



Cochlear Implant Center  
**Westchester  
 Medical Center**

Westchester Medical Center Health Network

# CochlearConnections

News from the Cochlear Implant Center | Winter 2025

## Fall Seminar Recap: A Successful Event!

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The Cochlear Implant Center at Westchester Medical Center, flagship of the Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth), provides coordinated audiology and speech-therapy services for cochlear implant patients and those considering this life-changing technology. It is the only center between New York City and Albany providing comprehensive services for children and adult patients.

The Cochlear Implant Center is staffed by a team of highly trained audiologists and speech pathologists with expertise in evaluation and rehabilitation services for individuals who are cochlear implant candidates and those who receive a cochlear implant. Cochlear implantation is a highly successful technology that allows deaf children to hear and speak, and enables deafened adults to enhance their lives. The Cochlear Implant Center provides comprehensive services such as individualized programming of the implant and speech-therapy services.

On November 1, the Cochlear Implant Center team successfully hosted the second consecutive Fall Conference for professionals working with children with cochlear implants. Titled, "The Early Years: Fostering Cochlear Implant Success in New Listeners," the full-day event took place at New York Medical College, with support from Partners in Hearing, New York Medical College, PNW BOCES and our corporate sponsors Cochlear, Med El, Advanced Bionics, and Phonak.



The conference brought together speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and teachers of the hearing impaired. Pamela Talbot, M.Ed., CCC-SLP, LSLC Cert. AVT, a speech-language therapist and certified auditory-verbal therapist, delivered an insightful keynote on the fundamentals of auditory-verbal therapy (AVT), emphasizing its importance and outlining practical strategies for integrating AVT principles into various services.

Throughout the day, members of the WMCHHealth CI team presented a range of clinician-led sessions on topics including cytomegalovirus (CMV), newborn infant hearing screening, cochlear implant and hearing aid connectivity, and single-sided deafness. The event concluded with a dynamic panel discussion that highlighted the collaborative team approach to working with children with cochlear implants and their families.



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## Winter Tips for Your Sound Processor

Brrr, it's getting cold outside! Winter is a wonderful time to enjoy outdoor activities, but it's important to take care of your sound processor to ensure it stays in great working condition. Here are some helpful tips:

- › **Avoid Extreme Cold:** Cold temperatures can affect your processor's performance. Try to limit exposure to the cold for long periods. If your processor has been outside for a while, turn it off and let it warm up before using it again.
- › **Keep Batteries Charged:** Cold weather can drain batteries more quickly. Make sure you have fully charged spare batteries, and be prepared to charge them more often.
- › **Wear a Helmet:** Activities like skiing, snowboarding, sledding, and ice-skating are fun but can potentially damage your processor or implant. Always wear a helmet to protect yourself and your devices. Check with your doctor before engaging in extreme or contact sports.
- › **Use a Hat or Headband:** To protect your processor from moisture while outdoors, wear a hat or headband. This also helps keep your devices safe while you're enjoying the slopes!
- › **Keep Your Devices Dry:** Just like in the summer, winter moisture can harm your processor. Use waterproof sleeves to protect your device, and don't forget to use your drying units to remove moisture and dust.
- › **Utilize Wireless Accessories:** Many winter activities involve movement where you may not be able to see the speaker. Additionally, hats and headbands can slightly muffle your processor's microphones. Wireless accessories can help improve your hearing experience and keep you connected.
- › **Contact the Manufacturer:** If something goes wrong with your processor or equipment, don't wait! Contact the manufacturer immediately for repairs or replacement parts.

*Stay Warm!*



## Patient Perspective: **Debra Frank**

Over the past 20 years, my hearing gradually declined. Then, one particularly challenging day at work, I reached my breaking point. I wiped away my tears and realized I could no longer pretend everything was fine. It was time for a change.

After visiting the Cochlear Implant Center at Westchester Medical Center, I learned that I was more than eligible for a cochlear implant, which could significantly improve my life. Dr. Kristi D'Auria, my audiologist, quickly became my best ally. She was fully committed to supporting me every step of the way, and I knew there was no turning back. The team's assistance with insurance and surgical scheduling was outstanding.

