



# SLT out of the Clinic and into Daily Life

Innovative Speech and Language Therapy  
approaches promoting the use of AAC

by Lorna Barrett



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Despite the devastation of Covid-19, we are all looking forward to combining our new-found skills with the development of further strategies in the ongoing delivery of our SLT initiatives. We will continue to work on identifying new ways of bringing our work on communication ‘out of the Clinic and into Daily Life’ based on current research and our experience with those we support. Working with people who have a disability is never mundane. Always changing, it’s an exciting area of Speech and Language Therapy with committed staff working as part of dedicated teams and organisations.

*Lorna Barrett*

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Series Editor: Patrick McGinley

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### The Front Cover:

A happy occasion in Our Lady of Good Counsel School, Ballincollig, Cork when “Lámheen” (Dr Pauline Frizelle, centre) visited for the National Launch of the “Lamh-a-song 2” video resource with (l to r) Geraldine Moran SLT, Cara O’Flaherty, Sean McMahon and Gillian Duloherly SLT.



## Author: Lorna Barrett



A graduate of the Dublin College of Speech Therapy, the first SLT Training College in Ireland, Lorna Barrett is the Speech and Language Therapy Manager for the Brothers of Charity Southern Services in Counties Cork and Kerry.

Lorna moved from Dublin to Cork to marry a Cork man, Greg. At the time there were only two other Speech and Language Therapists in Cork and one in Kerry. Employed as the first SLT in the Brothers of Charity Services in Cork, Lorna has worked with people with disability for most of her career, and over the years she has been very active in the development of the SLT role in services for children and adults with intellectual disability and/or autism. The SLT service has expanded significantly in the Brothers of Charity Services in Counties Cork and Kerry during these years including the development of Early Intervention services, SLT services for Adults, Autism specific services, and the acceptance by the Brothers of Charity to offer services in Kerry. She has been involved in the development of Lámh, the Irish sign system for people with an intellectual disability, and she is a member of the Lámh© Board of Directors.

Currently managing a complement of 34 dedicated professional staff Lorna is now supporting the significant change for staff moving into the national programme called 'Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People' known as PDS which is currently being rolled out across the country. This is a challenge for everyone involved.

Lorna is passionate about advocating for her profession and for its role in providing effective services for those we support and their families. Living in Cork City, Lorna has three children and one very new grandson!



## Foreword: Minister of State for Disability Anne Rabbitte TD

With Covid as pervasive as it is, it can be hard to see that there is great work continuing across disability services. Even though we face into challenging circumstances, disability staff have continued to work hard, ensuring that those who need the supports are continuing to be offered as much as possible, and as safely as required.



As the Minister with special responsibility for Disability, I'm acutely aware of the importance of therapy supports, as well as how they are structured and delivered. The insights offered by Lorna Barrett reflect the many positives in the delivery of Speech and Language Therapy. As a Speech and Language Therapy Manager for the Brothers of Charity Services in Counties Cork and Kerry, Lorna has many years of experience and clearly understands what works and how best to adapt to the person or people you're supporting.

Communication plays an integral part of any day, but, of course, we all communicate in different ways. The importance of Speech and Language Therapy cannot be overestimated and as Lorna discusses, it is always evolving, and the supports being offered must change and adapt too.

As with many such supports, it's so important that services are person-centred, and the information provided here shows how this applies in different circumstances. It's not just policies such as 'Progressing Disability Services' or the new Children's Disability Network Teams that we get an insight to, but also the real and tangible impact of programmes like Super Signers, Club AActivate and Social Stories.

There is real food for thought offered here and I want to thank Lorna for her work. I don't doubt it will be of real benefit to readers.

*Anne Rabbitte TD, Minister of State for Disability*



## Introduction

This booklet looks at some of the innovative ways in which Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) in Disability has moved from the early days of clinic based intervention to new ways of supporting people with a disability and their families in their daily lives. We describe innovative ways we have worked to support the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) through projects such as Club AACtivate, a Saturday club; making YouTube videos; and using Lámh© to promote signing as an integral part of the person's environment. These AAC supports enhance the communication skills of the person supported and the community around them.

