Let Them Have Their Voices

Information Booklet

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Let them Have Their Voices

The Joshie-Man

LET THEM HAVE THEIR VOICES is a campaign to ensure that non-speaking children, especially those with autism, have the support they need to communicate. Over 30 million non-speaking autistic individuals worldwide lack the tools for effective communication, often due to systemic barriers and complicated access to AAC devices.

Inspired by Joshua Harris (The Joshie-Man), who uses an affordable AAC device to communicate, we believe non-speaking children should have access to these essential tools just like hearing aids are provided to those with hearing impairments. However, many families face challenges in obtaining devices due to funding delays or lack of awareness.

Led by Dan Harris and Marissa Webb a Speech and Language Therapist at The Orchid Practice, and supported by a team of volunteers, we aim to raise money to provide iPads and communication software to families who can't afford them.

Together, we can ensure that no child is without the tools they need to communicate and lead empowered lives. Thank you for supporting this cause.

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01 Overview

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices are powerful tools that support communication, allowing people with communication difficulties to be empowered to be who they are, and connect with the world around them, through what they have to say.

For children who have difficulty speaking, AAC can provide a means of expressing thoughts, needs, and feelings in a way that might otherwise be impossible.

These devices help children build confidence, reduce frustration, and ensure they have a voice, even if verbal communication is challenging.

An AAC device should be seen as a scaffold for communication, not a barrier to future speech. Just like any other tool, such as a wheelchair for mobility, AAC devices enable children to engage with the world around them while still working on building verbal communication skills in parallel.

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01 Importance

AAC is especially vital for children who struggle with verbal communication. By offering a means to express themselves, AAC devices give children the opportunity to be heard, participate in conversations, and communicate their needs effectively.

It's important to understand that just because a child isn't talking, it doesn't mean they have nothing to say. AAC ensures that their voices are acknowledged and they can continue building their communication abilities.

For many children, this tool provides the necessary support to foster greater independence, social interaction, and confidence in expressing themselves. As parents and caregivers, it's crucial to embrace AAC as a bridge to communication, supporting the child's growth, both verbally and non-verbally.

02 Key Considerations for Parents

Child's Needs: The most important factor when considering an AAC device is understanding your child's unique needs.

Every child is different, and so the device you choose should align with their specific needs and abilities. For instance, children may have varying levels of literacy, physical abilities, or cognitive skills, all of which can influence the type of AAC system that would be most effective. Some children may require a symbol-based system with pictures or photos, while others may be able to use text-based systems or even predictive text tools as their language skills develop. Additionally, children with physical disabilities may need specialised hardware, such as larger screens or switch access, to interact with the device. (please note we are not able to fund these through this campaign at the moment).

The iPad Apps for Complex Communication Support Needs document offers a range of AAC apps tailored to different needs. It provides useful references for parents, listing apps with various features like symbol-based communication, text-to-speech, and accessibility options like switch scanning and eye-tracking. This resource can help parents evaluate the available options and choose a system that will work best for their child's abilities and developmental stage.
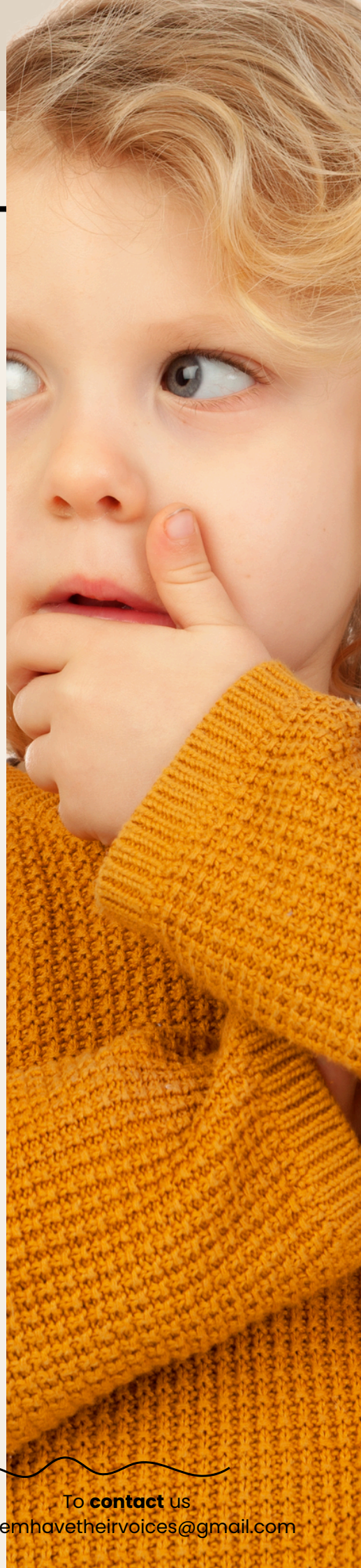
Family Involvement: AAC devices are most effective when they become part of everyday life, which means consistent use at home and in various environments.

