

This mailing completes our first year of Augmentative Communication World Network (ACWN) newsletters. I hope the contents have been informative and useful. I look forward to sharing your Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) thoughts and experiences during 2010. And, hopefully, many of us will have a chance to meet personally during the upcoming ISAAC conference in Barcelona.

Setting up AAC Services in Emerging AAC Areas.

During 2008/2009 Prue Fuller, Past President, ISAAC, and Caroline Gray, Past Chair, ISAAC Developing Countries Committee, supported ACWN by recalling their experiences in the promotion of AAC in emerging countries, by writing an article that offers guidance to individuals who wish to start an AAC programme in the developing world. This article was first published in *Communication Matters*, August 2009 edition. You can read **Setting up AAC Services in Emerging AAC Areas** on the Central Coast Children's Foundation website. www.centralcoastchildrensfoundation.org [See: Augmentative Communication World Network.] Our appreciation and many thanks to Prue and Caroline.

This month there is AAC news from Spanish speaking countries; Panama, Peru and Cuba. Congratulations to Claudia Marimon (Chile), Dana Corfield (Peru), Lynnette Norris, Nora Rothschild (Canada) and Paul Marshall (Canada), and Marta Aragon (Canada) respectively, our colleagues who have worked so hard to bring about amazing developments in AAC and thus provide communication to many children and adults.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Panama: Claudia Marimon reports:

“The history of how Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) was introduced to Panama has its origins in 2004, when I was a professor in the Master's Program of Special Education at *Universidad Metropolitana de Chile*. Among the students in my course about "AAC Systems," there was a Panamanian special education teacher, Laura Araba, who was very enthusiastic about the idea of publicizing Augmentative and Alternative Communication in her country. She promised to take me to Panama.

Time went by, and by mid-2007 Laura returned to Chile to obtain her master's degree and asked me to schedule a training activity on AAC in Panama. She had gained funding as a result of her thesis.

And this is how, by October 2007, we went to Panama to hold training courses on “Implementing and Learning Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems,” a course which gathered over one hundred participants, including special education teachers, speech therapists, physiotherapists, *etc.*, from Panama's nine provinces.

The activity included theoretical and practical aspects of AAC and lasted 5 days. During that time participants learned definitions and a theoretical basis of AAC, strategies and assessment tools for AAC and strategies to support communication and build resources. Participants shared and applied that knowledge in accordance with their actual workplace, creating and developing AAC systems. They also used high-and-low tech resources for AAC. All in all, it was a very successful week and, most importantly, all participants felt that AAC would be helpful for their students with special needs (autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, multiple challenges).

Because of the benefits accrued from this first training on AAC, during the following year the State Institution in charge of Panama's special education made a major investment in technology to support the development of AAC projects at various schools all over Panama.

Through the Chilean company 'Adapta', they acquired *Boardmaker with Speaking Dynamically* software, *Go Talktalkers*, *Teach Talk*, *Intellikeys Keyboard*, *Touch Screen*, etc. *Adapta* offered them free training on software and hardware purchased.

In November, 2009, *Adapta* carried out a training activity in Panama, with the purpose of forming monitors for implementation of AAC systems and use of technology. About 40 people attended, including teachers, speech therapists and specialists in technology, and they learned how to make optimal use of the resources recently made available to schools.

As a follow-up to this training activity, we asked the participants to send us a short description, photographs or videos of the systems they implemented in their workplace with their students. In return they will receive an incentive or reward, as a way to encourage the implementation of AAC in the short term. We are already beginning to receive the first ones. The goal is further development and support of this project so that more children can have access to AAC in Panama.”

Claudia Marimón R., Special Education Teacher, AAC Specialist, Santiago, Chile.

AAC in Peru, Dana Corfield reports:

“Our first AAC conference (2003) was held concurrently with a conference about cerebral palsy. The two events had a combined attendance of about 400, with around 180 people participating in the AAC conference. Our second conference (2005) had over 250 participants (“just” an AAC conference), and our third (2007) was our biggest, with over 25 speakers, concurrent sessions and around 550 participants from all over Latin America.

So, why go against the grain and do a smaller event this time around? Well, to tell you the truth, after 3 big events and lots of time, effort and money spent trying to promote AAC and to teach others how to implement it (in order to improve the lives of children with disabilities), we realized that few people had actually put what they learned into practice. After asking why they weren't using AAC with their students, most people told us that it was such a new and big topic that they just didn't know where to start. So, with that in mind, we decided to make this year's event much smaller, more in-depth and practical, in hopes of giving participants the confidence necessary to move forward and use these strategies with their students.

We decided to have limited spaces (80 was our ideal number), meant only for those who were really interested in implementing AAC and who were likely put it into practice. In fact, this year's event was much more of an AAC course than a conference. We kept the name “conference” for continuity sake, but with 3 speakers giving a comprehensive program through one long week, calling it an AAC course would certainly be more appropriate. In the end, we had more interest than we expected. So, even though we had to turn many participants away, we still had over 120 participants with us throughout the week.

