



June 2023

**Find out what is happening in AAC
around the world.**

And connect.

In this edition:

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- ❖ Day Break for AAC in Kenya
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USSAAC's Speaker Connection Succeeds in Amplifying AAC Voices

by Chris Gibbons



Image of Chris Gibbons

USSAAC's Speaker Connection has been up and running for more than a year and, as a result, AAC voices are being projected throughout the US. The Speaker Connection was born from the recognition that AAC speakers have so much to say, yet they are seldom given paid opportunities for public speaking. People who use AAC are rarely recruited as speakers due to the misperception that they are ill-equipped to speak in a manner that others may find captivating or that they lack experience or training. With few conventional routes to employment, AAC speakers may also find themselves "out of the loop" of paid speaking opportunities due to the typically sporadic nature of paid speaking and the widespread myth that people using AAC fall into the category of doing things pro bono – or even worse, paying the venue or organization to have a chance to speak. These false assumptions, along with many others, conspire to forge a great irony that after so many have been provided a voice via AAC, they remain essentially voiceless in our communities.

The AAC Speaker Connection was specifically developed to open the door to paid speaking opportunities for people using AAC and is one of the key initiatives of USSAAC's *Amplifying AAC Voices Campaign*. It is a web-based portal enabling businesses, schools, organizations, and other entities to find and engage individuals who use AAC as invited speakers for their classroom, organization, clinic, workshop, conference, or other event. To date, with limited advertising and word-of-mouth promotion, 30 AAC speakers have registered on the site and

nearly 40 paid AAC speaking engagements have occurred with 17 different speakers hired and a dozen more in progress. This represents an incredible opportunity for speakers, their audience, and is one more step in the right direction towards normalizing all communication.

The engagement we have seen via the AAC Speaker Connection demonstrates a hunger for the stories and perspective shared by people using AAC. We can all identify moments in our lives that impacted us emotionally or that have challenged and changed how we think about things. An amazing concert, a sweeping view on a hike, studying an iconic piece of art, or listening to a captivating lecture from someone who opens our mind to new ideas. AAC speakers open, challenge and change the minds of those listening. And the ripple effects of that impact travel far beyond the moment. Audience members have commented that they now understand, for the first time, the barriers to participation people using AAC face daily and now view even the most trivial communication differently – with curiosity, empathy, and attention. In other words, exposure to someone using AAC and hearing their story has changed how they will listen to and support all communicators in their orbit. And with that, the world becomes ever so slightly more connected.

For many AAC speakers, the Speaker Connection represents a practical opportunity to build a history of paid employment while honing speaking skills and increasing social and professional networks. Because not all AAC speakers registered have extensive experience at virtual or live events, USSAAC hosts a series of Power Hour sessions to help up-skill AAC speakers. Peers learn from and mentor each other on everything from writing a compelling speech, managing SGD settings for optimal performance, pacing, payment negotiations, and other critical topics. So often it is the little things that make public speaking effective and Power Hours are a place to learn the more artistic as well as pragmatic aspects.

Ultimately, the impact of the Speaker Connection is best reflected by the AAC speakers themselves. It takes so much to “put yourself out there” and to attempt to make relevant to an audience some aspect of life so that, at the end of the speech, everyone listening agrees that it was worth their time to be there. Audience members have reported being most profoundly affected by witnessing the use of AAC to deliver the speech. Others are touched by the personal stories, humor, anecdotes of struggle and triumph, perceptions of ableism and humanism, and everything in between. And while the tension between the message and how

the message is delivered may be novel and enlightening to the audience, it is a way of life for the AAC speaker.

With the success realized by the Speaker Connection, USSAAC continues to actively solicit the support of corporate sponsors to continue and grow this invaluable resource. We are also looking for an ever-larger number of speakers to sign up and take on the challenge of amplifying AAC voices nationwide. There is so much more to say, and all our voices deserve to be heard. So, we now invite you to shout about the Speaker Connection, [share this link](#), show your support by becoming a member of USSAAC, and hire an AAC speaker for your next event.

