

1986-2016

THE HISTORY OF
**Communication
Matters**



Early Developments

1978

The first international organisation to provide support for those interested in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) was formed in **1978** and was called The International Project on Communication Aids for the Speech impaired (IPCAS). The countries involved were Canada, Sweden, UK and USA. Its stated role was to identify and explain the new communication aids that were coming onto the market. Its members comprised government and non-government agencies; within the UK these included the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR) and some specialist practitioners and engineers. One of the recommendations of IPCAS was that each member country should be served by a national network of communication aids centres.

1982

The 1980s saw many developments. Building on IPCAS work, the first official UK support for AAC began in **1982** when RADAR pledged £250,000 over five years to support six communication aids centres (CACs) in England and Wales. The Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) (including the Welsh Office) more than doubled that finance and in 1983 six CACs started to take shape. The six centres were based in (i) Charing Cross Hospital, London; (ii) The Wolfson Centre, London; (iii) Frenchay Hospital, Bristol; (iv) Sandwell Hospital, Birmingham; (v) The Dene Centre, Newcastle; and (vi) Rookwood Hospital, Cardiff. The original aims of these centres were:

1. To undertake the assessment of clients for communication aids
2. To spread expertise to speech and language therapists and other relevant professions
3. To act as resource centres
4. To undertake evaluation and research

Regular meetings of the people running each CAC was a quickly established practice, sharing administrative, clinical and technical expertise. These meetings were in due course expanded to include others in the field, albeit not funded from the same source. However, there was no common blueprint for these centres and each centre developed in its own way, to fit in with local needs, services and practices. This resulted in several challenges. One challenge and major cause of frustration was the lack of a route to the funding of any communication aid or equipment that was recommended.

In the same year, the CALL Centre (Communication Aids for Language and Learning) was established in the University of Edinburgh, led by Phil Odor, one of the original IPCAS UK team members. Initially, this was an action research project to evaluate technology to meet communication needs in education. Funding came initially from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Lothian Region Education Department, followed shortly afterwards by support from the Scottish Office Education Department. The CALL Centre has now been re-branded as CALL Scotland (Communication Access, Literacy and Learning).

1984

Around the same time (**1984**), in the world of education (almost a 'parallel universe'¹), four SEMERCs (Special Education Microelectronics Resource Centres) were established through the Microelectronics in Education Programme (MEP) administered by the Council for Educational Technology (CET). Their remit was to support and train teachers in good practice in the use of microelectronics with children with special educational needs, as well as to develop software and ancillary equipment to support access to microelectronics (largely computers) and the curriculum. (Only the Manchester SEMERC remained after withdrawal of central funding in 1989.)



The Wolfson CAC with Nicola Jolleffe (second from left)

1982

Regular meetings of the people running each CAC was a quickly established practice

¹ Education and Health are referred to as 'parallel universes' because in the early days it was not unusual to hear that Health funded devices could not be taken into school and Education funded devices could not be taken out of school!

The Scottish Microelectronic Development Project carried out a similar role in Scotland, but without providing support and training, only software development.

There were special schools where significant early development work in IT and special access was carried out by pioneering partnerships of educators and engineers, for example, Charlton Park School in Greenwich, Ormerod School in Oxford, Lancasterian School in Manchester.

A group that included many of these early developers, the Group for Technology and Disability, held an exhibition and lobbied in Parliament at Westminster in the early 1980s to gain recognition (and hopefully, eventually funding) for emerging new technologies in education.

1984

The Aids to Communication in Education (ACE) Centre at Ormerod School in Oxford was established in May **1984**. The Northern ACE Centre (Oldham, Lancs.) was established in 1985. Along with CALL in Scotland, these were the first agencies to try to bridge the gap between Education and Health by integrating AAC and learning.

Later in the 1980s, in Northern Ireland, an NHS centre was set up in Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast, as the Belfast Communication Advice Centre.

In 1987 the Scottish Home and Health Department opened a communication aid assessment centre, based loosely on the six original CACs in England and Wales. This centre, the Scottish Centre of Technology for the Communication Impaired (SCTCI), was based in Glasgow but provided an AAC service to all the Health Boards in Scotland. The original contract was for five years, to evaluate the need for such a service in Scotland. SCTCI's original aims were similar to the four broad aims identified for the six CACs.

Also in Scotland, a new regional AAC assessment service, The Fife Assessment Centre for Communication through Technology (FACCT), was opened in Fife in the same year (1987), with – importantly – joint funding from Fife Health Board, Education and Social Work Departments. Because of its funding base, FACCT not only carried out assessments but also had the budget to provide the recommended communication aids. FACCT also provided training and support to the local professionals working with children and adults using AAC. FACCT has now become FAACCT - Fife Augmentative and Alternative Communication Team. In 1992, 1994, and 1996 further regional AAC centres of specialist expertise were established in Scotland.

The Birth of ISAAC

The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) was set up in the United States of America in a small room in Michigan State University in 1983 by a group of speech therapists, special educators and rehabilitation engineers many of whom had been actively involved in IPCAS but who felt that it had largely completed its work and that the emphasis should now be on developing new communication aids and adapting these to the needs of their users. One of those present in that small room in Michigan was UK engineer Clive Thursfield who was to become the UK Chapter's first Chair².

The founding of a UK chapter of ISAAC (ISAAC (UK)) was formally proposed at a conference held in Cardiff in 1986 which attracted 500 national and international delegates. Funding to initiate and support such an organisation was, as usual, a challenge. While Chapter status and a contract with ISAAC were being negotiated, DHSS and RADAR made the decision to withdraw from IPCAS and redirect support to ISAAC (UK). With a grant from the DHSS to fund secretarial support, RADAR's director, George Wilson, agreed to take the fledgling ISAAC (UK) under RADAR's wing, providing it with space in its offices in Mortimer Street in London.



The ACE Centre, Oxford, 1988

1986

The founding of a UK chapter of ISAAC was formally proposed

² In an article in the third ISAAC (UK) newsletter (later to be Communication Matters journal), Clive Thursfield recalls that he was there more or less by chance.

1985

Early discussions and negotiations with ISAAC were far from straightforward but the Articles of Association of ISAAC (UK) were signed by Ena Davies on 14 October **1985** and by Robert (Bob) Fawcus on 15 October 1985. ISAAC (UK)'s Certificate of Incorporation as a Private Limited Company Number 1965474 was granted in the Cardiff Registration Office on 24 November 1985.

1988

The first newsletter telling people of ISAAC (UK)'s existence was published in December 1987 and ISAAC (UK) was officially launched at the House of Commons by Ray Michie MP (a former speech therapist in Scotland) on 21 January **1988**. Forty-one people attended the launch including seven MPs, two members of the House of Lords, a few members of ISAAC (UK) and other relevant voluntary organisations. George Wilson of RADAR introduced Clive Thursfield, ISAAC (UK)'s first Chair, who outlined the six main roles of ISAAC (UK). These were:

1. To provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas between users of communication aids, their parents/families or carers and professional workers
2. To establish augmentative and alternative communication as a positive tool in a wide range of medical conditions
3. To raise public awareness of the difficulties of people with communication handicaps
4. To make more widely known and available the techniques used in AAC in this country
5. To encourage political recognition of the needs of people with communication handicaps with particular regard to funding
6. To act as a resource and co-ordinating body for research and development

The first ISAAC (UK) Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on 28 November 1988 in the RADAR offices in Mortimer Street, London. Twenty-five members were present.

