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**Centre for Augmentative
and Alternative
Communication**

CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

National Newsletter

Decisions, decisions...

“Shall I first have orange juice, or first brush my teeth?” This is the introductory line of a radio advertisement for financial consultants that will ‘take care of all your financial decisions’ – in order for you to have headspace for the ‘important decisions of life’. Well, anybody who has tried knows that orange juice after toothpaste tastes absolutely disgusting – so that’s a no brainer! When working in the field of AAC, on the other hand, decisions



are often not that easy and the potential consequences far weightier than a bad aftertaste. Which AAC system or strategy is best for this client? Key word signing or an aided system? A communication board or a speech generating device (SGD)? A dedicated device or a non-dedicated device? What vocabulary should be included? How should it be organized? How should it be taught?

Evidence-based practice (or EBP) suggests that intervention decisions should be informed by three sources, these being research evidence, team member expertise and client/family preferences and characteristics. New research in AAC is consistently being published in a variety of special education, rehabilitation, speech therapy and disability journals. The AAC journal is the most obvious example. Review articles are particularly helpful as they summarise research done on a particular topic and/or with a particular population (e.g. the use of the Picture Exchange Communication Programme versus the use of SGDs for kids with autism).

The Biennial Conference of the International Society for AAC (ISAAC) is another forum where the newest research is disseminated. Clinical research is, however, not easy to do, especially in populations as varied as that of people in need of AAC. For this reason it may often seem like research is ‘lagging behind’ with little published on certain topics. Team member expertise is therefore another important factor in decision-making. Team members who constantly hone their skills and spend time and energy in problem-solving best possible solutions are a great asset in guiding AAC intervention. Being aware of and knowledgeable in a variety of techniques and approaches is of great value. Intervention programs can sometimes be presented as ‘the only solution for this population’. Without negating the merit of many specific programs, I would suggest that most programs have pro’s and con’s and should be chosen with careful consideration of the client’s and family’s abilities and needs. Obviously, best possible solutions can only be found if clients and families are at the core of the team and at the core of any decisions made.

Choosing an AAC strategy or system that is a ‘good fit’ for the client is typically the crucial starting point. Making intervention decisions in AAC will always be a multi-faceted process where a great variety of factors need to be considered. There will always be more to learn as new strategies, methods and technology is developed. Today, we need to do the best we can with the knowledge we have to promote maximum communication and participation for people in need of AAC.

**Kerstin Tönsing
Editor, Centre for AAC**



Interface promotes communication for people with little or no functional speech by supplementing existing communication with gestures, communication boards and assistive technology (thus, augmentative and alternative communication)

Interface Branch News

News from KZN

Our therapy and training team has been very active. On the 7th of June, Avishana Sewrajan presented a one-day workshop on AAC Strategies for Children with ASD, which was followed on the 8th of June by a Boardmaker workshop presented by Jocelyn Mngomezulu, both at Interface KZN.

Avishana represented Interface KZN at the Action in Autism Parent and Professional Skills Transference Workshops, on the 17th and 18th of May and the 24th and 25th of June. She also presented on the 15th of June at the Support Group on Assistive Technology. Avishana has thoroughly enjoyed her involvement in the above workshops and has found them to be a great learning experience and a great opportunity for building networks and for marketing/raising awareness for Interface KZN.

Our Communication Circle is now well established, with a core group of 5 to 7 teenagers and Dan Ngcobo and Frans Mngenge as Mentors. The group now meets on a Tuesday afternoon from 1 to 3pm, and is always happy to welcome new members. Please contact Trudi if you would like to join.

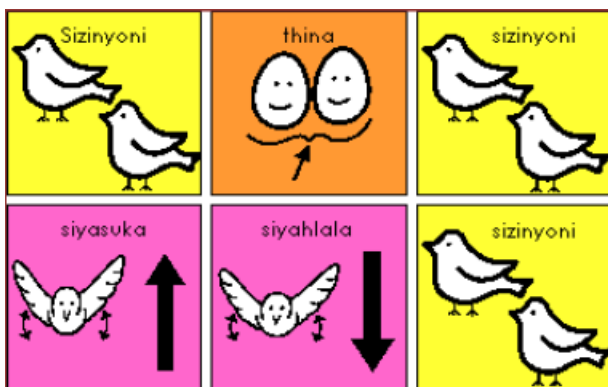
The follow-up visit to Sisizakele Special School is scheduled for the 9th to 12th September 2013. The team will include Kirsty Nourse, Jocelyn Mngomezulu, and France Mngenge as Mentor.

