

## Unexpected Joys when Life Doesn't Follow a Plan



Cameron (left) and Noah (right) have both benefited from attending Toddler Communication Group at CDHH, even though only Noah was born with a hearing loss.

Noah and Cameron are twin brothers. Two sweet, adventurous little boys who love to play, and who act pretty much exactly how you'd imagine any 2½ year olds would. What one does, the other has to try too, and while they may not always get along, they are definitely best buddies, looking out for each other and enjoying that special bond that only twins can share. What's surprising though in watching them play is not how well they get along, but that one of the twins, Noah, was born profoundly deaf.

As if the surprise of having twins wasn't enough for Melanie and Nick Ribich, they were overwhelmed when they found out shortly after their birth that Noah had "bilateral profound sensorineural hearing loss." As you might imagine, this diagnosis was hard to fully understand

for parents with no history of hearing loss in their families. "It sounds crazy to say now, but at the time we didn't know that meant that Noah was deaf," says Melanie. After all, there were no warning signs, risk factors or anything else that could have prepared them for this, and their first child, daughter Mia, had perfect hearing, so they naturally assumed this would be the case with the boys as well.

But soon the realities set in and random worries took over. Would the family need to learn sign language to communicate? Would Noah ever be able to listen to an iPod? Would he be able to 'fit in' with other kids his age? "At times the concerns were all-consuming, and they weren't always rational," says Melanie. But eventually, when the shock wore off,

Melanie and Nick realized that worrying wasn't going to change anything. What they really needed to do was to figure out what steps to take next to help Noah reach his fullest potential.

Figuring out those next steps became a lot easier once the Ribich's were referred to the Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by their Birth-to-Three coordinator. According to Melanie, "after that first home visit, we knew that CDHH was the perfect fit for our family." There was a lot to learn about hearing loss and all of their choices, but now they had the support they needed to make those crucial decisions. *(continued on pg. 5)*

### DID YOU KNOW...

- The concept of Deaf Culture was first introduced in 1965 in the Dictionary of American Sign Language by William Stokoe, Carl Croneberg, and Dorothy Casterline.
- Hearing damage is the number one disability faced by veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- According to research being done at UC Davis Health System, deafness caused by the death of hair cells—typically due to aging or excessive exposure to loud noise—may eventually be reversible using stem cells from another part of the brain.

# CDHH Receives International Visitor



The Center was recently honored by a visit from a very special guest, Duong Phuog Hanh, President of the Hochiminh City Deaf Association (HDA) in Vietnam, and Coordinator for the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA) Asia Pacific Region. Hahn stopped by for a tour of the Center while visiting the US to attend ALDAcon 2009 in Seattle. She was in Milwaukee to visit her sister and wanted to be sure to include a trip to CDHH on her itinerary while here.

Hahn knows firsthand the challenges faced by those who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing because she developed a profound hearing loss herself as a child. Although she does not wear hearing aids, she is able to speak and speechread in both Vietnamese and English, and she knows Vietnamese Sign Language and some American Sign Language. Her commitment to learning about new technology and new ways to help others with hearing loss is extraordinary.

It was fascinating to learn from Hahn how different life is for people with hearing loss in Vietnam. Although it is actually a very common condition in Vietnam, the technology available to the Deaf and hard of hearing is very minimal. Most people do not even have basic telephone access, since telephone and video relay services do not exist there. Also, visual and tactile alerting systems, commonly used here in the US by people with hearing loss, are not readily available. This lack of technology, and of specialized services for the Deaf and hard of hearing, makes the work that Hahn and her colleagues do even more important. Providing sign language classes, speechreading training, support groups and advocacy, Hahn works tirelessly to help others with hearing loss so they too can become more independent and self-sufficient.

The highlight of Hahn's visit to CDHH was the tour of UniversaLink, as she was able to get hands-on experience with many of the different technology options for people here in the US such as CapTel phones, FM Systems and vibrating alarm clocks. As a token of our appreciation for her visit, CDHH donated a personal assistive listening device and earphones to the Hochiminh City Deaf Association-HDA, which Hahn says will be used by members who need assistance hearing in a classroom or workshop. Below is a letter from Hahn received shortly after her visit.

