

Abstract No. 6.1

Thursday 7th September 2017 at 14:15-15:00

Title: From thoughts to language to reality - getting closer to social connectivity

Presenter: Sabine Brink and Ole Wøssner, CFD - Døvblindehuset, Denmark
Co-presenters: Tanja Nyons
Litte Frehr

Main focus: Both research and practice/Both congenital and acquired deafblindness

Abstract: About a year and a half ago, a young woman came to our facility; she moved into her own flat in a single dwelling, as for years she has been unable to socialize with others. She has acquired deafblindness due to Usher Syndrome, type 1, and since she was about seven years old she has displayed a high degree of psychotic and hallucinatory behaviour. To a considerable degree, this behaviour has locked her into a rigid pattern that has also caused her to be mentally and socially stuck and isolated. We soon realized that she has a considerable potential for developing her sign language, which in our assessment has been insufficiently stimulated during the past two to three years. When she interacts with deaf members of staff, we see a very communicative and interested young woman, who is keen to engage in conversation, but who is also very rigid and repetitive in her topics of conversation.

In October 2016, we launched a project aimed at assessing, developing and expanding her sign language capacity in order to have the opportunity to speak with her about the situations and periods when she is psychotic and hallucinating as a way of enabling a cooperative effort to build a more nuanced and stable linguistic platform capable of externalizing her mental disorder.

We wish to acknowledge what she experiences while also holding on to reality by communicating that we do not see what she sees, that it is not real – and, if possible, offer tactile stimulation to help her distinguish between real and not-real.

With regard to her sign language, we will also be working on externalization by synchronizing our communication and assigning specific signs to her psychosis to enable it to be expressed. We aim to facilitate her ability to engage socially and express her thoughts, feelings and concerns. This would allow her to work with her partner to develop a closer grasp on reality and lessen her psychosis – facilitating social connectedness.

We will involve sign language interpreters in the assessment of her sign language skills; specifically, we will look up to the experiences from the pilot project on congenital deafblindness and sign language interpreters under the Danish National Board of Health and Welfare. Moreover, psychologist Litte Frehr of the CFD will provide supervision throughout and coordinate the communicative intervention strategies.

In a sense, thus, the project has two – complimentary – tracks; 1) as we aim to assess and develop her language in order to equip her with new words and concepts, 2) so that she can describe and share her psychotic experiences, which in turn would allow her to develop a higher degree of closeness with the real world and her partners – ideally, eventually, also with other residents in our facility.

The project runs until June 2017, so at the workshop we will be able to present our results – including video recordings documenting the process and the assessment and



development of communication as well as a brief report on the project in whole, including the project hypothesis, objectives, evaluation and conclusion.