Our speakers for the week were Lynnette Norris, Nora Rothschild and Paul Marshall, all from Canada and all of whom had spoken at 2 of our previous 3 conferences. They put together a wonderful, comprehensive “course” – a “how to” of Augmentative Communication you could say. Nora and Lynnette are both known internationally for their experience and dedication to the field of AAC. They also both happen to be excellent teachers. Paul is himself an AAC user, and as such, has much more experience and knowledge about AAC than any of us could ever have. He is also wise, funny and charming and has a way of opening people's minds to the possibilities for people with disabilities.

It was a 5 day event and the days were long. We started at 8 A.M. and normally finished between 6 and 6:30 P.M.. And, would you believe, despite these long days, participants were

there, eager and attentive and sometimes didn't even want to take their breaks. I'm not kidding! One day, while the teams were doing some group work, we told everyone they needed to go for their break, as the coffee was getting cold. There was a loud "AAAWWWW!" throughout the room and, when we jokingly said we could bring the coffee to them, there were actually cheers.

Another important change this time around was that all of the participants were divided into teams (groups) and there was a lot of practical work throughout the week. Each group had a "student", a child they met via video, who would be their "case study" throughout the week. Participants learned to assess, gather information, plan, choose strategies and make materials, using examples we went through as a large group, and then by going through the same steps for their own student. I think this made all the difference in this conference and people really seemed to "get it". On the last day of the conference, groups had to present their work for the week, telling us about what goals they had set for their student and why they had chosen those goals, and also showing us the materials and strategies they would use to accomplish those goals. We were extremely impressed with the work of the participants. They made some wonderful materials (communication boards, stories with symbols and even a headpointer!), most of which were donated to the students at the end of the week.

The week ended with a very simple but moving closing ceremony. We had such a great group of participants, who had really been touched by what they had learned, that they were giving us thanks and gifts at the end. As usual, Paul was the star of the show and everyone wanted their picture with him...I really wish I had pictures to share of everyone lined up to kiss him and say thanks and have their picture taken with him. I got particularly choked up and could barely say thanks myself. So thanks Paul! And thanks Nora and Lynnette! I know I've said it before but I really can't say it enough.

Now, we're anxious to see what participants will do with their new found knowledge. There are thousands and thousands of children around Peru who are unable to speak because of any number of disabilities, and as of yet, they all remain silent (okay, all but a very few). We really, REALLY hope to see more people working with them and helping them to communicate, so that the world will open to them, and they can open up to the world. Time will tell. I feel good about things though. I'm quite sure there is a good group, many people I got to know and could pick out right now, that will try and implement these strategies and help these kids communicate. And, the great thing is that now that we are in Arequipa, we will be continuing to work with many of the groups present and we hope to mentor them and support them on their beginning AAC journey. We will be keeping track of participants, and we'll let you know how it goes! Oh yes, and there are more picture on our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?ref=home#/pages/Equip-KIDS-International/95667351682?ref=nf>) for anyone interested.

Dana Corfield. www.equipkids.org.

Augmentative Communication in Cuba: A two-week introductory and awareness course in augmentative communication was recently presented in association with the Catedra de Estudios Sobre Discapacidad, Universidad de la Habana, Cuba by Marta Aragon, Disabilities Resource Centre, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. A detailed review of this event will be included in our next newsletter.

Augmentative Communication in Bolivia and Ghana: In our next newsletter, we also expect to have a report from Catherine (Cate) Crowley, distinguished lecturer at Teachers College Columbia University in New York City, who coordinates the bilingual/bicultural program focus in the speech language pathology program there, and has established an annual, 4-week trip to Bolivia whereby select graduate students in the department participate in what has become a melding of work, study, and humanitarian outreach. She is now extending this program to Ghana and will report on both experiences after her early 2010 return from Ghana. (<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/bbs/speech-language/detail.asp?Id=The+Ghana+Project&Info=Ghana+2009>)

ISAAC Awards.

There are ISAAC Awards of particular interest to people in emerging AAC countries. The **AbleNet Award** is open to a professional ISAAC member who has utilized easy-tech AAC in a remarkable manner to improve the lives of people with disabilities and further the field of AAC. Easy-tech (not to be confused with NO-TECH) is defined as battery-operated, lower cost, simple-to-use technology designed for communication. The **Bridge School International / ISAAC Scholarship** is a teacher-in-residence program that offers an opportunity to learn and teach Augmentative and Alternative Communication methods in an educational centre at The Bridge School of excellence in the United States.

People in emerging AAC countries can also apply for **The Possum- Aspirational Award** that provides financial assistance to enable a person who uses Augmentative and Alternative Communication to expand their future opportunities. The **WORDS+/ISAAC Outstanding Consumer Lecture Award** highlights the talents, perspectives and/or individual endeavours of a person who uses augmentative communication. **Note:** Applicants must be members of ISAAC.

[www.isaac-online.org See: About ISAAC/Awards.]

News from Pennsylvania State University.

