

Looking forward!



It's finally a bright new year for Sarah, who lost her speech and the effective use of all her limbs following two devastating strokes when she was just seven years old. She's now nineteen, and has to rely on others for everything, something this intelligent and fun-loving young woman finds very difficult. But now she can look forward to a far more talkative future with the delivery of a computer that she controls just by moving her eyes.

"Sarah is trapped in a body that doesn't allow her to communicate her thoughts, feelings, wants and needs to the people around her," said her mother, Paula, "but through the ACE Centre she was able to try out a computer that's controlled by her eyes." £12,000 was raised to buy the device through a massive fundraising effort that included a sponsored skydive for Sarah and her mother. "It's been a life-changing experience for us all." laughed Paula. "The computer will allow Sarah to read books, do her schoolwork, surf the web and email her friends, but most importantly it means that she's able to communicate independently with us, her family, for the first time in twelve years!"



Sarah's new eye-gaze computer

Sarah's eye-gaze computer arrived on Christmas eve. "She screamed with excitement when the covers came off the box." said Paula. Within minutes she could tell her family that she was hungry, ask for a drink and a favourite CD.

All of us at ACE are overjoyed with the progress Sarah has made. "At last my daughter has a voice again" said Paula, "and we're very grateful for the ACE Centre's help and expertise. We all now have a better future. This is just the start, and it's priceless!"

● Challenging times ahead

We're facing our toughest test in many years due to a loss of funding from central government. We've reluctantly had to start charging for our services in real cost terms, which is a new way of working for us, but we've redoubled our fundraising efforts with the appointment of Mary Boullin, our new fundraiser. Despite the funding crisis, we've still got a lot to celebrate – we'll be helping more people than ever through our Toys2Talk and SpeechBubble projects, and we're rolling out an accredited training programme in partnership with our sister centre in the North to give communication professionals the quality support they deserve.

● Re:nude fundraising efforts

The famous form of the Fallen Madonna from the BBC series 'Allo 'Allo recently fronted up a noteworthy fundraising campaign. One of our supporters, Shaun Moore, kindly donated the painting to us and the sale created a media storm with the ACE Centre appearing in the national media. After a tight bidding race the painting was won by Colin Jennings from Solihull, where it now has pride of place in his study. We're grateful to Colin, Shaun and to all the other bidders.



● Meanwhile, back in the Andes

Seven stalwart supporters braved altitude sickness, rats, torrential downpours and the company of our fundraiser Nick when trekking the famous Inca Trail in Peru recently. In the process they raised over £10,000 for our work here at ACE. Our thanks go to Audrey, Andrea, Gill, Kate, Steve, Vicki and Nick for their all their efforts.

The ACE Centre are a charity dedicated to transforming the lives of children with complex disabilities who struggle to communicate.

● RoundUp – two more projects that need your support!

Chatterbox: Held twice a year, our Chatterbox Club is a fun activity day for children with communication disabilities. They are given the opportunity to spend time with other children with similar disabilities, taking part in activities such as painting, cooking and drama. All the children are supported by therapists and teachers as well as our fantastic volunteers.

Bubble machine: When we buy a camera or a washing machine, websites that compare and contrast what's available are invaluable. Unbelievably, nothing similar exists for communication aids – devices like the 'talking' computer used by Stephen Hawking, for example. We're planning a website called **SpeechBubble**, a unique searchable resource through which therapists, parents, carers and communication aid users themselves can compare and contrast key features of the aids.

It's child's play!



Playing ball: Tamsin tries out a switch to activate a ball carousel toy, with the help of therapist Jackie Ayre

Tamsin is four and has cerebral palsy. She can't talk, move her body normally or pick things up with her hands. She gets very frustrated when she sees other children playing with toys or computers and misses out on this vital part of interaction, development and learning.

As part of our Toys2Talk project we're loaning Tamsin a toybox containing switch-accessible toys, related communication materials and access equipment that allows her to control a computer. She'll be able to start playing with her young brother – and begin to experience all of the fun (or otherwise!) of sibling interaction at this level.

Toys2Talk is a new and exciting pilot project that will help preschool children to enjoy communication through play. The project will provide these special toyboxes for loan to children who, because of their disabilities, rarely have the opportunity to play with toys. Our specialists will ensure that every box contains toys to suit each individual child, and will offer home visits and fortnightly drop-in sessions. Two-thirds of the

● We must be in Seine!



Popping down to the shops on your bike will never be the same again! Team up with members of our own staff to cycle from London to Paris this summer on a enjoyable five-day trip. We're planning to don our lycra and join a top adventure travel company on one of their open challenges to raise funds for the ACE Centre, and we'd love you to join us. Give us a call on 01865 759800.

total needed has already been raised, but if you would like to help us reach our target, please contact our fundraisers Nick and Mary at the address below.

● A new Director

In February we welcomed Liz Simpson-Wells (right) as our new Director. She takes over the reins from Caroline Gray,



who has retired after nearly a decade in charge. "It's been a privilege to have worked with such amazing children and their families over the years," said Caroline, "And I wish them all well. The ACE Centre is a unique place and it's been an honour to have been part of it, I wish everyone well and will watch its progress."

Liz, who has many years of management experience in the health sector, is looking forward to overseeing our diverse work. "The ACE Centre clearly has unique expertise, a big heart and a lot to offer. Changes to funding mean that things may have to change a little behind the scenes; and that's where I come in, bringing a wealth of expertise and common sense."

● Spot the Ball

The social highlight of the ACE Centre calendar last year was the Intellect Charity Ball, where ACE were the beneficiaries. Six members of the ACE Centre team (below) bravely volunteered to lend a hand and soak up the atmosphere of the lavish Las Vegas themed event. The brilliant Jeremy Beadle hosted the evening and encouraged everyone to dig deep and donate. A fabulous £28,000 was raised which will go a long way towards helping us continue our world-leading work in the field of eye-gaze technology for people with disabilities. Special and heartfelt thanks go out to Tina Compton, Roger Ellis, Maxine Ricketts Paul Harper, Claire Landau and, of course, our host Jeremy Beadle.



Can you help?

If you are the parent, carer or therapist of a child who has complex physical and communication difficulties, we offer help and support for both you and your child. And, as a charity, we rely on your help in return to enable us to give the gift of communication.

Your donation really can make a difference. There are many ways in which you can help, from payroll giving to challenge events. Please contact our fundraiser at the address below for details.