

The ASHA Leader

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Aphasia Recovery Inspires Poetry

by *Walter Kraft*

In August 2001, Rick Knupfer, then executive director of the Michigan Humanities Council, and an aspiring creative writer and poet, knew he was ill. He was having trouble speaking clearly, and his organizational skills had severely deteriorated.

Knupfer was diagnosed with a brain tumor that was surgically removed in August 2002. Although the surgery was successful, the tumor had been in his brain's left ventricle, where speech ability resides. Unable to speak more than three words after surgery, Knupfer went through physical rehabilitation and traditional speech treatment, which helped, but still did not allow him to communicate in a functional manner.

Knupfer learned of the University of Michigan's Residential Aphasia Program (RAP; www.aphasiahelp.com) and its six-week, intensive regimen. RAP has treated thousands of people who have suffered a stroke or closed-head injury since it was established in 1947. Clients receive as much treatment during the focused six-week program as they would in a year of traditional treatment.

RAP worked with Knupfer to help rebuild his cognitive and speaking skills. The result? Although he continues to improve, he has recovered a tremendous



Rick Knupfer leads an art therapy session at the University of Michigan Residential Aphasia Program.

amount of his comprehension and language skills through working on verbal expression, reading, and writing while at the RAP, thanks to his determination and the program's intensity. Knupfer is now using his expertise in the arts as a volunteer at RAP leading art therapy programs. An example of his poetry appears to the side.

Walter Kraft is executive vice president of *Caponigro Public Relations* in Southfield, MI.

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Lines

by Walter Richard Knupfer

We're sorry—
there must have been
a disconnect.

We were understanding ourselves
when something disturbed
our conversation,

disrupting my line
of thought. There must be
a miscommunication.

I'm sorry—
if you could have known
what I was talking about.

My connection is now disabled.
There's a long line
waiting for my memory

to reconnect itself.
I could have remembered something,
if I had the disposition

to ring again....
Now I have ringing in my ears....
or there's a telemarketer disrupting itself....

Click.

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