

*Hello: To begin October's Augmentative Communication World Network (ACWN) 2009 newsletter we celebrate a new web site: www.patientprovidercommunication.org, Sponsored by the Central Coast Children's Foundation (CCCF) the website is designed to help keep the field updated on new research and promising practices in the application of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) in medical settings. Complementing Harvey's (Pressman) initiative, Sarah (Blackstone) has dedicated her recent international newsletter, *ACNews*, to the subject of patient:provider communication. We are also celebrating conferences. Very best wishes to Luciana Wolff and all our friends in Brasil for their upcoming conference in San Paolo. And congratulations to Lia Kalinnikova and her colleagues for the very successful conference held during the past summer in Archangelsk, Russia. I hope you will enjoy all this reading and surfing. This month's newsletter also gives us a glimpse of the way in which assistive technology is being used and developed in emerging countries; places where AAC is being developed to enhance the lives of people with complex communication needs.*

Conference Report from Archangelsk.

VIIIth Eastern and Central European Regional Augmentative and Alternative Communication Conference (ECER-AACC) June 29th – July 2, 2009, Archangelsk, Russia. The 7th East European AAC-conference was held in Archangelsk, Russia during the past summer. Organized by Pomor State University, Archangelsk municipality and the Rehabilitation Centre of Archangelsk and its Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Centre, it was the first AAC conference to be held in Russia.

The aim of conference was to spread information about AAC research, practical experience and assistive technologies in Russia and former Soviet Union Countries. Over 100 participants representing 10 Universities, national research institutes, institutions and NGO from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Norway, Italy, England, Eastern European countries and Sweden attended the conference. The conference was supported by Archangelsk municipality; the Swedish Institute; Stockholm University and its Department of Special Education; Ablenet, Inc; Zygo, Inc; Attainment Co; the Central Coast Children's Foundation's Augmentative Communication World Network and the Russian Fund of Fundamental Research.

The conference programme covered many aspects of AAC and included Professor Stephen von Tetzchner from Oslo University, a well-known researcher in the international AAC-field and the creator of the ECER-AAC-conferences, Dr Sophia Kalman, who participated at a distance with a presentation from her centre in Budapest. Dr Margareta Jennische from Uppsala University gave workshops on Bliss-Symbols and Ms. Judy King from England, supported by Ablenet, Inc., presented workshops on basic AAC-technology. Dr Lotta Andersson from Malmo University College gave lectures on Social Networking. Professor Malofejev, head of the Vygotsky Special Education Research Institute in Moscow, participated in the conference with the 'instrumental' approach to new reality of special education in Russia, and Dr. Magnus Magnusson from Stockholm University described the need for good infrastructure for successful AAC implementation. Conference participants from European and former Soviet Union countries

described their AAC research and programmes plus their desire to spread knowledge of AAC throughout their homelands.

Rehabilitation Center for children with Special needs is a Municipal Institution of Archangelsk City Administration. The Center supports three hundred children and their families. Fifty children have communicative problems. Thanks to AbleNet Company, Zygo Industry, Global Network and Attainment Company Inc the Rehabilitation Center started to help children in developing their communicative abilities using low AAC technologies. The experience of specialists of the Rehabilitation Center has been represented on the conference in Archangelsk. Parents and youth were a great part of this event! So we are going on with AAC together!

The department of Special Education at Stockholm University is planning to initiate further projects in the AAC field. More partners from Russia, as well as partners from Moldova, Albania and Romania will be included.

The next conference of the local Eastern and Central-European network in AAC will be arranged in Poland, in AUTUMN-2011.

For further information, contact lia_kalinnikova@mail.ru or Magnus.Magnusson@specped.su.se

Conference Report from Brasil.

III BRASILIAN AAC CONGRESS - ISAAC 2009

Date: Oct 31st 2009 to Nov 2nd 2009.

Location: UNIVERSIDADE PRESBITERIANA MACKENZIE – São Paulo - Brazil
Title: “Anyway to Communicate is Worthy”
The 3rd ISAAC Brasil Congress intends to continue the promotion and developing of AAC in Brasil within research, clinic and educational areas. The conference committee and participants are also planning to form a Brazilian Chapter of the International Society of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC.)

More Information can be obtained from www.csabra.fnd.br

Assistive Technology in Malta.

