A collection of stories about communication from around Australia
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THE stories that came out of Speech Pathology Week 2012 were inspiring, moving, humbling, at times funny, but always insightful.

By asking people to ‘tell their story’, we found much more than a collection of stories about communication – we found almost 500 insights into the way Australians view, value and even struggle to communicate.

The purpose of this project was to take a snapshot of the stories and experiences of people living and working with communication impairment in Australia. More than 5,000 speech bubbles went to every corner of the country and we received stories from Kununurra to Kingaroy.

The ability to communicate is a basic human right. It is a right that is often taken for granted and I hope that when you look through these pages, you are as touched as I was by the stories they contain.

Here we present just a snapshot of those stories that were sent to us. Thank you to everybody who contributed to this book; who filled in a speech bubble, who encouraged others to, and especially to everybody who ‘told their story’ during Speech Pathology Week 2012.

Chris Stone
SPA National President
October 2012
We use our communication skills to make friends.

Tell your story Speech Bubble
The ability to speak should never be taken for granted.

Being diagnosed with cancer of the larynx was no way as devastating as the thought that I would lose my voice.

The total laryngectomy operation may have saved my life, but it also took away the desire to live with no voice; life to me was going to be meaningless.

Speech Pathology gave me back the life I thought I had lost.

The Speech Pathologists are my angels of mercy.
My name is George. I had a stroke 20 years ago.

I have Aphasia. The stroke has affected my memory, speech, reading and writing BUT I'm tackling reading books again. I still go to social events. I love to tell jokes (sometimes a little cheeky in content).

My speech can be frustrating because my thoughts are there one minute and gone the next BUT I know exactly what I want to say.

After my stroke, I met a lovely lady she has made my life wonderful. We've travelled to Queensland, Alice Springs, Phillip Island, Adelaide and to many other places around Australia.

My message to people who don't have Aphasia is “Give the person with Aphasia a chance to speak!”
Communication connects me to......

.....and helps me understand, enjoy and discover
.....everything.....

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Tell your story' speech bubble
I feel happy about my talking.
I am constantly amazed by the brain's ability to change itself, to heal itself, to find alternative ways of doing things after it's injured; we need to give it more credit for doing what it does best!
In 2011 I had throat cancer and lost the ability to communicate. I would often lay in bed at night and think was it the worse thing to not be able to talk, maybe even worse than not having my sight or ability to hear.

Prior to losing my voice, I felt my voice was the backbone of my career, having to manage people, train my staff in their everyday tasks and communicate to our customers on the phone. I was known all through school as the “talking” in the class and my school report always noted “Anne would do better in class if she didn’t talk so much.”

And all of the sudden I can’t speak. I was devastated. I would whisper to communicate so I could still talk on my phone. I used Morse code. I would use something hard to tap the phone once for yes, twice for no, multiple times, when I told my children I loved them. If I wanted someone’s attention I would knock the table and most people could understand. It was funny because my whisper but men had trouble probably due to not being able to do 2 things at once: lip read and listen, that’s my opinion, haha. It was 9 months of not talking. I probably wrote 100 kilometres of notes for everyone. I even became an incredibly fast writer. My hearing became very intense. I started to hear what everyone was saying. My voice finally came through but I couldn’t talk because I couldn’t make the words come out. My manager at work said, “I sounded like a man.” My manager at work said, “I wasn’t allowed to write messages anymore. I had to talk. I didn’t think him. I didn’t talk. I am now told don’t stop. I have so much to catch up on. And no, not being able to talk isn’t as bad as not seeing or hearing because there is always ways of communicating but only one way of seeing and hearing.”
My Story is,

These past 11 year since I was 5 years old, Speech Pathology has helped me a lot. I did not know how to talk properly when I first came and seen Diana she has helped me a lot over the past 11 years. Now I am 17 and currently attending Nepean CAPA High School. I am nearly finishing school next year, I hope some time in the future my speech will improve. Diana is the best I have ever had.

Brandon

Tell your story' speech bubble
Parents are the best teachers of their children’s language through emotional connection and everyday experiences.
I can do little lipreading but I often use my hand to sign.

Tanya
Yr 4
Born autistic in the 70s
Multiple head injuries
Years of daily seizures

My thoughts are big
but words come hard

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
Communication means the ability to have your thoughts out in the world and take in other ideas.
Communication for me is about: going out, meeting people and working together.