The isiZulu Literacy and Resource Project is ongoing, with some objectives having been met, and new ones added. Jocelyn's efforts remain focused

on translating books, materials and resources into isiZulu. Going forwards, Jocelyn is focusing on a range of switch accessible power-point books for independent reading, interactive dynamic boards with isiZulu phoneme games; more worksheets and AAC for the Oxford series based on CAPS recommendations for foundation phase reading and writing instruction; and research into published children's books written in Zulu available at the municipal library – to use as a basis for further adapted books.

Although in the past Interface KZN was providing regular intervention and support to a group of young residents at Hepburn House (previously known as Storm House) at Natal Settlers, Jocelyn has ceased screening of new residents and is currently attending to 3 residents on a 1:1 basis. These three children have LNFS and require/are ready to use AAC expressively. For two of these are young children (who are both attending local developmental centres), we are looking into schooling options for 2014. The third is a young man (± 21 years of age), who attends CREST daily and has significantly limited speech. Although he has never been to school, he demonstrates early literacy skills.

Lastly, Interface KZN is participating in Casual Day on the **6th of September 2013**. Every year we try to sell more stickers. Please consider supporting this very worthy event by purchasing your stickers through us. To do so please contact Trudi Louw at 031 708-4237 or ifacekzn@saol.com



Felicity Jonck
Chairperson: Interface KZN

School news

Ethembeni School –KZN

At Ethembeni School in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Valerie Allen has used AAC to facilitate participation for learners in some innovative ways. Here is what she reports:

The Foundation Phase AAC class took part in choral verse in the annual Ethembeni School Speech and Drama Festival held in May. To facilitate participation, the learners with little or no functional speech were given the Tech Talker speech generating device to use, and each learner was given a line or author's name to "say." Two of the learners, Manelisi and Ndumiso accessed the device by means of a head-pointer, while the other two were able to use their hands.

This is the poem the class presented:

Manelisi: *Whoops! By Andrew Pender-Smith*
 Class: *Whoops! I've dropped the milk,*
 Lihle: *It's now a big puddle on the floor.*
 Class: *The cat and dog are going*
 Mtobisi: *Lick, lick, lickety-lick!*
 Class: *While their eyes are saying*
 Ndumiso: *"Please drop lots more!"*



All learners derived enjoyment from being able to actively participate and perform on stage in front of the judges, the whole school, staff and visitors. The class received a B+ and received the following remarks from the adjudicator and I quote:

"Well done children; I so enjoyed the poem and particularly the 'lick, lick, lickety-lick!' You had such happy faces and you participated so enthusiastically. Well done!"

We also had a special AAC activity for the Comrades. Seeing that our school is on the Comrades route, runners always receive much support from our boarders who line up in their wheelchairs along the road at our school gate to sing and cheer them on! I was told about a runner who is always reduced to tears at their enthusiasm!

Our school principal usually arranges 6 - 7 busloads of foreign runners to visit our school where they are entertained with Zulu dancing and singing in the car

park. This year I made communication boards and the children using AAC were able to interact with the runners, which turned out to be much fun for everyone!



Using AAC to chat with Comrades runners



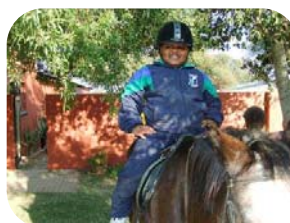
Valerie Allen
Ethembeni School

Pathways Polokwane

Pathways Polokwane has had an active first term. Herewith some highlights:

To horse and away

We are so proud of our young riders who participated in the Broadlands Horse-show that took place on the 25th of May. Tumelo Modishi, Nare Mathobela, Hloni Monatisa, Eruem Okumbor and Ofentse Mokgehle all rode their horses very well and earned themselves a rosette and certificate each for their participation.



Out and about...

The Junior and Senior classes made their way to the Polokwane Game Reserve for their excursion this term. We drove and spotted until we could drive and spot no more, and then stopped at the picnic area for a lovely braai. The boys handled the braai like real masters before we were all



treated to a short but fun tractor ride around the picnic site. All in all the fun we had outweighed the disappointment we felt having not spotted a single rhinoceros or giraffe! (I still maintain that there aren't any in the reserve!). The Life Skills Class will be going to the game reserve in the last week of term and we wish them every success (in fact I challenge them) in spotting the giraffe and rhinos!



