VOLUME 16 ISSUE 2 SUMMER 2026

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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Making Waves for Aphasia:

Highlights from Aphasia Awareness Month

This summer, our community made waves far beyond the shoreline! Throughout Aphasia Awareness Month, advocates, students, professionals, and community members came together to help more people learn about aphasia. Each event, conversation, and shared story created another wave of awareness that spread throughout our community and beyond.

Here's a look at how we made a splash this summer:

FIREFLIES NIGHT AT SEGRA PARK



Participants, families, students, and lab members enjoyed an evening cheering on the Columbia Fireflies. It was a wonderful opportunity to connect, build friendships, and celebrate our aphasia community.



Continuing the Celebration...

UPLIFT RESOURCE EDUCATION DAY



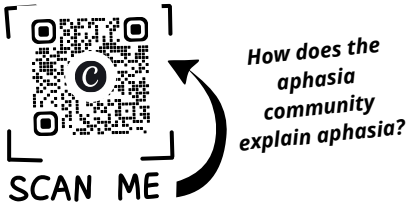


The USC Aphasia Lab participated in the **4th Annual UPLIFT Resource Education Day**, where individuals living with chronic illnesses and disabilities connected with organizations offering education, services, and support. We shared information about aphasia, answered questions, and introduced visitors to resources available through our lab.

NAA: ASK THE EXPERT

Our lab was honored to participate in the National Aphasia Association's "**Ask the Expert"** series during Aphasia Awareness Month. This opportunity allowed us to answer questions, share resources, and connect with people across the country while promoting greater understanding of aphasia.

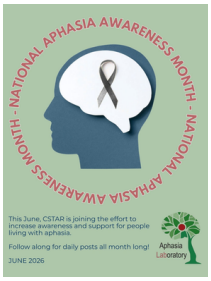


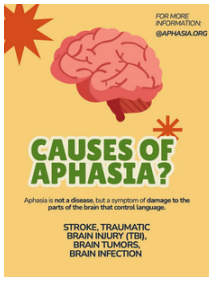


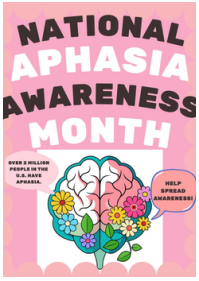
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5rN3hsYRKE

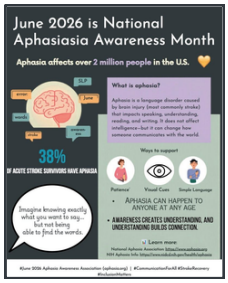
STUDENTS SPREAD AWARENESS

Throughout June, our master's students created and shared daily educational posts on Facebook and Instagram. Their creativity helped educate the public, share communication tips, and keep aphasia awareness visible all month long.









HIDE & SPEAK UP FOR APHASIA

Our **Hide & Speak Up for Aphasia campaign continues to grow**! Painted rocks have been hidden across the United States and around the world to spark conversations about aphasia. Follow the **Aphasia Rocks** Facebook page to see where rocks have been hidden, share your own, and join the movement. **Paint a rock. Find a rock. Hide a rock. Help spread aphasia awareness!**







IN THE NEWS

The USC Aphasia Lab was recently featured in two USC news stories!

🧠 **Expanding Our Impact**
From local outreach to national advocacy, see how the Aphasia Lab is helping build a more aphasia-friendly community.
https://tinyurl.com/Lab-impact

👩💬 **Learning Through Lived Experience**
Read how people with aphasia helped train future nurses through clinical simulations.
https://tinyurl.com/different-way-of-speaking

PROCLAMATION



State of South Carolina

Governor's Proclamation

WHEREAS, aphasia is an acquired language disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate through speaking, understanding language, reading, or writing, while leaving intelligence intact; and

WHEREAS, aphasia is most commonly caused by stroke, but may also result from traumatic brain injury, brain tumors, or progressive neurological diseases; and

WHEREAS, approximately two million people in the United States are living with aphasia, including thousands of residents of the State of South Carolina; and

WHEREAS, individuals with aphasia often face significant barriers to communication, employment, healthcare access, and community participation; and

WHEREAS, increased public awareness and understanding of aphasia can reduce stigma, promote inclusion, and support communication access for all individuals; and

