

2025 AAC SUMMER CAMP

Text by Tanushree Saxena-Chandhok

Photos by Nik

Exciting. Joyful. Memorable.

These three words capture the spirit of any great camp—and ISAAC-Singapore's AAC Summer Camp on 14 June 2025 was no exception.



This year's camp was a vibrant, three-hour carnival-themed event that brought together AAC users, their families and caregivers in a joyful celebration of connection and communication. The venue buzzed with energy from the beginning, as participants arrived excited and eager to see what was in store for them.

The day started with a lively welcome activity, setting the tone for a series of engaging experiences.

From inclusive carnival games to crafting handmade fridge magnets, there was something for everyone! A short break and snack time allowed participants to recharge before joining in a special celebration of ISAAC-Singapore's fifth anniversary—a milestone made even more meaningful by sharing it with the AAC community.

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Dear Readers

This issue marks a special milestone—ISAAC-Singapore’s fifth anniversary. As we look back on our journey, we are grateful for the many people who have brought us here: AAC users and their families, volunteers, partners and sponsors. Your belief in our mission has made every event, workshop and publication possible.

In June, our AAC Summer Camp brought together users, caregivers and volunteers in a lively carnival-themed celebration—an event that truly embodied connection and inclusion. Alongside this, we reflected on our journey as a Chapter through the voices of members who have been with us since the very beginning.

We are also excited about our practitioner-focused section—“When You Know Better, You Do Better”—which encourages growth and reflection in AAC practice. This complements the stories about the lived experiences of AAC users, parents and volunteers—because every voice adds to the bigger story of our community.

As always, we invite you to read, share and connect with us. Let us know if you have a story to share. Together, let’s continue building a Singapore where every voice is valued.

Catherine
Newsletter Head
(catherine@isaac-singapore.org)

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Behind the scenes, preparations for the event had begun months in advance.

The AAC Also Can team, consisting of passionate volunteers, held a mix of physical and virtual meetings to plan every detail of the event. While the team has organised mid-sized events before, this marked their first large-scale event—a bold step taken in honour of their five-year journey.

This memorable day would not have been possible without the generous support of our partners and volunteers. We are grateful to **The Majority Trust** for funding and believing in the vision of AAC Also Can events; to **Google Singapore** and the **Google Serve** team for providing a spacious, accessible venue and enthusiastic volunteers. Our heartfelt thanks also go to FDS (Friends of the Disabled Society) and to our amazing volunteers from ISAAC-Singapore, NTU BMES (BioMedical Engineering Society), Rotaract ITECC (Rotaract Club of ITE College Central), and National Junior College—your contributions made every moment seamless.



Everyone involved in making the AAC Summer Camp 2025 come to life was truly inspired by the inclusiveness of the event and how AAC communication naturally embedded across all activities and aspects of the event.

The three words that set our camp apart from others are... **Exciting. Inclusive. Memorable.**

As we look forward to future events, I am filled with optimism and excitement for the programmes we have planned. We remain committed to fostering a more inclusive and communicative society for all.



Tanushree Saxena-Chandhok is a Speech Language Therapist by profession, and an AAC advocate at heart. She is currently serving as a committee member for ISAAC-Singapore and is the AAC Also Can Head.

TAKE A PEEK BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE PREPARATION, SETUP, AND JOY OF THE DAY ITSELF—CAPTURED BEAUTIFULLY THROUGH THE LENSES OF OUR YOUNG AND EMERGING VOLUNTEER NYRA'S SINGLE-USE CAMERA.



VOLUNTEER'S P.O.V.

JESSICA LOW: ISAAC-SINGAPORE VOLUNTEER

Volunteering for the AAC Summer Camp with ISAAC-Singapore has always been something close to my heart. I chose to return as a volunteer because I'm passionate about helping AAC users connect with others in meaningful and joyful ways. These opportunities don't come by often for them, and I wanted to play a small part in creating a day filled with fun, connection and inclusion. I was especially looking forward to meeting more AAC users and their families, and to simply spend a day where communication and fun take centerstage.

This year, the experience, like before, was incredibly fulfilling. While there were months of preparation behind the scenes, seeing everything come together on the day of the camp made all the effort worthwhile. The energy from the organisers and volunteers was infectious—everyone was eager to step in and make the day a success.

One of the moments that really stayed with me was overhearing a parent say, “She looks like she’s enjoying herself more than she did in last year’s camp!” That single sentence reminded me of why we do this. It was heartwarming to see families connecting, sharing about how their children communicate, and forming a community that understands and uplifts one another.

Reconnecting with the ISAAC-Singapore community to plan this third AAC Camp was a truly encouraging experience. It brought back memories of our very first camp just two years ago. To see the same group of passionate individuals still coming together with the same drive and warmth, now planning for an even larger group of participants—it was deeply moving. There’s something special about growing a vision together and seeing it evolve, year after year, with familiar faces who continue to believe in the same cause.