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) has had a role in working with people with Disability in Ireland for over 50 years. In the beginning dedicated Speech and Drama teachers were employed to support the children and adults in disability services. Over time, and with the setting up of the Dublin College of Speech Therapists in 1969 (<https://www.flipsnack.com/50Objects50Years/slt-in-ireland-the-early-years-1969-1999.html>), awareness grew in Disability services, that perfect speech was not the principal objective, but rather successful communication, often by a combination of means, not just speech. As communication is a two way process, there was also a growing realisation that the onus should not only be focussed on just the people who use our services to adapt or develop their skills, but also on all of their communication partners. A communication partner is anybody who is interacting with a language learner. They can be anyone in their daily life – family, friends, staff members and so on.

Given this evolving understanding of communication, Disability services started to employ SLTs. The Brothers of Charity Services in Cork, began with the employment of the current manager, Lorna Barrett, to a staff grade half post in 1982. We now cover Cork and Kerry as part of the Brothers of Charity Southern Region, with a current total of 34 therapists delivering SLT services to people and families of all ages attending our services. SLTs work as part of multidisciplinary



*Elizabeth O'Leary and Santa: "Good communication can just be a look!"*



teams providing assessment, diagnosis and intervention in a wide range of areas. In Kerry, the SLTs work as part of the Kerry Intervention Disability Services (KIDS) which is part of the national roll out of the Children's Disability Network Teams. The KIDS SLTs along with their colleagues work as part of an interdisciplinary model and have presented at a range of conferences on their work as part of the HSE Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (PDS).

### **The HSE 'Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People' (PDS) vision for children's disability services**

- Easy access to the services children need
- Fairness in providing services
- Families, health services and schools working together to support children in developing their potential

What is this programme about?

At present, there are some very good services for children with disabilities and their families but also some large gaps. There may be a service for children with an intellectual disability in a locality, but none for children with a physical disability. Some children and their families have little or no access to services.

We need a fairer way to provide services for children with disabilities:

- Services should be based on a child's needs rather than on their diagnosis.
- Children and families should have services available wherever they live.

A national programme called 'Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People' (often shortened to PDS) is changing the way services are provided across the country to make it equitable and consistent for all.

(Courtesy of the HSE)





*Aoife Ní Riordáin (SLT)  
signing Pat a Cake on  
YouTube*

## What is it like working as an SLT in Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Disability in the 2020s?

Working with people who have a Disability is fun and challenging! Informed by the latest international research, we promote a Total Communication approach, where all available means of communication are used to enable the people we support to understand others and be understood themselves. Where speech alone is not sufficient to meet the communication needs of an individual, we introduce Alternative or Augmentative Communication (AAC) systems. These can be ‘unaided’ via Lámh©, a sign system used by children and adults with an Intellectual Disability and communication needs; or ‘aided’ via objects, photos, symbols, text or voice-output apps and devices.



*Ruth McCluskey (SLT)  
running Lámh© Bingo on  
YouTube for Adult Services*

As part of our work, we identified the need for a bank of devices which we access if an ‘aided’ system was to be trialled. This would allow us to lend devices for longer trials to those who might benefit from an aided system. So we approached Rotary in Cork to see if they would contribute to purchasing devices for the Cork services. Rotary agreed to help. This partnership has allowed us to do this and we can now lend these devices for longer periods for trials, or while someone is waiting to receive their own device.



*Gillian Dulobery (SLT)  
filming ‘Introducing and  
Using Visuals’ video for  
YouTube channel’*

AAC helps the people we support to express themselves and it greatly helps their understanding and thus their independence



*Elaine Barrett (SLT), TJ Compagno & Caitriona Ní Charragáin (SLT) having fun at Club AActivate*



and participation. For this reason, it is essential that family and staff members themselves use AAC in conjunction with their speech in day-to-day life. This is a big ask! In order to best support communication partners to “Speak AAC”, SLTs must provide intervention in the individual’s natural context and support their communication partners. While focus on speech is not lost in this way of working, we aim as much as possible to support the development of functional ‘Total Communication’ skills in real life contexts with their family, friends and other communication partners.