Renate Wieffering
Pathways Polokwane and Mitchell House
Enrichment Centre

Pathways – Pretoria

Toys from Waste

Our learners help to make and pack toys and learning aids from recyclable materials, (for example, bottle top snakes). These toys are distributed to centres in rural areas, where there is not enough money to buy toys and learning aids. The Kids4kids benefits children in these outlying areas, who would otherwise not have the opportunity to play with toys or use learning aids. For our learners, this project is both educational and hands-on fun! It just goes to show that each and every one of us can make a difference.



Collecting waste



Putting it together to use as educational toys



Wanjiru Njenga packing



PJ Wiegand filling beanbags

Ina Potgieter
Pathways Pretoria

CAAC news

Disability in the workplace

There is a drive to get people with disabilities employed in the open labour market. One of the reasons, and by far not the only one, is for companies to comply with the national target of 2% of the workforce comprising people with disabilities. It is an unfortunate situation in South Africa that only 0.83% of workers in the labour market are people with disabilities. Of the 0.83%, 60% are employed in semi-skilled, unskilled or temporary work (Department of Labour, 2011).



Dr Jerry Gule (Total), Prof Kitty Uys (CAAC) and Dr Penny Mkalipe (Eskom) discuss possible collaborations

Recently the Center for AAC was invited to talk to South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D) on strategies they could use to enable them to reach their targets. This organization represents employers who are committed to addressing issues confronting the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace and we realized that the missions of the Centre for AAC and SAE4D call for collaboration. It has been identified that some of the major barriers to the employment of people with disabilities is the lack of knowledge regarding legislation, as well as certain prevailing attitudes in the open labour market. These types of barriers need to be addressed urgently in order to reach the national target.

A 2-option package was presented to SAE4D for an action-based training programme.

Option 1: A one-day awareness training on disability etiquette

Option 2: A more comprehensive five-day training including five modules, namely:

- Working for a social inclusive and productive work environment ,
- Understanding and defining disabilities,
- Best practice in recruiting, selection and training of people with disabilities,
- Facilitating understanding and communication with people with disabilities in the workplace,
- Person-centered planning and training approach.

Ke nako! Now is the time to stand together to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities to employment opportunities are realized.

Kitty Uys
Centre for AAC

AAC in the intensive and acute care setting

John Costello is a speech-language pathologist and Director of the Augmentative Communication Program at Boston Children's Hospital. In 1994 he established a dedicated inpatient augmentative communication program focused on supporting communicatively vulnerable patients in intensive and acute care settings to more effectively communicate and participate in their own care. He has created and published a model for pre-operative message banking and is currently developing a message banking model to support persons with neurodegenerative conditions. John is a renowned expert in his field and has lectured widely nationally and internationally on the topic of AAC in the Intensive and Acute Care Setting and has published several related papers. He will visit the Centre for AAC from 1 – 4 October 2013. During his visit, he will address the PhD students, focusing on clinical research studies. On 2 and 3 October he will share his knowledge during a two-day mini-conference on patient provider care and how to support communication vulnerable patients in the intensive and acute care setting. Don't miss out on this opportunity to learn more on the implementation of AAC in the health care setting. For details about registration please contact Liza Siefe at 012 420 2001/ saak@up.ac.za.



Mr Costello will also present the **Neville Cohen Memorial lecture** on the 2nd October at 18:00. A free cocktail will be included after the lecture. The entrance to the memorial lecture is free and all are welcome – Again please RSVP to Liza Siefe if you are interested in attending.

Ensa Johnson
Centre for AAC

A tale of two cities: Pretoria to Rabat

Profs. Juan Bornman, Kitty Uys and Mrs Robyn White recently attended the 11th International Conference of the Society of Neuroscientists of Africa (SONA) in Rabat, Morocco . They presented the work (done in collaboration with Prof MaryAnn Ronski and Prof Rose Sevcik from Georgia State University) on the translation of standardized tests for children with speech-language delays and neuro-developmental disorders in South Africa. The conference was well attended by approximately 300 scientists and post-graduate students from all over Africa as well as by researchers who have an interest in Africa. At the SONA conference the team also had the opportunity to meet Dr Kathleen Micheals, who coordinates the

Brain Development programme at the National Institute of Health, at the Fogarty International Centre in the USA, who currently funds their research.