Family involvement is crucial in ensuring the device is used regularly and in a natural way. As parents, caregivers, and siblings model and use the AAC device, children can see how it functions in real conversations and daily interactions.

The more it is used, the more the child will see the power of it as their voice. It's important to treat the device as an extension of the child's communication, incorporating it into routines, playtime, mealtimes, and even moments of frustration.

By making the AAC device a regular part of family life, you help your child feel more confident and motivated to communicate with those around them.

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02 Key Considerations for Parents

Support Team: Choosing and using an AAC device is not something parents should do alone.

Working with a team of professionals is essential to ensure the device is suitable and used effectively.

Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and AAC specialists can provide valuable guidance on selecting the right system based on the child's needs. They can assess the child's language development, motor abilities, and cognitive skills to recommend an appropriate device and software.

Additionally, teachers and other professionals who are familiar with the child can help ensure that the AAC system is being used effectively in the classroom and other settings.

Together, this team can help the child make the most of their AAC system, supporting both their communication skills and their overall development.

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Software Options:

When selecting an AAC system, consider the software's features and adaptability to your child's needs. Two popular options funded through this project are Grid for iPad and Proloquo2Go.

- **Grid for iPad** offers a range of resources suitable for children of all ages and literacy levels. It provides customisable symbol-based communication systems and text-to-speech options. Notable features include Super Core, a core vocabulary for beginners and skilled communicators alike, and Voco Chat, which supports various communication needs, from social interactions to mental health topics. With a UK helpline available for parents and professionals you are never alone with your questions.

- **Proloquo2Go** is highly customisable, with over 27,000 symbols. It supports language development by progressing from single words to complex sentences, with a Crescendo™ vocabulary feature. It includes 23 pre-programmed button layouts for users with different accessibility needs.

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Choosing the Right AAC

Hardware:

Choosing the right device to run your AAC app is essential for ease of use and accessibility. iPads are a common choice and funded through this project due to their portability, ease of use, and compatibility with AAC software. If an iPad is not right for you, please look around for the right device for your child.

Here's what to consider:

- Screen Size: A larger screen is easier for children who struggle with precision or need larger icons. It also provides better visibility for children with visual challenges.
- Portability: The device should be lightweight and easy to carry to ensure it can be used in various settings, such as at home, school, or in public. A tough case is a must!
- Durability: Since AAC devices are used frequently, a sturdy iPad with a protective case is crucial. Consider adding accessories like stands or straps to ensure ease of use.
- Alternative Access: For children with physical disabilities, additional hardware like switches, eye-tracking, or head-tracking may be necessary for easier interaction with the device. (not funded through this project)

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04

Is it right for your child?

Symbol Sets: Both Grid for iPad and Proloquo2Go offer a range of symbol sets to support communication. These symbols help children understand and use the AAC system more effectively. It is common to start by modelling the symbols for words we most commonly use throughout the day, progressing to more abstract symbols as the child's communication skills grow. If your child is already familiar with a specific symbol set, for example the symbols used at school, this is likely a great place to start.

Accessibility: An iPad can be accessed by children who can press a screen. The size and number of symbols can be changed to accommodate your child's level of skill and adjusted as they progress.

Customisation: The iPad and software have customisations such as voice options, symbol choices, and layout designs. There is the ability to add personal images or videos to buttons. This can make the system more relatable and engaging for the child, helping them feel more connected to their communication tool.

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04 Features to Look for when choosing which App

Feature	Proloquo2Go	Grid for iPad
Symbols	Over 27,000 symbols (SymbolStix) and ability to customise symbols and add personal images.	Includes SymbolStix, PCS, and Widgit symbols, customisable with photos and symbols for easier communication.
Age Range	Suitable for children of all ages with varying literacy levels.	The symbol-based vocabularies include child and teen/adult vocabulary.
Language Development Support	Crescendo™ vocabulary system, supports development from single words to complex sentences.	Offers core vocabulary options, including Super Core and Voco Chat for more complex needs.
Customisation	Highly customisable: change vocabulary, voices, layout, and add personal images.	Highly customisable: flexible layout, can add phrases, words, and personal images, and supports remote editing.
Device Compatibility	Requires iOS device (iPad/iPhone), fully compatible with Apple's VoiceOver.	Requires iOS device (iPad), and has remote editing via Windows PC.
Accessibility Features	Supports switch control, head-tracking, and has 23 pre-programmed button layouts.	Access through finger pressing and swiping.
Learning Curve	Easy to start with, intuitive interface, especially for beginners.	Very flexible and can be adapted as the child's needs change. Grid for iPad learning pathway is there to help.
Content for School Use	Includes options for educational content and can be adjusted for classroom environments.	Includes resources like Grid for Schools, developed with input from speech therapists for school use. there is an online community for support.
Community Support	Strong support from the Proloquo2Go user community, plus resources and tutorials.	Extensive online support through Smartbox Academy and Grid community Smartbox plus UK based support team who can be contacted via phone/email /online chat between 8am and 10pm Monday – Friday.