Planning, sharing ideas, making decisions, giving information and taking the time to understand each other.
I am 20 years old and have speech dyspraxia. I started speech therapy when I was 3 years old and continued all throughout my primary and secondary schooling. I do not remember much about my early days at speech therapy but my mum told me that I could not talk when I started school in prep. My fantastic speech therapist helped me to communicate with a communication book and I went to speech therapy twice a week to start with. Mum would practice the sound exercises with me every morning. It was very hard work but slowly I made progress. Progress would not have been made if it wasn't for persistence and determination. I am currently doing a bachelor's degree. I still need help but I would not be where I am now without the support from my wonderful, dedicated speech therapist.
WHERE DO I START!!

When you lose your vocal chords, the chances are horrific. First you have to get your head around communicating, before anything else. I found people had difficulty understanding, so repeating myself was common, which I hate, because it's hard enough to say once and especially in noisy environments where I don't try to talk at all.

I've found children very inquisitive, which is great, because they want to know why you talk funny.

I feel that a lot of doctors, nurses, medical staff do not completely understand laryngectomy's. Ambulance people are now starting to understand that we cannot blow into breathalyzers, and my greatest fear is, in case of accident, "mouth to mouth" doesn't work, they don't understand it works differently.

When I had my laryngectomy, it took awhile to order, request anything from a shop, supermarket, etc but as time goes on you overcome these hurdles, by hand gestures, which when I'm tired, becomes common.

My wife is great at lip reading, or interpreting what I'm going to say. My family have been fantastic and helpful with what I'm going through and I appreciate their help, especially my granddaughter who has seen every step I have taken.

Then there have been the dental, radiation, chemotherapy operations, peg tube feeding, rehab, doctors appointments, tinnitus and hearing loss etc, but through it all the doctors, specialists, etc have all been fantastic and the best part is I am still above ground.
Communication is my link to the world.

Speech Pathology Australia: ‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
I have done 6 years of speech pathology and have enjoyed every bit of it! I used to not be able to say 's' and 'z' sounds but after doing the work and putting in effort I have accomplished so much that I can use words to explain it. Now I can speak perfectly and I am getting into public speaking.

Libby - 11 years year 5
"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

(George Bernard Shaw)

This resonates with me - so many of our problems in relationships are due to lack of communication. But all of us can learn how to communicate - maybe for the first time - if we have a mind and heart to do so!
When I had my stroke
I felt frightened and confused 😞 😐?
People would talk to me but it made no sense. With time, I am starting to find my words again and I am starting to understand more and more.

To others with aphasia, I would say "keep hope!". Things seem to get better.
Communication is bridging the gap across cultures and generations.
How do you forget to talk when your SS. It doesn't make sense, but it did happen.

You can make signs with your hands but people treat you differently.

I don't want your sympathy, just your patience. Baby steps is the catch phrase of the day.

My first lesson included blowing a piece of paper off my lips to make the sound of "P." After a few weeks it felt good to say my own name, let alone my daughter's and my son's name. It no longer scares to answer phone, it just takes longer.
I love singing with my family.

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
"My Mum will tell me what the pictures say. In the morning I always say hello to my Mum."

- 5 year old

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
One day I was in a classroom & a young boy who doesn’t talk was playing on the interactive whiteboard. A “Thomas-the-tank-engine” song came on, & he began singing all the words - in time & in tune! He had a big smile on his face, & it was certainly infectious!

I couldn’t help but wonder if there was a way to help him communicate more through song... ☺️🎵生活的歌唱

(OT)
My name is Allan. I've had a stroke and I have Aphasia. I had a stroke 6 years ago (a bleed on the left side of the brain). After my stroke I went to Rehab to learn to speak. At first I felt very, very angry. My speech has improved. I have trouble remembering people’s name which is embarrassing. I know what I want to say but I have trouble finding and saying the right words... "WHICH IS FRUSTRATING!"

Life goes on......I still go ten-pin bowling, go to Vision Australia and still do social things.

I feel I'm a great support to help other people with Aphasia as I’ve been on that journey already. I give this support through our Aphasia Support Group.

My quote is “Keep Trying - Don’t Give It Away”.

"Tell your story’ speech bubble
The best part of being a speechie working with people with disabilities is hearing the great goals that they and their families come up with.....

"I want to sing louder in church" 😊

"I want to say "HEY YOU" to a friend in the playground" 😊

"I want my son to tell me there is a stranger at the door"

THERE IS NEVER A BORING DAY...
95 year old man with swallowing difficulty.

