

## Interface National Newsletter



University of Pretoria

**Centre for  
Augmentative and  
Alternative  
Communication**

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**Interface promotes  
communication for  
people with complex  
communication needs  
by supplementing  
existing communication  
with gestures,  
communication boards  
and assistive  
technology (thus,  
augmentative &  
alternative  
communication)**

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## Editorial



On the 10th of June I attended the launch of The National Disability Portal, an extremely exciting and ambitious project of the CSIR Information Society Technologies Centre (ISTC) in partnership with a representative group of Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) and the Office on the Status of Disabled Persons (OSDP) in the Presidency.

The National Disability Portal was born out of need identified after an extensive investigation by the CSIR's icomtek into the needs of persons with disabilities in South Africa. The investigation found a dire need for access to information and communications technology (ICT) and all the advantages that come with it, existed. To address this need CSIR's icomtek has devised an Internet

technology based ICT national networking and communication system for people with disabilities. The system will be built on open source software whenever possible. It will be a web-based, multi-portal system with portals situated throughout South Africa, including the rural areas. Disability organisations and other stakeholders will be able to upload and download relevant information and data related to disability issues. Anybody will be able to retrieve such information anytime, day or night. Additionally, people will be able to communicate with each other, not only via e-mail, but also by means of web-cams and audio. A Broadband (fast Internet) capability will be available for video conferencing.

Three things really struck me at the Launch, the first being the fact that in certain areas, South Africa is truly a world leader! Something which filled me with enormous pride! I think too often we look to Europe and the U.S.

and don't see the tremendous talent and potential we have locally. We need to start seeing ourselves for what we very often are, world leaders! Secondly, I got a sense of the growing collaboration between all the DPO's. Something which is long overdue, as the saying goes; united we stand divided we fall.

The third thing which was apparent to me was that AAC has truly arrived! All the dedicated efforts of countless individuals over many long hard years are finally beginning to payoff. AAC is at last starting to take its rightful place in society.

I left the launch of The National Disability Portal filled with pride and excitement. I feel there is a lot to be enthusiastic about for persons with disabilities, their families, friends and people working within the disability sector in South Africa!

**Martin Pistorius**  
Editor

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## Chairman's report

Since the last issue of our newsletter the National Coordinating Committee held one meeting in the form of a telephone conference. A majority of the committee members were able to participate. Two of our members submitted apologies and we were unable to connect to two members whose contact numbers were "pre-paid" telephones that cannot use the telephone conferencing facility at this stage.

A number of the urgent issues were discussed and resolved. We unfortunately did not address all the items on our agenda and have held these items over for the next meeting. Two of the required office bearers were elected and I would like to congratulate Maureen Casey on her election as Vice Chairman/Vice President and Nicky Eyre on her election as Secretary. I am sure that they will serve our organisation well during their term of office. The one very important office bearer that must still be appointed is a treasurer. If any of the Interface members (preferably from the Gauteng area) has a flair for financial matters and is willing to assist us with this aspect of our organisation, please contact us. I believe that we could co-opt such a person onto our committee.

As most members are no doubt aware, the First Regional African AAC Conference that was held in February was a joint venture between the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication and Interface.

Thanks to all the time spent and effort put into the matter by Professor Alant, she has been able to finalise the financial aspects of the conference.

Another joint venture between the CAAC and Interface was our application to the Lottery for funding. We were allocated about 3% of what we had applied for last year. One of the items for which we requested funding was the conference.

A large proportion of the funds received was utilised to pay the difference between the income received from conference fees and the actual costs.

The balance of the Lottery Fund allocation will be distributed between the branches for the building of infrastructure and matters related to the conference. Again, thanks to Professor Alant and Personnel at the CAAC, a joint application to the Lottery Fund for this year is being prepared and will be submitted shortly.

All of the branches are active and are trying to identify the needs of the members so that these can be effectively addressed. If you have a need for something specific to be addressed, please communicate this to the committee in your area.

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*Chairman*  
**National Coordinating Committee**  
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## Regional News

### Interface Gauteng:

How would you like a speechless awareness day, where all participants vow not to speak for a whole day? I'm sure that would be an eye-opener for many people! Or how about a documentary on SABC on AAC?

