



Show Notes - Episode # 29

Cups of Confidence: Bama Perks Coffee Shop A Conversation with Mary Ray-Allen

Today, Katie Strong (Assistant Professor at Central Michigan University) will be presenting another segment on “A-ha!” Moments in Aphasia Care as she speaks with Mary Ray-Allen about the Bama Perks Coffee Shop at the University of Alabama Speech and Hearing Center.

Mary Ray-Allen is the Clinical Director at The University of Alabama Speech and Hearing Center. With 24 years of clinical experience, her interests include language interventions in adults with aphasia and related disorders, psychosocial/functional approaches to intervention, and the effectiveness of social approaches to aphasia intervention. She is the project director for Bama Perks, a simulated coffee shop that is housed within The UA Speech and Hearing Center that offers a unique social environment for individuals with aphasia to practice and enhance their communication skills. Bama Perks was featured in the March '17 ASHA Leader. She received her BS from The University of Georgia and her Master's degree from Valdosta State University. She is a member of Alabama Clinical Educators (ACE) and is a nationally certified Speech Language Pathologist and member of ASHA.

In today's episode you will:

1. Learn how a cup of coffee can lead to confidence in communicating for people with aphasia;
2. Learn about the how Bama Perks program facilitates the opportunity to socialize in a café style environment;
3. Learn a few tips about how to develop this type of program in your work environment, including student training opportunities.

Note: These show notes have been edited and condensed.

I first learned of your program through your ASHA Leader article entitled ‘Bama Perks’ Beats Aphasia One Sip at a Time. I’d love for you to tell our listeners more about the aha moment that led to the creation of Bama Perks.

Absolutely! The idea for Bama Perks followed a conversation that I had with a dear former client. His wife and daughter were out of the home during the day and he had no one to talk with except for his dog. He told me that sometimes he would go to the mall and just sit on a bench so that he could have the opportunity to say hello to people. It was obvious that he was very lonely and longed for connection with others.

Just as a side note...Here, at The University of Alabama Speech and Hearing Center, we offer a variety of aphasia groups such as book clubs, travel clubs, and various language groups, but they are still somewhat structured. The gentleman I am referring to participated in many of these



groups....but in reflecting on our conversation, I began to notice that there was something missing...

I began to think, how could I create a therapeutic environment for our clients with aphasia that focused solely on enhancing social communication skills??...The building that the SHC is housed in was formerly a medical center. There are random nurse's stations or check-in desks throughout the building, and there was this one station that I would pass by frequently, and I wondered what could become of this unused space?? The more I pondered it, it just hit me out of the blue! A coffee shop for clients with aphasia! It had this nice counter space, a lower working space behind the counter...it had all the makings of a would could be quaint coffee shop!

I thought, this could be the perfect supplemental form of therapy to offer our clients with aphasia, targeting social communication skills. So, I proposed the idea to our department chair, Angie Barber, and she absolutely loved the idea.

What type of funding is needed to support this type of programming?

We knew that the nurse's station was going to need somewhat of a facelift to transform it into that warm, cozy communicative atmosphere that we were striving for. So, we set out to explore funding. A few months into the process, Bama Perks received grant funding from University of Alabama's College Academy of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity as well as monetary support from the department.

With your grant funding, then came an opportunity for research. What type of outcome measures you are using with Bama Perks?

We decided to start simple, so our first research questions were...

1. To determine feasibility of the coffee shop as an effective environment for social communication.
2. Measure changes in quality of life and communication abilities of the persons participating.

For the first goal, we determined...

- The physical space including the clinic, Bama Perks tables, counter and drink items was accessible for all clients.
- Student clinicians successfully participated in preparation of Bama Perks materials and interacted with participants during scheduled therapy times.
- All students reported positive learning experiences.
- 100% of clients communicated during all Bama Perks sessions and 80% of the participants demonstrated higher levels of communication at 12 weeks than at baseline.