1989

The Communication Aids Suppliers Committee (CASC) was formed in **1989**. This group was formed because of the need to examine the interaction between the supplier of communication aids and the therapist, and to ensure that an aid supplied to a user, after a full assessment, met certain standards with respect to reliability, durability, safety and aftersales service.

Clive Thursfield's Chairman's report in the September 1989 Newsletter No.7 reported that membership had increased by almost 100% to 120, that a collaboration with The Children's Communication Charity (ICAN) was in its final stages of negotiation, and that the Trustees had each taken on specific roles as requested by members at the first AGM. He also recorded his special thanks to Ena Davies who had recently stood down as a Trustee. (Ena had run the initial conference in Cardiff at which ISAAC (UK) was proposed, was an inspiring driving force, one of the founders of ISAAC (UK) and one of the two original signatories of the Memorandum and Articles of Association.)

ISAAC UK's move from RADAR to ICAN as a new hosting body was precipitated by the ending of the grant from the Department of Health that had funded the secretarial support for the ISAAC (UK) secretary Jo Stracey. Also at that point in time George Wilson of RADAR was retiring and Jo Stracey was moving to another post.

ICAN expressed an interest in collaboration with ISAAC (UK) because this offered a chance to extend the spectrum of communication impairments with which it was involved.

The first ISAAC (UK) National Conference was held at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) on 27/28 September **1989**. The event was staged in association with ICAN and featured Shirley McNaughton from Canada (the first President of ISAAC) as its keynote speaker. Gail Van Tatenhove from the USA also attended and presented a paper on AAC and Severe Learning Difficulties. The content of this conference was inspiring in spite of the very basic facilities:

I have two recollections of this conference where we were housed in a student accommodation tower block next to a railway line and in which the windows in the communal showers were broken. Taking a shower involved standing in such an icy blast that even the water seemed cold. The other memory was going



Clive Thursfield – First Chair of Communication Matters

1989

Clive Thursfield's Chairman's report... reported that membership had increased by almost 100%

to a night club with a number of people including Prue Fuller. The music was so loud that conversation was impossible except for Prue and someone who chatted away for the entire time we were there using Paget Gorman signing. This was the first time I really saw the value of this system!! *Janet Larcher*

Janice Murray remembers the train running along the lines immediately next to the building and being "gobsmacked" to be eating dinner with one of the greats of AAC. *Shirley McNaughton.*

1990 In August 1990 the ISAAC Biennial Conference was held in Stockholm. ISAAC conferences were held alternately in North America and in Europe, the logic being that the conferences held in North America made more money than those in Europe and therefore generated funds that maintained the ISAAC office. For the first time, representatives from the UK attended an ISAAC Board meeting.

Janet Larcher and Janet Scott were the UK representatives at the ISAAC Board meeting and remember that it seemed then to be a rather boring and pointless exercise, "...with us raising various coloured pieces of card – and really not understanding what we were supposed to be doing." They questioned how people from non-English speaking countries were coping if two native speakers could not fully comprehend or feel a useful part of what was going on.

Other memories of this conference in Stockholm include using the train system to get to the conference venue and being delighted to find that the trains were fully wheelchair accessible.

"Janet Scott and I had to share a pizza because we could not afford one each. However, these early international conferences were very friendly and people from different nations mixed and exchanged ideas very freely." *Janet Larcher*

The 1990 ISAAC (UK) conference was held at Leicester University and was the first to have a significant number of users of AAC equipment present. The picture on the front of the Autumn 1990 Newsletter number 11 (right) shows a number of the users of AAC on the Platform. During this conference, at the AGM, the Trustees were charged with setting up a User Forum.



My team at the Spastics Society (now Scope) were the instigators of this session as well as the use of videoed interviews with users of AAC. I remember the nightmare of arranging transport for all the users of AAC to get to the conference, and of pressing my son to use my car to collect one of them. I'm glad that it was only later that I heard he had been driving and simultaneously writing notes in response to chat from the deaf user who communicated using a Lightwriter. *Janet Larcher*

1991 In the autumn of 1990 ICAN decided to cease funding administrative support for ISAAC (UK) as of December 1990. Numerous options were considered but in the spring of 1991, a decision was made to bring in a fund-raiser. This fundraiser was not to be paid directly but was to raise his salary as well as funds for ISAAC UK – but unfortunately he managed neither. As part of this move into fund raising it was suggested that ISAAC (UK) should change its name to something 'more accessible' that 'would be a positive way for us to get ourselves known, and would assist in fund raising and promotion activities'. After much discussion, it was suggested that we would remain as ISAAC (UK) but adopt a trading name of COMMA – Communication Matters. *Communication Matters* would be the name used for the Newsletter while the abbreviated version COMMA would be incorporated into a logo as the new name of the organisation. In fact at the time of Newsletter 14 (Summer 1991) Communication Matters was the accepted name of the organisation and COMMA was no longer used. Communication Matters very quickly became shortened to **CM**, the name by which it is commonly known in the UK today. Roger Potter was made ISAAC (UK) Company Secretary – the first mention of this role – and Alice Meacham became ISAAC (UK) administrator.

Janet Scott remembers around this time worried phone calls and conversations with people like Arlene Kraat on behalf of ISAAC – there was a lot of concern

1991
Communication
Matters very quickly
became shortened
to 'CM'

about the UK wanting to change the name from ISAAC ... and what this might imply. There was also some concern that the name COMMA was rather dismissive ... so that's probably why it never actually really got off the ground.

1991 AGM documents reveal that:

- The income for the year ending December 1990 was £7,929 whereas expenditure was £9,003
- The proposed budget for 1992 was £17,806 of which £10,000 was to be achieved through fund raising
- A new Communication Matters (CM) business plan with nine objectives was agreed based on the proposed budget which was augmented by the anticipated fund raising

After the 1991 conference Alice Meacham moved on and a new secretary for CM, Carole Baidoe-Ansah, was appointed as administrator based in Clive Thursfield's Office.

In 1991 the first Scottish Study Day on AAC was held in Glasgow, hosted by SCTCI and organised / supported by the group of specialist AAC practitioners in Scotland that later became known as 'Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland' (ACiPS). This group still exists, and still runs annual Study Days to share best practice for professionals, and to include and link with Scottish people who use AAC. ACiPS is not a formal group so is not exactly a Scottish branch of CM, but ACiPS committee members are all members of CM and between them, over the years since 1991, have included a significant number of CM office-bearers - one past Chair (Janet Scott), several past Trustees (Sally Millar, Deborah Jans, Pamela Cornwallis, Dithé Fisher), and a Journal Editor (Sally Millar). ACiPS also runs Study Days in partnership with CM from time to time.

1992 In August **1992** The ISAAC biennial conference was held in Philadelphia and a larger UK contingent attended that event than had attended the Stockholm conference. American conferences at this time held their meetings, presentations and exhibition in a hotel and most delegates stayed there too. This made for a friendly and integrated event with much mixing amongst delegates from different countries.

