Some communication tools and approaches that may be useful

‘All about Me’ books

‘All about Me’ books involve gathering information about a person’s life. They can include information about someone’s past, about what is happening now and even a look to the future. They can be in the form of a book, a poster, a CD-Rom or any other method that suits the person and their situation. ‘All about Me’ books are useful for anybody who finds it difficult to share information about their own life with others and needs support to communicate important information clearly to others - especially when someone moves from one place to another and meets new people. The process of compiling an ‘All about Me’ book can help you to get to know the person better, value the person and their experiences, present the person in a positive and valued way and have a permanent record of important information. The book can help others to get to know the person better and know how to interact with them and listen to what they may be ‘saying’ and are part of the way in which a person’s needs and wishes are recognised.

For more information:

• **Fitton, P. (1994)** Listen to me: communicating the needs of people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities, *London and Bristol, Jessica Kingsley publishers*


Communication passports or dictionaries

“Passports are a special way of sorting information. They don’t contain all the available information about a person but key information about day-to-day ‘need to know’ things. Passports are about collecting information from the people who know the person best, observing, analysing and then distilling and organizing all of this information in new ways. In other words, a Passport is not a list but a synthesis of information useful to help other people to help the person to ‘be the best he/she can be.” (Millar 2003)
Communication passports or dictionaries are a practical way of enabling effective communication. They provide a guide to communicating with and supporting somebody effectively and should reflect both the certainties and uncertainties of doing this in a honest and sensitive way. They can take the form of a booklet, a poster, a CD Rom or any other format that will enable the information to be owned by the individual and be available to those who need to share it. Some passports contain a wide range of information about the person whilst others (particularly those often called communication dictionaries) focus almost entirely on the way the person can best be supported with their communication. As with all of the communication strategies described in this paper, this will be most effective if person centred thinking skills and tools are incorporated. This includes

• distinguishing what is important to from what is important for people and finding a balance between them
• defining the roles and responsibilities of supporters in relation to what is important for and to that person
• ensuring a good match between people and those who support them
• learning about, using and recording all forms of communication from the people
• being mindful and recording your learning about a person

For more information:

• Personal Communication Passports www.communicationpassports.org.uk
• CALL centre www.callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk
• Hampshire Social Services www.pcp-in-hampshire.net
• Helen Sanderson Associates www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk
• PAMIS www.dundee.ac.uk/pamis/projects/passports
• SCOPE http://tinyurl.com/cczz13 (a template for a child’s passport)
Multi-Media Profiling

“Multi Media Profiling is about engaging individuals with PMLD in using a range of multimedia tools to enable them to be as self-determined in their lives as possible and meaningfully involve service users so that they are truly empowered to make decisions about their lives.” (Cavet and Grove 2005)

A multi-media profile contains film clips, photographs and power point slides about important areas of a person’s life. Information about a person’s communication is presented in a highly visual way to enable others to know how to understand and interact with them more effectively. The person about whom the profile is made can also be involved in a meaningful way through opportunities to view and respond to themselves on the screen. Multi Media Profiling is a way of people can say ‘this is me’. The profile can be shared with others, for example at review meetings, giving the person themselves more opportunity to participate in a meaningful way and illustrate their likes and needs.

For more information:

- **Acting Up** [www.act­ing-up.org.uk](http://www.act­ing-up.org.uk)
- **Big Ears Multimedia** [www.bigearsmultimedia.co.uk](http://www.bigearsmultimedia.co.uk)
- **Cavet, J and Grove N (2005)** Multimedia Technology for People with Profound and Multiple Impairment – An Evaluation of a Mencap Pilot Project Using Multimedia Profiling *Mencap*
- **Grove, N (2003)** Multi Media Profiling: a person centred tool for people with profound disabilities *PMLD Link, 15, 3, 46, 5-7*
Sensory communication

For many people who are seldom heard, a sensory basis to communication may be necessary. There are many different approaches and tools that may help with this according to the person’s sensory preferences and abilities. A Speech and Language Therapist should be able to advise on the appropriate approach to take for any individual.

