Building Bridges is the quarterly newsletter of the Aphasia Institute (AI) – a community-based centre of excellence that helps people with aphasia express themselves to the world around them. Aphasia affects more than 100,000 Canadians, depriving them of the ability to speak, read, write and understand the speech of others. Aphasia affects a person’s language skills, not their inherent competence, but all too often, people with aphasia are discounted as incompetent because people lack the skills necessary to help them be understood. With ongoing support from donors, the Aphasia Institute’s direct service and community outreach programs help people with aphasia and their families find new ways to re-join life’s conversations.

CHANGING LIVES:
Home is where the heart is….

The Community Aphasia Program is designed to encourage community involvement and social exchange. One of the most popular programs is a book club during which members and facilitators work to build conversation skills by discussing a book. Recently, a group of members and facilitators discussed The Wizard of Oz and Dorothy’s famous words: “There’s no place like home.”

During the discussion, one facilitator asked the members the question: “Where is home?” In spite of their significant language challenges, members articulated many thoughtful replies. Some mentioned their home countries, some said Canada, and one member pointed to her heart. The facilitator then asked a follow up question: “What makes a place a home?” In the end, members agreed that it was the people in a place that makes it a home – the community that is formed and the memories that are shared. Several members mentioned that the Aphasia Institute had become a “new home” for them. Welcome home, all.

RECLAIMING IDENTITY:
Garfield, Stroke Survivor

Garfield Alexander was a husband, a father, a talented cook and had many friends. He was a full-time employee with two jobs. In 2003, a stroke stripped him of these treasured aspects of his life. He lost his driver’s license, he could not work, his wife returned to Jamaica with his children and he was confined to a long-term care facility, unable to make choices for himself.

He was, both literally and figuratively, robbed of his identity. “I felt like an ant,” Garfield explained. “Small…. invisible.”

Staff at the Aphasia Institute helped Garfield to communicate, found him a scooter to increase his mobility and helped him move to a more appropriate residence. They helped him to build confidence and to apply for a new identity card for adult citizens who don’t drive but who require identification.

Today, Garfield proudly carries his Ontario identification card and shows it as a symbol of how far he has come. “I came here and I got my identity back,” Garfield said.
The Aphasia Institute relies on the generosity of individual donors and volunteers to deliver life-changing programs. For more information about the Aphasia Institute, please visit our website at www.aphasia.ca.