Learning Norwegian through AAC

by Ahmad Naziri



Photo by Ida Wigstrand

My name is Ahmad Naziri, and I am 49 years old. I've mostly lived in Iran, but in the spring of 2011, I arrived in Norway where I didn't have a speech device. My family understood what I was saying in Persian, but I could not communicate with others in Norwegian. This was a bit difficult when I came to Norway as I could not communicate with anyone other than my closest family.

I started as a student at Oslo School for Adults Nydalen in the autumn of 2013. Here I met many people who understood what I needed. Minspeak was introduced as my AAC tool. I cannot remember my thoughts at the time, but I remember my great happiness. Before I started at the school, I hadn't used digital tools, but after a while I got to learn Minspeak, PC, and a mobile phone.

A new world of opportunities to communication opened. Now, I can use Minspeak to talk to whoever I want. I use the computer to search on YouTube, write emails and talk with people on Facebook. My mobile phone, a Handi, is also used for SMSs – an easy way for me to get in contact with more people.

When I started with Minspeak for the first time, it was very difficult because I couldn't understand Norwegian. It is great that Minspeak has pictures which made it easier to understand.

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Now, I've been talking with the use of Minspeak for nine years. I'm turning 50 and am about to switch to a speech device with a different system. I've started to learn Grid, which is a bit difficult, but I think it will be great. I'll get a bigger vocabulary that will allow me to use more words and more correct words in conversations. What's also great about Grid is that I know several people using this speech device which makes it easier to help each other and provides better opportunities for collaboration.

In 2013, I attended an ISAAC conference. I enjoyed it very much because I could have conversations with a lot of people which was very exciting and interesting. I liked to be part of the AAC community, and I hope I'll get the opportunity to do that again in the future.



Photo by Lisa Magnussen

Day Break for AAC in Kenya

by David Methu Githu, Chairman, SAAC-Kenya

About Kenya

Our country Kenya is situated in East Africa with a population of just over 50 million. We boast of beautiful landscape encompassing savannah grasslands, Lakelands, the scenic Great Rift Valley, evergreen highlands and a coastline that provides all manner of holiday resorts. We are home to famous wildlife marvels including the spectacular annual wildebeest migration dubbed one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Kenya is a very committed member of the global society that engages in positive initiatives towards ensuring better livelihoods for all. In particular and most relevant to this article, we strongly uphold the ideals of the UN's convention on the Rights of Children with disability.

How the Idea of AAC got into Kenya

AAC was practically introduced in Kenya in 2015 through a project dubbed **AAC in Kenya**. This project was funded through collaboration of a Danish retirees' organization called **Seniors Without Borders** in partnership with two Self Help Groups comprising of parents of children with Intellectual and related disabilities among whom were many with severe speech difficulties.

In 2014, Lisbeth Aaen and Ole Holst of Seniors without Borders had visited our Special School (*I was Deputy Head and later Head teacher*) while touring the country. During the visit I held a discussion with them about the challenges we had for a long time experienced with our learners with speech difficulties that posed obstacles to their participation in interactive learning due to problems in communication. They could not use the Kenyan Sign Language (*used by the deaf*) due to the natures of their disabilities. Following this discussion Lisbeth Aaen and Ole Holst went back to Denmark and presented the concern to Seniors Without Borders who decided that it would be good to introduce AAC to our Nakuru Hills Special

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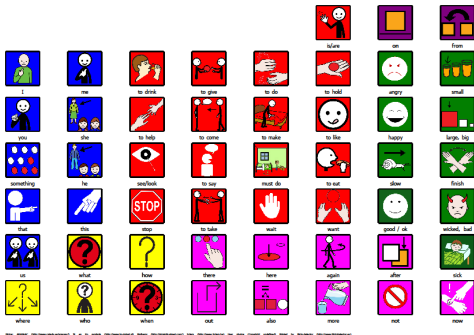
School and Pangani Special School and Learning Centre, both in the Nakuru City of Kenya.