For the first time a 'Trustees' Report' appeared in the September 1992 CM Newsletter. This two-page report covered a number of issues including membership, funds, National Symposium, Newsletter, and role, nomination and election of Trustees. It revealed that membership had dropped from the previous year and in June 1992 stood at only 138 members. Unfortunately the fund-raiser had not raised any funds and the CM bank account was heading for the red. Due to the financial difficulties the number of Newsletters that members received each year was reduced from four to three and the funding for Newsletters beyond 1992 was uncertain.

The Newsletter section of the report spelled out the complicated system then in place to produce the newsletter - "articles and items of interest, along with photos or other graphic material are solicited - elicited - chased up - hunted down or otherwise 'got' (as in 'blood from a stone') by the Editors and the Editorial Board, and collated in Edinburgh; copy is then sent to Bournemouth for design and layout of the Newsletter artwork; the finished draft is then sent back to Edinburgh for proofreading; then back to Bournemouth for finishing touches; then over to Norwich for printing. The finished Newsletter is then delivered by the printers to the CM office in Birmingham, at which point Carole Baidoe-Ansah, the CM administrator, inserts any extra mailing items and sends the packs out to ISAAC members!!" Having taken over this complex arrangement when they became joint editors of the Newsletter in 1992, Sally Millar and Patrick Poon re-organised the system to produce the newsletter in a more streamlined fashion.

At the 1992 AGM a number of cost-cutting measures were agreed:

- The number of Trustees was reduced from nine to seven
- The number of Trustees meetings was reduced to two per year
- The part-time paid administrator post was discontinued - all work to be done by the Trustees themselves

1991

A new Communication Matters (CM) business plan with nine objectives was agreed



Patrick Poon and Sally Millar

- The price of international journals for members was increased by 20% to cover distribution costs
- Membership materials and all correspondence were to be produced in the cheapest possible medium
- The size and print quality of the Newsletter were reduced

Later that year Clive Thursfield stood down as Chairman and Roger Potter took on the role. Janet Larcher became Treasurer.

Also in 1992, in Scotland, the Lothian Health Board, along with local authority (Education and Social Work) partners City of Edinburgh, East, Mid, and West Lothian, established KeyComm, an AAC service for children and adults. Similarly to FACCT, KeyComm provided an assessment service, provision of equipment and training for local professionals.

1993

The government Initiative on Communication Aids for Children (ICAC) was launched in April 1993. This initiative was jointly funded for three years by the Departments of Health and Education (England and Wales only). It was warmly welcomed by professionals working with children using AAC because of the hope that some co-ordination might result between these two government departments with respect to the availability of communication aids. The project aims were:

- To facilitate and monitor the coordination of augmentative communication services for children, to examine assessment provision and support, and, in particular, to draw together health and education professionals, voluntary organisations and carers
- To produce guidelines for good practice through the establishment of a working party
- To collect, collate and disseminate relevant information on service providers
- To develop regional networking and training programmes

The initiative funded purchase of communication aids for some children, and did result in three publications – (i) **Guidelines To Good Practice**, (ii) **Briefing For Purchasers And Managers** and (iii) **Information For Parents**.

In 1993 the official mouthpiece of CM became a 'Journal' rather than a 'Newsletter'. This was done because the 'articles appearing were of considerable substance relating to research, policy and professional matters – not just news'. Individual CM Membership fees were increased from £25 to £30. Funding was made available from the Gatsby Foundation for the development of local groups for users of AAC. Large funds were not available but small grants could be made, for example, to offset the costs of travel and hire of a venue.

The 1993 CM Symposium (as it was called in those days – 'conference' was considered too grand a title) celebrated the tenth anniversary of the founding of ISAAC (UK) with Bob Fawcus (one of the founding Trustees) cutting the cake. There was also a very memorable real 'ding-dong' presentation during which Barry Romich (of Prentke Romich) and Walt Woltosz (of Words+) argued as to whether static or dynamic screen displays were the best /easiest to learn and use for people communicating using AAC systems. This was an argument that ran and ran, and certainly got everyone at the conference fully involved.

Conferences were hardly luxury affairs...

Colin Clayton remembers trying to organise the symposium at Portland College, Notts. because CM was broke:

We turned up the day before to ensure smooth running and after complaining that the rooms we were given still had students' dirty washing in the corner we were marched up to the bosses office where basically we were told 'Tough!'

Janet Scott says:

I can't remember which one, but one of the first Portland conferences involved Tony Jones having to go home to bring towels and soap etc for delegates because none were supplied. Liberator Ltd used to provide entertainment at conferences at Portland – I remember David Morris playing the bagpipes and singing. Also I



Roger Potter

1993

The official mouthpiece of CM became a 'Journal' rather than a 'Newsletter'.



Bob Fawcus cutting the cake



Walt Woltosz & Barry Romich

remember Paul Hawes of Sensory Software playing the clarsach at a number of conferences.

Sally Millar remembers barn dances, with 'callers' to shout out the moves, which were good fun at the time, although were discontinued as more people using wheelchairs started attending conferences (and as younger delegates requested less 'fuddy-duddy' pursuits!).

At Christmas 1993 Roger Potter stood down as Chairman due to pressure of work and Janet Larcher took over as Chair whilst also retaining the post of Treasurer.

1994 In April 1994 work began on a new CM leaflet to inform people about AAC and CM. In September the conference moved to Lancaster University for the first time.

In Scotland, Aberdeen City Council established an AAC assessment service for Aberdeen children (linked to the TASC service for children with special educational needs).

In October 1994 the ISAAC Biennial Conference was held in Maastricht, in the Netherlands. At that time ISAAC Germany had the largest number of members and most of its members were teachers rather than speech and language therapists (who are typically the largest group in other countries). Sadly most German members were teaching in October and could not attend the conference even though it was close to home.

1995 Toby Churchill caused quite a stir in early 1995 by his company winning the Queens Award for Exports and having his new factory opened by David Gilmour of the pop group Pink Floyd. On a more serious note, Facilitated Communication was already a hotly debated topic and two articles appeared in the April edition of the CM Newsletter attempting to encapsulate the two sides of the debate.

By 1995, after being in the financial doldrums for a while, CM started to feel more financially secure and began to 'motor'. The membership of CM had risen to 201; a small (A5) cream and red leaflet giving general information about CM was available; CASC started running roadshows; an advocacy project (funded by the Viscount Nuffield Auxiliary Fund) started work; and small grants were made available to kickstart initiatives and projects to advance the knowledge and use of AAC.

In February 1995 a CM delegation representing all aspects of the organisation (Simon Churchill, Pam Enderby, Prue Fuller, Janet Larcher, Liz Panton, and Anthony Robertson) met with the junior Health Minister John Bowis. It was hoped that more money would be made available to fund communication aids but this was not to be. He did, however, call for examples of joint commissioning of communication aid services by local Health, Education, Employment and Social Service agencies. It was later announced that as of April 1996, GP fundholders and community fundholders in England and Wales would be able to purchase communication aids up to a ceiling of £6000 for individual patients.

The CM 1995 symposium was again held at Lancaster University and Bruce Baker ('Mr. Minspeak') and Bob Seaver from the USA were welcome presenters. This was the beginning of a truly 'international' flavour to CM conferences that was to develop further in future years.

1996 In Scotland in 1996 Ayrshire and Arran Health Board established a part-time Speech and Language Therapy based AAC assessment and provision service for children and adults living in this NHS area.