For more information:

Affective Communication Assessment
• Coupe, J., Barton, L., Barber, M., Collins, L., Levy, D., & Murphy, D. [1985] Affective Communication Assessment, Manchester Education

Sensory choosing
• Clear http://www.clearforall.co.uk/

Multi-sensory referencing
• Fowler S (2007) Sensory stimulation; sensory focussed activities for people with physical and multiple disabilities Jessica Kingsley publishers
• The work of Flo Longhorn and others www.multi-sensory-room.co.uk

Individualised Sensory Environments
Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction is a powerful way of ‘being’ with another person and reaching those who are hard to reach. It involves basic interaction and communication and sharing somebody else’s world through using their own language (whatever that may be). It helps the person with learning difficulties and their communication partner to relate better to each other and enjoy each other’s company more. It uses body, voice and another person’s presence to develop communicative exchanges in ways suited to each person. Intensive Interaction can be used as a way of teaching the fundamentals of communication, as a way to build relationships, or simply as a way to pleasurably spend time with people. It is one way of establishing and maintaining contact with people on their own terms and is a concrete way of showing respect and commitment to listening to them as much as possible.

For more information:

• **Nind M and Hewett D (2001)** A practical guide to Intensive Interaction, *BILD publications*
• **Intensive Interaction website** [www.intensiveinteraction.org.uk](http://www.intensiveinteraction.org.uk)
• **Leeds Intensive Interaction service** [http://www.leedsmentalhealth.nhs.uk/ldservices/intensiveinteraction.cf m](http://www.leedsmentalhealth.nhs.uk/ldservices/intensiveinteraction.cf m)

Creative communication and story telling

Creative media (eg dance, art, music, storytelling etc) can be used to aid both self expression and emotional well being. This can be approached as an informal leisure or educational activity or as a specialist arts therapy (which must be provided by specially trained and qualified therapists). The creative arts and arts therapies all provide a largely non-verbal medium for self expression and may help to express feelings non-verbally for people who lack speech. For some people it may simply be an enjoyable and relaxing experience which helps them to communicate with those sharing the activity with them. The use of multi sensory approaches such as Bagbooks has proved useful and more recently an approach called Story Sharing™ has proved highly effective. Story sharing™ involves the shared remembering and telling of an experience (an event, outing, something new or out of the ordinary that happens) by a
person with the support of a story-sharing partner. Through repetition and providing ways in which the person themselves can be involved in the retelling (such as using a communication device onto which a word or phrase or sound effect is recorded or using sensory clues or objects of reference), the story becomes an important part of the way in which the person can be included in conversations.

For more information:

• **British Society for Music Therapists** 24-27 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PD [http://www.bsmt.org](http://www.bsmt.org)
• **In the moment (2007)** a DVD about the arts and people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (available from Mencap)
• **Story sharing:** [http://www.bild.org.uk/storytelling/storysharing.htm](http://www.bild.org.uk/storytelling/storysharing.htm)
• **Bagbooks:** [www.bagbooks.org](http://www.bagbooks.org)
• **Multi sensory and sensitive stories:** [www.dundee.ac.uk/pamis](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/pamis)

**Objects, symbols and signing**

Some people who are unable to communicate effectively through spoken means may benefit from the use of additional means such as objects, symbols or signing. ‘Objects of reference’ refers to the use of objects as a means of communication. They can be used particularly with people who have limited vision or are unable to understand pictures or symbols or are not able to access pictures or symbols because of physical difficulties. Symbols are pictorial representations used in a standard formalised way to convey meaning. They can be in the form of photographs, drawings or one of many commercially available symbol sets (such as Widget Rebus, Makaton, Somerset Total Communication etc). Anybody who can see and understand the meaning of a
two dimensional picture, photo or symbol may benefit from their use. Signing is using a series of hand gestures in an agreed way to communicate information with another person. Signs from British Sign Language (BSL) have been developed into vocabularies specifically to help people with learning disabilities (such as Makaton and Signalong.) For people who have developed their own system of signs or gestures it can be helpful to introduce a formal shared system alongside their own signs to help more people understand them.

