



## Comprehensive Aphasia Program

# Return to Your Life



**Return to Your Life** - Ontario's first and only comprehensive, intensive treatment programs for people with aphasia and communication challenges post-stroke and brain injury.

## What is Aphasia?

**Aphasia** is an acquired communication disorder, meaning that person wasn't born this way. The difficulties happened because of a stroke, brain injury, or brain illness. The damage happened in the language centre of the brain, making talking, understanding, reading, and/or writing difficult.



## What is an intensive comprehensive aphasia program?

Sometimes called an "ICAP," which stands for Intensive Comprehensive Aphasia Program, these programs vary slightly in how they are set up, who provides the therapy, the number of weeks and hours per day, etc. By definition, an ICAP contains **intensive** and **comprehensive** components:

**Intensive:** at least 3 hours per day of speech therapy for at least 2 weeks.

**Comprehensive:** addressing a wide range of individualized goals, incorporating multiple approaches to aphasia treatment, including:

- individual and group treatment
- technology
- education
- evidence-based therapy approaches to help people with aphasia improve and better participate in meaningful life activities.

More information about ICAPs can be found in this article: "Intensive Comprehensive Aphasia Programs: An International Survey of Practice" (Rose et al., 2013).

Only a handful of these programs exist in the world. This program is the first in Ontario. A 2012 survey showed that there were 12 programs in the world: 8 in the USA, 2 in Canada, 1 in Australia and 1 in the United Kingdom.

## What makes our program different?

An important component of the intensive aphasia program would include comprehensive ABA therapy, which stands for Applied Behaviour Analysis. ABA, while most widely known for treatment with children with autism, is a behavioural approach that is highly appropriate for individuals recovering from stroke with aphasia. ABA uses repetition, known to be effective in neurorehab, and positive reinforcement as a major component of instruction. Functional tasks, such as an individual writing down his postal address, would be broken down into measurable steps which would be recorded, tracked, and monitored to evaluate progress. The primary goal of ABA therapy is for an individual to become fluent in activities of daily living and ultimately carryover to learning or re-learning new skills. Currently no other intensive aphasia programs use this behavioural approach; this innovative pilot project proposes to include ABA with Speech-Language Pathology and Occupational therapy services in order for clients to make optimal gains.

## What is the weekly schedule?

The program is divided into the following components:

- 15.5 hours of individual intensive ABA therapy per week with an instructor therapist (supervised by a Speech-Language Pathologist)
- 2 hours of individual speech-language pathology therapy with an SLP (two 1-hour sessions)
- 30-minute daily lunch break (catered lunch)

- 3.5 hours of computer / technology time in a computer lab
- 1.5 hour life skills group (designed to target functional everyday living skills)
- ½ hour of Social Work therapy
- 2 hours of conversation group therapy with an SLP and assistant

These components are broken into sessions to create an individualized weekly schedule.

The following is a sample weekly schedule:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 AM	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual
9:30 AM	ABA therapy	ABA therapy	ABA therapy	ABA therapy	ABA therapy
10:00 AM					
10:30 AM					
11:00 AM					
11:30 AM					
12:00 PM	Lunch				
12:30 PM	1:1 SLP Therapy	1:1 ABA therapy	Life skills group	SLP Therapy	Conversation Group with SLP
1:00 PM		Social Work			
1:30 PM	Computer/ technology	Computer/ technology	Technology	Computer/ technology	
2:00 PM					

## What can I expect from the program?

The primary goal of the intensive aphasia program is to enhance life participation, improve functional communication, improve confidence, and improve fine motor skills.

2-5 individuals with aphasia attend the program at one time.

## Who can benefit from the Return to Your Life Program?

- Participants must be 18 years or older
- Diagnosis of varying severity of aphasia and/or other communication impairment post-stroke or injury
- Medically stable; living in the community
- Fluent in English prior to the stroke or injury
- Individuals who want to regain functional communication skills
- People with aphasia who are motivated to learn and try new things
- No/minimal cognitive difficulties
- Client care needs (i.e., toileting, feeding, transportation) are met by the client or caregiver
- Available for 2-hour assessment prior to program start date

Positive outcomes have resulted from intensive programs that provide 5-10 hours per week over 8-12 weeks, as opposed to programs that provide 2-4 hours per week 20-26 weeks (Bhogal, Teassell & Speechley, 2003). There is strong evidence to show that Speech-Language Pathology treatment at a high intensity (i.e., >5 hrs / week) is effective, even for chronic aphasia (Breitenstein et al., 2017).

Recovery during rehabilitation post-stroke or injury is complex and involves many factors, including:

- the location and extend of the brain damage (i.e., where was it, how much of the brain was affected)
- client motivation and personal beliefs
- support system (family, caregiver)

## **What is the cost of the program?**

The program cost includes:

- Comprehensive evaluation of speech and language skills
- Speech-Language Pathologist sessions (individual, group, and consultation)
- Education for client and caregivers about aphasia
- Occupational Therapy-based sessions (individual and group)
- Individual intensive ABA therapy
- Social work counselling and therapy for client and caregiver
- Computer-based technology therapy
- Group outing (KW Art Gallery)
- Daily catered lunch

Intensive program runs 5 hours per day, 5-days per week, for 3 months. The program costs \$2,200 per week for a 3-month program.

Many clients will use private medical insurance to cover part or all of the costs of the intensive program.

Ask your private insurance company about your coverage, which may include:

- Critical illness insurance coverage
- Speech-language therapy benefits
- Occupational therapy benefits

## What will we work on in therapy?

The benefit of our interdisciplinary program is that the goals are highly individualized.

Here are some examples of client goals that could be targeted within the program:

- Send a text message to a friend without assistance
- Write an email
- Read a bedtime story to my grandson
- Plan, grocery shop, and cook a meal on my own
- Initiate conversation with my husband
- Prepare and give a PowerPoint presentation
- Order my own food at a restaurant
- Explain to others about my aphasia and strategies that work for me
- Understand a news article
- Say all of my family members' names clearly

## What can I do in Waterloo?



Waterloo is a dynamic, urban centre located in the heart of Southern Ontario.

Waterloo has been consistently voted as one of Canada's "smartest cities," and is home to the University of Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier University, and Conestoga College.

With convenient access to domestic and international flights through Waterloo Airport, or one-hour from Toronto's Pearson International Airport, Waterloo is easy to get to from almost anywhere in Canada.

## Where can I stay?

Accommodation is available in Waterloo:

- Hotels
- Air Bnbs [www.airbnb.ca](http://www.airbnb.ca)
- Long-term stay residence in  
Kitchener: <https://www.stayrcc.com/locations/kitchener-waterloo/extended-stays/>

Please note that accommodation is not included in program fees.

For questions about the Return to Your Life program, please contact Brittany Clark,

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