

Message from the ISAAC President

Tracy Shepherd

Welcome to the December issue of the ISAAC Communicator. Where does the time go?

As the ISAAC EB gets back to business and looks ahead after ISAAC Conference Cancún, there are many initiatives we are working towards for the next year.

2024-2026 Executive Board

Nominations will open for the 2024 – 2026 positions on the ISAAC Executive Board soon in the new year. This is a great opportunity to look within your Chapters to see if there are roles that you or your members would like to hold within ISAAC International. The friendship and learning from being involved with ISAAC is unmatched. I feel like I have gained as much as I have given with my ISAAC experiences. Consider taking on a leadership position.

ISAAC-Israel

Our ISAAC-Israel chapter needs our best wishes and kindness as they continue to be in crisis and uncertainly



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about what is next. I hold strong to our time together in Cancún when ISAAC-Israel invited many of us to join their Chapter Meeting. It was a great time to meet together with all the joy and enthusiasm for our long overdue face time. And just a little secret – they have the best chapter meetings for reasons I will not divulge. Please see more on AAC Support for Israel [here](#).

Conference Cancún Video Recordings

For those of you who were not able to join us in Cancún you are in luck! We are releasing videos of presentations from the conference for a very low price. There will be 5 or 6 each month that you can purchase and have access to for a limited time. Don't miss out and take advantage of viewing these fantastic sessions! Videos are available [here](#).

Membership

Lastly, thanks for being a member and being dedicated and passionate about AAC and

Messages from ISAAC's President and Executive Director are available in French, Italian, and Portuguese translation on our [website](#).

ISAAC. We are a grassroots organization and need volunteers and membership to keep us going.

So, what can you do to help?

- [Renew your membership.](#)
- Sponsor a new member.
- Choose ISAAC as your preferred charity on PayPal and donate what you can.
- Run a GoFundMe event for your birthday and ask your friends and family to donate to ISAAC instead of buying you a present.
- Volunteer for a committee.

As various holidays are coming up around the world, I want to send out a message of peace. This is a time of year that can be joyful for some and can also leave others feeling vulnerable and lonely. Be kind to one another.

Whatever holiday you celebrate at this time of year - Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, Winter Solstice, birthdays, or nothing at all; I wish you happiness, peace, and health.

Season's greetings to you and your families.

[Tracy Shepherd](#)

ISAAC President

From the Executive Director

Franklin Smith



Welcome to the December 2023 edition of The ISAAC Communicator.

The final few months of every calendar year is always a busy time here at the ISAAC International office. In addition to paying the final few bills (!) from our highly rated ISAAC Conference Cancún, we have been working hard on behalf of our membership and stakeholders, by:

- a. Monitoring and reviewing ISAAC budgets and monthly financials
- b. Reviewing different aspects of ISAAC operations, with a focus on identifying opportunities to achieve increased efficiencies and/or decreased costs
- c. Working with our Chapters to identify opportunities for mutual support and collaboration during 2024 and 2025
- d. Leveraging resources from ISAAC Conference Cancún towards additional ISAAC revenue generation
- e. Planning for a 2024 ISAAC virtual event

ISAAC Membership 2024

Membership renewal notification emails were sent to all [ISAAC-Australia](#), [ISAAC-Canada](#), [ISAAC-Español](#), [ISAAC-US \(USSAAC\)](#), and [ISAAC International](#) members, during October and early November 2023.

These new or renewing members can make use of our [online membership portal](#) to renew an existing membership, or take out a new membership.

During early December, we will also be sending out first reminder notifications to renewing members from 2023 and earlier.

If you are an ISAAC member through one of our other Chapters, we look forward to you renewing your membership for 2024 through your Chapter directly. Please do watch for communication from them.

As noted above, we also are looking forward to providing 2024 members with special access to an ISAAC virtual event next year!

AAC Awareness Month

We have had a very successful 2023 Awareness Month! The theme for AAC Awareness Month 2023 is “Say What? Sharing your most memorable moments with AAC.”

