



# NSW Speech Pathology Evidence Based Practice Interest Group

## Critically Appraised Paper (CAP)

**CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE:** Training of volunteer communication partners (via the ConnectUK program, involving 6 hours of theoretical and practical and ongoing supervision via a 6 weekly support group) appears to be an effective long term service delivery option that can facilitate opportunities for communication and increase confidence for people who predominantly have severe aphasia.

**Clinical Question [patient/problem, intervention, (comparison), outcome]:**

1. Which communication partner training methods are effective in facilitating communication activities and participation for people with aphasia?
2. Which patients and/or communication partner characteristics lead to better outcomes in communication partner training?

**Citation:** McVicker S., Parr S., Pound C., Duchan J. (2009) The Communication Partner Scheme: A project to develop long term, low cost access to conversation for people living with aphasia. *Aphasiology* 23:1, 52-71.

**Design/Method:** Prospective non-randomised phenomenological qualitative study of 3 years total duration. A total of 72 volunteers were sourced from predominantly university and community organisations to act as conversation partners with people who had aphasia. All volunteers were matched to a person who had aphasia primarily by location, then by interests. All volunteers undertook 3 training sessions totalling 6 hours targeting generic communication strategies (theory & practical). Upon completion and confirmation of match, all volunteers saw the person with aphasia for 1 hour per week over a period of 6 months. Each volunteer was required to provide weekly feedback forms to the ConnectUK contact and attend a 6 weekly support group. All participants with aphasia, volunteers and referring agents were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire post completion of the program.

**Participants:**

Communication partners:

- 72 volunteers (no relationship to person with aphasia)
- 90% female
- age range between 20-40years
- sourced predominantly from university (SLP students) and volunteer organisations.

Persons with aphasia:

- 72 persons with aphasia
- mean age 71years (range 35-94)
- predominantly white, British origin
- 55% - 45% female – male ratio
- High incidence of severe aphasia (12% with Boston severity rating of '0', and 50% with Boston severity rating of 0-1.5).
- 37% resided by themselves, 23% in a nursing home, and 40% where living with family/partner.
- 68% had some form of mobility disability requiring an aid.
- time post onset not outlined, but participants overall described as having 'longstanding aphasia'
- No exclusion criteria documented.

**Experimental Group:** As per above

**Control Group:** N/A

May 2002

**Results:** 83% of people with aphasia who participated in the program returned completed evaluation questionnaires. The main themes identified indicate that 80% of people with aphasia found the scheme lead to “real changes in their confidence”, with a further 50% indicating that they “felt better at trying new things”. 83% of referring agencies returned completed evaluation questionnaires. All referrers felt the service was complimentary to Speech and Language therapy, with 88% indicating they would refer in the future (12% didn’t respond to this question). 93% of volunteers returned completed evaluation questionnaires. Nearly all reported they enjoyed visiting the person with aphasia. Note cultural and age differences were discussed as possible reasons for a lack of success with some partnerships.

**Comments – Strengths/weaknesses of paper:** Replicable paper with analysis, method and recommendations relevant to clinical service development. However, limited information was provided regarding specific training provided to the volunteers. Brief themes are stated (e.g. introduction to conversation techniques) however these are not further discussed. Replicating the study in full would therefore be difficult.

This analysis highlighted the resource benefit (cost & time) to an organisation. No biases were identified however may be possible given the high proportion of SLP students who acted as volunteers, and the in-house development of the scheme. In addition, it is interesting to note the drop out rate for volunteers was approximately 22% which may be considered high considering the background/interests of the volunteers.

**Level of Evidence (NH&MRC):** Level IV

**Appraised By:** NSW Adult Speech Pathology Language EBP Group

**Date:** 2011