

# My speech app offers therapy in your home

'Now [husband] Steve feels he is connected to what's going on'



**APPY DAYS:** Aviva with her successful Neuro Hero app

## MUM'S DRIVE TO HELP OTHERS

■ Siobhan DEVOY

**MUM-OF-TWO** Aviva Cohen had enjoyed a relaxing Sunday with her husband Steve and two young daughters when they were hit with a stomach bug.

But that was to be the least of her worries when Steve had a stroke later that evening. "At about nine or 10 that night, I thought Steve was just sleeping because he was ill," Aviva recalls of the night nine years ago.

She tried to wake karate instructor Steve to help her change beds as the girls had been sick again. "I couldn't wake him up. I called an ambulance, and told them I thought it was a stroke," she says.

**"I knew we were in big trouble when we were sitting in the emergency room and I showed one of the young doctors pictures of our two little girls and she started to cry," recalls Aviva (49).**

Steve, who was 52 at the time, was moved to Connolly Hospital in Blanchardstown. It was unclear whether he would survive.

"It was a really difficult time," recalls Aviva, who lives in west Dublin. "My girls [Gina and Tanya] were so young at the time. "The prognosis for Steve was really bad

because he had no speech, his cognition was badly impaired and he was paralysed down his right side," she says.

And the doctors weren't sure if he was going to get much better. The road ahead was rocky but Aviva was determined to do what she could to help Steve.

When Steve came home after six months in hospital, he could walk with a stick.

**"He had maybe two or three words, he found it difficult to follow conversations and his left arm was completely paralysed," says Aviva.**

Before Steve's stroke, Aviva had been a lecturer in philosophy, but her doctorate was multi-disciplinary.

"I had a good background in psychiatry, psychology and a little bit of neurology. I started just researching as much as I could all the options within medical therapies."

Aviva was looking for "anything that could possibly help Steve".

She began by trying to find therapies that could be of benefit. Acupuncture had helped Steve with his speech and stem cell therapy three years later allowed him to move his right arm again.

"These things are really amazing so I decided to write it all up and I published a research resource called researchandhope.com.

"And that was the first step into a different world," recalls Aviva, after she gave up her career to concentrate on Steve and the research.

But there was still a lot of work to do. "Steve still had no speech and that was frustrating for all of us," she says.

### Families

And while he received some excellent speech therapy, it wasn't enough.

Aviva asked the therapists to help her develop something that would allow families to access continuing speech and language therapy at a low cost.

They found that word-finding difficulties was a particularly common problem.

**Aviva likened it to: "When you are watching a film and you can't think of the name of the actor — it's on the tip of your tongue but you just can't bring it to mind."**

"Steve has this problem all the time. And it's not just after a stroke, it's with dementia, with autism. There are a lot of brain injuries resulting in a lot of people not being able to find the word they need to say."

"This therapy we identified would help all kinds of people in all kinds of areas," she says. "So we created an app and it has really beneficial exercises in it. It's called TalkAroundIt," says Aviva, who is the founder of Neuro Hero.

Since the app launched, there have been 14,000 downloads. The app has been so well received that a version has now been created for Spain and America.

### Arm

"And over the last month, we've just launched it in Hindi," explains Aviva.

With the aid of therapy and with Aviva by his side, Steve (62) has improved a lot in the nine years since his stroke.

"Now he can move his left arm, he can walk up to about five miles. He can follow conversations, he feels he is connected to what is going on and he has about 20 words," says Aviva.

And it wasn't just Aviva who had a heavy load on her shoulders, she says her girls have had to mature a lot because of the

situation at home. Her eldest daughter Gina (15) was six at the time of her dad's stroke while Tanya (9) was just 10 months old.

"I actually think they're both very wise in ways that I wouldn't expect for their age. I'm very proud of both the girls," she says.

**"We're like a normal family, the difference is that it takes a long time to understand what Steve wants to say. I think we've just come to learn how to live with our situation," she says.**

And Steve's stroke had a profound effect on Aviva's outlook on life too.

"I have a completely different life from the one I imagined. I think I was always aware about how important family is and how important relationships are.

"I'm very aware of not waiting to tell people how I feel. I don't want to let a moment pass because you don't know if you're going to get that moment again," she adds.

■ For more information, see researchandhope.com; for details of the app, see [www.neurohero.com](http://www.neurohero.com)



**STROKE:** Aviva with husband Steve who can use the app to help him communicate

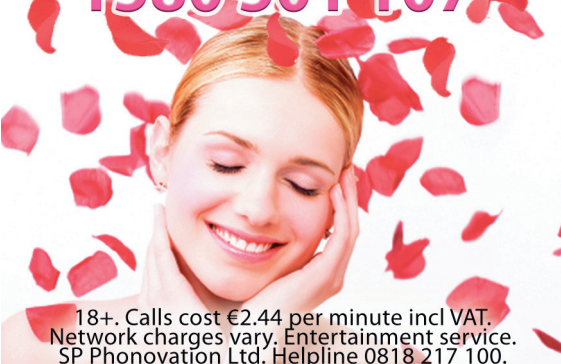
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