



The Art and Science of Training and Supporting Volunteers to Deliver Programming in a Life Participation Model of Service to Adults with Aphasia

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Introduction

The Aphasia Institute is a community based, communication program offering programs and services for all people affected by and living with chronic aphasia. Lay volunteers, trained and supervised by Speech-Language Pathology staff, are utilized to facilitate most of the programming. This service delivery model is identified as a "Mediator Model"

The strengths of this Mediator Model enable:

- More people with aphasia to participate in programs
- Increased opportunities for conversation which facilitates connection, and assists the clients in revealing and building identity
- Wide range of programs due to the range of volunteers and their unique skills and talent
- The opportunity to "practice" and experience adult conversation in a highly supported environment
- A therapeutic experience based on long-lasting social relationships

The volunteer has no prior knowledge of the person with aphasia. As such they come to clients with a "blank slate." They meet the client as they are today; a person with value and potential whose social world has shrunk and where the risk for social isolation is huge. The volunteer is the essential ingredient in our supportive social environment at the Aphasia Institute.

- Aura Kagan, Executive Director

The volunteer brings personal experiences in life and individual opinions that make it (conversation) interesting, valid and normal to the person with aphasia. Our clients feel they are talking to a friend, and at the same time, are being stimulated to converse – something they thought they could never do again.

- Pat Arato (The Language Thief, pg. 111)

The Voice of the Volunteers

So much of our role is listening and helping our clients to get their story out. And within each story, we help our clients to see new possibilities and opportunities open to them. It's a humbling experience as a volunteer facilitator. I always feel I receive more than I give.