These were some of the ideas, which were bounced around at a recent Interface Branch meeting, ideas which we hope will mature and hatch at some stage, given the necessary support. Another aim for Interface Gauteng, which might be closer to realising, is to help create a support network amongst parents in Garankuwa. Two of our members are currently visiting parents of children with little or no functional speech in their homes, but we hope to have a joint meeting in Garankuwa in order to link people up with each other and create an awareness of AAC and other resources.

In the meantime, the parent support group at Nuwe Wending is into communication board making and learning gestures! I'm not sure who has more fun, the kids, the parents or the facilitators. It has been amazing to see how parents start to link with each other and put sensitive issues on the table, and support each other in ways that professionals often cannot. We are still open for people to join the committee – still lots of space around the table!

Please contact us on (012) 420 2001, if you feel you would like to join in on this worthwhile cause.

*Kerstin Tönsing*

### Interface Western Cape:

Interface Western Cape has been growing in leaps and bounds this year after a "kick-start" at the AAC conference in February. We held our AGM on the 15th of May, which was a great success. More than 40 people, half of them parents or AAC users, attended the AGM. At the meeting we changed our name from "Interface Cape Town" to "Interface Western Cape", thus extending our borders. Graham Clarke resigned as chairperson and Mrs Zoliswa Saleni was elected as the new chairperson. The other people on the committee are: Brenda Allen, Nafisa Baboo, Maureen Casey, Vaughan Cuff, Nicky Eyre, Lezanne le Roux, Graham Clarke, Andiswa Gaika, Veronica Gavu, Cathy Hartman, Diane Hoctor, Beauty Phama, Zoliswa Saleni, Delia Tew and Luvuyo Tyhulu.

We have identified a number of aims for Interface Western Cape. These include parent support, awareness, training and support. Tembaletu School has an active parent and AAC user group, which is well represented on the committee. Parents meet to support each other and share information. They are also planning on making craft items to sell for fundraising.

Maureen Casey promoted Interface on a national level by speaking on SAFM radio. Tembaletu School visited parliament where Luvuyo Tyhulu handed out pamphlets on Interface. Nicky Eyre has visited a few centres and schools providing information on AAC. A number of children and adults needing AAC devices have been identified and we are starting the fundraising process. We also hope to expand the support and information service by re-establishing our resource office at Vista Nova School.

Training events for the third term include a workshop by Bruce Baker on Minspeak (14 July) and a workshop on Boardmaker (presented by Maureen Casey – date to be announced). Other workshop topics that have been requested include: "Using the Clicker programme" and "Key-word signing". Please let us know if there are other AAC topics you would like training on.

That's about all for now. Watch this space for more exciting happenings under Table Mountain. We would love more Capetonians to join up as members - the more support we have, the more we can achieve!

*Nicky Eyre*

## Interface KZN:

### AAC Study Days

We were very privileged to have Bruce Baker, the originator of Minspeak® (Minimum Effort Speak) visit KwaZulu-Natal to present a two day seminar. On the first day Bruce addressed the following topics:

- Vocabulary and Language: What words do children and adults really use & how do they use them?
  - Iconicity : Does a picture really look like what it means?;
  - Navigation, Sequencing, motor Planning and Reading: What are the real trade-offs in AAC?
  - Minspeak® Unity® How to begin: teaching language and literacy to early communicators
  - The single overlay advantage for row column scanning: Why do teachers and clinicians think multi-page systems are easier for scanners?"
- Information about core vocabulary including the fact that there is great commonality of vocabulary usage across different ages and different populations (including those with severe cognitive impairments) and that 78% of vocabulary we use daily comes from a core of less than 400 words and that over 90% of core vocabulary words are non-iconic was well illustrated by research studies presented. All of the information presented had enormous implications for the application of AAC and challenged the way we often implement AAC, particularly with young children. On the second day Bruce presented the Adult Quick learning System (AQLS) that was specifically devised for adults with motor neurone disease but clearly has amazing possibilities for any literate person who requires AAC. An hour's training in the system had participants appreciating the initial statement by Bruce that AQLS provided (communication) **power in an hour!**

The seminar ended with a quick look at a fascinating manual board developed by Gail van Tatenhove based on Unity® - certainly the first manual board ever devised that includes morphological structures.



