



The USC Aphasia Lab Newsletter



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

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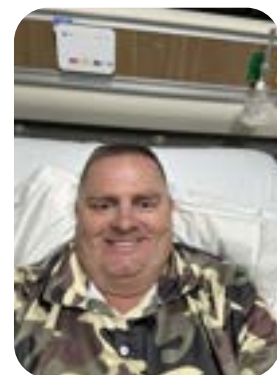
Center for Simulation and Experiential Learning (SAEL)

Practicing Patients and Patience: A Simulated Care Experience

A group of stroke survivors with aphasia recently participated in simulated patient experiences at the USC College of Nursing-Center for Simulation and Experimental Learning (SAEL) located at Lexington Medical Center. Under the direction of Kelly Russin, DNP, the program integrates evidence-based methods, cutting-edge research, and hands-on training to enhance patient safety and elevate healthcare education for nursing students.

“**Having the patients from the USC Aphasia Lab on our Simulated Participant (SP) team has been wonderful and I have enjoyed getting to know them.**

Kelly Russin, DNP, RNC-OB, CHSE,
Director of SAEL Center



Kelly said that working with people with aphasia has been very helpful in improving nursing students' communication skills. Students complete simulations at the SAEL Center during their first nursing course before they have even been to the hospital. So, for most of them, this is their first experience talking to a real "patient". Data gathered from the students will be presented at upcoming conferences and in a future publication.

“**It's experience for both sides. Out in the hallway the students they waiting for the teacher to call them back, we would tell the students what aphasia is. They had interest in learning so we teach them not to rush just be patient.**

Charles, Simulated Participant



This was fun for the people who were there... We even had some of our group for Lunch at Cracker Barrel.

James, Simulated Participant



What it means to be part of training for the next generation... I feel honored to help them learn from my experiences both as an adult, and as a former hospital patient.

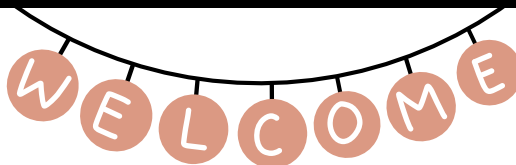
Marcus, Simulated Participant

Some stroke survivors took their roles a step further by intentionally creating challenges to push the nursing students to problem-solve and engage more deeply. Charles described how he purposefully crossed his legs when it was time to take his blood pressure, which forced the students to adapt and think on their feet.

One of the stroke survivors who participated, Addie Brown, now has an ongoing position working as a Simulation Patient at the SAEL Center. Here's what Addie had to say about her experience:

As a Simulation Patient (SP), I tend to hold myself to high standards. Getting to be okay with not saying things exactly precisely is still a process for me. In terms of being an Aphasic, I am challenged by word finding, thinking on my feet... It's wonderful to be part of the process of training our next generation of nurses.

Addie, Simulated Participant



Caylee Brand

SLP Graduate Student



Sarah Canniff

SLP Graduate Student



Tori Aichele

SLP Graduate Student



Saeed Ahmadi

SLP & PhD Candidate

Join us in welcoming our new team members! This fall semester, Caylee, Sarah, and Tori joined our Center for the Study of Aphasia Recovery (C-STAR) Graduate Student Team & Saeed started his journey towards earning his PhD.

We look forward to seeing all of the amazing things that you will accomplish!



Writing the next chapter, together

ANNA AND RYAN TEAL

At just 34 years old, Ryan Teal's life took an unexpected turn when he suffered a massive ischemic stroke caused by the rare condition known as Eagle syndrome. That night, his wife, Anna, found him collapsed on the floor, unable to speak or move his right side. It was the start of a difficult journey; one marked by the challenges of stroke recovery and a language disorder called aphasia.

Aphasia, which affects communication in about one-third of stroke survivors, became a central focus of Ryan's rehabilitation. As they navigated his recovery, both Anna and Ryan experienced their own set of challenges.

For Ryan, laughter remains one of his best medicines. Despite the difficulties of finding the right words or expressing thoughts, moments of humor bring lightness and connection. Whether it's laughing at a silly mistake, a joke, a movie, or dancing with someone who understands, those are joyful and filled with happiness.

"I remember having a stroke and aphasia at the hospital. I felt sad, angry, fearful, lonely, etc. But then, Anna played music on her phone, and we started dancing! That moment was funny, joyful, and full of happiness. Anna is the most gorgeous, kind, intelligent, hilarious, and amazing person I know. I felt so fortunate and grateful," explains, Ryan.

“ When life knocks you down, you must keep getting back up. ”

For Anna, being a victim of this traumatic event was never an option. “Even through my most challenging days and multiple breakdowns, I recalled a piece of advice from my father, which is **when life knocks you down, you must keep getting back up**. Life hit us hard and is still hitting us, but we keep getting back up. As a caregiver, there are many lonely and overwhelming moments. My most toxic trait was staying busy so I wouldn't have to address my emotions and feelings about what happened to us. If I could tell my past self anything, I'd tell her to slow down and work through those moments. Even if you have to carve out time to see a counselor or therapist. It's tough but if you don't deal with your emotions, sooner or later, they will deal with you or they will manifest in other ways.