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Please do check out the [AAC Awareness Month](#) resources from around the world posted on the ISAAC website.

Ongoing ISAAC International Financial and Operational Management

Beginning on the ground at ISAAC Conference Cancún, the ISAAC Finance Committee and Executive Board (EB) have been closely monitoring ISAAC International revenues and expenses for the balance of 2023 and into 2024, as part of ensuring accurate monthly cash flow monitoring and projection. In addition, and as requested by the ISAAC Council, the EB committed to presenting the Council with a balanced budget for the 2024 and 2025 budget years during November 2023. The work on that biennial budget was completed, and we look forward to reporting back to the membership on the outcome of our presentation to the ISAAC Council.

As part of this effort, ISAAC International is also now reviewing different aspects of our office operations, to ensure that we are able to improve business processes/practices and reduce expenses. Two expense reduction

opportunities have already been implemented – reducing expenses on cloud-based server storage through Google, as well as switching email mass marketing platforms from Constant Contact to Brevo. The office is also taking a leadership role in a current state review of information technology (IT) usage. We also look forward on reporting back to the membership on this effort in the coming months.

ISAAC 2024 Virtual Event

ISAAC International is hard at work ensuring our ability to present a virtual event on behalf of our members and AAC stakeholders during 2024. A volunteer committee is in the process of being created and will be holding its first meetings this month. We anticipate releasing more news about this early during 2024. Stay tuned!

As always, I welcome your thoughts and feedback. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly, at franklin@isaac-online.org, should you require any further information or assistance.

Regards and thanks,
Franklin Smith

News

USSAAC

USSAAC THE VOICE OF AAC

USSAAC's Disaster Relief Committee is thrilled to announce the publication in the *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* of their article, Emergency and Disaster Preparedness for People who Use AAC: A Pilot Study Using a Supported Toolkit. https://pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/2023_AJSLP-23-00086

This OPEN ACCESS article means anyone with the link can read it and digest the important content.

Conclusion: "This study highlights the need for preparedness activities that are person-centered and account for the communication support needs of individuals who use AAC if faced with an emergency/disaster. Outcomes suggest that these methods were feasible and supported positive change in perceived preparedness in the young adults who used AAC and their caregivers."



Communication Matters



Communication Matters International AAC Conference 2023

The Communication Matters annual [International AAC Conference](#) took place at the University of Leeds from 10-12th September 2023.

We welcomed 411 delegates including 34 AAC users. Communication Matters were delighted to be able to fund 94 subsidised places for AAC users, their Personal Assistants and family members to attend. The conference was thrilled to have 17 companies present in our Exhibition Hall (see photo below).



Thank you to our fantastic Keynote and Plenary speakers, Graham Pullin and Abdi Omar, for bookending the conference with such important AAC messages.

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Thank you to everyone else who presented, the programme was very wide-ranging this year. Thank you, also, to our sponsors for your support.



Graham Pullin



Abdi Omar

The fancy dress theme was 'Back to the Future'. Well done to everyone who dressed up, it all added to an amazing night. We enjoyed piano playing during the drinks reception by Bill and then wonderful singing from Corin during the Conference dinner on Monday evening, which was hosted by CM member, Jamie Preece. We then danced the night away to DJ Oli, and he showed some great photos of people who were celebrating birthdays.



DJ Oli

The smooth running of the conference was helped by eight volunteer Conference Makers who were all Speech and Language Therapy students from either Leeds Beckett University or City, University of London. Thanks must also go to Kerry Schofield who took the helm at this year's conference, on behalf of the University of Leeds Conference and Events team.