**Get Gail van Tatenhove free Minspeak manual board here:**  
<http://www.vantatenhove.com/materials.html>

## Interface-Kzn announces new Chairman!

*Interface-Kzn committee and members extend a warm welcome to our new chairman, Ben Jonck.*

*We trust that your time as Chairman will be long, happy and rewarding*

*Marei Lilienfeld*

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new Chairperson of the Interface KZN Committee.

My name is Ben Jonck, and as a parent of a special needs child I am looking forward to this opportunity to become more involved in an organisation such as Interface.

My wife, Felicity, is an Occupational Therapist, and is also a member of Interface and is currently the Minutes Secretary for the KZN committee. She became interested in the field of augmentative and alternative communication as a result of our son's severe communication difficulties, and is currently doing her Honours in AAC through Pretoria University. Our son, Matthew, is 4½ years old and has multiple disabilities. He has severe cognitive and motor impairments, is severely epileptic and has no functional speech.

We are currently using various methods to help him to communicate, and he attends Pathways Special Needs Centre.

As the new chairperson, I hope to be able to offer a variety of skills and perspectives. I am a qualified Diesel and Petrol Mechanic by trade, but have been working for the past 6 years for a division of the First Rand Group. Holding the position of New Business Development Officer, I like to think of myself as a people person and a team player, who always goes the extra mile to get the job done. At work I pride myself on my attitude, motivation, and customer care skills. I therefore hope to be able to use my corporate skills and resources, as well as my experiences as a parent of a special needs child to add value to the challenges ahead.

*Ben Jonck:  
Interface KZN Committee  
Chairperson*

The 3 day workshop, "Discovering AAC", that was jointly hosted by Interface-KZN and Comm-Links at the Westville Campus of the University of KZN from the 8<sup>th</sup> till the 10<sup>th</sup> July was successful and enjoyed by both delegates and presenters. Topics included in the workshop included "When should AAC be implemented?", communicative competence for individuals who use AAC, the aided and unaided systems used in South Africa, the importance of the method of language encoding used in the AAC system, designing communication boards, beginning strategies, positioning for communication, encouraging learning and communication through play, sequenced social scripts, the importance of involving families in AAC, emergent literacy and access methods. Therapists, educators, facilitators and a parent attended and feedback indicated that the "friendly atmosphere", "wealth of practical ideas in addition to sound theory" and the "comprehensive, relevant and useful handout" were greatly appreciated. Presenters included Margi Lilienfeld, Shelley Tooth, Elaine Byrne and Chris Engels. Philip Susman and Brendan Bowdler from Devices South Africa briefly demonstrated the Pathfinder, Vangaurd II, Vantage and Springboard devices before delegates had a chance to have hands on experience with these high tech devices. Lots of light technology options were presented during the workshop and a good balance between presentations and hands-on activities was achieved.

Participants confirmed that new viewpoints and insights were provided by the workshop and all the delegates suggested topics for further workshops. Topics suggested included "AAC and the child with autistic spectrum disorder", "AAC in Literacy", "AAC with children who are blind", "challenging behaviours, "recent developments in AAC" and "how to combine ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis programming) with AAC". So watch this space.....!!

### Interface-KZN also welcomes Pretty Gcabashe.

Pretty is working for Interface-KZN as a project developer while she completes the practical part of her learnership in project management through the Services seta. One of the initial projects Pretty is tackling is organizing our growing resources into a more effective library. Additional projects include an awareness project.

## School News

### News from Pathways Roodepoort

#### *Reaching for our Highest Potential!*

It has finally happened! Pathways Roodepoort opened its doors somewhat unofficially on 10th May 2004 and we have exactly 3 kiddies to start with and we're running 3 days a week - Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Weltevreden Park Methodist Church in J.G. Strijdom. Although it has taken over a year to open our doors, we are thrilled,

despite only having about R125,00 in our bank.

The challenge now begins to sustain the Centre and we need as much help as possible. An enormous thank you to Fay Hannah who is running Pathways with no salary for now with only the help of the children's caregivers until we have money to hire properly trained staff. Without Fay's brave commitment, we'd still be only dreaming about Pathways becoming a reality. Estelle Brown, our physiotherapist, is assisting Fay in customising special educational and stimulatory programs for each child. Without Estelle's guidance and sacrifice of time we would not have been able to make a start. So, despite our lack of funding, everything is going well.

These are the ideas we have in order to try to raise money:

> A Fun Walk / Run with a large contingent of disabled sports people involved. Metro Cash and Carry have kindly donated 200 T-shirts which we can give out to participants at this event.