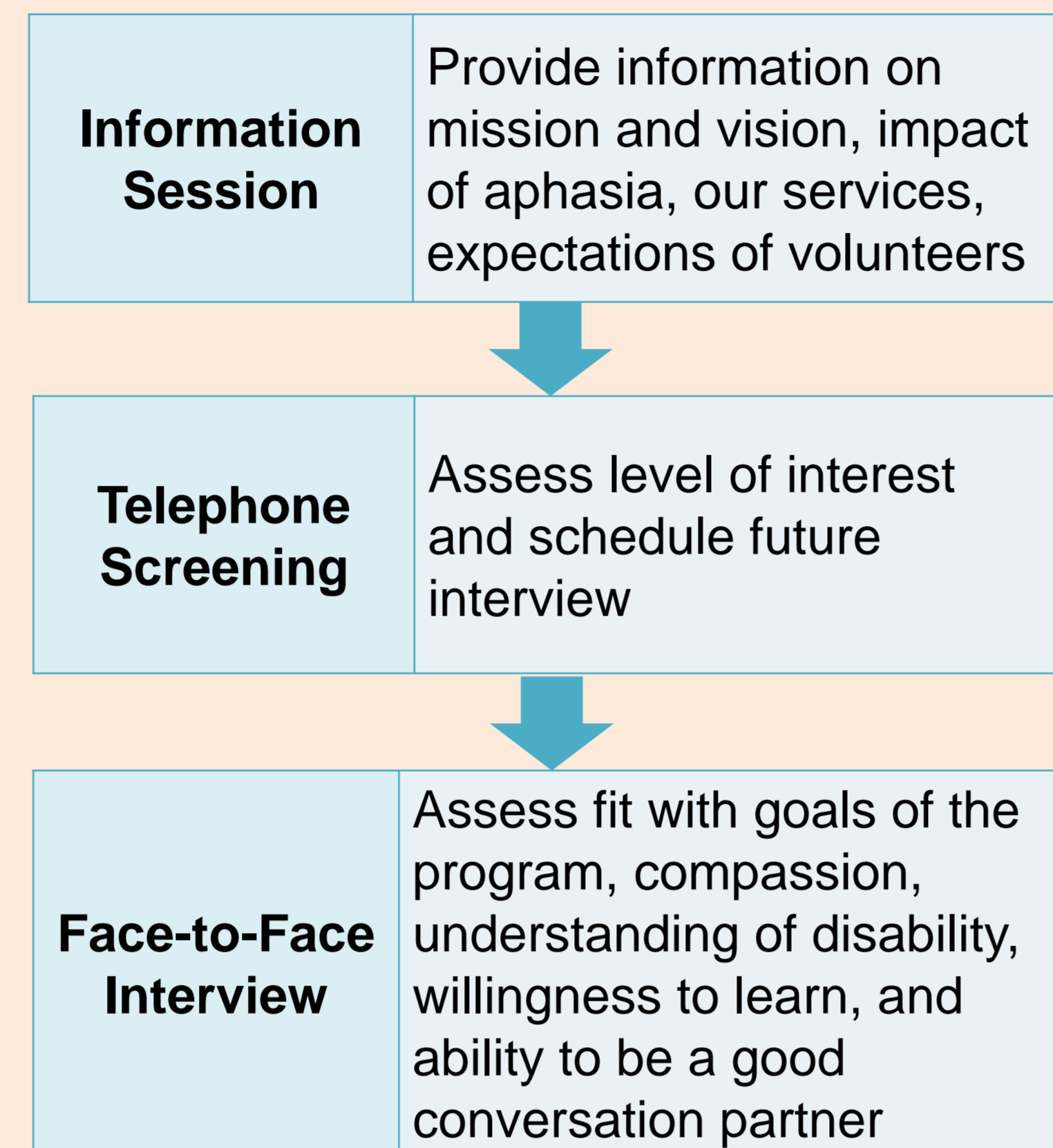
-Conversation Volunteer, 12 years, GK

Every day is a 'learning day'. This is a volunteer experience that challenges me to explore new knowledge about communication, conversation and language.

- Conversation Volunteer, 20 years, MS

Ensuring a High Quality Volunteer Program

A. Process for Screening & Selecting of Volunteers



B. Training and Support: "The Crown Jewels"

Process	Goals and Expectation for Volunteers
Observation (Weeks 1-4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to know clients and their volunteer colleagues • Learn how aphasia affects people differently through observation of various levels of aphasia (mild to severe) • Observe other volunteers' skills and communication strategies
Classroom Training (2 days – Weeks 5-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain insight into what it means to have aphasia and how they can help • Learn Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA™) techniques • Interact with clients in conversation and role-plays • Learn skills and language specific to group facilitation
Hands-On Training (Week 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive individualized and customized feedback to support emerging skill development
Transition Period (Week 7+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take on an active role as a Co-Facilitator in a conversation group, applying SCA™ skills in groups with various levels of aphasia • Reflect on strengths and skills for development during weekly discussion in the "Prep" and Debrief meetings
Maintenance (6 months +)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the learning process through volunteer meetings, debriefings, seminars, feedback from staff, and opportunities to try different programs • Review experience and progress through individual meetings with Volunteer Services Coordinator and Program SLP

C. Staff's Contribution to a High Quality Volunteer Program

1. Fostering growth and development

SLP staff observe the volunteers "in action" and provide feedback for growth and development. Feedback and evaluation focus on communication skills, application of agency policies, respect, and professionalism.

2. Creating ongoing opportunities beyond the day to day learning

Seminars are held 3 times a year to provide in-depth focus on areas for development e.g. group facilitation, listening to the voices of family members in order to gain perspectives from all those affected by aphasia.