For more information:

Objects of reference

Pictures, photos and symbols
- Widget [www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com)
- Makaton [www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org)
- Somerset Total Communication
- PECS [www.pecs.org.uk](http://www.pecs.org.uk)
- Your local Speech and Language Therapist should be able to advise you further on helpful ways to use pictures and symbols

Signing
- Makaton [www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org)
- Somerset Total Communication
- Signalong [www.signalong.org.uk](http://www.signalong.org.uk)
- Your local Speech and Language Therapist should be able to advise you further on the use of signing.
Communication technology

A variety of special switches and other specialist input devices such as touch screens and interactive whiteboards can be used by people to learn to interact with and ultimately control their environment. In addition there is a wide range of communication aids that can be used by a person to communicate more effectively with those around them. These range from simple boards or books to more sophisticated pieces of voice output computer equipment so the person can “speak”. These devices can be operated by pressing buttons or a touch screen to trigger a message. For people who have physical difficulties, there are a number of switches and other equipment that allows access through, for example, head control, sucking and blowing - even eye movement alone.

For more information:

- The Call Centre [http://www.callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk/)
- ACE [www.ace-centre.org.uk](http://www.ace-centre.org.uk)
- Inclusive technology Ltd Gatehead Business Park, Delph New Road, Delph, Oldham, OL3 5BX. Tel: 01457 819790 [www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk)
- Quality Enabling Devices Ltd, Unit D16, Heritage Business Park, Heritage Way, Gosport, Hampshire PO12 4BG, [www.qedonline.co.uk](http://www.qedonline.co.uk)

Special tools for special situations

The Paediatric Pain Profile is a tool to assist in assessing and monitoring pain, especially in children who are unable to communicate pain through speech. It is designed to identify behaviours which have been shown to be the most important indicators of pain (such as changes in the child’s movement and posture, in vocalization and in facial expression.) The Paediatric Pain Profile aims to make it easier to describe and record pain behaviours, monitor pain and the effectiveness of treatments and communicate concerns about a child’s pain to professionals.

For more information: [http://www.ppprofile.org.uk/index.htm](http://www.ppprofile.org.uk/index.htm)
The Disability Distress Assessment Tool (Disdat) can clearly identify distress, rather than pain. It helps to document signs and behaviours when a person is content and when they are distressed. It helps to put the distress into context by providing a checklist that suggests possible causes of distress. It can then summarise the signs and behaviours specific to an individual for easy reference by other staff and teams. It also allows for monitoring of any changes in distress during treatment or intervention. Disdat provides a picture of a person’s “language of distress.”

For more information: [www.disdat.co.uk](http://www.disdat.co.uk)

Health passport or hospital books are ‘All about me’ books that specifically focus on a person’s health needs. Many local areas have developed their own versions. They can be used for anybody who finds it difficult to convey vital information about their health and feelings to health professionals.

For more information: Easy health information: [http://www.easyhealth.org.uk](http://www.easyhealth.org.uk)
See what I mean is designed to aid understanding of ambiguous communication, either because the person is unclear about what they are saying or you have been unable to establish clearly what they are saying. It also helps when it is difficult to get agreement as to whether people can communicate intentionally or not. The guidelines enable you to gather a consensus view on what the person may be saying or what is in their best interests. It is useful to use a structured process like this when there is an important decision to be made and there is uncertainty about what the person is thinking or feeling about it. It is also useful when there is a difference in opinion as it allows everybody to have their say and be clear about their own agendas as well as identify what the person concerned is feeling or thinking.

http://www.bild.org.uk/03books.htm

Talking Mats™ help people with communication difficulties to think about the issues discussed with them and to express their opinions. They comprise a mat on which you place a topic (what you want to talk about), a series of options relating to the topic and a visual scale on which to order the options. Once the topic is chosen the person is given the options one at a time and asked to place it on the visual scale to indicate what they feel about it. The finished mat can be photographed as a tangible record of the person’s feelings about the topic. People who can successfully use a Talking Mat™ must be able to recognise pictures or symbols and use them to represent ideas. They must also understand the use of the visual scale and be able to sort the option symbols in that way. Talking Mats™ can be repeated on different occasions to check out the consistency of views.

For more information: Talking Mats™ resources are available from the AAC Research Unit, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA
www.psychology.stir.ac.uk/AAC and there is a website www.talkingmats.com