> Hold a Benefit Concert for Pathways - Roodepoort but are sorely lacking contacts in the music and publicity industry.

> I have the opportunity to climb Kilimanjaro to raise money and need to generate publicity and sponsorship to maximise the opportunity for Pathways - Roodepoort.



We are aiming to have fun projects lined up as fund raisers so that people can climb on board with a smile, enjoy them and benefit Pathways - Roodepoort at the same time. We'll also be assisting a small Centre in Soweto, which is in dire straits and we would like to uplift them while getting ourselves on our feet. Very exciting stuff indeed.



We have not contacted the parents of children who have applied to attend Pathways yet as we feel we are not ready and we will only take the next step in inviting them to join us once we have money and staff. This is why I say that we have opened unofficially, just to make a small start. If we want to do this properly, we have to take it slowly so as not to disappoint anyone in their association with us. It's all about quality for us! The children deserve nothing but the best and once we are in a position to offer them this, we shall have an official opening and our Centre will be filled with children who we will assist in reaching for **their highest potential!**

**Julie Botha**  
Cell: 083 653 5655

## News from Pathways-Polokwane

Pathways- Polokwane will be joining Mitchell House Preparatory School, a local mainstream school in 2006. Including our children into a mainstream school is a dream we have had for many years and it is incredible to experience a dream becoming reality. We were fortunate enough to meet some incredible people in Cape Town who have successfully implemented Inclusion programs into their schools. To see Inclusion in action and to discuss the structures in place and receive invaluable advice was inspirational. We have made incredible contacts, which we would be willing to share. As part of our inclusion program the children from Mitchell House have been coming to Pathways to join our children in various activities on a weekly basis. Our children have in turn joined their peers on picnics at the new premises. It is heartwarming to see the interaction, which occurs and to witness the natural, uncomplicated way in which it happens. To see all the children playing, communicating and learning together regardless is awe-inspiring. At one picnic Kgaugelo was lifted out of her chair and placed on her picnic blanket. She was immediately surrounded by a group of girls. The topic of conversation revolved

around her beautiful red coat, where she bought it and where she thought they could get one. Words cannot describe the pride we felt watching Kgaugelo offering her friends fashion advice. Some things just need to be experienced and we know that there are going to be many, many moments of inspiration.

*Sue and Ruth and all at Pathways-Plokwane*

## News from Pathways-Pretoria

Pathways Pretoria has been blessed with a lot of new children and we are bursting out of our seams (20 children to be exact!!!)

We currently have a sensory stimulation group, 'n pre-literacy group and a functional literacy and life skill group. With the help of facilitators we focus extensively on communication and learning of life-skills. Our dream for the near future is to start a young adult group to facilitate life-skills and employment skills. You are also blessed with new equipment. We got an adapted bike, walker and crawler to enhance our outside play programme. We have also bought a lot of sensory integration equipment and are waiting for our beam to start with program. Our older group enjoy aerobics twice a week and also does an obstacle course the alternative days because we want to get and keep them moving.

We are looking forward to our next



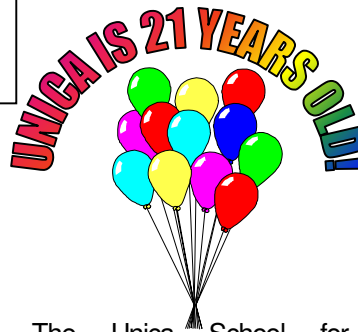
golf day on the 14th of October and we are already starting to plan our



Christmas cards.

All in all we have been very blessed and we enjoy each day at the school tremendously.

*Danita Nel*



The Unica School for children with autism is coming of age this year. After having started as a small unit for children with autism with 2 pupils, it is now a fully fledged school with 96 learners! To celebrate this very special occasion, they held a concert and carnival. As always, a few speeches had to be made, but these were different. All of the speakers celebrated the fact that we are all unique human beings with unique interests, talents and skills. We are all different, but it is in this differentness, this diversity, that our true strength lies.

Boy! Did the children celebrate this event! From the little ones who sang "happy birthday" and did the chicken-song, to the older ones who did the Hokey Pokey and danced to the

beat of "Meisie Meisie" with their hoola-hoops and the whistle-blowing brigade, everyone participated. Some of the learners and ex-learners clearly enjoyed centre stage and sang individual numbers and "Bles Bridges" even made a special appearance with one of the boys handing out red roses to the ladies!

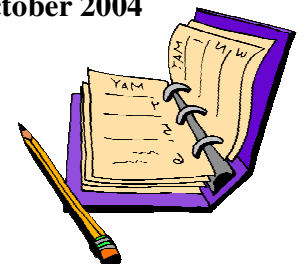


Helena Hetteema was the guest artist and certainly added to the glamour of the day, and for the grand finale a huge four story birthday cake complete with candles were lit, before hundreds of balloons floated into the air. Congratulations, Christine and all the teachers, learners and parents. May the next 21 years be just as exciting and enriching. As Margaret Golding said, in the end it is all about the "3 P's": Parents; Professionals and Public!

*Juan Bornman*

## For your diary

**ISAAC 2004 (Natal, RN, Brazil): 4 – 12 October 2004**



# FUN IN THE MUD!

Spring is approaching again, which means that shortly we'll all be outside again, enjoying the warm rays of the sun on our skin, creating a feeling of well-being and happiness. What does this have to do with the newsletter I hear you ask? Let's see...

When do children learn best? When they are **engaged** in activities, **inspired** to learn, when they **laugh** and when they have **opportunities** to explore and to be **creative**. This is a mouthful. How can that be

All of that is possible when elements of fun are woven into the learning experiences, making the learning come to life.

Let's take a well-known activity like making mud pies. It's an activity that is available and accessible and that creates many opportunities for laughing... But do children actually learn anything while they are getting messy and laughing? Well, making mud cakes is actually a science because we are mixing two things together to create something

new. We can also turn this into a creative activity as we can decorate these mud pies with stones, leaves, twigs and other nature items. When looking at it even deeper it can enhance communication opportunities, e.g. requesting more mud, leaves or water, indicating things like "messy", "finished" and "fun".

We can even use some mathematical principles as the children can measure the ingredients (e.g. the water), identify ingredients on picture/word cards, following steps that explain how the activity should be done. (Some of these ideas come from the AbleNet Newsletter. If you want to see their newsletter, e-mail them at [vision@ablenetinc.com](mailto:vision@ablenetinc.com)).



*Here is a basic communication board that might help to get you started!*

## CAAC Open Days and consultations

Do you want to find out more about AAC? About devices? About resources for the classroom or for home? Why not come round to an open day at the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAAC), at the University of Pretoria (Lynnwood Road entrance).

Parents, AAC users, educators or therapists can attend a free presentation by the CAAC on services, resources and activities. A demonstration can be given on high and low tech communication aids. Programs are tailored to your special area of interest. Open days take place on a monthly basis, usually on the last Friday of the month, starting at 9h00. If you would like to attend, please confirm with Liza (012 420 2001) in order for us to tailor your program.

Apart from open days to give a basic overview of AAC and the Centre's services, the CAAC also offers consultations to persons with complex communication needs.

In order to schedule a consultation, please contact Mirinda (012 420 4728) or Liza (012 420 2001), Consultations cost R500.00 to be paid on the day of the consultation. We operate on an in-contracted fee, so claims can be made from the medical aid.

## CAAC news

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### Staff news

We have the privilege to announce a new member on our staff at the CAAC, Corneli Strydom came all the way from the University of Stellenbosch, Department of Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy. She joined us at the end of June this year. Her responsibilities at the CAAC include training, consultations and ordering AAC equipment..

Unfortunately, we also had to say goodbye to one of our other staff members, Derick Poremba-Brummer. He was an employee at the CAAC as a disability consultant from 1 April 2001 – 30 June 2004. During this period he proved to be a valuable member of the team and assisted in tasks such as training, presenting the value and significance of AAC during open days and administrative tasks. He is still an active committee member and loyal supporter of INTERFACE as well as BIG, both associations for persons with disabilities and their families.

*Kitty Uys*

### Basic & advanced AAC training

This year's annual AAC training workshops were held from the 21<sup>st</sup> June until the 2<sup>nd</sup> July. The lecture venue was filled to capacity with educators, therapists, parents and students who wished to learn more about AAC - once again we had participants attending from all over the country. These workshops aim to provide a solid foundation in the basic principles of AAC

from assessment through various intervention issues (i.e. intervention principles, devices and switches, positioning and play) and beyond intervention to legal and employment issues for people with disabilities, as well as the fundamentals of research. Apart from the comprehensive handouts received, the workshop also provided the ideal opportunity for networking with people who have an interest in disability and/or work in the field of AAC – we saw many people exchanging emails and contact telephone numbers with others.

