

LICA In Action

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This Issue:

Middle school self advocacy.....2

Role modeling self esteem.....3

High schoolers try on jobs.....3

Web-based resources.....4

Thanks to our partners... 4

Dear LICA families and friends,

In this issue of *LICA in Action*, our focus is self advocacy. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing need to take action to avoid missing crucial academic and social information. Some key components of self advocacy are:

- knowledge of one’s strengths and weaknesses
- the ability to set goals and make progress toward achieving them
- the confidence to ask for assistance when needed
- responsibility for making decisions and being accountable for the consequences of those decisions.

At LICA, we support our students’ academic and social success by introducing these concepts early

and reinforcing them frequently. Parents can do the same thing at home. On these pages you’ll read how we teach self-advocacy skills at all grade levels. We’ve also provided a list of Internet resources where you can learn more about how to support your child’s problem-solving strategies. Please share your questions and comments. Contact LICA at 847.803.9444.

Sincerely,

Becki Streit
Executive Director

It’s elementary: Learning how to learn

Being a good listener.
Following directions.
Asking for help.
Participating in discussions.

These are skills that every student needs. However, when that student has a hearing loss, like Clara Lynk, building these skills takes on added importance.

Clara is a second-grade student at St. Joan of Arc School in Evanston who hears with the assistance of a cochlear implant. Twice a month, for half an hour at a time, she works with LICA itinerant teacher Gloria Ellenbaum. Part of what Ms. Ellenbaum teaches is self advocacy: that Clara must be in charge of what she needs to continue to be a successful learner.



Gloria Ellenbaum and Clara review learning and listening rules.

Understanding your hearing loss

“First of all,” Ms. Ellenbaum said, “students with hearing loss have to understand that they have a loss. They need to be aware that there are things going on in the classroom, in the lunchroom, on the playground that they may be

missing. They need to identify what they can and cannot hear. An average second-grader will take in a lot of information through hearing without even trying. A student with a hearing loss is likely to miss academic as well as social information whenever they aren’t appropriately focused.”

Continued on page 2.

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Continued from page 1.

According to Ms. Ellenbaum, once students understand this, they can begin to apply self-advocacy skills. “Clara is really bright. She knows that saying, ‘what? I couldn’t hear you,’ repeatedly can be annoying to her friends. So she looks for other ways to make sure she’s on top of situations. She’ll sit closer, watch faces, keep her own body still. These techniques help her to be a better ‘listener’ in all kinds of environments.”

Making the most of self advocacy

“Clara’s positive attitude is a great asset,” Ms. Ellenbaum said. “Although we’re working at these skills in the school context, we always talk about where else Clara can use them. I present social stories – examples from real life – and we talk about what needs to happen for someone with a hearing loss to fully participate.”

Clara’s mom, Julie Lynk, has seen a real difference since Ms. Ellenbaum began reinforcing self-advocacy skills. “Clara is much more aware of how to create the best listening environment for herself,” Ms. Lynk said. “Whether she’s in her classroom or playing with her friends, she knows she has options and she makes good use of them.”

Elementary-level skills and strategies

Skill	Strategy
<i>Being a good listener</i>	Look at the speaker Keep your body still Think about what’s being said Ask questions
<i>Following directions</i>	Focus on the teacher Listen to all the directions Ask the teacher questions Ask yourself: what is my job? Am I doing it?
<i>Asking for help</i>	Try it on your own first Decide what kind of help you really need
<i>Participating in a discussion</i>	Listen and think about the topic Raise your hand Stay on topic Let others talk, too

Middle school students role-play self advocacy

Some students prefer to sit front and center and others like a desk in the back row. For a student with a hearing loss, the “best” seat is one that allows uninterrupted visual access to the teacher. Knowing this and asking for that spot is an example of appropriate self advocacy for a middle schooler.

Middle school self advocacy in action

Amy Fleischmann’s seventh- and eighth-grade students are learning about new communication tools. A clock that vibrates your pillow when it’s time to get up is cool and useful. Recognizing what you need and being able to ask for it is an even more valuable tool.

Ms. Fleischmann brings self-advocacy learning alive through role-playing activities. After practicing scenarios at school, Ms. Fleischmann assigns students the task of advocating for three changes in their home life. Students have asked that the closed captioning be used on the family television, that an interpreter attend a doctor’s appointment and a church service, and that the family attend a movie at a captioned theater.



