

report:

Deafblind International European Conference 2017

The 9th Deafblind International European Conference was held from the 5th - 8th September in Aalborg, Denmark. 500 people attended from 30 countries. The conference theme was Touch of closeness: maintaining social connect- edness.

The term deafblind is used to refer to people with combined vision and hearing impairments which impact on an individual's communication and abil- ity to access information and the physical and social environment. For people with an intellectual disabili- ty, the greater the cognitive impairment, the greater the likelihood of vision and hearing difficulties.

There were many great presentations, but I will report on three in particular here.

Professor Alberto Gallace from the University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy, gave a keynote presentation titled Touch and the body: tactile awareness and the science of interpersonal touch. His presenta- tion highlighted how under researched the proximal sense of touch is. He highlighted the complex nature of touch and discussed how touch is used for:

- 1) Perceptual analysis
- 2) Spatial processing
- 3) Social and emotional aspects of life.

Lorraine Simpson and Brenda Clarke from Deafblind Ontario Services Canada presented on the approach to palliative care they have taken in their residen- tial service. They have developed a palliative care resource guide for staff which includes a range of tools and scales including a chronic pain scale for non-verbal adults.

Susan Bashinski from Missouri Western State University, USA, gave a presentation on Nonsymbolic



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communication forms and functions as reported by families of individuals with CHARGE syndrome. Some key findings were that:

- ALL children / young adults used some commu- nication forms for multiple functions
- 19 of the 27 participants had previous / current experience using Unaided AAC
- only four of the 27 participants had previous / current experience using an Aided AAC system.

As with all conferences, one of the highlights was meeting up with colleagues from other countries and learning about their services, and projects. Conversations of particular interest to me were about:

- Residential services for adults born with deaf- blindness in Norway
- A project on smell with people born with deaf- blindness in the Netherlands
- Use of social haptics (touch cues) when teaching orientation and mobility
- Use of video feedback interventions.

The next Deafblind International World Conference will be held in Australia on the Gold Coast in August 2019.

For copies of the presentations mentioned in this report or further information about deafblindness contact Meredith Prain meredith@meredithprain.com.au ●

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