Consequently, Seniors Without Borders successfully applied and secured funding from the Danish Civil Society with the condition that it could only be channeled through a civil society group in Kenya. Fortunately, I had just initiated the formation of a disability parents Self Help group which teaming up with another of the sister school, readily accepted to partner with Seniors without Boarders in the project **“AAC in Kenya.”** I became the coordinator of the Project Activities.

Seniors Without Boarders supported the training of a total 13 teachers in both **Special Schools** who became our lead facilitators in training and sensitization activities.

Our inaugural 4 AAC Methods

The AAC techniques introduced in this initial venture into AAC include the use of Core Word boards, Theme Boards, Partner Assisted scanning and application of communication passports. To date, these are the techniques that we try to propagate albeit conscious that there are numerous techniques in this communication system.



Our Core Word board



*A learner with special needs
in one of our model schools
communicates with a theme board*

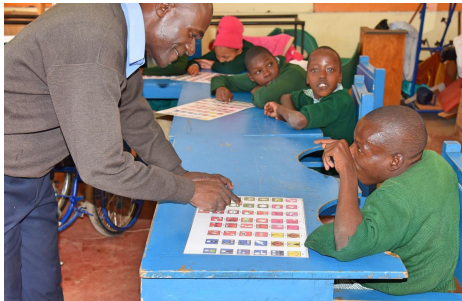
Early Initiatives and achievements

We owe our greatest stride in achievement to the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), our state curriculum development Agency. This began with a two-day presentation that we made in March 2017 at the institute, at which apart from members of the KICD, the Kenya Institute of Special Education as well as lead universities were represented. This was followed by a more elaborate presentation to lecturers at the Kenya Institute of Special Education in February 2018. Today, we note with great delight that the KICD has entrenched AAC in the Country's Stage Based Educational curriculum pathway, thus addressing in its mandate, a long-time challenge in the education of learners with communication difficulties in our special schools. We look forward to greater development of content to be included in subsequent reviews of the curriculum as our country gains capacity to use higher technology in mitigating the challenges faced by our Persons with communication difficulties. However, the challenge still heavily presents that the Government has not been able to put programs of ensuring that schools fully and effectively embrace the teaching, training and learning of AAC.

Meanwhile, on varied occasions, our team has made sensitization presentations at forums with teachers, parents and other stakeholders including curriculum support officers, health workers, social workers, lawyers, sportsmen and parents as well as PWDs who could use AAC. *The general consensus at all these forums has been that AAC could be the system that would help fix to a large extent, the challenges that have otherwise posed obstacles to full inclusion of persons with severe communication difficulties. Today, as more and more people gain awareness about AAC, it is emerging that the system is not only valuable to PWDs in school systems, but also for every person who faces challenges in communication due to lack of functional speech.*



Our trainer takes a group of teachers through a session



Special Needs Education Teachers in our pioneer schools take their classes through familiarization with the AAC communication boards.



Stakeholders of Nakuru City in Kenya gathered for a 2-day seminar on AAC at Mount Kenya University. The man addressing the participants lives with severe communication difficulties, but had not learnt to use our boards. Thus, he was struggling to communicate about his experiences. He is now registered as Member of Isaac International.

The formation of SAAC Kenya

The society of Augmentative and Alternative Communication-Kenya (SAAC-Kenya) was registered on 4th July 2019 by our registrar of societies under the Societies Act (CAP. 108) with the overall goal of raising the social economic standards of persons living with complex communication difficulties through sustainable communication inclusion. Pursuant to this goal, our mission is to do everything possible towards ensuring that everyone in Kenya who could communicate more easily by using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), will be able to do so.

The membership of this society includes SNE teachers, other professional service providers, parents of Persons with disability, and Persons with communication disability.

The key objectives of SAAC-Kenya are:

- a) To maintain ongoing communication with members on emerging issues and innovations in using Augmentative and Alternative communication systems.
- b) To educate and provide training to persons living with complex communication difficulties on concepts and skills in using Augmentative and Alternative communication systems.
- c) To provide information and education to communities on issues related to individuals who have little or no functional speech and/or writing.