The September 1996 Journal reported news from the ISAAC meeting in Vancouver including the creation of a paid ISAAC executive post, reduction in the size of the ISAAC executive committee, a face on the internet, request for User representation on the executive committee and the announcement of the first AAC Distinguished User Award lecture for ISAAC.

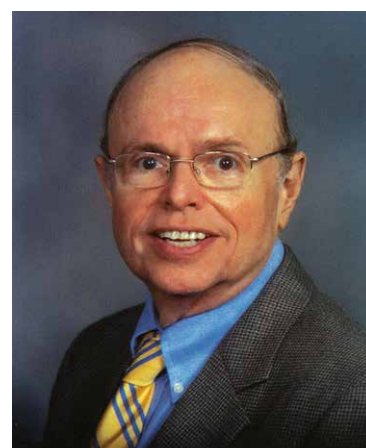
The desire to fully include people who use AAC in the CM organisation was strong, though it was not always easy to see how best to do this. In the UK, the supplier Liberator Ltd had been funding Anthony Robertson to run AAC user groups but this ceased in 1996. Funding was sought from various sources but as none was identified CM itself funded the four spring 1997 user group meetings



Janet Larcher



Toby Churchill receiving an Honorary Engineering Doctorate from Bath University (2010)



Bruce Baker

- North West England, Scotland (Motherwell College), Nottingham, and South East England (Valance School).

It was agreed that running the CM symposium on an informal, voluntary 'two chums' basis (Colin Clayton and Mark Williams) could not go on, given its increasing size and complexity. It was agreed to pay £5000 to his employer the Wolfson Centre for Colin's time over one year to co-ordinate the conference activities. Mark Williams chaired the Conference Papers Committee, and other CM Trustees took on the remaining specific conference activities.

1997

The 1997 Conference at Lancaster was the first to have an extra Study Day added to the conference with an outside speaker who that year was Linda Burkhart from the USA. It was also the first at which a CM Distinguished AAC User award was made; this was presented to Sylvia Grant and Kate Ellis, both from Scotland. The award allowed them to attend the CM conference free to deliver their papers, and also to have their ISAAC conference fee paid if they attended the next international conference.

Other activities in 1997 included the development of a full set of leaflets about CM and AAC funded by the Viscount Nuffield Auxiliary Fund. These leaflets: *What can I say*, *First Steps*, *How to be a good listener*, *Using symbols for communication*, *Let your hands do the talking*, *Accessing communication aids and computers* also resulted in the development of the 'jigsaw piece' logo for CM, designed by Caroline Gray.

Judy Robertson successfully achieved validation for the AAC curriculum from the Open College of the North West. The curriculum was piloted in three FE colleges with the plan for it to go live in September 1998. CM paid the £3000 fee to City & Guilds to make this happen. The book *Michelle Finds A Voice* (number 42 in the series for adults with learning difficulties produced by St Georges Hospital) was launched, featuring a young 'heroine' with communication difficulties who is able, with AAC, to communicate effectively with the police and to have more control over her life.

1998

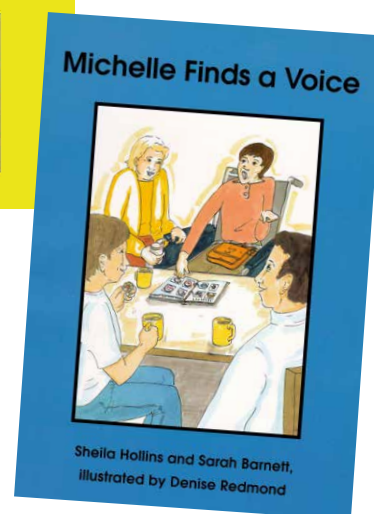
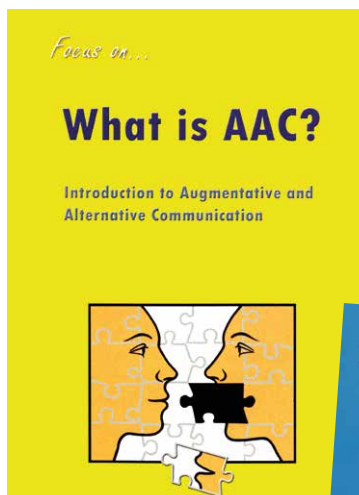
Up until 1998 all the work of CM was done by the Trustees but as each was also working full time, and as the organisation had grown, it was becoming difficult to get through all that was required to maintain an efficient organisation. In early 1998 Patrick Poon was employed by CM for two days a week for six months to do the CM administration and thereby to scope how much actual administration work needed to be done. One of his first tasks was to rationalise the databases and spreadsheets and pull them together into one administrative system.

The 1998 ISAAC biennial conference was held at University College in Dublin. The relative closeness of Dublin resulted in many UK participants. As usual, Irish hospitality flowed, (albeit occasionally in the absence of food), so bonhomie abounded.

In the UK, Jenny Selby won the CM Distinguished user award, Joan Murphy published her first article in the CM Journal on Talking Mats, and the December edition of the CM Journal that year was given over to the manufacturers and suppliers of communication aids. CM published its collectively written work *Advocacy: Speaking Up and Speaking Out! Pathways to Self-Advocacy*, developed and designed with and for people who use AAC.

1999

In January 1999 Prue Fuller became President of ISAAC, (having been Vice President for two years), Janet Larcher was elected as Chair of the Board of Directors of ISAAC, and the CM Journal became an affiliated publication of ISAAC and was therefore easier to sell abroad.



Prue Fuller holding some chin switches

The 1999 CM conference started on a Sunday for the first time and then added an extra study day on the Wednesday led by Carol Goossens from the USA. Carol Goossens and Juliet Goldbart were the Keynote speakers at the conference. Alan Martin presented the CM Distinguished User Lecture.

CM revealed a vastly improved new-look website which enabled people to not only learn about AAC and the work of CM but also to join CM on-line and order books and other resources. The journal used colour photographs for the first time that year. CM was gradually 'upping its game'!

2000

In **2000** CM members Katie Clarke and Tamsin Crothers, founders of the new **1Voice** organisation, provided their first notice for a 1Voice family weekend which was to be a sociable affair providing activities for the children and young people while hopefully providing time for parents to socialise together and learn from each other. It was obviously a great success, because they immediately started to plan the next event.

Scope launched a new campaign to ensure communication aid users and potential users received the appropriate equipment, training and ongoing support. They hoped to build on the campaigning work already done by many people in the field and to establish the right to equipment and support as a human and civil rights issue. They launched the findings of their survey as the report *Speak for Yourself* at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton in September.

Inclusive Technology (a supplier company that had grown out of the old Manchester SEMERC) became a supplier of training under the New Opportunities Funding scheme ('NOF training') funded by the Department of Education. Through partnerships with a variety of specialist practitioners, it delivered training in educational IT adapted to pupils with special needs (including awareness and basic AAC knowledge) widely across the UK over a three year period.

A popular and innovative communication aid supplier Cambridge Adaptive Communication merged with Possum Controls Ltd.