As the years passed, Ryan and Anna continued multiple types of therapy. **However, they quickly identified a frustrating gap in aphasia resources.** Ryan wanted to practice speaking sentences by reading aloud. However, the materials recommended for practice—often children's books—felt irrelevant and discouraging for an adult like Ryan.

Determined to make a change, Anna and Ryan decided to create something better. **Their vision: Aphasia Readers, a series of functional, age-appropriate books tailored specifically for adults with aphasia. The books would provide practical tools for recovery, fostering confidence and independence.**



Their journey took them to the University of Michigan's intensive aphasia therapy program, where they shared their idea. While the program couldn't develop the resources directly, they encouraged Anna and Ryan to pursue their project, providing invaluable guidance along the way.



Through persistence and collaboration, Anna and Ryan brought Aphasia Readers to life. The books are available in three levels—Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced—designed to meet adults at various stages of recovery.

Each book includes:

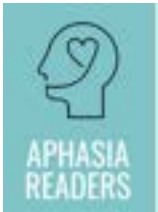
- Simple, functional phrases for practical everyday use.
- Spiral binding for easy handling, especially for those with limited mobility.
- Icons above words to support word retrieval.
- A dialogue format for practicing solo or with a loved one.
- Customizable sections for personalized practice.
- Intricate scenes at the end of each section are designed for writing practice.
- A flexible format so the reader can practice one or multiple sections per day depending on fatigue level.
- Soothing, calming colors.

The books are available on aphasiareaders.com and Amazon.



To further support the aphasia community, Anna and Ryan donate a portion of every sale to aphasia awareness initiatives.

They also offer free resources, including their popular Fridge Functional Phrases Printable Practice Sheets, designed to help users prepare for social interactions like holidays or birthday gatherings to reduce loneliness and increase confidence.



More than just a series of books, Aphasia Readers represents Anna and Ryan's resilience and commitment to the aphasia community. Their creation fills a critical gap, offering tools for confidence and progress beyond formal therapy sessions.



Let's Create a Community Cookbook!



Send us your favorite recipes for an aphasia-friendly cookbook!

Please send us:

- **Microwave only** recipes
- Recipes with **limited ingredients**
- Recipes that can be cooked **one-handed**
- **Family favorite** recipes for our community to enjoy!

Other considerations:

- Let us know of **adaptive kitchen utensils** that we can recommend to the community (e.g. rocking knives or one handed cutting boards)
- Any other **helpful kitchen hacks for stroke survivors!**



Send via email to ssayers@mailbox.sc.edu



Holiday Travel Tips

Traveling during the holidays is stressful, especially for those with aphasia. Here are some of our favorite tips to ensure your holiday vacation is as stress free as can be!

TIP #1: Easy, Accessible Aphasia ID Card

Carry an ID card with a short explanation of aphasia. **Keep it somewhere where you can display it easily**, like in a clear phone case. TSA also has a free notification card you can print and fill out to avoid any issues with airport security.



TSA Notification Card

TIP #2: Stay with Your Support System

Travel with people you know and trust! Whether it is a family member, caregiver, or friend, they will be helpful to navigate airport security, finding your gate, or ordering at an airport restaurant.

TIP #3: Plan Ahead!

Plan ahead and arrive early! Try to consider potential obstacles beforehand to avoid added stress on the day you are traveling, and if you do, ensure you have plenty of time to address them. Some questions to consider may include:

- What key phrases/questions may be helpful to have written down?
- Where is a good meeting point if you get separated/lost?
- Will you need wheelchair accessibility?

Accessible Tech Shoutout: Loop Earplugs

Aphasia can make it difficult for people to speak or understand what others are saying in a quiet, one-on-one setting, but it becomes more difficult in loud settings with lots of background noise.

Heather Centella, a participant of the USC Aphasia Lab since 2023, has found a solution to filtering out excess background noise in Loop Earplugs. The **Loop Earplugs Engage 2** model are built to filter out 16 dB of background noise while still keeping speech clear and understandable.

Heather wears them when she goes to restaurants, Walmart, in the car, and even sometimes at home. She explained that they can also help with anxiety and overstimulation by helping reduce the overall level of noise.

Loop Earplugs Engage 2 model are \$44.95 and have 100-day returns. Let us know if you try them out and how they work for you!





Power of the heart

ALLISON CROXTON



Did you know our hearts contain a bundle of neurons referred to as “the little brain”?

Researchers in the early 1990's found that our hearts have their own nervous system and can function independently of our brains. Despite having only 40 thousand neurons compared to our brain's 86 billion, our heart's electromagnetic energy is 5,000 times greater than the brain's.

