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May 18, 2006

**The AAC-RERC: An Interview with Dr. Sarah Blackstone***by Lauren Baxter, AAC-RERC Writers Brigade*

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) is a program funded by the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The 22 RERCs conduct research, development, and training to benefit people with a variety of disabilities. One of them, the Center on Communication Enhancement (known as the AAC-RERC) investigates how to serve people who use augmentative communication. The AAC-RERC conducts research into how communication technology can enhance the individual's participation in employment, recreation and daily living.



Other roles of the AAC-RERC are to inform the public about communication technologies and lend support to people who use augmentative communication.

Dr. Sarah Blackstone, one of 10 AAC-RERC active partners, has been with the AAC-RERC since its beginning in 1988. Sarah chose to become a partner because, "I saw it as a unique opportunity to work with people I highly respected, who were fun and creative and who really REALLY cared about moving the field of AAC forward in ways that would truly benefit individuals with complex communication needs." (Personal Communication, December 13, 2005) Dr. Blackstone is the founder and president of Augmentative Communication, Inc. (ACI) and also serves on the management team of the AAC-RERC. Her company takes responsibility for much of the dissemination component of the AAC-RERC. She explains, "The RERCs are meant to foster the development, distribution and utilization of technologies that support people with disabilities." Based on Dr. Blackstone's experience and passion for written expression, she adds, "The mission of the AAC-RERC relates to supporting the needs of people with severe communication impairments. We focus on research and development related to communication technologies, as well as the training of future professionals and a broad dissemination of information relevant to individuals who rely on AAC, their families, service providers, educators, researchers, and policy makers."

Dr. Blackstone emphasizes she is honored to collaborate with all members of the powerful and productive AAC-RERC team.

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