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05 How AAC Supports Development

AAC serves as a **scaffolding tool**, providing essential support for children to build their communication skills. By offering a means to communicate, AAC helps reduce frustration, fosters social interactions, and builds confidence, all of which contribute to overall language development.

For many children, AAC can be a bridge to **verbal speech**, supporting their progress as they develop the skills necessary for talking. As the child becomes more confident with their communication, they may begin to use their AAC system alongside or in place of speech, depending on their individual needs.

Language Development: Apps like Grid and Proloquo2Go actively support language growth by progressing from basic vocabulary (such as single words) to more complex sentence structures. This progression encourages children to build on their communication skills and understand the function of language, moving from simple requests to more detailed and expressive conversations. As children gain more control over their vocabulary and sentence formation, their language skills expand, which may ultimately support their development of speech. The app's structure, which adapts to the child's needs, ensures that language development is both gradual and consistent, helping children to communicate more effectively as their skills grow.

06

Practical
Steps for Parents

Choosing a Device: This project is aimed to provide an iPad and software for children who are not yet able to use their voice to communicate. In order to access an iPad in this way, children need to be able to use their fingers to press the screen for access. At this time the project is not funding any additional access hrdware like eye gaze or switches.

Training and Support: Parents should seek out training resources to ensure they are using the AAC system effectively.

For example, Smartbox Academy (UK based) offers free online training and community for families and professionals using Grid for iPad. Similarly, Proloquo2Go (US based) has a support community, where parents can access tips, resources, and problem-solving advice from other users and professionals.

These training resources can help parents feel confident in using the device and integrating it into daily routines.

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06 Practical Steps for Parents

Setting Goals: Setting clear, achievable goals is crucial for tracking progress. Parents should work with Speech Therapists or AAC specialists to create goals for their child's communication development.

These goals should be specific, measurable, and focused on real-life communication situations. For example, goals could include teaching the child to use their AAC device to request specific items or express simple thoughts.

Regularly tracking progress helps parents stay focused on the child's development and allows for adjustments to be made as needed to continue supporting their communication journey. Think about using tools like a communication diary to record progress, and support goal setting.

Insurance: Enquire with your house insurance to add the AAC device.

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07 Funding and Access

To help you access an AAC device, the LTHTV project is providing funding support.

Follow these steps to get started:

1. **Research Software Options**: Begin by researching which AAC software might work best for your child. We recommend exploring Proloquo2Go and Grid for iPad to determine which system best suits your child's needs.

2. **Consult with Your Child's Support Team:** Speak to the professionals working with your child, including speech therapists, teachers, and other specialists. Ask about their experiences with AAC devices and which system they believe would be most effective for your child's communication needs.

3. **Complete the Application Form:** Once you've decided on the software, complete the online application form. You can access the form using this link: https://bit.ly/letvoice.

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Contact Information

Before applying for the grant please do your research on which symbol software is best for your child.

Things to consider:
If school/nursery are all ready familiar with a software, go with that as they can support your child's use of the AAC better, if they know it.

Look at the support availability from the software company, what do they provide and how easy is it to access?

Speak to your child's Speech and Language Therapist/Pathologist and Occupational Therapist and get their opinion on which would work best for you?

Look at demonstrations of how to use the software and check you feel comfortable with working with it.

Useful Contacts

Grid - Smartbox
Phoner number: 01684578868
Website: www.thinksmartbox.com
Support: support@thinksmartbox.com

Proloquo2Go - AssistiveWare
Website: www.assistiveware.com
Support: support@assistiveware.com

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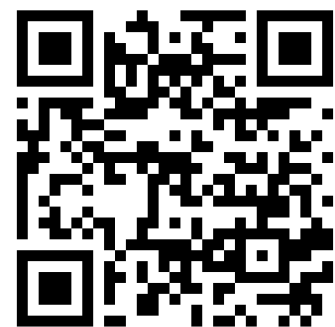
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8. Spreading the Word and Business Support

We need your help to make sure more children can access AAC devices. If you are a business or know someone who works at one, we are calling on British businesses to donate funding or iPads to support this cause. Your generosity can make a significant difference in the lives of children who need these devices to communicate effectively.

If you or your company are interested in contributing, please get in touch with us at letthemhavetheirvoices@gmail.com. Together, we can help ensure that more children have access to the tools they need to express themselves. Spread the word, and let's make a bigger impact!

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