Handout 2: Communication Systems

Most of us are so used to communicating by talking that it is easy to think that there are no other ways to communicate. However the use of gestures, facial expression and body language are part of the way we all communicate. For some people, this may be their only way of communicating.

There are other methods of communicating that many people use. Sign language is used as the primary source of communication for many people in the Deaf community. It is also used by other people who are unable to talk. In Australia one type of signing used is called Auslan which is a way of expressing words and concepts by the use of hand movements, facial expression and body language. Signed English is another type of sign language which is based on signing letters and words.

Many people are now using voice output systems. These are computerised systems where a symbol is pressed or a sentence typed and these are then spoken by a computerised voice. These can range from the simple to the complex.

Other people may communicate by written word through email, faxes and telephone typewriter systems (TTY). These are of particular use to Deaf and Hearing Impaired people and those who are unable to talk.

Picture symbols may be used by people who cannot talk. One of the common systems is Compics which are simple line drawings which represent words and concepts. Pictures and photographs are also used if people find Compics too abstract. Some people may communicate by pointing at objects on a board.

Despite the range of communication supports that are now available, many people have not been supported to access these and so have only very simple ways of communicating. Assisting people to develop communication is an important role of all service providers.