September 2023

Message from the ISAAC President

Tracy Shepherd

Conference Cancún was a success! After years of planning and replanning, the 19th ISAAC Conference was an amazing reminder of what ISAAC is all about – the people and **Communication Beyond Borders!**

The over 500 people from 40 countries included those who use AAC, family members, professionals, researchers, students, and manufacturers, all interested in AAC. This list of participants demonstrates one of ISAAC's greatest strengths, which is embracing multiple perspectives to move toward a better future for people who communicate in different ways and who use AAC.

There are so many highlights, and I will share just a few.

There were several distinguished Mexican guests at the Opening Ceremonies who drew in the press, and it was nice to see ISAAC highlighted in the news. The city of Cancún and the state of Quintana Roo are proud of the focus on accessibility to enhance our conference. You can read the article from El Universal here.

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Message from the ISAAC President ...continued

Accessibility in Cancún will be forever changed given all the work done by the Ambassadors who trained hundreds of people on communication accessibility around the city and the conference venues.





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

Given that the last two ISAAC

Presidents, Meredith Allan and Juan
Bornman, have not been able to gather with
the membership in person during the
pandemic, we shared some of the honours at
this much anticipated Cancún event. The first
was collaborating to present the following
prestigious awards:

- ISAAC Fellowship Award to Melanie Fried-Oken
- President's Award to Gabriela Berlanga
- Distinguished Service Award to Stephen von Tetzchner

In addition, we shared the President's
Reception which was an amazing Mexican
evening with mariachi, tacos, margaritas and,
of course dancing. In true Juan fashion, she
likened us to a stop light with Meredith being
the red President who had to stop
everything, Juan being the yellow who
needed to proceed with caution and myself
being the green – let's go and finally see this
conference come to life! Leading ISAAC takes
much time and dedication; and leading
during a pandemic was particularly tricky, so I
wanted to make sure the incredible women
who were my predecessors were honoured

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Message from the ISAAC President ...continued

appropriately for all their volunteer efforts over the last four years. It was lovely to be able to get this group of Presidents together pictured below in order of terms.



Gregor Renner (2015- 2018), Meredith Allan (2018 – 2020), Juan Bornman (2020 – 2022), Tracy Shepherd (2022- 2024), Yonit Hagoel-Karnieli (2024 – 2026)

ISAAC Conferences are not only about the very important and exceptional educational sessions and meetings of the Council and the Executive Board, it is about what happens in between. This connection cannot be accomplished in a virtual forum. It is the conversations that happen in the corridors. It is about meeting those new people from far away countries to hear about their experiences and learn from them.



It is about forming new collaborations after listening to a session that resonates with you. It is about having fun and getting to know people on a personal level at the social events, in this case on boats that were made physically accessible at Xoximilco.



ISAAC Council Meeting



ISAAC Executive Board Meeting

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Message from the ISAAC President ...continued



Social Event: Xoximilco

ISAAC Conferences for me are like coming back to a familiar summer camp that is full of love, kindness and mutual respect for all of us - our strengths, our similarities and our differences. That is what makes ISAAC special and magical.

This conference was quite literally the result of thousands of hours of work by hundreds of people from around the world, so thank you to each and every one of you for your contribution. Honourable mentions go to our dedicated team of Co-Chairs from Mexico and USSAAC, and the ISAAC International office staff led by Franklin Smith, who is the glue that holds the operations together.



I remain energized from my many conversations and interactions during the time in Cancún. Although we don't have enough information about when we will next gather together in Italy, I know we will and it will be memorable and successful. In the meantime, we will continue to connect virtually to keep the ISAAC spirit alive.

Tracy Shepherd

ISAAC President



From the Executive Director



Franklin Smith

Welcome to the September 2023 edition of The ISAAC Communicator.

For those of you who were able to join us this past July at Conference Cancún, I know you will agree with me that the event was a tremendous success! Beginning with our Opening Ceremonies and concluding with our Closing Ceremonies, the main conference was an exceptional event, with high levels of conference satisfaction noted by a majority of our conference attendees, as attested to through the results generated by our post-Conference survey.