Our driving spirit

The motivation to form the society was ignited by the realization that whereas a lot of effort had been put in our country to ensure mainstreaming and inclusion of PWDs, not much thought had been given to the fact that persons with severe communication difficulties had not been adequately included. We were further alive to the prescription of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) at Article 54 which states that a person with any disability is entitled to use appropriate means of communication and to access materials and devices to overcome constraints arising from the disability. Moreover, Kenya's position as a signatory to the UNCRC on the rights of children with disability gives a platform from which we can pursue our dream with confidence.

Recent and current undertakings

In the most recent undertakings, we were able to sensitize 40 more teachers drawn from 10 special schools and a corresponding number of parents all from 10 special Schools across Kenya in November 2022. In March 2023, we sensitized 20 university Lecturers drawn from 10 universities across the country. We have also sensitized 20 university Lecturers drawn from 10 universities across the country. You note that I am very deliberate in using the word *sensitize* in this regard. This is because I believe the efforts we are making are more about awakening everybody in our country to the essence of AAC in regard to developing a fully inclusive society.

Emphasis on parents, teachers and lecturers has the purpose of ensuring that children and youth with severe speech difficulties will be trained in our pioneer techniques in AAC and thus leverage on their educational achievements. The ability to participate in active interactive communication with peers and adults in educational settings is essential for a student to succeed in school (ASHA, 2005).

Indeed, the number we have sensitized is very small in light of our overall population of 50 million. This is so because we lack adequate resources to engage in a larger magnitude. We fear that the extremely slow pace will present a burn out to our efforts. However, we remain focused to our belief that we are up to a good course that will certainly bear ultimate glorious moments as we celebrate inclusivity for all. Indeed, we have adapted a clarion anthem for our sensitization seminars that ends with the words, “Heaven will be ours when we all get to use AAC and can communicate with all.” Yes! We have lit a small AAC candle as we look forward to a giant AAC candle that will withstand any winds.

Our Inaugural National Conference dream

In our efforts to ensure sustainable effort in propagating AAC in our country, we are fully conscious that we need the collaboration of all relevant stakeholders in oiling and pulling the wagon of AAC. In view of this, we have proposed a national conference with participants from all sectors that behold service to persons with communication difficulties. Pursuant to this end, we have tendered appeals to Governmental and non-governmental agencies for financial and any relevant support since May 2022 without success so far.

Conclusion

The more I engage in the initiative of growing AAC in Kenya the more my mind opens up to new perspectives on just how important its propagation is to us and indeed the entire world. In the development of AAC, I see the growth of a culture that holds very strongly to the quest of inclusion for all. I see AAC as cultivating a culture of greater cohesiveness among societies and ultimately among all peoples of the world. I see a future where every human being will

feel the warmth of belonging to whichever community they live in. I see the growth of greater ideas about how communication can answer to the question of inclusivity in a deeper and more functional sense.

End.



Thank you.

David Methu Githu.

Chairman, SAAC-Kenya.

My profile:

A Special educationist. Formally Head of Nakuru Hills Special School in Kenya.

Academic credentials: Diploma in special education.(KISE). B.Ed. Special Education,(Kenyatta university). Masters In Project Planning and Management, (University of Nairobi).

Currently engaged in volunteer Consultancy in Special Education.



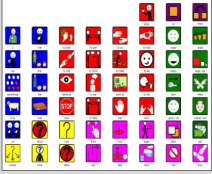
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Brochure on AAC

United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Children with Disability

Kenya has signed and ratified this UN convention on May 19th 2008.

"Kenya shall hereafter ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right."



50 Core Word Board

Partners

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AAC in Kenya

Augmentative and Alternative Communication



Communication for all

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

What is AAC


If a child does not speak, how can he tell you what he wants?

You can always make a guess.
But it is actually possible for the child to make himself understood in another way.