We had some new ideas for this year's conference. We introduced a "newbies session" for those delegates that had not attended a CM conference before. Almost 40% of delegates were first-time attendees this year, so this was really well attended, and we hope it was useful for those who turned up early on the Monday morning for this. We also introduced an Assistive Gaming Zone on the Sunday afternoon, which was supported by Everyone CAN, an Assistive Technology charity. Julian and his team gave delegates the opportunity to try out the latest solutions in assistive gaming technology using adaptive controllers. The other new idea that we had was an Open-Mic night in the bar on Sunday night. We had seven people put themselves forward for this which ranged from a poet and a dancer to a comedian. It was a great evening and we have had some wonderful feedback. So, get your thinking caps on for what you can do for next year's Open-Mic night – all sorts of entertainment will be welcome!

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Further information can be found on our website:

<https://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/what-we-do/conference/>

The next Communication Matters Annual AAC Conference will be held at the University of Leeds from 8-10th September 2024. You are very welcome to join us in the UK! Registration will open in Feb/March 2024. We look forward to meeting you.

Receive Updates from Communication Matters!

WELCOME TO COMMUNICATION MATTERS

We aim to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of the needs of people who struggle to communicate.



Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Join our [AAC Forum](#) google group.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please email

admin@communicationmatters.org.uk.

News from Spain



AAC Awareness Month

#SuperandobarrerasCAA

From October 24th to November 3rd, 2023, a series of 6 webinars were launched to celebrate AAC Awareness Month by [Qinera](#)- Assistive Technology Company- and other organisations, such as [AlfaSAAC](#), [Try It Pediatría](#) and [SATB2](#). The main goal for these seminars was to address issues that concern both professionals, family members and users in their day-to-day and to identify the barriers they have encountered or are still facing. The seminars also aimed to identify how people from different backgrounds, profiles and in different contexts have managed to overcome these barriers without being “professional experts” in the field of AAC.

The topics covered were:

1. AAC support from the **speech therapy** centre.

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2. AAC in **special education settings**.
3. AAC for **inclusion** in mainstream education.
4. Initiating AAC in **adulthood**.
5. **Literacy** for students with complex communication challenges.
6. Talking to Families: "**Dando voz**" Project (Spanish for "Giving voice").

All sessions were streamed live on YouTube and are still available on the Qinera channel at the [following link](#). In less than a month, the videos have already received more than 3,300 views.



AAC Awareness Campaign

#ComunicacionPorDerecho

In January 2023, [AlfaSAAC](#) -a Spanish non-profit organisation devoted to advocating for AAC and Literacy for everyone- launched the 2nd campaign called "**Comunicación por derecho**" (meaning "The Right to Communicate") focusing on the promotion of

literacy and communication rights for people with complex communication needs.

The campaign received funding from the Spanish Foreign Affairs Ministry and was aimed at families and professionals working with people with complex communication needs and potential AAC users as well as social workers, paediatricians, family doctors and neurologists. It was also designed to be used for educational purposes, in associations and other organisations working with people with learning disabilities.

As part of the campaign, a 5-minute professional video was made to raise awareness among the general public. In the video, AAC users explain in their own words what it means for them to have access to communication. To mark the end of the campaign, 20 people received scholarships to access online training courses on Emergent Literacy and AAC. The video can be accessed [here](#).



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AAC in the Legal Field

[Plena Inclusion](#) is an associative movement that has fought for the rights of people with learning disabilities and their families in Spain since 1964. It is formed by **950 different organisations** throughout the country.

Last November, they hosted an online seminar to present several printed guides and other resources aimed at enabling people with disabilities to have better access and participation in the field of Justice.

In the first part of the seminar, Ana Medina, Begoña Llorens and Ruth Candela, from AlfaSAAC, presented the guide they have developed on **AAC in the legal environment**. They stressed the importance of taking AAC systems into account to ensure that all people can access and communicate with all agents working in the legal system.

This guide is available at [this link](#).



Approximately 200 people from various job profiles and from different Spanish and English-speaking countries attended the event: notaries, solicitors, lawyers, police officers, social workers, psychologists, amongst others. Simultaneous translation into English was available for non-Spanish speakers. A recording of the seminar is available [here](#).



