

Wellbeing and aphasia conference 2024

In March 2024 56 people with aphasia, 16 relatives, 20 professionals and seven speech and language therapist students came together at Warwick University Conference Centre to meet and share ideas about Wellbeing and Aphasia.

This residential event was designed based on evidence from an in-depth consultation process across two years (funded by The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia) with people with aphasia and their families. Their input was essential to ensure that this conference was accessible, informative and interesting for those affected by aphasia. Gill Pearl (Speakeasy) and Gill Jackson (Dyscover) convened the event, and were supported by SLTs, mostly from across the UK but also including Australia, Singapore and Poland.

People with aphasia co- planned and delivered presentations The overall theme was crafted around Wellbeing and Aphasia and the 5 contributory elements. A session focusing on research showed how goals for all aspects of wellbeing can be met through engagement in aphasia research.

In addition, there was opportunity to browse an exhibition from aphasia groups to share and learn about support available. There were opportunities for relatives to have their own discussions around the theme.

The residential aspect in particular gave opportunities to put into practice some of the aspects of wellbeing e.g. connecting with people, and learning.

Following on from the conference sessions, at the evening delegates shared a three course meal and spent time in the relaxation space 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. There was a particular emphasis on what people were going to do differently after the conference, and how they were going to share their learning with other people with aphasia in their community groups. We hope that this ensures that the event had impact long term and for more than just the delegates. A follow up on-line call 6 months after the conference for delegates and presenters suggested that these aims were met with reports of positive impacts.

The event was a phenomenal success; feedback has been quite overwhelming. Delegates gave feedback at the event, as part of the co-generation of a word cloud, and through emails and verbal feedback after the conference - 'amazing' 'brilliant', 'inspirational' were the most commonly heard descriptions. They reported that there was very little that needed changing. The structure, topics, timings, printed and on-screen resources and style of presentation were all designed and delivered in a way which was appropriate for them. The venue and facilities were also described as ideal. This success is due to the initial consultations with people with aphasia and to the commitment of the organisers to see these ideas to fruition despite considerable barriers and challenges.

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. Delegates and presenters are hoping that this event will be repeated in 2026 and discussions have already been held. Anyone interested should contact gill@speakeasy-aphasia.org.uk

With thanks to BAS for their support in funding which assisted with the delivery of the conference particularly supporting the research topic.

Gill Pearl and Gill Jackson

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