

THE B.I.G. NEWS

BUFFALO IMPLANT GROUP

COMMUNICATING ▶ SHARING ▶ COUNSELING ▶ SUPPORTING



UPCOMING EVENTS

B.I.G. Meeting March 14

B.I.G. Picnic July 27

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MEETING NOTICE:

Wednesday, March 14

6:00 – 8:00 pm

St. Mary's School for the Deaf
2253 Main St. - Buffalo

Winning!

By Kaitlyn Koester

Growing up as a little girl, I would always have scabby knees and elbows from playing rough with my twin brother and three older brothers. Every day after school and weekends, my brothers and I would spend all day playing baseball, street hockey, football and any sports with physical contact. My twin, Connor, and my two other brothers, Jesse and Chris, are all hearing. My oldest brother, Ryan, and I are deaf. My brothers and I are all hockey fanatics and huge fans of the Buffalo Sabres. We would watch every home and away game on television. My father usually had two tickets to watch the Buffalo Sabres play and my brothers and I would take turns going to games with my father. My brothers and I, except for Ryan, started playing ice hockey at an early age. We grew up playing on travel teams and our middle and high school teams.

Ryan was born deaf and he played basketball, soccer and track at St. Mary's School for the Deaf while attending Sweet Home High part-time. Ryan is eight years older than me and he is not only my big brother but my role model. I have always looked up to him since I was a little girl, I would always follow him around as an annoying little sister. Ryan fulfills the role of big brother. He has always supported me, cheered me on, given me the best advice, and has simply been there for me my entire life. Without his impact on my life, I don't believe I would be striving to reach my full potential.

In May of 2012, Ryan had decided to get a cochlear implant because he wanted to upgrade from hearing aids and he wanted to improve his hearing ability with the available technology nowadays. Ryan attended Rochester Institute of Technology in 2006 with a major of Electrical Engineering (EE). After the implant, Ryan was starting to be able to hear a lot more, to the point where his hearing aid on his other ear was almost useless. He felt like the hearing aid was not



there since the implant was overpowering it. He was in the process of learning and recognizing new sounds that he was not able to hear before. Two months later, I decided to get an implant on my left side and I was never so anxious about anything in my life.

Like Ryan, I was born deaf and wore hearing aids on both ears for most of my life. We communicate with our parents and brothers with our voices most of the time while signing. I attended St. Mary's School for the Deaf from kindergarten to third grade then I switched to mainstream education to be with my twin brother and to challenge myself with the hearing world. I had a Teacher of the Deaf, Joanne Mayers, and two interpreters, Jennifer White and Michele Kasmore, with me until my senior year. They have been my biggest advocates and they have taught me the values of life. They are the reason why I am successful in my life today.

My passion was playing hockey and softball and my dream was to play collegiate hockey and play for the Olympics. I played on hearing teams full of boys, including my twin brother, until I reached the age of twelve. Then the first girl's travel tier one team was established. I was brought to a new challenge by playing for the Amherst

President's Corner

By Sue Wantuck



Hello and Happy New Year! Hopefully your 2018 is off to a good start! Have you included some listening goals in your resolutions?

I have decided to try and work on listening to TV shows without reading the closed captions this year. It will be a huge challenge for me!

I am very excited to report that our family adopted a rescue dog from Texas. We

named him Max Harvey (after the Hurricane) Wantuck. We have been spending a lot of time getting to know each other. For me it has been quite interesting to understand all the different noises that he makes. For example his crying sounds, the whining, deep barking, etc. It is really awesome how clear it is to me. I don't recall hearing these sounds this way when I just had my hearing aid.

At our November meeting we had the "couples panel." I really enjoyed it. Did you? It was a wonderful opportunity for our members to discuss their day-to-day lives, as well as the impact their hearing situation had on their significant others. Some chal-

lenging situations, as well as suggestions and solutions were shared. It is nice to hear these real stories so that we can relate to one another. We know we are not alone on this journey, but have each other for support.

Our next upcoming B.I.G. general meeting will be a youth (high school/college students) panel. It will be held at St. Mary's School for the Deaf on Wednesday, March 14 from 6 - 8pm. Please join us, whether you are an implant or BAHA user, family member, professional or individual considering amplification. All are welcome! If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to reach me. My email address is suewantuck@gmail.com. Happy Hearing!

From the Editor

By Gail Cronin



It is a new year and fresh start for B.I.G. with some exciting changes in store. In this issue you will find the news that we have

finally accomplished our longtime goal of developing a B.I.G. scholarship, which will be awarded annually to a deserving college-bound high school senior for use with their college expenses. The application deadline is March 31 and the recipient will be notified by May 1. Look for an announcement about the winner in the next issue of The B.I.G. News.

