



REBUILDING COMMUNICATION

BUILDING Bridges



Building Bridges – Newsletter of the Aphasia Institute – The Aphasia Institute is a Canadian community-based centre of excellence, pioneering programs and practices that help people with aphasia learn how to communicate in new ways and begin to navigate their own lives again. Through direct service, research, education and training, the Aphasia Institute has built an international reputation as a world leader and educator in aphasia.

Annual Appeal Surpasses Its Goal... Because of You!

Every day we see the real-life difference our professional training, research, education, and direct client services have on individuals and their families living with aphasia – here in Canada as well as internationally.

Because you've shown us with your generous support just how much you believe in what we do, we are galvanized to keep forging ahead, dismantling the communication barriers that have threatened to overwhelm our clients.

It is **because of you** that this year's Annual Appeal surpassed our goal by **\$8,000**. This tremendous accomplishment means we can continue to work in the areas for which we receive no funding: our research and education. **You are making the difference!**



Walk, Talk 'n Roll

Launches Soon!

On Sunday, June 12, our community of clients, staff, volunteers and family will join together for the **Walk, Talk 'n Roll**, the Aphasia Institute's annual signature fundraiser. This year's ambassador is Chris, a client whose inspirational story we'll be sharing with you in the coming weeks. Chris's challenge for himself and to all of us: **To make this year's Walk our most successful yet and have fun doing it!** Look for the information package coming to you soon, and please mark your calendars for **Sunday, June 12!**

Stroke Treatment: The Future is Now

Human nature makes us long for the "old days," but when it comes to healthcare in Canada, now is definitely when it's at. Software and other hi-tech advancements are providing promising solutions for pre- and post-stroke treatment. A powerful program is currently being developed that will accurately and safely break down blood clots in the brain. The Heart & Stroke Foundation has just released an app that tracks your heart health and stroke risk. And a new aneurysm intervention is currently being practised at Sunnybrook Hospital. This is the future of healthcare... now.



Member Chris, with his wife, Marita

The Aphasia Institute relies on the generosity of individual donors and volunteers to deliver life-changing programs.

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Volunteer Celebrates 30 Years of Conversation



Our volunteers are a remarkable group of individuals, united in a common goal: Engaging as conversation partners with people with aphasia. The Aphasia

Institute could not function without their dedication and commitment to our community.

This month we highlight Jane Thorson, a 30-year volunteer of the Aphasia Institute. From our humble beginnings in a school room to our much larger facility today, it's fair to say Jane has been witness to and participant in many changes here.

A tall woman with a comfortable stride, Jane Thorson is funny, friendly, and unassuming. Her modesty and self-deprecating humour belie a resume that includes not only five decades of volunteerism, but also a full life as a stay-at-home mom, long before society caught up with reality and called that a career.

Juggling her responsibilities raising three children during the day and volunteering at night, Jane's first community involvement began in Ottawa almost fifty years ago, with Girl Guides of Canada. She began as an inexperienced parent guide and eventually became Brown Owl, the adult leader in charge of the Brownies. One of Jane's student helpers, leaving the Girl Guides for university, gave Jane a parting gift – a paperweight owl. This thoughtful token of thanks not only

started a hobby for Jane, but it also bore her a nickname: The Owl Lady.

Jane laughs when she thinks about this. "I've lost track of her. She has no idea how the collection has grown. I have more than a hundred owls now." After moving to Toronto several years later and needing a new volunteer opportunity, Jane found it while reading a Toronto Star article on the Aphasia Institute and our founder, Pat Arato. Something just clicked. "It was the right fit. I knew it right away." That was 30 years ago.



The Owl Lady with **some** of her collection

What has changed since then? Jane notes that our volunteer roster includes a more diverse mix of ages. "Working with students gives you a totally different aspect. You learn from them; they learn from you."

She also believes the training our volunteers now receive is vital to the program's success. "We didn't have that. You went to the conversation table and you figured it out. You learned

on the spot. It could be intimidating for someone without any training. You have to learn to feel comfortable with the silence."

Now a facilitator in our 12-week Introductory Program, Jane and co-facilitators engage one-on-one with new arrivals to the Aphasia Institute. These clients come to us often scared and frustrated, but by the end of the program they feel empowered by the tools and support they receive. Volunteers like Jane are integral to this.

As Jane hands out completion certificates on the last day of the program, her face beams with a wide smile, as if she is just as happy for our clients as they are. "You see the changes in the people that come – almost right away. A smile is worth a lot sometimes."

Would she ever consider packing it in and calling it a day? "Not until I feel inadequate," she quips. In that case, we look forward to Jane's contributions for another 30 years.

Quite a legacy for the Owl Lady.

As we were finishing this piece, Volunteer Toronto announced that Jane will be honoured on April 11, 2016 with their prestigious Legacy Award. We congratulate her on this well-deserved accolade.



I CARE

I Care is the Aphasia Institute's grassroots fundraising campaign. Through dinners and bake sales, pizza parties and raffle tickets, our committed clients, volunteers, staff and family

members have already **raised over \$7,000** toward **I Care's** 2016 campaign.

This year, **I Care** will help support the **SCA™ Acute Care** research project. Its goal is to determine how the Aphasia Institute and our supported conversation tools and training can assist doctors, nurses and other stroke team members on the front lines of the acute care wards of our hospitals. This would provide vital assistance to people with aphasia and their families from the very beginning of the healthcare journey.



Peggy, Kay & Mary, stalwart I Care family volunteers

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