



Aphasia Re-Connect

Welcome to the spring edition of the Aphasia Re-Connect newsletter

So far, **2020** has presented many **challenges** for our **society** and our **communities**. However, we would like to **share** what we have been up to in this edition of our newsletter. For those of you who are not yet familiar with us, **welcome!** We are an organisation which works with people with **aphasia** and other **acquired communication disabilities**. Our **mission** is to **bring people with aphasia together** - we welcome those with broader acquired communication disabilities too!

7

WEEKLY GROUPS

We also run **6 monthly** or bi-monthly **groups**, which reach over **260 people**.

80

VOLUNTEERS

This includes **trainers with aphasia**, peer befriended and many co-facilitators.

25

STUDENTS

We have welcomed **25** Speech and Language **students** to Re-Connect for their **placements**.

70

BUDDIES

Many of our **buddies** are **Speech and Language Therapy student volunteers**.

Become a friend of Aphasia Re-Connect

At our Annual **Carol Concert** in **December**, We launched our **Friends Scheme**. It is an **opportunity** to **learn** about **aphasia**, to find out about the **work we do**, to **support our work** and to get involved.

Anyone can become a friend, including:

- People with aphasia
- Friends and family
- Healthcare Professionals and workers
- Wider supporters

Come and join our vibrant network of Friends - Every contribution is recognised and appreciated!

This edition of our **newsletter** is **filled** to the brim with **articles, news** and **events**. If you would like to **get involved** and **contribute** to **future editions** of our newsletter, **please email Sally**. You can also reach us via **social media**:

Aphasia Re-Connect



info@aphasiareconnect.org



@Aphasiareconnect1



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Becoming a Friend of Aphasia Re-Connect

An article by Sally McVicker



In these **difficult** and **uncertain times**, it is more important than ever for us to **encourage** people with aphasia, their family, friends and other supporters to become a Friend of Aphasia Re-Connect. By doing this, you are supporting our future as we endeavour to keep in touch with everyone through our continuing support program for people with aphasia at home.

We are launching the **Friends Scheme** to ensure our long-term future. We plan on running and expanding our range of regular weekly and monthly groups, extending our reach to people stuck at home. We also aim to further our investment in training and supporting our peer leaders, and to **extend** the **information and support** that we provide to our service users. Our vision is for people with aphasia to have a stake in what we do, feel involved, **participate** and have a sense of belonging in a community as well as having opportunities to be involved in research.

We are a **small peer-led organisation**, built on goodwill and commitment. **We do not receive any funding from the government or NHS and we are not part of the Stroke Association.** We rely entirely on voluntary donations from individuals and grant making trusts to support the running of groups and everything we do, ensuring costs are kept to a minimum.

Our Friends are part of a vibrant community where everyone is recognised for their contribution. As a Friend you can discover more about the work we do, become involved and contribute in whatever way you can. **We believe that this will give you a sense of belonging and the feeling that you have a stake in our organisation.** One of the ways to be actively involved is to become **a volunteer, peer supporter, trainer, co-facilitator or ambassador.**

In fact very many of you already are! We have some fabulous **co-facilitators, trainers, befrienders, ambassadors, advisors.** We are so conscious of the wonderful posts on WhatsApp at this time to support and encourage everyone, and the fantastic liaison that is happening as you all look out for each other and we **thank you!** If you are not yet involved as a peer supporter, please let us know!



Co-facilitators support our social groups

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Once we are back to normality and we are once again able to get out and about, it would be great to **involve our groups in some fundraising initiatives**, which is another way for a wider range of people to contribute too, including your wider family and friends. For example, the three McVicker girls are busy training for the Hackney Half Marathon, now postponed to September, though they are already running their 10k targets!

Invite your friends and family to our events or nominate us as your charity of the year at your workplace, promoting the work that we do.

Perhaps the most straight forward way to support our work, is to offer, where possible, a financial contribution. This can be a one-off donation, a regular donation, or a chance to remember us in your will.

Anyone can become a Friend. If you, or any of your friends, or family, are inspired to become a Friend, we would be delighted. **Friends receive a Certificate; a badge; aphasia cards, and a subscription to our quarterly newsletter, with invitations to all our events.**

We value and thank all of our existing friends and look forward to welcoming and introducing you to a wider and growing circle of friends.

As a Friend your support will bring more people with aphasia together, to transform lives and live life with aphasia well.

To help create more opportunities for people with aphasia, become a friend via our website:

<https://aphasiareconnect.org/support-us/friends/>

Your support allows us to do many activities such as:



Exploring the Tate Modern



Our Conversation Group



Our Weekly Music Group

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Continuing Support At Home

How we are Providing Remote and Virtual Support during the COVID-19 Crisis

We have been busy **providing remote support** for **all existing** as well as **new members** and will continue to provide this service for as long as it is needed.