Following Dr. Stidham's expert surgery, I am now five months post-activation and enjoying life as a happy, bimodal implant recipient. I had forgotten the sounds of nature, the ticking of my car's directional, and so much more! With streaming practice lessons, I've become better at deciphering words. In fact, I had tears of joy the first time I used the telecoil in both my implant and hearing aid at a Broadway show and heard every single word! Before, I would only attend musicals to avoid struggling with speech.

The support from Med-El's team has been incredible, and I know I can always reach out for help, which I do frequently.

Most importantly, my 2-year-old granddaughter, Saide, has become a source of pure joy. It broke my heart when I couldn't understand what she was saying when she first learned to talk, and I often looked to my daughter for translation. Now, I get to hear her stories and have real conversations with her — there is nothing better!

I am forever grateful to the team at the WMC Cochlear Implant Center for helping me get to where I am today. And this is just the beginning!

## 2025 Spring Family Event

The Cochlear Implant Center is excited to announce our second educational advocacy lecture and social event, proudly sponsored by Partners in Hearing. This event promises to be an enriching experience for both parents and children.

### Event Highlights:

- A brief lecture and panel discussion for parents, offering valuable insights and advice on cochlear implants and hearing aid support.
- Opportunities to connect with leading cochlear implant and hearing aid vendors.
- A fun-filled craft activity session for children, providing a chance for them to socialize with their cochlear implant and hearing-impaired peers.

### Save the Date: Sunday, April 6, 2025

Stay tuned for more details in upcoming Cochlear Connections newsletters and CI Center emails. We look forward to seeing you there!





## Staff Spotlight: **Mindy Schmelzer**

**Q: Healthcare and specifically, audiological services, have seen many changes over the last 20 years. What do you believe is the greatest change you have witnessed as clinical supervisor?**

As a clinical supervisor, the greatest changes I have witnessed in audiology include the advancement of technology, the ability to identify hearing loss in infants, and the increased availability of rehabilitative resources. The evolution of diagnostic tools, hearing aids, and cochlear implants has resulted in outcomes far beyond what I could have imagined at the start of my career.

As a result, the scope of knowledge and practice for audiologists has significantly expanded, paving the way for more engaging, higher-level educational and employment opportunities.

**Q: When working with families and caretakers of hearing-impaired individuals, what educational information do you find to be the most helpful to discuss?**

I always make it a priority to understand the structure and type of the child's classroom, the services they are receiving, and the teachers' and therapists' perceptions of the child's performance. This includes assessing their ability to stay on task, follow directions, and manage fatigue by the end of the day. Given that reading and language arts development can be particularly challenging for children with hearing loss, I consistently include a discussion about the child's reading skills. Lastly, I ensure to inquire about the child's social well-being.

**Q: What about choosing to be an audiologist brings you the most satisfaction?**

I am deeply grateful and humbled by the trust my patients and their families have placed in me over the years. Helping patients and their families improve hearing and communication has been a source of immense joy and fulfillment. I also deeply value the team support at Westchester Medical Center and the camaraderie shared with my fellow clinicians.

On a different note, I have a passion for technology and have thoroughly enjoyed expanding my clinical knowledge and skills to deliver gold-standard care.

**Q: What is one thing you will miss as you move toward your retirement?**

Although it is difficult to pinpoint one specific thing I will miss as I approach retirement, I know I will deeply cherish and miss my interactions with both patients and colleagues.



## **WMCHealth Cochlear Implant Center to Host HLAA Spring Meeting on March 8**

We are excited to announce that our Cochlear Implant Center will be hosting the spring meeting of the Westchester/Rockland Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) on Saturday, March 8, from 1 – 2:30 p.m.

### **Featured Presentation:**

Dr. Stidham will present "The Latest Updates in Cochlear Implant Surgery, Technology, and Rehabilitation." Following the presentation, attendees will have the opportunity to enjoy refreshments and connect with fellow HLAA members and others interested in hearing loss solutions.

### **About HLAA:**

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is a national organization helping people with hearing loss thrive through education, advocacy, and a nationwide network of support. HLAA meetings are both educational and enjoyable, offering valuable tips, tools, and support for navigating hearing impairment.

### **Event Details:**

- When: Saturday, March 8, 1 – 2:30 p.m.
- Where: Maria Fareri Children's Hospital, Conference Room B
- Parking: Complimentary parking passes will be provided

Whether you're a current cochlear implant recipient or a potential candidate, this event is for you!