Fully 92% of all survey respondents rated their satisfaction with the quality and range of presenters as either "High" or "Very High," while approximately 82% of respondents similarly rated their satisfaction with the range of session formats and the relevance of content to their individual learning needs. Tremendous results indeed, which could not have been achieved without the dedication and commitment of all of

our partners and stakeholders. Finally, fully 86% of conference survey respondents indicated that their overall satisfaction with ISAAC Conference Cancún was either "High" or "Very High."

ISAAC is looking forward to presenting our next in-person conference in Italy, during either 2025 or 2026. Fully 95% of our survey respondents indicated that they would attend a future ISAAC conference, based on their experience in Cancún, while well over 80% indicated that they are either planning to attend the next conference themselves and/or recommend to a friend that they also attend!

On a personal note, the best part of any ISAAC Conference for me is to witness first-hand the positive impact on people's lives that hosting an ISAAC Conference has. In Cancún, I was able to speak directly with new and upcoming professionals and researchers in the field who were able to attend because of ISAAC travel assistance. Their positive feedback and gratitude is a tremendously positive harbinger that the next generation of AAC professionals and researchers are truly committed to the field.

ISAAC was also able to support the attendance at Conference Cancún of a large cadre of ...continued on page 6



From the Executive Director ...continued



in-Mexico registrations. Nearly 17% of all registrations were from in-Mexico, part of the legacy that ISAAC International wanted to invest in by hosting a conference in Mexico! The other critical conference legacy that we will all be hearing about over the course of the coming months and years is, of course, our latest ISAAC Chapter, ISAAC-Español, which was officially launched at Conference Cancún!

ISAAC Membership 2024

Membership renewal notification emails will be sent to all <u>ISAAC-Australia</u>, <u>ISAAC-Canada</u>, <u>ISAAC-US (USSAAC)</u>, and <u>ISAAC International</u> members, during October 2023.

As in previous years, these members can make use of our <u>online membership portal</u> to renew an existing membership, or take out a new membership.

AAC Awareness Month

If it is almost October, then AAC Awareness Month is nearly here! The theme for AAC Awareness Month 2023 is "Say What? Sharing your most memorable moments with AAC."

As part of the focus on AAC Awareness Month, ISAAC is planning on making a number of select

session recordings from Conference Cancun available as "video on demand" that can be purchased directly from the ISAAC website.

We hope that all our stakeholders will consider purchasing and viewing these recordings. Whether you were at the conference in-person and would like to catch up on sessions that you were not able to attend, or could not make it to the conference, this is a great opportunity (and the first of its kind for ISAAC), to make our conference content even more accessible!

2024 Events

ISAAC International is currently looking at a number of options to host and/or support the hosting of both in-person and virtual events during 2024. These events, developed in conjunction with our stakeholders around the world, will provide additional opportunities for the AAC world to stay connected.

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



Conference Cancún



Message from the Conference Co-Chairs

ISAAC Conference Cancún: A Dream Come True

It all began back in 2018, during the ISAAC Australia Closing Ceremonies. As the enchanting notes of "Huapango de Moncayo" filled the air, a video announcing the Conference in Cancún sparked a dream to come true.

Attending every single ISAAC conference was a journey filled with inspiration, but it was the ISAAC Australia conference that felt "perfect" from every angle. We knew that the task ahead was no small feat. We knew it was volunteer work that would be on top of our current jobs, but after years of unwavering support from the ISAAC community in our quest to introduce AAC in Mexico, this was our chance to give back with the very best of Mexico's offerings.

The road was far from smooth; COVID forced us to postpone, and postpone again. But this journey was also marked by incredible collaborations—with USSAAC, ISAAC (including

its exceptional office staff and the unbelievably wonderful Executive Board members), and numerous international groups, like the North American Alliance of Communication Access. It turned out to be one of the most incredible learning experiences of our lives.

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Just when we thought the day we'd all been waiting for was a distant speck on the horizon, it arrived. With nearly 600 attendees from 40 different countries, our conference was finally underway.