Where possible, **everyone has been contacted** and a **survey** was conducted to **find out what type of support** individuals would most like to receive. We welcome ideas to **improve our support**.



One of our virtual group meetings on Zoom

Options included:

- A weekly **telephone buddy**
- **Weekly email contact**, with weekly quizzes and news updates
- The dispatch of **paper resource packs by post**
- The option to join **virtual groups using zoom**
- **WhatsApp group** with upbeat and encouraging posts

We have **met with astonishing success**, and now have a vibrant and growing package of opportunity.

We have some **70 volunteer buddies**, all either training or qualified with expertise as professional speech and language therapists, recruited in the main from City and UCL, Universities of London.

All volunteers **receive training** and are provided with regular **support and supervision** over zoom with **individual feedback** and **regular bi-weekly support groups** - here is a snap shot of one in operation.

These volunteer **buddies provide weekly contact** either by **phone, FaceTime, Skype**, and or **email**. Feedback indicates that this remote support is working well and is enjoyed by both the buddies and those that they befriend!

'We had a fluid conversation for 45 minutes and I fed back that we were going well and being fluent and they nearly burst into tears.'

'I'm really enjoying the element of making a new friend - good for both our mental health.'

All our groups are temporarily closed.

Over the **next few weeks**, we will continue to **support** in whatever way we can.

Visit our page on <https://aphasiareconnect.org/find-peer-support/support-at-home/> to find out **how we can support you and keep in touch during these uncertain times.**



A few of our trained volunteer buddies are also **happy to deliver the occasional bit of shopping, medication** or anything else if they can cycle, or walk, to one of our more isolated members.

Our **virtual groups** are also proving **very popular** with **traditional and new group members joining! We welcome new members!**

There are **plans in progress** for a **virtual art group** using some of the **wonderful videos shared by art galleries.**

All the virtual groups are **running successfully.** A steep **learning curve** for all with **technology** but we are **moving forward as we all gain experience. So far, so good!**

The WhatsApp group has been set up for anyone who wants to join and has about 20 active members, with daily posts of music, poetry and good things to share and enjoy together.

Resource packs and cards are sent to all without email or phone contact. Packed with crosswords, word searches, news, small plants, artwork and origami, these are designed **to share our good wishes** and provide **some entertainment during lock-down,**

For anyone with access to our website:

www.aphasiareconnect.org

We **regularly post a weekly quiz, puzzles,** word searches and crosswords, **art, music,** and the **weeks news** and current affairs. A webpage has been added with a blog by Dr Sophie McKenzie SLT to provide **spiritual support** for all our members during these difficult and uncertain times. Please get in touch with us if you would like to receive support at home at this difficult time: info@aphasiareconnect.org

Please see our virtual social activity timetable below:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10am					
10:30am					
11am					
11:30am					
12pm					
12:30pm					
1pm					

Young People’s Group is held **fortnightly (twice a month).**

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New Developments

This year, we aimed to **reach** new **people** living with **aphasia** in **new areas**. Our **numbers** are **growing**!

We have taken on the support of the **Putney** group.

When?

Wednesday mornings,
10:30am to 12pm.



Where?

We are currently holding this group **online**.

Otherwise, the group is held in **SW6 3LA**.

We have also started a new group in **Croydon**.

When?

Wednesday mornings,
11am to 1pm.



Where?

We are currently holding this group **online**.

Otherwise, the group is held in **CR9 1ET**.

If **you** have an **interest**, come and **join us; virtually!**

Are you **interested** in any of our **activities** or do you **know someone** who would like to join?

Please **download** and **fill out** an application **form** for our **website**:

www.aphasiareconnect.org/groups/application-form/

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Bromley Drop-in

An article by Julie Cook

Currently, we are **sending cards** and **keeping in touch** with our **members** during **lockdown**.

We **usually** meet **twice** a month in **Bromley**.

The **average attendance** is **20 - 23 people**. This includes **6 Volunteers** and **2 Peer Helpers**.

The **attendees** cover the full **range** of **speech and physical disability** with several in wheel chairs.

We **share** cups of **tea, coffee** and **biscuits** and a lot of **communication**. We are a vibrant welcoming group with a **friendly** and **lively atmosphere**. We have recently adopted a **new** way of **arranging** the **room** with three separate tables and this **facilitates different activities and conversations** around each table, for example **chatting** on **particular topics**, reading aloud with help, playing games and subject related discussions.



WHO CO-ORDINATES YOUR ACTIVITIES?

We have **8 Trustees, 12 committee members** and **advisors** including Sally, Lin and Sophie.



Welcome Sophie!