The SLTs deliver regular training to communication partners, and in recent years we have also devised a number of initiatives to create relaxed Total Communication environments where the individuals supported and their primary communication partners can be immersed in AAC, learn new skills, meet others who are also using Total Communication, and build their confidence putting theory into practice!



*Knock Knock Knock  
- What's inside?  
Clodagh Crowley SLT  
on YouTube*

### **So let’s show you some of the ways we do this! Total Communication Environments**

#### **Early Intervention – Sing and Sign Groups**

‘Sing and Sign’ is a group for children up to 3 years of age and their parents. It brings families together from across the three Early Intervention clinics in Cork, typically taking place once a month during school term. ‘Sing and Sign’ is a fun, interactive group where the aim is to support parents to learn and to use Lámh©. Natural opportunities arise for parents and their children to communicate within a structure of fun and motivating nursery rhymes and other songs. SLTs facilitate the group, demonstrate signs, and support parents and children to communicate ‘in the moment’. We link the vocabulary and activities used in these sessions with relevant themes such as Christmas, summer holidays and so on, as well as targeting functionally relevant vocabulary.



*Andrew Sheehan asking his Mum, Sharon Sheehan, something using his communication board at Club AACtivate*



Although Lámh© is an integral part of the group, there is a broader emphasis on Total Communication, and parents are supported to notice, interpret and respond to all of their child's communication attempts. The 'Sing and Sign' group meetings are an opportunity for parents of a child with a communication difficulty to meet with other parents in a similar situation. It allows them to see how alternative and augmentative communication can be used in naturalistic situations and how it can be easily transferred to the home setting, in order to continue to support communication development.



*SLTs Caitríona Ní Charragáin and Gillian Dulobery with Maja Szulnis enjoying building a volcano at Club AACtivate*



*Adam O'Driscoll tells Gillian Dulohery (SLT) what his favourite clothes are for the OLGC fashion show.*



## Working in a Special School

Our Lady of Good Counsel Special School, Ballincollig, Cork (OLGC), under the Patronage of the Brothers of Charity Congregation, is an example of our work in schools. In this school, all means of communication are championed. The school is a well-established Lámh© environment where some teaching staff are trained to the level of Lámh© Tutor. Every type of aided Alternative or Augmentative Communication is evident in OLGC: visual timetables on the classroom walls, ‘Colourful Semantics’ visuals on the corridors and in the hall, ‘no tech’ communication books, and a variety of ‘high tech’ apps.

Speech and Language Therapy at OLGC is often delivered in the classroom, where school staff and SLTs can work collaboratively throughout the day to support the students’ communication needs. Therapists accompany staff and students on social trips and get involved in school plays, fashion shows and special events, ensuring that all the children are supported to enjoy full participation. The success of these joint working initiatives was acknowledged by the Department of Education inspectors. They commented on the “service user focus and the quality of the programmes that were being delivered in an SLT/teacher approach”. They also said that this model was “an example for other special schools in the country”. As one SLT commented, “The more environments that we can tap into, the better chance we have for successful outcomes for the children we support”.

Lámh© is the manual sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in Ireland. Lámh© was originally developed in the early 1980s in order to have a unified, standardised, Irish-based approach to signing for those with intellectual disabilities and communication needs. With Lámh©, speech is always used with signs and only key words in a sentence are signed.

Lámh© currently has 500 signs and has evolved and added signs since its initial development.



*Alex Desmond uses a Colourful Semantics Picture Strip to communicate in school*



## Adult Services – Super Signers

‘Super Signers’ is a programme and social occasion which runs a number of times a year in adult services in Cork. Men and women from our services attend with key staff members to engage in fun activities such as Bingo, quizzes and singing. Themes change depending on the time of year adding a festive feel.