During their visit, the team from the CAAC consulted with an ISAAC

member in Rabat, Jamaldin Slimani. They accompanied him to the Amal Educational and Rehabilitation Centre in Rabat which is a centre for children with disabilities, where the team gave training. Jamaldin voluntarily interpreted during the training, translating from English

into Moroccan Arabic and French. The team's training focused on Visual Aid Strategies for the Classroom and the importance of multi-modal communication and using more static and visual forms of



The Staff from the Amal Educational and Rehabilitation Centre in Rabat where the CAAC team did training.

communication, such as pictures and symbols. Visual recipes and shopping lists with Velcro strips were received with enthusiasm, as were the song boards and rhyme boards. Morocco is an exotic destination. A place filled with centuries of history and magic, where the old Medina lives peacefully alongside modern trams (similar to the Gautrain) -the birthplace of the tagine, home of couscous and the best freshly squeezed orange juice in the world. These experiences will stay with the team, but even more than this, the possibility of continued collaboration and support - maybe even a joint presentation at the 2014

ISAAC conference in Lisbon about AAC and children with neurodevelopment disorders.

Robyn White
Centre for AAC

Using AAC to testify in Court

Prof Diane Bryen, visiting professor Emerita from Temple University in Philadelphia recently visited Cape Town Mental Health with Juan Bornman, Kerstin Tonsing and Robyn White from The Centre for AAC. Carol Bosch, the coordinator of the SAVE Programme (Sexual Abuse Victim Empowerment) discussed this aims and nature of this unique psycho-legal programme aimed at people (mostly women and children) with intellectual disability who are complainants in cases of sexual abuse. This exceptional programme started in 1991 and currently the Department of Justice refers more than 100 cases per annum to them for psychometric assessment, court preparation, case planning and support through the court process.

During the afternoon a most enlightening and enriching seminar was co-hosted by the Centre for Disability Law and Policy (UWC) and the Gender Health and Justice Research Unit (UCT) on the topic "Testifying in Court through Augmentative and Alternative Means of Communication". The aim of the seminar was to explore the possibility and implications of evidence through the use of picture-based AAC in the South African legal framework, as The Criminal Procedures Act 51 of 1977 requires witnesses in criminal trials to give viva voce (oral) evidence, subject to certain narrow exceptions. This seminar was well attended by various different role-players - all committed to ensuring that the human rights of some the most vulnerable members of our society are met. Participation by CAAC staff strengthened future collaboration with



Staff from the CAAC together with Graham Clarke, Helene Combrink (Centre for Disability Law and Policy), Prof Diane Bryen (Temple University, Philadelphia)

these important groups. Finally, having Graham Clarke join us during the seminar provided an important opportunity for staff of SAVE and members of the legal community to meet and interact with a member of the AAC community.

Robyn White
Centre for AAC

Parent-coached language intervention Workshop

Andrea Barton-Hulseley from Georgia State University presented a workshop on “*Parent-coached language intervention for toddlers and pre-schoolers using AAC*” on Wednesday 22 May 2013. The workshop concentrated on strategies which caregivers of toddlers and pre-schoolers with limited speech can implement to enhance communication through AAC.

Under the leadership of Dr Mary-Ann Ronski, two research projects on language and literacy were completed and Andrea presented some of the results. Some of the key findings were:

- Children between the ages of 2 – 3 years benefit from a systematic AAC parent-coached language intervention model. Best success was achieved in natural settings like the home environment;
- AAC does not hinder speech development! In fact, their data strongly indicate that it helps speech development. But, AAC intervention has to start early, opposed to using AAC as a last resort;
- Receptive and expressive language is important in AAC intervention. They found that combined augmented input and output provided the strongest use of augmented and spoken words. But importantly, children do not develop these skills without intervention;
- Parents can play a critical role in their child’s communication development if given systematic coaching, training and support. They were able to implement the features of the augmented language intervention. It is, however, important to adhere to guidelines for parent-coaching in order for intervention to be successful.



We want to thank Andrea for sharing her valuable knowledge about AAC in early intervention with us. Hopefully, the Centre for AAC and Georgia State University will collaborate in future on a similar type of research project.