He can use gestures and make signs with his hands. He can also point at something to attract your attention.

With AAC he can use a board with symbols and with pointing at three or four of them he can make a sentence.
This will make you understand what he is telling you.

This is Muraa.
At the age of 14 she was in a car crash.
The accident paralysed her and gave her a brain damage.
Since then she was unable to speak.
Still, there are many things she wants to say.




By moving her eyes in a certain way she says "yes".
At Nakuru Hills Special School they taught her that.
Now it is up to you and everyone else to ask her questions she can answer with a "yes".
In that way she will be able to express her mind




I want to drink

This is Paul.
He suffers from cerebral palsy.
He is confined to a wheel chair and he cannot speak.




But Paul is bright.
With the AAC method he can express needs, wishes and dreams.
Or he can just give you a piece of his mind.
And he can be quite specific about it.
Just by pointing out symbols on a board.



to help more small

This boy can neither walk nor speak.
Around his neck there is a small card.
It says:
My name is Collins Maina.
I have no speech.
There is a book about me in my bag



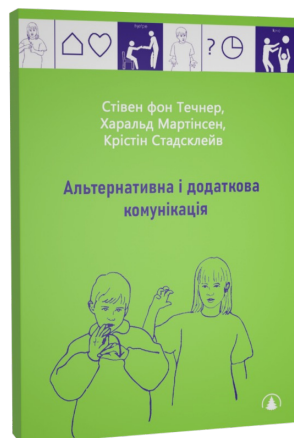
Because of Maina's lack of speech he cannot tell you his name, who his parents are, the name of his school.
He cannot tell you how he feels, what he wants or if he has a problem of some kind or how you can assist him.
By providing him with a Communication Passport he

AAC Book Project for Ukraine

by Eva Kirkeberg

Since 2018, there has been an extra focus in Ukraine on sharing knowledge about the best practices for people in need of AAC, their relatives and professionals. The AAC community in Ukraine consists of around 10,000 users and professionals. The war has made this investment into the AAC community in Ukraine even more important.

All countries need academic books in their own language, and this is lacking in Ukraine. Stephen von Tetzchner and Kristine Stadskleiv have been teaching in Ukraine and have been in contact with colleagues there for several years. Stephen von Tetzchner, Harald Martinsen and Kristine Stadskleiv have written this book, ***Augmentative and Alternative Communication for Children, Adolescents and Adults with Developmental Disabilities (2023)***.



Professionals in Ukraine have a strong desire for the book to become available in Ukraine and have received permission from the authors to translate the book into Ukrainian. The edition based on scientific evidence and years of the best global practice will become a source for training in AAC for Ukrainian parents and professionals.

Region 2 in ISAAC International wants to contribute financially towards this translation and printing. The book will be distributed to specialized non-profit organizations in Ukraine for free



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and sold by DyvoGra Social Enterprise to support the AAC community in Ukraine. Ukraine needs 8500 euros to implement the project (preparation, translation and printing).

We are therefore starting a fundraising campaign. Your support in bringing this translation project into reality will be immensely valued and appreciated. Donations for the project are accepted through the ISAAC Norway VIPPS number 13222 or by scanning the QR code below.



For more information on the project, visit the ISAAC-Norge site at <https://isaac.no/fundraising-aac-book-for-ukraine/>.

More about the Ukrainian AAC community is available at <https://aac.org.ua/aac-in-ukraine/>.

Conference News

ISAAC Conference Cancún is scheduled from July 24 – July 27, 2023 in Cancún, México!

Visit the [Conference Cancún webpage](#) for details.



From the Editors

Thank you to everyone who shared your ideas, resources and information and all of you who read CSWN, our global newsletter! Our next edition will be published in December 2023.

We would love to hear your news. Please submit your articles and/or news to signhild.skogdal@uit.no and miroslav.vrankic@eglas.hr. The font is Calibri 12. Our content guidelines are approximately four pages and five photos.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Wish all the best to all of you and stay safe,
Signhild and Miroslav