Our adventure kicked off at CRIT Quintana Roo with six extraordinary Pre-Conference Workshops led by some of the most outstanding clinicians and researchers in our field. Seeing them all gathered in one place felt like a dream come true. And another dream realized was the inclusion of Spanish-speaking attendees, thanks to ISAAC's support in providing translation services.

Alongside the Pre-Conference Workshops, the AAC camp unfolded. Children from various places, especially Cancún, participated joyfully. Witnessing them have fun, communicate, learn about Mayan culture,

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Conference Cancún ... continued



and hearing camp volunteers discuss ways to support children without access to communication was truly heartwarming.



But this was just the beginning. After two immensely successful days, the Main Conference took center stage, and on Monday morning, it began. The Opening Ceremonies, held to a full house, was a sight to behold. Thanks to seamless registration coordination between the ISAAC office and BTC, our conference organizer, everyone was on time to soak in the experience. Warm welcomes from Mexican government representatives, our incredible President Tracy Shepherd, our Executive Director Franklin Smith, our Mexican and USSAAC Co-Chairs, and our Keynote Speaker and Co-Chair Yoo Sun Chung set the tone. A beautiful conference song brought tears to our eyes, and a breathtaking Mayan ritual closed the event.





The following four days were packed with high-level short sessions, posters, interactive seminars, workshops, research panels, and Chapter and Committee meetings. An incredible Exhibition Hall showcased the remarkable work and resources available from our always supportive AAC and technology developers.

And as if that weren't enough, our amazing sponsors continued the tradition of the Film Festival, where participants, especially AAC users, created and shared their short films, and the Lightning Pitch, where creative and innovative AAC ideas competed for a chance to win \$1,000 to kickstart or further develop their concepts.

With the conference in Mexico, parties were a highlight. The Welcome Reception on Monday saw the formal launch of the ISAAC Español group, uniting key representatives from Spanish-speaking countries to celebrate. A mesmerizing dance show featuring Salsa, Tango, Flamenco, and more closed the day in style.

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Conference Cancún ... continued





Our eagerly anticipated second party was the President's Reception, which, for the first time, was shared among the three incredible presidents who led ISAAC over the past five years: Meredith Allan, Juan Borman, and Tracy Shepherd. Their creative outfits, representing the traffic light colors, brought a smile to our faces as we remembered how each played a role during the challenges of COVID. Meredith, the RED light, kept us safe by making the tough decision to STOP the conference. Juan wore YELLOW, symbolizing caution, as ISAAC proceeded with planning, and Tracy, in GREEN, gave us the green light to GO. A Mariachi band, delicious tacos, and the dance floor Meredith had envisioned ensured a night to remember.



On Wednesday evening, we boarded Xcaret buses that took us to the enchanting Xoximilco, where a traditional floating fiesta unfolded. Traditional Mexican music, dance, and delectable Mexican cuisine made this event unforgettable.



As we search for the right words to conclude this piece, we realize how challenging it is to wrap up this life-changing chapter, but we cannot do so without expressing our heartfelt gratitude to every member of the ISAAC community. Thank you for being there, for sharing, for your boundless enthusiasm, for your encouraging words when we needed them most. Thanks to the ISAAC office staff and ISAAC EB for putting up with us for five amazing years, and thanks to USSAAC for your invaluable collaboration in making this event possible. From the depths of our hearts, we thank you all.

With immense gratitude, Wendy, Gaby Mangino, Marce, and Gabriela

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Conference Cancún ... continued



Film Festival

The Conference Cancun Film Festival was a great success!

Thank you to everyone who created and submitted films and to <u>Cam on Wheels</u> for their support. The festival lived up to its theme, "Communication Beyond Borders," with entries from Brazil, Israel, Spain, Netherlands and the USA. The top ten films were screened at the Welcome Reception on July 24, 2023, and the audience voted for the best film. The prize for the winning film was a free one-year ISAAC membership.

The winning film was "Kiaro and his Words," submitted by Alessandra Gomes Buosi of Brazil. Congratulations Alessandra and to everyone who worked on the film!

Watch "Kiaro and his Words" here.



