

A voice for the speech impaired

NICOLA WILLIAMS - Eastern Courier 30/07/2010



INVALUABLE HELPER: David Apple has been volunteering for the Stroke Club for three years after training in supportive communication techniques from speech language therapist Rachel Emmitt.

Speech therapists create the sounds of success for people suffering with speech impairments.

Speech language therapy awareness day on August 20 aims to educate people about the profession.

"A lot of people are aware of what we do with children but aren't aware of what we do with older adults," says Rachel Emmitt.

Most of the clients Mrs Emmitt helps have suffered neurological conditions, head injury or cancer.

Much of their work involves helping people with swallowing difficulties.

"The big concern is that when they swallow it will get to the lungs.

"A big risk of that is aspiration and pneumonia which can kill people.

"We are making sure people are medically safe."

She says speech therapy can help improve quality of life.

"We get a lot of people who are in pain or discomfort and we can quite easily do something to stop that," she says.

"Making sure people can swallow their medications is quite a big thing for our population."

Speech therapists also work with many terminally ill clients to help improve their remaining quality of life.

Computerised devices are available for people who can't speak.

The service is funded through the Counties Manukau District Health Board and Mrs Emmitt says many people are suffering unnecessarily because they are unaware help is available.

"If people don't raise a concern with their GP they don't have the chance to refer a patient," she says.

"It's quite special being involved with someone when they have gone through a massive incident like a stroke or are at the end of their life.

"Quite often we do get to make a difference by enabling them to take their pain medication or making eating and drinking more enjoyable."

Residents can access the service if they have muscle weaknesses causing difficulty with speech or swallowing, if their voice sounds unusual or if they constantly lose their voice.

Mrs Emmitt says they can help people to use certain muscles that will help avoid voice loss.

She also gives training to stroke club volunteers, providing them techniques to encourage communication. To access the service call Howick Home Health Care on 270-4758.