Looking ahead, I hope future ISAAC-Singapore events can expand beyond just camps and into activities that also give back to the wider community. It would be wonderful to have initiatives like bake sales or collaborative art projects where AAC users and their families can contribute to raising funds or awareness for others in need. My hope is for our AAC community to not only be inclusive and fun, but also generous and outward-looking—coming together not just to receive, but to give as well.

ISAAC-Singapore has become a meaningful part of my journey, and I’m excited to see how we can continue to grow together.

Jessica (right, in foreground) is one of our passionate volunteers. This photo shows her engaging with a participant at an ISAAC-Singapore camp in 2023.

VOLUNTEER'S P.O.V.**FAUN: PRESIDENT OF ROTARACT CLUB**

Coming on board as a volunteer with ISAAC-Singapore has been a truly enriching and eye-opening experience. As a Rotaractor, I've always believed in "Service Above Self" and the importance of creating meaningful connections with the communities we serve. Volunteering with ISAAC-Singapore allowed me to experience this vision in action through inclusive communication, collaboration and compassion.

Rotaract's vision is about nurturing members who act and inspire change in the world around them. Working with ISAAC-Singapore brought this to life. It reminded me that service isn't just about doing, it's about understanding. Collaborating with an organisation that empowers individuals with complex communication needs resonated deeply with the kind of impact Rotaract strives to create, one that uplifts every voice.

The training we received was both thorough and inspiring. I appreciated how ISAAC-Singapore's team took the time to walk us through the fundamentals of AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication), equipping us not only with technical knowledge but with empathy and sensitivity as well. It was a shift in mindset for many of us, learning how communication could look and feel so different, yet be equally rich and valid.



Faun, at a camp in 2024.



Planning activities with the ISAAC-Singapore team was a collaborative and creative journey. We were encouraged to think inclusively, to design moments where AAC users could fully participate, express themselves, and enjoy the experience in their own way. Every small detail, from visual support to simplified instructions, mattered.

Faun (right), with ISAAC-Singapore member Sayfullah at a camp in 2024.

Seeing it all come together reminded me how powerful intentional planning can be.

What impacted me most were the interactions with AAC users and their families. Every conversation, whether through devices, gestures or symbols, held so much meaning. I remember a moment where a young AAC user's face lit up while playing a simple game we had planned, proudly using their device to communicate. That joy and confidence was unforgettable. Speaking with parents and caregivers also gave me a glimpse into the challenges and triumphs they navigate daily. It reminded me of the strength that lies in community and in never underestimating the power of being understood.

This experience has shifted my understanding of inclusion and communication in ways I didn't expect. I now see accessibility not as a "nice-to-have," but as a necessity in all forms of service. It's also inspired me to continue advocating for greater awareness and acceptance of AAC users, not just within Rotaract, but beyond.

Moving forward, I hope to continue this journey with ISAAC-Singapore, and to share what I've learnt with my fellow Rotaractors. Together, I believe we can build a world where every voice—spoken or unspoken—is heard, valued and celebrated.

PARTICIPANT'S P.O.V.

**SAYFULLAH: DIGITAL ARTIST,
AAC USER & ADVOCATE**

My Carnival Chronicles

I woke up early, buzzing with excitement. Camp Day was finally here! My face beamed as I met the volunteers. We kicked off with the huge parachute game. The colours were flying everywhere and I loved every minute.

Then I spotted something hilarious. A fishing game with fishes swimming in a pool of macaroni!? I had to try it. Who knew fishing could be this fun? I don't think fish usually live in pasta, but hey, it's camp!

Suddenly, I heard cheering and I looked around. Oh! It was for the team who made the carnival happen. That's me down by the stage, with Mommy feeling proud.

By now, I was a little tired. My younger brother still had energy like a rocket. I was ready to chill... until I saw the Googlers behind me. I perked up again! And look! My long-time buddy, Nik the photographer, was back; he was clicking away with his camera.

The day ended with a photo moment with Tanu, one of the amazing co-leads who made the whole thing unforgettable. Honestly? Best. Camp. Ever. Even if I'm still finding macaroni in strange places.

BELOW: TAKE A PEEK AT THE PHOTOS TAKEN BY SAYFULLAH AND SHAHEED (SAYFULLAH'S BROTHER). THEY WENT BACK AND FORTH ON WHICH PHOTOS TO TAKE, THEN HAD FUN CAPTURING THE DAY WITH THEIR KODAK CAMERA.



PARENT'S P.O.V.**ABBY'S MOM**

As a caregiver to a non-verbal four-year-old, communication is something we never take for granted. One of the most memorable moments on our AAC journey was when Abby used her PODD book to tell me she wanted to go to school. Another time, she asked where her little sister was. She's even expressed wanting to hang out with a friend. These might seem like small things, but for us, they were deeply meaningful. Her AAC book has become a window into her soul—a bridge to her thoughts and feelings in ways words alone never could be.

Recently, we had the chance to attend an event organised by ISAAC-Singapore, where everyone used AAC. For the first time, we didn't feel like the odd ones out. Instead, we felt embraced by a warm, understanding community.

