

Aphasia Insights!

March 2022
Volume 4, Issue 3
March 22, 2022

“Aphasia awareness campaigns also appear to largely “preach to the choir.” That is, social media, print materials, and events typically target people who already know about aphasia – family, friends, professional colleagues and those on organization contact lists (pp. 465).”

Beyond the statistics: a research agenda in aphasia awareness. Simmons-Mackie Nina, Worrall L, Shiggins C, Isaksen J, McMenamin R, Rose T, Guo Y, Wallace S. *Aphasiology*, 34:4, 458-471 (2020).

Stroke Educator, Inc. is committed to educating the wider public about stroke and the international “*Aim High for Aphasia!*” Aphasia Awareness campaign.

Stroke Educator, Inc.
4 Aspen Drive
Brunswick, ME 04011
207-798-1449
tbroussa@comcast.net
www.strokeeducator.com
www.aphasianation.org
FB: DrTomBroussard
FB: StrokeEducatorInc

Aphasia Nation, Inc., focused on educating the wider public about aphasia and plasticity.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

I had a stroke and aphasia in September 2011. I was an associate dean at The Heller School at Brandeis University when I fell down on Main Street, Waltham, MA. I lost my language and could not read, write or speak well.

It took almost four years after my stroke to be able to read, write and speak well in professional circles. Much has happened since then that led to the announcement of Aphasia Nation, Inc. (www.aphasianation.org)

The purpose of Aphasia Nation is to educate the wider public about aphasia and particularly the healthcare and hospital communities. About 25-40% of people with stroke acquire aphasia yet few in the public are aware about aphasia and the link to stroke.

Educating the public about neuroplasticity, the foundation of all learning, is the next step. Stroke/aphasia survivors have learned about plasticity and

recovery the hard way. The rest of the population needs to learn about it too. Learning a new skill, mastering algebra or relearning one's language after a stroke all possess the same *experience-dependent neuroplasticity*.

Photosynthesis is a process that converts sunlight into green leaves and is a wonderful metaphor for plasticity and aphasia recovery. The plants and leaves contain light-

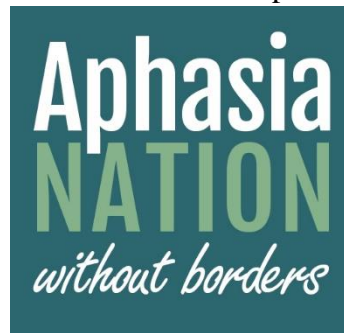
dependent reactions that provide the energy required to sustain life on Earth.

We learned about photosynthesis when we were in elementary school. Learning about plasticity at a

young age should be part of early education too. Plasticity converts thought (it might as well be sunlight) and cognitive activities (reading, writing, and speaking among other things) into neural (brain) matter.

Plasticity is the foundation of *all* learning and creates dendrites and synapses, the metaphorical branches and leaves of photosynthesis.

Aphasia Nation is looking for people with aphasia (PWA) as well as other aphasia advocates who are sharing their stories that include partners with similar interests while developing a sense of aphasia community worldwide.



Aphasia awareness is so much more than just stating our case and then hoping that people will learn about how the brain works in just one class or session.

The Rosetta Stone of aphasia recovery needs persistent, repetitive and intensive language activities to induce plasticity for the long term. It is also the case for educating the wider public about aphasia and plasticity. Lifelong learning and lifelong therapy use exactly the same kind of plasticity!

But we can't just preach to the choir. If we only did that, the public would *remain* unaware and never know how learning really works. The Aphasia Nation members must start the dialogue to hundreds of millions of people around the world about aphasia *and* plasticity (Simmons-Mackie, 2020).

This requires a massive effort across every domain: government, business, schools, law enforcement, hospitals, healthcare providers, churches, and non-profits just to name a few (Simmons-Mackie, 2018).

Public education is the key to the missing link that ties stroke *to* aphasia. People who have never heard of it before, what it is connected to, or even how to pronounce it (uh-Fay'-zhuh) have no idea what *aphasia* really is.

Aphasia Nation members are doers. They are the people we need and usually find by seeing the evidence of their aphasia

awareness outreach activities in progress.

Aphasia advocates often start by sharing their stroke/aphasia stories through their family, friends, and neighbors, and then to local businesses and community organizations.

The next phase is reaching out into the states, regions, national, and international organizations beyond the aphasia world to help them understand why it is so important to know about stroke/aphasia *and* plasticity.

There are many members who have already taken these steps and more, to help educate the public about aphasia. The goal of Aphasia Nation is to grow to scale in terms of educating millions and millions about stroke/aphasia AND plasticity.

The key to all of this is; only do what you yourself can do. As a result, we can become a self-directed team of committed advocates and activists banded together towards universal understanding about how the brain and learning work together.

Please join us!

Signed: *The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness*

Citations:

Simmons-Mackie N. Aphasia In North America, Frequency, Demographics, Impact of Aphasia, Communication Access, Services and Service Gaps. Aphasia Access White Paper (2018).

Simmons-Mackie N., Worrall L, Shiggins C, Isaken J, McMenamin R, Rose T, Guo YE, Wallace, S. Beyond the statistics: a research agenda in aphasia awareness. *Aphasiology*, 2020, Vol. 34, No. 4, 458-471.