Another important change for B.I.G. is that we have expanded our state of officers

from four to five with the addition of a Corresponding Secretary. As of our last general meeting and election, this position was not yet filled, as no one ran for the new office. Fortunately, after the meeting, Dr. Mia Canale stepped up and offered to take on this important role. You can read more about her in this issue.

Our Board of Directors has been busy, having already met twice since the start of the year. There are plans to continue with four annual meetings and also an additional fundraising event in the Fall of 2018. Although we didn't hold a fundraising event in 2017, we did initiate a t-shirt sale as a fundraiser. There are still plenty of t-shirts available, which can be purchased at our meetings for \$20. We hope that all members will support this endeavor.

At the time of this writing, the Olympic Games are underway. What better time to

feature the story of an athlete who is also a cochlear implant user? Our cover story, written by Kaitlyn Koester, does just that. I am very grateful to Kaitlyn for sharing her story.

We are currently looking for more of our readers to share their stories in 2018. If you haven't shared your story, or your child's story, with us yet, please consider doing so. And even if you have written for us before, we would love to hear an update on your life. Or perhaps you would like to write about a specific issue you are facing or an experience you would like to share. If there is particular store, restaurant, or entertainment venue that is accommodating to you as a person with hearing loss, please let us know! You can send your story ideas and newsletter submissions to me at gdcronin@roadrunner.com

Treasurer's Report

By Lisa Hill Nowicki



Though a bit skewed due to the upfront cost of the B.I.G. T-shirts, this was one of the first years that our expenses for the year exceeded our income. Our membership dollars are on par with past years, but at the new rate this means fewer members are subscribing. Without a large fundraiser in 2017, we were able to close the gap with donations, the Walk for Hearing proceeds and United Way contributions. As usual, our largest expenses are the newsletter and picnic. If you

have not already sent in your 2018 dues, please do so. Thank you in advance.



Knights twelve-and-under girls travel team. I traveled to Canada and all over New York and met so many great friends. I kept playing



and moving up until my last year of travel hockey on the nineteen-and-under team. My career of travel hockey was successful when I made it into states championship three times and national championships twice. We won third place in Nationals as the third best team all around. The Amherst Hockey board had met to discuss the addition of an interpreter for me during games, but the board decided against it. I never had a real interpreter, but my father was mine for every game and practice. He made sure I did not miss anything. I also played hockey at Sweet Home Middle School with the boys. By my freshman year at Sweet Home High School, a group of girls and I fought for a women's hockey team. We were successful and Sweet Home and Amherst High merged together as a women's team called "Katz." We were proud to first establish and play on the first women's high school team in history. Throughout my four years of high school, I also played volleyball and softball for Sweet Home and travel softball and hockey outside of school. In my senior year I decided to go to St. Mary's School for the Deaf part-time by attending Sweet Home in the morning then driving to St. Mary's for the rest of the day. I also played basketball there and won third place for the ESDAA tournament. After experiencing my senior year at St. Mary's, I met a great friend and I was still in love with the deaf community so decided to commit to National Technical Institute for the Deaf and playing division three softball for RIT in 2014.

I started off with a major in Business at NTID, then I changed several times to Liberal Arts and Nutrition, but decided that none were a fit for me. Then I transferred to Gallaudet University in 2016 to major in English in order to become an English Teacher for the Deaf and a coach for a

hockey or softball team. Throughout my two years of college at RIT, I met so many great deaf people and hearing people from being involved in the deaf community and hearing community. I played intramural hockey with deaf people and played softball with hearing people for the RIT team. By my sophomore year, the first women's hockey club was successfully established and I was one of the first to play on it. After a vast experience at RIT, it was tough leaving to go to Gallaudet University for a new chapter in my life with a new major and school. My first year at Gallaudet University was successful. I made the Gallaudet women's Division III softball team and practiced with the Gallaudet diving team for one semester. In March 2017, there were tryouts for the first Women's USA Deaf Hockey team in Minnesota and the team competed in Buffalo for the World Deaf Championship against Canada in April. I was so excited when I first heard the news and bought flight tickets to try out for the team. After the tryouts in Minnesota, I learned a few days later that I made the team and I competed in my hometown against Canada in April. We had tough losses to Canada but had the best experience with the deaf community and to represent USA.



