Wake Chapter Newsletter

May 2024

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Wake Chapter

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Save this Date!

The HLAA Wake Chapter is a sponsor of a **June 9 benefit event** for BEGINNINGS for Parents of Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, a nonprofit that helps North Carolina parents and families understand hearing loss as well as the diverse needs of children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

This family-friendly event will feature food, beer, wine and live music provided by Charles and Jackson Pettee. The event takes place at the Durham Exchange, 801 Gilbert Street in Durham, and runs from 5 to 8 p.m. Tickets are $50 per adult. Children ages 4 and under get in free. Ticket prices for children ages 5 to 12 are $25; the ticket price for children 13 and older is $35.

To buy tickets, visit www.ncbegin.org.

The impartial support provided by BEGINNINGS helps families make informed decisions and empowers them to advocate for their child's needs.

2024 Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipients Announced

Shannon Williams of Cary and Ian Fan of Raleigh are being recognized with college scholarships through the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter Scholarship Program.

The program provides $500 scholarships to high school seniors residing in Wake County who plan to attend an accredited university, college, community college or trade school. In its fifth year, the program is made possible by the generous support of participants in the North Carolina Walk4Hearing, a hearing health awareness and fundraising event conducted by HLAA.

Williams will graduate from Green Hope High School and attend the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Fan will graduate from Cary Academy and attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Learn more below about our outstanding scholarship recipients.

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2024 HLAA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Shannon Williams

Shannon lives in Cary and is graduating from Green Hope High School.

Shannon's hearing loss journey

Since birth I have been deaf in my left ear, with moderate fluctuating hearing in my right ear. Since 2020 I've used a hearing aid in my right ear.

In and outside of school environments, I advocate for myself by moving closer to the front of the room or closer to the source of the sound. I often discretely let a teacher, boss or co-worker know about my situation and suggest how they might adjust their methods of communication for our mutual benefit.

"Shannon has always been proactive with regard to her hearing loss," says B. Carl Rush, her teacher in Advance Placement Environmental Science and Honors Marine Ecology classes. "Her self-advocacy is respectful and mature. Shannon does not let her hearing loss slow her down in any way, demonstrating a persistence in her interests and an unwillingness to let hearing loss lessen any experience."

School accomplishments

Shannon is an excellent student and is active in her school's chorus and theater programs.

My involvement in music began in middle school band, learning percussion instruments and music theory. I eventually progressed to leading sectional rehearsals in my Advanced Treble Choir in high school. Chorus serves as a therapeutic activity for me, offering stress relief and a sense of community with diverse individuals united by love for music!

A crucial turning point in my musical success was in my sophomore year when a chorus peer encouraged me to audition for a solo in a song. I was on the fence contemplating whether I should audition. Many negative thoughts raced through my head. Participating in that audition increased my confidence and opened up more singing opportunities, such as with the Eastern Regional Choir in my junior year.

"Shannon is a true lover of music," says Chorus teacher Allen Botwick. "Her passion is evident in her rehearsals, out-of-class preparation and musical creativity. Her hearing loss regularly impacts her communication, social and musical skills. It took Shannon a few semesters in chorus to improve her pitch accuracy. However, I find her growth since ninth grade to be quite impressive. Fighting through this challenge demonstrated Shannon's incredible perseverance."

Future plans

Shannon plans to attend the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Although I am unsure of which specific direction in the field of music I would like to go, I am certain that in my future career I will continue to serve my community with my passion for music. I have been considering music education, with my inspiration coming from my chorus teacher, Mr. Botwick, or music therapy, which is a new career field in the music industry.

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2024 HLAA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Ian Fan

Ian lives in Raleigh and is graduating from Cary Academy.

Ian's hearing loss journey

I passed the newborn hearing test but developed rapidly progressive hearing loss and received a late diagnosis of profound deafness at age two. After months of fighting the insurance company, I finally had surgery for both ears (six months apart) by the age of two-and-a-half.

Afterward, there were constant reminders that I was different. I was labeled the "bionic man" because of the magnets that hold the implants securely on my scalp. I didn't play with other kids because I didn't communicate and often wandered off alone. I traveled long commutes to a specialized preschool for deaf children to receive intensive therapy.

I was mislabeled due to a delay in my speech and communication. The developmental experts recommended a vocational training path. Self-contained classrooms or specialized schools were recommended. My parents were told I could not learn to play sports or music, but I could live successfully in adult homes or with assistance in the future. Knowing I was motivated, my parents decided to go with that and ignore the rest of the experts' opinions.

Thankfully, the miracle of medical technology, supportive parents, and thousands of hours of speech and occupational therapy paid off. I now attend a mainstream high school. Some experts doubted my ability to play music or sports, but I went on to become an all-district clarinetist and co-captain of the junior varsity basketball team.

Overcoming obstacles to do what most kids take for granted has given me a unique understanding and empathy for others. My self-belief is one of my greatest attributes when others doubt me. I was also blessed with a fantastic support system. For those less fortunate, I want to help them access resources that were available to me.

