI's magazine that comes out two times a year.

We publish papers by people with complex communication needs, family members, therapists, and other interested people.

Our next edition will be coming out in June 2023.

The theme will be: **Past, Present, and Future**. This theme is open to reflections, changes, aspirations, calling out of gems of the past....

We are also looking forward to sharing more book reviews. We welcome new ideas too.

Contact agosciinfocus@agosci.org.au to discuss your idea



www.agosci.org.au/In-Focus-Magazine



ISAAC is pleased to announce that **ISAAC CANCÚN**, the 19th Biennial Conference of the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, has been rescheduled for 2023. As originally planned, the Conference will be held at the Cancún Center (*formerly known as the Cancún International Convention Center, or Cancún ICC*) in beautiful **CANCÚN**, adjoining the Riviera Maya on México's Caribbean coast.

JULY 22-23, 2023

AAC Camp, Pre-Conference Workshops, Executive and Council Meetings

JULY 24-27, 2023

Main Conference at the Cancún Center

Surrounded by Mayan culture and with easy access to beautiful beaches, tours, shops and restaurants of both Cancún and the Riviera Maya, the ISAAC conference will feature AAC events and perspectives; cutting edge research and clinical innovations; workshops, seminars, exhibits, social events, and entertainment, all in a unique cultural setting.

**Mark your calendar today, and save
the date for ISAAC CANCÚN in Mexico!**

**For more information, visit us at www.isaac-online.org
and follow #ISAACcancun on Twitter.**

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The AGOSCI webinar series is designed to promote skills and knowledge about AAC across all sectors of the Australian community. Now with more than 40 free webinars for AGOSCI members, we can only fit the most recent webinars... log-in to your AGOSCI account to see them all.



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...

Assessment and AAC - Where do we start? What am I looking for? *by Janelle Sampson*

Communication assistants: What strategies do they use in conversation with people who have Down syndrome, Rett syndrome or Cerebral Palsy? *By Dr Jane Remington-Gurney*

What's in a voice? An overview of message banking and voice banking *By Peta Booth, Speech Pathologist from LifeTec Australia*

Understanding parent rejection and abandonment of AAC systems *By Alison Moorcroft*

Using AAC to give evidence in court and tribunal hearings *By Fiona Given*

Implementing music therapy and AAC in a lower resourced set *By Kylie Hinde and Farhin Chowdhury*

Championing Communication Access for All *By Barbara Solarsh and Georgia Burn (from Scope)*

Online therapy: Making the most of technology to support AAC users and people with complex communication needs. *By Edward Johnson*

Finding your way with AAC AT provision in the NDIS: A joint collaboration between AGOSCI and Speech Pathology Australia *By Cathy Olsson and Jessica Moll*

AAC and literacy *By Ash Harling*

"How do I need to be in order to be with you?": Supporting adults with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities *By Sheridan Forster*

Encouraging the promotion of long-term AAC use: Learning from social identity theory *By Ruyi Tong*

I have a dream for communication - AGOSCI Conference Keynote Presentation 2019 *By Joey Harrall*

SPA x AGOSCI: Considerations for AAC assessment in the world of NDIS *By Cathy Olsson and Jessica Moll*

Moving beyond object requesting for AAC users with ASD: What does the research say? *By Kristy Logan*

SPA x AGOSCI: Considerations for AAC assessment in the world of NDIS (Webinar #3) *By Cathy Olsson and Jessica Moll*

International perspectives on Easy English and Easy Read: What do we need to know? *By Cathy Basterfield*

Exploring the spoken language development of school-aged children on the autism spectrum with minimal verbal language *By Lauren Davis*

Connection, Isolation, and Online Life in Lockdown *By Siobhan Daley*

Family, Friendships and Autonomy for the Future *By Hannah Gutke*

Improving communication access in mental health support - How can we help? *By Eleanor Watson*

Autonomy in Decision Making (AiDEM): A summary of the key learning and resources from the project *By Ashley Harling*

"The best PD we've ever had" - What we learned from creating, refining, and delivering an AAC workshop series for parents and carers *By Megan Walsh and Caitie Mitchell*

AAC competencies from coursework into practice *By Ruyi Tong and Abigail Lewis*

Building an AACConnect community *By Jenna O'Brien*

The view of an AAC user *By Noah Callan*

Individualising AAC systems for diverse needs *By Amarie Carnett*

Fostering Autistic wellbeing through the neurodiversity paradigm *By Katrina and Kat of Bridges Learning*

Inclusive education for people with complex communication needs *By Phoebe Lehmann and Dr Abi Thirumanickam*

EMG and Spatial Technology for AAC. What is it? *By Alex and Annette of Control Bionics*

Cosmos Connect: Beyond Assistive Communication - What is next? *By Alex and Annette of Control Bionics.*

AAC Therapy for Non-Verbal Children With ASD - What Works For Whom and Why *By Dr Stephi Sievers*

Assessing mental health in young people with complex communication needs *By Jacinta Pennacchia*

Connect Play Learn; Including a relationship-focus in early childhood interventions *By Dr Jacqui Barfoot*

Impaired speech and ableism: An exploration of the meanings constructed around coherent speech *By Lesley Champion*

AAC Space *by Noah Callan*

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Where

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Price

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Parent/ Carer Rate \$390

Early Bird Rate Ends 31st January

For more information and to register, head to:

<http://tix.yt/lamp-congress>



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