



# Smartbox Newsletter

April 2022



## Foreword

Welcome to the first edition of the termly 'Talk Smart' newsletter.

We have much to share and celebrate and we hope you enjoy the highlights in this issue.

Following the acquisition of Smartbox in 2020, a number of schools took part in the 100 Voices project. This joint initiative brought Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to 100 adults and young people and the results have been astounding.

Our Smartbox (AAC) working party was established last summer. We meet regularly to share best practice, increase awareness, identify young people across the schools that would benefit from a device, discuss training approaches and consider ways to measure progress and impact.

Through this termly update we want to let you know how this assistive technology is already supporting fifty of our young people to develop communication skills and have a voice and we are confident that there are many more who would benefit from using talk pad devices.

We are here to support you to utilise Smartbox, where appropriate, to help children and young adults in our schools and colleges to communicate and live more independently.

If you would like to work with us, or want some more information please contact Cath Fisher.

We very much hope you enjoy reading our update.

Please spread the news and talk smart!

Simon Brown  
SEN Regional Lead - Education



This poster was created for the 100 Voices project.

## Top tips

for communication partners

### Go team!

Teamwork is key for successful AAC development - everyone is part of the team and will make a difference.

### New skills

Make training essential, from AAC awareness to in-depth device training, every new skill counts.

### Presume competence

Recognise AAC learners' potential to learn and that they have something to say - it can take time.

### Gather evidence

Dated notes, videos, screen shots... it all helps to demonstrate success and set next steps.

### Review

As with any support, regularly review, adjust and set new goals to keep progressing.

### Make a plan

Plan for when new team members arrive so it's easy for them to get up to speed as quickly as possible.



Smartbox

Smartbox - Communication Top Tips - UK - A



Hi! I'm Cath and I am a Consultant Speech and Language Therapist. I have recently returned to work for Cambian again. My role is around supporting newly qualified Speech and Language Therapists in their roles across a number of sites. This is an new and exciting way of delivering the service. Within my role I also have a number of projects I am involved with which support the development of the quality of the service that we offer our young people. I am very pleased to be involved in the Smartbox project and I will be taking over for Kirsty Marsden who has done such an amazing job with the team of getting the Smartbox project to this point. This is certainly an exciting journey and I am very privileged to be part of it.

Contact Cath by email: [Catherine.fisher@cambianguroup.com](mailto:Catherine.fisher@cambianguroup.com) or phone: 07503 623356

# The beginning of the Smartbox journey

by Sam Salici-Gilbert

(Speech and Language Therapist at Purbeck View School)

I first heard about Smartbox from my Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) colleagues at Hill House and The Forum schools during a supervision session. They had been involved in the 100 voices project with Smartbox, but due to the project ending, I didn't think I would get the chance of working with Smartbox at this time. During my supervision with my SALT colleagues I was intrigued to find out which students would benefit from a high-tech aid. Lots of the students at Purbeck View School (PVS) were using a low-tech aid, and it was often challenging to get them to use this consistently. My peers felt that these students may actually be more motivated to use a high-tech aid, this left me with nearly all of our student caseload potentially benefiting from a high-tech aid and Smartbox input.

This supervision gave me the confidence to pursue the possibility of Smartbox supporting our students. I asked Simon Brown (SEN Regional Lead - Education) if there was any chance PVS and I could be involved in a similar project. He invited me to the Smartbox AAC Working Party meeting which includes representatives from Smartbox, the Commissioning Team, Speech and Language Therapists from The Forum School, Hill House School, Bletchley Park School and Dilston College. I could hear first-hand about the 100 Voices project. This helped me to see the successes and challenges and get an idea of what we could do at PVS. The main challenge highlighted in the Working Party was difficulty in attaining funding for current students in the schools. These students were currently loaned devices but did not own them. It was agreed that with 10 students identified at PVS we could be used as an experimental subject to work out how to get funding for current students for Smartbox. Being in this position also meant that Smartbox would have to think about what was needed to support PVS successfully to use the high-tech aids. During the meeting I was advised me to create an email template for Local Authorities, outlining the potential benefits of using Smartbox and high-tech aids. The email explained that this could improve the students (that they funded) quality of life and indicated there may be a cost implication to the LA's if

a Smartbox was deemed as essential for their communication. This email was sent to the Commissioning Team who sent it on to appropriate Local authorities.

Evidence was needed to prove that these students would benefit from Smartbox input, so myself and the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant started recording our student's communication methods. We also filled in a pragmatic profile (adapted from the ACE centre) and completed Therapy outcome measures pre Smartbox input.

We secured a Discovery Day with Smartbox, which involved Smartbox representatives coming to PVS with a range of devices and various communication grids set up. We virtually met with a Smartbox representative Jess on 2<sup>nd</sup> March and discussed our student's communication profiles with her so they could prepare their resources for students on the Discovery Day.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> March Jess and their inhouse Speech and Language therapist Becky came and met all 9 students (unfortunately 1 student could not be seen due to isolating due to Covid). Students were seen either in the therapy room or within their class. All students showed some interest in the high-tech aids some choosing to explore and press the buttons to see what they sounded like, sometimes we paired the use of the high-tech aid with an activity such as blowing bubbles and the Smartbox staff would press the appropriate words with the activity. They used the core grid which helped support the student to build up vocabulary but also allowed staff and students to engage in conversation around the activity. Students that often find it difficult to communicate and interact with on a daily basis, were sharing moments with us using the high-tech aids, which was exciting and so meaningful.

At PVS we are excited about the prospect of trialling these communication aids and seeing how they will support the student's communication needs daily. I am keen to share the next steps of our Smartbox journey with you...

## Strategies for supporting AAC development

### Simple AAC

#### **S**how

Point to symbols as you talk

This SHOWS the learner what to do and models language for them. It's okay to make mistakes and you don't have to point to every single word - just the important ones.

#### **I**nteresting

Remember to keep things fun!

Relate your teaching to the AAC learner's favourite things to keep them INTERESTED. We all learn more when we are interested and motivated!

#### **M**onths and months

Learning AAC takes time

Some learners will need MONTHS of modelling, to see and hear their AAC being used, before they are ready to start using it themselves. This is okay.

#### **P**ause

Give learners lots of time

Learners might need longer to process what you say and respond. A PAUSE also shows it's their turn to talk. It can help to count to ten in your head to make sure you pause for long enough!

#### **L**anguage

Teach different types of words

Try to remember all the reasons we use LANGUAGE. It's not just to ask for things! So model a range of words and how to use them - to comment, protest, ask questions and more!

#### **E**xplore

Give learners time to explore

Allowing learners to 'play' with their device is okay. In fact, it's really important that we give learners time to EXPLORE their AAC and see what it can do.

#### **A**lways available

Make sure AAC is available

AAC users need access to language all of the time! This can be a high tech device, or a low tech communication book. But if they don't ALWAYS have their AAC - they can't learn to use it!

#### **A**dd words

Add new words as you teach

Once a learner begins to use their AAC, support their language development by ADDING WORDS to what they say. If they say one word, repeat it back and add another word.

#### **C**omment

Swap questions for comments

Questions can be testing, not teaching. So instead of asking questions we know the answer to, say the answer instead, or just COMMENT on what is happening.

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Simple AAC poster - UK - A

stop



bubbles



little



up



want