My parents have been my biggest advocates, role models and my backbone. They are behind me one hundred percent. My dad is in his early sixties and is an honest, caring, funny, and devoted father with a beautiful wife and five children that love him dearly. When my father was in his late forties, he was experiencing kidney failure and was put on dialysis. After a few months on dialysis, a stranger not only saved my father's life but my family and myself. Since I was a little girl, my father also drove me to every softball and hockey practice, games and tournaments even if they were more than five hours

away. I played on hearing teams and my father was my interpreter for every game and practice. He made sure that I would not miss anything. At game times, he was not allowed on the benches with the coaches but he was always in the stands where I could see him. Throughout the game, I would always look over to him and he would sign advice and motivating words to me while playing the game. If I wasn't feeling confident enough before a game, he would enliven me and make me feel eager to play. He was my biggest fan, along with my mother. Without them I would not be as confident in myself today. On the night before my father's kidney transplant surgery, we met the stranger that offered such a lifesaving gift. Her name was Carolyn and she was very admirable. For our one-year anniversary of the kidney transplant, I met her daughter, Tiffany. Both Carolyn and her daughter Tiffany are part of the family now. Tiffany is the sister I never had. This changed my life.

All of my achievements have shaped me into the person I am today. I have faced many barriers and tireless amounts of challenging work. My cochlear implant has not played the biggest role in my life, but it has made a colossal change in my hearing ability. I am more confident around hearing people today. Before the surgery for my implant, I was not able to hear many things with my hearing aids. I was always reading lips, which is what I am strong at, but today I struggle a little bit if I try to read lips from a hearing person when I do not have my implant on. I can hear most words without looking at a person's lips and I am able to hear bug sounds, birds and many nature sounds. On my senior year of high school, after two years with my implant, my trigonometry teacher was writing an equation on the whiteboard and suddenly there was a squeaking sound. I had no idea where that sound was coming from, I looked around but other hearing students were sitting there acting like they heard nothing. I looked at my interpreter and asked her where the squeaking sound was coming from. She was confused at first then realized that it was coming from the marker writing on the whiteboard. I goggle-eyed my interpreter and asked, "So literally, everything has a sound?" as if I saw something disturbing. She laughed and nodded while I was sitting there staring at the marker and feeling bad for the hearing people who have to hear everything. Every year, I am shocked on how many things I can hear and I still am learning new sounds today.

Meeting Report

By Gail Cronin

On November 1 we held our Fall general meeting at Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center. There were 45 people in attendance. A short business meeting was held, during which elections took place. All the current officers were running unopposed and were re-elected unanimously. The newly created position of Corresponding Secretary was not filled because no one had yet volunteered to take the position. The upcoming UB mindfulness workshops were discussed. Raffle tickets were sold, for a Vera Bradley purse donated by Margie Fitchlee, to support our scholarship fund. The winning ticket was pulled at the end of the night and I was the lucky prize winner. Pizza and soft drinks were provided and desserts were contributed by our members.



An award of appreciation was presented to Joe Sonnenberg, V.P. of Administration and Development at Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center. Joe is a speech-language pathologist and has been a supporter of our organization for decades. He has giving the full resources of the Center in support of our mission. Joe was clearly surprised when his name was announced at the conclusion of the glowing description President Sue Wantuck read from the plaque with which he was presented. This award was well-deserved.

A panel discussion was then held, featuring four of our members and their spouses. CI user Jan Telban was accompanied by her husband Carl. CI user Ron Sippos was joined by his wife Pauline. Baha user Diane Mogavero brought along her husband Steve. Karen Ward was joined by her husband Mike. The panel discussion was moderated by speech-language pathologist Jessie Holst. Valerie Ward and Joanne Mayers provided sign language interpretation.

The panel discussion was one of the best meetings we've ever had. Not only did our members open up and share their experiences, but their spouses did as well. Their spouses, in particular, impressed us with their knowledge, compassion, and most of all, humor. All of the participants shared great advice.

One of the subjects that came up a lot during the panel discussion, and tends to be an issue for most people with hearing loss, is the difficulty in dining out. Carl Telban pointed out that whenever he makes a dinner reservation he always asks for a table in a quiet spot with a wall behind them so that his wife can sit with her back to the wall where the acoustics are better. His wife of 54 years, Jan, pointed out that a booth with a high back can work well too. Ron Sippos added that it is best to find restaurants that do not play music overhead. Karen and Mike Ward both recommended that you tell people that you are hard of hearing, and advocate for yourself.

The topics raised by the panelists motivated several people in the audience to share their experiences as well. Our member Ingrid mentioned that her cochlear implant is very helpful with reducing tinnitus. Our member Norma made the point that a CAP-TEL phone is of great benefit to people with hearing loss and she highly recommends them.

The response to this program was so overwhelmingly positive, that the Board has decided to put together another panel discussion for Spring, this time with our community's youth.



Reflections On: Hope Brings Us Together

By: Margie Fitchlee



What if someone out there had a magic formula to make our lives better? A formula to let us invite into our lives acceptance, calmness

and finally hope? The new year has arrived. Let us greet it with anticipation. Let us make it the best year it can be! Let us do exactly what David Wolfe proposes when he tells us to “accept what it is...let go of what it was...and have faith in what it will be.” Hold on, we might utter to ourselves. These words might be easier said than done.