The relaxed environment provides an opportunity for people supported by our Service to meet each other and use all of their communication skills, while staff members get to brush up on their Lámh© skills with support from SLTs. With up to twenty people in attendance, some of the people we support have come on board to take a role in facilitating the sessions alongside the SLTs. ‘Super Signers’ is a wonderful, social occasion for all involved! This also links with other Lámh© initiatives in the Service such as the Lámh© choir, the recent entry into the Today FM “Dancer for Cancer” event, and also singing and signing at the Rotary Cork Christmas Tree Appeal in the city.



*Geraldine Moran (SLT) showing how to use AAC in daily activities such as feeding the dog on YouTube.*



*Lorna Barrett and Sheila Lucey (SLTs and Lamb Tutors) signing and singing along with people in our Adult Services at the Cancer fundraiser*



*Club AACtivate SLTs and volunteers*

### **Saturday Club – Club AACtivate**

The need for an opportunity for family members of aided AAC users to meet others with whom they could share experiences, as well as provide them with the opportunity to practise using AAC in meaningful activities was identified by the SLTs working with the users. It was recognised that maintaining use of AAC was difficult for families when they did not see others around them using similar communication approaches. The concept of Club AACtivate was identified, researched and developed by Cairtriona Ní Charragáin in consultation with the SLT Manager. Although the Club has an emphasis on aided AAC, unaided communication such as Lámh©, visual schedules, choice boards and Social Stories© are also all utilised in this Total Communication environment. Although the Club has an emphasis on aided AAC, unaided communication such as Lámh©, visual schedules, choice boards and Social Stories© are all utilised in this Total Communication environment. Held in Scoil Triest Special School under the Patronage of the Brothers of Charity Congregation, 8 to 12 volunteers joined the six SLTs in running the club each month. The volunteers were provided with tutorials on AAC and implementation strategies. Thirty-two families signed up to take part in the club and the average number of attendees, made up of AAC users, their parents and siblings, was fifty.

Research was carried out on parental experience of Club AACtivate in collaboration with the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences, University College Cork. Overall, parents showed a positive attitude



towards the club and the quality of the support provided by SLTs was commended. Prior to participation in the club, no parents had regular interactions with other families of AAC users. The majority reported the only opportunity they had to meet other parents of AAC users was during training evenings, however for most this happened only once. Similarly all those who commented on their child's social status noted that there was very little opportunity for their child to interact with other children and AAC users outside of school. One parent said, 'There's not a lot of places you can bring them to, where he doesn't stand out... it's great to bring him to a place... where he can just be himself, you don't have anyone staring or looking and we're all in the same boat'.

Parents reported the positive impact the club had for other family members, particularly those who would not have had formal training on AAC communication prior to attending the club. To quote one of them, 'It was great for his Dad 'cause his Dad wouldn't have known what a coreboard was. He found it very interesting because like he wouldn't have known anything about these coreboards... he learned a lot from it'.



*Elaine Barrett (SLT) modeling AAC during a pretend picnic on YouTube*



### **Covid 19 and YouTube – adapting to incorporate remote intervention**

It was planned for Club AACtivate to continue at least into the summer of 2020 - however, this was not possible following the COVID-19 outbreak. So SLTs began to make videos focused on using aided AAC in a variety of ways and posted them on the Brothers of Charity Services YouTube Channel. They include explanatory videos for families about AAC and many of them have activities that can be carried out with children and adults using AAC, aided and unaided including Lámh©. Many parents from the club watched the YouTube videos and reported that they were helpful and worthwhile. One parent commented, ‘Some of them are really quite good at giving me tips on how to use aided AAC more around the house... I’d watch them to pick up things, even like feeding the dog, and he loves to feed the dog in the afternoon now’.

