

Communication Matters National Symposium

Merry Christmas and welcome to the winter edition of our newsletter. Inside you will find, Top Tips for facilitating peer to peer communication, an insight into eye gaze technology, a review of Communication Matters National Symposium, and information about our latest training opportunities.

Communication Matters is the national organisation for those interested in Augmentative Communication. They held their national symposium in September in Leicester and Debbie and I attended. This is a great opportunity to catch up with the latest developments in the world of AAC, and share what we are doing here at KEYCOMM.

I'm going to summarise the seminars I attended, but keep an eye on our website for Debbie's thoughts too.

Symbolising the Environment: A whole school approach

FACCT have been going great guns integrating a consistent use of symbols within their schools. Schools within Fife had to sign up to the project and agree to make symbol use an priority on their school development plan. FACCT wanted to address the purposeful use of symbols, as school are well known for using visual prompts but sometimes these can conflict with meanings. One success story they told involved a child who needed to use a symbol book for expressive communication but was reticent to use this as it was not viewed as the "norm" within her mainstream setting. FACCT's project made symbol use the "norm" and the child now uses her communication book.

Using Natural Language Generation and Pre-Storage to Facilitate Rapid Conversation and Interaction

Martin Dempster from Dundee spoke about a project he is developing where vocabulary and personal stories about an individual are stored in a different way to the traditional dynamic display. Basically vocabulary was linked in more than one way, and the software would find natural links between phrases. For instance, if the individual wanted to talk about their holiday, phrases available would include chat about the place (geography), the weather, personal experiences, people (and other stories related to the people). He explained his reasoning for this. Within any conversation there is a natural transition from talking about an old topic to a new topic, triggered by an event within the conversation. He felt that his software made conversation more natural, more enjoyable and less demanding for the individual to use.

The Pixon Project: Implementing an AAC language development curriculum

Gail Van Tatenhove spoke about implementing an AAC language development curriculum through The Pixon Project. We all know that vocabulary is the key to talking and that the vocabulary we make available for an individual can transform a person's communication or limit it. She talked about a very structured introduction to language, taken from research into child language development and she looked at generalising the use of language. She avoided nouns and naming things. For more information about the Pixon Project contact Liberator.

AAC and ASD

Andrea McGuinness, Lisa Farrand and Louise Pennington talked about AAC and ASD asking the question "Are people with ASD really using high tech systems?" They spoke of their experiences with school leavers using a communication aid called the Proxtalker, as opposed to a traditional PECS book.

As you can see Scotland was well represented at Communication Matters. KEYCOMM also presented at two seminars, "Communication Effectiveness using AAC: What is it and how do we know if we have achieved it?" and "AAC training for teachers."

Ruth



Top Tips!

Facilitating Peer to Peer Chat

Have you identified a child or adult in your centre that communicates mostly to staff? Are there opportunities for peer to peer interaction and are we overlooking an important opportunity for our clients to talk and socialise.

Benefits of peer to peer interaction include the development of:

General social skills - turn taking in conversation, awareness of others needs and interests, use of appropriate humour,

Friendships - relating to people of similar interests, relate to those of equal power (i.e. similar age group, child - child, adult - adult, informal - informal), widen social network beyond paid staff, develop deep as opposed to superficial friendships.

Communication competencies - spontaneous chat/ initiation, develop communication strategies to repair conversation, keeping interaction going, two way interaction

Psychological/well-being - build confidence to speak to different people, sense of belonging with peer group, build self-esteem and sense of own identity.

Here are some top tips on how to encourage this person to interact socially with their peers.

Within the Environment:

- Provide the time and space to make it happen!
- Make a specific time in the person's routine to talk with a chosen person (might be the same person each time to start with or a different person each time).
- Dedicate a space for this time free from distractions. This will keep it focused and naturally responsive.

With the Person

- Prepare - what does the person want to talk about? Do they have the vocabulary? Who do they want to spend time with? How long can the person concentrate for? Rehearse some scenarios
- Encourage the person to ask their chosen person if they would like to chat.
- Encourage a structure to the conversation if needed to act as a prompt i.e. say hello, what have you been up to, how do you feel today, why, I like..., what do you like, goodbye

For the Communication Partner

- Prepare - ensure peer is able to respond to topics, what do they want to talk about? Ensure vocabulary is adequate for responses or be prepared to programme device on-the-spot.
- Advise - give some tips on how best to communicate with person i.e. wait for person to say their bit before speaking, speak slowly/ speak loudly/ face person, etc...

