

Family VOICES

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My Brother; My Inspiration

LAYNE KINNEY, TX

His throat clenched as he struggled to squeeze the words out. He was only trying to say his name. I waited there patiently, my insides in knots, while his anxious expression went from frustration to embarrassment. The seconds tick-tick-ticked by until my brother finally said “Will” to the woman who was checking us in for youth camp. My brother William has been dealing with a stutter since the age of four. For 11 years it has been dominating his life in almost every realm. Situations I take for granted – from a simple response when a waitress takes our order, to a full-blown classroom presentation – fill William with anguish.

It’s difficult enough for a teenager to maneuver his way through high school, but to have the added stress of dealing with a disability is downright incomprehensible to me. Got acne? Find a good skin-care routine. Bombed a test? Study harder for the next one. Backstabbing friends? Make new friends. Have a stutter? Not so easy. Speech therapy may help, but it’s not a cure. William’s stutter can’t magically be fixed, and low self-esteem is often the result.

As a child, William shied away from anything extra-curricular. His blocking speech kept him in a mental prison, making him feel limited and inferior. Our parents encouraged him to pursue a variety of sports, and in time he discovered that he was a natural athlete. Tennis, lacrosse, hip-hop, and football – he dominated in these non-verbal activities. Once he realized how gifted he was athletically, William’s self-esteem began to grow, and the stutter-related anxiety which had kept him imprisoned had begun to loosen its grip. William is now 15, and as his individuality develops, so does his bravery, prompting him to venture outside of his comfort zone.

Growing up with a brother who experienced almost weekly “melt-downs” and outbursts of panic over his strangled speech, and standing by helplessly as I watched him repeatedly struggle to express himself in the simplest of situations has inspired me in two ways.



First, it has made me sensitive towards the problems and issues of others. The typical teenager is very self-centered and often finds it difficult to be empathetic. Yet, it’s hard to discriminate against someone with a disability when you fiercely love someone with a disability of their own. My compassion is deepened through my brother as he shows me how hard it is to cope with such a relentless impediment. Second, I realized that if my brother could rise above his own personal demons, then why should I not possess an internal strength to do the same? If he can venture outside of his comfort zone, why shouldn’t I? William may think that he has trouble expressing himself, but he doesn’t. Without realizing it he has eloquently taught me two great life lessons: always have compassion for others because you never know what they are dealing with and do not underestimate the amount of inner strength one can possess when overcoming life’s obstacles. Thank you William for articulating these life lessons so beautifully. ::

*...for kids and
teens who stutter,
their parents,
SLPs and others
who support them!*

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Be sure to check out ‘WeStutter’ on Facebook and Twitter today!

Fort Worth Family Chapter

The Fort Worth Family Chapter met with the theme of 'King or Queen for a Day'. The group talked about the film *The King's Speech*, several of the kids and parents gave speeches on what they would do if they were king or queen for the day, and the group enjoyed King Cake. There were several new families and some repeat families in attendance. Overall, there were over 30 people and at least 5 families!

Phoenix Family Chapter

The Phoenix Family Chapter met at the ASU-Tempe campus and had 19 people (four families, 5 leaders, and SLP grad students). The theme was 'Awareness & Advertising'. The group talked about the meaning of awareness in general and awareness as it relates to stuttering (both for PWS & others' knowledge). Using the NSA's *Advertising Challenge* page, the leaders introduced the idea of advertising and group members shared how they have advertised in the past. Several entertaining skits were performed about advertising stuttering.

The second part of the meeting was a field trip on campus to survey random people about stuttering. Chapter members demonstrated how to interview in a skit and then everyone ventured out. Interviewing people was optional for the kids/teens but pretty much all of the kids jumped in and participated! Afterwards everyone regrouped and talked about their experiences giving the surveys and some of the responses that people had given.

