

# Teen's School Project Helps Local HLAA Chapter

BY JERRY LAPIDAKIS

What can a daughter do to support her mother with longtime hearing loss, satisfy a high school class requirement, and raise awareness of hearing loss in children—all at once? Emma Schaefer found a way.

Emma, daughter of HLAA Member Leona Schaefer, is a sophomore at Wisconsin Heights High School in Mazomanie, Wisconsin. For her humanities English class, she needed to choose a research topic and devise an action plan to implement it. She wanted to do something that made a difference. The topic she chose, and the only one she considered seriously, was youth hearing loss.

Emma completed her school assignment by writing a paper on the effects of hearing loss in children. But now she needed the action portion. After considering several ideas, she realized that her topic was close to home. She'd focus on her mother's hearing loss story, research hearing loss in children, and come up with a plan to raise awareness of the topic.

## Her Mother's Story

Emma's mother, Leona, was diagnosed with severe hearing loss in both ears when she was 3 years old. She was fitted with bilateral, behind-the-ear hearing aids and participated in speech therapy as a young child. She received no other services throughout grade school or high school. She met some deaf students and learned about sign language in high school. She continued to do well using hearing aids and speechreading in high school and college.

Over the years, Leona's hearing loss gradually worsened, and her family struggled to communicate with her. When Leona's children were 6 and 8 years old, her husband encouraged her to explore cochlear implantation. She now has bilateral cochlear implants that have greatly improved her life.



Emma Schaefer (left) with her mother, Leona Schaefer, who's a member of the HLAA Madison Chapter.

## From Term Paper to Action

Emma wanted an action project that would both complement her school project and honor her mother. She thought designing and selling a T-shirt that brought attention to hearing loss was a way to do both. Emma decided on the theme "Listen Up" for her T-shirt sale.

"In past years, students have sold various items to raise money for an organization," Emma said. "I thought it'd be a great way not only to raise money, but also to spread even more awareness—by people walking around with my cause on their T-shirt." The sale of 59 T-shirts raised \$249, which Emma donated to the HLAA Madison Chapter.

## Project Within the Project

But Emma didn't stop there. Emma—along with two friends also in the humanities English class—decided to hold a bake sale to raise additional funds for their three independent projects.

"We thought it'd be a great way to raise some extra money for our organizations because the three of us all love baking," Emma said. "We sold homemade donuts, brownies, cookies and cupcakes before and after school for three days. We ended up making it a lot more of a project than we'd planned. After the first night, we all went home and made extra batches because we sold out of what we'd originally brought.



Emma Schaefer with Jack Spear showing off T-shirts.

“Emma’s donation was a complete surprise. As a chapter, we struggle with our own fundraising. Emma went out and showed us how it’s done. But she also showed acceptance, understanding, honor and love for her mother, who demonstrates that having a hearing loss doesn’t prevent living life fully.”

—HLAA Madison Chapter President Jack Spear

In the end, we raised \$162 from the food items, which we thought was pretty good for our small school.”

Emma donated her \$54 share of the project to the HLAA Madison Chapter. All in all, Emma learned about youth hearing loss, donated a total of \$303 to the HLAA Madison Chapter, and best of all, honored her mother. **HL**



*Jerry Lapidakis is a member of the HLAA Madison Chapter and serves on its board. He also is immediate past president of the HLAA Wisconsin State Association and is an active member of the state board. He’s retired from the Wisconsin*

*Department of Natural Resources, where he was a forester for 35 years. Jerry’s hearing loss has been progressive over the past 19 years. He recently received a cochlear implant on his right side and continues to wear a hearing aid on the left. He credits the education and support received from HLAA and its members for opening the world of better hearing to him.*

# Listen Up!

BY EMMA SCHAEFER

Hearing loss is a much more common condition than we let on. In fact, it’s the third most common physical condition in the U.S., behind arthritis and heart disease. With this shocking statistic, the importance of maintaining good auditory health is clear, especially in youth.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 14.9% of America’s youth, ages 6-19, have some degree of hearing loss, which translates to more than seven million children. Early detection is important when it comes to youth hearing loss, as it can affect a child’s social interactions and quality of life.

Signs of potential hearing loss in children include delayed speech or language, asking for repeated instructions, turning up the volume on the TV, and repeatedly asking, “Huh?” or “What?” If you notice any of these signs in your child, have your child’s hearing screened.

*Nursing2019* recommends getting your child’s hearing screened regularly. Not all schools perform basic screenings though. Janice Sampson, DNP, R.N., CNE, says that children should have their hearing checked at 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 years of age. Sampson recommends that if a screening is failed, to have a full evaluation by an audiologist. Also keep in mind that babies should have their hearing checked at 1 month and then have a full evaluation at 3 months. Stay safe and get your child’s hearing checked! **HL**