Developing language skills through group projects

Many service users choose to improve their communication through direct work on language impairments, for example accessing the department’s expertise in computer-based language therapy. Working on group projects provides a vehicle for honing language skills such as word retrieval, sentences, grammar and narrative structure, as well as skills of rhetoric such as making and defending an argument. Examples of recent projects include:

Meeting with Frank Dobson, local MP and former Secretary of State for Health. Group members described the effects of aphasia beyond language use, including having good days and bad days, time needed to get a message across, other people interrupting, reading and writing difficulties, reliance on familiar films and TV rather than ‘looking forwards’, anger and upset, and lack of awareness from businesses.

They challenged the view that recent improvements to acute stroke services would have prevented their difficulties, and stressed the economic benefits of supporting people over the longer-term:

As experts in aphasia, group members wrote and produced a leaflet that gives strategies for using the telephone. It was distributed at the clinic and is freely available.

One of the clinic’s groups planned and made a YouTube video describing aphasia and its consequences.

The picture below, ‘Coming face-to-face with stroke’ is on display in Chandler House. Made of 302 separate self-portraits drawn by members of the public using their non-preferred hand, it reproduces a self-portrait by Mike Austin. Many people reported that they could not draw with their preferred hand so could not be expected to draw with their non-preferred one. A number of people reported that they were anxious that their attempts might be judged critically. The experience highlights what we expect from people with aphasia, who often have no choice but to complete tasks in new ways.

Why is the clinic important to you? Service users’ views:

- Before, I could only say ‘no’ and ‘yes’... But now! (AS)
- What would I have done if I didn’t come here? I don’t know what would have happened if I hadn’t been referred. (SS)
- Nice to be in a group. (TW)
- To communicate. Before, just ‘uh... uh.’ for 2 months. Then and then, just ‘yes’. It’s so important. (JM)
- It’s... my language, it brings it back. People say to me ‘you’re speaking well at the moment.’ They couldn’t believe it. (MC)

Further information about the Communication Clinic, including how to make a referral and/or join the research volunteer register, can be found on our website:

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/pals/research/langcog/commclinic