“We want to share with you a new website resource on early intervention with children with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other disabilities. This website: <<http://aackids.psu.edu>>provides guidelines for early intervention to maximize the language and communication development of young children with complex communication needs. We hope you find it to be useful. Feel free to forward the website to others who might be interested.”

Janice Light Kathy Drager

Distinguished Professor Associate Professor
Communication Sciences and Disorders Communication Sciences and Disorders
Penn State University Penn State University

There are wonderful ways to share your teaching ideas on the web. As an example the Weekly correspondence from AdaptedLearning (DynaVox/Mayer Johnson) and the bi-weekly news from Bridge School have much to offer all of us. If you discover sites that support your work please send them to me so they can be shared via our newsletter.

AdaptedLearning provides a site for sharing teaching resources. Along with the usual worksheets and stories, this month’s issue highlights a [PBS Teachers Tip Sheet](#) on integrating

multimedia resources into the classroom. [Getting Started](#) describes a simple, electronic book that was created with the talking book template. The book describes how certain animals prepare for the winter season and consists of 20 page layouts with simple text, graphics, and photos. The book can be read with prerecorded narration or text-to-speech. And the site's [Pick from the Web: Tips for a Happy Holiday](#) comes from the Autism Society website and features "Twelve Tips for Helping People with Autism and Their Families Have a Happy Holiday." (www.AdaptedLearning.com)

Bridge School News is designed to form a 'bridge' between home and school. A recent edition provided the following resources: **Tux Paint** is a free drawing program that combines an easy-to-use interface with sound effects. Download the software for your Mac, Windows or Linux based system and have fun. It is great when paired with a touch screen or switches for cause & effect creations. (Thanks to J. Cheung for this recommendation.) www.tuxpaint.org

EduWeb develops digital games and interactive learning environments for museums and other public institutions (e.g., Minnesota Zoo and Museum of Science & Industry). The company makes their products available on this site for everyone to use. Explore four learning environments – role playing, creation, deduction and tinkering. <http://www.eduweb.com/>

*There are people who receive our newsletter who write **blogs**. You will have read in an earlier newsletter about **Eleanor's Project**. Tamara Kittleson-Aldred recently returned from Jordan and has written an excellent blog that tells of her experiences there. If you write a blog please let me know so we can all share your site and your news. Blogs are just one more interesting way in which we can all share in AAC's international development.* <http://www.eleanoresproject.org:80/wordpress/>

Harvey's Place.

Global Assistive Technology Encyclopedia

The Global Assistive Technology Encyclopedia (GATE) is a Wiki, or piece of software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser. It's a little bit like Wikipedia, but concentrates exclusively on assistive technology. GATE is very simple to use, with a control panel enabling you to add content, and more. It is available in 10 languages. <http://abilitynet.wetpaint.com>

The Beginning Communication Package

The Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAAC), in collaboration with the South African National Department of Health, recently developed The Beginning Communication Package (BCP). This package is aimed at assisting health care workers in helping parents or caregivers of children with severe communication problems. The package uses everyday activities to assist parents to encourage children who are unable to speak to participate by using other communication means, such as graphic symbols, as well as communication devices, to supplement their existing communication.

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Babylon is a useful, intuitive dictionary and translation tool for use with a computer. Babylon translates 75 languages and offers a free download programme. <http://www.babylon.com/affiliates/landing/index.php?id=9606>

Sparklebox is a great site for teachers. Provides teaching plans, worksheets, fun and seasonal activities, e-books *etc.* in English and other languages. <http://www.sparklebox.co.uk/index.html>

Living made easy for children is an impartial advice and information website about daily living equipment and other aspects of independent living. The site has been created by a team of occupational therapists who do not sell equipment for children with disabilities, but who do give advice on daily living equipment.
www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Unlimiter is an Assistive Technology Engineering Lab in Taiwan. The site, available in English and basic Chinese, describes symbol systems, communication boards and adaptive technology. *Communication without Speech*, Anne Warrick's basic introduction to AAC in the ISAAC Series, is now available in basic Chinese (as well as Spanish and English) as a download from ISAAC (free to ISAAC members).
(<http://www.isaac-online.org/en/publications/buy/books.php>). Many thanks to our Taiwanese colleagues for their help in making this translation a reality.
<http://en.unlimiter.com.tw/>

Teaching Learners with Multiple Special Needs. This site provides resources and ideas for teachers of learners with severe, profound, intensive, significant, complex or multiple special needs. This is a 'friendly' site with excellent information and tips. For example: "Free and Low Cost Head Tracking Software (note head trackers can usually track any body part and more so if you put reflective tape, shiny nail polish or an LED on that body part)."
<http://teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com/2009/10/free-and-low-cost-head-and-eye-tracking.html>

Thank you to everyone who has sent information for our newsletter during the past year. I have also received photographs. Unfortunately, when I imbed these into the newsletter, the documents are often returned. So I will try to make and send a photo album in the New Year. Until then, I wish everyone peace, happiness and good health for 2010.
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