

## Case Study

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### **Jess and Jill – re-learning to read, one vowel at a time**

Speech Pathology Week 2011 '*Literacy for Life*' (21 – 27 August)

When 40 year old Jess suffered a brain injury three years ago, she didn't expect that learning to speak, read and write again would change her life and help her fulfil a lifelong dream.

When the building where Jess worked was re-painted with an oil based paint, lack of ventilation resulted in her developing toxic poisoning which lead to lack of blood flow in her brain and brain damage.

"I couldn't make complete sentences, remember my own name or talk when the pain went off the scales. My short term memory was almost non-existent and pronouncing words was painful. Finding words to describe what I was trying to say was very difficult and painful, so I usually gave up," Jess said.

Following two years of arduous rehabilitation, Jess still found talking to people difficult and exhausting, writing very tiring and spelling or remembering words to communicate a frustrating and upsetting chore.

Her next door neighbour, speech pathologist Jill Robinson and her bucket of speech, language and reading exercises was an unexpected source of help.

Jill and Jess developed a strong bond of mutual trust that was integral to the success of the therapy.

"When I first met Jess, she had huge difficulty finding words, identifying word sounds or remembering the name of letters. Writing required her to recall whole word images and write them down as a complete unit," Jill said.

"Jess was determined to address her loss of reading ability, and with a lot of hard work and encouragement from her husband, has made amazing progress."

Using a method that helped develop awareness of the beginning and end sounds of words, the way sounds are produced and that matched sounds to mouth movements and letters, Jess and Jill made painstaking and exhausting progress, spending a few months on each exercise.

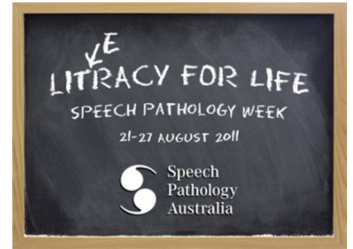
"We'd work slowly, often with several weeks between sessions and after three months I'd mastered consonants followed by vowels – even though, as a Kiwi, it was interesting getting the sounds just right," Jess said.

Progress continued slowly until one day, a breakthrough meant Jess was able to make sense of the words in front of her. Almost overnight Jess was able to put together more than one consonant sound and reading was well underway.

One year on, Jess is taking the first steps towards a new dream: to become a children's author.

"I am about to finish a course in editing and proofreading, aimed at regaining some writing and grammar skills, and I'm in the middle of a children's writing course," Jess said.

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“Thanks to Jill I can speak clearly most of the time, find words 65-75 per cent of the time, can spell, have improved short term memory and have my passion back.”

If you are concerned about a friend or family member who might have literacy or communication difficulties, encourage them to visit a speech pathologist or make enquiries at their local educational or health service.

For more information about speech pathology and Speech Pathology Week, visit [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au).

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**To arrange an interview with speech pathologist Jill Robinson and Jess, please contact:**

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**About Speech Pathology Week 2011 ‘Literacy for Life’:**

Speech Pathology Week 2011 (21 – 27 August) celebrates the speech pathology profession and the important role speech pathologists play in acquiring and maintaining literacy skills.

**About Speech Pathology Australia**

Speech Pathology Australia is the national peak body for more than 4,500 members. The Association supports and regulates the ethical, clinical and professional standards of its members. The Association also lobbies and advocates for people with communication and swallowing difficulties.