We live in a world that is sometimes even hard to define. A world full of chaos, full of confusion and yes even sometimes full of doubt. How can we possibly put all of these things behind us? How can we rediscover the faith that we may have lost and allow ourselves to embrace this New Year as we have never embraced another? I have felt the chaos, I have felt the confusion, and yes I was overcome with doubt. What lies ahead for us and what circumstances will come along with it? We don't have a crystal ball, but we do have each other. I have heard it said that we weren't meant to walk this earth alone. Thank goodness for this wonderful organization called the “Buffalo Implant

Group.” It has become a family within my family. I don't know where I would be without the support, guidance, friendships and love that has come my way via this fantastic group. I have often professed that the Buffalo Implant Group cares. We care about all of you.

I don't have all the answers but something I saw posted at the Grammy's really hit home to me. Four profound words lit up on the screen, lit up for all of us to see: “HOPE BRINGS US TOGETHER.”

I can't speak for all of you, but hope is exactly what brought me to the door of the Buffalo Implant Group. I was feeling lower than low, frightened by my devastating hearing loss. I was feeling alone and had no idea that so many others out there were dealing with the same feelings I was. Ann Voscamp believes that “hope holds a breaking heart together.” I totally agree with her. The current members of The Buffalo Implant Group can attest to those words too. They provided me with the hope I needed to forge on. We see meeting after meeting the effects that possessing that hope has had on our members. We see the folks out there who are getting ready to receive cochlear implants overwhelmed with hope. They hear our stories and we rally around them, helping them accept what it is, move on, and have faith in what their lives will be like after that all important surgery.

The new year also brings with it more work to do. Work that keeps our implant group going. We are so happy to provide the

people in Western New York who are affected by profound hearing loss and deafness support, programs and activities. We depend on our fundraising efforts and work tirelessly to keep all that we offer available to you. Over the years we have been able to raise much needed dollars doing many wonderful events. We will continue on with our efforts. We can't do it alone. We are always willing to accept your help, support and donations. I will personally continue to support this group with my fundraising efforts. Nothing means more to me! In the future we will be announcing another great fundraiser to be held in the Fall. It is said that volunteers are love in motion. I have seen it firsthand and I look forward to feeling that love all throughout the 2018 year and beyond!

So yes, let's make the year 2018 the year that we accept what it is. Let go of what was and have faith in what will be. Look forward to the coming seasons and think about the words of Brittney Moses below. May they help you get through those days where doubt creeps in.

“You have to stop thinking you'll be stuck in your situation forever. We feel like our heart will never heal or we'll never get out of this impossible struggle. Don't confuse a season for a lifetime. Even your trials have an expiration date. You will grow, life will change; things will work out.”

Remember to look at HOPE this way: “H.O.P.E” hold on pain ends. And may many sunny days come your way!

Save the Date!

Our 2018 Summer Sunset Dinner and Picnic will be held at Westwood Park in Lancaster on Friday, July 27. Once again you will find us in Shelter #5 at 5:00 pm for dinner and our basket auction. Please mark your calendars!

Our New Corresponding Secretary



Mia Canale, Au.D, is grateful to serve on the B.I.G. Board as Corresponding Secretary. She is a practicing audiologist, having received her Doctor of Audiology degree from UB with a certification in Mindful Counseling for Wellness and Engagement. Mia enjoys learning from different cultures, including the Deaf culture. She minored in Deaf Studies from Ithaca College which influenced her path toward audiology, and practiced her working ASL skills at Rochester School for the Deaf through her UB Audiology clinical training. In addition, Mia has gained insight on Cochlear Implants from JoAnn Hammer and Michelle Dubé at BHSC, and is excited to learn more from the B.I.G. community and be of service. Mia is originally from

the Finger Lakes Region, and enjoys cooking, reading, community theatre, and practicing yoga. She is currently training to become a Hatha Yoga Teacher through the Himalayan Institute of Buffalo.

The Buffalo Implant Group Scholarship

The Buffalo Implant Group Scholarship is an annual award offered to any high school senior who uses hearing implants. This award has been created to assist recipients with expenses related to post-high school studies. The scholarship value is \$500. It will be available in the spring of 2018 to graduating high school seniors.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must use hearing implants (Cochlear Implant or Bone-anchored Hearing Aid)
- Must have a GPA of 80% or higher
- A copy of applicant's official high school transcript
- Must submit an essay on how the Cochlear Implant has impacted his/her life (Please attach to scholarship application.)
- Letter of recommendation from a non-family member
- A copy of the applicant's most recent audiogram

Application deadline is March 31, 2018

All materials should be sent to: B.I.G., PO Box 350, Clarence Center, NY 14032-0350

The scholarship recipient will be notified by mail on **May 1, 2018.**



BUFFALO IMPLANT GROUP

P.O. BOX 350 • CLARENCE CENTER, NEW YORK 14032-0350

Scholarship Application

Applicant Information

Full Name: _____ Date: _____
Last First M.I.