I've learned about families' financial burdens to pay for hearing devices and therapy sessions. Since the sixth grade I have raised funds for The Children's Cochlear Implant Center at UNC (University of North Carolina) through my participation in the North Carolina Walk4Hearing. Although annual fundraisers draw great publicity, I find the greatest satisfaction in the personal conversations. From speaking to parents with a newly diagnosed child with hearing loss to fist-bumping tearful eight-year-olds after coaching a winless basketball season, I realized I could pass my gift of self-belief to others and inspire a brighter mindset in each person. Seeing my story inspire hope and put smiles on people's faces is a gift.

I've learned that my disability isn't a loss but an opportunity for me, my family, my church, and my community to be more accepting of others who are different. Through my story, I hope other kids will learn not to let a label or diagnosis define who they are and can be.

There are still moments when I'm insecure about my hearing and speech issues. And there were those learning professionals who doubted what I could do based on a label. During those times, I tell myself to recount the lessons I've learned, remember where I started and the obstacles I've overcome, and be excited about future opportunities to be great and do great things!

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Through the NC Walk4Hearing, Ian has raised more than $50,000 to help The Children's Cochlear Implant Center provide remote therapy sessions for deaf children in rural areas.

School accomplishments

Ian is an exceptional student whose potential is described by one of his teachers as "limitless."

"Ian is a mathematics talent and basketball coaching enthusiast with the gentlest soul you could ever encounter," says college counselor Brandon Carter. "He'll be the college student everyone wants to live, study and grow with in their time together."

"This young man is a champion," says Precalculus teacher Dr. Hillary Sawyers. "He has done what experts told his parents that he would never be able to do. He works hard at everything. For example, in 2021, he was named first chair clarinet at NCAIS (North Carolina Association of Independent Schools); he had to push himself to garner that recognition. In addition, he is the founder and president of the Cary Academy Sports Analytics Club, where he teaches the importance of data-driven decisions. Team coaches have benefited from Ian's data analysis and reports."

Future plans

Ian plans to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Pursuing a major in statistics and data science is, for me, a strategic choice. It's about equipping myself with the tools to analyze, interpret and leverage data to advocate for policy changes, resource allocation, and awareness that can significantly improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. Data has the power to tell compelling stories, to unveil the hidden struggles of marginalized communities, and to drive evidence-based solutions that can help my community.

My aim is to use my expertise in data science to conduct research that sheds light on the challenges faced by the deaf and hard of hearing community, among others. By quantifying the impact of early intervention, accessible education, and community support, I can provide concrete evidence that empowers policymakers, educators and advocates to make informed decisions that uplift those in need.

2024 North Carolina Walk4Hearing

On Sunday, October 13th hundreds of people who care about hearing loss will gather at the WakeMed Soccer Park to enjoy a fun day of meeting each other, and walking (if you want), winning (there are always raffle prizes), and checking out the vendor tables. There are activities for kids. Dogs are welcome and will enjoy the day, too. Wake Chapter will have a team in this year's North Carolina Walk4Hearing that will be encouraging donations to support the team's walkers. All donations supporting the Wake Chapter team will be shared between the HLAA National organization and our local Wake Chapter. It's our main local chapter funding and supports not only our continued operation, but our outreach and scholarship program for worthy local high school graduates with hearing loss to recognize their accomplishment and help with their post-secondary education plans. We'll announce our Wake Chapter Team soon and provide a link you can use to support our team if you wish.

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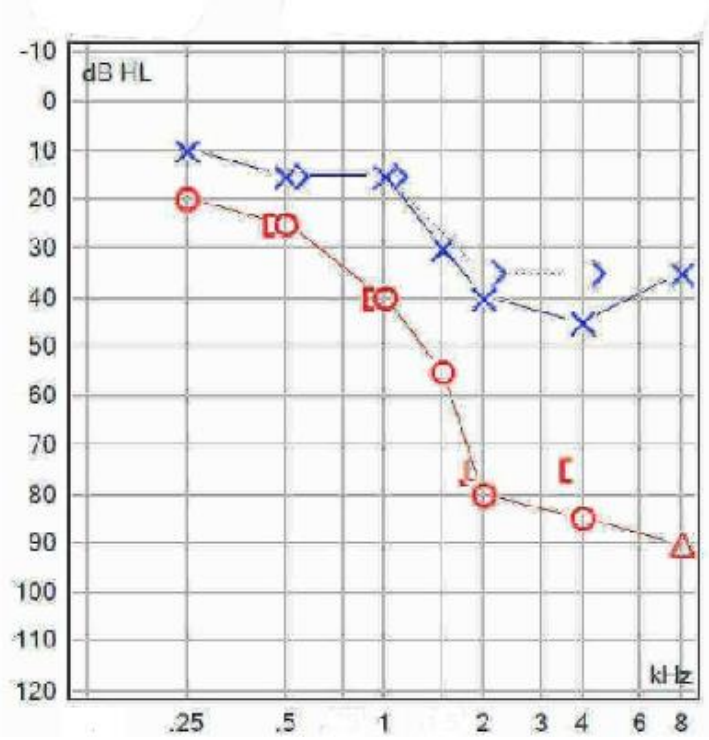
Tech Focus: Understanding the Graph on Your Audiogram

There's a lot of interesting stuff on your audiogram. In addition to showing how much loss you have at each frequency, there are also speech recognition results, a tympanogram plot (eardrum flexibility) and measurements showing how well you hear conductively. But let's just focus here on the graph on an audiogram that shows hearing loss by frequency.



