

Making a Will with Communication Support.

Harry's story is shared here by a Speech Language Pathologist. Harry is not the man's real name.

Harry is a 70-year-old man who suffered a left hemisphere stroke. This resulted in a moderate-severe receptive-expressive aphasia. Harry was married for 20 years and has two adult children from that marriage. He is separated and has been living with a new partner for the past 5 years.

As a result of his stroke, Harry struggles to find the words he wants to say and his conversations are often marked by phrases such as, "I need to do the....I can't get the word... I can't say it... you know what I mean..." He is able to point to written words that he wants to say. His ability to understand what other people are saying is also impaired. He is able to interpret facial expressions and context and therefore he appears to understand more than he does. However, his comprehension difficulties become more evident when discussing complex issues and/or there is limited context and a great deal of abstract language, such as when discussing legal/financial issues.

Harry wanted to make a will to ensure his partner can keep the condo in which the two of them live. When Harry and his partner contacted a lawyer, the lawyer told them that Harry was not competent to make a will. Harry engaged a Speech-Language Pathologist to assist him communicating with the lawyer.

The Speech-Language Pathologist provided the following supports:

- Explained Harry's aphasia and his need for communication supports.
- Used a variety of strategies from Supported Conversations with Adults who have Aphasia.
- Comprehension supports such as simplified language structures, re-phrasing information, short sentences, one piece of information at a time, chunking information, pausing between sentences, signally change of topics, writing words to augment spoken language, showing pictures, photos, diagrams, gestures, calendars, and confirming understanding.
- Expressive supports included facilitating the accurate transmission of messages by encouraging Harry to gesture, draw, write words or part of words. The Speech Language Pathologist also presented written words as choices that Harry used to express his thoughts. In addition, the Speech Language Pathologist used techniques such as interpretation, reformulation, reflection, expansion, clarification and validation strategies.
- The lawyer drafted a will that reflected conversations with Harry. The Speech-Language Pathologist read and explained the document to Harry, in the presence of the lawyer.
- Harry, the lawyer and Speech-Language Pathologist signed the will to indicate agreement, that HW understood and communicated his understanding and that the Speech Language Pathologist acted to accurately explain the information in the will.

More information: [Training programs offered by The Aphasia Institute](#)