Augmentative Communication World Network has a great friend in Marica Gatt. Marica has shared her work with us for the past year, is mentoring a network colleague in Romania, is promoting an AAC Awareness Month in Malta and offers reports and free downloads from her centre in Malta (ACTU) via <http://actu.inclusivecurriculum.com/> plus a video showing the devices offered by her centre at:

http://public.dive.com/streaming/on_demand_media_streamer.aspx?id=2369&encoding=8&backUrl=streaming%2fon_demand_event_encoding.aspx%3fid%3d2369 Go into *di-ve.com*, then go into *TV and live event*, then click *education 22 stream*, then click on *demand library* and finally click *LURA FIL-KLASSI 20th April 2009*. Thank you Marta for your contribution.

Access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU: Fra Gaetano Pace Forno, Hamrun, HMR1100, Malta, Tel: (+356) 2122 8350, 2122 8349, Fax: (+356) 2123 3513, Website: <http://actu.inclusivecurriculum.com> Email: marica.s.gatt@gov.mt

ACTU within Student Services Department, Directorate for Educational Services is the leading unit in Malta and Gozo which provides access to communication and technology through use of unaided means of communication such as key-word signing, gestures and/or aided means of communication such as graphic symbols and electronic devices.

Mission statement: ACTU is committed to improve the quality of life of persons with learning disabilities and /or Complex Communication Needs (CCN) by providing Access to Communication and Learning through the use of Assistive Technology and to ensure that ALL students are Active Participants in the learning process.

Our services: The unit provides support in mainstream and resource centres through the use of assistive technologies (AT). ACTU provides AT assessments related to seating and positioning, motoric capabilities related to access issues, cognitive and linguistic capabilities, literacy, sensory and perceptual skills. ACTU works in the spirit of collaborative teamwork with the support of various professionals. ACTU gives utmost importance to the student and his/her family/guardians. ACTU meets the continuing needs of parents, individual schools/teaching teams, professionals and undergraduate/postgraduate students by providing ongoing in-service training. ACTU implements AAC programmes and strategies in schools by assisting the school teams in identifying additional adaptations that may be required by the student to actively participate in a meaningful way.

Our team: Our team is made up of specialist staff in the area of augmentative and alternative communication. The core team is made up of two speech therapists, occupational therapists and a learning support assistant. The team is managed by Marica Gatt, an Education Officer for Inclusive and Special Education, who is responsible for the day to day running of the unit including assessments, implementation, research, training and funding proposals.

Referrals for an AAC assessment: ACTU maintains an open referral policy and direct approaches are welcome from anyone associated with students with communication and/or physical difficulties. All referrals must have the signed approval of the parents/guardians. A referral form is also downloadable from ACTU website. <http://www.actu.inclusivecurriculum.com>

Device Funding: Following the assessment, realistic recommendations are submitted by the team to families who in turn apply for assistance through government schemes and charity organizations. Families can also apply for assistive technology solutions for AAC users in schools through their inclusion coordinators.

Device availability: Devices are usually purchased from the United Kingdom, although parents and therapists seem to prefer paper based communication aids since high tech aids are still very expensive. In fact ACTU is currently assessing the use of ultra mobile PCs which are compatible with The Grid 2 from Sensory Software International.

Training and Support: ACTU ensures that proper training and support is given to parents and professionals in the use of Assistive Technology (AT). ACTU provides accredited training in Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication strategies. ACTU promotes the use of AAC intervention techniques as well as specialized training in the use of manual sign systems, low tech aids, the latest adaptive computer technologies and high tech communication aids.

Research and Development: ACTU is embarking in continuous research in the area of AAC. This includes the development of Policy and Practice Procedures documents, assessment checklists, literature review as well of trialing of new software, hardware and devices related to assistive technologies. ACTU is also a partner in R&D projects in collaboration with government and non-governmental entities.

Raising Awareness: ACTU is committed to raising awareness of the importance of early intervention in AAC and recommends multimodal approaches through the use of manual signing, graphic signs, lite and high tech aids. ACTU believes in the educational inclusion of AAC users and suggests natural instruction and interaction arrangements, expectations and support for all subject areas of the curriculum. ACTU has an online social network - “Friends of ACTU” through Facebook - that connects parents, AAC users and allied professions both locally and internationally. ACTU joins the world to celebrate 2009 International AAC Awareness Month with various activities to raise awareness of the benefits of AAC.

Assistive Technology in India.

Thank you to Swati Chakraborty, Co-ordinator NRC-AAC, IICP Kolkata, for this report from Kolkata.

“I always envied my friend, Sayomdeb, who uses fancy software called EZkeys. I dream of having something like that in Bengali”. Barsha Bhattacharya (AAC advocate, 19...)