CM was also very active: it launched a new award to encourage and reward users of AAC systems at a more basic level than that achieved by the Distinguished User awards. This was a new award to acknowledge the achievements of people who had recently made a major breakthrough in learning to use any system to communicate other than through speech, for example: using a picture card to order a drink in the pub; using a communication aid to join in school assembly. Entries could be for individuals or a group. There was small cash prize, a certificate of achievement and one free place to the CM2000 National Symposium for the winners.

CM revitalised its Small Grant service to encourage and support projects or activities that furthered the aims of CM, such as an AAC User event or travel expenses to get to one, or the costs of publishing an information leaflet, or the costs of a social research project. CM Trustees also began development of a three-year plan for CM (2000-2003) which was revealed at the AGM and published in the November journal. The CM conference had an international flavour with speakers from Australia, Belgium and Sweden, with Mats Granlund as the invited keynote speaker.

2001

Much of CM's energy in **2001** was concerned with supporting and following up on the Scope campaign *Speak For Yourself*. As it was an election year, members were encouraged to chase up their local MP to ensure it was brought to the attention of as many MPs as possible and wherever an opportunity arose for it to become an election issue.

In April 2001 the Department of Education and Skills (DES, formerly DfEE) announced a £10million Capital Modernisation Fund to provide high-tech communication aids to children with special educational needs and disabilities (England and Wales only). The equipment was to help pupils with communication difficulties to access the curriculum. It was also planned to help ease the transition of pupils to employment or further and higher education. Funding was also provided to pay for the assessment and training, which is crucial to the success of the use of such systems. The project was managed by the



Mats Grunlund speaking at the 2000 CM Conference in Lancaster



Gail Van Tatenhove

2000

CM revitalised its Small Grant service to encourage and support projects or activities

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) on behalf of the DES, and ran for two years starting in 2002. This project is referred to as the Communication Aids Project (CAP).

Also in April 2001, the Department of Health for England and Wales announced a new budget for Community Equipment of £100 million over three years, from 2001 onwards. Equipment included simple care equipment and adaptations, such as grab rails and pressure relief mattresses, as well as communication aids. The underfunding of communication aids in the past was acknowledged in the report.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill went through the House of Commons. The 'All Party Parliamentary Disability Group' in the House of Commons, chaired by Lord Jack Ashley, invited Scope to make a presentation on its Speak for Yourself campaign. As a result, James Ford from Scope, and Anthony Robertson and Simon Churchill from CM made a presentation to this group and received a very positive reception.

CM introduced new procedures for proposing and voting for new Trustees – evidently successful, as nine new people stood for election to be Trustees of CM.

The 2001 conference was inundated with excellent papers and, for the first time, some had to be refused due to lack of space. Gail Van Tatenhove from the USA was the guest speaker and delivered a separate Study Day on the day after the conference as well as an earlier Study Day in Scotland.

Janet Scott remembers that the conference took place just after 9/11 – and when Gail was presenting in Scotland and on her way to Lancaster she still had not heard of the fate of a relative who worked in the Twin Towers – nightmare! She did learn at some point during the CM conference that he had managed to escape ...she was supremely professional and no-one would have guessed that she was extremely anxious and stressed throughout the whole period.

CM's 'Focus On' leaflets finally became available for distribution. The leaflets – *Accessing Communication Aids and Computers, First Steps; How to be a Good Listener, Let your Hands do the Talking, Using Symbols for Communication, What is AAC?, What can I say?* – were designed to be easy to read and as jargon-free as possible.

2002 was a busy year, getting to grips with the Communication Aids Project. Meanwhile, the Trustees were reviewing the CM Constitution with the aim of making it more 'user-friendly' and more up to date. As part of that exercise they also developed an Equal Opportunities policy.

CM organised a Study Day on *AAC and Aphasia: New Ideas and Creativity* at Birmingham City at which the speakers were Joan Murphy, Katherine Black and Stephen Bloch. The CM conference had two invited keynote speakers – Pam Enderby and Keith Park – who informed and challenged in equal measure. The ISAAC biennial conference was held in Odense, Denmark.

2003 In 2003 what was formerly known as the CM Distinguished AAC User Award was renamed The Communication Matters Scholarship for people who use AAC, and was focused on the person submitting the best paper on the topic 'What I would do if I won the Lottery'. The winning entry would be presented at the CM2003 Symposium.

A great deal of work was going on in the background: a re-vamped website was launched, the booklet *Safety in Numbers* was published, the CM constitution was being re-worked and individual members were involved in trying to progress the Integrated Community Equipment Service for England to ensure that communication aids were fully included.

2004 was a year of administrative changes:

- The Symposium /Conference moved its venue from Lancaster to Leicester. (Few people remembered that it had previously been at Leicester in 1990.) Overall people were pleased with the new location even if it meant learning their way around a very different campus



CM banner outside the Leicester Conference Centre

2001

The 2001 conference was inundated with excellent papers and, for the first time, some had to be refused due to lack of space

- The Journal updated its style
- The AGM approved the budget for CM's first 'proper' office (it had previously been a room in Patrick and Sally's home, which had long ago run out of space for effective working and for storage). It relocated to a small serviced office in Edinburgh

The ISAAC conference was held in Brazil – the first time that the international conference had been held in the southern hemisphere and the first time in a country where AAC was not well established. The significant role that the UK has played and does play in ISAAC was confirmed by the number of UK people in significant offices within ISAAC:

- ISAAC Executive – Katie Price
- Vice Chair of the Board – Janet Scott
- Bulletin Editor – Janice Murray
- AAC Journal Editor – John Todman

(Previously Prue Fuller had been on the ISAAC Executive committee and became ISAAC President in 1999; Janet Larcher was Chair of the Board from 1999 – 2003; Anthony Roberson and Katie Price had been members of the ISAAC Executive; Janet Scott and Janice Murray had been on the ISAAC Board.)

2005

2005 was the 20th Anniversary of the founding of CM – although full celebrations were held off until CM was 21! A dream catcher that 'caught' ideas of conference attendees of what they hoped would happen in the field of AAC was a very popular feature of the conference.

New Bylaws were voted on at the year's AGM which sought to provide working rules for CM that reflected the massive changes that had taken place since CM was founded.

Karen Erickson from the USA provided three extremely popular full day Study Days in different locations around the UK on 'Successful Literacy for Children with Severe Communication Difficulties: What does it take?'

2006

In **2006** CM celebrated its coming of age – 21 years since it was originally founded. At the conference, many people shared memories of AAC in the 1980s, the growth of AAC, ISAAC and CM as well as their thoughts for the future.

It was, once again, a financially worrying time – CAP was ending in England and there was concern as to where funds were going to come from for repairs and new equipment. CM's finances had taken a downturn and the small grants had to be shelved until funds improved. A sponsored Inca Trek was undertaken by a few hardy souls to raise funds for CM. Trustee Bernie Henderson ran the London Marathon for the second (and not the last) time, for CM fund raising.

Toby Hewson was awarded a BT Childline award having been nominated by Beth Moulam as a 'Superhero'. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) awarded RCSLT Honours to Janet Scott and an RCSLT Fellowship to Sally Millar for exceptional contributions to the profession of Speech and Language Therapy.

Two American AAC experts gave Study Days during this year: Carol Goossens on 'Aided Language Stimulation' and Tracy Kovach on 'The Continuum of Learning'.

CM published a newly created DVD – *The Power of Communication*.

Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland created a new website.

Work began in reviewing the CM Governance. The ISAAC conference was held in Dusseldorf, Germany.

2007

2007 saw the new CM Governance and Articles of Association passed at the AGM and then published. A major issue to come to light during these re-workings of documents was that legally the only actual 'members' of CM were the Trustees of the Charity Communication Matters, who are listed as Company Directors with Companies House. (Previously, through custom and practice, all those who had paid a 'membership' fee assumed that they were full voting members of CM.) This posed a challenge to Trustees, who then quickly sought to reassure the paid-up 'membership' that their new role was of equal importance, within CM.



The dreamcatcher of AAC hopes



Janet Scott cutting CMs 21st birthday cake

Having taken legal advice, 'Associate' membership was instituted for ordinary individual members, along with as many safeguards as possible in the Memorandum and Articles of Association to ensure that Associate Members still had a strong say in the way CM was run.

CM continued to experience financial difficulties which resulted in price increases and cutbacks. To drive forward the ethos and hopes of CM, several sub-committees were set up: Finance and Funding, Publications, Marketing, and Increasing Involvement. This last subgroup started a leadership project to identify a person who uses AAC to join the Trustees in a trainee role.

During the year Scope had been collecting information via its communication aid survey and based on this launched their *No Voice – No Choice* campaign. The Government's John Bercow Commission³ was instigated and was due to report in July 2008.

2008 was a busy and high profile year. CM made submissions to the John Bercow Commission whose interim draft paper was published in March. It then made a further submission before the publication of the final paper in July.

In Scotland, Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland, along with the RCSLT and Capability Scotland, launched the campaign Give Us The Right To Communicate involving a survey showing the patchiness of AAC provision, meetings with MSPs, a successful petition and a motion on AAC debated in the Scottish Parliament. Following a meeting with MSPs and a Scottish Minister, a short term working party was set up, in which Scottish members of CM were prominent, to draw up a draft report for improving AAC provision in Scotland. 1Voice teenagers, who had launched their DVD – *Listen to Me* – at the 2007 CM Conference, in 2008 won the Diana Award, to improve and inspire the lives of others.

The ISAAC international conference was held in Montreal, Canada and in the lead up to this ISAAC launched a story writing competition. Twenty-five entries were from Great Britain with Sean Lucas winning the international youth prize for his entry *M16 Rescue*. The twenty-five UK entries were returned to the UK to be judged by a UK panel with the promise that the best three would be read at an event in London in October. Few could have guessed how prestigious the location for the event would be. 11 Downing Street had been planned but to ease access for all concerned it was moved to Number 10 Downing Street and was kindly hosted by Maggie and Alistair Darling. A very memorable evening was had by everyone who attended; the winners were Sean Lucas for the under 11s, Beth Moulam for the 12-16s, and Alan Martin for the adults.

Meanwhile in the background a survey was conducted in January of what members thought that CM was doing (and should be doing), and what was going well or could be done better. The online AAC Forum was up and running, as was the E-news; a bid was submitted to the Big Lottery for research funding; negotiations were opened with research organisations interested in CM's bid to the Big Lottery; and interested CM members were meeting with Trustees to develop a set of standards for AAC provision.

Not surprisingly, a motion was raised at the 2008 CM AGM to endorse a decision by the Trustees to seek funding for paid staff to assist with the ever-expanding range of demands and activities with which CM was involved, following the Bercow report.

2009 was a year of upheaval and consolidation. Liz Moulam stood down halfway through her intended three years in the Chair, for personal reasons, and Toby Hewson stepped up to being Chair although he decided he would only fulfil this role as a temporary measure until the AGM. Janice Murray took over as Chair at the AGM.

David Morgan also stood down after six years as Chair of the eCAT section of the British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA). David Weatherburn took over the role.

2008

1Voice teenagers, who had launched their DVD – *Listen to Me* – at the 2007 CM Conference, in 2008 won the Diana Award, to improve and inspire the lives of others.



Alistair Darling presenting Beth Moulam with her award at 10 Downing Street

³ A government commissioned review of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

2009 In England, following on from the Bercow Report, the Communication Council was formed with one subgroup (as of November) for AAC. CM member and former Trustee, Anna Reeves of ACE Centre North was appointed as the National Co-ordinator for England. Education expert Jean Gross was appointed in October to be the Communication Champion. This post was jointly funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health and was intended to co-ordinate and build on initiatives to improve services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

Katie Clarke, the founder of 1Voice, was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, as a non SLT who had contributed outstanding services to speech and language therapy for the benefit of those with communication disability.

Janet Scott - who had been Chair of CM for six years from 2000 to 2006 - received the great honour of being made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to speech and language therapy in Scotland.

Pam Enderby was one of the plenary speakers at the CM Conference. She was fascinated by the signer and really questioned whether she could sign whatever was said. With that in mind she used a swear word and then paused to see if the word would be signed - it was!

2010 In **2010**, following on from the Bercow Report, Naidex provided a 'communication village' as part of its exhibition in Birmingham; in addition CM gave talks on each of the three days of the exhibition, raising awareness of AAC.

CM's research project *Communication Matters - Research Matters: An AAC Evidence Base*, appointed Katie Holmes as Research Manager and Dave Morgan as Research lead and began the first phase of its research which was to map the extent of need for AAC.

An adjournment debate in the House of Commons on Speech Therapy Services for Children tabled by Paul Maynard was held in November.

Meanwhile, in the background the website was revamped, the CM opened a Twitter account, some members attended the ISAAC conference in Barcelona, Toby Churchill was awarded an Honorary Engineering Doctorate by Bath University. CM was, however, unsuccessful in its bids for funding for a Chief Executive for CM. The very successful 2010 conference welcomed plenary speakers Jean Gross the Communication Champion, special needs education innovator Carol Allan, and SLT Joan Murphy who posed the question "Can AAC ever really work?"

2011 In **2011** CM coordinated a wave of AAC awareness raising events from Devon to the Scottish Highlands, celebrating and promoting the 'Hello' campaign for the National Year of Communication. 'Hello' was run in partnership with Communication Champion, Jean Gross, to make children and young people's communication development a priority in homes and schools across the country. Events culminated in a celebration event at the House of Commons organised by The Communication Trust. Over 200 Hello supporters gathered with MPs and Ministers and were praised for their efforts in raising the profile of communication. A new booklet - *Other Ways of Speaking* - was also launched, in collaboration with the Communication Trust, to meet the information needs of people who were coming new to AAC.

In Scotland CM supported the continued lobbying of Scottish Government around AAC funding and support which resulted in SLT Alison Gray finalising a National Review of AAC Services, and eventual publication of the *Right to Speak* report in 2012. Paul Nisbet, Joint Co-ordinator of CALL Scotland, was honoured by the University of Edinburgh with the Principal's Medal in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Scottish education community and beyond.

CM was successful in its bid to 'Awards for All' to produce an online training course and educational materials to be freely accessible from the CM website.

The AAC Standards documentation, which had been worked on by CM Trustees and members at a series of meetings, was endorsed by the Royal College



Pam Enderby and signer at the CM Conference



Toby Hewson, Dave Morgan, Katie Holmes and Mike Clarke with the cheque to fund Research Matters



Katie Caryer with her individual 'Hello' Campaign hand



Jean Gross speaking at the Communication Matters Conference

of Speech and Language Therapists and published to provide accepted and recognised quality statements against which an AAC Service can be measured.

