



International Society for Augmentative  
& Alternative Communication

**What does it take to be a leader in promoting  
the use of Augmentative and Alternative  
Communication?**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Regional African AAC Conference  
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Birchwood**

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**Christopher Hitchens,  
“*Unspoken Truths*”  
Vanity Fair, June 2011**

Like health itself, the loss of such a thing (loss of voice) can't be imagined until it occurs. In common with everybody else, I have played versions of the youthful “Which would you rather?” game, in which most usually it's debated whether blindness or deafness would be the most oppressive. But I don't ever recall speculating much about being struck dumb.



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What do we do to communicate?

**Sending messages**

How?

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Talking...



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– Using gestures



– Pointing, facial  
expressions



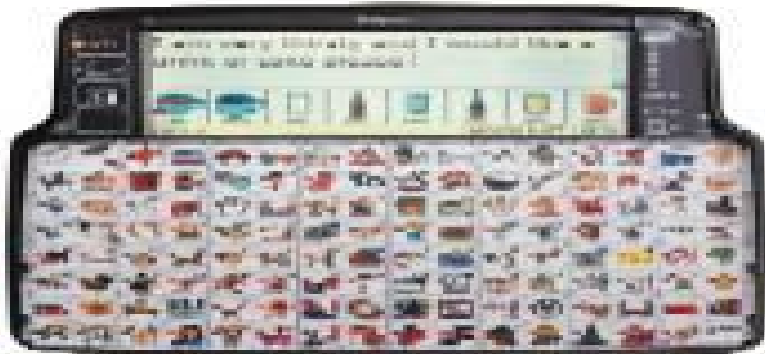
# isaac

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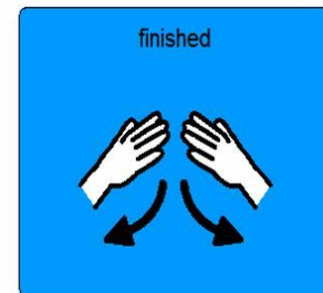
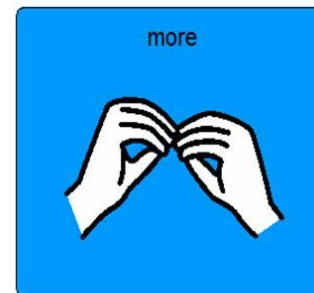
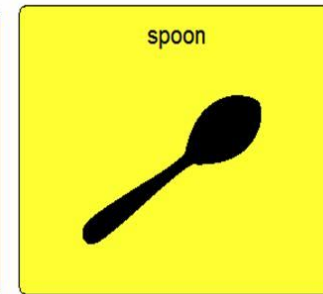
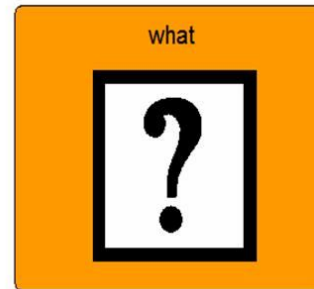
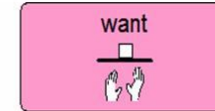
- Identify objects
- Make physical contact



# Communication boards and AAC devices



## MEALTIMES



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What is

Communication **really** About?



..listening





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- Observing
- Seeing
- Understanding



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It's about  
**sharing..**



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**Closeness, friendship**

And the ability to make  
sense in interaction  
with others

***MEANING – the ability to  
build relationships***





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***MEANING – the ability to  
build relationships***

- Being able to engage with others
- Positive relationships

***Well-being***

- Martin Seligman (2011):  
Flourish
- move from *Authentic  
Happiness*



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***MEANING – the ability to build  
relationships***

**What are the challenges in using  
AAC strategies?**

- Imposing a new system into natural interaction situation
- Difficulties in getting to use this system as it is atypical (intrusive)
- Complicated (demanding to use) – need to do it one step at a time
- We should to not be side tracked. Focus on engagement with others (needs to be internally rewarding – communication intent)
- Time-intensive



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## **What do we know about using different strategies of communication (AAC)?**

- It is much slower than speech
- Others don't always understand or know how to use the strategies to interact with people who use AAC
- People get impatient, rather walk away than talk to people who use AAC
- AAC users are dependent on others to assist them
- It is not only about teaching an individual skill, but the process of engagement



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**What types of  
leaders do we  
need to  
promote AAC?**

**The legacy of  
Nelson Mandela**

- **Tolerance**
- **For the good of all**
- **Forgiveness**
- **“That you fall is not that important – it is how you get up”**
- **67 minute community service to celebrate Mandela’s 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday**



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## What does it mean to be a leader in promoting AAC?

