

Veterinary Technician with Aphasia Resulting from Stroke

Julia, a veterinary technician, had a stroke 6 years ago and still has difficulty speaking, reading and writing due to her aphasia. She received intensive rehabilitation services for several years after her stroke (physical, occupational, and speech therapy) and experienced much progress, but was informed that her insurance would no longer cover the services. Julia lives at home with her spouse Sarah, who works full time. Julia hasn't been able to return to work due to her physical and communication limitations. She feels socially isolated since she is unable to participate in many of the activities she used to enjoy: hiking, singing in a local choir, and volunteering at animal nonprofits. She finds it hard to connect with her friends due to her aphasia.

Julia and Sarah heard about Cognitive Concierge in their online aphasia support group and decided to try the services. Julia's Cognitive Ambassador listened to her needs and together they developed a comprehensive plan to help her reengage in meaningful life activities. They began by creating emails to send to Julia's family and friends, telling them more details about her aphasia, her need for more frequent socialization, and how they can best support her during conversation. Julia and Sarah created a weekly schedule of virtual and in-person engagements with her social network. A neighborhood friend who enjoys hiking helps to research local paved paths conducive to wheelchairs, and they set up an outing each week. Julia's Ambassador also researched and recommended a virtual aphasia choir, comprised of other people living with aphasia. Julia enjoys the virtual choir and finds that her words come out much more easily when singing.

After helping Julia to re-establish social relationships, her Ambassador works with her to identify opportunities to reengage in her life role: caring for animals. They work on a script that Julia uses to call local animal rescues to inquire about volunteer opportunities. She practices explaining her aphasia and hemiplegia, and animal care tasks that she enjoys. They identify a wildlife rehabilitation center 20 minutes from her home, that needs a volunteer to greet and complete the intake for people dropping off injured animals. The role also involves helping to feed and care for the animals. Julie decides to volunteer two days a week but is concerned about transportation. Her Ambassador helps to coordinate transportation to and from the center using Uber WAV (wheelchair-accessible vehicle).

Julia is thrilled about the opportunity to volunteer but is experiencing anxiety about her ability to communicate with others at the wildlife center. Her Ambassador researches and speaks with a local outpatient therapy clinic, who agree that Julia, given her new volunteer role, will qualify for physical, occupational, and speech therapy services covered by her insurance. Julia's Ambassador works with the team of therapists to ensure the therapy is targeting skills she will need for mobility, fine motor tasks, and communication at the wildlife center. Julia works with her speech therapist on conversation scripts to use when greeting visitors at the center, along with the rehearsal of important vocabulary words related to the animals at the center and their care. Her occupational therapist works on fine motor skills such as pouring water and food pellets and writing legibility. Her physical therapist targets her ability to independently transfer to and from the Uber vehicle. Julia begins her volunteer position with confidence, having already practiced the skills needed for her new role.

Julia frequently visits her Personalized Resource Page, where she and Sarah can review all of the recommended strategies from her therapy and can also watch videos reinforcing the content. Sarah appreciates the practical communication tips that she can utilize as a communication partner, to help them more easily engage in meaningful conversations at home.

During weeks that Julia isn't too busy with her other engagements, she participates in Cognitive Concierge's virtual retreats, where she enjoys meeting and conversing with others who have aphasia. She becomes friends with another retreat member, and they enjoy connecting over FaceTime several times a month.

Julia and Sarah are grateful that they found Cognitive Concierge and the lasting impact the services have had on Julia's participation in meaningful life activities. Sarah expresses that their Ambassador gave them new hope for the future and illuminated a path forward for Julia to reengage in life. Julia continues to meet with her Ambassador several times a month, to discuss communication challenges that have arisen at the wildlife center, at outings, or while participating in her virtual groups. Together they brainstorm strategies to facilitate successful participation in her weekly activities.