

# The USC Aphasia Lab Newsletter

Research and Community News for People with Aphasia, Their Families and the  
Rehabilitation Professionals Who Work with Them

## Welcome New Associate Director: Sara Sayers!

WRITTEN BY SARA SAYERS



Hello Aphasia Lab friends! I'm excited to be connected with you all again and for new members of the lab, I am excited to meet you. I joined the Aphasia Lab family back in 2016 working as an SLP with Leigh Ann and Allison on our POLAR study. In 2019, I took on a new adventure helping to lead a sister project with the lab, the Aging Brain Cohort at USC. As of January 2023, I'm honored to be in the new role of associate director of the Aphasia Lab.

I am excited to connect new participants with aphasia and families to our studies, support groups and amazing community that everyone has helped to build here. I look forward to many future opportunities for us to continue growing as a community. Together let's support each other, spread aphasia awareness and help find ways to improve aphasia recovery.

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Sara Sayers!

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# The Aphasia Awareness Project

WRITTEN BY SIGFUS KRISTINSSON



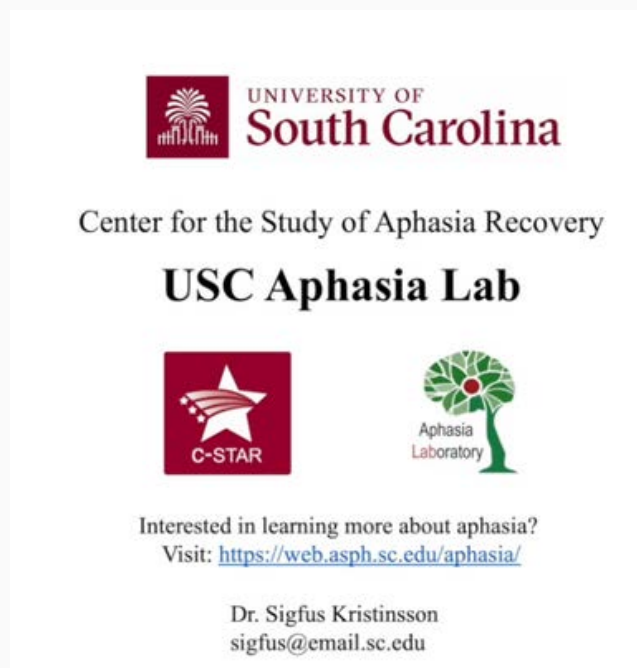
The Aphasia Awareness Project aims to do just that, raise awareness of aphasia in the near community as well as nationwide. The project is essentially a video series where we interview people with aphasia about various topics other than their specific language impairment. For instance, we talk about how the interviewee's role within their family changed as a result of the brain injury, how unfamiliar people respond to them, and challenges related to being on the job market with aphasia.

The topic varies from person to person depending on what they want to discuss. Our main goal is simply to tell people's stories in such a way that they can control the narrative and, ultimately, to share their stories with anyone willing to listen. I started this project because I've found immense inspiration in the stories of the people who come through our lab.



Each person has a unique story to tell, but aphasia can make it challenging for them to share their story. As a result, public awareness of aphasia is staggeringly poor compared to other neurogenic disorders with similar prevalence. Therefore, being part of a large aphasia research lab, I feel like I have access to the tools and platform necessary to help people talk about their journey. It is my hope that we can use this opportunity to make a meaningful impact and foster awareness and understanding of aphasia in our communities.

I hope that we can inform people in the community that aphasia is a language disorder that limits people's ability to communicate using speech or writing. And that aphasia does not affect people's cognitive abilities or intellect. However, the language barrier may impact people's lives in ways not obviously appreciated at the surface, including social relationships, employment, and participation in many daily activities we typically take for granted. I hope the stories we share will help people understand aphasia and facilitate their re-integration into community in a new role after stroke. We are just getting started – we fully intend to continue this work and make a meaningful contribution toward substantially raising awareness of aphasia.



The Aphasia Awareness Project is actively recruiting interviewees who are willing to talk about their experiences. Please contact Sigfus Kristinsson (sigfus@email.sc.edu) for more information.

## Virtual Aphasia Group

WRITTEN BY LELE KELLY AND KAT VLACH

Second year students in the Aphasia Lab, Kat Vlach and LeLe Kelly, have been leading the Virtual Aphasia Group since Summer 2022. This virtual group is an hour-long session designed to bring members with aphasia together and provide support and a sense of belonging. Many participants live in states across the country, and virtual group allows for connection across all states. Living with a communication deficit after a stroke can be an isolating experience, and this support group provides a space for participants to feel connected and supported, even when their community does not offer an in-person support group.

### **What is the benefit of aphasia group?**

There is ample research surrounding the importance of support groups. Aphasia support groups promote increased interaction, initiation and turn-taking within a setting that provides various communication partners in a more natural environment. Furthermore, research shows that aphasia support groups increase the likelihood of carryover within the home and community. Depression is very common in people with aphasia, and group treatment has been shown to directly and indirectly improve psychological function due to the nature of shared communication with others who share similar experiences and feelings.

Additionally, many of the participants in the virtual aphasia group have stated the difficulty in finding a community of individuals who have had similar experiences and have emphasized the positive impact that attending virtual group has provided. Members have shared, “this group keeps me going during the week”.



