Background
Communicative competence relies on the integration of operational, social, linguistic and strategic skills in response to the demands of real world interactions\(^1\). Individuals should engage in naturalistic communication interaction within the community\(^2\). 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\(^3\). 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.

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.

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.

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

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