SmallTalk: The Most Helpful App Around!

An article on the SmallTalk apps

SmallTalk has a wide range of **apps** for your **phone** and **tablet** to help you with **daily tasks, communication and facial exercises**.

The SmallTalk Aphasia app, which is available in an either **male or female voice**, can **help** you **communicate with others** with the help of **common phrases** and **images**. This could be **useful** when you're **traveling** and you **need** some **guidance**, or for when you **can't** seem to **find the word you're looking for**.

SmallTalk also offers an **app** for individuals living with **dysphagia**. This app includes **images** and **phrases** to communicate any **swallowing needs** or **challenges** you may have.

Other SmallTalk apps include:

- **SmallTalk Conversational Phrases** which includes **words commonly** used in **conversation** such as **greetings, questions** and **responses**.
- **SmallTalk Pain scale** which includes the **Wong-Baker Faces pain scale** to help you **communicate** if you're **uncomfortable** or in **pain**.
- **SmallTalk Daily Activities** which can help with **communication** during **daily activities** such as bathing, dressing and grooming.
- **SmallTalk Intensive Care** which can help with **communicating medical needs** to **health professionals**.

If you are **interested** in any of the SmallTalk **apps**, please visit their **website** for more information on how to access their apps:

<https://www.aphasia.com/smalltalk-aphasia-apps/>

Young People's Group

If you are a **younger** person with **aphasia**, this group is for you!

Where? We are currently holding this group **online**.

When? We meet **twice a month**.



What have we been up to?

The group are working **creatively** on ideas for reconnecting with life **after stroke or brain injury**, including **external speakers, structured conversation group with topic-based discussion** and some wanting an opportunity to **form new friendships** or **peer support** as well as being able to **share tips, ideas** and **personal stories**.

For more **information** about the **coronavirus** please visit the NHS advice website:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19

If you believe you are **showing symptoms** of the **coronavirus**, call **111** for guidance and advice or visit their website to check your symptoms:

111.nhs.uk/covid-19

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A Word About Age Related Memory Loss- A Personal View

An article by Chris Hartup

If you have ever **walked** into your **bedroom** and **thought 'why did I come in here'** or gone into a **supermarket** with a shopping list of 5 items and your **mind went blank** when you got inside, **DO NOT WORRY**, this could be **Age Related Memory Loss**, also known as **Mild Cognitive Impairment**, which is absolutely normal.

If you **struggle** in a conversation because you **cannot think of the word you want**, or if you can recall the film you saw yesterday but not the title of it, **DO NOT WORRY** blame Age Related Memory Loss.

If you **forget where** you put that **book**, or where you left your glasses, **DO NOT WORRY**, it is more than likely Age Related Memory Loss. If your mind goes blank and you cannot remember the name of someone you have just been introduced to, again, it could be Age Related Memory Loss.

As we get **older**, our **brain slows down**. Age Related Memory Loss is **temporary** and **should not have a big impact on your everyday living**. If you know that the word you want, or the title of that film, is tucked away in your brain somewhere, it is **unlikely** you have **aphasia** or **dementia**.

But if your **memory loss** is having an **impact** on your **everyday life**, for example having a **sudden panic** because **you don't know where you are** or **why you are there**, or you **get lost** in what are **familiar surroundings**, or you **struggle** to **recognise** close **family members**, or you go out on a freezing cold day wearing a cardigan and slippers, or you forget how to make a cup of tea, that is when you need to have a **conversation** with **your doctor**.

Most people forget things from **time to time**, but see a **GP** if you keep having **problems** with **your memory**. It could be **caused by something that can be treated**.

Here are some useful links from NHS England if you would like to learn more:

A guide from NHS England on healthy ageing: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/practical-guide-to-healthy-ageing/>

NHS page for memory loss (amnesia): <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/memory-loss-amnesia/>

A guide from Alzheimer's Society on memory loss: <https://www.humber.nhs.uk/Downloads/Services/Memory%20Clinic/Alzhiemers%20Society%20>

Aphasia Research at City

An article by Chelsie, Deirdre, Jen and Shannon

We had **two focus groups** involving **twelve** people that took place at **City, University of London**.



The **research project** involved **people** with **aphasia** working in partnership with postgraduate speech and language therapy **students** investigating **'What conversation topics are meaningful to people with aphasia'**.

This information could help **inform future therapy**. Our **research** project was **huge success** and we would like to **thank everyone** who **volunteered** to take part. **We look forward to sharing the results!**





Spotlight on: Mark Jepson

A storyboard on one of our service users

I **like** to **watch tv** programmes **about cars** and **cooking**.

I am **curious** about **how things are made**.

I **enjoy reading** the **newspaper every morning** on my **iPad** and love to **practise reading** different texts **aloud** whenever I can.