Dear CDHH,

I really appreciate your time and concerns to help and share information with me this morning. Being a social worker working with deaf, hard of hearing and late-deafened persons in Vietnam, I always want to enrich my knowledge of services and advanced assistive devices so that I can do my tasks well. I am still impressed what I learned from you and feel touched by your gift. You do not help only me but the Vietnamese Deaf Community who I support.

I would like to say my thanks from the bottom of my heart to you.

Sincerely yours,

Duong Phuog Hanh

## Holiday Wish List

From time to time, some special items are needed to help the Center do its work. If you are able to help by donating any of the items below, the Center would be extremely grateful.

- Digital camera – 8 megapixels or higher
- Children's books in Spanish
- Digital camcorder
- CD player or MP3 player with high quality speakers
- Gift cards for stores such as Target, Wal-Mart, OfficeMax or Pick 'n Save for purchasing supplies
- 9 or 18 gallon storage containers
- Wooden puzzles for small children
- Sanitizing wipes
- Colored copier paper



## Did you know?



### Many Choices, One Goal: Communication

CDHH is one of only a few centers of its kind in the country that provides a full spectrum of communication options and therapies to children with hearing loss including Auditory-Oral, Total Communication and Auditory-Verbal therapy. And, in addition to working with children with hearing loss, CDHH also provides services to hearing children whose parents are Deaf and who may need additional help developing their spoken language and signing abilities.

### CommunicationLink is There to Help 24/7

CommunicationLink, the Center’s interpreter coordination service, provides interpreting services to Deaf adults throughout Wisconsin, and its staff includes certified specialists in legal and mental health interpreting. As the only agency in Wisconsin that is on-call 24/7, CommunicationLink is dedicated to helping facilitate communication between Deaf and hearing individuals wherever their services are needed. From job interviews to weddings, medical appointments to keynote speakers, CommunicationLink’s team of qualified interpreters help to eliminate communication barriers and ensure equal access to the Deaf Community

### Kemp Clinic of Chiropractic Selects CDHH as 2009 Charity

CDHH was honored to be chosen by Kemp Clinic of Chiropractic in Milwaukee as its 2009 charity. What does this mean? Until the end of the year, when individuals visit their office and make a \$25 donation to the Center, they will receive a free chiropractic exam and consultation valued at \$100. According to Jill Lindsay, Kemp Clinic’s Marketing Coordinator, their practice selected the Center as its adopted charity because, “we wanted to support a local organization that is truly making a difference in the lives of children as well as adults in our community, and where we knew that the donations would be used to provide direct services to those in need.” In fact, Lindsay is very familiar with the impact that hearing loss can have on individuals, and how important agencies like CDHH are, since her mother had visited the Center for help when she began experiencing severe hearing loss in her later years. Thank you to Dr. Kemp and his staff for selecting CDHH, and to all those that have donated this year, thank you for your support!

### CDHH Hosts NASCH Fall Conference

CDHH was pleased to host the National Association of Speech and Hearing Centers (NASHC) fall conference in September. The NASHC is a consortium of freestanding, not-for-profit community speech and hearing centers, located throughout the United States, of which CDHH is a member. This two-day conference was held at the Astor Hotel in Milwaukee and featured in-depth presentations on social media, emergency preparedness, Board development and much more. This bi-annual conference is a way for hearing and speech centers like CDHH to network with other organizations with similar missions and to share best practices and new ideas. Attendees came from as far away as Seattle and were impressed with all that Milwaukee has to offer!

### UniversaLink is a Leader in Providing Assistive Technology

Did you know that each year, UniversaLink serves more than 3,000 people to help them find the right assistive devices to meet their hearing and communication needs? In addition to providing consultations and training within the showroom, UniversaLink also provides in-home assessments and installation assistance, as well as worksite assessments for individuals who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. As the number of people with hearing loss continues to grow, UniversaLink works hard to stay on top of the latest technology and to provide the personalized service and unmatched expertise for which it is known, so people of all ages with hearing loss can live more active, independent lives.