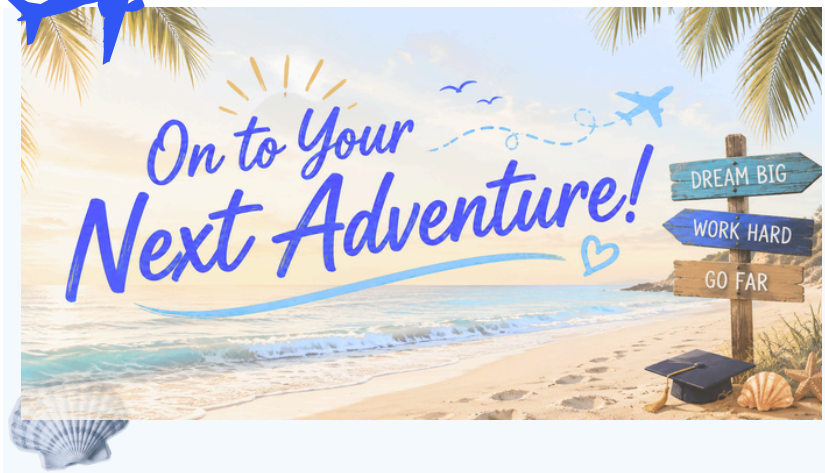
WHEREAS, National Aphasia Awareness Month serves as an opportunity to recognize the resilience of people with aphasia, honor their families and care partners, and highlight the importance of accessible communication in our communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Henry Dargan McMaster, Governor of the great State of South Carolina, do hereby proclaim June 2026 as

APHASIA AWARENESS DAY

throughout the state and encourage all South Carolinians to learn more about aphasia and support individuals living with communication disabilities.

HENRY DARGAN MCMASTER
GOVERNOR
STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA



Congratulations to our graduating undergraduate and graduate students from the CSTAR and ABC teams! Thank you for your hard work, dedication, and the many contributions you've made to our research community. We are so proud of all you've accomplished and can't wait to see where your next adventure takes you. Wishing you every success ahead! 🌴☀️

☀️ **Celebrate our graduates! Click to see their accomplishments & what's next on their journey.**

https://canva.link/91j1tv0klt82nwp







GROWING TOGETHER: OUR GOALS IN ACTION

MEGAN RATTIE & SARA SAYERS

At our ACE (Aphasia Community Event) this spring, our Community Garden celebrated growth, hope, and new beginnings. Community members shared something new they had accomplished on their aphasia journey. **This summer, we did a Community Garden Check-in and asked:**



Thank you to everyone who shared. Your stories remind us that every journey is unique and every step forward matters.





100% reported practice and determination

🌱 Growing Communication

Many people are working on communication. They are attending groups with "Aphasia Friends", reading, practicing every day, and finding strategies that work for them. Many said they are making progress and feel proud of how far they have come**.**

🌞 Growing Confidence

Community members are returning to activities they enjoy. Goals include golfing, driving, writing, advocacy, and participating more in everyday life. Every goal shows courage and determination.

🌻 Community Voices

"Hope… thank you."
"Have faith and confidence in yourself and the Lord. Continue to work and don't give up."
"Keep talking. Practice for 10 minutes or even an hour."

💚 Community Reflection

"Living with aphasia 24 hours a day, 365 days a year is an amazing feat—like learning a new language or craft."

🌷 Every Step Counts

Whether your goal is finding the right word, returning to a favorite hobby, or becoming an advocate, every step is worth celebrating.

Thank you for growing with us. Together, we continue to learn, encourage one another, and grow.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT:
On the Research Horizon

STARS Study Begins!

The Aphasia Lab at the University of South Carolina (USC), together with research teams at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) and the University of Utah (UofU), is excited to announce the launch of the STARS Study (Superiority Trial of Aphasia-focused Rehabilitation with tDCS).

All three study sites are now enrolling participants, and we are excited to share an early milestone: the first participant at USC has completed the three-week study intervention!
We are grateful to our first participant—and to everyone who chooses to take part in research—for the time and effort they contribute to advancing aphasia research.

The STARS Study is a Phase II/III clinical trial funded by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD).

It Takes a Team

The STARS Study is led by Drs. Leo Bonilha and Julius Fridriksson and supported by a multidisciplinary team across USC, MUSC, and the University of Utah. At USC, Mary Aitchison, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, leads the clinical team, with Allison Hare, CCC-SLP, serving as Research Program Coordinator.