What touched me the most was seeing older children use AAC with such confidence and fluency. It gave us a glimpse of what the future might hold for Abby—one that was not just possible, but promising. ■



Abby (girl facing camera), with her family at the AAC Summer Camp.

EVENT UPDATE

Learning from Lived Experience: ISAAC-Singapore's Online Sharing with Aditi

By Rho Evelyn



A screenshot of the workshop participants. Aditi Sowmyanarayan can be seen in the top row (second from right).

On 17 May 2025, ISAAC-Singapore hosted an inspiring online event featuring Aditi Sowmyanarayan, an adult AAC user, who generously shared her personal journey of communicating using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). During the session, Aditi spoke candidly about her lived experiences, offering attendees invaluable insights into the realities, challenges and triumphs of communicating through AAC.

The event concluded with a lively Q & A session, where participants had the opportunity to ask Aditi questions and hear her perspectives directly. It was particularly powerful to witness how everyone in attendance naturally adapted to communicating with Aditi through text-based exchanges, highlighting how shifting communication styles can foster genuine, inclusive conversations. The attendees that evening included AAC users, caregivers, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists (SLTs) and educators, all of whom came together to learn from Aditi's experiences.

Q & A Highlights with Aditi Sowmyanarayan

After the webinar, we caught up with Aditi to find out more about her AAC journey, as well as her thoughts on various matters:

Who were your first speech-language pathologists?

Aditi: Tanushree [Saxena-Chandhok] and Andal Murthy were my first SLPs, and Tanushree was actually present at the session, which made me so happy! I worked with them back at Com DEALL in Bangalore.*

What challenges did you face when you started using Avaz, and how did you overcome them?**

Aditi: I had issues with perception on the left side of the keyboard, and my educator at Ishanya helped me with perception improvement activities. That made a big difference. I actually picked up reading at three years old, so I already had language when I started using Avaz. The prediction feature—like what I'm using now—also helps since I type with one finger.

What was the most useful way your SLPs modelled AAC use?

Aditi: By asking me questions that I had to type to answer. I remember we started with yes/no options that required just one touch, then moved on to one-word answers, phrases and finally, sentences. I also practised typing on typing.com, which helped me develop my typing skills.

How do you use AAC during day-to-day activities and in public? Some caregivers feel embarrassed using it. How do you encourage consistent use?

Aditi: This is my voice, and I can't verbally talk much—even if my life depended on it! Trust me, as a parent, you don't want your child

* speech and language pathologists

** Avaz is a picture and text-based AAC app that empowers children and adults with complex communication needs to express themselves and learn.

to have a meltdown in public out of frustration. An iPad is easy to carry, and most importantly, your child deserves a voice—a reliable way to communicate—even if it doesn't match your expectations of verbal speech. That's autism, and this is what your child needs.

What were some barriers to using AAC in your personal journey?

Aditi: The biggest barrier is the myth that AAC discourages speech. Beyond that, I'm grateful for my family, who understood my need for AAC early on, and for living in a city where I had access to tech-based AAC.

Can you share more about your journey using AAC in the community and school system? What helped, and what didn't?

Aditi: Awareness, access and consistency in using AAC were key for me—both at home and in school. The need for me to have a voice was consistently acknowledged and encouraged. Plus, I use devices with features that make typing easier—Avaz and Pages both have extensive predictive text, which helps a lot.

What advice would you give caregivers just starting their AAC journey?

Aditi: This won't take away your child's initiative to talk. Instead, it will open up a world of communication and possibilities. It's a slow process, but it will help your child become the best version of themselves.

How can we make AAC communication more accessible and natural in the community?

Aditi: We need to make people aware of complex communication needs, establish communication boards in public spaces, and

implement the provisions of The RPwD [Rights of Persons with Disabilities] Act in my country, which makes accessibility tools mandatory. Offering tax cuts for devices bought for AAC usage could help. Another key step is training more therapists in AAC—especially in smaller towns where AAC-trained professionals are scarce. Training parents and caregivers is also essential.

Have there been instances when your AAC couldn't communicate what you wanted? How did you handle those situations?

Aditi: I haven't really experienced that because I type my messages rather than use pictures or symbols. I do have a SOS folder saved for times when I feel overwhelmed—it has words like "tired," "period pain," "headache," "noisy" and "hot". I just tap the right word, and it speaks for me when I need it.

This engaging event underscored the importance of centering the voices of people with lived experience to deepen our collective understanding of AAC. By listening and learning from AAC users like Aditi, we can build more supportive, responsive, and empowering communication environments for everyone.

Let's create a more inclusive community together! ■



Scan this QR code!



To keep up to date about AAC events in Singapore, please join ISAAC-Singapore's WhatsApp broadcast group. We share event flyers and sign-up links here to help keep everyone informed.

WHEN YOU KNOW BETTER, YOU DO BETTER

RETHINKING AAC

By Rho Evelyn

Welcome to the second edition of *When You Know Better, You Do Better*, a space for sharing personal journeys in the world of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). This column invites stories of growth, reflection and change—reminding us that AAC is ever-evolving.

