



2021 AT Scholar Report

ZOE CLARKE

Zoe Clarke works for the Barnsley Assistive Technology Team as Environmental Controls Lead and also represent Environmental Controls nationally on the NHS England Clinical Reference Group for Rehabilitation and Disability. Her team provides the specialised EC and AAC Service across Yorkshire and the Humber.

“Once again I’d like to say a massive thank you for the opportunity I had to attend ATIA2021!”

ATIA

I have worked in Electronic Assistive Technology for nearly 20 years and the ATIA conference is something that I have often looked at but never managed to get to. When I received the email saying that I had been nominated as an AT Scholar with the opportunity to attend ATIA remotely I was excited and honoured. A few weeks prior to the start I logged in and after getting my head around the time difference worked out what to attend. The choice was vast and as with all conferences there was often a couple on at the same time which looked interesting but it was reassuring to know that they were being recorded.

Although the conference didn’t start till 4.30pm UK time, when it was announced that we were going into lockdown and my children would be at home for home schooling it felt a little more stressful as to how everything was going to fit in.

Sessions

Overall, I wanted to say how much I enjoyed the daily introduction sessions. David introduced the day and the polls were interesting, especially to see the split between first time attendees and people who had been before. I felt brave enough on one day to turn my microphone on when invited to say how I was feeling about the day and the conference so far. My particular days of interest were the Augmentative and Alternative Communication days and the AT for Physical Access and Participation however having access to all enabled me to attend some interesting sessions on the other days. I attended a number of sessions but have highlighted some key sessions for me below. One particular highlight was the Guess the 80’s Song disco party at the start of Kelli Suding’s session.

Leveraging Automated Data Logging to Guide Therapy and Improve Client Outcomes

Krista Davidson and Abigail Denque presented this paper. Data logging in AAC has always been an interesting topic in terms of whether it is a good measure of usage etc. and the consideration of the privacy and consent elements. The presentation covered the process of introducing data logging and the data collected. The reasons considered for data logging were described as identifying and modifying therapy targets, encouraging home use and buy-in and to promote generalisation. The timeline of the data collection was covered and the challenges that COVID-19 had introduced to this. The findings were identified as being able to make more informed clinical decisions, enabling increased collaboration between team members and an increased device use. This prompted me to reconsider the potential of data logging and how as part of a structured process it could have benefits. In addition, I picked up a useful link to an Assistiveware Blog on this topic [Assistiveware Data and Privacy](#).

Diversity in AAC – Where are we now, where are we headed?

This was a panel session with representation from PRC Saltillo, Assistiveware, Tobii Dynavox and Avaz. It was interesting hearing how the different companies had been considering diversity and how recent events including the Black Lives Matter movement had had influence within AAC. Each of the panelists answered questions around the topic of diversity. I think this session highlighted the challenges of evolving AAC to appropriately provide vocabulary for all aspects of diversity yet the importance of



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moving this on. There are careful considerations required to ensure that it is well informed and not a token effort. As I was listening something which sprang to mind was whether when we are looking for options for AAC in different languages whether we consider software developed in the countries where that language is native. In addition, a really useful resource was shared, giving details of some of the AAC software and the options in terms of language and diversity which can be found here <https://bit.ly/39rEaiw>. The talk also highlighted the YouTube channel [Diverse AAC](#).

AAC Exhibitor Lightening Round

I really liked this really short snap shot of the exhibitors. It highlighted the Mount and Mover to me as something to investigate more fully.

This also flagged up the USSAACs disaster relief committee for people who use AAC. More information can be found about this on [USSAAC](#)

The AT Policy Landscape

Presented by Audrey Busch, Executive Director, Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs and Marty Exline, Director, National Assistive Technology Act Technical Assistance and Training (AT3) Center this gave an overview of the current and future policy landscape for AT in America. This interested me greatly both to understand how AT was featuring on the agenda for Congress in America and think about the position in the UK. It prompted me to email APPGAT to say how the Global Pandemic had raised awareness of AT in America and whether there had been similar observations in the UK. Clive Gilbert and myself followed up after the conference around this and broader issues.