Address: _____
Street Address Apartment/Unit #

Address: _____
City State ZIP Code

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Cumulative GPA: _____ Type of Implant: _____

Extracurricular Activities:
 (Use space provided or attach a separate sheet.)

Post Education Goals:
 (Use space provided or attach a separate sheet.)

Education

High School: _____ Address: _____

From: _____ To: _____

2nd High School:
 (If necessary) _____ Address: _____

From: _____ To: _____

Quality Improvement through the 2017-2018 Buffalo Learning Community

By Jessica Holst



In the fall of 2017, the New York Hearing Detection and Intervention Program (NYEHDI) announced formation

of a yearlong Learning Community in the greater Buffalo region. Through a gap in performance data between NYS average and greater Buffalo performance in reported initial hearing screening, follow-up testing and referral to early intervention, it was determined that the Buffalo region would benefit from this type of engagement to improve both reporting and process. In addition to technical assistance for the newborn hearing screening reporting program, NYEDHI-IS, services across the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) system of care would be discussed and reviewed using an evidence-based, patient-centered approach for local quality improvement initiatives that encourage timely identification and referral of infants with hearing loss.

A kick-off event took place in October 2017 at St. Mary's School for the Deaf. NYEDHI leaders at both the state and local level gathered for a day of information sharing and candid discussion. Attendees reviewed current NYS public health law requirements as it relates to newborn hearing screening and follow-up, learned promising practice strategies from expert providers, were exposed to first hand experiences from local families in the system and discussed quality improvement strategies for use in their own practices. Local participants represented twelve birthing facilities, five area pediatric audiologists, three surrounding county early intervention officials, two specialized early intervention providers, family support services, and most importantly, parents of our area children with hearing loss. The Buffalo Implant Group was

represented by president Sue Wantuck who shared valuable information about what resources are available in our area, as well as how to best engage families of a newly diagnosed baby. It was an invigorating day, inspiring all to take a hard look at the services they provide, stepping back to identify how to make those services better and then planning improvement strategies to make those ideas a reality.

Following the October meeting, the Buffalo Learning Community has participated in monthly coaching calls where providers are afforded the opportunity to present their improvement initiatives, discuss what has gone well or what has been a challenge and then learn from the group strategies to effect positive change. This open discussion forum has resulted in several local protocol changes including the use of a fax back form that will include all key providers for the newly diagnosed baby, supporting improved documentation, as well as ensuring that key members of the family's medical team are all on the same page. All area pediatric audiologists are now also making direct referrals to early intervention for families of a child with a newly diagnosed hearing loss to promote timely services and close an existing gap.

The NYS EHDI program is also hosting a series of Virtual Learning Sessions targeted to identify areas of desired education or system-level process learning. The first session took place on January 25 and was titled "Ensuring Initial Hearing Screening & Tracking Infants Who Refer: A Virtual Learning Session with the NYEHDI Program & Top Performing Birthing Facilities."

Our Buffalo area birthing hospitals were afforded the opportunity to learn from top performing programs across the state. The top performing birthing facilities presented respective newborn hearing screening processes and subsequent follow-up measures. The five presenting hospitals all have consistent implementation of greater than 99.5%

initial hearing screening rates and strong follow-up for babies that are referred for an additional screening. They represented a diverse group in size, geographical location, and administrative make-up; each uniquely tailoring protocols to ensure consistent implementation and support of both the family and child. Our Buffalo area birthing facilities benefited greatly from this opportunity that highlighted promising practices and special consideration adjustments at the hospital level. This peer-to-peer learning proved to be extremely successful as many of our area birthing hospitals have already identified strategies they will put in place to improve local processes.

The work has only just begun as coaching calls will continue through June of 2018, culminating with another in-person meeting to discuss what we learned, what we accomplished, and what the next steps will be. The Buffalo region should be praised for their efforts and commitment demonstrated to families of children with hearing loss. Above all else, our region is developing a culture of collaboration that will surely extend well past the end date of this project.

The NYEHDI office should also be commended for their efforts in engaging individuals involved in EDHI in our region and across the state. Their collaborative spirit and empowering programming will continue to further the EHDI vision and improve screening, diagnostic and intervention rates across the state. Our state EHDI office is centered in ensuring that all infants receive a timely and accurate newborn hearing screening so that those with hearing loss can be identified and receive appropriate intervention, enabling each child reach his or her full potential.

