

# Virtual Connections & The Importance of Social Interaction in Living with Aphasia



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## Background

Virtual Connections is a collaborative program between Lingraphica and Aphasia Recovery Connection (ARC) that was founded in March of 2020 in response to COVID. Virtual Connections provides free daily virtual conversation and support group sessions for people with aphasia and care partners. All sessions are modeled off the Life Participation Approach to Aphasia to promote social engagement and wellbeing.

It is well known that people with aphasia (PWA) experience depression and isolation following the onset of their communication impairment. A study by Lam & Wodchis (2010) compared quality of life among sixty different diseases and fifteen conditions, identifying aphasia as having the greatest negative impact on quality of life. Similarly, in an article by Zanella et al. (2022), adults with aphasia were found to be over 7x more likely to exhibit post-stroke depression than stroke survivors without aphasia. Finally, in a study looking at social networks in PWA by Hilari & Northcott (2006), 64% of PWA reported less contact with friends following the onset of aphasia and 30% of PWA were unable to name one single close friend.

## Purpose

In this analysis, we surveyed members of Virtual Connections to assess the impact that virtual support and conversation groups have on their emotional well being and social participation.



VirtualConnections.com



## Methods

A survey was distributed via email to all Virtual Connections participants at the time of this study (3,379 total), of which 2,171 emails were opened. This produced a 12% response rate, with 264 members completing the full 20-question survey. Of the participants, the average age of respondent was 58.9 years old, having had aphasia for an average of 6.9 years. 52% of the participants were female and 48% were male. Participants from nine different countries and 35 U.S. states were represented in this survey. Cause of aphasia was not determined within the survey.

Data was collected via SurveyMonkey. Participants received a 20-question survey and responses were collected over a two-and-a-half-week span. Questions included in the survey were divided into the following categories: Demographics (5 questions), Psychosocial (10 questions) and Virtual Connections specific (5 questions).

## Results

- Motivation for Recovery:** When asked how participating in Virtual Connections impacts motivation for recovery, 95.4% of participants reported consistent or improved motivation for recovery.
- Confidence:** Similarly, when asked how communicating with other people with aphasia impacts confidence, 79.3% of participants reported some level of increase in confidence.
- Hope:** Finally, when participants were asked how seeing other people with aphasia affects hope about their own recovery, 86.2% of participants reported some level of increase in hope.

## Conclusions

Virtual Connections provides opportunities for people with aphasia to meet others, receive support, and practice their conversation skills. In addition, members report that attending Virtual Connections sessions generally improves their motivation for recovery, confidence in communicating, and overall hope about their recovery journey. Such findings indicate that social interaction with others living with aphasia, even if virtual, can have a profound impact on quality of life and overall wellbeing.

How has your motivation for recovery improved since participating in Virtual Connections?