2012 In **2012**, the Scottish 'Right to Speak' initiative (costing £4million) was formally launched, to be administered by NHS Education for Scotland (NES). In this first phase, substantial grants were made to fund the purchase of AAC equipment (through an identified 'AAC Lead' in each NHS Health Board); to support the development of multi-agency AAC; and to initiate projects on a variety of aspects of AAC partnerships. Scottish members of CM or Augmentative Communication in Practice: Scotland played a leading role.

In March 2012, CM and eCAT ran a joint event at the House of Lords to help maintain focus on the work of Jean Gross and to ensure a significant place for AAC in future legislation and initiatives.

Behind the scenes, work was progressing to achieve the objectives of the CM Five Year Plan: agreement was given to the use of a lobbying company and to establishing a part-time Marketing post employing Sandra Hartley. Safe Social Networking Study / Workshop Days (for people who use AAC) were expanded to further locations.

The ISAAC conference was held in Pittsburgh, USA.

The *Outcome Measurement Project* document was published in September. Outcome Measurement tools are recognised as a means of demonstrating efficacy and impact of intervention. There were no outcome measurement tools in use in the UK that were designed from a perspective of aided communication needs. The project team reviewed a range of tools and measures commonly used in the UK, appraising them in terms of their usefulness to measurement of aided communication.

Dr. Annalu Waller became a Professor at Dundee University with a Chair in Human Communication Technologies.

2013 **2013** brought changes for CM – the conference moved from Leicester to Leeds University. Less dramatically, the eCAT group became the BHTA AAC section.

The CM-RM (Communication Matters – Research Matters) AAC Evidence Base research project's Final Report was launched in April in partnership with the launch of the Department of Education funded project to develop resources to inform stakeholders on AAC commissioning arrangements. The search for funding to maintain the AACknowledge.org.uk website continued.

Paul Maynard MP was able to table a question in Prime Minister's Question Time resulting in a more overt commitment to funding specialised services for AAC.

CM conducted an online survey of members and non-members which indicated that most people wanted CM to work on increasing awareness of AAC and felt satisfied that CM was doing a good job.

Lee Ridley ('Lost Voice Guy') accepted the invitation to become a CM Patron. He is a great advocate for AAC and through his standup comedy not only makes people laugh but also addresses thought-provoking issues with a serious underlying point.

Throughout 2013 an ISAAC position statement on Facilitated Communication was prepared. Many people were unhappy about both the content of this paper and the manner in which the content was assembled. This resulted in a lively exchange of views at the 2013 CM conference. CM refused to endorse the position statement at the ISAAC Board Meeting. (It was passed, however, with 23 in favour, four against, and two abstentions.)

The Scottish Right to Speak project continued, with further funding for AAC equipment, partnerships, projects and, particularly, educational and training opportunities for practitioners.

2014 In **2014** it was announced that Patrick Poon, CM's administrator for 15 years, was going to retire in 2015, as was his assistant Peter Head. This resulted in



Peter and Angela Zein meet Lord Rennard at the House of Lords reception



Paul Maynard speaking at the CM conference in Leeds



Peter Zein talking to Cathy Harris and David Cameron at the opening of the new ACE Centre 2013

the development of new job descriptions, interviews and preparation for the handover of CM administration from Patrick and Peter to Hilary Gardner and Emily Campbell, as well as the eventual relocation of the CM office from Edinburgh to Leeds.

On the government front, 2014 saw the signing-off of £15 million pounds for the Convergence Fund for England and the inclusion of AAC in the Special Services Commissioning. The hub and spoke structure for services was agreed and 13 specialist hubs were identified.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) formally launched *IPAACKS: Informing and Profiling AAC Knowledge and Skills*. Written by Janet Scott, and building partly on earlier work carried out in CM's AAC Competencies project plus policy document 'Quality Standards for AAC Services', this framework outlines the core values and commitments, and the specific AAC knowledge and skills required by those who work with people who use, or who may benefit from, AAC.

The ISAAC conference was held in Lisbon, Portugal at which Professor Stephen Hawking was given a Lifetime Achievement award. Former CM Trustee, Treasurer and Chair Janet Larcher was awarded a Distinguished Service Award.

2015 2015 was a year of celebratory events also tinged with sadness. A celebration lunch was organised in Leeds and attended by old friends and colleagues to say farewell and thank you to Patrick Poon for his 15 years of dedicated service to CM as well as to Peter Head – the hard-working unseen additional member of the office. The event also said goodbye and an enormous thank you to Sally Millar for her 25 years as editor of the CM Journal. The event also took the opportunity to present Janet Larcher with the ISAAC Distinguished Service Award in person (it had been collected on her behalf at the ISAAC conference in Lisbon the previous year by Beth Moulam).

An event was also held at Leeds University to publicise the new CM office and to introduce faculties and local businesses to CM and the work that it does.

In Scotland, the three year Right To Speak initiative was drawn to a close at a conference celebrating the work of the AAC partnerships and projects, and the participation and achievements of people who use AAC. There was still no funding in place for ongoing support of AAC. CM supported the lobbying of the Scottish Parliament in relation to the legislation about provision of 'Voice Equipment' currently going through the Scottish Parliament within a Bill about electronic equipment in the NHS⁴. The need was to ensure accuracy in the wording of the legislation, and that the directives were sufficiently robust to ensure not only that funding for AAC equipment is made in a timely and equitable manner, but also that people are provided with the support they need to learn to use their AAC system.

Over the year the everyday work of CM continued:

- 8 Roadshows
- 3 Study Days – 'Autism and AAC', 'Voice Banking', and 'Literacy'
- A working group on AAC & Literacy
- Further development of relationships with FE Colleges
- Sales of publications and availability of Focus On Leaflets
- Successful website for updates on many things especially on Specialised Commissioning
- Successful conference with 430 delegates and including speakers from Australia and Germany
- Network day with 1Voice on the Sunday of the conference



Peter Head, Patrick Poon, Sally Millar and Janet Larcher after the celebration lunch

2015

The need was to ensure accuracy in the wording of the legislation, and that the directives were sufficiently robust

⁴ Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Bill Stage 2 Amendment on the provision of voice equipment

CM now and in the future

2016 In **2016**, CM continues to work towards achieving its aims.

CM's **Vision** is a world where all individuals are able to communicate in all aspects of life.

CM's **Mission** is to promote the awareness, understanding and use of all forms of communication, so that individuals can express their thoughts, feelings, needs and desires, using their chosen means.

CM's **Aims** are:

- Increasing **awareness** about AAC
- Involving **PwuAAC** in all activities
- Improving **service standards**
- Encouraging **research**
- **Lobbying** government for change

CM continues to run a successful AAC conference each year and to facilitate Roadshows and Study Days alongside its communications programme through the website, social media, and e-news. 2016 sees the introduction of a Hub and Spoke model for Specialised Commissioning with funding for those with the most complex needs through NHS England. CM continues to raise its profile with other charities and currently works in collaboration with the RCSLT and the Stroke Association on a Communication Access for All project to launch a Communication Access symbol in the UK and pilot accessible business training, supported by funds from the John Ellerman Foundation.

