

## “No friendship is an accident” (O. Henry):

### Bridging friendship in younger people with aphasia from formal programs to informal meetups

Lee-Ann Kant, Fatima Cabral, Elyse Shumway and Natalie Gierman, Aphasia Institute, Toronto



#### BACKGROUND

Younger adult members of the Aphasia Institute asked to engage in a more informal way to develop closer friendships and to have fun.

Social connection and friendships are safeguards against the effects of social isolation in aphasia.

Younger adults with aphasia, in particular, face isolation from regular connection opportunities such as workplace, school and social life activities. They are looking for peer connection with others at the same stage of life.



#### THE BRIDGE

##### APHASIA INSTITUTE PROGRAMS

Differences from conversation group program:

- Informal: side conversations, smartphone use naturally incorporated, come and go
- Less overt \*SCA™ support
- Increased *relational* communication: connect on their lives, humour/teasing, giving each other tips

What main programming provides in preparation:

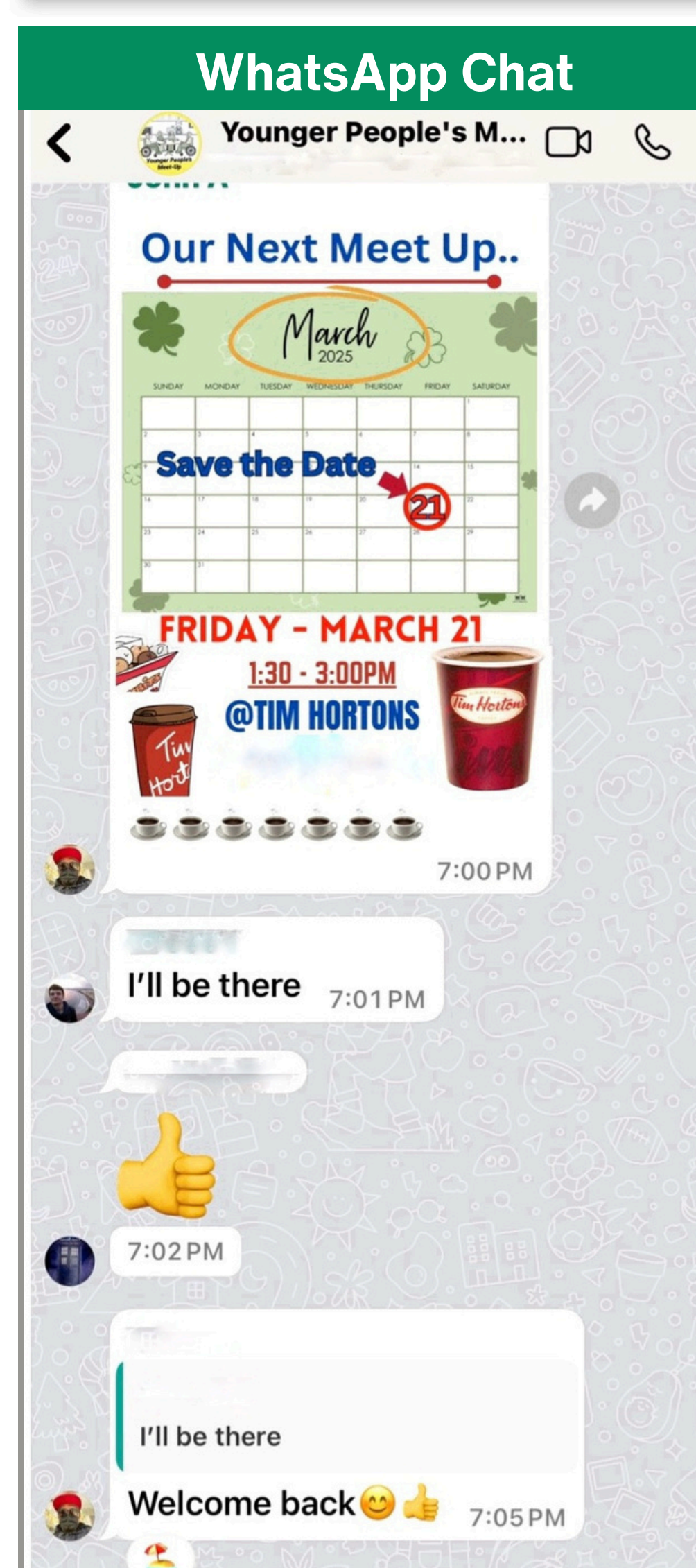
- Conversation skills and SCA™ tools
- Advocacy for self and others
- Strong connections through natural community engagement activities (volunteering, outings)  
'Shared action' is vital



#### SUPPORT

##### HOW – HOW MUCH – HOW LONG

- Logistics: Location, date/time, invite, transportation
- Encouragement and validation: attendance, independence to book next meetup, to share responses before and after meetup e.g., emojis/GIFs
- Conversation and social facilitation and SCA™ support
- Modelling the sharing of personal facts, stories and jokes, and relaxing with one another



#### Dictionary



meet·up

/ˈmēdəp/

noun US

an informal meeting or gathering.



Scan QR Code for more information & resources



\*SCA™ – Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia



#### WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

##### IDENTITY

Younger age was the motivation for this meetup and shared identity has proven vital to friendship development.

For some, aphasia helps connect people, while for others, it's just a starting point, not a key part of building new friendship. Shared new experiences, common interests, and a similar sense of humor help create stronger bonds of friendship.

##### FOSTERING FRIENDSHIP

Factors that seem to play a role in developing closer *autonomous* friendships involve planning opportunities, conversation skills including how to stay 'in touch' and building trust and intimacy.

Trust and intimacy may develop through sharing vulnerability, and humour, and finding a way to show who you are through fulfilling roles that contribute to the whole of the friend group.

Members of this meetup share that they recognize the staff support in encouraging and strengthening interpersonal roles and skills amongst the friends.

##### MEETUP FORMAT

The meetup format is proving to be an effective opportunity to build friendship for our young members with aphasia. The formality of planning provides enough structure to reduce barriers such as keeping the group of friends in touch and scheduling times together.

Meetups are socially acceptable and part of regular life. They are viewed as informal, fun and conducive to a mix of communication modalities such as direct messaging and connecting on social media. Meetups may provide a bridge from formal conversation groups toward increasingly independent friendship opportunities.