The example graph at the right shows the minimum sound level at several frequencies – typically, 250 Hz (cycles per second), 500 Hz and each increment from 1,000 Hz through 8,000 Hz – you need to first detect a sound either through the normal path through your ear canals or conductively through vibrations of your skull.

The blue **X** symbols plot the normal path (through your ear canal) hearing loss of your right ear, and the red **O** symbols plot the normal path loss of your left ear.

The Blue **>** symbols plot the conductive loss of our right ear, and the red **[** symbols plot the conductive loss through your left ear. Conductive loss measures how well your cochleas can hear sound caused by vibrations of the mastoid bone.

Your personal audiogram will likely be different. This one shows a common high frequency sensorineural loss called a "ski slope." For other types and loss amounts, the plots will look different … perhaps a "reverse ski slope" showing a low frequency loss, or a "cookie bite" loss showing either a loss in the mid-range frequencies or a loss in both high and low frequencies, but better hearing in the mid-range.

But what is "sound level"? Sound is just air molecules vibrating in sound waves that cause your eardrums to flex. If there is no sound at all, it would represent a sound level of zero decibels (dB). "Normal" hearing can typically detect sound when the sound level increases to the 10-25 dB level. Your loss at any measured frequency could be a **mild** hearing loss (25-40 dB), a **moderate** (40-55 dB), **moderately severe** (55-70 dB), **severe** (70-90 dB) or **profound** (90-120 dB). Sounds above 120 dB are so loud that they are beyond any use in measuring your loss.

One thing that's a bit confusing about the graph showing the amount of loss on your audiogram is that dB is plotted logarithmically. The reason is that a sound level range between the quietest sound a normal hearing person can detect, and 120 dB is HUGE. If your loss is 40 dB (just twice a normal 20 dB range), the sound level required for you to hear a 40 dB sound is not just double …**it's 10 times louder**. Each time dB doubles, the sound level is 10 times higher. So, a sound level of 80 dB (a severe loss) is 100 times louder than a 20 dB level. That's why the graph can be deceiving. A 50 dB loss looks like it's only about halfway down the graph, but a 50 dB hearing loss is a lot worse than a 50% loss. Percentage losses are often mentioned but are estimated based on speech recognition tests … they're not related to the graph on the audiogram.

Now let's consider how an audiogram can show whether your loss is sensorineural, conductive or a mixture. In the example chart above, the loss is mostly sensorineural, because the amount of loss is almost the same between the sensorineural loss (**X**'s and **O**'s) and conductive (the **>**'s, and **]**'s). In other words, it doesn't matter how the vibrations got to your cochlea, the results are the same, suggesting that your cochlea is the problem. If your conductive plots are much worse than the sensorineural plots, then it suggests that your cochlea and its hair cells are working (at least not the whole cause of your loss) and the normal path via your eardrums and ossicles to your cochlea is not working as well as it should, so part (or all) of your loss is a conductive loss.

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Wake Chapter's Previous Program Meeting

Appreciating Music Despite Hearing Loss was the topic for our chapter hybrid meeting on April 25. Taylor Sands, MED-EL Senior Consumer Engagement Manager, was our featured speaker. Her presentation prompted a wide range of questions from the audience of about 25 in the Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall in Cary and online via Zoom.

May is Hearing Loss Awareness Month

"NOW, THEREFORE, I, ROY COOPER, Governor of the State of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim **May, 2024**, as "HEARING LOSS AWARENESS MONTH" in North Carolina, and commend its observance to all citizens." You can read the actual proclamation HERE.

We Supported the Cary Senior Center Health Fair

HLAA Wake Chapter shared our story and general information about hearing loss at the annual Cary Senior Center Health Fair on April 26. As you can see below, it was a busy few hours. We enjoyed meeting many attendees interested in hearing loss. One of the many visitors to our table was long-time chapter member Rita Venezia, here with table volunteers Steve Barber and Deborah Stroud.

Photos by Steve Latus

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HLAA 2024 Convention

Set aside June 26-29 on your calendar to attend the HLAA 2024 Convention at the Sheraton Grand Resort at Wild Horse Pass. As HLAA's first-ever event at a resort rather than an urban hotel, this year's convention in Phoenix promises to be a brand-new experience! This annual event is the largest of its kind, designed to support hundreds of people with hearing loss from all walks of life around the United States. Start planning your trip to the Valley of the Sun now! Registration is open online at hearingloss.org/convention.

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