Kiersten, Yehryn, Sahir, and Rachel take turns in role-play situations with Leah White and interpreter Darlene Cecchi.

How much am I missing?

The common starting point for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is acknowledging their individual hearing loss. Ms. Fleischmann’s students learn to read their individual audiograms. Starting with the vocabulary and a generic audiogram that shows sound volume and frequency changes, each student is given his or her own audiogram to interpret.

Some are surprised to learn how many sounds they miss in everyday conversations – especially if they choose not to wear their hearing aids. Others discover that even when they “hear” a conversation, they might not be able to interpret it fully because of unfamiliar words.

Understanding that some information is missing helps students realize how important it is to assert themselves. Role-playing practice helps them gain confidence in speaking up.

“Our hard-of-hearing students are asked to interpret for themselves in a variety of situations everyday,” Ms. Fleischmann said. “They need to advocate for themselves to make sure they are getting meaningful access to communication both in and out of school.”

High school students explore the world of work

Self advocacy includes the desire and ability to set and progress toward personal goals. For LICA students at John Hersey High School in Arlington Heights, part of goal-setting is asking these questions: What am I interested in? How can I pursue my interests in the world? LICA's employment training program helps students find the answers.

Building relationships

Sue Bords, LICA transition coordinator at Hersey, sets up student job opportunities through calls, letters, and visits to prospective employers. Some sites have an established relationship with LICA and provide work opportunities year after year.

Other potential employers have never interacted with a deaf person; they may be concerned about how a student will be able to communicate verbally and in writing. They may ask if there will be an interpreter present (and at times there may be). Sometimes they confuse disabilities and ask if the students know Braille, the system of raised



Alex checks dishes at Nibbles Children's Play Cafe in Wheeling.

dots that enables the visually impaired to read.

"Hearing loss is not well understood, but there are truly very few jobs that cannot accommodate a worker who cannot hear," Ms. Bords said. "Any place with entry level jobs is a potential partner for our program. I work to educate the community in addition to providing opportunities for our students."

Employment training program offers work experience

Through job experiences in the community, high schoolers begin to sort through their options for the future.

They consider what they might study in college. They learn what kinds of skills are needed to do different jobs. "Through work experiences, students learn to be responsible members of the community," Sue Bords said. "Sometimes they find something they're passionate about. We have one young man who has discovered that he really likes cooking and is thinking about a future career in the food industry."



Bridget helps a toddler balance at Flower Garden Day Care Center in Prospect Heights.

"Students have worked in clerical jobs in offices, in hotels, in camp and day care settings, in restaurants, hospitals, nursing homes, and retail," Ms. Bords said. "They 'try on' different roles and it makes them feel good about themselves and their capabilities."

Building self esteem to promote self advocacy

Self advocacy has strong ties to self esteem. Students with high self esteem are more apt to articulate what they need with confidence. Sometimes, self advocacy skills are built by indirect means.

This year LICA third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders learning about deafness were visited by high school students also served by LICA. Bonnie Koss, LICA social worker, coordinated the opportunity. "The younger kids had been learning about famous people who also happened to be deaf," Ms. Koss said, "and they enjoyed that, but it was a really big deal to them that high school students would come to meet with them at their school."

The younger kids felt important because these "big kids" were role models willing to talk with them about school and other activities. The older kids felt important because they realized that they had something to share that could help someone else.

"Sometimes young students believe that they will become hearing adults simply because they've never met an older person who is deaf. The high schoolers really didn't know what to expect," Ms. Koss said, "but the little kids treated them like rock stars. Everyone's sense of self-worth got a boost."

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LICA In Action

Thanks to LICA's 2008-2009 Business Partners

Jimmy John's
Arlington Heights

Schaumburg Marriott Hotel
Schaumburg

Nibbles Children's Cafe'
Wheeling

IKEA
Schaumburg

Helpful resources on the web

www.handsandvoices.org/needs/advocacy.htm
Good information about the development of self-advocacy skills as children mature.

www.deafmd.org
Medical information (descriptions of diseases, tests, etc.) clearly presented in signed videos and in straightforward English. Also state-by-state listings of deaf-friendly doctors and hospitals.

www.disabilityresources.org/AT-DEAF.html
A gateway site to information about assistive technology for people who are deaf or hard of hearing from a variety of sources.

www.idhhc.state.il.us
Website of the State of Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission.