

# Communicating with Confidence: The impact of using High Tech AAC in the community

Evidence Based Practice



## Background

Communicative competence relies on the integration of operational, social, linguistic and strategic skills in response to the demands of real world interactions<sup>1</sup>. Individuals should engage in naturalistic communication interaction within the community<sup>2</sup>. However, it has been reported in a review of research that in more than 50% of Augmentative and Alternative Communication studies conducted this is not the case<sup>3</sup>. The AAC team at St Catherine's school have designed an independence program for building confidence when using high tech AAC devices due to a lack of skill application interventions. This work will begin to provide more practiced based evidence for how this approach increases their opportunities to live happier and more fulfilled lives.

## The Activity

The program comprises of four levels – independence around school, the local town, our county town and our nearest city. Each level has various tasks which need to be completed e.g. ordering from a cafe. Each student attends a weekly group session and this information is then shared with our care staff, education staff and parents for a collaborative approach. Questionnaires were sent to school staff after 1 term of intervention (around 12 weeks). These were designed specifically to measure the potential impact of this intervention. The questionnaire focused on 4 key areas; confidence in use, social confidence, organisation and independence of use. The results were then compiled and an average increase score taken.

## Recommendations

Thoughts for the future:

- Inclusion of data from a control group – Currently we are awaiting questionnaire results from our control group.
- Further data collection – Questionnaires to be sent again after another term of intervention to see whether students continue to improve.
- Generalising program content – Looking into whether the program would be useable in settings other than the Isle of Wight .

## The Impact

Results indicated that students had increased in all areas (results ranging from an increase of 22% - 40%).

The greatest improvements were seen in social confidence (38%) and using their talker effectively on an individual basis (40%).

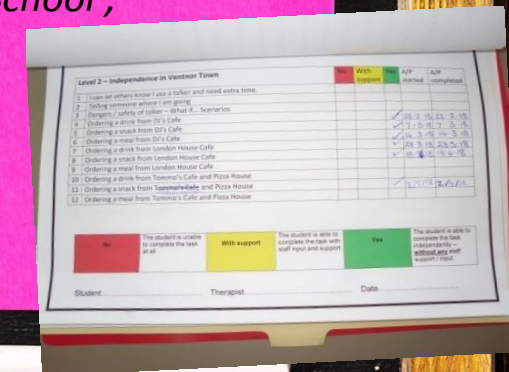
The significant increase in their social confidence when using AAC, highlights that working on participation in real world contexts such as the wider community, has a direct impact on their social confidence observed within the classroom.



Level 2 independence students enjoying a meal they ordered using their talkers.

Kayleigh Sparkes,  
Speech and Language Therapist  
Laura Buswell,  
Occupational Therapy Assistant

St Catherine's School ,  
Isle of Wight



<sup>1</sup> Light, J.C. & McNaughton, D. (2015). Designing AAC research and intervention to improve outcomes for individuals with complex communication needs. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. Vol 31, Issue 2.  
<sup>2</sup> Sennott, S.C., Light, J.C. & McNaughton, D. (2016). AAC Modelling Intervention Research Review. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*.  
<sup>3</sup> Shell, M.E., Brady, N., McLean, L., Ogletree, B. T., Siegal, E., Sylvester, L, Mollica, B.M., Paul, D., Romskil, M.A. & Sevcik, R. (2010). Twenty years of communication intervention research with individuals who have severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. Vol 115.