If you would like to learn more about the NYEDHI program or become involved in regional efforts to support EHDI components at the local level, please contact Jessica Holst at holst.jessicam@gmail.com.

Mindfulness Training

By Meghan Kennedy and Carisa Citro

This past November, we had the opportunity to teach a mindfulness course to a number of members of the Buffalo Implant Group, their significant others/family members and audiologists from Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center. Mindfulness is the skill of being in the present moment with non-judging awareness. As students in the UB Audiology program, we helped to conduct a research project focused on using mindfulness to help those who suffer from bothersome tinnitus, or ringing in the ears. The positive outcomes of this study lead us to believe that mindfulness would be a useful skill for individuals with hearing loss to have at their disposal. We thoroughly enjoyed teaching mindfulness to members of B.I.G. and received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback. Group members reported feeling more able to cope with frustration, related to both their hearing loss and daily stressors, and stated they would be interested in more mindfulness classes or a newsletter.

Mindfulness based stress reduction is an eight week program which introduces you to mindfulness practice in the form of sitting meditation, body awareness and mindful movement. The seven attitudinal pillars of mindfulness are discussed throughout the eight weeks. For our course we conducted two sessions in which we introduce mindfulness philosophies, different activities to practice, and discuss the pillars of mindfulness. Throughout our sessions we talked about the seven pillars of mindfulness, which are non-judgement, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. These pillars help build a foundation for mindfulness practice and allow us to truly be present. Non-judgement is cultivated by paying attention to our moment-to-moment experiences while not getting caught up in our ideas, opinions, likes, or dislikes, and allows us to see things as they are. Patience can be developed towards our own minds and bodies as part of our mindfulness practice. A beginner's

mind is a clean slate, pure innocence where everything is fresh and new. Think about the innocence of a child or baby seeing something new for the first time with intensity and excitement. As adults we lose that power. An important foundation of mindfulness is learning to trust ourselves. We sometimes overlook our own gifts of knowing, believing that others know better. Striving for something that we don't have yet, whether it be a goal at work, a goal with hearing or a relationship goal, is a habit of the mind that we seem to do every day. The basis of acceptance is to realize that things are as they are and we must accept what we can't change. Lastly, letting go is the foundation that teaches us to notice how we may be clinging to thoughts, emotions, or body sensations with a very firm grip.

In addition to addressing the seven pillars of mindfulness over our two weeks course, we completed a number of guided meditations and activities. During our first week, we completed guided breathing, gratitude and loving-kindness meditations. Focusing on our breathing is a crucial part of mindfulness and mindfulness meditation, so this was an important place to begin. No matter what, in every situation, we can always return to our breathing. As it was around Thanksgiving, we each completed a gratitude exercise focusing on giving thanks to an important person in our life. We wrote letters thanking this individual, which could be given to that person or kept to oneself, to help remind ourselves what the Thanksgiving holiday is all about. In the second week, we focused on meditations that coincided with the second half of the pillars. We completed a body-scan meditation, chair yoga and the "leaves on a stream" meditation. Chair yoga was a nice exercise to help remember that we can all be active and in touch with our bodies,



regardless of exercise level or environment. Meanwhile, a body-scan helps us maintain relaxation and mindfulness by pulling our attention to each part of our body individually, which can be centering for a busy mind. The final activity we completed in our course was a 30 minute period of time set aside to complete any activity each participant likes to do but does not always have time for. In these thirty minutes, group members colored, worked on Christmas crafts, read books and magazines, and completed crossword puzzles. This helped us to remember to take time for the things in life that bring us enjoyment, especially when we feel our lives are the most hectic. This can give us a break from the daily hustle and bustle and provide an outlet to avoid burnout.

As students and future audiologists, we were fortunate to have this amazing opportunity and found that mindfulness was a successful coping skill for the people in the group. We thank B.I.G. and our group members for allowing us this opportunity and helping us grow as audiologists and individuals.

Learning Mindfulness

By Karen Ward



UB Audiology students Meghan Kennedy and Carissa Citro presented an overview of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Self-Care to

Buffalo Implant Group members and their families. Those in attendance were taught about the seven pillars of mindfulness and listened to fable-like stories as well as real life examples that illustrated these concepts. We were given an introduction to meditation and even participated in chair yoga.

Practicing mindfulness means focusing your thoughts completely on what is happening in the present moment. It requires being non-judgmental and patient, so that you can experience what is actually occurring, not what you expect will happen, what you think should happen, or even what you want to happen. While these seem like simple suggestions, mindfulness is a skill that will require practice. Too often our thoughts and opinions prevent us from seeing things

as they truly are.

