

Helping Kids Who Are Waiting to Hear

Respiratory therapists are known for helping people breathe. They're also known for helping their colleagues when they need it, and in Tennessee that's meant helping children to hear as well.

It all started when two RTs from Fall Branch learned that their two-year-old daughter Sarah had lost her hearing. "A few months after being diagnosed, Sarah received two cochlear implants and began a journey back to the hearing world," says her father, Shannon Ball, RRT-NPS, RPFT, AE-C. But he and his wife Sherry, also an RRT, quickly learned that Sarah was an exception to the rule. In reality, fewer than 5% of children with hearing loss receive a cochlear implant to help them hear again. Most of their parents are never even told it is an option, says Ball.

The Balls decided to found an organization to raise awareness of the issue in their area of the country, and Waiting to Hear was born. Their fellow RTs quickly rallied to the cause. The board of directors includes three therapists, including AARC member Sherry Bailey, RRT, and Shannon Ball counts members Missy Webb, RRT, Tammy Willis, RRT, Greg Cornett, MA, RRT, Vanessa King RRT, Kayla Bates RRT, Justin Bishop RRT, and Heather Long RRT, among his most active volunteers. All told, more than 40 RTs and RNs turned out at a recent fundraising event for the organization.

"The live events have really given the area RTs and RNs a chance to get to know each other's non-medical talents and brought us all closer as a community," says

Shannon. "In many ways, they have acted as de facto team building exercises that have inadvertently improved working relationships — and should anyone ever stop breathing at an event, we have that well covered!"

Since its inception in 2014, Waiting to Hear has sponsored cochlear implant awareness programs throughout the area, a language enrichment summer camp for deaf and hard of hearing children that is offered at no cost to the families, and regular outings where deaf and hard of hearing children and their families can meet each other and share their experiences. Even bigger things are in the works for this year: hosting a cochlear implant conference for medical professionals, establishing a hearing aid loaner bank for children awaiting implant surgery, and publishing a free guidebook and reference materials for newly diagnosed families.

Having RT colleagues like Sherry Bailey, Missy Webb, Tammy Willis, Greg Cornett, Vanessa King, Kayla Bates, Justin Bishop, Heather Long, and many others help out with fundraising has made it all possible. "These guys are just amazing. We've had volunteers that have done everything from opening for an Elvis tribute artist, to wearing an Olaf costume, to wading a freezing river in the middle of October for our Bionic Duck Derby," says Ball.

You can learn more about the organization online at www.waitingtohear.org and on social media. ■



Shannon and Sherry Ball are working hard to ensure more children like their daughter Sarah have the chance to receive cochlear implants.



Greg Cornett put together a great band for one of the organization's Music to Our Ears concerts.



Elvis gathers with some of the Waiting to Hear volunteers at the Hearing from the King concert.



The Hear Me Roar fundraiser took place at a local zoo.



Kayla Bates had fun playing 'Anna' from the movie 'Frozen' at a recent event.