



# Conversations

With Alex Graham

**D**edication defines the subject of “Conversations” in this edition of *Volta Voices*. On a cold December day in 2009, I spent some time with AG Bell’s president-elect, Kathleen Treni, visiting Laurie Hanin, the executive director of The Center for Hearing and Communication (CHC). CHC is the new name for the world-renowned League for the Hard of Hearing based in New York City, N.Y. AG Bell has been reaching out to a variety of organizations in the interest of building partnerships. Our conversation included areas where CHC and AG Bell could explore future cooperative efforts as well as an exciting tour of their facility. Through our conversation, I realized that dedicated leaders like Laurie have an important story to tell. I hope you will enjoy getting to know Laurie as much as I have.

**Alex Graham: What made you choose audiology as your specialty?**

**Laurie Hanin:** When I was in college, I did some volunteer work with children

who were deaf in a nursery school at the Lexington School for the Deaf. I really felt a connection. I decided to major in Communications, and planned to become a speech-language pathologist. When I took my first course in audiology with Toni Maxon at Queens College in New York City, I realized I had found the area I loved.

**A.G.: How has the field of hearing loss changed over the years?**

**L.H.:** I think that there are at least two very significant changes in the field, especially for young children: cochlear implants and universal newborn hearing screening. For the first ten years or so of my career, when a child was diagnosed with a profound hearing loss, one of the first questions most parents asked was, “Isn’t there some operation that can help my baby?” And the answer was always “no.” Today, due to cochlear implant technology, the answer is a resounding “yes.” With the advent of

universal newborn hearing screening, our CHC staff are diagnosing hearing loss in infants and fitting hearing aids at much younger ages than in the past. When you combine early diagnosis with hearing aids and/or cochlear implants, and then provide high quality auditory-verbal services, it is much more possible now than ever for children with hearing loss to develop excellent speech and language skills alongside their peers with typical hearing.

**A.G.: From fundraising to service delivery, these are challenging times for nonprofit organizations. How do you stay motivated?**

**L.H.:** Two things really keep me going. First, I believe deeply in the mission of CHC. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all people with hearing loss. Second, I am simply awed at the quality of work the clinicians at the CHC provide on a daily basis. Just last week, I was watching a group

## Meet Laurie Hanin

Laurie has been with CHC since 1992 and has been an audiologist for over 30 years. She received her master’s degree in audiology in 1979 from Queens College of the City University of New York, and her Ph.D. degree in speech and hearing sciences in 1988 from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She has been a researcher in the areas of hearing loss and cochlear implantation and focused much of her clinical audiological work in pediatrics. She recently received the New York State Distinguished Clinician Award, is well published and has made frequent presentations at major conferences and conventions in addition to numerous television appearances as a leading expert in audiology, particularly on NBC’s “The Today Show.”



Photo Credit: Laurie Hanin.

speech-and-language therapy session with 3½-year-old children who are profoundly deaf. The therapist was talking about railroad tracks and the switches that they use to operate, and that if they don't work the trains can "collide." One little boy, who was born deaf, aided at about 3 months old and implanted at 9 months old with his first implant and at 12 months old with his second, asked her, "Does collide mean to crash?" When I see our therapists in action, and the results they achieve, that's all I need to stay motivated.

**A.G.: Your organization has a history that stretches back to 1910. What was the motivation for changing the name from the League for the Hard of Hearing to The Center for Hearing and Communication?**

**L.H.:** About two to three years ago, we began to feel that our name didn't reflect the scope of services that we offer, especially our work in enhancing communi-

cation skills in children and adults. We conducted numerous consumer surveys, which revealed that to the majority of people who had no prior experience with us, when they heard our name they believed our primary work was as a social group for adults with hearing loss. They had no idea that the "League" was a place to go to for clinical services. This confirmed what we had been hearing from many people anecdotally. So, we decided to start our second century of service with a new, more broad-based name. What hasn't changed? Our mission remains the same today as always: To improve the quality of life for people with hearing loss, regardless of age, ability to pay or mode of communication.

**A.G.: As a leader of an organization serving individuals with hearing loss, what do you think are the top three challenges these types of groups face today?**

**L.H.:** First, getting the word out on the critical importance of treating hearing

loss in the elderly – only 27 percent of people over the age of 70 who have a hearing loss use hearing aids. Second, ensuring that babies diagnosed early with hearing loss receive treatment without delay. Finally, working hard to gain insurance coverage for hearing aids in most states and improving reimbursement to providers.

**A.G.: What's next for The Center for Hearing and Communication?**

**L.H.:** This year we celebrate our Centennial and look forward to beginning our second century of service. While we expect that technology will continue to improve and that we will continue to offer state-of-the-art care to all of our clients, what we will carry into our next 100 years is the compassion with which we deal with all of the people who cross our doors. We are moving forward and utilizing new social media to reach as many people as possible with our new Web site ([www.chcheating.org](http://www.chcheating.org)) and our Facebook page. ☺

Experience better hearing today.

**Dry & Store**<sup>®</sup>

[www.dryandstore.com](http://www.dryandstore.com)  
800.327.8547

Finally hear what you've been missing.

**TransEAR**<sup>®</sup>  
For Single-Sided Deafness

[www.transear.com](http://www.transear.com) 888.382.9327

EAR TECHNOLOGY CORPORATION Helping people hear better, every day.<sup>™</sup>