When I learned of the opportunity to attend these sessions, I was intrigued by the concept of mindfulness, but what really caught my attention was that it could be used to reduce the stress we all feel in our daily lives. Even a short 3-5 minute meditation that aims to have you concentrate on your breathing can have a very calming effect and leave you feeling refreshed. Breathing is something we normally do without thinking about it at all, so at first it may seem strange or even silly to think about breathing. However, if you are aware of each breath and are paying attention to how you feel as you inhale and exhale, it is very relaxing. All of the thoughts that were racing through your head are displaced even if only for those few minutes. It may be just what you need before you get yourself going and tackle what's ahead of you. I have also found this to be very helpful prior to going to sleep at night.

One activity we did was to practice mindfulness while we ate a piece of chocolate. We were told to think about what it smelled like, to place it on our tongue, to feel it starting to melt, and to taste the sweetness,

all before biting into it. We then chewed it slowly while noticing the creamy texture and finally swallowing the candy. Chocolate happens to be one of my favorite guilty pleasures and I am sure I could have easily eaten quite a few pieces in the time it took for this exercise, but it would have been mindless consumption while I was thinking about other things. I know I would not have enjoyed it as much and all it took was to slow down and pay attention to what I was eating.

Everyday, we all undoubtedly have to communicate with many different people. Often we are thinking about many different things instead of just being present in the moment and truly listening to what is being said. I have tried to be mindful while conversing with others, sometimes more consciously than others. I have found that my mind slows down and I feel calmer and relaxed. Despite the challenge of being hard of hearing, I believe it has led to better communication. My only focus is on what it being said, not what my next comment or question will be. I have tried to eliminate the voice in my head that is worried about not hearing everything the first time or questioning what I heard. My mind feels less

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The Affirmative Project: "Between People"

By Gloria M. Matthews

We all have a backstory. Some of us may have had a traumatic past. Some of us may have had struggled with self-love and acceptance. Some of us may have had to grow up faster than our peers. Some of us may have had to overcome many obstacles to get to where we are today, and still overcoming. All this combined and more, is what The Affirmative Project's performance "Between People" explored and conquered in its humanistic manner.

Back in August of 2017, I was knee deep in a lot of things. The biggest one being my health. I had just made the decision to have a total hysterectomy to help alleviate the lower abdominal pain and swelling. It was draining me, and the fibroids I had were growing and showed no signs of shrinking on their own. As I walked into work one morning at Deaf Access Services (DAS), just not as energetic as I would like to be, I saw Petra, my supervisor, she excitedly waved me over to her, to say, "There's our artist!" I looked at her, like, "Okay, what are you up to now?" and I said, "What's up?" She went into Pam's office, our boss, to grab a young lady to introduce us and explained that she was working on her master's thesis at UB and looking for artists. Her name is



Galia Binder, the Director and Founder of The Affirmative Project.

Galia and I spoke briefly in the conference room at DAS about art and her

plans for the project. We exchanged contact information to keep in touch about the project. I honestly had no idea what role I was going to play in this project, but my gut said, "Go for it!" And I did.

As one of over 40 creators involved in this project/performance, it was a much-needed outlet not just for myself but for all who were involved. Each of us had a story to tell, OUR STORIES. As a collective group, the unsuspecting audience traveled through five different settings hearing, experiencing and seeing these very personal real-life experiences of each of us coming out in a creative form. We touched on homelessness, mental health, disabilities, race, denied opportunities, bullying, sexual assault, domestic violence, single motherhood/parenthood, healing and overcoming.

The five settings were Gamelan Club Players (Mediation), City-scape (Chaos), the Forest (Darkness - where my performance was), the Desert (with an aerial performance - Contemplation) and finally the Afterlife (Letting go). At the end, Galia closed the program with a poem written by one of our creators and it was very fitting for closing out the show's themes. "WE ARE ALIVE!"

I am proud to say, we sold out all four shows! It was held on October 27, 28, and 29, 2017. Two shows were performed on the October 28. It was held at Jim Bush's Photography, located on the West Side at 44th 17th Street, in Buffalo. To learn more about this project you can go to <https://www.affirmativeproject.org/>. To view the video of the project performance you can go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UI0N-r61maw>.

I want to congratulate Galia Binder as she graduates this February 2018 with her Master of Fine Arts degree from UB. She is looking to turn this project into her own company and I have no doubt in mind she will. I will look forward to being a part of it!

The Affirmative Project is a Community-Based Social Practice Art Initiative based in Buffalo, NY.

Learning Mindfulness *cont. from page 9*

cluttered because my full concentration is on this one topic. I will definitely try to practice this more often.