> "It is exciting to launch this study that was developed by an amazing group of collaborators. So many people worked very hard to make this possible; it took a dedicated and compassionate village. Every participant is important to us, and we are committed to creating a positive experience in our Aphasia Lab. After more than 30 years as a speech-language pathologist, I continue to feel honored to walk alongside people on their recovery journey. I am hopeful this research will lead to improved treatment options for people living with aphasia."
>
> **-Mary Aitchison, Ph.D., CCC-SLP**

The STARS team brings together expertise in aphasia rehabilitation, speech-language pathology, neuroimaging, statistics, data management, research coordination, and other areas needed to carry out a large, multisite clinical trial.

We are excited to see the STARS Study underway and grateful to the researchers, clinicians, staff, students, participants, and members of the aphasia community who make this work possible.

Enrolling now!

Please see the IRB-approved study flyer for information about the study.

For more information, email us at:
USCSTARS@sc.edu

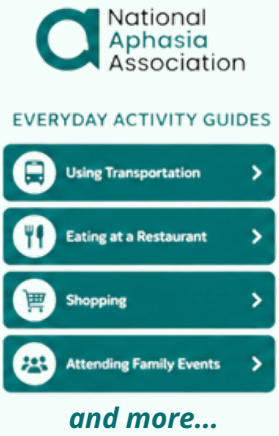
https://tinyurl.com/USC-STARS-Study

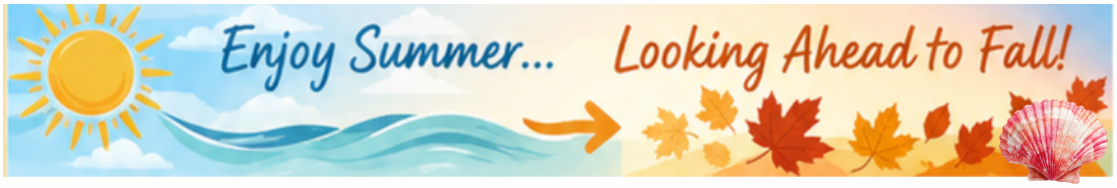
RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

National Aphasia Association: Everyday Activity Guides

Looking for practical ideas to make everyday activities easier?
The National Aphasia Association's Everyday Activity Guides offer simple tips and strategies for common situations like going to the doctor, shopping, using transportation, eating at a restaurant, attending family events, and more. Each guide includes communication strategies, preparation tips, and suggestions for care partners to help make everyday experiences more successful.

🌐 **Explore the guides:** aphasia.org/living-day-to-day





We hope you're having a wonderful summer and enjoying the sunshine!

As we look ahead to the fall semester, we're exploring the possibility of hosting a Community Fall Festival for our aphasia community. Before making plans, we'd love to hear what you think.

Please take a few minutes to complete the **interest survey by clicking the link below or scanning the QR code.**

Your feedback will help us decide whether to move forward with a Fall Festival and, if so, plan an event that everyone can enjoy.

Thank you for helping us create programs that bring our community together!



SURVEY https://tinyurl.com/Fall-Festival-Interest-Survey

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Instructions: Look at the two pictures. Can you find the 10 differences?





CELEBRITY ANAGRAM

Instructions: Rearrange the letters to reveal the correct celebrity with aphasia!

1. **RUCEB ILLISW =**
2. **MILIAE LARKEC =**
3. **HARONS TONES =**
4. **ANDYR RAVIST =**
5. **ENDYW IIALMSLW =**
6. **UBREYA LAZAP =**
7. **ARKM CEWENM =**
8. **ICKD LARKC =**

FIND THE HIDDEN SEASHELLS

Instructions: Find all the hidden seashells embedded within this newsletter! Check the link below to reveal the answer!

Answer Key: https://tinyurl.com/summer-puzzles-answer-key

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LUNCH BUNCH & MORE!

Be on the lookout for upcoming **Lunch Bunch** gatherings and the **"What's New in the USC Aphasia Lab"** flyer for our **fall group**/study offerings!

FOLLOW US

- Instagram: @uofscaphasialab
- YouTube: tinyurl.com/Aphasia-Lab-YouTube
- Facebook: Aphasia Lab – USC
- tinyurl.com/Awareness-Video-Series

CONTACT US

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THANK YOU

for being a part of our community!