

What DEAL contributed to Victoria, Australia and the World from July 2008 to June 2009

DEAL serves people with little or no speech, people who often have great difficulty in having their needs met, people who cannot even say 'I need help'. Since opening in 1986, DEAL has provided communication therapy to nearly 2500 Victorians without functional speech. Some of the first children to attend DEAL, students who were once believed to be significantly intellectually impaired as well as mute, have now graduated from university.

DEAL's innovative augmentative communication (AAC) programs have had wide international impact. Communication strategies developed at DEAL are now used in more than thirty countries, and have led many government agencies and universities to establish programs in non-speech communication.

DEAL remains highly productive despite its limited resources. In the financial year from July 2008 to June 2009 DEAL's output included:

***Therapy provision** to 237 individuals with severe communication impairments, 95 of whom were new clients. As well as providing on-going services to Victorians, DEAL staff undertook assessments and consultations in Queensland and the U.S.A. and China (see *Breaking the Silence: Providing communication aids for Chinese children who cannot talk*).

***Advocacy** – in addition to providing individual advocacy, DEAL takes up wider issues affecting people with significant speech limitations. Currently DEAL staff are working with concerned parents, professionals and Communication Rights Australia to push for much needed improvements in the support provided to students with severe communication impairments by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

***Research & Development** – DEAL staff are joining with researchers from Melbourne University and St. Vincent's Hospital in an investigation of the usefulness of MRI technology in the assessment of the awareness of patients diagnosed as being in Persistent Vegetative State or Minimally Conscious State.

***Information & Education** – During 2008-9 DEAL staff and committee members delivered many presentations on AAC at national and international conferences, including 2 at the ISAAC conference in Montreal, 2 at the West Coast Facilitated Communication Conference in Los Angeles, 2 at the ASSID conference in Melbourne, 2 at the AGOSCI conference in Canberra, and 3 at speech therapy conferences in Shanghai and Beijing.

As well, DEAL provides an e-mail information and advice service used by parents and therapists throughout Australia and around the world. This was augmented by the distribution of two issues of our on-line newsletter in October 2008 and April 2009.

