Communication Accessible Communities
forum

hosted by
Speech Pathology Australia

report by
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ASID was invited to attend a forum hosted by Speech Pathology Australia to discuss a way forward to make the community more communication accessible. Hilary Johnson attended as an ASID representative. In attendance were a broad range of stakeholders including AGOSCI Inc, Aphasia Victoria, Australian Aphasia Association, Australian Speak Easy Association, Autism Spectrum Australia (ASPECT), Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), Communication Rights Australia, Deafness Forum of Australia, Disability Discrimination Legal Service, Motor Neurone Disease Australia, Monash Health, Parkinson's Australia, People with Disability (PWD) and SCOPE.

Over the past eight years the concept of communication access has progressively gained recognition in Australia through work that started with the launch of the first Communication Access Symbol internationally by Scope in 2011. Communication access focuses on the elements of human interaction that enable everyone to feel welcome, to be respected not judged, and to experience others as meeting them half way in achieving successful communication. These basic elements are what all members of the representative stakeholder groups require to differing degrees in order to assert their human and communication rights, and feel comfortable and confident that they are included as part of their community.

Communication access is a relatively new concept when compared with physical access. The physical access symbol, the International Symbol of Access (ISA) (person in a wheelchair) was launched by Rehabilitation International in 1969. There was acknowledgement that creating physically accessible environments, required more than an awareness of the barriers faces by people with mobility issues and that standards for creating access to the built environment were needed. Similarly, to achieve real outcomes in creating access to the human environment, communication access needs its own national standards.

This forum was the start of the conversation about communication accessible communities and led Speech Pathology Australia to collaboratively progress into the next phase in which national standards for communication access will be considered.

At the start of the forum, Speech Pathology Australia's Chief Executive Officer, Gail Mulcair, welcomed all to the meeting. In addition, there was a 'Virtual Welcome' and introduction from Alastair McEwan, Disability Discrimination Commissioner through a short video supporting communication as a basic human right and outlining the importance of communication accessibility.

The meeting was facilitated by Gretchen Young, Young Futures.

... Accessible Communities
forum

Background to the forum

Speech Pathology Australia have a visionary plan, the 'Speech Pathology 2030' project, with eight aspirations, the first of which is to consider how to enable Communication Accessible Communities.

There is work occurring, nationally and internationally, to raise awareness of communication as a basic human right and of communication access. Speech Pathology Australia is furthering this through inviting submissions regarding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in a special issue of the International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology (IJSLP). The title of this issue is 'Communication as a human right – Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights'. Speech Pathology Australia is also actively contributing to global policy work being coordinated through the International Communication Project (ICP), a consortium of speech pathology professional bodies from six English speaking countries.

Forum goals and overview

The forum aimed to begin the conversation and explore the concept of communication access. It was acknowledged that this was an initial conversation anticipated to achieve an indication regarding the applicability of communication access to all members of the participating stakeholder groups. It hoped to gauge the willingness of organisations and individuals to progress work together to establish a broad platform for change.

Communication access in action

There were four presentations of exemplar work, highlighting the relevance of communication access across stakeholder groups and sectors.

Presentation 1:

"Aphasia friendly environments" Presented by: Professor Linda Worrell. School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Queensland. Director of the Centre of Clinical Research Excellence.

Presentation 2:

"Communication Access Initiative" Presented by: Dr Barbara Solarsh Communication Access Coordinator, SCOPE & Denise West Acting General Manager Scope's North Division and State-wide Services, Customer and Service Delivery

See https://www.vline.com.au/News-Alerts/News-Articles/Now-we-re-talking

for a short video, 'Now we're talking' about communication access at V/line.

Presentation 3:

"Developing Undergraduate Paramedic Knowledge of Aphasia and their ability to Communicate effectively with Aphasia Patients: A Collaborative Study by Monash Health and Monash University". Presented by: Kirsten Toll, Speech Pathologist, Monash Health.

Presentation 4:

"Communication access for Victorian voters"

Presented by: Sue Lang (via video), Director of Communication and Engagement

Victorian Electoral Commission.

See

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evZIvRaPyTA

In order to obtain stakeholder input for developing basic concepts of communication access, two exercises were conducted.