To view the incredible top ten films and all the entries, visit the <u>ISAAC website</u>.

Sharing your story is not limited to the film festival. Become an ISAAC Cam-On-Wheels Reporter and share your stories with the ISAAC Community. Learn more here.

Lightning Pitch





The Conference Cancún Lightning Pitch was an opportunity for nine successful applicants to pitch their AAC-related ideas in three minutes and with one slide. Presentations were judged by a panel of three experts, according to set criteria. The author of the winning pitch received \$1000 CAD to further develop their idea over the next 12 months. The audience also voted for their favourite pitch and the winner received an Audience Power Award certificate.

Congratulation to Clare Pudney, New Zealand, for her overall winning pitch, "Taking the work out of AAC supported shared reading and writing: Creating a go-to resource for busy

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Conference Cancún ... continued



teachers" and to Mariane Alves Graciano, Brazil who won the Audience Power Award for "Let's break the border: International AAC data based for service encounters."



Clare Pudney describes her pitch.

"My name is Clare Pudney and I work as a Speech Language Pathologist at a special school in New Zealand called Kōwhai Specialist School. I want to thank Acapela and Deakin for giving me the opportunity to bring this idea to life!

We have spent many years at our school creating resources, activities and ideas for supporting teachers with shared literacy activities. We have tried them out, made adaptations and refinements to the point where we feel we now have a 'bank' of knowledge and ideas that we are keen to

share with the world. We want to make shared literacy accessible to busy teachers, less daunting and show the fun that shared literacy can be.

We will be using the money for a web designer to create a user-friendly interface that teachers can easily access. We have the info, but not the web skills to create an online platform that is organised and attractive to teachers.

Resources will be organised around common books - so if you are wanting to do "Brown Bear" by Eric Carle, you can look this up and access a range of printable AAC resources, ideas to support the AAC tools already in your classroom, hands on activity ideas, ways to incorporate active participation and sensory elements, other books that link to the same theme/vocabulary. A kind of 'pinterest' of fun activities related to the book, templates for printing for different low tech AAC tools or predictable chart books, etc.

Our focus will be on early emergent communicators, and those sensory learners who find accessing more traditional shared literacy difficult or overwhelming. We want to help teachers who are time-poor or who need support with coming up with ideas for those students who don't 'fit' conventional literacy engagement.

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Conference Cancún ... continued



I look forward to sharing this resource in the future and hope that we create something that can continue to grow."



Awards

At every ISAAC International Conference, awards are presented to ISAAC members who have demonstrated outstanding commitment to ISAAC's mission and achievement in the field of AAC.

At the Awards and Membership meeting on Wednesday, July 26, the following recipients were honoured:

 Gabriela Berlanga received the President's Award 2023 for extraordinary leadership and support of both ISAAC and AAC worldwide.

- Stephen Von Tetzchner received the Distinguished Service Award 2023 for outstanding contribution to the field of AAC.
- Melanie Fried-Oken received the Fellowship Award 2023 for outstanding contributions, leadership and dedication to AAC and ISAAC.
- Outgoing AAC Journal Editors Ralf
 Schlosser and Rajinder Koul were recognized for their outstanding editorial contributions.
- Conference Cancún Co-Chairs Gabriela
 Berlanga, Miriam Boesch, Yoosun Chung,
 Gabriela Mangino, Marcela Manzur,
 Wendy Moreno and Sarah Blackstone
 were recognized for their significant
 contributions to ISAAC and to the field of AAC.





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Conference Cancún ... continued



Silent Auction

A silent auction is held at every ISAAC Conference, organized and led by a dedicated international team.

The 2023 Conference Cancun auction raised more than \$2300.00! It also fostered a supportive community of donors and purchasers from across the globe. Funds raised will be used to support people who use AAC to attend future conferences.





Thank you to everyone who made the Conference Cancun Silent Auction a success!

Conference Videos

On demand video of select conference sessions will be made available in October!

Opening Ceremonies and Closing Ceremonies are currently up for view on YouTube. The Conference Cancun Closing Ceremonies Slide Show is also available to watch here.

Be sure to follow up with ISAAC's social media and website for details.

