Partnering to Increase Life Participation: Launching the Calgary Aphasia Centre

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Background:
• Up to 35 per cent of stroke survivors present with aphasia, a language disorder which often persists beyond the initial stages of recovery.
• Canadian Best Practice Recommendations for Stroke Care (2013) state that aphasia treatment should include group therapy and conversation groups, not only to supplement intensity of therapy during hospitalization, but also as continuing therapy following discharge.
• As well, these recommendations state that "programs and services should be in place in all organizations and communities, with easy access…
• Aphasia groups and centres are effective service delivery options to help people with aphasia re-engage in their communities.
• In 2014, an environmental scan of available community-based aphasia groups revealed a large gap.
• The majority of existing groups were attached to time-limited in-patient rehabilitation programs, or out-patient programs that did not accept external referrals. Only one active community aphasia group existed which accepted external referrals.

Methods:
• A presentation was made to the Stroke Recovery Association of Calgary (SRAC), outlining the need to address the shortage of community-based aphasia groups.
• Subsequently, a partnership was formed between SRAC and key stakeholders, and a steering committee was formed in June 2014.
• The steering committee mandate is to support the development of the Calgary Aphasia Centre (CAC), as an initiative of the SRAC.

Results:
Over a span of 12 months, CAC has expanded to offer six community aphasia groups from the initial single offering. A vision statement has been generated, and CAC has participated in several community fairs to raise awareness. Recruitment and training of new volunteers is ongoing.

Conclusions:
Partnerships between community members, organizations, professionals, and persons with aphasia and their families resulted in positive growth of services for clients with aphasia.

Publicity: Via community fairs, media features and Twitter (@CgyAphasiaCntr)

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Locations: Spaces for groups are provided by these partners: Carewest Fanning Centre and Glenmore Park, Southern Alberta Brain Injury Society (SABIS), First Baptist Church, Heart & Stroke Foundation.

Fundraising: In partnership with Aliki’s Art House, hosted two fundraisers: A Create & Donate event, and the Expressions Art Sale & Auction; we continue to pursue other funding opportunities.

Volunteer training: Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA™) workshops hosted at the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured.

Next Steps: Refine referral process; strategic planning; client and caregiver satisfaction outcomes; program development.

Calgary Aphasia Centre steering committee (established June 2014): Samantha Berscht, Vic Davies, David Elliott, Vicky Jones, Kat Lasiuk, Kevin Lindland, Gord Mathezer, Robin Rogers, Margaret Steel, Jim Steel, Heather Tomlinson (Chairperson).

Calgary Aphasia Centre is a community of individuals with aphasia, family members, volunteers and speech-language professionals. Our vision is to improve communication skills, support independence, encourage community participation and enhance quality of life. This is an initiative of the Stroke Recovery Association of Calgary.

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Stroke Recovery Association of Calgary (SRAC) provided the seed money and continues to support this initiative.

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