Forum participants were asked to capture the meaning of communication access through writing a "Twitter-length" definition.

The following responses were received:

- Human Right. Enabler of a meaningful life
- To 'expect' to communicate effectively in all environments, rather than to expect the opposite as the norm or current status quo

- Everyday people being able to understand and engage in functional, meaningful, interactions with people who have a communication disorder

- Access to support to enable effective two way communication

- Successful approach, entry and use of all communication modalities in all areas of life

- Where everyone can be understood and get their message across

- Communication Access - so that everyone can get their message across

- Communication Access includes access to individualised communication technology resources and community understanding

- Everyone is welcome and supported to communicate

- A right to express and be understood

- People with a communication disability being understood and able to understand others. Genuine communication in a respectful manner

- Communication Access means ability to enter any social situation and communicate to the full extent of an individual's function need and / or intellectual ability

- Facilitating a two way 'conversation' between two individuals

- Being able to communicate needs / decisions / preferences. Getting the message

- Everyone can get their message across and understand what people tell them.

Participants were also asked to indicate five key variables that need to be considered within the concept of communication accessibility. A summary of these responses and key themes was as follows:

- Awareness and an understanding of communication difficulties

- A focus on individual needs but also at a community level

- Recognition of differing styles, modes and context of communication

- The importance of the communication partner and others within the communication environment

- Awareness of environmental barriers and impacts on communication

- The knowledge, tools and acceptance to promote communication accessibility and inclusion

- Communication accessibility to be viewed and accepted as equally important as physical accessibility

- Education and support at individual, professional and society levels

- Technology and innovation to support differing needs and modes of communication

- Outcomes to be driven by community and government

- Respect and opportunity for full participation.

Possible goals of a collaborative effort

Participants were asked to consider what goals might be relevant for a collaborative effort towards achieving communication access. A summary of these responses is provided below:

- Promote communication accessibility as critical to improving the lives of those with communication support needs

- Ensure the involvement of those with lived experience of disability and communication difficulties

- 'Sell' a clear message around the right to communicate, as well as, how communication access benefits the whole community, with these benefits being far reaching – ie. what's in it for everyone?

- Establish a national strategy, including a strong promotional (awareness raising) campaign
- Scope the development and adoption of national standards, underpinned by strong research and evidence
- Government endorsement to achieve policy and program change
- Ensure integrity of symbol use, through standards/criteria, accreditation and monitoring
- Work towards international consensus around terminology, definitions, guidelines, standards and use of a universal symbol
- A collective effort to provide strength to achieving real outcomes.

A plan going forward

Given the in-principle agreement to work together towards communication access, consideration was given to what role each organisation or individuals may play in the process going forward. Each individual / organisation was asked to indicate interest against the following levels of participation;

(i) Organisations and individuals interested in being **accountable** and involved in the over-arching group (governance)

(ii) **Responsible organisations** and individuals interested in being responsible for and playing a role in advancing specific issues

(iii) **Consulted organisations** and individuals interested in contributing knowledge, information and experiences

(iv) **Informed organisations** and individuals interested in being kept in the loop, with the opportunity to participate if specific issues arise.

In progressing communication access, consideration was given to other organisations, disciplines /professions and individuals who were not present, however were felt to offer an important contribution for future discussions or consultation. As above, the level of potential participation (ie accountable, responsible, consulted, and informed) of these additional organisations will be explored. Identified organisations, professions and individuals were suggested.

Next steps and close

In closing and in summarising clear themes from the meeting, Gail Mulcair (SPA's EO) highlighted the following:

- There is an identified need for a strong over-arching vision and collaborative effort to ensure change.
- A key to informing future work will be the participation and experiences of those with a communication disability.
- Efforts must be driven from a human rights perspective and to build awareness and respect around communication differences.

The ability to extend on existing work, to progress towards a national strategy and standards, was acknowledged, along with the potential to work towards international recognition of a communication access symbol.

The need for identified goals to be outcomes focused and drive real change in communication access for all within services, policy and programs, was strongly reinforced.

ASID has made a commitment to play a role as a responsible organisation interested in advancing opportunity for people with an intellectual disability. It is hoped that in this role, ASID will contribute to realising communication access for people with an intellectual disability.

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