By openly exploring what we've learnt (and unlearnt), we hope to help one another feel connected, supported and inspired to keep improving our practices. Together, we can create more inclusive, empowering communication experiences for AAC users—because when we know better, we do better.

In this edition, I will share some recent reflections I've had as a professional supporting AAC users. These reflections have challenged me to rethink certain approaches and deepen my commitment to practices that truly centre the needs and voices of AAC users.

Recent Reflections on Supporting AAC Users

Over the past few months, I've been pausing to think about three themes and how they will shape my clinical practice going forward. One experience in particular stands out: supporting a student who uses AAC as they went out into the community to get their nails done.

It was a completely different setting from our usual sessions, and it reminded me so clearly that while I might spend just an hour a week with someone, the real impact of our work lies in helping families communicate confidently across all the places and situations that matter to them. It's not enough to focus solely on the

individual or a primary caregiver; communication needs to extend throughout the entire family and their daily lives.

Another reflection that's been on my mind is the importance of being willing to share when I don't know something. I've felt worried about being vulnerable in this way, wondering if it might make me seem less capable. But I've come to believe that openness is essential for growth. The field of AAC is evolving rapidly, particularly with the advancement of technology like AI at a rapid pace. If I want to support AAC users truly, I need to stay curious, acknowledge what I don't know, and invite others into that learning experience with me. I think this is something that, as clinicians working with this population, it is so important we always remember: the nature of our professions is to be constantly curious, and these are professions of lifelong learning.

Finally, I've been reminded of the power of setting goals jointly with AAC users and their families. When we sit together to talk about what's most important to them, the process becomes more meaningful and empowering. These shared goals don't just guide therapy; they foster connection and ownership, making communication a part of everyday life rather than something that only occurs in therapy sessions. What I may prioritise as a goal for a family is not always what they choose, and it is through joint goal setting that we can make the most meaningful change.

Looking Ahead

As I continue to reflect on these themes, I'm reminded that communication is a lifelong process, not just a goal to achieve in therapy. Supporting AAC users and their families means walking alongside them through various stages of life, adapting our approaches, and celebrating growth, both big and small. I invite you to pause and reflect on your own journey: what have you unlearned, and what new understandings have helped you do better? Together, we can build a community where AAC users and their families feel supported, empowered, and heard every step of the way. ■

Rho is a Speech and Language Therapist with a passion for working with non-speaking and minimally speaking individuals who use AAC. She takes a strength-based, family-centred approach, ensuring that communication support is tailored to each individual's needs within their daily life. In addition to her clinical work, Rho is the co-lead of ISAAC-Singapore's AAC Can Share group, a community dedicated to supporting AAC users, caregivers and allied health professionals in Singapore. Through this group, she helps foster a collaborative and inclusive space where individuals can learn, share experiences, and grow in their AAC journey.

INTRODUCING ISAAC-SG COMMITTEE MEMBER: FADILLAH

GIVING MY SON A VOICE: OUR JOURNEY WITH AAC

For years, my son Sayfullah was a chatterbox trapped in silence. He had so much to say, but no way to express it. Born with Quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy and complex communication needs, his words never came through speech. Many mistook his silence for detachment, but I knew better. He was observant, thoughtful and eager to connect. He just needed a way to be heard.

That was how our journey with Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) began.

We started with the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and basic pointing strategies. The real breakthrough came in 2013, when we were introduced to TouchChat, a speech-generating app on the iPad. It was Sayfullah's preferred choice among the options recommended by Sarah Yong, Clinical Head of SPD's Specialised Assistive Technology Centre and a founding member of ISAAC-Singapore.

With TouchChat, Sayfullah quickly learnt to form sentences, answer questions and express his opinions. His personality—once hidden—began to shine. The boy many had labelled “non-verbal” finally had a voice.



Fadillah (left) and Sayfullah, in a scene in “Caring Together”, a video series co-developed by SG Enable and AIC (Agency for Integrated Care).



This was not just a communication win. It marked the beginning of independence.

As a mother, I often ask myself: What would happen when I am no longer around to speak up for him?

That question fuels everything I do. Teaching Sayfullah to communicate through AAC is part of a larger mission—to equip him to navigate life with confidence, dignity and agency. We practise real-life situations such as ordering food, greeting visitors and joining in conversations. Every skill Sayfullah masters is a step toward self-reliance.

Under Fadillah's guidance, Sayfullah learnt to use TouchChat to order his favourite desserts.

Still, I know that families cannot walk this journey alone. The path to understanding and implementing AAC can feel overwhelming, filled with unfamiliar terms, devices and doubt.

That is why I became a Parent Coach in SPD's AAC for Caregivers training programme in 2023 and 2024. Working alongside SPD's speech therapists, I support caregivers, many of whom are just beginning to explore AAC. I share practical strategies drawn from our lived experience—from personalising vocabulary to building habits that support consistent AAC use at home and in the community.

We explore how to integrate AAC meaningfully into daily settings such as the playground, the park or the local *kopitiam*, so that it becomes a natural part of life, not just a therapy tool.