Based on Johannesen, Valde &  
Whedbee (2008)

**It means 4 things:**

1. Sensitivity: Know what is available and what could work - situational understanding
2. Moral Direction: what is fair?
3. Taking responsibility: Commitment & motivation to do something about it,
4. Energy to persist: character, backbone

**If you have the first three and not the last – nothing will happen.**



# Sensitivity: Knowledge and Application in context

- Knowledge about :
  - AAC, different strategies available: low and high tech, manual signs
  - and its **implementation**
- Dedication to develop training courses in AAC to provide a scientific basis for implementation & skill to apply these within the context
- No one-fits-all recipe: individuals who use AAC and families have different needs and expectations

# Moral Direction

Moral: Generally agreed-upon cultural standards

- Fairness and social conscience
- Stand up for what we believe in
- Tension between what “is” and what “ought to be”

# Take responsibility

- Commitment & motivation to do something about it
- Take Initiative to engage those who should be involved
- Make sure that there is built-in accountability
  - Quality
  - Outcomes

# Energy to persist

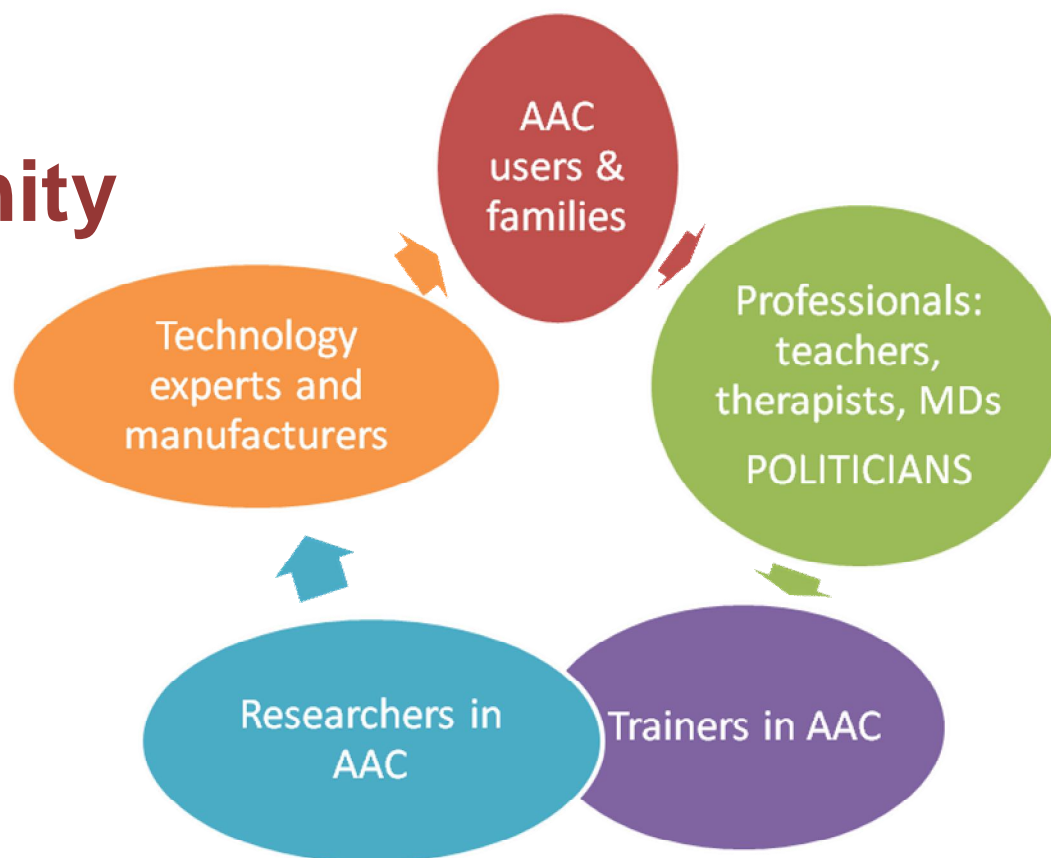
- Character, backbone
- Being there through ups and downs
- Learning from mistakes: not to be discouraged
- The power of one...
- Being able to sustain energy: know how to protect your own energy and those of others.. and live



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## Who should take leadership?

### Community



# Ghost boy (Martin Pistorius, 2011)

- His realization : the box (p. 13 & 14)
- His Father: care and initial lack of communication
- His mother: fighting in the family. (p.62)
- Siblings: what about the other children?
- Friends – Care centre
- Professionals – how much we really can't do..
- Technology – what it takes to program for communication
- What it takes to make friends...and to dream

# Different types of leadership

- Traditional model of leadership:
  - How can we **understand their suffering**
  - How can we **rehabilitate** – get them out of suffering
  - Deficit model
- New Leadership:
  - How can we understand what makes the **individual and family** flourish
  - How do we **increase their ability to flourish** and people and families in the community

# What are we working for?

Strong leadership partnerships within communities that can promote the use of AAC

- A Voice for All
- Empowering families to support their own
- Proficient AAC users that can dream and be mentors for other young people
- Dedicated trainers, clinicians and researchers who support the efforts of AAC users and families
- Innovative AAC technology experts and manufacturers that can develop easy to use devices to facilitate interaction.
- Politicians that promote our cause



# What does it require?

- **Keeping our eye on the ball** ...it is not about the latest technology – rather it's about communication and friendship and how technology can facilitate this process.
- **Changed service provision models?** Can present services and cost structures really provide what is needed? **Do we really serve families?**
- Leaders in promoting AAC are those who with humility and awareness are able to maintain what is good, but..
  - have the courage to work for change to ensure **more relevant services to families and those who use AAC**

How do we move forward?



- Sensitivity



- Moral direction



- Responsibility<sub>y</sub>



- Energy

***Thank you***

***Ke a le boga***

***See you at the ISAAC Conference in  
Pittsburgh, USA in August 2012  
– be there!***

***Erna Alant  
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