While human heart-energy creates a field that extends several feet out from our bodies, a horse has a heart-field that extends 5x as far. Therefore, when a person is close the horse's energetic field completely envelops them. This shared energy then can influence both the heart rhythm and emotions of the individual in their presence.

Aphasia Lab study participant, Loretta Alexander, used to train horses. She has first-hand experience of the powerful connection that can exist between a horse and a human. Loretta has a dream to own her own horse one day and was actively working towards realizing that dream prior to experiencing her stroke. Knowing of her love for horses, her sister who lives in South Carolina came up with a fun surprise for Loretta and their two other sisters who had traveled cross-country with her to Columbia for our TERRA study. **The four of them spent part of a beautiful October afternoon visiting Hickory Top Farm just outside of Columbia, in Eastover. This farm has been providing therapeutic services, with horses, for people in our community since 2022.**

Founder and Executive Director at Hickory Top, Amanda Malanuk, shares Loretta's passion for horses. She gave Loretta and her sisters a warm Southern welcome, providing them time to connect to the beauty of the farm as well as with one of the horses. **Loretta was able to experience elements of the program known as 'The Company of Horses', including guided breathwork and mindfulness activities.** This program is intended



as healing support for people coping with various illnesses or life changes. The horse's ability to use non-verbal communication to extend its calm, coherent heart energy is particularly helpful in assisting with emotional healing and regulation in any human condition where spoken communication is affected, including Aphasia.



Every healing journey is unique. Through sharing their experience on the farm, Loretta and her sisters reminded me of the power of letting your heart inform your mind, and connecting with the people, places, and things that bring you joy! What might that look like for you...?

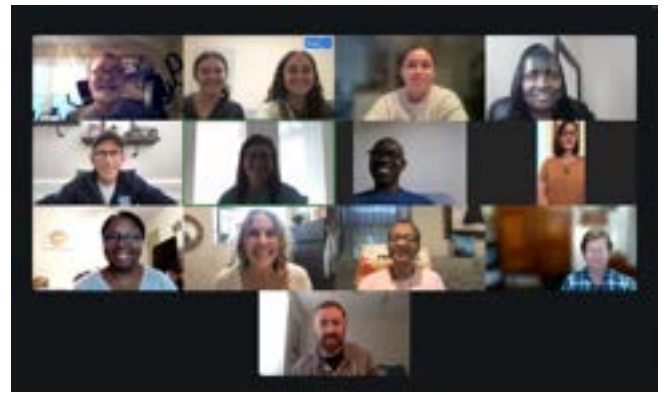
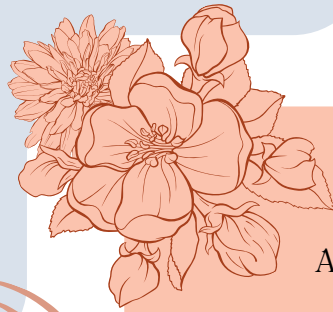


Website: hickorytop.org

In October, the SLPs in the Aphasia Lab – Sara, Allison, Cissy, and Mary – joined the Virtual Aphasia Group, altogether! As each of us, adores each of you, our theme highlighted your wonderful and unique selves, recognizing you as our teachers.

We celebrate you exactly how you are, in this moment! Be You.

The following week, our graduate assistants Marisa and Melanie offered the group time to **create a YOUNique poem, 'Be You'. With love and light and gratitude, enjoy!**



Be YOU

A poem by the Aphasia Lab virtual group

When the world tells you to **stop**,
Remember, your **light** shines the brightest.
In the mirror, you see **me**,
But I see **flowers** waiting to bloom.

Your heart beats to the rhythm of **music**,
Your soul dances like **dandelions** in the wind.
Don't hide your **imperfections**,
For that is where your true power lies.

In moments of doubt, think of **where you have come**,
When you were in a crowd and felt **alone**.
Embrace your **awesomeness**.
Because no one else can **shine** quite like you.

Check out the mindfulness moment that inspired the poem:

WATCH NOW



<https://tinyurl.com/Be-You-Meditation>

We came together for a potluck with members of our aphasia recovery groups to celebrate the end of this semester. Laura, a graduate student in the Aphasia Lab, led a heartfelt discussion about what we're grateful for this holiday season. Check out our word bubble to see what made the list!

At the lab, we are especially thankful for our incredible team and supportive community. Everything we achieve is made possible because of you!

everybody family happy
wife aphasia friends
Thankful for...
speech good husband
grandchildren friends



The USC Aphasia Lab
Communication Sciences and Disorders
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2025 Spring Events!

**FEB
11th**

Aphasia Lab Prom

Capstone House, Columbia, SC
6-9PM

**MARCH
27th**

Aphasia Community Event

Stone River, West Columbia, SC
6-9PM

**APRIL
8th**

Advocacy Day

SC State House, Columbia, SC
10AM-12PM

Study & Ambassador Opportunities!



[https://tinyurl.com/Studies
andPrograms](https://tinyurl.com/StudiesandPrograms)

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HAPPY
Holidays!