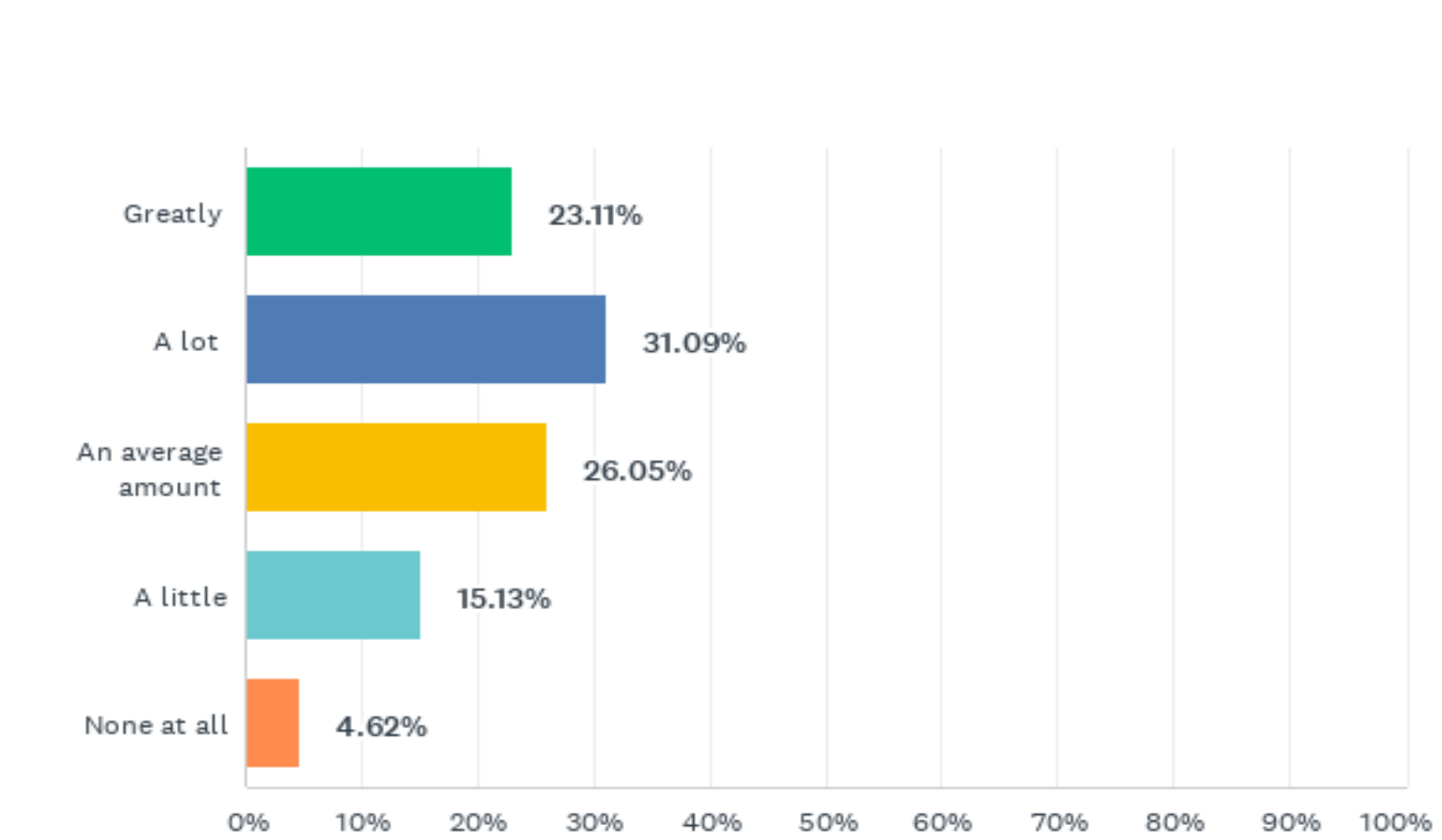


Figure 1

How does communicating with other people with aphasia impact your confidence?

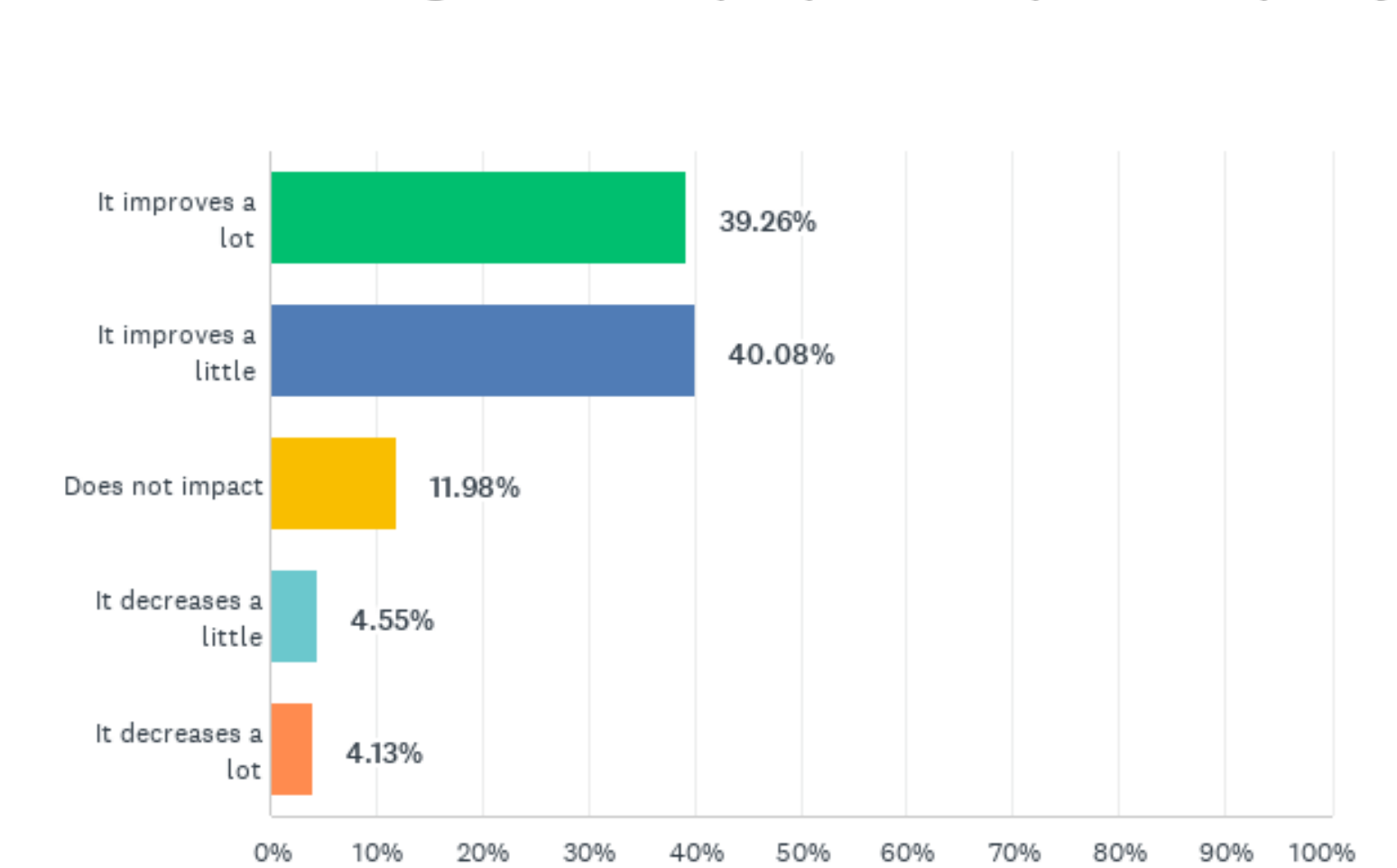


Figure 2

To what degree does seeing other people with aphasia give you hope about your own recovery journey?