Kitty Uys
Centre for AAC

Student Training

KMP Students-Devices Practical Training

On Wednesday, 29 May 2013, the 3rd year Speech-language therapy and Audiology students experienced a wonderful morning at the Centre for AAC. They had the opportunity to put theory into practice and to end off their module on AAC on a high note. During the course of the module the students were introduced to various speech generating devices. These devices provide people with little or no functional speech the means to express various ideas and needs and to also “make their voices heard”.

CAAC staff members demonstrated the use of a number of these devices to the students, ranging from electronic low technology to high tech devices such as the MyTobii eye gaze system.



Ms Karin Van Niekerk demonstrating the wonders of eye gaze technology

Afterwards, students listened to the inspiring messages of Zach

Joubert and Carla van Nieuwenhuizen, two individuals who use AAC as a means of communication on a daily basis. Dr Diane Bryen (Professor Emerita and former Executive Director of The Institute on Disabilities from Temple University, Pennsylvania) ended of the session with a stimulating talk on the rights of people with disabilities. We were once again reminded that persons with disabilities are entitled to exercise their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights on an equal basis with others. Everybody went home just once again realizing what a wonderful privilege it is to



Constance Ntuli demonstrating AAC apps on the iPod

be able to speak and communicate, but also realizing that communication is a basic human right. It truly was a morning to remember.

Enid Moolman
Centre for AAC

Masters Students Onsite Weeks

July is a busy week at the Centre for AAC as the first and second year Master’s students of our two courses (Master’s in AAC and Master’s in Early Childhood Intervention – MECI) come to the Centre for training. The 2nd year MECI students complete a ‘specialization module’ as part of their training. This year the students of the ‘Occupational therapy’ module and the ‘Severe disability’ module visited Pathways Learning Centre in Pretoria, in order to expose students to the inspiring work that is achieved at this NGO. Pathways follows a comprehensive learning approach, with individual education plans for each child. While there is a strong focus on literacy skills, functional, meaningful life skills and preparation for meaningful work are always kept as a focus. They have many exciting projects – like their kids4kids project. The students really enjoyed their visit, commenting that it was inspirational to see how passionate the staff is and how true collaborative teamwork looks in practice.

For the second year students especially the last onsite week is a bitter-sweet experience. Although they are one step closer to coming to the end of their training, it is a sad time to say a fond farewell to classmates and lecturers.



MECI students writing final notes of farewell to their class mates

**Kerstin Tonsing
Centre for AAC**

Staff matters

The great defence

We are extremely proud of Alecia Samuels, who successfully defended her doctoral thesis in the field of Early Childhood Intervention before a panel of national and international experts on the 6th of August.

Alecia’s study was entitled “*The coparenting arrangements and relationship quality of teenage mothers in a low-income community*”. She investigated the degree and quality of parenting assistance teenage mothers received in a low income community on the Cape Flats, in order to determine possible risk and protective factors that may influence child development. The panel members specifically commented on the fact that Alecia involved the community in her research in order to feed back benefits directly to them. Following her PhD Alecia will continue to extend her research on risk and protective factors influencing child development in low-income communities in a collaborative programme with international researchers.

We join colleagues, family and friends in congratulating Alecia on passing her defence with flying colours – a well-deserved achievement!



The successful candidate, Alecia Samuels, and her proud promoter, Prof. Juan Bornman

**Kerstin Tönsing
Centre for AAC**

New staff member at the Centre



Hello everyone, I am very delighted to be part of this innovative and creative team. I am a qualified speech language pathologist and audiologist who graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2010. I did my community service in 2011 in 1 Military Hospital in Thaba Tshwane Pretoria. I was later transferred by the South African defence force to 3 Military Hospital in Bloemfontein where I worked for 18 months from January 2012 to June 2013. I am currently a second year student in M(AAC). I love elephants (and chocolate of course!) as well spending time with my sister who is also my best friend.

My interest in AAC arose from my dream of becoming a teacher and working with learners with disabilities while I was still in high school. Studying speech therapy later enhanced my passion and I found myself gravitating more towards AAC. I approached the centre for AAC about training programs available and later registered for my Master's. Doing my Master's in AAC has piqued my interest in further understanding the field and in the process learning more.

I am looking forward to a great, fun, fulfilling and enriching time in the Centre and hope my contribution will be of great value to them.