In addition, I have been a member of ISAAC-Singapore since its formation and serve as an SPD Inclusive Champion, advocating for greater awareness and support for AAC users. Whether through workshops, media interviews or public events, I share our story to help shift perspectives.

I am also one of the co-leads of AAC Also Can, a subcommittee under ISAAC-Singapore. It is a platform where AAC users can meet and connect with one another, both online and in person. This space fosters peer support, mentorship, and offers the opportunity to hang out and have fun.



Thanks to her close-knit family, Fadillah can occasionally take time off for self-care and to meet up with friends.



Fadillah, with fellow committee members (from left) Sarah, Tanushree, Jocelyn, Seng Koon and Rho after an ISAAC-Singapore workshop in 2022.

Building peer networks among AAC users is key to developing confidence, friendship and a sense of belonging. We also plan events for AAC users to enjoy together with their caregivers, creating shared experiences and stronger community bonds.

Today, Sayfullah is a confident communicator, a contributor, and an advocate in his own right. Together, we plan in five-year milestones, focusing on building skills in video editing, digital storytelling and independent living. While he still requires support, his path forward is strong and clear.

“

AAC is not a last resort. It is a gateway to learning, relationships and self-determination.


”

My mission is simple: to ensure children like Sayfullah are seen, heard and supported—not only today, but also well into the future.

To fellow families, educators and professionals: Keep believing in your AAC user. Equip them not only to speak, but also to stand on their own.


Look at the ability, not the disability. Together, let us build a more inclusive future, one voice at a time. ■

Fadillah believes everyone deserves a voice and communication should never be a barrier to inclusion. As a mother, advocate and Parent Coach, her journey with her son Sayfullah, an AAC user, has taught her the power of persistence, patience and love in unlocking potential. Through her work, she supports families and educates the public on the importance of AAC and assistive technology. Her mission is to foster a more inclusive society where people with communication needs are heard, respected, and empowered to participate fully.



**The AAC Can Share team
is hosting a December
meet-up for all passionate
AAC advocates to come
together to discuss and plan
for AAC events in 2026.**

Contact us at
aaccanshare@isaac-singapore.org
if you would like to join us!



WE ARE FIVE!

ISAAC-Singapore turns five this year, and on this momentous occasion, we bring to you reflections from three committee members who have been here from the very start.

By Sarah Yong, Tan Xuet Ying and Michelle Cheong



Reflections by

SARAH YONG

It all started during an international AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) Awareness Month, when those advocating for AAC in Singapore felt

that it was time for us to come together to collaborate and work to enhance AAC in Singapore for the betterment of individuals who could not express themselves through verbal speech. In order to do this, we needed to first get to know one another, find out what we were doing, and build trust and relationship.

As eating is a favourite Singapore pastime, we decided to get together for *makan*, for a meal!! What followed was the setting up of a Special Interest Group, where we met, talked about cases, chatted, and supported one another. We were generally happy and quite contented with this arrangement.

A significant phone call and a momentous decision

In 2018, Dr Gregor Renner, who was then the president of ISAAC International, was passing through Singapore on his way to the ISAAC International conference in the Gold Coast. He phoned me and said, "Sarah, I would like to meet up with the AAC advocates in Singapore to challenge them to set up an ISAAC chapter."



At that time, my mind was full of opposition as I thought of how an ISAAC chapter was too much work and too expensive. In any case, we were happy as a local special interest group. However, to oblige Dr Gregor, I decided that we would all meet for pizza.

Dr Gregor, Dr Kristine Stadskleiv and Dr Stephen von Tetzchner presented us with the challenge of how we could do more if we were an ISAAC Chapter. The ISAAC international conference was in a couple of weeks, and many individuals from Singapore were attending because of its proximity. The Singapore delegation met in the Gold Coast and discussed the possibility of forming a Chapter. We agreed that we would get together to discuss the matter after the conference was over. When we returned from the Gold Coast, we met—again over pizza. We realised that we had a momentous decision to make.

Again, like Singaporeans, we drew parallels to food. The options were:

- Professional Special Interest Group

This decision was akin to being an individual chicken rice store. However, from the start, the group of advocates had decided that if we were ever going to set up an AAC group, it would be one that included all members of the AAC community. This would include persons who used AAC and their caregivers, as well as interested members of the public. So, a professional group was not an option.

- A Local AAC Chapter

In Singapore, there were food chains that sold fried chicken but had stores all over the country. As there were already quite a few advocates in Singapore, there was an option to become a local chapter. However, we would not have the benefit of individuals from other countries, so our perspectives would be very much limited.

- An International Chapter

The next option was to be like KFC—the international fried chicken franchise. KFC was known to all around the world! By joining ISAAC International, we would have the perspectives of an international ISAAC family, and this would greatly enrich our own. We would also contribute to this amazing AAC global family.

ISAAC was an organisation that included all parts of the AAC community—and had individuals who use AAC devices at the leadership and membership level. As part of the ISAAC Executive Board, I had the privilege of working with many persons who use AAC devices, including Meredith Allen, Vic Valentic and India Ochs.