Similar ideas expressed by many other augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) users, led to the establishment of the National Resource Centre for AAC (NRC- AAC) in 2008, at the Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy (IICP) Kolkata. IICP had over 30 years of experience in AAC service delivery, research and training. It was relevant for us to focus on developing technologies for inclusion; technologies that would empower persons using AAC to access their environment; technologies for learning and living. We realized that commercially available technology from the West could not meet our national needs because these were not affordable by the majority of persons who needed them; often not relevant to the Indian socio-cultural and linguistic contexts, and, if the technology was imported, had little or no support for maintenance in India.

The NRC-AAC has developed low tech AAC resources and inclusive technology resources that are pragmatic, affordable, easy to use and flexible. It has developed several training programmes in AAC for a very diverse group of people – people who use AAC, family members, community workers, care givers and support staff and professionals. Some examples of AAC resources developed at the Centre are given below:

‘Indian Picture Symbols for Communication- version 1’(IPSC) – a software that has a current library of 1960 picture symbols that are culturally relevant to any Asian context and linguistically appropriate for any of the 22 constitutionally recognized Indian languages. The software can be used for making any picture symbol based communication displays for persons with complex communication needs. Text for these languages can be incorporated provided the font for the same is available on the computer. The package includes an animated demonstration and an instruction manual with sample displays.

ITCP is a software programme that allows writing with IPSC symbols. Digitized speech is attached with the picture icons for auditory feedback. Switches and hardware interface have been indigenously developed to facilitate indirect access.

Shikshak is a software that auto-generates programmed learning. It has text to speech output in Indian languages. Adaptive hardware interface with indigenous switches is also being developed.

Sanjyogis a language prediction and processing based software that helps the user pick up

picture icons with word-inflections, and auto-generates syntactically and semantically correct messages while producing synthesized speech output in vernaculars. This visual soft keyboard, with text to speech and intelligent word prediction provided with the software, is the first of its kind in India. It has an easily accessible opening menu and hardware interface to facilitate access. A visual mouse emulator to access the entire desktop area and facilitate web accessibility has also been developed.

Voice Output Devices: Low cost moulded access switches have been designed which can be widely used. Entry-point digitized VOCAs have been developed over the last couple of years. These are being widely used for participation in classroom activities; giving lectures, delivering a speech or for chatting in different contexts.

Kathamala is a widely used VOCA. This bright yellow coloured device has 8 mins of speech; can be stored in 1, 2, 4 or 16 message locations; has easy recording with clear auditory output; tactile access switches and a rechargeable battery. A four-layer version with 16 messages at each layer is also available. This will help to store theme-based pre-planned layouts (conversational / educational) for instant use. External speakers and microphone can be attached if needed to be used in a public place to deliver a speech (a hall, lecture room, etc.) A scan-able version is in the pipeline.

Gupshup Book is a 16 leaf, attractive album to use with photographs/picture symbols or word messages for instant communication. Photographs/picture symbol cards (4x6 ins) can be used with 8 mins of speech. Thirty seconds of speech can be recorded in each page. Easy to record, photos, message cards, picture cards can be used. It is rechargeable pencil battery operated. **Gupshup Book** is a handy, attractive, easy to carry around aid for AAC users at different cognitive levels to express themselves.

All these resources have been developed by an interdisciplinary team at **NRC-AAC**. The team is made up of 'Advocates for AAC' (people with complex communication needs) and professional staff. IICP works closely with reputed technology training institutes when developing technical resources.

Vidyasagar at Chennai in south India has also undertaken AT projects that have delivered the software/hardware products and prototypes listed below,

Slate: A Multimedia Software is a product that has culturally appropriate picture symbols. The software uses animated picture symbols with sounds and movies and is Speech enabled

Hope is a synthetic speech enabled software (English) that can be uploaded in a tablet or laptop and works as a voice output device. It has word prediction facility with alternative access

Aditi – A Non-touch sensor based alternative access switch for persons with severe physical problems

The usefulness of these AAC 'tools' are reflected in comments by people using AAC:

“I use a switch to do my class work on the computer. The best thing is, I can write in Hindi now... I want to learn more computer skills”- Soumya, a child in school

“Now I am working for the research projects taken up by IICP and with indigenous technologies. I can now write poems, can take lectures, can participate in community awareness programmes and can communicate with strangers.... AAC is a special gift in my life.” Barsha, an AAC activist.

As you can read, assistive technology in IICP has followed an appropriate route for India. Thank you Swati Chakraborty, Co-ordinator NRC-AAC, IICP Kolkata, swati.c28@gmail.com & Sudha Kaul, Director, IICP, Kolkata for this article. Sudha.kaul@gmail.com

Assistive Technology Resources.