Highlights of the workshop included a speech by Zach Joubert (on his Delta talker) and the practical demonstration of classroom implementation of AAC presented by Danita Nel and Felicia Barrett (from Pathways Pretoria). The participants were also introduced to INTERFACE (a support group for individuals who use AAC and their significant others). Throughout the workshop participants commented that they felt that the information provided was practical and they said they were looking forward to implementing strategies and tips that they had learnt throughout the week. All round it was a very enjoyable workshop for the presenters and staff of the CAAC as well as for the participants.

*Michal Hartly*

### Bruce Baker Visit

Mr. Semantic Compaction (MinSpeak), Bruce Baker from the USA, visited South Africa during July and presented sessions in Cape

Town, Pretoria and Durban respectively. Bruce included a variety of interesting topics in the sessions, one of which is the difference in the vocabulary used by typical speaking children and adults and the vocabulary depicted on AAC boards and devices. As interventionists we were confronted with the fact that we often introduce symbols or words we "think" AAC users will need in order to cope with situations we predict they will participate in without considering whether it really includes functional and developmentally appropriate words.



He stated that the unpredictability of conversation made it too difficult to plan a core vocabulary for a specific activity. Bruce used the findings of various research studies to point out that most of the words used by speaking individuals are not picture producers (highly iconic), and are therefore quite difficult to depict graphically. This brought up the important issue of iconicity in AAC. Bruce continued by highlighting that speech in general is not highly iconic and suggested that the emphasis of intervention should shift away from the iconicity considerations to the learnability of icons.

Apart from the language learning that will be encouraged by such an approach, the individual will also be able to rely on the existing or developing motor plan of the communication act taking it another step closer to mimicking speech. As a result greater automaticity will be achieved which will in turn enhance the overall communication effort.

Bruce is planning to return to South Africa in February 2005. According to Bruce he fell in love with the country when he first visited it in February this year when he attended the First Regional AAC Conference in Johannesburg. We are looking forward to welcoming him back and recommend that as many of you as possible attend his talks.

*Corneli Strydom*

**University of Pretoria and Purdue University, U.S.A. Exchange Program Commences!**

Our group of 6 undergraduate students and 3 faculty members from Purdue recently enjoyed the wonderful hospitality and many fabulous experiences in Pretoria. We visited for 4 weeks, from early July to early August. Students completed an intensive program of 2 classes (Special Education and Educational Psychology) as part of their teacher education program. The visit began with a warm welcome and braai at Groenkloof campus on the first day, where we met many Pretoria staff and sampled the great South African food. Thank you Laurel Becker for

hosting this event. We were thrilled that our students joined with a Pretoria special education class, for which teaching was shared by both Pretoria and Purdue staff. Students found this a wonderful experience to learn about similarities and differences in their lives, and the Purdue students thoroughly enjoyed the evenings spent with Pretoria students sampling local restaurants and night-spots.

A heart felt thank you Mirinda van der Merwe and Dr. Annatjie van Vuuren for adjusting your schedules so that we could have the integrated class. We hope it will be possible to organize a similar shared class in educational psychology for pre-service teachers in future visits.

We were also extremely fortunate to visit some impressive schools such as Zodwa, Unica, New Hope and Edu-plex to observe special education and inclusion in action. Thanks go to Lien Howatt and Mirinda for organizing these visits.

Despite an intensive schedule of classes we also enjoyed many recreational visits, such as to the Sterkfontein caves, Sammy Marks' house, the Lion Park, and to the zoo. We were so lucky, too, to spend 3 days in Kruger, where we saw many more wildlife than we had dared to hope.

We hope this inaugural visit will be just the first of many. And we look forward to opportunities to return the gracious hospitality we received – we hope that the exchange will be reciprocated with Pretoria students and faculty visiting us at Purdue University in Indiana.

*Helen Patrick*

**CAAC wins award!**

**National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) Awards for 2003**

The CAAC was most honoured to be awarded the winners in the category of "Corporate organisation over the past ten years" at a function in March at Ceasars. The award was made for the contribution that the CAAC has made in training and intervention for people with severe communication problems.