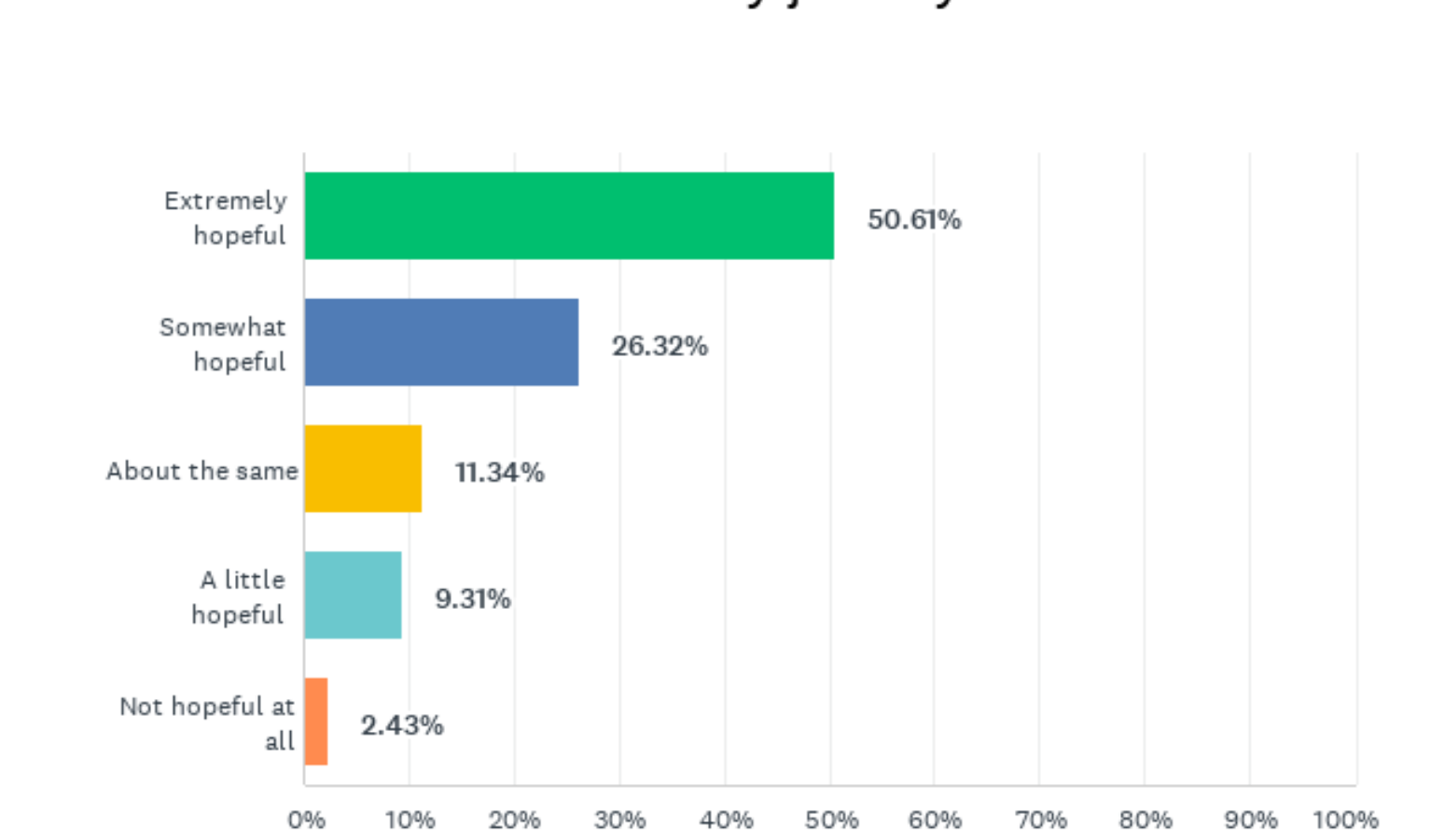


Figure 3

*"I love Virtual Connections. Practice, practice, practice, it helps. The VC people get it, my lonely is better."*

*"My grief ... very much less."*

*"Each day, I feel purposeful. This is my new reality, and for the first time in two years, I have a sense of community."*

## References

- Lam, J.M.C. & Wodchis, W. P. (2010). The relationship of 60 disease diagnoses and 15 conditions to preference-based health-related quality of life in Ontario hospital-based long-term care residents, *Medical Care*, 48(4), 380-387.
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- Hilari, K. & Northcott, S. (2006). Social support in people with chronic aphasia, *Aphasiology*, 20(1), 17-36.