There are many organisations that provide information about assistive technology. Thanks to Rowley Waisman and colleagues, Linda Burkhart and Paul Hamilton. Their references might result us all searching the web until our next newsletter!

The Family Village is a global community that integrates information, resources, and communication opportunities on the Internet for persons with cognitive and other disabilities, for their families, and for those that provide services and support. <http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/education/at.html>

Selected Links to Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication Resources for Children with Disabilities. This web site provides a table that is sorted by topic then listed alphabetically below within the table. <http://www.lburkhart.com/links.htm>

Educational and Assistive Technology to support Universal Access and Universal Design for Learning: This site is a result of a collaboration between [Center for Literacy and Disability Studies](#) and the department of [Computer Science](#) at the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#). Tar Heel Reader, provides a collection of free, easy-to-read, and accessible books on a wide range of topics. The books may be downloaded as slide shows in PowerPoint, Impress, or Flash format. Each book can be speech enabled and accessed using multiple interfaces, including touch screens, the IntelliKeys with custom overlays, and 1 to 3 switches. Great fun demonstrations (Reading with Franz) using puppets to describe various access methods. <http://www.paulhami.edublogs.org/>

Harvey's FreeDownloads:

A great place for downloads is **SWAAAC: Supporting Learning Through Assistive Technology** <http://www.swaaac.com/> Select the Resources menu for hosts of useful information on Assistive Technology and free software downloads at http://www.uchsc.edu/atp/resources_FreeATSoftware.html

There are also PowerPoint presentations on the following topics and much more

- AAC Assessment http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/1AAC_Assessment.ppt
- Making Toy Adaptations <http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/3MakingToyAdapations.ppt>
- An Overview of Assistive Technology. http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/6Overview_ofAT.PPT
- http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/6Overview_ofAT.PPT
- Picture Exchange Communication System <http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/11PECS.ppt>
- Reading and Writing: Assistive Tech for Learning Disability <http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/12TrainingTrainers0405.ppt>
- Assistive Technology in the Schools <http://www.swaaac.com/files/PPTs/14ATpresentation.ppt>

The WATI: Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative

<http://www.wati.org> is also a great source of free downloads. From the main page, pull down the Supports Menu and click on Free Publications or Classroom materials. The following is a list of just some of the materials available:

- Resource Guide for Teachers and Administrators about Assistive Technology <http://wati.org/content/supports/free/pdf/ATResourceGuideDec08.pdf>
- Hey! Can I Try That? A Student Handbook for Choosing and Using AT <http://www.wati.org/content/supports/free/pdf/HeyCanITryThat08.pdf>

Recursos en español

- Oye! Puedo yo intentar eso? <http://www.wati.org/content/supports/free/pdf/oye!puedo.pdf>

- Lista Comprobante de Asistencia Technolgica http://wati.org/content/supports/free/pdf/atlist_sp.pdf
- Guia de Consideracin para Asistencia Technolgica http://wati.org/content/supports/free/pdf/at_conderation_sp.pdf

Free and Low Cost Head and Eye Tracking Software

<http://teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com:80/2009/10/free-and-low-cost-head-and-eye-tracking.html>

Videos:

<http://www.intellitools.com/videos/> Shows the many applications of Intellitools.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rz2HpGC9vbw> Shows the remarkable achievements of someone with complex communication needs with the use of assistive technology.

Please note that our past ACWN newsletters from February, April, June and August. 2009, are now available on the web site of the Central Coast Children's Foundation www.centralcoastchildrensfoundation.org.

*I end by describing an amazing dedication and passion for AAC. In well over one hundred separate newsletters, Sarah (Blackstone) put together AAC information that was and still is immediately useful and organized in meaningful, easy-to-read categories. How we waited impatiently for those first copies of **Augmentative Communication News** to arrive in the mail! Who had new ideas to share? Where were the people to whom we could write with our questions? And how were we doing ourselves in this new field called AAC? All the issues of *Augmentative Communication News* from 1989 through 2008 are now available on the web site of *Augmentative Communication Incorporated* (augcominc.com). The last year's issues (2009) will become available sometime in 2010. Thank you Sarah for such a wonderful gift – over the years and now. Likewise, Michael B. Williams (since the mid -1990s) has brilliantly articulated the views of people with complex communication needs in his newsletter **Alternatively Speaking**. So thank you Sarah and Michael for making your work available and free to us all at www.augcominc.com*

Until our December issue of ACWN. Best wishes.

Anne. awarrick@rogers.com