

pediatric pointers



Bridging the Gap

A few months ago I wrote with excitement about “Getting Kids Connected,” a unique pediatric marketing event being planned by Albuquerque Hearing Associates, a successful mainstream audiology practice in New Mexico.

The brains behind the event were Carol Clifford, AuD, president; her husband Jim Benson, marketing director, and Shannon Qualls, director of operations. As stated in their CEU application, the day-long seminar was developed to educate, encourage and empower adolescents on their journey into adulthood as well as educate the parents and professionals who work with them.

Once an October Saturday date and speakers were confirmed, the planners applied for CEUs and created a promotional brochure, mailing it to the practice’s patient database and targeting parents of teens with hearing loss. Local school audiologists were personally contacted and asked to assist in distributing the event announcement to school nurses, itinerant teachers of the hearing impaired and students with hearing loss. To facilitate communication, Albuquerque Hearing Associates hired a Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) reporter and a sign language interpreter to attend the event.

The day began at 8 a.m. with a continental breakfast for all participants, which included six teens, 10 parents, two school nurses, two itinerant teachers, and 10 educational audiologists. The practice’s waiting room was transformed into a meeting room with rented tables and chairs. Outside the storefront office, invited representatives from Oticon, Cochlear Americas, Hands & Voices, the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), and the New Mexico Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

During Getting Kids Connected, a special hour-long session just for the teens was held in a separate meeting room. “Say What: A Challenge for Students to Embrace Their Hearing Loss,” was hosted by Shannon Qualls, director of operations at Albuquerque Hearing Associates. She sought to engage the students in a relaxed environment and speak to them about her own experiences as a 20-something adult with hearing loss.

set up displays and shared their wares with the attendees.

Speakers included John Anderson, a licensed mental health counselor and mainstream adjustment counselor from Clarke School for the Deaf in Massachusetts, who spoke on self-advocacy and communication; representatives from the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the state Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, who gave practical information on students’ legal rights, state services and preparing for college and the workplace; and other lecturers who discussed new hearing technology, ALDs and cochlear implants—all interspersed between multiple breaks for plenty of casual conversation and lunch.

Looking back on the event, Carol, Jim and Shannon are pleased with its outcome and say they received many positive and enthusiastic evaluations from attendees. Rather than simply marketing their services and knowledge to a targeted audience, they feel they created a unique educational event focused on helping teens with hearing loss move forward and bridging the gap between teens, parents, audiologists, and other professionals.

Here are a few suggestions they would offer another practice considering this type of event:

1. Begin planning at least 6 months in advance;
2. Publicize the event with at least 4 to 6 weeks notice and expand outreach to include pediatricians and other audiologists in the community;
3. Consider holding the meeting at an alternate location; most practices cannot comfortably accommodate 20-plus attendees with the additional space needed for podium presentations and food;
4. Procure a CEU sponsor and be aware of the CEU application format and deadline. If a manufacturer is participating, it may be able to sponsor CEUs;
5. Create an ice-breaker for the teens at the start of the day, since they are most likely not acquainted with each other, and dismiss them after the lunch break. Alternatively, consider offering the event for parents and professionals only, with a separate student presentation coordinated with local educational audiologists;
6. Seek financial sponsorships from manufacturers and a local corporation committed to children/education issues;
7. Schedule time in the agenda for a Q&A session. This discussion should be held well before the end of the event; after lunch is a good time.
8. Recognize that your return on investment will not be immediately measurable; this kind of event should be seen as a long-term investment in building your practice as a strong pediatric resource. 💰

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