Changes in Communication Interactions and Perceptions of Aphasia: The Communication Partners Program

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**Introduction**

**Aphasia**

Aphasia can be defined as a chronic language disorder, typically caused by stroke, which causes the loss of ability to understand or express speech. Speech and language problems occur when the right side of the brain is damaged and can result in difficulties speaking, listening, writing, and reading, but does not affect intelligence. Other causes of aphasia are brain tumors, traumatic brain injuries, and progressive neurological disorders. Approximately one million people in the United States suffer from aphasia (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2014).

**Methods**

**Participants**

- Ten partners were selected from a list of undergraduate UW-Eau Claire Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) students who expressed interest in previous aphasia related programs.
- Five individuals with aphasia were recruited from a pool of individuals who have participated or are currently participating in aphasia groups, camps, or other programs.
- Criteria for participation as an individual with aphasia included a diagnosis of aphasia, ongoing communication difficulties relating to aphasia, and residency in the Chippewa Valley area.

**Communication Partner Visits**

- Communication Partner visits last approximately one hour per session and occur every 1-2 weeks.
- The communication partners were asked to record their initial visits using Peds.
- After each visit, the communication partners were asked to reflect on what went well, what needed improvement, and what they planned to work on for next time using a reflection form and dropbox via D2L.

**Reflections from the Communication Partners**

Communication partner reflections provide an inside look on how they are communicating with the individuals with aphasia, the topics that come up during their conversations, and what kinds of challenges the people with aphasia deal with in their daily lives.

"How do I approach conversations with my partner when he is talking negatively about his aphasia?"

"Every time I visit them it reminds me how lucky I am to be able to communicate my thoughts clearly all the time"

"My partner mentioned that he couldn't work on his car anymore because of the weakness in his hand. This is the fourth week in a row that he has brought it up and the third week that he has mentioned the activities he cannot do anymore."

"It was challenging for me to not jump in and finish what my partner was saying during communication breakdowns because I had an idea of what he wanted to say and I wanted to help him. I knew that jumping in and finishing for him would not help the situation, so I thought it was helpful during these instances to be patient and wait for him to finish his thoughts."

"We should keep encouraging him to step out of his comfort zone."

**Plans for the Future**

- With the communication partner, collaboratively review initial and final communication partner recordings.
- Analyze recordings using the Measure of Skill in Supported Conversation/Measure of Participation in Conversation (WISC/MPC, Kagan, 2004).
- Interview partners with aphasia and students for their thoughts on the program and potential improvements.

**References**
