



These two men have had to learn how to talk twice in their lives, but as *Leader* intern **Nadja Poljo** reports, with a little help they're doing just fine.

# Learning to speak again

LIFE for John Fazio and Alex Tasvilis has been tough since the day they both found out they may never speak the same again.

For Mr Fazio, 65, of Cheltenham, it has been more than a year since thyroid cancer attacked his windpipe and took away his voice.

"It was like a rollercoaster ride," he said. "I was often in tears because I was so frustrated and unable to communicate.

"I didn't care about anything else but my speech."

Mr Fazio had only five days to decide if he wanted surgery to remove the cancer which would also remove his voice box.

He chose to fight the cancer and now speaks through a voice prosthesis which allows him to talk and breathe through a hole in his throat.

"It was difficult at first," he said.

"The hardest part was answering phones, going out and meeting people. You have to regain lost confidence.

"My wife misses my laughter and I am a bit quieter these days, but apart from that I am fit and healthy."

Eight months ago, Mr Tasvilis, 48, of Noble Park, had the right side of his tongue removed after doctors discovered a tumour growing.

He said he then had to learn to talk, swallow and eat again.

"I have my own business so communication was crucial to me," Mr Tasvilis said. "I just wanted to get back to work.

"Talking was more important to me than eating."

Both men faced daily challenges on their road to recovery but say the struggle was made easier because of Southern Health speech

pathologist Felicity Megee, at Monash Medical Centre Moorabbin.

"She was fantastic; she taught me to speak again," Mr Tasvilis said.

But Ms Megee humbly declined the need for special thanks.

"It's a very rewarding job to work in because we don't just care for the clients after they come out of surgery, we support them for up to five years later," she said.

"Most doctors describe eating and breathing as the most important steps to recovery but for some patients it is definitely speech they consider No.1."

Speech Pathology Australia launched Speech Pathology Week last Sunday with the theme "Communicate to Participate". Details: [speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)



Speech pathologist Dr Felicity Megee and clients Alex Tasvilis and John Fazio, who have been involved in a speech pathology program at Monash Medical Centre.

Picture: RICHARD SERONG, N99M/5900