

Let's Talk: Former TIRR Memorial Hermann Patients Establish Houston Aphasia Recovery Center

Four years ago, Don Ison suffered a severe stroke that left him with aphasia. Today, thanks to the support of his wife, Grace, his indomitable spirit and the resources of the Houston Aphasia Recovery Center (HARC), he enjoys supported communication, recreation and camaraderie that allow him to participate fully in life.

“Imagine how you would feel if suddenly you were unable to speak or understand,” says Grace Ison, who is now a driving force at HARC. “Without language, the ability to communicate and participate in life is lost. Don received outstanding care at TIRR Memorial Hermann, but when his insurance would no longer cover the cost of inpatient rehabilitation, we discovered that there was no place to turn for help and support. Don was paralyzed, and I was lost.”

Founded in 2008 to address a void in Houston's medical services community, HARC provides a wellness program, education, advocacy and resources for

people with aphasia, their caregivers and the Greater Houston medical community, creating a life-affirming environment where participants come for therapeutic socialization and long-term recovery. The center was begun as a collaboration of five people who served as its original board of directors:



Rita Justice, Ph.D., and Blair Justice, Ph.D., Doris and Rick Spengler, and Lynn M. Maher, Ph.D., C.C.C.-S.L.P., professor and chair of the department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Houston (UH). Blair Justice and Doris Spengler, former TIRR Memorial Hermann

patients, both suffered strokes that left them with aphasia.

With the guidance of nonprofit advisors, the board created a three-year strategic plan and started drop-in communication classes in the spring of 2009 at UH. In February 2010, HARC officially opened its doors in a new location, offering a rich array of

programs that help Ison and others with aphasia re-engage in life.

The Isons were honored as founding members of HARC at the organization's first annual Let's Talk Luncheon, a fundraiser held in February 2011 at the Houston Country Club. Next year's luncheon, scheduled for March 7, will feature *New York Times* bestselling author Diane Ackerman, who will discuss her latest book, *One Hundred Names for Love: A Stroke, A Marriage, and the Language of Healing*.

Don Ison will be 74 in October and is now walking with the help of a walking stick. He's an active participant in HARC's music therapy program and conversation group, and uses the center's aphasia-friendly computer room.

“It's a wonderful place and such a warm group,” Grace Ison says. “We now have 33 regular participants. I can't say enough about it, and I'm so thrilled that we're a part of it. Having a new family has helped so much with Don's recovery. Thanks to HARC, my husband has a whole new life. And I do, too.” ♦

The Houston Aphasia Recovery Center is located at 3701 Briarpark Drive, Suite 310. Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. For more information, call 713.781.7100 or visit www.harctx.org.