Refilwe Morwane
Centre for AAC

We are all extremely happy to have Refilwe as part of the Centre for AAC team – in the few short weeks that she has been with us she has already proven that she has the creativity, energy and drive to make a positive contribution.

Welcome Refilwe!

Juan Bornman
Director: Centre for AAC

Casual Day 2013

It is never too early to start planning for Casual Day 2013. The date is Friday 6 September. Put this in your diaries and start putting together a big outfit, because the theme for Casual Day 2013 is **Go Big**.

Casual Day was launched in 1995 in South Africa and is the flagship project of the National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities (NCPDSA), a public benefit organisation mandated to improve education, accessibility and social inclusion for persons with disabilities. Last year Casual Day raised a record amount of R22.2 million. Now in its 19th year, the project has a long and respected history of fundraising and increasing awareness of persons with disabilities. Your participation in Casual Day will show your commitment towards persons with disabilities as we move our society towards equality and full integration. The beneficiaries of this project are all organisations of, and for persons with disabilities who provide a service on a national level and represent different schools, homes and workshops in the field of disability. The funds raised by Casual Day are deployed in many areas, including job creation, poverty alleviation, social upliftment, housing, education and training, improvement in accessibility and initiatives that serve to fully include persons with disabilities into the community.

The retail group Edcon, is Casual Day's principal financial sponsor. Stickers will be available at all Edcon stores: Edgars, Edgars ACTIVE, Red Square, Boardmans, CNA, Jet, JetMart and LE-GIT. Stickers will also be available at Absa, Game stores and DionWired. None of these partners benefit financial from the sticker donations.

So save the date: Friday 6 September.

And...

Wear something BIG – with lots of brocade
Wear something BIG – even if it's handmade
And the Casual Day hot air balloon will soar and soar

If we go BIG, with a sticker or ten
We'll support the activities
Of persons with disabilities
And make a really BIG impact
In a really BIG WAY

Ensa Johnson
Centre for AAC

Assistive Technology

Mount n' Mover

The Centre for AAC recently bought a Mount n' Mover (Full Evaluation Kit) from BlueSky Designs from the United States of America. The Kit is used for evaluating mounting equipment to facilitate access to a variety of devices in a variety of positions.

The Full Evaluation Kit consists of:

1. Tilt 'n Turner, which has a single rotational joint, twelve possible lock positions and it is compact and adjustable,
2. Single Arm Mount 'n Mover which has two rotational joints, 144 possible lock positions and it is also more compactable than the Dual arm,
3. Dual Arm Mount n' Mover, which has three rotational joints; 1,1728 possible lock positions and it is most versatile,
4. Laptop Tray, which accommodates most laptops. It secures your laptop with adjustable straps and backstops,
5. iPad tray, which could accommodate other tablets too. With this, you will get great positioning and access for the iPad and you will easily switch from landscape to portrait without any hassles,
6. Multipurpose tray, which is great for books, tablets, art and even plates for food,
7. Wheelchair attachment set, which consists of fourteen piece set which will attach to the vast majority of wheelchairs,
8. Table Clamp, which attaches your mount to a table for easy table evaluation.



Appropriate mounting of devices can play a big role in ensuring that devices are accessible in a variety of situations and is thus an important part of an AAC assessment.

For more information about the Mount n' Mover products you can visit their website at www.mountnmover.com

Simon Sikhosana
Centre for AAC

Makaton SA

The Centre for AAC recently received a generous donation of resource materials from Makaton South Africa. Two Special Educators (Margaret Golding and Christine Koudstaal) collaborated with DeafSA and the Makaton Charity in the UK to make the Makaton Core Vocabulary set available in signs from South African Sign Language.



Makaton is a language programme whereby spoken language is supplemented using signs and/or line drawings, in order to provide a medium for those whose speech is not effective to meet all their communication needs. Makaton focusses on a core vocabulary which is divided into stages and can thus be taught systematically.

The resources developed by Makaton South Africa include reference books of signs and line drawing symbols that contain the vocabulary of the different stages. Picture books with the core vocabulary are also available, as are story books in which the text is supplemented with line drawing symbols and signs, making it easy for partners to read and model the signs or for the person with limited speech to 'read' by pointing to the symbols.



For more on these and other resources please go to the Makaton SA website: <http://www.makaton.co.za/>

We would like to thank Makaton SA for their generous donation. We are sure that these resources will be very helpful to many people in need of AAC in South Africa.