“I don't look forward to meals because I know I'm going to struggle. I miss being able to keep weight on, because of it, I have no strength in my legs & have difficulty walking. I get cross because my lunch is always interrupted by people wanting to take my blood pressure, temperature... It's such a struggle to eat that I want to eat with No interruptions!”
SpongeBob and his friend can talk under water. I can too because I sign.
Communication is a human right. Is anything and everything love power reading
connection touch sharing
knowledge dancing
learning staying connected

my laptop Margaret

Tell your story Speech Bubble
My aunt had a stroke. She couldn't move one side of her body. Her swallowing and speaking were affected as well. At the beginning she put up very bad, but then with the help from her speech pathologist she felt more confident to improve her state. She was eager to attend her exercise with the speech pathologist. So far, she had improved very well, and I am very proud of her.
My name is Nathan. Please use my name to gain my attention before chatting to me.
I am blind but good at communicating my likes and dislikes.
I can sign that I want a drink by holding my right hand open in a cup sign.
I communicate ‘YES’ by using my voice to vocalise “happy” sounds, or by accepting an object and exploring it.
I ‘dance’ my special Spanish dance with my hands when I am happy and squeal in a high pitch which is why my nickname is “Noisy Nathan”.
I communicate ‘NO’ by using my grumpy voice or by pushing away an object.
for me
"Communication
is all about giving people a
voice ....
& with that voice comes
choice!"

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
I am Brian. I am 73 years old. I have had Parkinson's for 14 years. It has affected my speech and walking. I have trouble communicating in a crowd of people. I can't get a loud enough volume of speech.

I need to think about some speech strategies before I speak including:

- Take a deep breath
- Use shorter sentences
- Use a LOUD voice - but I tend to forget.

I also have trouble eating if I go out for dinner. I forget to swallow saliva. It doesn't happen automatically. I have to make a conscious effort to swallow my saliva. Because I have a tremor in my hand sometimes I need help to cut up my meals.

I have been having speech therapy and physio over the last 10 years.

I remain positive that the treatment will help.

I look around and see others worse off than me!

Brian
We have 2 beautiful daughters, aged 2 and 5. Both girls were born with hearing impairment and have 2 cochlear implants each. They have both had regular speech therapy since they were tiny babies. We have read hundreds of books, played many games and sung many songs to the girls. Now they are both speaking really well for their age. Both girls talk a lot and our oldest daughter even talks in her sleep!
Smiling is my favorite form of communication!
SPEECH is FUN.

That's a girl.

This is so pretty.

Hey look!

Cleo, 9

Tell your story’ speech bubble

I love speech!
COMMUNICATION IS
Talking  Listening  Reading  Writing
facial expressions  Gestures

COMMUNICATION EQUALS
respect  satisfaction  involvement  feelings
understanding  dreams  sharing
opportunities  fulfillment  inspiration
discovery  empowerment
imagination  self-esteem
pride  learning
togetherness  contribution
equality  emotions
meaning  accomplishment

Speech Pathology Australia

'Tell your story' speech bubble
Communication is...

Sounds, understanding, words, gestures, sharing, drawings, paintings, chatter, songs, music, speeches, emails, sms/texting, emails, whispering, voice messages, talking, poems, stories/essays, books, magazines, newspapers, ads, articles, body-language, facial expression, facebook, twitter, listening, writing, reading...

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble

Speech Pathology Australia
When you lose the ability to talk, you become so vulnerable... sometimes invisible! Communication is a right, and something we take for granted. Being a Speech Language Pathologist is a wonderful opportunity to work with people to realise their communication potential. As the daughter of a mother with early dementia, I saw loss of speech as her biggest hurdle. It was the saddest thing to watch.
I communicate using my eyes, ears, mouth and hands.

Tell your story Speech Bubble
In 1994 I was in a Motor Car Accident which resulted in Acquired Brain Injury and other Medical Conditions including speech and swallowing difficulties. After being assessed by a Speech Pathologist I learnt I had dysphasia. As time went on my speech became worse and was encouraged to learn Sign Language to help my frustration which I still use to a lesser amount today.

In 2011 I had mouth surgery to help with my Severe Sleep Apnoea. As my tongue and palate were reshaped eating has become extremely difficult to coordinate. I was referred back to Speech Pathologists to Assist with this problem. I have always received Support and encouragement from speech therapists to relearn how to eat again - with modifications. They have been helpful with trying to make a difficult situation easier. Although it has often been challenging we have been able to have a laugh.

Thank you for your dedication.

Julie
I have a special place of gratitude and fondness for speech therapists as one of my brothers had life-changing help from them in his early years.

One of my 4 brothers was determined to be 70% deaf some 5 years after birth, having been misdiagnosed at about 18 months as autistic (late ‘60s). An astute nurse at his Mon-Fri residential care for autistic children, (my mother had 5 children less than 10 years at one stage and he was the second youngest) picked up that he was deaf – not autistic. By this time he was almost five. Transferred to the school for deaf children and with excellent speech pathology he integrated into our primary school at the age of 7 years. One of the lasting memories I have apart from speaking clearly, is helping him with his exercises and my favourite word for him “sta – tis – tics”. His speech is fantastic now.