And so, we took a vote and decided to take the plunge and work towards becoming

ISAAC-Singapore and we have never looked back!

What followed that decision was many months of hard work—writing our constitution, registering our Chapter, liaising with ISAAC International, and holding our first AGM. Our small committee of Michelle Cheong, Alison Choo, Ong Yu Jing and Tan Xuet Ying spent many nights meeting together. We are so grateful for the help of the ISAAC International Office—Executive Director Franklin Smith, then President Meredith Allen and all who helped us navigate the complexities of starting a Chapter.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to Drs Gregor, Kristine and Stephen von Tetzchner—who were from more established chapters—who challenged us to be part of ISAAC.

Looking back

It's very hard to believe that it has been five years since we made that significant decision. We have worked hard to build an AAC community where everybody is involved and where all advocate that “everyone deserves a voice!” We are proud that our executive committee is diverse—comprising persons who use AAC, caregivers, professionals from speech therapy and music therapy backgrounds and advocates of AAC helming the leadership.

Through our AAC Also Can programmes, we have organised and created opportunities for individuals who use AAC and their caregivers to come together and build community. Our AAC Can Share subcommittee offers platforms for sharing and learning about AAC. We also have had the opportunity to collaborate and work with other ISAAC Chapters around the world.

There is still much to do, as we continue to build a strong AAC community for ALL and by ALL!



From left: Tan Xuet Ying, Ong Yu Jing, Sarah, Alison Choo, and Michelle Cheong.

Sarah has been part of ISAAC-Singapore since it was founded five years ago. Back then, she and a few AAC advocates came together with a dream... to build an AAC community in Singapore. Looking back, she is amazed at how far we have come. Today, she is a Principal Speech Therapist and Assistive Technology Specialist who is passionate about enabling and empowering others to have a voice and to be heard.



Reflections by

TAN XUET YING

I have always been deeply drawn to AAC and its power to transform lives. My journey began with my honours thesis on AAC, focusing on key word signing with children with autism.

Through my lecturer, the late Karen Bloomberg, I met Eva Loh from MINDS, and learnt firsthand that championing AAC in Singapore was far from an easy path.

After graduating and returning to Singapore, I was not surprised to find that AAC use in hospitals was even rarer. Once I had settled into routine work, I gathered my courage and approached my head of department with a request—to help build up AAC services in my hospital. To my delight, I was given support through the Healthcare Manpower Development Programme (HMDP).

Determined to learn from the best, I reached out to several centres in the US and Canada, and was fortunate to visit each for a few days to a week. These visits opened my eyes to how AAC services were provided both in hospitals and in the community.

On that same trip in 2016, I attended my first ISAAC International Conference which was in Toronto. Sarah Yong and I were the only two Singaporeans there. As we listened to stories from other chapters, we couldn't help but dream—perhaps one day, Singapore could have its own ISAAC chapter.

During the conference, I was privileged to meet inspiring leaders in AAC such as Dr Gregor, Dr Stephen, Tami Altschuler, and Sarah Blackstone. I returned home brimming with ideas. With the support of my team, I launched the “Help Me Speak” programme—a loan service dedicated to providing access to costly and often inaccessible eye gaze devices. Through this programme, many patients who had lost their ability to speak, including those who were tetraplegic, were able to communicate again using eye gaze technology. Around the same time, a small group of us in Singapore began meeting regularly as a Special Interest Group.

In 2018, the ISAAC Conference was held in Gold Coast, Australia and many AAC specialists and advocates stopped by Singapore along the way. With the conference so close, more Singaporeans attended than ever before. Inspired and energised, we gathered upon return to decide: should we remain a Special Interest Group for speech therapists, form our own independent society, or work towards becoming an official ISAAC chapter?

After countless discussions and with unwavering commitment from everyone involved, ISAAC-Singapore was officially registered as a society in May 2020—right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we had to begin with online activities, we all shared the same vision: that people who use AAC should be at the

very heart of everything we do. Every activity would be planned for them and with them, ensuring that AAC was celebrated and used at all times. From that dream, our flagship series AAC Also Can was born.

The idea for our newsletter, *ISAAC SG Connect*, came from one of my late patients—the very first person I had inspired to write to the ISAAC International community using her eye gaze device. She had contributed passionately to the ISAAC CWSN Newsletter in April 2018, December 2018, and July 2019, and often spoke about her wish for a local newsletter where AAC users could freely share their voices.

That dream stayed with us despite her passing in 2019, and soon after, we launched AAC Can Share to connect vendors, professionals and AAC users, while sharing news about the latest technology, tips and solutions.

Over the years, thanks to the dedication of all committee members, subcommittee members, planning volunteers, AAC users and their families, we have grown into a true community. Together, we continue working towards our shared vision—a future where communication is never a barrier, and where inclusion is not just an idea, but a reality lived every day.



ISAAC-Singapore's "origin story," as depicted in the inaugural issue of its newsletter ISAAC SG Connect.