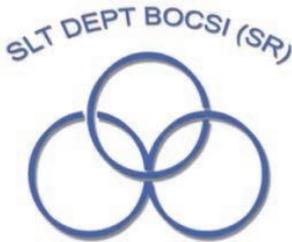
In the absence of face-to-face work, the other Total Communication initiatives soon also moved online! The Early Intervention SLTs regularly record songs or rhymes so that parents can continue to sing and sign with their children at home. An added benefit of this online presence is that the songs and rhymes are now readily available for all of the families accessing our services to learn from and to enjoy.



*Keira O'Mahony Luttrell SLT signing and miming to My Girl for the Adult Services*



## Introduction to Aided AAC Video # 1 of 6



Brothers of Charity Services  
Ireland – Southern Region



*Caitriona Ní Charragáin SLT running tutorials for families and staff on YouTube*

Adult Services' SLTs have recorded a number of adult-appropriate songs while using Lámh©, and they have created videos to review seasonal vocabulary and play Lámh© Bingo! Similar to the experience of Early Intervention above, the therapists have found that their videos have had a reach far beyond that which they originally envisioned; with the videos being watched hundreds of times. The videos have been accessed throughout the Brothers of Charity Services in Ireland and have been circulated beyond to clinicians in other services for their use.

Although it has been an adjustment for the SLTs to become comfortable with the technical aspects of creating YouTube videos, as well as overcoming the initial horror of seeing and hearing themselves online, we are in agreement that this unexpected departure holds a lot of potential for Speech & Language Therapy going forward! As we write this in February 2021, our YouTube videos have had over 7,000 views since we started only nine months ago! We could never have achieved all those contacts with families and staff through face to face sessions and the written word! In this age of smart phones and social media, we recognise and value the versatility of being able to demonstrate and coach communication strategies in the comfort of families' own homes and at the convenience of their busy lives.



### **Further change is coming for Children's Services**

The new Children's Disability Network Teams are currently in the process of being rolled out in Cork and around the country. As mentioned earlier, they have already rolled out in our Kerry services and in some other parts of the Country. All service providers will reconfigure into new teams which will be across agency and across all disabilities. We look forward to bringing our experience in these initiatives into the wider team, potentially opening new avenues for us to continue to develop our new-found skills, while offering opportunities for us to share our learning with others on the new teams, with the other agencies, and the wider disability community.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the devastation of Covid-19, we are all looking forward to combining our new-found skills with the development of further strategies in the ongoing delivery of our SLT initiatives. We will continue to work on identifying new ways of bringing our work on communication 'out of the Clinic and into Daily Life' based on current research and our experience with those we support. Working with people who have a disability is never mundane. Always changing, it's an exciting area of Speech and Language Therapy with committed staff working as part of dedicated teams and organisations.



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*Happy Days by Catherine Fahy, Studio C*



## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Caitríona Ní Charragáin and Geraldine Moran for their significant contribution to the development of this booklet.

I am also grateful to all of the SLT staff in the Brothers of Charity Services in Cork and Kerry for their dedication and professionalism in continuously striving to provide high quality person centred services through their work and the development of new initiatives.

Thanks to those involved in the development and uploading of videos to YouTube: Sarah Egan, Elaine Barrett, Ruth McCluskey, Una Sharry, Aoife Ní Riordáin, Keira O'Mahony-Luttrell, Caitríona Ní Charragáin, Geraldine Moran, Kate Hogan, Charlotte Cogan, Clodagh Crowley, Gillian Duloherly, Eimear Hickey and Lisa Field.

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Thanks to the Series Editor Patrick McGinley for all his work on the photographs and for the design and layout of the Booklet.