**We look forward to seeing you there!**



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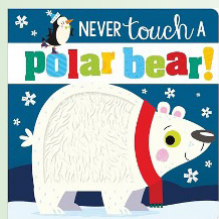
## Winter Books

Did you know that reading to your child for just 15 minutes a day can significantly boost their listening and spoken language development? It's a simple yet powerful way to support their growth! Try to incorporate books into routines you already have, such as before bedtime, during snack time, or after bath time.

To make it even more fun, here are a few book recommendations that focus on winter-themed vocabulary and concepts. Enjoy reading together!

### Never Touch a Polar Bear

By Rosie Greening and Stuart Lynch

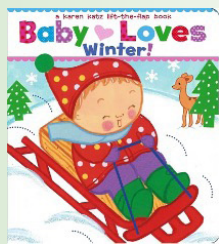


*Ages 0-18 months*

Talk about how the pictures feel and the colors you see.

### Baby Loves Winter

By Karen Katz



*Ages 0-2 years*

Knock on the flaps and lift them. Ask questions from the book and wait for your child to answer.

### Bunny Slopes

By Claudia Rueda



*Ages 2-5 years*

Interactive book  
Follow directions

### The Wishing Tree

By Kyo Maclear



*Ages 3-7 years*

Lots of vocabulary including animals and verbs.  
Abstract concepts.

# Summer Programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children & Teens

As summer approaches, you may be starting to plan programs for your deaf or hard of hearing child. Here are a few well-known summer programs that cater to both spoken language and American Sign Language (ASL) users. All of the following programs offer scholarship opportunities.

## Spoken Language Programs

**Alexander Graham Bell Association's Leadership Opportunities for Teens (LOFT) Program** for high school students (ages 14-18).

Apply at: <https://agbell.org/student-programs/loft-2025>.

- This program will run from July 29–August 2, 2025 and the deadline is March 1, 2025.

**CampedUp:** Summer day camp for children ages 3-10 (can accept children up to age 12 on a case-by-case basis) located on the Upper West Side in New York City.

Apply at: [www.campedup.com/registration](http://www.campedup.com/registration).

- This program runs in week-long sessions between July 7–August 1, 2025

## American Sign Language Programs

**Camp Isola Bella — American School for the Deaf:** This is a two-week sleepaway camp that's located in Salisbury, CT. Registration for the 2025 season is not yet open but you can contact the camp for further information at: [IBDirector@asd-1817.org](mailto:IBDirector@asd-1817.org), or visit their website at: [www.asd-1817.org/programs/camp-isola-bella](http://www.asd-1817.org/programs/camp-isola-bella).

- There are two sessions:  
Youth Session (ages 8-12): June 22–July 4, 2025  
Teen Session (ages 13-17): July 13–July 25, 2025

**Camp Mark 7:** This is a two-week sleepaway camp located in the beautiful Adirondack Mountains of New York. Applications for summer 2025 will open on Sunday, January 5, 2025 at: [www.campmark7.org](http://www.campmark7.org).

- There are two sessions:  
Deaf Youth Camp (ages 9-12): June 22–July 3, 2025  
Deaf Teen Camp (ages 13-16): July 6–July 18, 2025

## Programs for all communication modalities

**Explore Your Future (EYF):** For junior or senior high school students at the Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). Students will gain hands-on experience in various career areas, including art, business, computer science, engineering, health sciences, information technology, and science, while experiencing life on a college campus! Apply at: [www.rit.edu/ntid/EYF](http://www.rit.edu/ntid/EYF).

- This program has two sessions: July 12–17 or July 19–24, 2025.  
The application deadline is early summer.

**TechTigers at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT):** For students entering grades 7, 8, or 9 who are interested in science, technology, engineering, and math. Apply at: [www.rit.edu/ntid/techtigers](http://www.rit.edu/ntid/techtigers).

- This program will run from July 26–31, 2025 and the application deadline is the beginning of summer.

**Bridging Hands Camp:** A one-week sleepaway summer program for deaf and hard of hearing children, as well as Kids of Deaf Adults (KODA) who have normal hearing, ages 7-13. This program is held at Camp Manidokian in Knoxville, MD. Apply at: [www.bhcamps.org](http://www.bhcamps.org).



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