

This is where the assistance of Speech Pathologists comes in.

Speech Pathologists are specialists with the training and expertise to provide intervention for communication and swallowing difficulties.

With the help of Natalie Kelly and Jade Cartwright, her Speech Pathologists and the multi disciplinary team at Royal Perth Hospital Shenton Park Campus, Sharon has since made a remarkable recovery from those early days.

Her communication skills have improved considerably allowing her to follow conversations and actively participate in conversations.

She can now communicate with people and share her stories with her friends.

Sharon's Aphasia is still present, however she has learnt to deal with it in an extremely positive way.

"Some days are easier than others and I still have a lot of hard work ahead of me," Sharon concedes.

Sharon will continue to attend Speech Pathology sessions to improve her reading, writing and communication skills but she is optimistic that she will make a full recovery and will one day return to work.

"I have had wonderful support and I strongly believe that I will get well, and I will never give up," Sharon said.

Ms Cartwright says Sharon's determination and positive outlook worked in her favour.

"Working in partnership with such a strong, courageous client is so rewarding and inspiring," Ms Cartwright said.

"Sharon has taught us so much about our profession and the strength of the human spirit," Ms Cartwright added.

Sharon is a strong advocate for the need to promote public awareness of Aphasia. Despite the fact that the disorder is more common than Parkinson's disease, it is largely unknown to most.

"Many people would have never heard the word 'Aphasia' before, or know the devastating impact it can have on one's life and well being," Ms Cartwright said.

For someone like Sharon, going into the community is a challenge, although she states that many of her experiences have been positive.

"Before I walk into a shop to ask the shop assistant something, I practice my words so that I am confident enough to ask," Sharon said.

"Sometimes if I feel a little bit overwhelmed, I breathe deeply and smile, and then start again so that they understand what I'm saying. It's amazing how people respond to a smile."

With further advocacy and health promotion it is hoped that the level of awareness will gradually improve and people like shop assistants, bus attendants, and 'everyday people' will know how to help someone struggling with their words or making a request that doesn't quite make sense.

Following a stroke, individuals with Aphasia can expect some recovery and often resume at least some of their previous life roles. In lucky cases language returns to normal, however in others severe problems may last a life time. In those cases communication becomes more than words.

"Individuals with Aphasia learn to rely more on gesture, facial expression, drawing or other alternative means of communication," Ms Cartwright said.

"With time and perseverance communication can still be incredibly successful and it is amazing what individual's with Aphasia manage to say with no words at all."

Individual sufferer's find their own special ways to interact with their loved ones, share a joke, and continue to touch the lives of others.

SPEECH PATHOLOGY WEEK AUGUST 24-30

"Communication: More than just Words" is the theme of the 2008 Speech Pathology Week. For more information visit the website: www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au or if you would like more information about Aphasia you can visit the website of the Australian Aphasia Association on www.aphasia.org.au

Some simple strategies for helping someone with Aphasia:

- *Give the person time to get their message across - don't jump in and "guess" too soon*
- *Ask them simple questions that require a yes or no response to take the pressure off*
- *Ask them to show you what they mean*
- *Ask them if they can write the word down or draw you picture*

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