My own children tire of me asking them to slow down and speak clearly!
Communication is... listening, inquiring, requesting, influencing, asking, telling, sharing, part of me, a means to learn, how I know others, I care. How we know and understand can be challenging, what we share what we know and understand.
Take the time to listen and talk to me.
Not just a cursory greeting on the way out the door.
Actually take the time to speak to me, face to face,
at my level (even if you have to kneel down or sit beside me on
the floor) and take time to speak with me with genuine
interest and respect.

Please don’t yell (I can hear you), just speak normally.
I like to be spoken to in soft gentle tones.

I love, absolutely adore being
included in communal laughter and fun
and love a good joke. I have a
great smile and chuckle and am
very cheeky!

Spend time to get to know me, my
loves, dislikes and dreams.
"What did he say?"

It’s been a six year journey fraught with frustration, joy, satisfaction, hard work, plateaus and progress.

Our speech pathologist was always there to guide us through the stormy weather. We could not have done it so well without her guidance, patience and perseverance.

Working together, we are achieving so much!

"He speaks beautifully"

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
I have really enjoyed having a more in-depth knowledge of how speech and language develop, how people communicate with each other. I was always interested in language, from learning foreign languages to studying linguistics, this led me to the profession of speech pathology, a profession I’m proud to be associated with.
My son, Patterson is a stutterer. He has had Speech Therapy for almost 12 months and is now speaking fluently most of the time. It has been fantastic seeing his confidence grow as a communicator since his stuttering has improved. Although a lot of money and time was invested into his therapy, it was well worth it to see a happy little boy who runs around chatting to everyone he meets! He is now ready for school and although we still have work to do, I am sure he won’t be bullied by the other kids.

Good communication = Confidence!
Today Marco took a brave step forward in his brain injury recovery. 10 months post severe brain injury he is back at work part-time amidst the maze of warehouses and truck in the Sydney Markets. Marco and his SP Colleen co-presented the story of his recovery to a very supportive management team - not only did he manage the group presentation comfortably - he gave his peers some first-hand insights into the reality of coming back from severe injury.

Huge Congratulations Marco!
A 90 year old lady following a stroke...

I was really terrified because when I knew I couldn't speak and move I knew it was a stroke.

I wished I had been struck down by a heart attack and not a stroke. I was hoping the good lord would make a good job of it.

The cat was sitting looking at me. He knew something was wrong. I pressed my alarm pendant around my neck and my daughter came.
Earl and Bubba were quietly sitting in a boat fishing, chewing tobacco and drinking beer when suddenly Bubba says, "Think I'm gonna divorce the wife - she Ain't spoke to me in over 2 months."

Earl spits overboard, takes a long, slow sip of beer and says, "Better think it over ... women like that are hard to find."

Jokes like the above usually bring a chuckle and a grin to people's faces, but have you ever thought what it would be like not to be able to communicate with people?

Unfortunately some people have to live with this for the rest of their lives. A friend of mine suffers from severe Downs Syndrome and has difficulty with even the simplest forms of communication. Just make me reflect on how lucky we are to be able to talk, laugh, sing and share our thoughts with each other.
The first time I realized that I couldn’t talk was in hospital after my surgery. I knew my larynx was removed, but hadn’t yet grasped it emotionally. I began asking the nurse for something and as she kept walking away, I realized I was not making a sound! I panicked and a wave of anxiety swept over me. How would I communicate? How could I tell my daughter, grandson or son-in-law I loved them? What would I do in an emergency?

I still feel anxious, frightened and helpless at times, but I am learning to cope. I never realized how important communicating was, and my voice was my primary tool toward that aim.

Now I have a voice prosthesis and can make voice. Life is much easier because I can make my thoughts and needs known verbally, but it certainly isn’t like it was. I still mourn the loss of my voice and probably always will.
"I love talking with my friends at kinder. I love having no bumps."  
Lucy, 5
The speech therapist identified the gaps in our son's language and gave us ideas about games and how to talk with him everyday that really helped. His language improved faster, he was less frustrated and we became more hopeful! He still finds it hard to find the words but he has the confidence to persist in conversations at home and school and express his unique view of the world. He is slowly learning to read now too.