Kerstin Tönsing
Centre for AAC

User Forum

Achieving dreams

Martin Pistorius is a former staff member of the Centre for AAC, and a person using AAC to communicate. His remarkable journey has been an inspiration to many people. Here is an update some of his latest activities and achievements.

Several years ago I found myself in a Dare to Dream session where I was dared and encouraged to dream. A task I found challenging at the time. From then until now, those dreams which I wrestled out of my mind and nervously expressed have taken me on an incredible journey. One that has challenged, pushed and stretched me, taking me places I could have never even imagined!

I have changed jobs, found the love of my life, immigrated to the United Kingdom and gotten married. I have written a book, started my own business and learnt to drive. One of my long standing dreams was to obtain a BSc degree in Computer Science. Like many of my dreams, there were many times when achieving them seemed inconceivable. However, I have found over the years that the most crucial thing about dreams is to have them. While hard work, dedication and determination is needed, there seems to be something almost magical about dreams – things simply seem to happen, sometimes when you least expect it. This was the case with my dream of obtaining a degree.

It began with my wife and I attending an Open Day at the University of Hertfordshire. I had tried a number of times in the past to study towards a computer science degree, but for some or other reason I was never able to. Not having any school education, still finding reading difficult, no knowledge of maths and having to earn money to pay for my studies, part of me once again half expected not to be able to. Nevertheless, I took a chance and spoke to the professor responsible for accepting students on to the course. He encouraged me to apply and write a motivation why I wanted to study computer science. Sometimes all we need is for someone to believe in you and provide you with an opportunity. I don't think I will ever forget the moment when I received the e-mail saying that I have been unconditionally accepted to study!

Having worked at a university and studied in the past I thought I knew what I was in for, I couldn't have been more wrong. Suddenly, the stark reality of the enormity of the task that lay ahead hit me. I found myself in all sorts of new social situations, and bombarded with

more information than seemed possible to process, let alone learn. I experienced the joys, and frustrations of group work, as well as what it feels like to be that kid that none of the other children want to play with. I felt the brotherhood of studying together and I made some good friends. I learned far more than programming, software engineering, algorithms and equations that hurt to look at – I learned how to deal with difficult communication situations and to be politely assertive.

The past three years have not been easy, especially with the added demands and pressures of writing a book and running my own business. They have been filled with many highs and lows, early mornings, late nights, all nighters and loads of coffee! I was awarded a Google scholarship and got to go to one of the Google offices. All of this culminated in me obtaining a BSc(Hons) Computer Science degree, with distinction in June this year. I now look forward to my graduation ceremony in November and the future!

Dreaming, and working to achieving those dreams is not easy, possibly even more so for people with complex communication needs and other disabilities. If the truth be told, all those years ago I was very sceptical about dreams becoming reality. However, having achieved so many of mine I urge you, I dare you to dream and keep dreaming – working and fighting everyday to achieving them. If nothing else, I guarantee you an amazing journey!

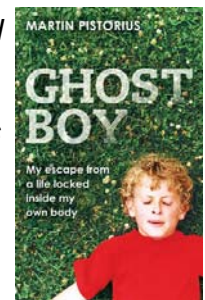


Martin fulfilling another one of his dreams - learning to drive.

Martin Pistorius

Martin has written a story about his life – a MUST READ for anyone who enjoys being inspired by the tenacity of the human spirit to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. 'Ghost Boy' can be obtained at all major bookstores in South Africa. It is also available on Amazon and Kalahari.net both as a hard copy or an eBook. For an author-signed copy please go to Martin's website:

www.martinpistorius.com



The FOFA

VOICE



France Mgenge

This column features regular contributions of the FOFA empowerment project participants. These young adults who use AAC all have a passion for writing and sharing their ideas on a variety of topics. Being able to write and reach an audience through a newsletter is one way to break the silence!

Our voice lets us say anything that we want to say at any time. Life can be hard if we don't have a voice and we wouldn't know what to do.

I would like to tell you about myself. **I don't have a voice** like other people do, **but I can speak**. I have a special voice on my laptop that helps me to communicate better with others. With this new voice of mine I started to feel different because it got my head high and I started to believe in myself. It kept me going and every time when I wake up in the morning I just can't wait to use my voice. I decided to give this voice a name. I call this voice the special voice. The reason why is because this voice is so special to me. It's so special that I can't explain. When I think about it, it makes me think of other people that don't have this kind of voice.