As the Facilitator

- Prepare as above, think about the structure and if symbols are needed on a board to prompt the sequence.
- At the beginning give advice/ tips i.e. suggesting who wants to start, encourage both to listen, take turns and wait for answers.
- Try to take a step back and let the conversation happen naturally.
- Help either person or communication partner find their answer if lost
- Keep the conversation going by recapping i.e. X asked if you liked football, Y is finding his/ her answer.
- If conversation goes off track - if both have kept up with the change, see where it goes and support the need for new vocabulary, if one is lost bring the conversation back to topic.
- Each week try to encourage a different topic to be introduced
- Try introducing a magazine or paper to bring in new topics
- Provide a list of topics they might want to talk about and they must choose together.

If you have any ideas that really help peer to peer chat, please feel free to e-mail us and let us know!!



The Eyes Have it!

Review of The Eyes Have IT! Study Day at University of Stirling Management Centre - 9 November 2010

This day was organised by the Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland group and focused on the new Gaze controlled technology. We had a number of plenary speakers during the day including Mick Donegan from SMARTlab at University of East London. Mick gave us an overview of where we have come from with gaze control and what the many options are now available. Janet Scott from SCTCI gave us an account of her journey as a Speech and Language Therapist into the world of Gaze control technology and how she is using it with a variety of clients. Janet concluded on what she has learned over the years about this technology including that this technology is here to stay, it can be beneficial for a variety of clients and it is only another access method to accessing communication and learning. There was also a very good description from Clair Latham about the Look2Talk Project. Clair gave us a summary of the outcomes of her project which was to develop a low tech eyepointing system of vocabulary for young children. She described the various outcomes some of which were surprising and unexpected i.e the use of siblings as a hidden resource. Clair worked with the parents to implement the system within the home during play and showed us some very interesting video clips.

There were also workshop sessions held by the suppliers of eye gaze technology which gave all the participants a chance to see the technology working and identify the various differences between the systems.

At the end of the day there was a very lively debate on many issues surrounding this new technology. Issues such as mounting on wheelchairs, affordability, and at what age is it appropriate to introduce the technology. We also discussed how this differs from using switch technology and whether we should be changing our practice.

The day gave us all a lot to consider about this new technology and I am sure we will be posing many questions throughout the year. There is a booklet produced from the day with articles from all the speakers as well as additional references and stories from AAC Users. It can be purchased from ACIP:Scotland through the CALL Centre for £7 + £2.80 p=p. For more information contact Keycomm or purchase online at www.callscotland.org/uk/shop/

Debbie



Edinburgh BSL Group
A chance to blether with some BSL learners
and users.
The Southern Bar, Thurs 7-8.30pm
Contact Rachel on
07814198715 or
edinburghbslgroup@hotmail.com

Project Award for People Who Use
Augmentative Communication in Scotland
ACIP have made available a sum of up to £2000 for a
number of activity based projects, which must directly
involve one or more users of an augmentative
communication system in Scotland. For more details
download a application form from [http://
www.acipscotland.org.uk](http://www.acipscotland.org.uk)
or contact FACCT on 01592 583375



Dates for your diary

Courses

Did you know?
You can download booking forms for our courses from KEYCOMM's website, or phone Janet to book a place

Making Powerpoint Resources for Single Switch Users

This two session course will focus upon making and sharing powerpoint resources for users who access the computer using a switch. This is a hands-on course and designed to show you how to create age-appropriate, and motivating activities. You will learn many features of powerpoint including animation, adding pictures, music and sound files. Session one covers the basics, with session two focusing upon making and sharing resources. This course takes place on Friday 4th March, 1.30-4.30pm and Friday 1st April, 1.30-4.30pm. Attendance on both days is required. Please download a booking form from our website or call KEYCOMM.



Open Afternoons

Upcoming dates for our open afternoons are 27th January, 24th February and 31st March



Boardmaker 6
January 28th 1.30-3.30
- Designed for people new to the Boardmaker series. It covers the basics of how to create boards using PCS symbols and photographs, and some new features of version 6. This course does not look at the "plus" features of Boardmaker Plus. Download a booking form from our website.

Plasma Play Sessions
These continue every second Friday of the month. Please call to book a place



Something missing?
You can request a course by phoning and talking to us. Schools and centres can download our training menu to give you some ideas for in-service

THE KEYCOMM TEAM

It can be a little confusing tracking us down when we are away on our travels visiting you. Fortunately, as I am sure you all know, Janet runs a tight ship and keeps us and the office all organised. But just in case you want to keep track of us, or hunt us down, tear off this slip and pin it to the noticeboard, fridge, diary....

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