Whilst we are most grateful for the award, an achievement of this nature clearly goes far beyond the CAAC – to all those who so dedicatedly work to make impact in AAC in the country. In fact what is most rewarding about this kind of recognition is that it is a confirmation that our common efforts are making a difference.

THANK YOU – to all those dedicated INTERFACE members: AAC users, parents and professionals who work so dedicatedly towards impact. It is the small steps that are important!

May this be an inspiration to us all in uniting towards our common goal: to bring AAC to those in need!

*Erna Alant*



**The CAAC gets ecologically friendly!**

The CAAC has a birdfeeder! It was kindly donated by Denise Mina, who is currently doing her masters degree in early childhood intervention through the CAAC. **Prof Alant's office has the best view – to give all involved in the trials and tribulations around the office table "a birds eye view" of what it is like to sit in the sun!**





### Why I'm still on this planet

Hi. I am Zach Joubert. I am 33 years old and stay in Pretoria, South Africa. I am suffering from Frederic's Ataxia, a genetic brain disease, which causes degeneration of the cerebellum and brain stem. As a result of this, I have a serious voice impediment, reduced hand control and poor balance to the extent that I cannot walk without support. I succeeded in obtaining a BCom Informatics degree at the University of Pretoria in 1992 before the disease reached a point where my voice was seriously affected. At that stage I could not find work simply because I could not communicate effectively. I could only communicate through my family and some friends. They served as my translators with clients, co-workers or strangers. That same year I became friends with the Centre of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAAC) at the University of Pretoria.

After a long struggle to raise money with the help of family, friends and CAAC personnel, I bought a second-hand Delta Talker. At last I had a voice with which I can tackle the "Normal" world!

### My Friendly Machine

You may ask: How big a problem can such a speech impediment really be? Well, for one thing, I was not independent. Whenever I wanted to go shopping, I had to take along a friend or family member to serve as translator. This is no more a problem. Through the use

of my Augmentative and Alternative Communication device (**AAC**) I regained a lot of personal independence and freedom. I can choose to whom, when, how, where and about what I want to speak. My days of struggling to maintain my friendship basis or meeting new friends is largely at end. My device is helping me to run my own business, thus creating financial independence.

I have used various communication devices like the alphabet board, an ordinary pen and paper and a small portable typewriter printing out a message letter for letter. These devices are time-consuming and have fallen in disuse due to technical advances made in the communication field.

I still use my Delta talker. It is a synthesized voice-output computer which uses Unity software. Its voice is activated by pressing a combination of pictured keys, called *icons*. You can talk in real-time or pre-record some sentences and trigger them when you need them.

Second to sign language, the use of icons to form phrases is the most common and understandable way of expression by people with voice impediments today.

### Hello! I'm not a "retard".

The other issue I had to face was people's reactions when I try to communicate to them with my natural voice. Most strangers would either look at me as if I am a creature from some comic strip. Some may even think that I am retarded, joking or that I'm drunk, especially when talking over the telephone with my natural voice. Others, realizing my

handicap, would avoid me by ignoring me. Most strangers who do talk with me, tend to put words in my mouth because they assume I can not make up my own.

Through experience and suggestions by friends and therapists, I have compiled a bag of tricks to avoid losing the other person's attention at the onset of a conversation. For example:

First pre-program your speech device with phrases like "Hi, I am ..... and you?" or: "I am using a speech synthesizer to communicate, so please hold on while I am typing!" or "I like to add something to the discussed point, please wait while I'm writing it."

Secondly, learn how to operate your speech device at as fast a tempo as you can. It must be very frustrating for non-AAC users to wait for an AAC user to finish spelling each sentence. I am a big sinner of this rule, but I am learning it as fast as possible. For me, communication is not only a social necessity. It is also imperative for making a living financially; in my case: running a business. Let's take an example of a coffee shop: Each customer has his/her own preference of how strong or hot the coffee should be. How does a waiter/waitress determine the individual preferences of each customer? The answer is through communication with the customer.

### Mr. Universe, here I come!

I often asked myself: 'Why did it happen to me?'. Through trying to come to terms with my handicap, I came to understand and become interested in the

process of communication.