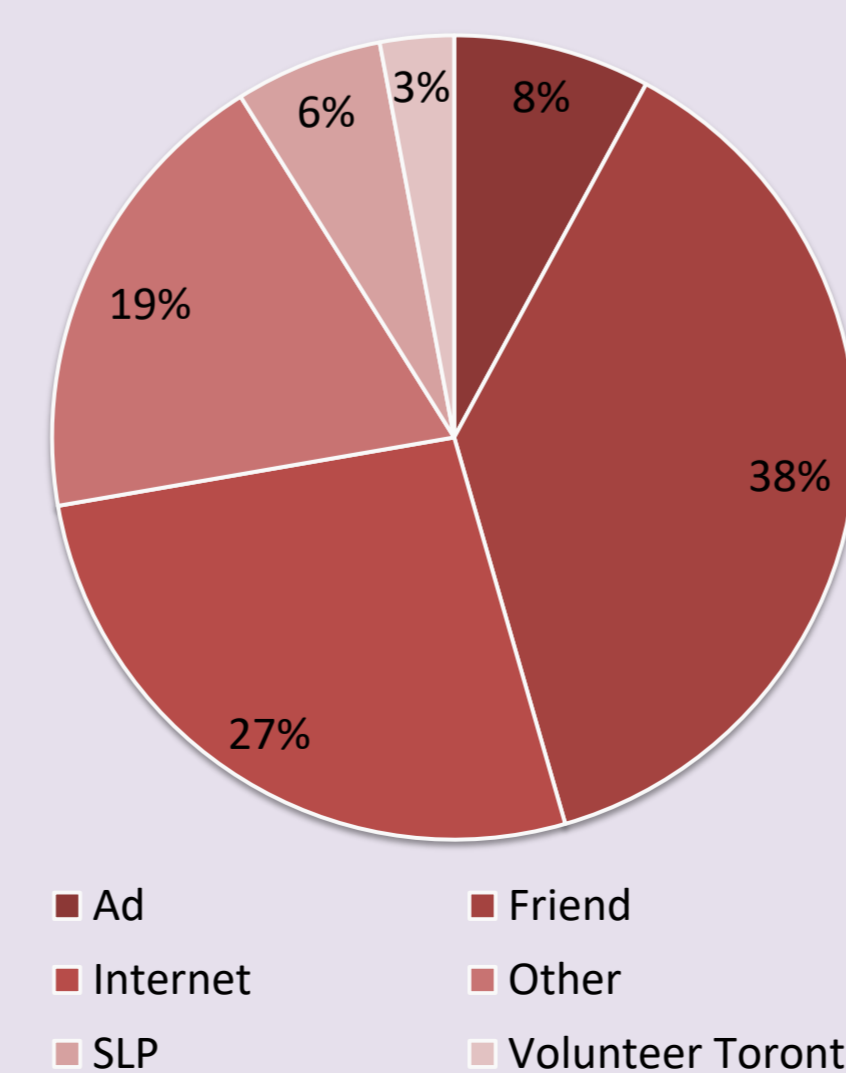
3. Nurturing volunteer's personal growth and their commitment to the Aphasia Institute

- Volunteer Services Coordinator available to volunteers as a sounding board when dealing with complex client-related concerns or personal challenges
- An annual survey for volunteers to provide feedback
- Volunteers invited to participate on agency-wide committees, often working along-side clients in this capacity
- Maintaining consistent communication through various channels (e.g. monthly newsletter, website updates etc.)

