

# An update on Voice Banking for healthcare professionals

Voice banking involves the creation of a synthetic and digital voice, which a person with MSA can use to aid communication. The MSA Trust currently funds voice banking for people living with MSA through two organisations:

Speak Unique is a UK company, and the MSA Trust has partnered with them for 4 years. Patients record and upload a specific set of phrases. This requires a laptop and microphone, and the assistance of someone able to use technology (which might be a health care professional such as an SLT, or a relative, or a friend). This option works best for those whose MSA either is not, or is only minimally affecting their speech currently.

ElevenLabs are an American company utilising AI technology to replicate a person's voice – which they call a 'voice clone'. With 30 seconds of speech an 'instant voice' can be generated, and with 10 minutes of speech a much more accurate 'Pro Voice' can be created. This speech can be taken from any number of voice recordings (such as voice-note messages) or it can be recorded specifically for the purpose of voice banking. This service may be preferable if a person's voice has already been impacted by MSA, but they have a number of recordings of their voice from the past. The voice clones are highly accurate and examples can be heard on the ElevenLabs website. To use the service, the user creates a free account and the MSA Trust can authorise it. Before accessing, the person undertaking the voice banking must agree to the ElevenLabs terms of service. Any such agreement is between the person and ElevenLabs (not the MSA Trust).



A resource created in collaboration with the Ageing and Movement Research Group, University of Bristol  
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We send a survey to people whose voice banking has been funded by us one year after they complete the process. This helps us identify the positive aspects of voice banking and highlight some important considerations, outlined below.

## Positive aspects of voice banking

- Undertaking voice banking is associated with a sense of security
  - *"It's peace of mind knowing it is there when I need it"*
- Doing the voice banking was reported to be a largely positive experience:
  - 64% said they had found the process 'easy'
  - 73% had involvement from a speech and language therapist
- Having a personalised voice helps to preserve a sense of identity
  - *"It gives me a sense of being me"*
- People find pre-typing messages for use in certain situations is helpful, and helps to make communication quick and easy
  - *"I need to prepare more phrases, as it takes me too long to type"*

## Important considerations

- Most people (75%) surveyed 1 year on were not using their banked voice
- The most common reason given for not using a banked voice was that speech was not affected enough yet to require it
  - *"I am still able to communicate. Slowly but clearly"*
- Movement problems impact the ability to use the apps and technology
  - *"Unfortunately, the dyskinesia brought on by MSA makes it difficult. We are still trying to find a device which will suit."*
- It was reflected that slow typing made communication difficult
- Several participants noted that the synthetic voice did not fully resemble their natural speech, and felt it was important for others considering voice banking to be made aware of this potential limitation
  - *"It didn't sound like me ... the voice just sounds so much different"*

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The MSA Trust has received enquiries about paying for the download of a banked voice after a family member or relative has passed away. Our current stance is that the voice is created by the person with MSA and it is intended for their use. Whilst we understand and empathise with the reasons for wanting to access the banked voice, we do not currently fund voice banking posthumously. Once the banked voice is downloaded to a tablet, families continue to have access to it and we have no authority over how this is used.

If you receive enquiries from families about this, it may be helpful to direct them to our page for loved ones of those with MSA:

<https://www.msatrust.org.uk/support-for-you/former-carers/former-carers/>



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