

The Aphasia Association of New Zealand's Conference 2011

The Association hosted its biennial conference in mid-November 2011. The aim of this conference is to raise awareness about aphasia and encourage people to discuss it publicly. In addition, the conference provides an opportunity for people with aphasia, their family and friends, as well as professionals, to get together, share ideas, feelings and thoughts in a supportive environment.

The two **international keynote speakers** were Dr Robyn O'Halloran, from La Trobe University, Melbourne and **Dr Jenny Dautlich, founder of AphasiaNow in the United Kingdom.**

Henrietta, Duchess of Bedford, who opened the conference, and Nicole Campbell from the The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia, attended the conference, which was held in Rotorua on 16-18 November. "We were so impressed by this three day conference. It was the perfect balance of people with aphasia, carers and professionals who work in the field of aphasia. Everyone was welcome to attend all the sessions, but there was one afternoon symposium that was dedicated to academic papers and discussion. It was a very uplifting and interesting few days".

The conference focused on the theme 'I am still me'. Robyn O'Halloran spoke on Creating Accessible Environments for People with Aphasia. During her insightful talk, she announced that an international sign for communication disability was being launched that week in Australia, by an organisation called Scope. As we understood it, initially this sign is intended for use in shops, where the staff will have been trained to understand something about communication disabilities.



Jenny Dautlich gave two inspirational keynote speeches about her experience of stroke and aphasia and her approach to recovery. The theme of her two talks was 'helping yourself' and 'helping others'. Jenny's talks were filled with insight and practical steps that she had taken. Both talks were a powerful and moving testimony of how someone can turn a traumatic event, which could have been only negative, into something

personally enriching and which she has used for the good of so many, through her work at Glos Speak and Aphasia Now.

Throughout the conference there were a number of workshops including music, games, singing, art, aphasia therapy software and personal stories. One afternoon was dedicated to a symposium that covered subjects as diverse as 'Intensive Communication Therapy' by Dr. Patty Govender, Massey University to 'The value of aphasia groups in fostering positive identity' by Dr Maxine Bevin.

The trustees of The Tavistock Trust for Aphasia were thrilled that two of the recipients of its University Student Prizes, NZ, given for excellence, presented papers at the Conference: Annette Rotherham, Canterbury, spoke on 'The benefits of groups for people with aphasia – the insider's perspective' and Meghann Grawburg, also from Canterbury, spoke on 'Third party disability in aphasia: family members report how they have been affected by having a relative with aphasia'.

Overall, both Henrietta Bedford and Nicole Campbell thought it one of the best conferences that they had ever had the privilege of attending. They want to congratulate the organisers, especially Kate Milford, Clare McCann and Emma Castle who worked so hard to produce such an excellent event.



Jenny Dautlich, Henrietta Bedford, Nicole Campbell, Patty Govender surrounded by the team from Massey who were attending the Conference