St George residents are being encouraged to think about the difficulties of daily life for people with communication problems.

St George-based South West Hospital and Health Service speech pathologists Alice Bechtel and Julie Rogan said more than 1.1 million Australians had difficulty communicating.

They said this year’s Speech Pathology Week from 25–31 August was designed to raise awareness of the problems many Australians faced in their day-to-day contacts.

“By starting the conversation about communication during Speech Pathology Week, we want to encourage people to think about what life is like for the large number of Australians living with a communication problem,” Ms Bechtel said.

“We also want them to think about how life would change if they were to have a communication difficulty themselves.

“Even though communication is often taken for granted, people who have difficulty getting their message across are disadvantaged in many parts of their lives.

“It’s estimated that one in five people will experience communication difficulties at some point in their lives.

“These difficulties can range from mild to very severe and can impact on the way they participate in family life, the community, education and the workplace.”

Ms Rogan said speech pathologists were specialists in all forms of communication and worked with people to maximise their ability to communicate in a way that best met their needs and abilities.

They work with people who have difficulty communicating because of developmental delays, stroke, brain injuries, learning disability, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy and hearing loss, as well as other problems that can affect speech, language and communication.

Speech pathologists work in a wide range of settings – schools, hospitals, nursing homes, universities, kindergartens, rehabilitation centres, community health centres, private practice and mental health services.

Ms Rogan said some speech pathologists also specialised in areas of complex need, such as autism, cerebral palsy and intellectual disability and might work in specialist intervention services for people with such disabilities.
She said speech pathologists around Australia were starting the conversation about communication ahead of the International Communication Project 2014.

This project aimed to raise awareness about the number and significant disadvantage of people living with communication difficulties around the world, she said.

- For more information about Speech Pathology Week and the International Communication Project 2014, visit [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)

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