I have become involved with speech disability awareness campaigns. I also inform other people with complex communication needs on how to gain funding for- or access to AAC-devices. I have become a member of the International Society of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) and of Interface - South Africa.

I am also a member of the ACOLUG listserve, where you can find out everything about Alternative and Augmentative Communication; tips and tricks of using AAC's and above all meet people with the same interests as yourself. Check it out at <http://disabilities.temple.edu/acolug/>

One of my life's highlights was attending an ISAAC conference in Odense, Denmark in 2002. The conference was about seeing what people with disabilities, like myself, have managed to achieve by using their assets and talents to overcome physical and mental barriers. People whom society writes off, marginalizes, ostracizes. People whom society puts in nursing homes to be 'cared for'. It was an absolute eye-opener as to what can be achieved.

Yes, of course we think: That's the States, or those are rich first world countries. What particularly struck me was that a lot of the challenges that we are facing here in South Africa, are the same in other countries. Negative attitudes towards disability resulting in marginalization

and little funding: It's world-wide. I realize how important it is to start talking to other people – ask them what solutions they have found and learn from each other. The financial burden that AAC users place on society can and is being reduced if all interested parties, e.g. AAC users, their friends/family, and professionals work together on future developments and studies in the field of AAC. As an AAC-user myself, I feel that we, AAC-users, have the responsibility to show society what benefits there might be in helping the AAC-users develop their full potential.

I intend to attend the ISAAC conference at Natal, Brazil in 2004, not just as a spectator but as someone who can help others who could copy some of my life's perspectives.

My vision is that public awareness and the exchange of ideas in support of ongoing research in the field of AAC **today** will ultimately result in the common availability of hi-tech Speech synthesizers and a friendlier social environment to use them in.

**Zach Joubert**

*Thoughts of Tomorrow  
A tranquil thought, or three  
Warm permanence and solidarity  
A constant Pal on this epic journey.  
By Kevin Hollingshead*

*I watch you move, I hear you talk and yet my limbs don't want to walk, I move my mouth to let you know and yet somehow the words won't flow. I watch your face to test your mood, perhaps you think me very rude.*

*But I have thoughts and feeling too, if only I could talk to you. To tell you Oh, so many things, the joy I feel when I hear you sing. And then if only I could explain, the pains and headaches I contain. I shout and rage to make it clear, but it all falls on stone deaf ears.*

*Oh Dear, here comes that horrid man. You know?  
The one who tries to plan and whispers too, those dreadful things, he bids me do. But you insist he's not there, when all the time he stands and stares. I try so hard to shut him out. Why can't you see, when he's about?*

*I want so much to be like you. To laugh and talk and play the fool.  
To understand and be understood, like everyone in this world should.  
But perhaps, I'm sent trapped in this frame, to teach mankind a simple game.  
That love and patience, strength and trust, you all can learn,  
by helping us*

*By Joan Scott Allen*

## Technology Talk

### Using Eye-gaze frames

Eye gaze or eye pointing is often used by children who have severe physical disabilities and require AAC. Young children often spontaneously use eye gaze with their caregivers as eye gaze is a motorically easy selection option. Even when children are able to use a switch and scanning or other methods of AAC they often become fatigued and then eye gaze can be used as an alternative option. It is also a very useful for when a child is given a more cognitively taxing task and one wishes to reduce the motoric demands or in the situation where one quickly wants to offer choices or resolve a communication breakdown. We have found using eye gaze frames far easier than using E-Trans. The communication partner looking through the frame from behind can readily see where the child using AAC is looking. Other advantages include portability and they can be used with the child in any position e.g. even when the child is lying down.

For effective use the pattern we want to teach the children is as follows. They need to look at all the options (represented by photographs, picture symbols, letters or words etc.) and when they are ready to give their message or make a choice, they must look through the frame and make eye contact with the communication partner. Now they must look at their selection and look straight back making eye contact again. In this way there can be no doubt as to what they have chosen. Frames made by Comm-Links are available from Interface-KZN at R 40 per frame. They frames are made from lightweight plastic tubing with adhesive Velcro already attached (reverse of frame can be used with press stick).

*Margi Lilienfeld*



**Interface KZN - 031 7011 444**

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*Your contribution will assist Interface and the CAAC in helping parents, children and other AAC users to face the great many challenges encountered on a daily basis*

**Let's work together to make a difference.**

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