AAC Assessment Tools

Two new free online tools for AAC assessment have been developed by Brotóns, Díaz, Gómez & Rabadán and are currently available for the Spanish AAC community in Spain and Latin America. These instruments were designed to offer additional options in Spanish - as well as the translated version of the Communication Matrix.

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The first tool is the [AAC Register in the Educational Context](#). It is aimed at gathering information from the school staff and family members regarding key aspects of the students' communication profile. It includes direct links to premade questionnaires, but it also allows for new information to be uploaded. This comprehensive register collects information from the AAC team, their needs and preferences, motor, sensory, language & literacy as well as social skills, multimodal communication and communication functions, AAC systems and intervention strategies.

It also provides a direct link to the second new tool: the [ROCAA](#), acronym standing for Observational Register for AAC. ROCAA is structured in 5 stages, ranging from the very early communication development and it covers both prelinguistic and linguistic skills as well as socioemotional, cognitive and emergent literacy skills.

At the beginning of the school year staff can fill in data about the communication skills of students with complex communication needs and then compare it at the end of the course

to obtain information about the progress made. Every item in the register is an intervention goal to work on. The regional government of Murcia issued a directive recommending the use of the register.

ISAAC Italy



AAC Awareness Month



On the 18, 19 and 20 of October 2023, an information event was held in Rome dedicated both to ISAAC Italy members and to all people interested in learning more about Augmentative and Alternative Communication. During the month of awareness, ISAAC Italy wanted to offer an opportunity to further spread the ISAAC mission thanks to the participation in the

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event of prominent national figures, but also thanks to the collaboration of international colleagues who shared their experience with AAC.

Among the people invited to bring their experience and professionalism, we find the founding members of ISAAC Italy, Aurelia Rivarola, Gabriella Veruggio, Paolo Vaccari and Claudia Jallà who were thanked for twentieth anniversary of ISAAC Italy, with a plaque of recognition from ISAAC Italy, delivered to the foundation "Valdese" in memory of Claudia Jallà.

Among the international colleagues who collaborated with great enthusiasm, we thank Miro Vrankic, president of BUILD, Lara Hermann from the ISAAC Francophone chapter, and Dr. Darryl Sellwood from the Australia chapter. Of great importance was the participation of several CAA users: Arianna Belluzzo, Ester Marchini, Arcangelo Signorello who we thank for sharing their experience with CAA, also giving rise to a very enriching debate. We also thank Paolo and Fernanda Frignani for their intervention in sharing their life experience with AAC in

memory of their son Marcello, an AAC user, and Giorgio Massoli for sharing his project on behalf of his daughter "Popy".



ISAAC Poland



What's New in Poland?

Author: Agnieszka Pilch

Translation: Magdalena Jańczak

An intensive development of AAC has been observed in Poland in recent years. Usually October marks celebration of the International AAC Awareness Month. This year, therapists from 26 centers in Poland, from both large and small towns shared on our FB page their activities undertaken this month to promote knowledge about AAC. We know from other reports on Polish FB that there was much more such initiatives,

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and they are not limited to October only. This is driven, among other things, by a greater awareness of families and therapists of people with complex communication needs, also gained thanks to the online “word of mouth”, and the regulations of the Polish Ministry of Education and Science, which imposed the obligation to introduce AAC in kindergartens and schools for students who need AAC support.

This year, the participation of members of our Association in the work on the draft Parliamentary Act regarding Support for People with Complex Communication Needs was very important. The project is submitted to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy and we very much hope that the new government in Poland will implement at least some of the solutions proposed. They include an establishment of Local AAC Teams in each county and of Regional AAC Centers in each region, as well as the establishment of the Polish AAC Institute. During the pilot phase of this project, the Social Council for AAC and ETR was established at the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled People in Poland at the Ministry of Family and Social Policy.