Dallas TwST

Two assistant chapter leaders, two teens, and two parents attended the Dallas TWST chapter meeting. In addition, the group was joined by two graduate students from the UTD program in Communication Disorders who are currently taking a class in Fluency Disorders and were interested in observing a support group meeting. The meeting began with an icebreaker called 'Two Truths and a Lie', where each person shares three things about him or herself, two of which are true and one of which is a lie, then the others in the group have to guess which is the lie. There was one parent who was so good, not even his teenage son knew which was the lie! The group then spent time talking about the upcoming NSA Annual Conference. Since the two families that are planning on attending had both been to the convention last summer in Fort Worth, each person shared what their favorite thing about the experience had been. Next, the teens broke

off into one part of the room to chat while the rest of the group talked. The two visiting graduate students had lots of questions to ask the assistant chapter leader (who stutters), as well as the parents, which resulted in a great discussion and a good learning experience for everyone.

Southern New Hampshire Family Chapter

The Southern NH chapter met with 20 people in attendance: 11 kids (6 of whom stutter), 9 adults, and fluency specialist Sheryl Gottwald. The group broke out board games and the kids and teens played those or ping-pong. They had discussions among themselves and were thrilled to just be together. The parents met separately and discussed challenges that the kids were having with school therapy, teasing, and how they felt about those things. The group was thrilled to welcome two new families, one of whom came down from Rhode Island (2 hours away)! There was a discussion about the NSA and the Annual Conference and the benefits of attending as a family, and the new families were given lots of information. The parents and kids came back together to get pizza and to talk about school and any difficulties they might be having with their stuttering or with peers at school, in addition to the usual 'getting to know you' topics. Everyone was happy to see each other and the new families were very positive about wanting to return.



National Stuttering Association

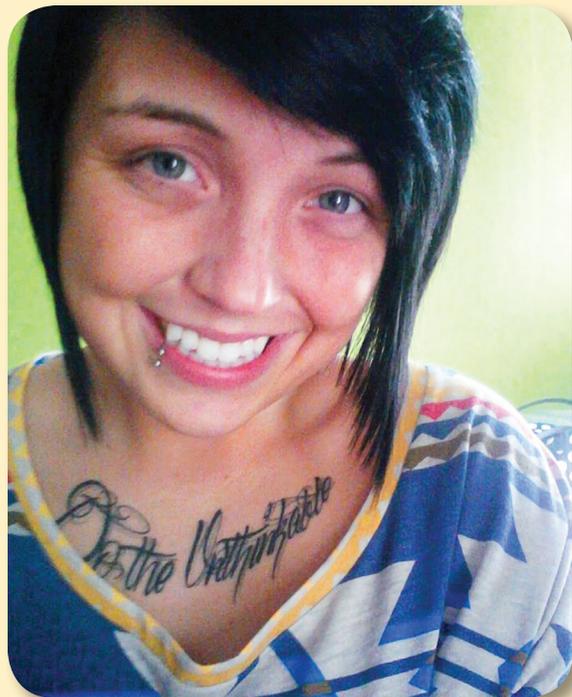


Upcoming Events

Please join us July 4-8 for Freedom of Speech at the Beach at the NSA 2012 Annual Conference in St. Petersburg, FL! See you there!

Teen Advisory Council News

MIRANDA SMITH, TAC CHAIRPERSON



With the 2012 NSA Conference in St. Petersburg quickly approaching, the Teen Advisory Council (TAC) is busy preparing, planning, and participating in many events throughout this past year. We have welcomed three new members to the TAC, Alex D'Agostino, Katie Duffield, and Danny Wood! Additionally, we have welcomed back Alex Rosenbaum and Stephanie Nicolai, two special TAC alumni to serve as TAC mentors.

Alex and Stephanie will help guide the TAC to grow as leaders and to be more involved at the conference.

Various members of the TAC have been very involved and helpful with various Youth Days throughout this past year. We have created an NSA TwST Facebook page where only teens can be members. The NSA TwST Facebook page has had some awesome posts and responses from a variety of teens regarding stuttering and the TAC has been involved by offering advice and support. Members of the TAC have also asked other teens for advice and support.

