

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

People noted these as the best things about the conference...

- *'Hearing everyone's stories and seeing their progress, it was beautiful!'*
- Stories of determination.
- Friendship.
- *'Lots of support, even from strangers.'*
- (Seeing) *such a lot of hard work come to fruition* (presentations from people with/affected by aphasia).
- *'Being so moved by personal stories.'*
- *'Opportunity to meet others with aphasia and their carers...great to find people who can relate.'*
- *'Learning how individuals cope with the new life'* (with aphasia).
- Opportunities for networking and meeting others.
- Opportunities to learn from both researchers and practising clinicians as well as from people with aphasia.
- *'Hearing about different groups available and new things happening for people with aphasia...inspires us to revisit things we haven't tried for a while.'*
- The organisation (of the conference).
- Clear and concise presentations from professionals.
- Tips on practical matters.
- Speakers' experiences...hearing about the good, and the bad.
- The relaxed atmosphere.
- *'The inclusion and participation of people with aphasia – having a user-friendly approach.'*
- *'Meeting clients from 2-3 years ago and watching them present.'*
- The great variety of speakers and topics.
- A high calibre of presenters and presentation skills.
- Current and innovative Symposium topics.
- Informative, interesting, and practical content, which is applicable to real life.
- Exceptionally good desserts.
- Bringing people with aphasia and clinicians together...the combination of therapy, research, and personal experiences.
- *'Being able to help people who need help.'*
- Excellent food.

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

- Waipuna Hotel and staff.
- *'Reassurance that the work I am doing is on the right track – I am not alone.'*
- *'Learning reasons behind the practice – neuroplasticity etc.'*
- Exposure to current research and relevance to practice.
- *'Feeling I have a family the same as me – I feel normal again.'*

Suggestions for improvements: The conference venue / food...

Please note comments/responses from AphasiaNZ are in red.

- Food selection limiting and not enough variety. A lot of leftover food, which should have been given to attendees. *Due to the Hotel's health and safety policies, leftover food is not distributed, as the Hotel is unable to control how people choose to store and / or heat the food.*
- Did not do a great job catering for food preferences / dietary requirements. *There were a large number of people with dietary requests. It is always a challenge to please everyone. We tried our best and communicated the importance of quality food to the venue, prior to conference.*
- Venue too far out of city, difficult to get to from airport. *A venue out of the city was specifically chosen in order to avoid Auckland city traffic, and exorbitant parking charges.*
- Rooms for quietness and lying down (very tiring for those with aphasia). *We had hoped to use the Clifton Room for this but, it was unfortunately not accessible due to having three steps up to it. Providing a space to lie down (i.e. not a booked hotel room) is difficult. We will however take on board a dedicated 'rest' space with comfortable chairs for future events.*
- A bigger screen – too small and some people were quite far away. *A second screen would have been appropriate. We will take this feedback on board for future events.*
- A venue with more realistic accommodation costs. A lot of people stayed elsewhere due to cost, leading to less informal communication opportunities. *Unfortunately, hotel accommodation in Auckland at the many conference venues that we approached is quite pricey. This was one of the less expensive options.*

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

Suggestions / comments / improvements: Speakers / presenters / workshops...

- Speaker volume was variable. *This is often dependent on the presenter, and their familiarity with using a microphone.*
- To ensure all speakers speak slowly, in an aphasia-friendly manner, and are able to use the microphone effectively. *We will take this on board for future events. One comment mentioned informing speakers with less knowledge of aphasia of supportive communication strategies – this is a great idea and something to ensure we do in the future.*
- An iPad workshop targeted at SLTs.
- A practical workshop for SLTs in the Symposium.
- Copies of the speakers' presentations. *See the next section for more information about this.*
- Session on the Thermomix too long and boring.
- All videos to have subtitles/super text. *We will take this on board for future events.*

Suggestions / comments / improvements: Organisation and structure of conference...

- Have people with aphasia speak early in morning, as they get tired quickly.
- Support for those with disabilities e.g. long way from where the conference was held to hotel rooms – exhaustion made it a hard trip. *In future AphasiaNZ will ask who would like support relating to accessibility on the day, and then we can plan how to manage this.*
- Provide lecture notes beforehand. *The logistics of this are almost impossible as speakers often 'tweak' their presentations in the days leading up to conference. In addition, the time and cost to do this is not practical for AphasiaNZ.*
- Slides available in conference book. *As above – unfortunately, this is too difficult to organise, and the printing cost to AphasiaNZ is prohibitive.*
- More information about presentation details before the conference. *A conference outline for each day was available on the AphasiaNZ website and regular updates accessible to 'Friends' and those on the mailing list. It is not our practice to make the comprehensive program available prior.*