### More Need than Ever for CDHH Services

In the past two years, the Kellogg Child and Family Program at CDHH has seen an increase of nearly 60% in the number of families served. Also, the number of Spanish speaking families served at CDHH has risen dramatically, prompting CDHH to hire a bilingual Speech-Language Pathologist in 2009 and to utilize translators to ensure that these families have equal access to the parent education and support that CDHH provides. Unfortunately, county funding to help support Birth-to-Three services has not increased at all, creating an even greater reliance by the Center on individual donations and fundraising events to fill in the budget gap.

**Here’s how to reach us . . .** 10243 W. National Avenue, West Allis, WI 53227 (between US45/1894 and Highway 100)

#### Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Voice • 414-604-2200  
TTY • 888-742-7651  
Fax • 414-604-7200  
Online • [www.cdhh.org](http://www.cdhh.org)

#### CommunicationLink

Voice • 414-604-7231  
Toll Free • 800-542-9838  
TTY • 888-758-6043  
Fax • 414-604-7200  
Online • [www.cdhh.org](http://www.cdhh.org)

#### UniversaLink

Voice • 414-541-LINK (5465)  
Toll Free • 800-755-7994  
TTY • 888-742-7654  
VP • 866-954-9435  
Online • [www.cdhh.org](http://www.cdhh.org)

## Thanks to our donors who help make it possible to continue the work of the Center.

We gratefully acknowledge contributions recorded between September 9, 2009 and November 20, 2009. Every effort has been made to ensure that all donors are listed. If there are inadvertent errors or omissions, please call 414-604-2200.

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At nearly 3 years old, Noah Ribich is a happy, adventurous little boy, who just happens to use cochlear implants to hear.

*(continued from pg. 1)* After weighing all of the communication options, and considering their family's unique situation, the Ribich's ultimately decided that they really wanted Noah to develop spoken language, so he could "walk into our local public school when he is five with his hearing twin brother, and have the skills to learn what every other child in his class is learning." With this goal in mind, Noah was fitted with hearing aids at four months old, and began receiving home visits for Auditory-Verbal Therapy from Amy Peters Laliotis of CDHH. As part of these weekly sessions, Noah's parents received guidance on how they could integrate listening activities into everyday situations to help Noah further develop his auditory and speech skills, which they found "very empowering."

Unfortunately, hearing aids provided little benefit, since Noah still wasn't able to access speech sounds. Because of this, his parents made the difficult choice to have him receive bilateral cochlear implants. Says Melanie, "The surgeries were scary, but we decided that the risks involved were relatively small compared with the long-term benefits of Noah having cochlear implants. We just wanted him to have the best quality of life possible and felt that in Noah's case, this was the best decision for him." The benefits of the implants weren't immediate

though, as many people often assume. Finding the right "MAP," or programming, for Noah's cochlear implants took longer than expected and it was months before any real progress was seen. Once he hit the one-year mark post-activation though, "his language just exploded."

According to Melanie, two things have been critical to Noah's success — finding the right specialist to work with and learning to be a good advocate. "I've really learned to trust my instincts. Professionals don't spend every waking moment with your child. You do. So, do your homework, ask a lot of questions and take detailed notes. Also, be sure to have the best people working with your child. We have been so fortunate to have Amy Laliotis in our lives as Noah's A-V Therapist. She is the best in her field and has never wavered in her commitment to Noah."

Of course, family support and involvement is critical too — even when it comes to siblings. Helping Noah each step of the way has been big sister Mia, who appears to be a budding A-V Therapist herself, highlighting different sounds for Noah and making sure to put his cochlear implant coils back on his head when they fall off. "She is a wonderful language model for both boys, and while she knows that Noah's ears don't work like hers do, it doesn't matter. To her, this is just Noah."

And in addition to the weekly home visits, twice a week you can find Noah and his twin brother Cameron in the Auditory Oral Toddler Communication Group at the Center. It is here that both of the boys get to practice their developing language and communication skills with other kids their age, most of whom have hearing loss too. Cameron participates in the group as one of the Hearing Peers, helping to model typical age-appropriate language in the group.

Given all of the ups and downs they've been through since Noah was first diagnosed with profound hearing loss, one thing has remained clear — life doesn't follow a plan. "We never expected to have twins, and we never expected to have a deaf child," says Melanie. "All the plans in the world couldn't have prepared us for the challenges we've faced so far with Noah. But hearing him say "Hi Mommy!" is even sweeter because of how hard everyone has worked to get him to this point, and we know that it will only get better.

For more information on Auditory-Verbal Therapy and all of the other communication options available at the Center to help children like Noah, call us at 414-604-2200 or email Chris Kometer, CDHH Child and Family Program Director at [ckometer@cdhh.org](mailto:ckometer@cdhh.org).

# Home Instead Senior Care Foundation Awards Grant to CDHH

CDHH is pleased to announce that it has received a grant from the Home Instead Senior Care Foundation to provide speechreading and communication strategies classes to seniors in SE Wisconsin.

This grant will provide funding for ten 8-week speechreading class series within SE Wisconsin, giving seniors the opportunity to gain the skills and training they need to manage their hearing loss and communicate more effectively so they can continue to live safely and independently and remain active in the community. Classes will be held at the Center as well as at locations within the community to make them more widely available to seniors who otherwise could not participate due to transportation issues or concerns about driving long distances.

Providing speechreading training in a group setting is a key factor in the long-term success of participants, as the classes provide a built-in support system and social network. This peer support provides participants with more real-world experience practicing their newfound communication skills and creates a positive social environment in which good communication and self-advocacy skills are consistently reinforced and encouraged among the group.

Classes will cover basic speechreading (lipreading) techniques, strategies for preventing communication breakdowns, effective use of assistive technology, self-advocacy skills and more. Each class will be one-hour long, one day per week for eight weeks. Individuals with ANY degree of hearing loss are invited to participate.

If you or a loved one are interested in discovering new ways to successfully deal with hearing loss, contact Pam Bergum at 414-604-7209 or email [pbergum@cdhh.org](mailto:pbergum@cdhh.org) to find out how to get involved in this program. Or, if you are a professional in the aging community and would be interested in hosting a series of speechreading classes at your facility, please contact Kerry Malak at 414-604-7202 or email [kmalak@cdhh.org](mailto:kmalak@cdhh.org).



## Volunteer Corner

*What is the essence of life? To serve others and to do good. ~Aristotle*

Thank you to all of the volunteers who helped the Center in so many ways during 2009 – from answering phones and stuffing envelopes to assisting in toddler communication groups and providing interpreting assistance. Your time, energy and talents are very much appreciated! Recent volunteers include:

Melissa Armstrong	Debra Graff	Laura Rogers
Shannon Aylesworth	Britta Hegge	Melody Rupp
Sam Ballas	Emily Jansen	Jeremiah Smith
Alexandria Clayton	Andrea Jones	John Steinle
Kyleigh Corder	Brenda Lerner	Rachel Taylor
Mary Deuster	Mairi Love	Helen Williams
Sarah Emerson	Andrea McKeown	Chantel Young
Deb Gerner	Andrea Rawski	
Cara Gerspach	Rockwell Automation	

If you would like more information about how to volunteer at the Center, contact Ruta Murphy at 414-604-7211 or email [rmurphy@cdhh.org](mailto:rmurphy@cdhh.org). You can also visit [www.cdhh.org](http://www.cdhh.org) to download a volunteer application online.

Dear CDHH,

I wanted to tell you about Christian. He is doing the very best in school since he received his hearing aids—you have no idea how far he's come. He is turning into such a big boy and is more independent now. He wants to do everything himself. And... well, like all moms I am just beyond happy that he has overcome so much. At conferences, his teacher said that Christian knows all his classmates' names and that he is now best friends with a little boy named José. She said that they are like two peas in a pod—everything Christian does, José does, too.

Another thing I wanted to tell you is that thanks to [CDHH], now I'm friends with Ceci (another CDHH parent) and now we are working together to get the school to get an interpreter, at least until we have learned English... Which leads me to the next thing—we're going to start going to classes to better ourselves and to be able to understand the teachers and...well, to be more involved in life in this country.

I just wanted to say thank you for all of your help with Christian because I truly could never have done any of this without you. Thanks for everything.

Sincerely,

Viridiana and Christian

*(Translated from Spanish by Laura Perlman)*



## CDHH Makes TEPP Program Even More Accessible

Thanks to grant funding from the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, the Center is pleased to announce that individuals receiving funding for specialized phone equipment through the Wisconsin TEPP program may now qualify to receive FREE home visits if they live in the metro-Milwaukee area and are unable to visit the UniversalLink showroom in person. This grant funding will also enable people who are low income and who qualify for a voucher under the Mobility or Speech Impaired categories to have their \$100 copayment waived. The TEPP program is available to any Wisconsin resident who has hearing loss or a mobility or speech impairment, and provides financial assistance to purchase specialized phone-related equipment such as amplified or captioned phones, visual alerting systems, voice amplifiers, voice activated phones, and hearing-aid compatible cell phone accessories. For more information on this grant project and to find out if you or a loved one may qualify, call UniversalLink at 414-541-5465 or email [universalink@cdhh.org](mailto:universalink@cdhh.org).

## Three No-Cost Ways to Give Back This Holiday Season

Although these are challenging times, you can help raise money for the Center and make a difference in the lives of others this holiday season and well into 2010. Without spending an extra penny, here are three simple ways that you can give back.

### GoodSearch & GoodShop



**GoodSearch.com:** You can raise money for CDHH every time you do an Internet search through GoodSearch.com. Visit [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com) and type in Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as your charity of choice, and then one cent will be donated to the Center for each online search. Sure, a penny doesn't sound like much, but if you make GoodSearch your homepage, it can really add up fast! GoodSearch also has a companion program called GoodShop.com that donates a portion of your online shopping purchases to CDHH too.

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**Pick n' Save We Care Program:** How much do you spend on groceries each year? Did you know that every time you use your Pick n' Save Advantage Card you could be helping kids and adults with hearing loss? The next time you're out grocery shopping, stop by the customer service desk at Pick n' Save and tell them

you want to designate CDHH as your charity of choice. Our organization ID number is: 108075. Then, every time you shop, a portion of your purchases will be donated to CDHH – at no cost to you.



**iGive.com:** If you're one of the millions of Americans who shop online, then you could be helping to raise money for CDHH every time you shop. Simply register online at [www.igive.com/cdhh](http://www.igive.com/cdhh), and then

when you shop from one of the 700+ participating online stores, a percentage of your purchase will be donated to CDHH. It's completely free to participate, and up to 26% of your next online purchase could be donated to CDHH. If you are new to iGive.com, they'll also donate an extra \$5 to CDHH when you register and make a purchase within 45 days.



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## Upcoming events . . . Mark your calendar now!

### Register Now for Sign Language Classes

ASL I: Tuesdays, Jan. 12–Mar. 30, 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

ASL II - Tuesdays, Jan. 12–Mar. 30, 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

ASL Follow Up – Thursdays, Jan. 14–Apr. 1, 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Communicating with Kids in Sign–Thursdays, Jan. 21 - Feb. 25,  
6:00 PM to 7:15 PM.

Take advantage of special early bird pricing for ASL classes if you register before December 31. For more details or to register, visit [www.cdhh.org](http://www.cdhh.org) or call 414-604-2200.

### Annual Gardens Luncheon

Thursday, April 15, 11:00 AM to 1:30 PM, at The Astor Hotel, 924 E. Juneau, Milwaukee. This year's luncheon will feature guest speaker Arlena Schott, host of the TV program Garden Wise, plus silent auction, raffle, music and more!

### Save the Date!

Friday, April 30, Location TBD

*Great professional development opportunity.* Warren Estabrooks, President and CEO of WE Listen International, Inc. will present “Listening for Life: Techniques and Strategies for Optimal Listening and Spoken Language Outcomes.” Watch the CDHH website and your mailbox for details coming soon! CEU’s will be available.

### Wisconsin Walk 4 Hearing

Saturday, May 16 at Veterans Park in Milwaukee.

Join the CDHH Walk team to help raise money and awareness of hearing loss in our community. CDHH is recruiting walkers of all fitness levels to join us. For more information or to sign up as a walker or event volunteer, contact Kerry at 414-604-7202 or email [kmalak@cdhh.org](mailto:kmalak@cdhh.org)



United Way  
of Greater Milwaukee