The other topic we discussed was self-care. We all know we have to take care of ourselves but too often we put ourselves at the bottom of the list. Hopefully we are seeing our doctors regularly and following a healthy lifestyle, but what about our happiness? At the first of the two sessions, we were given a list of self-care activities. These were simple things like play solitaire,

paint your nails, or call a friend you have not spoken to in a while. The goal was to try to do one activity that you enjoyed everyday. During our second session, thirty minutes was set aside do something we enjoyed. I brought a book to read. Others did a crossword puzzle, or colored a mosaic design with colored pencils. It was a quiet, peaceful time to just enjoy what you were doing. We should all place enough significance on our own happiness to set aside time to do things we enjoy so we can be the best

version of ourselves to handle all the other things in our lives.

I thoroughly enjoyed the presentations as well as all of the activities we participated in. On behalf of all who attended, I would like to thank Meghan and Carissa for sharing their knowledge and personal experiences with our group. It was especially helpful that all of the Power Point presentations were provided as handouts, the videos were captioned and sign language interpretation was provided.

Many Thanks

Many Thanks

Tracy Balon

Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center

Patti Burns

Melissa Burroughs

Mia Canale

Craig and Jackie Carpenter

Carissa Citro

Joe Cronin

Kathy Danahy

Deaf Access Services

Paula DeJac

Frank Duchini

Ingrid Ennis

Sr. Dorothy Feltz

Margie Fitchlee

Kathleen Fix

Jeff Foley

JoAnn Hammer

Lisa Hill Nowicki

Jessica Holst

Donna Johnson

Don Keller

Meghan Kennedy

Kaitlyn Koester

Joe Kolis

Will Licata

Gloria Matthews

Joanne Mayers

Dianne Mogavero

Steve Mogavero

Jane Ploetz

Jean Ras

St. Aloysius Gonzaga R. C. Church

St. Mary's School for the Deaf

Paul Savinsky

Pauline Sippos

Ron Sippos

Joe Sonnenberg

Sandra Swaciak

Carl Telban

Jan Telban

Sue Wantuck

Karen Ward

Mike Ward

Valerie Ward

Carol Wesley

Zenger Group

Sr. Jean Marie Zirnheld

**Note: Several of our most recent donors and contributors were not thanked on this list, but will be thanked in the Spring issue.*

Who Is On the "Many Thanks" List?

By Gail Cronin

I've received several recent emails inquiring about the "Many Thanks" list that appears in each issue, and exactly what people are being thanked for.

The "Many Thanks" list has been a regular feature of The B.I.G. News for decades and was started by founder and first editor, Craig Carpenter. It began as a list of donors in each quarter of the year, and grew to include all people who contributed to our organization as volunteers as well. Two years ago I made the decision to add to the list the names of everyone who had recently renewed their dues.

The list is compiled by me, based on information from Board meetings and also from a list of donors and subscribers submitted to me by our treasurer, Lisa Hill Nowicki. The two of us do our best to keep one another up-to-date. However, it sometimes does happen that we go to press before I can get an updated list from her. That certainly happened this month, as we were not able to include the most recent batch of checks in this list. When that happens, we include the missing names in the next issue.

When it comes to volunteers, I am only able to include the ones I know about. I try to include everyone who has given time to the organization in the last quarter, including Board members, committee members, writers, guest speakers, bakers, etc. However, it often happens that I miss someone. If you are aware of someone who isn't being recognized, please send me an email at gdcronin@roadrunner.com so that I may include them in our "Many Thanks" column in the subsequent issue.



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Without your support, there can be no B.I.G. News. It is our belief that the B.I.G. News is of great value to our readers and to those who would like to learn more about us. We strive to provide you with current, useful information, inspiring stories and valuable resources for cochlear implant users and the people who care for them. Please show us your support by joining B.I.G. now!

Our Next Meeting: Panel Discussion

Cochlear Implants and Youth

The Buffalo Implant Group is pleased to welcome a panel of young people in high school and college who are willing to share their experiences with hearing loss and cochlear implants.

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

6:00 -8:00 PM

St. Mary's School for the Deaf

2253 Main St. - Buffalo

The meeting will be held in the St. Mary's School Assembly Hall.

Free parking is available in the lot behind the building. Enter from Main St. in the driveway marked "Main Entrance." Sign language interpretation will be provided. A brief business meeting will be held at the beginning of the evening, followed by our panel discussion. The treasurer will be collecting dues payments for 2018.

Our newly redesigned t-shirts will be available for purchase. Please support this fundraiser.

Pizza, pop, and water will be provided. Contributions to our dessert table are welcome.

Social time will follow. Friends and family are always invited to join us.



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Awards our Newsletter has Received:

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Service to the Hearing Impaired by Kenmore Lions Club

Judy Weiner Award for Service to the Hearing Impaired by Western New York Academy of Audiology