

By Ann Rancourt

# Brews, Friends, and Triumph: HLAA Young Professionals

**T**he HLAA Young Professionals group in Washington, D.C. was established in January 2017. The goal was to hold a fun get-together every month for young professionals, allowing them to socialize with others and to help further the mission of HLAA by bringing in young adults. Most of our gatherings involve meeting up for happy hour at well-known bars and restaurants in popular D.C. neighborhoods such as Dupont Circle or Chinatown. We try to create an intimate environment in a convenient and safe place for young adults with hearing loss to feel comfortable sharing their challenging moments and celebrating their triumphant ones.

The inspiration for the HLAA Young Professionals came from networking and meeting a few young working

adults with hearing loss through my outreach efforts for the Washington D.C. Walk4Hearing. I was frequently being asked why we don't have any groups or activities specifically for young professionals with hearing loss in the D.C. area. I knew we needed to do something, but it would take a little initiative and planning to get it started.

## Teamwork

I needed to find someone to help plan these monthly events. Rachel Stevens, the director of operations for a local non-profit and social events coordinator for the HLAA D.C. Chapter, jumped into action. She saw the potential, she wanted to meet others her age with hearing loss, and she knew there was interest for a group like this. Rachel and I then rolled up our sleeves and began to plan for the first

*Below (l to r): Ann Rancourt, Rachel Stevens, Sarah Gumpert and Deborah Shaffer enjoying the outdoors at the Truckeroo Food Truck Festival*



*The HLAA Young Professionals group gathering at Bar Deco in July. (l to r, front) Ann Rancourt, HLAA Board of Trustees Member Patrick Holkin, and Ryan Seeley; (l to r, back) Andrew Jefferies, Erik Nordlof, and Mary Corley*



happy hour, which had a great turnout. Fast forward nine months, the group is up and running, and Rachel remains active to help plan each event and new faces keep popping in.

Since then, I am astonished by the different stories I hear of how these young professionals grew up with hearing loss. I learn about their triumphs and struggles—and their persistence to overcome their challenges living with hearing loss. No two stories are the same, and that makes these gatherings more special. We work together to help each other overcome common barriers we face every day.

I asked two regular attendees to provide their insights and describe how the HLAA Young Professionals group has benefited them. Mary Corley, who works as a graphic designer for political online fundraising said, “My life is enriched from the diverse group of professionals in health care, IT, politics, advocacy, and government who just happen to have hearing loss. I’ve benefited from the instant connection that comes from similar life experiences we all have and I have since made some quick friends. It is always a relaxing environment because you know that everyone is understanding and patient with one another. The group offers both support and a soundboard for processing difficult listening situations in the workplace, and allows us to hear about other peoples’ solutions for communicating.”

Erik Nordlof, a managing consultant at IBM Global Business Solutions, looks forward to the monthly gatherings. “I benefit from shared experiences. Socializing with

my peers is a great way to relate and compare our experiences, and potentially learn from each other. It’s also nice to communicate with others who ‘get it’ when it can sometimes be a chore to teach hearing people how to communicate with us.” Erik and Mary have experienced firsthand the personal and professional rewards of being part of the Young Professionals group.

### Join Us!

If you are a young professional living or working in the D.C. area come join us at our next event. Visit our Facebook page at [facebook.com/hlaayoungprofessionals](https://facebook.com/hlaayoungprofessionals) to get in on the action!

Not living nearby but want to form a young adults or young professionals group in your area? Please reach out to us on Facebook! We’d love to help you get started. As Erik says, “I look forward to HLAA Young Professionals every month because the good feeling of being a part of a larger community lasts for days afterward and the friendships last long after the event ends.” We want you to have a similar experience. **HLM**

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## 2017 Fall Walk4Hearing Dates and Locations

The HLAA Walk4Hearing is taking place in 13 cities this fall. The Walks bring communities together to raise funds for both local and national programs and services to raise awareness for hearing loss and end the stigma associated with it. Join us to continue the tradition and make this year a smashing success!



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|--------------|------------------------------------------|
| September 24 | Chicago, Illinois                        |
| September 24 | New York, New York                       |
| September 30 | St. Louis, Missouri                      |
| October 8    | Buffalo, New York <i>NEW LOCATION</i>    |
| October 15   | Cary, North Carolina                     |
| October 15   | West Windsor, New Jersey                 |
| October 15   | San Diego, California                    |
| October 21   | Houston, Texas                           |
| October 21   | Washington, D.C.                         |
| October 22   | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania               |
| October 29   | Brighton, Massachusetts                  |
| November 4   | Louisville, Kentucky <i>NEW LOCATION</i> |
| November 11  | Mesa, Arizona                            |

Visit [walk4hearing.org](http://walk4hearing.org) for more information.

