

Using Your Voice

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In the fourth grade, I discovered something important: I didn't know how to use my voice.

I had come in from recess — hot, sweaty, my hearing aids cutting in and out. My teacher began a spelling test, and I was completely lost. I glanced at my neighbor's paper. He raised his hand immediately to tell on me. I was sent to the principal's office, and I didn't say a single word in my own defense. I didn't know how. I didn't know yet that my situation was worth explaining — that there was a story I could tell that would change how people understood what had happened.

That moment has stayed with me ever since. I was embarrassed. I was

met with our industry partners, our Special Interest Groups, our State Champs, and our Parent Advocacy Network. Across every conversation, one theme emerged: advocacy and awareness — at the kitchen table, in the clinic, in the statehouse, and on Capitol Hill — is the thread that runs through everything we do, and it is what nearly every person I spoke with wanted to do more of.

It reflected exactly why we exist. ACI Alliance was built on advocacy, awareness, and research. In 2010, a group of surgeons, audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and industry representatives sat down together around a shared conviction: cochlear implants should be accessible to every person who

“As I step into this role, my job is to make ACI Alliance the place where all those pieces find each other.”



devastated. And somewhere under all of that, I started to understand that advocacy isn't instinct — it's something you have to learn. It can be learned, modeled, and strengthened — but someone has to teach and encourage it. And you have to know your story well enough to tell it.

I've thought about that fourth-grade version of myself a lot during my first ninety days as Executive Director of ACI Alliance. These past months were intentional: I spent them listening. I met one-on-one with every board member, connected with partner organization leadership,

can benefit. That conviction became ACI Alliance. It is the most grassroots kind of advocacy — people deciding that something matters enough to build something around it.

Over the years, ACI Alliance has grown into a community that spans the entire cochlear implant team and beyond. Each of you brings an important piece to the puzzle. The surgeon who performs the implant. The audiologist who maps it. The researcher and scientist who advance what's possible. The industry partner who develops and delivers the technology. The

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therapist, the psychologist, the counselor, the navigator, the nurse, the teacher — every professional and supporter who walks alongside a family through the journey. The parent or caregiver who makes the calls, keeps the appointments, and refuses to stop asking questions. The individual who decides that hearing matters enough to pursue it — and in doing so, makes everything else possible. The State Champ who picks up the phone and calls their legislator. Every piece is essential. The picture isn't complete without all of them.

That starts with voice. Your voice — in a clinical setting, in a school meeting, in a legislator's office. I know what it feels like to not know how to use it. I also know what it looks like when you finally do. After years of advocating for myself as a person who is deaf and hard of

hearing, I started making it a priority to know my legislators before there was a problem. I went to town halls. I requested district meetings. I shared my own experience — what access to

You have that same seat. It doesn't matter what your title is or how long you've been in this work. Being a constituent is enough. Knowing your story is enough. The cochlear

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hearing technology had meant to my education, my career, my life. Being a persistent communicator gave me a seat at the table on issues related to hearing health care.

As your Executive Director, I carry that same commitment forward — to keep showing up, keep speaking up, and to amplify every voice in this community.

implant community has one of the most compelling stories in all of healthcare: technology opens the world of sound, families forever changed, adults hearing again for the first time in years, children who learn to listen and communicate and thrive. That story — and the mission to advance access to the gift of hearing through research, advocacy, and awareness — belongs to all of us to tell. ■



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How to Get Involved with ACI Alliance

"The puzzle only comes together when we each contribute our piece. What will you do?"



Become a State Champion

Connect with your legislators before there's a problem. 222 Champions in 49 states are already at work — join them.



Join a Special Interest Group

Six SIGs connect professionals around the topics that matter most in CI care. Find the group that fits your work.



Parents & caregivers: add your voice

You don't need a policy background — just your family's story. Join the new Parent & Caregiver Advocacy Arm.



Become a member

Membership connects you to the full ACI Alliance community — conferences, SIGs, advocacy tools, and the people advancing access to cochlear implants.



Share your story

Data shapes policy. Personal stories move it. Your experience with cochlear implants is one of the most powerful tools in advocacy.



Advocate at the state level

As policy shifts to states, your local voice matters more than ever. Use the Medicaid Toolkit to know the issues and take action.

Find your place at acialliance.org