The TAC has also hosted and been featured on NSA Family Radio's teen shows. The teen episodes have been a huge hit! The last episode, about college and job applications, had over 50 listeners and featured our newest host, Steve Ernst (not a member of the TAC but one of our most active teens!) and one of the TAC's newest members, Alex. The guests were Steven Kaufman and Nina G., who were both interviewed and asked for advice regarding college and job applications. They did a fabulous job and provided some really great information! Steven joked about his stuttering saying, "I don't stutter, I'm just equipped with instant replay". And Nina gave us advice on how she introduces herself to a room full of new people stating, "I'm Nina. I stutter, so you're just going to have to wait for all my insights and all of my great ideas". The two guests advised teens to "stutter confidently!"

Lastly, the TAC has been busy preparing workshops for not only the usual teen group, but a new age group which will be seen at the conference – the tweens. This age group (11-14) is growing rapidly and will now have their own set of workshops at this year's conference. The TAC has been working hard to create new and exciting ideas for the tweens along with the teens. We believe the Florida heat, the beach, and the beautiful Vinoy Renaissance hotel will give us many opportunities for some fun in July! We'll see you there! ::

A Message from Family Programs

PATTIE WOOD, NEWLY ELECTED CHAIRPERSON

When my son Danny's fluency specialist, Sheryl Gottwald, mentioned in 2008 that the NSA Annual Conference was being held in New Jersey and we might want to think about bringing our son, I never knew how much our lives were about to change. My family attended that conference, and in the four years since have become a part of the NSA family. We were made to feel welcome the second we arrived. My son immediately made friends with other kids his age who stuttered. I made life-long friends as well and have received support I could only dream of. Danny found confidence and a

positive attitude about stuttering that would not have been possible without NSA. I was so impressed with Family Programs and everything and everyone we encountered at conference that I decided I had to find a way to give back to this organization that has given so much to my family. I am thrilled to serve as the newly elected chair of Family Programs on the NSA Board of Directors. I am looking forward to working with the amazing group of staff and volunteers that make this organization the most profound support system of people who stutter and their families. ::



NSA Pre-Teen Pays it Forward

ALEXA JAWORSKI

“Being a person who stutters isn’t always easy at any age. But if you’re a pre-teen who stutters – no longer a child but not quite a teenager, and several more years from being a full adult – you may have some very special challenges,” says 12-year-old NSA member Evan Tiller of Tampa, Fla.

That’s why Evan plans to assist in the design of workshops for pre-teens (twens) at this summer’s Annual Conference in St. Petersburg.

“Creating and offering workshops for the a pre-teens is very important,” says Evan, who is currently getting ready for his Bar Mitzvah – the Jewish coming-of-age ceremony for boys – and would like to help out other kids his age who stutter as part of his preparation process, which requires him to give back to his community.

“Pre-teens need the most help,” he says. “When you are a pre-teen, that’s when the bullies start to pick on you. Junior high school isn’t very easy. For some kids it can be really hard.”

Although Evan doesn’t belong to a local chapter, he and his family are members of the national NSA organization. In addition, Evan participates in NSA-sponsored Youth Day events at the University of South Florida. And of course, he looks forward to attending the annual conference – he’s been to five so far!

“I feel very fortunate to have a son who stutters and doesn’t allow it to stand in his way,” says Evan’s father, Marc. “It truly is not a problem for him; it’s just something he does.”

Adds his mother Wendy: “The NSA has had a lot to do with Evan’s attitude with stuttering. It has helped him form his positive image around himself. Stuttering doesn’t define him.”

In the meantime, Evan has some words of advice for other pre-teens who stutter: “Ignore the bullies. Don’t let them get the best of you. And don’t think you are different from anyone else.”

Questions for Evan

What grade are you in? And what school do you attend? I’m in sixth grade at Terrace Community Middle School.

Who inspires you the most? My Mom and my Dad because they both went to college and got good jobs and make good choices.

Will we see you at this year’s conference in Tampa? Yes

Farthest place you’ve traveled to? Alaska

What is your favorite movie? *The Green Hornet*

Do you go to speech therapy? I used to but not now.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be? Flying

If you won a million dollars, what would you do with it? Spend it! I would save half of it and spend the rest on a Ferrari.

What would you like people who don’t stutter to understand about stuttering? That it’s not a problem, it’s just something you do.

What do you want to be when you grow up? I want to own a big business and become a billionaire, or do something with sports. ::



NSA Family Radio Schedule

Your Virtual Family Chapter for Parents, Kids, and Teens!



Wednesday, June 13th 8PM EDT

Pre-Conference Tell-All. The NSA Conference is fast approaching and families are making the best decision of their life to attend the NSA’s Annual Conference. Tune in to find out why you and your family should join us, what you can expect and how you can prepare! After listening to this show you’ll be ready to back your bags and head to the 2012 Annual Conference in St. Petersburg, Florida July 4-8, 2012! You don’t want to miss it!

NSA Family Programs Prepares for 2012 Conference

STEPHANIE COPPEN, FAMILY PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATOR

Stuttering Frustration

NATE R., ARIZONA

I am pretty comfortable with my stutter. I do my best to educate those around me about stuttering. Something that has frustrated me recently, however, is when people finish my sentences when I have a block. This frustrates me because I can speak, but they are not giving me the extra time to finish my own thoughts. I can speak perfectly well, but it does take me a little bit of time. Often, when they finish my sentence, they are not finishing my thoughts at all!

As an example, even within my own family, my younger (4 y.o.) sister started completing my sentences a couple weeks ago. Whenever I try to share a story with my family and I block, she steps in and fills in with the words she thinks I am trying to say. I get very frustrated. My mom has explained that she is trying to help and doesn't understand exactly what stuttering is. Even though she has lived with me her whole life, she doesn't realize that it is something I struggle with daily.

When this happens to me, I stop my story and tell the person, "Could you please not finish my sentences? I have a stutter, so sometimes it takes me a while to get words out." Usually, people respond with an apology and try to let me finish my own sentences. If they continue to complete my sentences, I ask them a second time to stop doing that. By the third time, I walk away and ask someone who does understand to explain it to them.

If you stutter and have this problem, I understand! I would also like to hear how you deal with the situation in your life. If you talk with someone who stutters, I hope that you have learned a little bit from this article and allow others to complete their own thoughts. I know it takes extra time, but I promise it's worth it!

.....

Nate R.

Mesa, AZ, 9 years old

Nate has stuttered since he was 3 years old.



Some days I feel like the luckiest woman in the world. I have a wonderful husband, 3 great kids, and for the last 5 years I've been involved in various ways with the NSA; the most incredible organization that makes a difference in the lives of people who stutter and those who love and support them. Back in 2005, when it was clear that my son Cam was not going to be in that large percentage of children who outgrows their stuttering, I began searching for answers, and that's when I stumbled upon the NSA in one of my late-night, anxiety-filled internet quests for knowledge. As I perused the website, I felt like

I had finally found a place where my questions and concerns were being addressed in a meaningful and supportive manner. I was able to utilize the information available on the NSA's website with family and friends, and when Cam went off to kindergarten, with his teachers and the families we met through relationships he was making with his classmates.

In 2008, Cam was finally old enough to attend his first conference in Parsippany, NJ. He was extremely excited because although he stutters, he has always been outgoing and loves to meet new people and experience new situations. On the other hand, I was nervous and anxious. I'm not nearly as outgoing as Cam, and attending as a first-timer not knowing what to expect was simply not a comfortable situation for me. As much as I'd like to say I was able to relax and have that "ah-ha" moment as soon as we walked in, I didn't. The first day was overwhelming and emotionally draining, but over the next couple of days as I went from workshop to workshop I quickly realized that these parents sitting next to me, whom I'd never met before, understood me, my feelings, and my experience in a way that family and friends that I'd had for 20 years simply could not. This was the first time I was able to let go of some of the guilt and self-blame that I had placed on myself for years. I watched Cam completely relax and enjoy himself and have no self-awareness about his stuttering because he was in a safe place where he didn't need to care about how he was speaking. It was then that I knew I had to do more to give back to the people and the organization that had given Cam, my family, and me so much.

Shortly after the 2008 Annual Conference, I began volunteering for the NSA in whatever ways I was able. In 2010, I was elected to the NSA Board of Directors as Family Programs Co-Chair and I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the board contributing to the mission of the NSA. Recently, I was fortunate to take on the position of Family Programs Administrator, and I am extremely excited about my new role in the NSA. It is my goal to create and foster an environment at our St. Petersburg 2012 Annual Conference (and beyond!) for parents and their children that will allow them to learn, know they are supported, develop relationships, have fun, and realize that they are not alone.

If you and your family are unsure about attending this year's conference, I encourage you to join us in St. Petersburg, Florida, July 4-8 for Freedom of Speech at the Beach. You will not regret it and I guarantee your lives will be forever changed! See you there! ::



Ask the EXPERT

NINA REARDON-REEVES, M.S., CCC-SLP, BRS-FD

Q :: My 11-year old son has begun switching out words for ones that may be easier for him to say if he knows he will most likely stutter on them. Also, when he gets stuck in a prolongation or block he sometimes just says "oh, forget it" or "nevermind" and doesn't finish his thought. Is it effective for him to switch and/or avoiding certain words as a means of dealing with his stutter? Additionally, what is the best way for the listener to address a speaking situation where it's clear he has something to say but decides he'll just move on by ending the conversation?



A :: This is a wonderful question, and allows us to discuss an often misunderstood subject; avoidance. For people who stutter, avoidance reactions can become ingrained and very powerful. Unfortunately, avoiding words and situations (what you are describing in your question) are not helpful in "handling stuttering." In fact, they are not handling stuttering at all! Avoidance brings momentary "fluency" on the outside, but it is a false fluency, as the stuttering is still happening "on the inside." Over time, it can begin to take more effort to avoid a stutter than to stutter openly, or to manage a moment of stuttering.

Many professionals and people who stutter alike seek to decrease avoidance through desensitization and acceptance of stuttering. This is a process that takes time, patience, and support.

Your second question speaks to the confusion many family members and listeners feel in dealing with stuttering. You can answer this question for your individual circumstance by putting yourself in the shoes of the person who stutters. Ask yourself, "What would I want or need from my listeners that would help me deal with my stuttering in the long term?" I pose the question this way, because as those who live in the world of stuttering, we must keep our eyes on the "long-term" prize. Many times, we do what we think will help in the moment, but forget to consider the long-term ramifications.

That being said, it is generally helpful for listeners to allow the person who stutters their own journey, but with the full knowledge that we care about WHAT they have to say, not HOW they say it. I like to tell my students that I hope they always say everything they want to say, no matter how long it takes. Encouraging communication without forcing it is the key. ::

It's Conference Time Again!

DEBBIE NICOLAI

It's that time of year again! It's time to make your hotel and travel reservations for the NSA 2012 Annual Conference in St. Petersburg, Florida July 4-8! You are going, right?

Just in case you haven't yet decided if you are going, here is a Top 10 list of reasons why you should:

10. It's a vacation away from home
9. The yummy dinner and fun auction on Saturday
8. You get to go to FLORIDA
7. It's PLAYTIME
6. You get to relax by the beach
5. You can go home with a Florida tan
4. You get to learn new things about stuttering
3. You get to meet new friends and see your old friends
2. You get to be surrounded by hundreds of people who stutter

And the number one reason why you should go to the conference...

1. The NSA conference is FUN, FUN, FUN!

Now that we have that out of the way, let me tell you about some of the great activities that we have planned for the 2012 Annual Conference. It's a new year, a new state, and a new program. The Teen Advisory Council is going to be everywhere! We listened when you said that you want the TAC to be more active in the workshops and more involved in the kids workshops, so there will now be at least one TAC member at every kids workshop! We also have a fun teaming event with the TAC and the kids planned. We are focusing on meeting the needs of our tweens. Are you too old for the kids workshops, but not quite old enough to attend many of the teen workshops? We have worked hard to address that issue for our 11 to 14-year olds and we're excited about what the Family Programs Conference Committee has developed. Do the kids and teens like Open Mic sessions? Of course they do! We will be hosting Open Mic workshops for both the kids and the teens! Closing Ceremony? We have planned a Closing Ceremony that won't be easily forgotten! You won't want to miss any of this!

If you haven't made your plans yet it's not too late! Register online, email us at Info@WeStutter.org or call (800) WE STUTTER. We'll see you in St. Petersburg! ::

