

# The Philadelphia Aphasia Community at Temple (PACT)

By Rena A. Krakow, Associate Professor, Dept. of Communication Sciences and Disorders

I first learned about aphasia as a young adult when a dear friend of my parents, formerly a college dean of engineering, had a stroke. Subsequently, he was unable to produce any language other than “yes” or “no,” and when he uttered either of those words, he repeated the word again and again as if trying to form a long sentence with the one lexical item. He seemed to understand everything that was said to him, judging by his facial expressions and other limited movements he was able to make, along with the repetitive “yes” or “no.” None of this changed before he passed away, about six years later.

An acquired language disorder, aphasia is more common than Parkinson’s disease, cerebral palsy, or muscular dystrophy, although most people have never heard the word. Aphasia does not alter intelligence and not all who have aphasia are as impaired as my parents’ friend was. The most common cause is stroke, but aphasia can be the result of traumatic brain injury, brain tumor, or progressive neurological disease. The extent and location of damage in the brain typically determines the nature of the language impairment as well as the degree. Some adults with aphasia have difficulty putting together a sentence (e.g., finding the words, producing the words) but understand what is said to them. Others seem to speak fluently (with good prosody) but the words don’t make sense or they are not real words.

Some people recover at least some of their language function not long after the precipitating event. Common wisdom has held that six months is the limiting timeframe for improvement. In contrast, mounting evidence shows that individuals with “chronic aphasia” can improve even years after the incident. Promoting such improvement is a central aim of the newly established Philadelphia Aphasia Community at Temple (PACT).

Temple has long provided diagnostic and therapeutic activities for those with aphasia (through the Temple University Speech-Language-Hearing Center) and our faculty have engaged in research designed to further the understanding of chronic aphasia and the efficacy of different treatment approaches (Eleanor Saffron Center for Cognitive Neuroscience). Building on those foundations, the recruitment of new faculty, new collaborators within Temple, and a growing need for services for adults with aphasia, we have established PACT to serve as a center of aphasia education, research, support and treatment.

In addition to comprehensive diagnostic and therapeutic services for adults with aphasia using innovative research-based practices, PACT provides adults with opportunities to engage in language-enhancing activities of a social nature. The latter are designed to help mitigate the social isolation and fear of interaction that commonly accompany aphasia. These activities also emphasize the interests, ideas, and talents that the adults have despite their challenges. Such activities include an art group, in which adults with aphasia collaborate with each other and with students in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) to create art for a monthly calendar each year. Communication in this group is through art and conversation. The calendars are also used to fundraise for PACT.



*Rena A. Krakow  
Associate Professor,  
Department of  
Communication  
Sciences and Disorders*

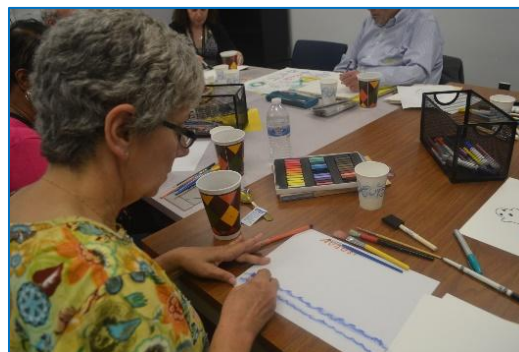


Fig. 1

Some of the adults participate in a choral group in collaboration with students from Music Therapy and CSD, culminating in a performance at the end of the academic year. Music also provides a vehicle for communication and some of our adults are quite musically talented. Moreover, it is sometimes easier to sing than to talk for individuals with aphasia.



Fig. 2

Under the direction of and accompanied by faculty and students from Temple's Recreation Therapy program, another adult group goes on outings in the community, attending sports games, movies, concerts, etc. These outings help the adults learn ways of communicating so that they can get to and from the destinations safely and enjoy the time there with others.

At PACT, we also work on written language, which often takes a back seat to spoken language when adults with aphasia are treated because their spoken language needs are so pressing and written language is considered to be more difficult to treat. Importantly, though, whereas spoken language is of a fleeting nature, written language is durable and lends itself to interventions that are not possible if you can't capture, examine, and edit the language produced. Taking advantage of that durability, we pair one CSD student with each participating adult with aphasia in our program called *Finding the Words: Authors with Aphasia*. In each pairing, the student guides the adult as that adult builds sentences by coming up with one or more words at a time and then adding to them, editing them and then creating and editing the paragraphs and pages of text that emerge. Text is also supplemented with artwork or photographs if appropriate. At the end of the program (one semester duration) there is a bound and printed work for each participating adult that tells a story, or teaches a lesson, or recounts the experience of having a stroke and its aftermath, or describes a favorite hobby or people. These written works express those thoughts, feelings, ideas that have been stuck inside of the adults with aphasia for too long. Often the authors can't believe they were able to produce the work and they can't wait to share it with others.

My name is JH. I was in a car accident, and I had a brain injury. I was right-handed. Now I am left-handed. I have trouble talking, but I like to draw because it makes me happy. I enjoy listening to all kinds of music, spending time with my friends and family, and playing games. I am working on painting a new pair of sneakers now.



Fig. 3(a)

Fig. 3(b)

In the preceding, I have tried to convey a taste of the kinds of activities we provide through PACT for those with chronic aphasia. In addition to the goals of PACT for adults with aphasia and for faculty research, PACT is a place for students to learn about aphasia. They learn from the faculty and they learn from the adults with aphasia. The adults feel it is important for them to convey to the students what life is like with aphasia. Students see the adults' struggles in social situations and they also see the talents and strengths that remain in spite of aphasia. Both undergraduate and graduate students from a number of Temple departments participate in PACT. Some participate in service learning, some in clinical education, and some in research.

With the recent appointment of our new faculty member, Dr. Gayle DeDe as PACT Director, we are confident that PACT will continue to grow and thrive! For more information about aphasia or PACT, contact Gayle DeDe at [gayle.dede@temple.edu](mailto:gayle.dede@temple.edu) or (215) 204-2453. ♦

[\\*The other founding members of PACT are Francine Kohen, Beth Levine, and Nadine Martin.](#)

|

### **Figure Captions**

1. Participants in the Art Group working on calendar pages.
2. Participants in the Chorus performing at our end-of-semester celebration.
3. (a) Information about the creator and author of a catalog showing his artwork and (b) one of the illustrations in the catalog. This individual was formerly right-handed and, no longer able to use his right hand, he creates his art (like that shown on these sneakers) with his left hand.