### **What activities do you do?**

As members of virtual aphasia group have a variety of types of aphasia, graduate clinicians must ensure that activities planned are inclusive to individuals' various needs. Some of the activities include member spotlight, word games, current events, mindfulness activities, and culture-based discussions. Graduate clinicians ensure that members' interests/suggestions are taken into account when planning for each week. Members have shared that member spotlight has given them an opportunity to grow their confidence in their speech, as well as connect with other members while forming deeper friendships through learning about each other. One member mentioned, “they soon get to be your friends, and in no time like family”.

### **How can someone with aphasia get involved in this group?**

People with aphasia who have gone through the USC Aphasia Lab's evaluation process are welcome to join Virtual Aphasia Group! Please contact Sara Sayers (ssayers@mailbox.sc.edu) for further information about Virtual Aphasia Group

# Night of Aphasia Arts Watch Party

WRITTEN BY JAMES JETT

On March 7th members of the Aphasia Lab gathered to watch the Night of Aphasia Arts presented by the National Aphasia Association (NAA). Through this event the NAA strives to celebrate the work and creativity of people with aphasia. Please see below for James Jett's review of the event!



Welcome to the Night of the Aphasia 2! This my second Night of the Aphasia Art and this was our first group Night of the Aphasia Arts first Watch Party for the USC Aphasia group. This was a great event and fun with everyone who was there. If you haven't seen this go to: <https://youtu.be/vkErWBz3nVY>

During the open ceremony we had USC Aphasia 32 people waving and James spoke, "Welcome to the Night of the Aphasia" (2:48/1:57:00). We also had the USC Aphasia Drama Club as well. (58:00/2:48/1:57:00) and it was Buffy Stoner, Marcus Ryninger, James Jett, Lee Woody Thompson, Van Gullledge, Dee Gullledge, and Peter Duffy (who is the director) star Acting.

You can also see all the art contributions in the gallery until it closed. Here it is: <https://www.aphasia.org/night-of-aphasia-arts/>

In room 3, check out the installation art by our friend Mike Child, as well as the fabulous nature photography by Buffy Stoner!! In room 6 (the poetry gallery), scroll to page 9 of the Poetry Book to find James Jett's poem "Struggled". A big thank you to James, by the way, for getting us going with the Night of Aphasia Arts this year! Wait till next year and South Carolina Aphasia Group for more joyful and art!



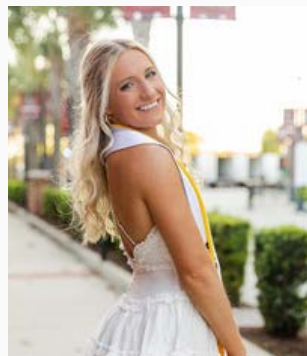
## Farewell To Our Second Years!

WRITTEN BY KRISTI SNOW

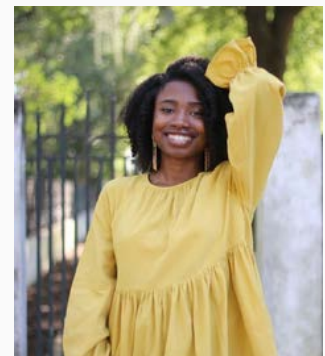
As the spring semester wraps up, our second year students are preparing for their final externships, which will provide students with valuable experience in the setting of their choice before they begin working full-time. We are so excited to see what the future holds for them. Read about their externship plans below!



Alexis Baldwin will be completing her final externship in Shelby, NC at Atrium Health Cleveland working with adults in the outpatient and acute settings.



Lele Kelly will be completing her final externship at St. Francis in Charleston, SC, working in the acute setting.



India Godlock will be completing her final externship at Busy Bee Therapy, a pediatric private practice in Columbia, SC.

# Farewell To Our Second Years Cont'd.

WRITTEN BY KRISTI SNOW



Gisele Martin will be completing her final externship at the Levine Cancer Institute in Charlotte, NC working with the head and neck cancer population.



Kristi Snow will be completing her final externship with the inpatient brain injury team at Craig Rehabilitation Hospital in Denver, CO.



Aubrey Nickelsen will be completing her final externship with Shepherd Center in Atlanta, GA in the comprehensive rehabilitation unit and ICU with patients with brain and spinal cord injuries.



Kelly will be returning to Philadelphia to complete her final externship with Penn Medicine at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.



Kristen DeJulio will be completing her final externship at FOCUS therapy, a Pediatric Private Practice in Fort Myers, FL.



Lauren Grimes will be completing her final externship at Prisma Health Richland Hospital in Columbia, SC in the Acute Care setting.



Kat Vlach will be in Greenville, SC for her final externship at Greenville ENT, where she will be working with adults with voice and swallowing disorders.

## APRIL EVENTS

**APRIL**  
**25**



<https://unlockingbarriers-sc.org/>



**APRIL**  
**26**

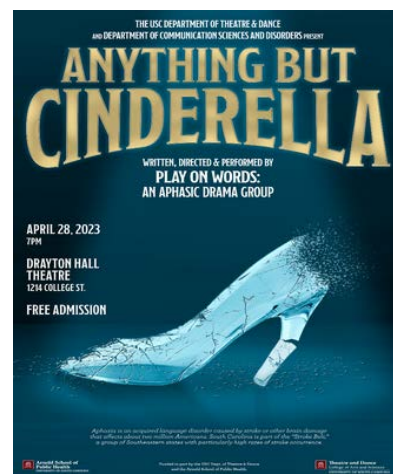
Aphasia Community  
Event (ACE)  
at Segra Park



**APRIL**  
**28**

### ANYTHING BUT CINDERELLA

Drama club performance at 7PM  
Drayton Hall Theatre  
1214 College Street  
\*FREE Admission



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