



Communication Matters – Research Matters: an AAC Evidence Base

The AAC Evidence Base research project is a three-year project funded by the National Lottery through Big Lottery Fund. Communication Matters is leading the project and working with three research partners: University of Sheffield, Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust and Manchester Metropolitan University. The research work started on 14 June 2010.

The project aims to improve the quality of life of people in the UK with severe communication impairments who need AAC (Augmentative & Alternative Communication) by raising awareness of their needs and by improving service provision. It also aims to develop Communication Matters' capacity to commission further research and to influence the research agenda so that it reflects the priorities of people who use AAC.

It is estimated that 365,000 people in the UK could benefit from AAC but there is no definitive proof of this. There is no overview of existing AAC services. This has resulted in a postcode lottery of service provision. The University of Sheffield and Barnsley Hospital will use a range of quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the need for AAC (from low-tech to high-tech) and to map current service provision. One output will be an online map showing services across the UK. This will make information available to everyone.

Best practice evidence relating to AAC is limited and much of it is inaccessible. This means that people who use AAC and professionals delivering services cannot benefit from and build on what others have learned. Manchester Metropolitan University will develop the online AAC Evidence Base. This will contain information on academic publications and examples of best practice from professionals. Information will be presented in a variety of formats, making it accessible to a wide audience. Access to this information will help professionals to improve their services and individuals will be empowered to say what they need.

Communication Matters will set up a research participant service. This will link researchers with people who are willing to participate in research into AAC. By recruiting people to join the service Communication Matters will widen the pool of potential participants making it more representative.

The involvement of people who use AAC and others with knowledge of AAC is crucial to the success of the research. The project was designed in response to the views of the AAC community and people from the AAC community will be involved throughout.

The project will disseminate its results widely and will provide targeted information to decision-makers in national and local government; commissioners of services and professionals.

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