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

- Shorter sessions and breaks between sessions. *A consideration for future events.*
- Shorter days – e.g. 9am start with a 2.30pm / 3pm finish- catering for those with fatigue.
- Extend the day by 1 hour and allow a 2-hour break at lunch, to enable those who need the rest to recharge. *An example of two differing opinions regarding the length of the day!*
- Alternate interactive sessions with lectures.
- Incorporate some movement within sessions – sitting still for long periods a bit difficult.
- Last sessions of the day to involve audience participation to keep us alert and engaged – e.g. the iPad session was great.
- Day 2 – lots of content and a long afternoon. Perhaps day 1 could be more intense. *Thank you for your feedback.*
- Hold the SLT Symposium on the first day.
- It was difficult to differentiate the clinicians from the people with aphasia. Different types of name badges would help. *There are both pros and cons to this, and some people may not want to be distinguished in this way. Day 2 (Friday) was intended as a way to allow those with and affected by aphasia to spend time together, while the Symposium for professionals and clinicians was held.*
- Notice about the conference – was difficult to obtain the funding as only heard about it 3 weeks beforehand. *We disseminated information about the conference widely including to all DHB Health Leaders. It was advertised in the winter edition of 'Communication Matters' as well as through the Stroke Foundation and other NGO networks.*
- Getting more people to the conference...increase marketing. *Agreed. Cost to attend is a big barrier for many. The biggest conference cost to AphasiaNZ is food and refreshments. How can we reduce these costs but still meet the expectations of attendees?*
- Clarification on who can attend the optional (Symposium) sessions on Day 2. *See the next page. The Symposium was never intended to be for people with or affected by aphasia but as a closed session for SLTs and health professionals only. We had thought this was communicated effectively.*

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

Improvements: Other comments...

- More ways to connect with people. Felt a bit disconnected at times. *Suggestions for better ways to connect are welcome – please contact Emma with your ideas.*
- Air conditioning quite noisy at times.
- A bit hot in the room at times. *Unfortunately, catering to all preferences in relation to room temperature is impossible.*
- Broader addressing of other impacts of aphasia in addition to speaking i.e. writing, listening, and reading. *We will take this on board for future events.*
- More clinical content presented in an aphasia-friendly format – so that people with aphasia can access topics relevant to them. The way the division in the programme was managed felt a little ‘us’ and ‘them’ with different levels of interest / intellectual material. *The Symposium forum was set up for SLTs and those working with people with aphasia to have their own space to listen, share ideas, and discuss issues and challenges pertaining to their practice. It is important to consider that some professionals may not feel comfortable having certain discussions when people with aphasia are present. It becomes difficult for the conference organisers to manage this when people with aphasia insist on attending the Symposium. The committee tried to ensure that there were enough presentations and sessions outside of the Symposium, so that people did not feel they were missing out.*

Other Comments and Suggestions...

- ‘Awesome organisation, so glad it exists! Keep up the awesome work!’
- ‘It would be good for SLTs / professionals to listen to aphasia clients too.’ *We agree! In addition, we wish more professionals had the time / funds / capacity to come to conference. What are the barriers to this and how can we change this?*
- ‘Timekeeping excellent and very important.’
- ‘A job well done.’
- ‘A great experience, which reflected an amazing amount of work by the organisers. Thank you Emma...this could not happen without you.’

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

- *'Absolutely fantastic. Well done to everyone involved. I feel very humble and privileged to have attended and met many people – other SLTs and people with aphasia.'*
- Interactive discussions: Professionals / clinicians and clients / people with aphasia problem solving and sharing experiences. *This is a great suggestion and something that we had hoped to do but there was not enough time or space in the conference programme.*
- Position of practical demonstration was not ideal. *Agreed.*
- Professional speakers' language inaccessible to lay folk. *Unfortunately, it is very hard to pitch to all attendees, due to such a diverse and varied audience.*
- Symposium...time for questions.
- Social activity – group walk, evening sing-a-long, chess...to promote more down time to connect with people. *We have tried similar activities in the past, which proved difficult to organise and manage on the day. However, we will take this suggestion on board for future events.*
- Mealtimes rushed...people need to concentrate on eating.
- Friday's lunch – not long enough.
- Excellent having lots of time over tea and lunch.
- Music too loud at the Thursday dinner – it was lovely, but intrusive.
- Hold the conference over 3 days...2x aphasia-friendly and 1x research / health professionals.
- *'Loved that you had healthy snacks, especially the fruit bowl.'*
- *'The Art Therapy session would have been beneficial to all participants rather than being a choice of 1 of 3 workshops.'* *Some people prefer options and some just one session...it is impossible to please everyone.*
- More presentations from carers, partners, and family members of people with aphasia. *Please encourage more to submit abstracts! Local support groups, and carers groups, work well to link support people together.*
- PowerPoints...bigger sized fonts. *An important consideration for future conferences / events.*
- Active keywords on the screen – or a second screen with keywords on it.
- Additional introductory speech needed to be aphasia-friendly and unsure of how it related to the conference.
- The partners / caregivers workshop was a good idea...perhaps it could have been more structured so that resolutions to problems could be discussed

Auckland Conference 2015 – Feedback, Comments and Suggestions

rather than just turn into a session of negativity. *For some people with a loved one with aphasia, this was their first opportunity to meet with a group of people facing similar challenges. It is hard to balance the importance (and necessity) of allowing people to speak freely, with a structured session. Thank you for your feedback – this will be noted for future workshops.*

- More about bicultural and multicultural perspectives and how SLTs approach cross cultural work. *Please encourage more SLTs / professionals to submit abstracts and share this information with AphasiaNZ so that we can disseminate it to our supporters and 'Friends'.*
- *'No more product demonstrations – too commercial.'*
- *'Appreciated the volunteers being highly visible (great idea to have blue t-shirts).'*
- *'Focus on friends and the benefits of group, using the expertise of the person (strength's based) having roles (new and old).'* *Great suggestion, thank you.*
- *'This is the first AphasiaNZ conference that I have had the opportunity to attend. I enjoyed it and learnt a lot. Thank you for organising a great conference! I look forward to the next conference. Congratulations!' Thank you for your comments!*
- *'We have never been to an AphasiaNZ conference before...it was great and a real eye-opener to treatments available.'*
- Laminate the aphasia wallet cards.