Council members, working in problem teams, developed a concept for educating future AAC specialists at postgraduate studies. They also set out a framework for future research on the population of potential AAC users in Poland. Our Association has been honored to see myself, Agnieszka Pilch, the current President of the “Mówić bez Słów” (“Speaking without words”) ISAAC Polska Association, as the Chairman of this Social Council. Another activity in the area of legislation was the cooperation of the president of the Association with the Ministry of Justice on the development of provisions regarding the hearings of AAC users as witnesses and work on the preparation of information materials for judges. We are also involved in selecting court experts to support AAC users during the hearings. These activities involve cooperation with specialists from various fields and organizations. We observe a growing awareness in Poland of the needs of people with complex communication needs.



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A project in which the Association has been involved for the last three years is the organization of an AAC club for adult AAC users by Karolina Kamińska, a member of the Association's Management Board. This club is supported in the capacity of communication partners by future speech therapists from the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw as part of their professional internships. On a monthly basis, a group of a dozen AAC users from several cities in Poland have the opportunity to meet online and discuss topics proposed by them or meet guests invited on their behalf. The club's activities were supported by the Polish Shipyard Foundation, which helped us to prepare materials promoting the club's work and providing information on how to organize and run such a club.

Information materials were developed in Polish and English and a promotional spot with subtitles in English and Ukrainian (www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0gZhQkUFz4).



Association Members have been supporting Ukraine in its access to knowledge about AAC for years now. It has been particularly visible since the war in this country started in February 2022. The last training conference organized in October 2023 by our "Mówić bez Słów" ISAAC Polska Association was free of charge and available online with Ukrainian translation for our friends there.

Recent years have posed a big challenge for our small organization. We are very pleased with the involvement of AAC users in the Association's activities, not only through their formal membership of the Management Board level, but also by undertaking important tasks within it. Without working side by side, I cannot imagine the work of our Association.

Conferência Da ISAAC Em Cancún!

By: Samara Andresa Del Monte

Translation: Nadia Browning

Entre os dias 24 e 27 de julho de 2023, teve a 19ª Conferência ISAAC, em Cancún/México.

Eu fui representar a ISAAC Brasil e o BCI.

Eu conheci terapeutas, pessoas que usam CAA e familiares de muitas cidades e comuniquei com eles usando meus símbolos Bliss.

Eu me diverti muito tentando saber o que eles falavam.

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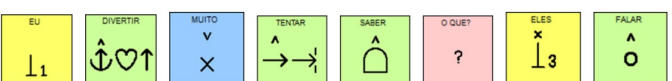
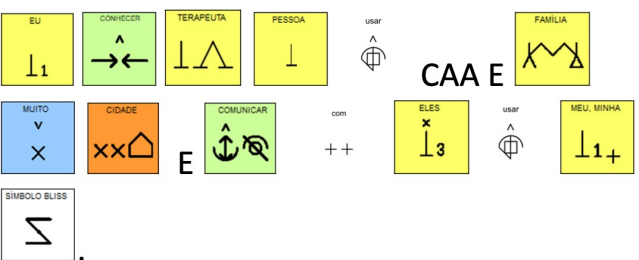
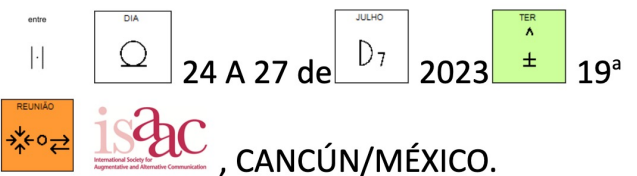


Eu fiquei muito feliz em saber que crianças estão se comunicando mais cedo.
Eu me comunico com os símbolos Bliss desde 6 anos de idade e estamos sempre juntos. Momento muito especial foi Festival Filmes e ganhou a história do livro brasileiro: “Kiaro e suas palavras”!
Eu senti orgulhosa em trocar histórias de vida neste encontro muito importante da ISAAC!

