



Keynote Speakers

Sarah Blackstone



Sarah Blackstone Ph.D., CCC-SP is president of Augmentative Communication Inc. in Monterey, CA and a partner emeritus of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement. Dr. Blackstone was the recipient of ISAAC's first Distinguished Service Award and of USSAAC's first Award of Professional Excellence, as well as the DeCarlo Award for Clinical Achievement (Maryland/ASHA).

Sarah chaired ASHA's Scope of Practice Task Force in AAC, and has served as Chair of the Advisory Board of the Center for Literacy and Disability. She has supported AAC teams for students with complex communication needs in the Berkeley Unified School District for more than 20 years. She authored and published Augmentative Communication News for twenty years and was Series Editor of the ISAAC book series.

Sarah Blackstone is co-author of Social Networks: A Communication Inventory for Individuals with Complex Communication Needs and their Communication Partners. This inventory enables successful implementation of AAC and has been applied to early intervention and educational settings, right through to people who acquire their communication disability later in life.

In addition to continued work with a Social Networks paradigm, her current interests include (1) investigation of the emotional competencies of children with CCN; (2) issues related to patient-provider communication across medical encounters and medical settings and (3) finding ways to support the development of 'best practices' in developing regions of the world.

Related websites:

www.augcominc.com
www.patientprovidercommunication.org
www.centralcoastchildrensfoundation.org
www.aac-rerc.com

Keynote Session Title: Inside, Outside and Upside Down: ReTHINKING Communication Access for the 21st century.

Synopsis: This presentation considers challenges and opportunities in AAC that are consistent with the conference theme "Connect2Communicate". A decade ago, those most likely to 'carry around' communication devices were people who had "complex communication needs". The technology was often heavy, clunky, and dedicated to communicating face-to-face.

No more. Today, people everywhere are literally dripping with communication devices. Information and communication technologies offer economic and political benefits to governments, industry, and communities, as well as are changing the ways individuals across the age span interact with each other. Communication options today enable us to communicate anywhere, anytime, with anyone. Perhaps because of this, the right to access information and communication is becoming an essential component of national and international human rights legislation. Communication Access for All... gives us a ripening political climate to demand that ALL people should have an essential human right to effective, authentic communication.

What role can the AAC/AT community play in this paradigm shift?

AAC stakeholders have much to contribute. For decades we have supported the efforts of people who face communication challenges to participate in desired activities across multiple contexts and partners. We have understood and appreciated the role that tools, strategies, and technologies play in diminishing communication barriers. We know the importance of team work in addressing complex problems. We have investigated and solved complex communication problems in creative ways. Blackstone's presentation will suggest that it is time to "shake things up" from the inside and refocus some of our current AAC practices and policies in order to broaden substantially our impact on people with communication challenges around the world.



Susan Balandin



Susan Balandin PhD. trained as a speech pathologist and after many years in clinical practice completed a doctorate and moved into academia. Susan is currently Professor at Molde University College and Honorary Professor University of Sydney and Edith Cowan University, Perth and Docent at the University of Helsinki. Her research focuses on community participation and inclusion for people with lifelong disability with an emphasis on communication, and particularly communication for people with little or no functional speech who require augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Currently Susan has programs of research exploring Friendship and Loneliness for people with lifelong disability, collaborative teaching with people with disability including teaching and learning within virtual worlds, and the interactions between service providers and clients. Susan has a number of international research and clinical links, including Sweden, Denmark and Finland, Australia, Germany, Scotland, India and Singapore. Susan's current teaching is focused in the areas of communication and lifelong disability, ageing with lifelong disability, qualitative research methods, involving people with disability in research, and AAC.

She is currently coeditor of the Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability and is a member of a number of other editorial boards. She has published more than 100 articles in peer reviewed international journals, 25 book chapters and produced 4 multi media training packages.

Keynote Session Title: Virtual Worlds: A possible tool or an impossible challenges for the field of AAC?

Synopsis: Currently there are few reports on the use of virtual worlds for people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). In this presentation I will provide an overview of how virtual worlds have been used by people lifelong disability and the possibilities and challenges that virtual worlds present for people using AAC. I will also discuss how stakeholders in the field of AAC might use virtual worlds to enhance social networks and recreation opportunities and to develop innovative learning opportunities.

The use of an avatar as a virtual representation of the person accessing the world means that users have freedom to be whatever they choose including whether to disclose a disability or not. Through their avatars, people with disability are able to participate in social, work related and educational activities in the virtual world. Furthermore virtual worlds offer an additional and exciting platform for education. Universities offer lectures in virtual classrooms, support virtual library facilities and sites where students and others can 'hang out' and explore the virtual environment. Students have reported that learning in a virtual classroom or for that matter, a virtual jazz club in virtual Montmartre, is innovative, exciting and meaningful, once the technology is mastered and an avatar created. Nevertheless, access to virtual worlds can be challenging and not everyone is able to use them. Virtual worlds also have a darker side, which may concern parents and those who support people with disability. These and a range of other issues gathered from the research will be discussed.



Melinda Smith



Melinda Smith is an Artist and a Dancer, "Living with cerebral palsy has limited my ability to speak, but this has never stopped me from wanting to be a creative communicator".

"I use the Pathfinder speech generating device and the new LightWRITER SL40 to communicate. Technology is only one part of the AAC picture. I also use my speech, sign language and many other ways of getting my message across".

Mel is employed at the Communication Resource Centre in Melbourne as a community development worker. She is also employed as a mentor and tutor for students and families at the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre (CPEC).

Keynote Session Title: "Why is being a Mentor and having a mentor important?"

Synopsis: Mel will speak from an AAC user's perspective and use some of her personal experiences to highlight examples of positives and negative of Mentorship. Mel will also speak through the eyes of the wider audience in her professional life to ensure that she creates a balance for her presentation and something that will become a useful resource for developing a stronger understanding of what a mentor is and why we need them.