

“Can You Hear Me Now?”



If you have normal hearing, you could have heard a pin drop. In early December, Eddie and Susan Dixon opened their home for an Any Baby Can Children’s Hearing Aid Texas (CHAT) benefit, where Eddie shared his personal testament to the isolation that hearing loss can create. “If I come downstairs in the morning without my hearing aids,” he said as his voice broke, “I can’t even have a conversation with my own children.” The Dixons have long supported Any Baby Can, and because of their personal experience with hearing loss, the CHAT program really speaks to them. They understand the isolation that deafness can create for adults, so it is easy for them to identify with the profound impact hearing loss can

have on a child. Susan, one of our terrific Board members, is leading the charge to raise funds so that more children can be served by CHAT.

It has been a little more than a year since CHAT became a part of the Any Baby Can family. As an organization, we have learned a lot about the impact of hearing loss on children. We have seen a child who failed his school’s hearing test for seven consecutive years, the toddler whose hearing issue was assumed to be a speech delay, the fourth grader offered expensive special education services who really just needed help to hear her teacher speak, and three siblings, all with hearing loss, who had to take turns getting repairs for their worn out devices.

Children hear and respond to sounds even before they are born. They learn to talk and interact by imitating the sounds around them and the voices of their parents and caregivers. If spotted early enough, hearing loss can be addressed before there are long-term impacts on the child’s communication and learning skills. However, the desire to act quickly when a child is suspected with hearing impairment does not always match a family’s ability to act quickly. Lack of financial resources makes accessing specialty care for childhood hearing loss difficult. Poor parents often have the dilemma of choosing between basic needs of the family (food on the table and a roof over their head) and the audiological needs of their child.

Currently, CHAT serves about 90 Central Texas children each year. Through negotiated agreements with local audiologists and vendors, we are able to source new hearing devices and the associated services for about \$1000 per child . . . a real bargain when you realize those dollars are literally buying the tools necessary for the development of critical life skills such as speech, language, reading, communication, and learning.

The opportunity, however, is that last year our Hearing Specialist fielded more than 1,000 contacts from parents, teachers, school nurses, social workers and doctors across the state who are trying to navigate audiological options for children. Led by individual efforts like those of the Dixons, coupled with increased foundation support from St. David’s Foundation, corporate partnerships like that of ETS-Lindgren and the ESCO Technologies Foundation, and allocation of crisis dollars from an Austin Community Foundation fund, we are building our capacity to serve more children with these straightforward, transformational services. We welcome your partnership in this effort.

Can you hear me now?

Ellen Balthazar
Executive Director
Any Baby Can



Susan Dixon, Any Baby Can Board Member, and Eddie Dixon, Vice President, Legal - Dell, Inc., open their home for a CHAT (Children’s Hearing Aid Texas) benefit.