

HLAA Accomplishes Its Work through Chapters



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In November 1979 when our organization was founded by Rocky Stone as Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, “self-help” was gaining popularity and credibility in the 1980s as a way to cope with life’s challenges. Rocky founded the organization because as a newly-retired person from the Central Intelligence Agency, and having a hearing loss himself, he found no resources for people who lost some or all of their hearing later in life.

Rocky realized that if he could organize credible information and disseminate it through a national organization and put self-help into practice through a national chapter network, people could get information they needed to help themselves. He then quickly realized that work also needed to be done at the national level to change and write public policy so people in the United States would have laws for communication access and to prevent discrimination.

For 36 years, our organization now known as the Hearing Loss Association of America has continued to provide all the information we can about hearing loss, communication techniques, coping skills, laws, and emerging technology letting people choose what works for them. That is the basis for self-help—learning what is available and making individual choices. Although our name has changed to represent the national scope of the work and the reputation HLAA has built over the years, the self-help philosophy has not changed. We are people who need to educate ourselves about anything we can do to help us live successfully with hearing

loss. Then, in turn, we reach out to help others.

This concept and peer support is best played out through HLAA Chapters and State Organizations. This is why chapters and state organizations are vital to the success of the whole organization we call the Hearing Loss Association of America. That is a message that I have seen resonate with new members and longtime members. We are doing different activities, but together at the local, state and national levels, ***we are changing people’s lives.***

I am always inspired and proud of the work being done by our chapters and state organizations. The articulate and knowledgeable leaders who provide invaluable support and information to the public and to their members never cease to amaze me. When people say to me, “HLAA saved my life,” or “HLAA gave me back my life,” it is often followed by a story of how attending a chapter meeting allowed them to truly feel part of a community that gave them invaluable advice and guidance on dealing with their hearing loss, or helped them ask for appropriate accommodations at work. Often it is a story of how becoming involved in an HLAA Chapter is giving them new meaning to their life.

That is not to say we don’t have challenges. We do, but as a national organization working together there is incredible work being done. I have often said that advocacy work being done by HLAA at the national and state levels is useless if we aren’t communicating that work to individuals at the local levels. The