*Lorna Barrett*



## A Celebration of Quality in the Brothers of Charity Services Ireland

As Service Providers all of us who set out to provide supports to children and adults with special needs recognise that the Quality of the supports we offer is of the utmost importance. Sadly, and all too frequently, when we set out to measure Quality we generally end up measuring the lack of Quality. Our focus, whatever the measurement instrument, too often switches entirely from the 92% of what we do really well, to the 8% which we don't do very well. Of course that 8% needs systematic, corrective and time-lined attention. But we must not give it all of our attention, we cannot allow the 92% to be taken for granted... to fade gently away into the Celtic Twilight. We are pleased to recognise the many important areas where the people we support, staff, families, volunteers and local communities achieve the highest standards. We gratefully acknowledge the tremendous commitment of every member of staff who, working individually and as team members in co-operation with other stakeholders, achieve wonderful, sometimes amazing, outcomes. We are happy to celebrate together in 2021 the level of success we have achieved in implementing the Mission of the Brothers of Charity by: *“Providing quality services to support people who are in danger of being marginalised... and creating opportunities and choices that develop and maintain connected lives where all are cherished as valued and equal citizens in our communities.”*

Patrick McGinley, Series Editor

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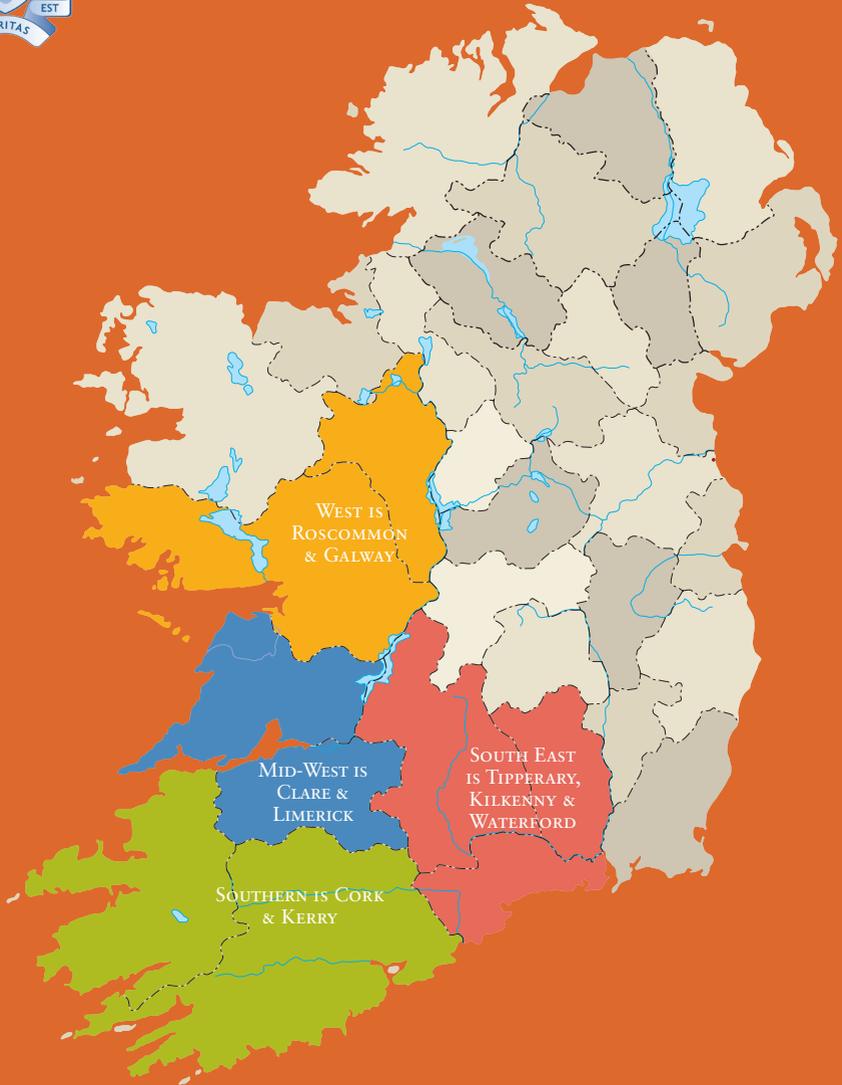
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Over 8,400 men, women and children received support from the Brothers of Charity Services Ireland in 2020, with over 4,300 employees (about 3,500 wte) making it the largest provider of support services for people with intellectual disability in Ireland.