

Speakeasy is a charity based in Bury, Lancashire. Speakeasy makes a positive difference to the lives of people who have aphasia, and their carers.

What is aphasia?

Aphasia is a communication difficulty which can happen after a stroke or other type of damage to the parts of the brain involved with language. Aphasia can cause a difficulty with using speech, understanding, reading, and writing. Sometimes the use of gesture and calculation can also be affected. The person's intelligence remains the same.

How does aphasia affect someone's life?

Aphasia can be different for each person. For those with severe difficulties it can lead them to feel locked inside their head unable to make sense of what other people are saying to them, and unable to express even the simplest of messages. Those with less severe difficulties can have problems in spelling, reading long sentences, or in finding the word that they want to say. The effects can therefore be very varied. These are the sort of everyday tasks that may be difficult or even impossible:

- Reading a newspaper or magazine
- Sending or reading a greetings card or letter
- Chatting to friends
- Using the telephone
- Reading instructions and sell by dates on food labels
- Reading instructions on medicines
- Leaving a note for the milkman
- Watching television or listening to the radio
- Reading directions from road signs, in hospitals, or large shops
- Dealing with household bills
- Explaining to the doctor what is wrong.

Does Speakeasy replace speech and language therapy?

Most people with aphasia will receive speech and language therapy and will get some benefit. This therapy will come to an end. At this stage the person who has aphasia and their carer may still have huge difficulties in getting on with life because of the aphasia problems. Speakeasy supports people who have aphasia and their carers to further develop skills and confidence, and to live as full a life as possible. Speakeasy is not a replacement for speech and language therapy, it can provide benefits for people while therapy is still happening, or when therapy has come to an end.

What do people do in Speakeasy?

Speakeasy provides the opportunity for members to meet on a weekly basis to communicate with other people who have similar problems and practice particular skills that may be difficult. Members decide for themselves what sort of activities they want to work on and the Speakeasy staff support them to achieve this. Members can be involved in running the charity, e.g. helping out with the administration, the planning and the fundraising; they can also help to increase awareness of aphasia amongst the local community. These activities are a good opportunity to practice skills like letter writing, decision making, reading leaflets, counting money, speaking to an audience. Members can take part as much or as little as they wish; there will be

no pressure to do more than any person chooses. Each person will be encouraged and supported to do as much as they are able.

Aphasia can mean that previous hobbies are no longer possible so Speakeasy works to encourage people to find new and interesting ways to spend their leisure time. This has included photography, art work, bowling, writing newsletters, music, theatre visits and museum visits.

Does Speakeasy use computers?

Speakeasy has computers, ipads and software that can help people who have aphasia by using special language programmes. Guidance and support will be given to help members to use the computers and to use these special language programmes. The computer facilities are available two days a week (Monday and Tuesdays at the present time). People who have aphasia are welcome to use the computer facilities even if they do not want to come along to the other group activities.

Why is Speakeasy different?

Most people take communication for granted and do not appreciate how hard it can be to join in with everyday life when there is a communication difficulty. Speakeasy provides a safe, supportive environment which helps to develop skills and confidence. The staff and all the volunteers have had training in how to support people to communicate in whatever way possible. Speech and language therapists and an assistant ensure that the volunteer's skills are used in the best way possible to help members and the result is a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for the members to gain in confidence.

When is Speakeasy open?

The group activities are available 2 mornings each week. Members can attend for either one, or both of these. Some activities will be organised outside of these times. The computer suite is available for some other days of the week.

Can I get help with travelling?

We hope that most members will organise their own transport. Some members get help from relatives or friends on a rota system. Some people travel in by Ring and Ride. For those people who have great difficulty organising transport Speakeasy has a small budget which can be used to help out.

We appreciate that aphasia can make it difficult to make arrangements and so Speakeasy staff will be available for support.

Is there any help for carers?

Carers of people who have aphasia need help and support too. Speakeasy can provide information in our resource area about all sorts of problems related to aphasia or disability. Carers can access this information even if their partner does not attend Speakeasy.

In addition Speakeasy runs occasional courses for carers to give information, discuss problems and share ways of coping with difficulties e.g. welfare benefits, holidays, healthy living after stroke.