In the News

Conference Cancún was featured in the news!

Check out the articles from **El Universal** about the Conference and an article all about ISAAC's very own, Kevin Williams.

Daniel Robles Haro also wrote a piece about his experience at Conference Cancún for **Yo También** which can be <u>read here</u>.



Conference Cancún



Photo Gallery







































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Conference Cancún



Photo Gallery



























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AAC Awareness « Month



AAC Awareness Month 2023 is right around the corner!

This year the theme is "Say what? Sharing your most memorable moments with AAC." "Say what?" is shorthand (American English) for the more general phrase "What did you say?".

What is this theme about?

Oftentimes with AAC, unexpected things happen while learning, using, supporting, and researching. We would like for you to share those stories with the world.

Use **#AACaware23** this AAC Awareness Month to share your most memorable moments with AAC! Be sure to also follow the month through ISAAC's social media channels and <u>website</u>.

Debunking the Myths of AAC By Chelsea Hagen

My name is Chelsea Hagen, and I use an AAC Device to help me communicate. I am a writer, and I enjoy creating dark but comical stories with an unexpected twist. I live near Breton, Alberta, and I am a student at the University of Athabasca studying for my Bachelor of English degree. I want to be like most authors and have the bio on the back of the book saying that I attended university. Some of things I enjoy, besides writing, are reading, cooking, antiquing, crafts, Broadway plays, movies, fishing, and bowling. My dream is to someday be known as a famous writer. I have had a few poems and articles published, and I've also made a couple short films. I have just written an illustrated children's book about a cat and a ball of wool, and I am hoping it will be picked up by a publisher.

Outside of my passions and ambitions, I am also the PWUAAC board member for ISAAC Canada. If you are wondering what my role is as the PWUAAC board member, it's not the person who brings the snacks. It is a person who uses an AAC device or, as I call myself, the defender. I am also an ISAAC International lead.

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AAC Awareness Month ... continued



Now that you know more about me as a person, I wanted to debunk the myths of an AAC communicator. The list I have is in no particular order because they are all equally important. I also want to mention that I use the term AAC device communicator as I'm not fond of the word AAC user. It's not like a drug addiction - well maybe a little, I have been known to turn a light shade of green from using my device for a long period of time. Jokes aside, I prefer to refer to it as a communication device. Knowing that, let's get to the myths.

Myth number one: AAC device

communicators are all the same. No, we are not all the same. We are each an individual. I am nothing like Steven Hawking, but wow when I meet people do they love to tell me I am just like him. He was an old science man with completely different interests from mine. Yet my grade 12 principal, as a graduation gift, gave me a bunch of Steven Hawking books. An AAC device communicator is still an individual. We have our own interests, opinions, likes and dislikes. I ask you to please see us and not just our devices. Let us make our own decisions and travel our own personal road.

Myth number two: AAC device communicators do not learn to read and cannot spell. We can learn to read. I learned to read. It was not an easy feat, and I am only at an average reading level, but I really enjoy reading books. When I left high school, I was at a very low reading level and the school felt that I had reached my peak reading level. Please, if you are told your child cannot learn to read, don't believe them. After graduation I worked for five years to get my reading to a grade six level. I'm not going to lie, it was a lot of sweat and tears from both my mom and me. Even now, if I don't read almost every day, I will fall back on my reading level. I also want to take a moment to mention that spelling is the hardest task for me. I used Minspeak, which is an icon based AAC device right up until last year and then I made the decision to switch to only using a keyboard. I still struggle with spelling, and I know I always will, but I feel this is not because I am an AAC device communicator. I actually blame my parents and their terrible spelling genetics. In fact, people always think my mom has a teaching background, but no, she is an accountant. Some days I am the one to correct her spelling and punctuation.