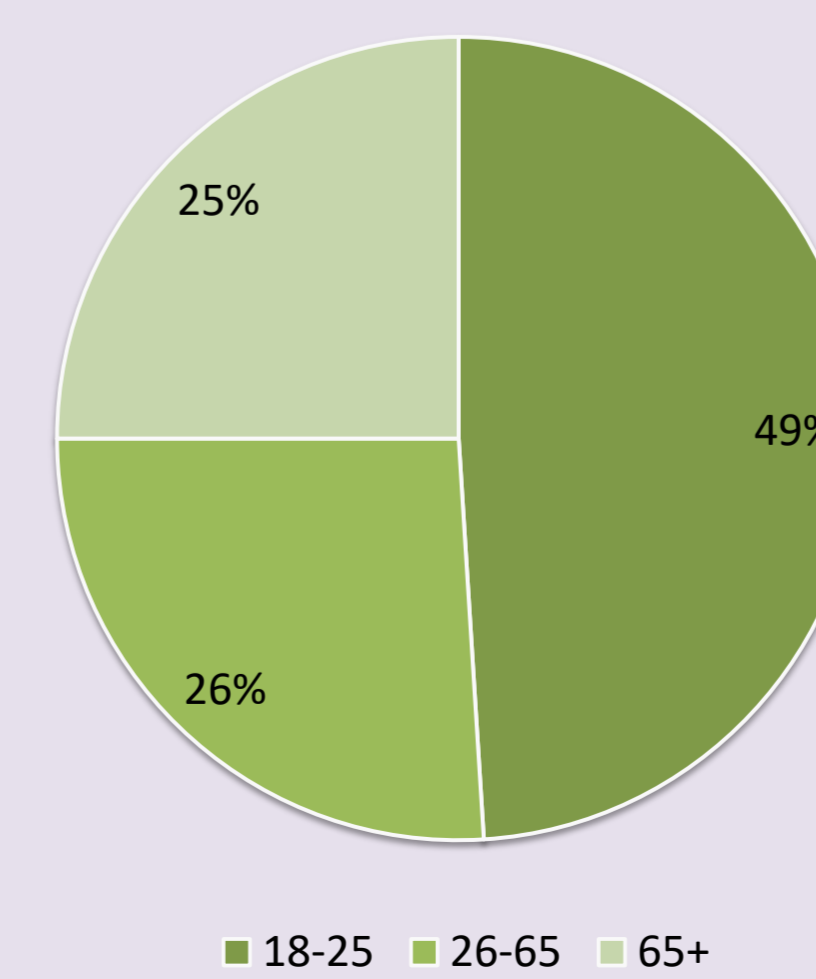
Volunteer Demographics

Activity	Count
Active Volunteers - CAP	139
VCON	104
Creative Writing	7
Toastmasters	7
IPads	10
Life Skills	0
Hear My Voice	6
Painting	27
Debate Club	10
Creative Expressions	7
Living and Learning	9
Book Group	6
Life Story Book	6

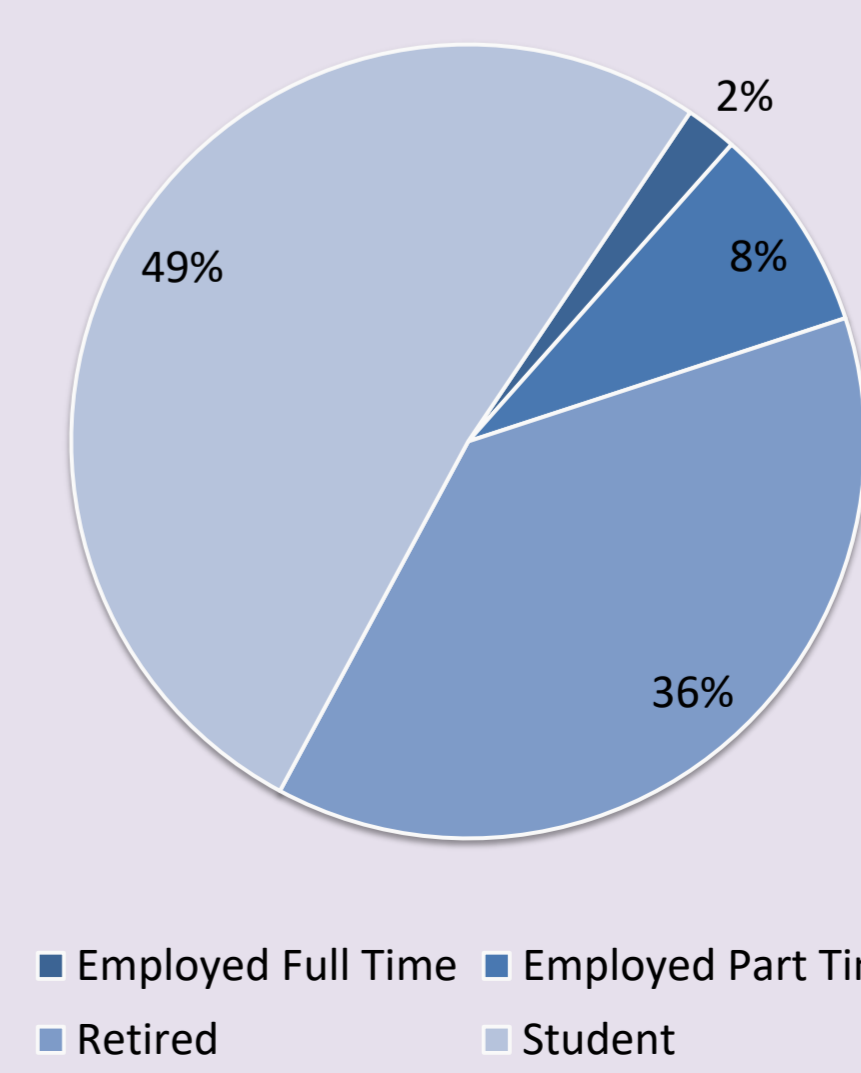
How did you find out about us?



Age



Occupational Status



Length of Service