For the second goal, looking at changes in quality of life and communicative abilities, we used a number of measures: Western Aphasia Battery-Revised: language; Montreal Cognitive Assessment: cognition; Burden of Stroke Scale: quality of life; Social Network Analysis: quality of life; Communicative Effectiveness Index: Caregiver questionnaire; Aphasia Group Conversational Competence Rating Scale: communication competence in a group setting .

Findings from our preliminary analyses were:

- 100% of clients demonstrated increased scores on the WAB-R.
- Caregivers reported increased conversation skills with familiar partners and strangers.
- Caregivers and clients reported decreased burden secondary to their aphasia.

So, from this initial study, we deemed that Bama Perks was a viable, supplemental form of therapy for persons with aphasia.

Let's talk about the logistics of what it takes to run the coffee shop. What type of equipment is needed? How much staffing does it take, etc?

When deciding what we needed in place to open the coffee shop, I truly felt like I was small business owner, which I had no previous experience as! I had to think about the design of the space, the feel of the space, appropriate seating, the coffee makers, the coffee, safety issues, who would do what in the coffee shop, and so on....With the help of a wonderful graduate assistant, we put together a spreadsheet of all the items needed and the tasks we needed to accomplish. She basically became the "operations manager of Bama Perks" while was the so-called, "owner." What we found in this process was that this was a very easy, economical thing to do. It was not a super expensive project...a few keurigs and some k-cups and you are essentially ready-to-go!

How are students are involved in Bama Perks? And what type of training is required to participate?

Yes, a big part of the success of Bama Perks is in our student involvement. Each semester, there are 4-5 graduate students who serve as communication partners in Bama Perks. And each semester, 2 undergraduate students serve as baristas, running the coffee shop. They receive a 2-hour training course on their role and basically learn how to be a communication partner for someone with aphasia. We have recently had a client working alongside the two undergraduate students, running the shop, and this has worked out very nicely for the client and for Bama Perks. He is supported in various ways in his role and does a wonderful job.

Would you give us a glimpse of what your clinic is like including who you serve and highlight a few programs for us?

Yes, I am extremely proud of The University of Alabama Speech and Hearing Center. We have 8 speech-language pathology clinical supervisors and 2 audiologists, and in our program, we average 35 graduate students per cohort and also offer clinical experiences to 15 undergraduate students each semester. We serve well-over 250 clients a semester. We offer



some wonderful programs...we have a literacy program, a pediatric feeding program, and Project Impact, which is a program that supports families and children with autism, just to name a few.

If you had to pick only one thing we need to achieve urgently, as a community of providers/professionals who support the Life Participation to Aphasia, what would that ONE thing be?

Service delivery needs to meet the needs of the person with aphasia. Keep clients at the center of their plan of care. Allow them to participate in defining their goals. Think creatively about goals and experiences to help them reengage in society.

As we wrap up do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share with our listeners?

This is a very simple concept...it's a coffee shop for persons with aphasia...but it has made a huge difference in the lives of the clients we serve at The Speech and Hearing Center. We see our clients getting back to "doing life" because this experience has given them the confidence to do so.

In the coffee shop, we have a piece of wall art that states, "Cups of Confidence" and clients have written little thoughts about what Bama Perks means to them. Some of those thoughts are:

- "Bama Perks has helped me to practice talking."
- "Bama Perks has helped me step out and be friends with so many different people."
- "Bama Perks has helped me share my life with everyone."

For more information on Aphasia Access and to access our growing library of materials, go to www.aphasiaaccess.org. If you have an idea for a future podcast topic, email us at info@aphasiaaccess.org.

Links for Episode

Ray-Allen, M. (2017). 'Bama Perks' Beats Aphasia One Sip at a Time. ASHA Leader, 22, 36-37. <https://leader.pubs.asha.org/article.aspx?articleid=2608136>

Bama Perks Website <https://cd.ua.edu/speech-and-hearing-center/our-programs/bama-perks/>