People that want to say something but they just don't have this opportunity to use this kind of voice called "The Grid". Many people don't even know about "The Grid". "The Grid" is a text-to-speech software computer program. When you talk about the grid they always look at you and just say "What is that?" This is what I think; I think people don't even care about the grid because they have a voice. If you have a voice life is easy because you are free to talk about anything. When you are communicating with someone that is using a grid you have to wait until he/she is finished because sometimes you may have to wait a while.

The Grid" gives us this freedom of speech meaning that we are free to talk. This voice also helped me to deliver my speech whenever I need to deliver it. The best thing is that I don't have to panic or to be scared when I have to deliver my speech, because it is already saved on my computer! I just have to activate my voice! I think that is the best thing.

FOFA

- Feels good to be involved in FOFA group
- Open to say anything with my communication device
- Friends are good in FOFA
- All we get is love in FOFA

Happiness
 Happiness
 Is playing music
 Is to be clean
 Be silly
 Laughing



Bheko, my brother
 Behaving brother.
 Happy always.
 Everyone likes him.
 Kind.
 Oh, his a wonderful brother.

Me, France
 Friendly and funny.
 Responsible.
 All I think of is music, soccer and girls.
 Nice and good looking.
 Can try anything.
 Everyone likes to be around me

LOVE

Love is important
 It is enjoyable
 Feels good to be loved
 Even I need to be loved

France Mgenge

For your diary...



26 August 2013

Free Eye Gaze Technology Workshop

Inclusive Solutions and Tobii Technology will be presenting a free course on the use of eye controlled computers for people with physical and communication disabilities. Come and find out more about the use of this technology for a wide group of clients, even those with nystagmus or profound cognitive impairments. Family members and service providers welcome.

Time: 08h30 – 15h30

Venue: Centre for AAC, University of Pretoria

RSVP: by 20 August to **Lisa Ellis**
lisa@inclusivesolutions.co.za

13 September 2013

FOFA-Spread your wings: Youth Empowerment Programme

Young adults with severe communication disabilities will 'make their voices heard' by sharing their stories through augmentative and alternative communication. Come and be inspired to see how people take steps to start realising their dreams – against all odds. To book for the final presentations on the 13th contact Liza Siefe at 012 420 2001 or saak@up.ac.za

2-3 October 2013

Workshop: AAC in the intensive and acute care setting

John Costello from Boston Children's Hospital will be sharing his knowledge and expertise on implementing AAC in the intensive and acute care setting. A must for service providers such as therapists, nursing staff and medical doctors working in these settings. CPD accredited. For more information please contact Liza Siefe at 012 420 2001 or saak@up.ac.za

Notes:

AUGUST 2013

19-23: Occupational Therapy African Regional Group (OTARG) conference in Harare, Zimbabwe. For more information please go to http://www.otarg.org.za/zimbabwe_1st.html

26: Free Eye Gaze Technology Workshop –Inclusive Solutions

28-30: South African Neurological Rehabilitation Association Conference in Cape Town. For more information please go to <http://www.sanra.org/conference-registration-28-30-aug-2013/>

29-31: Eye Tracking South Africa Conference in Cape Town. For more information please go to <http://www.eyetrackingsa.com/Default.aspx>

SEPTEMBER 2013

2-4: Rehabilitation Research Conference in Cape Town. For more information please go to <http://rehabconf2013.uct.ac.za/>

2-5: The 5th East African Conference on Communication Disability in Mombasa, Kenya. For more information please go to <http://www.sltkenya2013.blogspot.com/>

9-13: Fofa Week @ Centre for AAC University of Pretoria

13: Fofa Presentations-10am -12pm (NB: Book with Liza Siefe)

OCTOBER 2013

2: Neville Cohen Memorial Lecture

2-3: AAC In the Intensive and Acute Care Setting

2 October 2013

Neville Cohen Memorial Lecture

The Centre for AAC would like to invite you to enjoy this year's lecture by John Costello from Boston Children's Hospital. John has a host of experience in implementing AAC for a variety of populations and has presented workshops and papers around the world. Attendance is free and includes a cocktail on the rooftop of the new Plant Sciences building at the University of Pretoria with a view of the sunset over the city. To book please contact Liza Siefe at 012 420 2001 or saak@up.ac.za