Pioneering Interdisciplinary Assessment

This was presented by Laura Paradowski. It was really interesting to hear about the work they had been doing online during COVID. They described how prior to COVID they had worked as a multi-disciplinary team whereby the whole team would get involved and communicate between each other. They explained how prior to COVID they had undertaken face to face sessions which had been very hands on and this is what they were used to. With the onset of COVID they looked to translate these assessments online and discussed how they had done this. I related to the things they described in terms of remote assessment and I liked how they described the three steps to success as being around the pre-session, interaction and reflection.

In terms of pre-session they described the importance of determining the facilitator, determining the type of device to use for the session, the best time of day, the parts of the home requiring assessment and establishing an agenda for a session. They also highlighted the importance of discussing the timeframe with the person who is going to facilitate the session and what equipment etc. will be required for the assessment. They emphasised being aware of the caregiver burden, something which we had also recognised in our service.

In terms of the interaction element of a remote visit, the session highlighted the importance of every interaction being customised, the importance of the facilitator and our use of language when undertaking assessment (true for remote and face to face). A suggestion which I am keen to integrate into my practice is if working in pairs or more designating a time for each person to speak can be beneficial to avoid people speaking over each other or it being unclear for the client and caregiver.

In terms of the reflection element, they explained how essential it is not to skip this. We have identified as a team how this immediate reflection after sessions both with someone who was part of the assessment but perhaps with someone else from the team has been harder as we have not been coming back to the office and chatting to someone etc.



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Communication, Access, Parent Coaching, and...COVID? How We Did It

This session was presented by Kristen Monroe and Lauren Andelin. This was another session that highlighted how they had moved to remote working due to COVID and the considerations that were made for evaluating access to paper based, low tech and high tech AAC remotely. This emphasised the creativity both assessors and families can have when looking at things they have in their own home. The element I particularly enjoyed was around coaching. This explained strategies they had used for coaching the caregiver on coaching and how to facilitate this and empower the caregiver. They described giving the caregiver a 'Coaching Toolkit' and I am planning to share these with our team to consider when we are working with our clients.

Social Programme

A big part of every conference is the networking. Overall I found it great that although there were lots of people attending remotely who obviously knew each other well from attending the conference face to face it felt very inclusive to newbies like me. Much as it was sad not to be face to face I enjoyed that I could attend in my pyjamas as it was 10pm in the UK.

I particularly enjoyed the AAC Jeopardy social (and even managed to get some of the hardest questions correct), the #ATChat, Bradley and Dan talking about their experiences (www.allaccesslife.org), the Maker Show and Tell Session and the sponsored lecture with Kevin Williams.

Seeing all the creative solutions in the Maker Show and Tell Session was a good reminder that despite all the advanced technology we have sometimes the perfect solution is to adapt something from home and school using some tape and wire.

Kevin Williams was inspirational. I felt for him that his technology had not quite worked but being able to see him throughout the presentation, I think made it even better. One of our Service Users also has an Honorary Contract with our team and we see what a big difference it can make both to professionals and other potential assistive technology users to hear the experience of another person who uses similar technology.

Conclusion

Obviously I have nothing to compare to but I thought the translation of the ATIA conference to the virtual platform was great. Things will always be different when remote but I felt the way the sessions were organised, being no more than an hour long, with the ability to ask questions in the chat was great and extremely well moderated and chaired worked well. I was involved in organising a one day Healthcare Science Conference about two weeks after ATIA and some of the tips from ATIA, such as having people turn off their cameras and to change their name to include where they were from, we adopted in our conference. As a model for how remote conferences can work I thought this was a shining example

Throughout my career I have really valued attending conferences, this is both for the content I am listening to but also for the networking and the time whilst listening to presentations to think about the ideas they trigger, which may be off the topic but having the space to think has generated them. Something I reflected on is that I found when attending a remote conference it was harder to achieve this thinking time as it took a lot of discipline not to be distracted by other things on my computer or other things going on at home.

I would like to thank the All Party Parliamentary Group For Assistive Technology (APPG_AT) for the nomination and Martin Littler, Inclusive Technology, HelpKidzLearn, and ATIA for the sponsorship. I still have a list of additional presentations to catch up on and look forward to doing this over the next couple of months.