Xuet Ying is a Principal Speech Therapist at Tan Tock Seng Hospital. She hopes to bring AAC to every space and person she meets. She envisions that AAC users will be valued members of society and can continue to live their dreams and contribute meaningfully in their own ways.



Reflections by

MICHELLE CHEONG

For me, the story starts back in July 2017, when my department head forwarded information about an AAC Special Interest Group with speech therapists from other organisations.

Since AAC was already a keen interest of mine and a big part of my work, and with the company of a similarly passionate colleague*, I decided to join.

At that meeting, I was both reassured and inspired to hear others share the same challenges, as well as fresh ideas. This was the start of my involvement with what would eventually become the ISAAC-Singapore chapter.

*** FUN FACT**
The colleague who also attended this SIG meeting was in fact our current president, Calvin!

Fast forward to 2018. Much has already been said about the turning point that year when Dr Gregor Renner visited one of our meetings and encouraged us to form a local ISAAC chapter. At a follow-up meeting, we made the famous “fried chicken vote,” when we chose to start an ISAAC chapter rather than a local AAC society or remain as a Special Interest Group.

What might have looked like a quiet year after that vote was actually anything but. Behind the scenes, five of us—Tan Xuét Ying, Sarah Yong, Laura Heyworth, Valerie Ann Villarosa, and myself—were busy researching what it would take to form a chapter, drafting our constitution, and finally, organising the chapter formation meeting on 16 November 2019.

I had the privilege of serving as one of the nine members of our first committee, which was elected at that chapter formation meeting. One of the first things we did was to reach out to the different stakeholders in the AAC community in Singapore to co-create our mission and vision as a society.

Next, being clear that we wanted the group to be *by* and *for* persons who use AAC, we started “AAC Also Can”, a platform for people who use AAC to connect with one another. We used the Singlish phrase “also can” to emphasise that using AAC was an acceptable way to communicate in our local context. Our very first event was a virtual Hari Raya house visit hosted by AAC user Sayfullah and his mother, Fadillah (who was on the committee).

Looking back, I’m amazed at and thankful for what we accomplished in that first year, even though it was in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. We registered as a society, hosted three AAC Also Can events, and even published the first two issues of this very newsletter. None of it would have been possible without the hard work and sacrifices of the team, some of whom were healthcare workers on the frontlines, while others were managing major disruptions to their own home

and work routines. I believe that what kept us going was our shared passion for AAC and for the voices of AAC users to be recognised and valued in our society.

From there, ISAAC-Singapore has continued to grow from strength to strength with new committee members and volunteers bringing fresh ideas and energy while staying grounded in that same mission.

Personally, I feel deeply thankful to have had the opportunity to be part of this journey since the beginning. Back in 2017, I was just three years into my career as a speech therapist, and appreciated the openness of more experienced team members in sharing their experiences and working together.

Being so closely involved with ISAAC-Singapore has given me invaluable opportunities to connect with and learn from many different members of the AAC community here and abroad. These experiences have deepened my understanding of the real-life challenges and triumphs faced by AAC users and their families, and played a significant role in shaping my practice. Beyond this, I'm also grateful for the lasting friendships built along the way.

If you are looking for an AAC community, whether as someone who uses AAC, works with AAC, or just keen to find out more, I encourage you to connect with our friendly ISAAC-Singapore group! (Click the icons at the bottom left of the page to find out how!) ■



The ISAAC-Singapore Committee at our first AAC Also Can event in 2020—a virtual Hari Raya house visit hosted by Sayfullah and Fadillah (top left).

Michelle is currently the treasurer of ISAAC-Singapore and works as a speech therapist in a social service agency. She is passionate about empowering and including every voice.

FACES OF AAC

MY NAME IS SARAH.*By Jasmine Swee, Sarah's mother***1. Introducing Ourselves** ❤️

Hi, I'm Jasmine—mom to Sarah, my brave and bright 13-year-old daughter who has high support needs. She's non-verbal, non-mobile, and has a tracheostomy, but none of that defines her spirit. Sarah is expressive, clever, and full of personality. Our family's life revolves around creating a world where she is understood, respected and heard.

We're a tight-knit team—her sibling, dad and I, supported by incredible educators, therapists and caregivers who've walked this journey with us. They have believed in her and adapted to her communication needs every step of the way.

2. Our First Encounter with AAC

Our AAC journey started early, during Sarah's time in EIPIC*. When Sarah was born, doctors had told us that she might have a low, husky voice or may never speak due to her condition and tracheostomy. Nonetheless, from the very beginning, I was clear—I wanted her to be able to communicate, in any form. Verbal or not, her voice matters.

We worked closely with the EIPIC team at Thye Hua Kwan and then with the amazing professionals at CPAS**—especially our SLTs: Ms Sunita, Ms Jocelyn, Ms Jessica, and Ms Celeste. These were the people who saw potential in Sarah when all we had were tiny signs of hope. They recognised her consistent responses and worked with us to personalise her communication journey.