**Translation into English:
ISAAC CONFERENCE IN CANCUN!**

Between the 24th and 27th of July 2023, the 19th ISAAC Conference was held in Cancun/Mexico.
I went to represent ISAAC Brazil and BCI. I met therapists, people who use AAC and family members from many cities and communicated with them using my Bliss symbols.
I had a lot of fun trying to figure out what they were talking about.
I was very happy to know that children are communicating earlier.
I have communicated with Bliss Symbols since I was 6 years old and we (Bliss and I) are always together.

A very special moment was at the Film Festival. A children's book written by a Brazilian clinician and her son, called: “Kiaro and his words” won the prize! I felt proud to exchange life stories in this very important venue: ISAAC Conference 2024.



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EU ficar MUITO FELIZ SABER CRIANÇA ESTAR COMUNICAR
MAIS CEDO. com SIMBOLO BLISS desde ANO ESTAR
SEMPRE JUNTOS HORARIO MUITO ESPECIAL FILME GANHAR HISTORIA LIVRO
“ KIANO E SEU (SUA) PALAVRA “!
EU SENTIR ORGULHOSO TROCAR HISTORIA VIDA ENCONTRO
MUITO importante DA isaac International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication !



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ISAAC Canada



Canadian Researcher and ISAAC-Canada Council Member Glenda Watson Hyatt wins prestigious award.

Congratulations to Glenda Watson Hyatt whose ground-breaking work has earned her the Mitacs Award for Outstanding Innovation—Master’s for her first-of-its-kind study of employment barriers for those living with speech disabilities. The award was presented at a ceremony at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on November 22, 2023.

Watson Hyatt, a Master’s student in applied sciences at Queen’s University, was recognized for her landmark study to uncover the current state of affairs in Canada in terms of employers’ awareness and knowledge of speech disabilities, and the barriers facing prospective employees who may rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) strategies in the workplace.

She found that their biggest challenge to finding and retaining employment is lack of awareness and acceptance in society, and that systemic discrimination against this segment of the disabled population causes unnecessary physical and/or mental stress.

The next step in her project is to interview employers who have experience in recruiting, hiring and retaining people with speech disabilities, as well as to gather further insights from Canadians interested in sharing their experiences living with speech disabilities. Once completed, findings from the research are expected to inform the continuous improvement of Canadian Council of Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) programs, services and resources for supporting employees with speech disabilities, a community for whom existing data and research remain sparse.

Read the announcement [here](#).



Chapters



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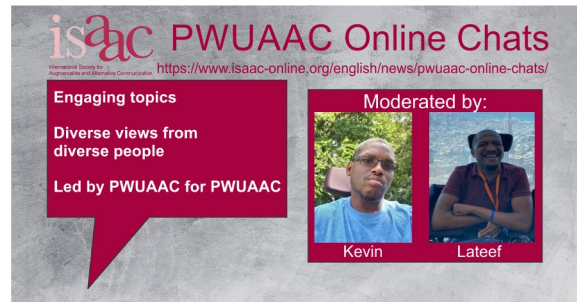
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PWUAAC Online Chats



Visit [PWUAAC Online Chats](#) on the ISAAC website for information about the next scheduled chat.

ISAAC Webinars

As of January 2021, most ISAAC webinars and archived recordings are available as a benefit of membership, and accessed through the Members' Only portal. A limited number of [webinar recordings](#) will remain open to the public. Find out how to become an ISAAC member [here](#).

Contact Us

Do you have a question or comment? Please feel free to send an email to feedback@isaac-online.org

Our Vision & Mission



ISAAC's Vision is that AAC will be recognized, valued and used throughout the world.

ISAAC's Mission is to promote the best possible communication for people with complex communication needs.

ISAAC is a Non-Governmental Organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic & Social Council.

Stay Connected

ISAAC Chapters and members worldwide are invited to submit items of interest from your country or region. News, AAC practice tips, research, personal essays, in article format or as a link to online articles or resources, will be reviewed and made available on the ISAAC website as appropriate. Please send articles and photos to [Nola Millin](#).

Stay Social

Stay in the loop! Follow ISAAC news & views in the AAC community on our social media!



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The ISAAC Communicator

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