Thank you for your skill and care!
Hi, my name is John

I lost my voicebox due to laryngeal cancer in 1998.
I communicate with other people by using a device called an Electrolarynx. I hold it against my neck and mouth to words. It works but it is not ideal. My speech has only a limited frequency range and is completely monotone. There is very little control of the volume and generally is very low. I must be close to people to be heard. When I go out to loud places like a party, I carry paper and pencil to “talk” as my voice is not strong enough to be heard across the table. So I do not like going to places that are noisy. People, especially children look at me in wonder when they hear my voice. Some people when they hear my voice assume that because my speech is failing, my intelligence must be failing too. So they tend to speak loudly and slowly as though I am a 4 year old. I get very annoyed when they do that. Nevertheless, I can converse with family and friends and for this I am very grateful. Because I have a speech problem, I tend to be economical with my words and my speech may be a bit shorter or sometimes curt. But I can speak.

John
Communication is the freedom to be who you are & be someone who can bring life, hope & soul to others.

- Vidy

Tell your story Speech Bubble
“MUMMA”

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble
This is my story, which begins unhappily, but has a very happy ending. Due mainly to doctors and nurses in several hospitals, and particularly at the Head and Neck clinic and Plastic surgery Unit at Moorabbin. After two frustrating years and many consultations and scans, the acute nerve pains in my face were diagnosed as a cancerous growth inside my mouth, probably a recurrence of a similar episode in 2000. Doctors advised me that the only cure was to excise it from the inside of the mouth, and to cover the resultant hole with a skin flap taken from the inside of my wrist. The perils of this procedure were carefully explained by the staff involved, including the speech therapist. I was reluctant to follow their advice, since I am eighty-five years old, but finally consented to the ten hour operation. The procedure comprised a tracheotomy to allow me to breathe, a delicate resection of the growth, as well as some of the lymph glands in my neck. Then, the plastic surgeons placed the skin flap over the wound in my mouth in such a way as to allow it to integrate, which it has done very well. Unfortunately, during my recovery period, I suffered a heart attack, and cardiac people joined the morning routine of 'Rounds'. They thought a triple by-pass would be needed, but on later reflection, decided that the insertion of stents in my heart arteries would be sensible. This happens on Friday, August 24th, 2012. Further to these tribulations, I had to ensure Radiotherapy as an insurance that the growth has gone—which—I'm told, it has. This therapy has been the worst part of the whole experience for me. Anyway. But now I can eat and swallow again. All has now been resolved, and with the loving help of my partner, Barbara and family, I am a new man.
My name is Arthur (Spike)

I had a stroke about 3 years ago. I have Aphasia. Aphasia can make me feel lonely because it's hard for me to find the right words. I would love to say words easily but my lips and tongue find it hard to get into the correct position to make the right sounds.

I am a patient man and do enjoy listening to people's stories. It is so hard for me to get my story across to other people. So many people don't understand that I need extra support and time to communicate.

I still have a great sense of humour.

I regularly attend support and social groups.

Although I have Aphasia....."Life is still good!"
Tell your story

speech bubble

Speech Pathology Australia

‘Tell your story’ speech bubble

The Great Australian Communication Story 2012

The Great Australian Communication Story 2012

Norah was very excited about his progress in speech therapy and could really see the difference made for him by the speech therapy team. As soon as Norah started therapy, he became much more socially active and his self-confidence increased. He was always excited to come to school and was very pleased with his progress in therapy. His teachers were very pleased with his progress and commented on how much more confident he had become.

Norah always enjoyed coming to school and was very excited to see his friends. He was very proud of his progress and was always eager to share his success with his friends.

Lucy was very impressed with Norah's progress and was very pleased to see how much he had improved. She was very proud of him and was always very supportive of him.

Norah's family was very pleased with his progress and was very proud of him. They were very happy to see how much he had improved and were very supportive of him.

Norah's teachers were very pleased with his progress and were very impressed with his dedication to therapy. They were very proud of him and were always very supportive of him.

Norah's family was very pleased with his progress and was very proud of him. They were very happy to see how much he had improved and were very supportive of him.

Norah's teachers were very pleased with his progress and were very impressed with his dedication to therapy. They were very proud of him and were always very supportive of him.
I communicate by signing language and by speaking too.

Liam

Tell your story Speech Bubble

year 6
I want people to stop when I talk to them, I like to joke.
“I like at the end of the year I’ve learned a whole lot of new words and I can’t wait for next year to learn some more.”

“I CAN DO IT!”
I have great neighbours.

The gentlemen at the back of our property is profoundly deaf but we have come up with our own signs so we know what each other is saying. One day whilst talking to another neighbour we noticed that the back neighbour's dog was constantly barking at us. Concerned we jumped the back fence to find our neighbour on the ground with a twisted ankle. We arranged medical attention and now he is fine.

Good communication starts in everyone's back yard. Just say hello.