CM is a charity which continues to 'punch well above its weight'!

After a four year term of office, Catherine Harris is standing down as Chair from September 2016. With a new Chair and the Board of Trustees, there are even more opportunities opening up for CM to be a key partner and contributor in various projects and initiatives.

This 'history of CM' celebrates 30 years of work and activity, and the celebrations continue at CM's 30th birthday conference and beyond. Communication Matters is committed to building on the foundation of all the previous work and activity in order to continue to promote and support all people who have an interest in AAC.

Acknowledgements

This history of Communication Matters has been written and collated in celebration of the 30th anniversary since it began.

Janet Larcher volunteered to undertake this piece of work and none of us realised what a major undertaking this would turn out to be!

During the last 30 years we have seen significant changes in the landscape of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). We are sure that this document will be a valued resource both now and in years to come.

The present trustees would like to express our gratitude to Janet Larcher but also give thanks to the numerous members of CM who helped to compile the CM history by sending in copies of journals and photos of equipment, themselves and their children using equipment. Special thanks go to Ruth McMorran, Sally Millar, Janice Murray, Tom Griffiths and John Larcher for their patience in editing, not only this document but all the additional material now on the CM web pages. And lastly sincere thanks are also due to all who have contributed over the years to Communication Matters and to the field of AAC, to make it what it is today.

The Board of Trustees 2016

2016

CM is a charity which continues to 'punch well above its weight'!



The 2015/16 Trustees and CM staff

AAC Equipment and Software

The history of AAC devices and systems is a long one and it would be impossible to include every single device in this book. We've chosen a few highlights here but you can view a much wider selection, which covers examples from most, if not all UK suppliers, online at our website www.communicationmatters.org.uk/resources

Believe it or not, there was a time when computers as we know them today didn't really exist. But, of course, there was still a need for AAC. Early AAC devices were much more "mechanical" and included the likes of...

The Light Box

A selection of lightbulbs behind a plastic screen. When a slide of images was placed on top, a switch could be attached so that a light could be moved around to select a picture or symbol. A similar system existed for selecting real objects. The number of items on the display could be varied as could the speed of the light's movement.



The Rotary Indicator

A clock-like interface that could be populated with pictures, symbols or letters. A single "hand" moved around the face and the switch could be pressed to make a selection. The speed of the hand's movement could be adjusted depending on the user's needs.

The Page Turner –

In the days before touchscreens and e-readers, it was possible to use a mechanical system to turn the pages of a book. A switch attached to the device would trigger a sequence of rollers to move over the book, "grab" the top page and turn it.



Typewriter with Keyguard

For users with good literacy skills, early keyguards started to appear for mechanical typewriters. In common with the keyguards still widely used today, these were sheets of metal and Perspex that sat over the keyboard and allowed the user to more accurately select single keys using a finger or head pointer.

In the 1980s, the advent of the personal computer and the birth of home computing provided the ground for development of the first software-based AAC systems.

Since the early days of AAC, pocket size devices have been a key part of the field. A few examples are on the next page.

The Canon Communicator

A small, battery operated device that originally retailed at just under \$400, the Canon Communicator has an alphabetic keyboard (which could be moved around to different layouts) and a small, built-in printer that printed the message onto a thin strip of paper. It even featured some early phrase banking and text expansion to generate frequent messages more quickly. Later versions included an LCD screen and the ability to connect to a computer to upload and print work.



The Psion Organiser

An early use of mainstream devices in the world of AAC, the Psion Organiser and the devices that followed it featured text-to-speech engines that allowed users to type and read messages aloud. Later versions would feature a larger screen and a full QWERTY keyboard.



The Pocket GoTalk and the MessageMate 8

For times when a few, easily accessible messages are needed, pocket size devices with digital recording capabilities are ideal. Both of these devices, and others like them, feature changeable overlays and "levels", meaning messages for different situations can be stored and quickly swapped. Some devices feature switch scanning.



The Early Lightwriter

Although not exactly pocket size, early examples of the Lightwriter functioned very similarly to those on the market today. Clearly it's not good to change a winning formula!



The Possum Jive, Say-IT-Sam and Casio01

Touchscreen pocket computers provided a new platform for AAC, placing dynamic screen systems in the pockets of users. These devices could support whole vocabularies and libraries of symbols, as well as text-based input.



Digital message devices can play a huge number of roles, helping users to join in, request attention and, in some cases, trigger external actions.

The BIGmack and Step-by-Step

It still feels as though you can't spend very long in the world of AAC without coming across a BIGmack! A single, digitally recorded message can be played back by hitting the large, colourful button. The BIGmack can be linked to a switch controller via an external output, meaning it can be used to activate a toy or control other switch-operated equipment. Devices such as the Step-by-Step introduce sequential messaging – where multiple digital messages can be triggered one after the other by hitting the button.





The Scan 4

The Scan 4 offers four items, each with a scanning light above it. It can be set up for single or two-switch scanning and allows the user to move through and select the choices, with auditory prompts if required. Again, external outputs mean a variety of switch adapted equipment can be connected and triggered through the device.

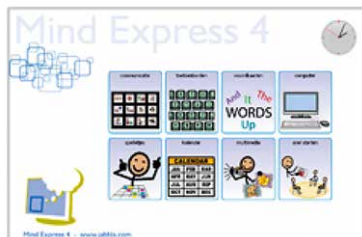
The Vanguard and Pathfinder

Examples of the Minspeak language system (which works by using multi-meaning symbols and semantic compaction to generate more complex language structures with minimal selections) in both static overlay and dynamic display form.



The Touchscreen Revolution Begins

As touchscreen computers and tablets became more available, some AAC systems migrated from dedicated devices to being specialised software on commercially available computers. Such technology also opened up the possibilities of computer control without the need to connect an additional device. Software like Mind Express and The Grid 2 offered integrated AAC, computer control, document editing and access to social media and web browsing all within the same software.



The iPad

In 2010, Apple released the iPad, which had a huge impact on the field of AAC. Apps like Proloquo2go, Grid Player, Compass and SonoFlex made use of the new and more readily available technology, as well as the increase in cloud computing, to provide flexible and creative AAC solutions via a range of apps for all levels of communication. As the device and its operating system grew up, new accessibility options appeared, opening it up to a wider group of users.



Eye-Gaze Technology



A variety of eye-gaze access systems can provide access to communication software. Eye-gaze technology has been used increasingly, with a wide variety of communication and other software packages being adapted to make use of the systems.



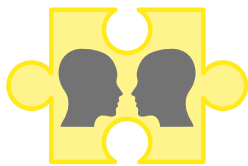
*Other documentation generated as part of preparing
this CM history is published on the CM website
www.communicationmatters.org.uk and includes:*

Articles in the CM Newsletter / Journal
AAC equipment from 1980 to the present day
AAC equipment as advertised by date
in the CM Newsletter / Journal
CM Chairs
CM Trustees
CM Symposium / Conference and ISAAC locations
CM Symposium / Conference and keynote and plenary speakers
History of the Trade Association and their links to CM

Issues over the years

Users of AAC and their role in CM conferences
CM's wider involvement
To lobby or not to lobby
Conference issues
FC and AAC
CM and ISAAC

www.communicationmatters.org.uk/resources



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