Word searches are another activity I like to do.

My **mum** and I often go out **shopping** and we have **lunch together**.

She **drives** me to the **Bromley** Aphasia Re-Connect **group**.

I really **enjoy** being **social** and part of a **conversation group**.

It's **great** to **sit** and **chat** to the **new people** I have got to know.

I currently attend the **Bromley** Aphasia Re-Connect drop-in **group**.

I **live at home** with my **wife** and teenage **daughter**.

I **was an Electrical Engineer**.

I **enjoyed** my **job** and it **kept me busy working** during the **week** and some **weekends**.

I **drove** my **daughter** to all her **after-school clubs** throughout the week and **took** my **mum shopping** on a **Saturday**.

I **enjoyed cooking** and made a **great** Sunday **roast** each week!

My use of speech is **returning** but it is **very frustrating not to be able to just say what I want to say like I used to**.

The **stroke** has **affected** my **mobility** but **little by little** it is **improving**.

I had my **stroke** in **June 2018** at the **age** of **55**.

I spent time in **four different hospitals** over **six months**. **When I first came home**, I could only **speak a little**.



Mark



Christchurch (Blackfriars Road) Windows

An article by Sally McVicker

This is the church where we held so many of our **weekly groups**, and where we eagerly **anticipate returning** after lock-down. The Church has two large sequences of **stained glass**, one from 1959 by Kenneth Bunton, the other from 1984 celebrating the Church's 25th anniversary by John Lawson. Of course, this Church is **situated on the Blackfriars Road**, in the heart of the Southern **Bankside area of the Thames**. The windows, old and new, tell a rich story of the mixed but inclusive community of residents and working population existing side by side. A celebration of everyone's gifts to the community.



The front of Christchurch, Blackfriars Road



Sea Containers and Kirkaldy Experimental Works windows

There are at least six 1959 windows that **remember the trades of the area**, with a Craftsmen and labourer's in construction; Lightermen and City Vistas; Sea Containers; Kirkaldy Experimental works; the Trade Unions at the Blackfriars: and institutions and new life. So next time you are there, **take a moment to explore these wonderful windows** with their **stories of local life**, past and present! **Learn about the lightermen and construction workers** providing a channel for trade in skins, wood pulp, food and other resources for local factory and workshop!



A Volunteer's Perspective: Aphasia Re-Connect Drop-in

An article by Sue Philpot

In May 2015, I **retired** from my job of **45 years as a Speech and Language Therapist**. My **first post** was at Brook General Hospital, Woolwich, which was a converted Victorian fever hospital. Although the **buildings** were **old**, all the staff loved the place because there was such a feeling of **camaraderie**. The same team working spirit was present at my **second main job** - at King's College Hospital in Denmark Hill.

Leading up to **retirement**, I had been very concerned as to how I would make the **transition** to a different way of life. But I did know I wanted to continue being with people who had some form of **communication difficulty** and volunteering provided the answer. Being part of the **Tuesday 'Conversation Group'** and the **Thursday 'Drop-in'** in Southwark gave me a renewed sense of purpose as I felt a sense of belonging. After a couple of years of volunteering, I decided to focus my time on the Thursday 'Drop-In'.

I have now been volunteering for almost three years with **Aphasia Re-Connect**, and I continue to love getting involved. **Every Thursday morning**, there are often as many as 20 people, including volunteers. It's a joy to be part of such a **mixed group** of friends of all ages, interests and backgrounds.

Many people know each other, but all are **welcoming to anyone new** who may attend. I enjoy art and travel in the UK and have had some fantastic conversations, albeit using gesture and simple drawings to supplement speech.

I am constantly amazed at what adventurous lives people have lived.

One especially **comical conversation** occurred between me and someone in his eighties with **aphasia** who used to run several clothes stalls in the original **Kensington market-in the 1960s**. As a teenager, I used to enjoy a Saturday morning trip to Kensington Market in the 1960s. With the help of **photos on an i-pad**, we had a great time discussing the fact that I may well have bought an Afghan coat from this man's stall - high fashion in those days!

I have learned so much about **people and their interests**. I now know quite a bit about fishing from an industrial size ring net fishing boat in the Seychelles, thanks to a regular member of the Thursday Drop-in! **Drop-in can be relaxed and restorative** as well. Just being alongside people with similar difficulties is helpful and affirming.

So, in conclusion, what a **great time** I'm having as a **volunteer** with **'Aphasia Re-Connect'** - thank you all!



Are you interested in becoming one of our fabulous volunteers?

We provide training, ongoing support and supervision.

If you are interested in volunteering, please **contact us** or download an application from our website: www.aphasiareconnect.org/support-us/volunteer



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