**Aphasia United ‘living with Aphasia’ conference**

**Aphasia United** is an international organisation which links those affected by aphasia, clinicians and researchers. The first UK based Aphasia United Conference took place in Coventry, UK, on March 5th and 6th 2017

Gill Pearl (Speakeasy) convened the event, however, it was **designed** by people with aphasia and their family members. They shared their ideas during an in-depth consultation process across two years (funded by Tavistock Trust for Aphasia). Their input was essential to ensure that this conference was accessible, informative and interesting for those affected by aphasia.

The conference was attended by 125 **delegates,** people with aphasia and their families, professionals, volunteers, students, and staff from voluntary organisations. Delegates travelled from Japan, New Zealand, Slovenia, Ireland, Australia, Hungary and the UK.

The conference was opened by a speech from Henrietta, Duchess of Bedford, and with a presentation to Joannie Scott for the 2017 Robin Tavistock award.

People with aphasia co- delivered presentations, topics included

‘**Aphasia around the World’,**

**Aphasia and Technology,**

**Connecting people with aphasia,**

**Aphasia research,**

**Carers and aphasia,**

**Aphasia and the arts**

**Raising awareness of aphasia and social media.** Delegates had the opportunity to make their own **videos for social media** to raise awareness of aphasia.

**An exhibition and workshops** throughout the two days provided information and opportunities to sample products, including Apps and software designed for people with aphasia.

There was an emphasis on **connecting people**, leaving time for **relaxation and socialising**. At night the delegates shared a three course meal and spent time in the games room and hotel bar after dinner. The atmosphere throughout the two days was electric and often emotional! People had a chance to make friends, share information and advice, and learn. The event was a phenomenal **success**; feedback has been quite overwhelming. Delegates reported that, ‘It felt like a family’, ‘It was brilliant’. They reported that there was very little that needed changing. The structure, topics, timings, printed and on screen resources, venue and style of presentation were all designed and delivered in a way which was **appropriate for people with aphasia**; the delegates with aphasia recognised and appreciated this. This success is due to the advice and ideas of the people affected by aphasia who planned the event, to the commitment to see these ideas to fruition despite considerable barriers and to attention to fine detail. The conference would not have been possible without the contributions from the sponsors, the amazing student volunteers, the presenters and those people who offered practical support.

Most people have asked when there will be another now that the potential benefits have been so strongly demonstrated. Much has been learned from this process and event and it would seem sensible to use this knowledge again. However, there would need to be some changes to the support for planning, funding, and the administration. Reflection on the process and feedback would suggest that it might be worth trying to hold this type of event every 2 years.

With thanks to BAS for their support in funding torwadfs the £23,000 costs of the conference

Gill Pearl