Myth number three: Secondary Education is not an option for AAC communicators. When COVID began, pretty much the whole world

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AAC Awareness Month ... continued



went online and it was a benefit for an AAC communicator as more options became available. Chats and Zoom are now set up for an AAC communicator and every two weeks I can talk with other AAC communicators from around the world. I am also now able to take my time and get my Bachelor of English online. I was told once that if you do your degree online you will miss out on the university experience. My response was that I will really miss out on sitting there by myself during breaks watching everyone on their phones and not talking to each other. The opportunity to experience the typical university experience is not appealing to me. Being able to be online reduces my stress level because I can work at my own pace. I am a two-switch user, and it takes me a long time to write. I average about three words a minute. This leads me to the next myth.

Myth number four: All AAC communicators should use eye gaze. This is so popular right now, but it is not for everyone. I have tried many different eye gazers, and they just don't work for me. Unfortunately, the eye gaze doesn't pick up my eyes even though I wish it did. I know it would be faster as I am a fast scanner but in reality, scanning can be as slow as ketchup

running out of a new bottle. I use my device everywhere and at all different angles. For example, I use it down bumpy goat trails and I like to write outside under my favorite tree in the backyard. I am also a shaker and a mover so when it comes to me, I'm faster and talk way more with my two switches than I do with eye gazing. The reason I have two switches with cords is that I scan fast and Bluetooth switches have a slight delay. It can take a bit to find the right fit. If the device is not effective, please don't forget to try all methods of accessing the device before making the decision that the person just was not smart enough to use a device.

Myth number five: If my child uses an AAC device they will not learn to speak. I have a quick answer to this one. Learning an AAC device is not easy. If I could talk, I would. I never give up trying to use my throat voice, but using an AAC device supports speech, and it allows one's personality to shine.

Myth number six: An AAC device communicator is not a sociable person. I love socializing but it is a challenge because conversations move fast, and I can't keep up. That doesn't mean I am not a social butterfly. If I am given the time, most people find me to be a bit chatty with a witty personality.

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AAC Awareness Month ... continued



Myth number seven: An AAC device

communicator is not intelligent. Boy, do I know this myth well. When I stay at a hospital and don't have my device it's like going back in time. I am treated like I am deaf, mute, and dumb. It's not until I am up in my chair with my device that the staff then believe that I can understand them. People need to be educated that nonverbal does not equal unintelligent.

Myth number eight: An AAC device

communicator doesn't need to be able to use 'adult language.' It's not true. I have friends that use AAC devices, and they swear like a sailor. I'm not someone who swears regularly but I do firmly believe it should still be an option just as it is for everyone else. As kids grow and become adults, the language in their devices should grow too. I have an emoji display in my device and it doesn't have the middle finger. As an adult I want the option of an emoji with a middle finger.

Myth number nine: AAC communicators are sometimes dreamy heads that do not listen. I will admit that I am a bit of a dreamy head, as are many writers, but most times when it seems like I am not listening it's because I am busy multitasking. If you ask me a question, I must remember the question and find my icons or

letters to answer the question. If you ask me a second question before I'm finished the first one, my brain starts to overload. We just need time and patience from you.

Finally, myth number ten: We are happy to have our robot voices. I have a difficult time with this one. I know I should be so grateful to have a voice, don't get me wrong, but why does it have to sound so much like a robot? I hate my American West Coast girl voice, but it's a bit different than the rest of my AAC girl friends' voices so that is what I use. My device doesn't have a Canadian voice and does not represent my natural dialect. What I don't understand is how a poor grandma can get ripped off by some guy that sounds like her grandson, or why Microsoft Word has such lovely natural voices, and yet I am stuck with this horrible robot voice. We need a natural voice with a number of options. This way we can sound like the individuals that we are.

There are more myths out there to tackle, but that is it for this article. I hope that I have helped to clear up some of the stigmas that surround AAC device communicators. Thank you for taking the time to further educate yourself about AAC devices and their communicators and for reading about my own experiences and views. I am an AAC device communicator, but I am also an individual, just as all AAC device communicators are, and just as you are.



Chapters



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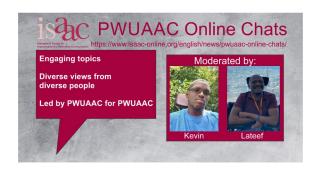
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PWUAAC Online Chats



Visit <u>PWUAAC Online Chats</u> 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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