* EIPIC: Early Intervention Programme for Infants & Children

** CPAS: Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore



Sarah's first time using Tobii: In the first photo, she used her eyes to control the white dot in the top left of the monitor. In a matter of seconds, she moved the dot to the picture, and was rewarded (as seen in the second photo).

It began with two choices. Then, four. Now, we're introducing categories. Seeing Sarah make those connections has been incredible.

3. Our AAC Journey

Sarah currently uses a switch and low-tech communication book. She is learning eye gaze with all her might, despite the challenge of having alternate squint, which makes calibration tricky.

Together with the CPAS OT team and the Adaptive Tech Team, we explored how Sarah could initiate communication using a switch—and she's come a long way. Through this, we established her clear “yes” and her preferences, and slowly, her ability to express her wants and needs more intentionally.

It's not just the therapists. Her teachers, like Ms Vina, Mr Ryan, Ms Kavita and Ms Sabrina, have been instrumental. They've adapted their teaching methods, consistently used AAC with her in class, and most importantly, they believed in Sarah. That makes all the difference.

As her main caregiver, I've learnt her quirks, her subtle cues, and how to partner with her support team so she can communicate more easily and meaningfully.



Communication goes beyond the verbal realm, and Sarah's eyes are her means of communication.

4. Breakthrough Moments 🌟

Some of the most meaningful breakthroughs have happened in the classroom—when Sarah was able to tell her teachers what she needs or wants. These are moments that may seem ordinary to others, but for us, they're extraordinary. Whether it's choosing an activity, requesting a break, or expressing that she doesn't want something, these acts of communication show us that Sarah is in control. She's not just participating—she's leading the conversation in her own way.

That moment of connection between student and teacher, made possible through AAC, is pure magic. It shows us that Sarah is aware, engaged, and ready to be part of the world around her—on her terms.

5. How AAC has Impacted our Family

AAC has completely transformed the way we connect. It's made Sarah feel seen and heard. As a family, it's made us slow down and truly listen. It's created a stronger bond between her and her sibling, who's become an intuitive partner in communication.

Knowing that her teachers and therapists can now communicate with her, understand her, and involve her meaningfully in learning... that fills my heart with gratitude.

6. Words of Encouragement & Hopes for the Future

Always have 101% belief in your child. They *can* understand. They *can* learn. They just need time and the right support. Never give up. Keep practising. Celebrate the little wins—because they're actually huge.

As parents, we are their voice while they're finding their own. So let's speak up, show up, and never stop trying.

My dream for Sarah is that one day, she'll be able to communicate not just with family, but with friends, teachers, and the community around her. That's independence. That's dignity.

For the AAC community in Singapore, I hope we continue to build—with more resources, more awareness, and more trust in our children's potential. AAC is not just a tool—it's their bridge to the world. ■

© Jasmine Swee



Sarah's ability to choose enables her to be seen and heard.

SAYFULLAH: MY LIFE USING AAC AND AT

MEET MY IMAGINARY MONSTER

BY MUHD SAYFULLAH

Back in April, I was invited to attend the Wish Alumni Ceremony 2025, held at The Ritz-Carlton. One of the highlights of the day was an art workshop conducted by Wildflower Studio SG.

Each table had a row of cat-themed cards. To break the ice, the facilitators asked us to pick a card that reflected how we were feeling at that moment. I told Mommy that I felt wonderful. She showed me two cards, and I chose the one that matched my feelings best.

Next, the participants were given a worksheet to create our own imaginary monster.

We had to fill in details like its name, age, colour, likes and dislikes, just to name a few. And as for its age.... hmmm...

Then came the fun part... building my monster! We were provided with recycled shoeboxes in various shapes and sizes, along with all kinds of colourful art materials. I asked Mommy to get a rectangular box and to wrap it with yellow (my favourite colour, of course), furry fabric. Once she did that, I selected a pair of eyes and showed Mommy where I wanted them placed. She helped me paste them using hot glue. I was very happy with how the eyes turned out.



Mommy helping me...

Next, I picked two green wired strips and folded them into two for the monster's eyebrows and a small, dark emerald green pompom for its nose. For the mouth, I chose dark pink buttons in different sizes to form a smile.



Mommy was shocked by the result!

After we finished, we took photos of my completed monster. Guess what I named it?

*G.E.R.I. – which stands for Great, Excited, Respect, Intelligent.
And yes, GERI is 22 years old!*

My monster creation would not have happened if it wasn't for my AAC that gave me my voice. It helped me share my ideas clearly, give instructions, and bring GERI to life, just the way I imagined.

I had so much fun creating GERI. It was a day to remember! ■



Muhd Sayfullah, known as [@artbysayfullah](https://www.instagram.com/artbysayfullah), is a freelance digital artist with Quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy. He brings his joyful spirit to life through vibrant, quirky creations. Despite his physical challenges, Sayfullah's passion for digital art and his determination to keep learning shine through his work. Follow his journey on Instagram: [@artbysayfullah](https://www.instagram.com/artbysayfullah)

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