

# Hearing the Difference

“Wow! Is this what it feels like to hear?”

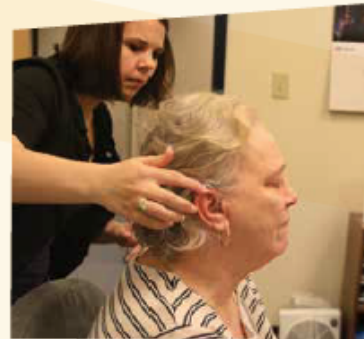
At age 59, Kathryn Eskridge experienced better hearing for the first time.

Due to a long history of ear problems, the Grafton, West Virginia, native had not heard normally since childhood. She was never able to afford hearing aids or other medical support.

Her hearing loss was the result of long-term ear infections and middle ear disease, according to her clinical supervisor, Janet Petite, an instructor in the College's Speech Pathology and Audiology Department.

“People with normal hearing often take for granted the things they hear in daily life. You never realize the types of sounds you hear all the time until you lose it.”

Because of her hearing loss, Eskridge struggled with everyday activities, even simply responding to a knock on the door. This particular aspect of daily living was a major concern, because she regularly received visits.



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“Meals on Wheels brought her food, and she could never hear them or anyone else knocking on the door. Family members unknowingly entering her home often surprised her. She was always startled by their presence,” said Crystal Vimpeny, a second-year graduate student and former president of the WVU Student Academy of Audiology (SAA).

**What changed Kathryn Eskridge’s life so dramatically was the amplification from two Starkey hearing aids.**

**And \$250 raised by the SAA.**

That amount covered her application fee for two hearing aids from HearNow, a program that provides hearing aids to people in need.

“I was in tears trying to think of ways of coming up with \$250,” Eskridge said. “I didn’t think it was possible.”

Eskridge was the first recipient of assistance from SAA donations to the SPA Greatest Needs Fund. The SAA holds fundraising events like the annual MountainEAR 5k to sponsor patients in the WVU Hearing Center, where the organization’s members serve as student clinicians.

“I was touched by the experience, and I wanted to pursue this for Kathryn by organizing the 5k,” Vimpeny said. “Of all the people I have fit hearing aids for, I have never seen anyone so grateful.”

“Kathryn Eskridge was the most appreciative patient I have ever met—so thankful and emotional,” said Ashleigh Callahan, WVU audiology assistant professor and SAA advisor. “The hearing aids gave her renewal and a brand new phase in her life.”

The SAA members later talked about Eskridge’s hearing aid fitting.

“I discussed how she was in tears and the overwhelming feelings. Everyone was touched by it,” Vimpeny said. “The reactions were inspiring. It was so good to hear that what we are spending time on goes toward a real effort. It is one thing to raise money, but to actually know someone who received it reminded us why we were working to raise the money.”

Before her final fitting, Eskridge was loaned temporary hearing aids from the WVU Hearing Center so she could experience her favorite holiday

season, Christmas, before her own pair was available.

Vimpeny added, “It was great for her to have them for the holiday season. She showed sheer disbelief about the ability to hear after a lifetime of a quieter world.”

“I felt really touched because you see people every day who get hearing aids. Yes, they are grateful, but to see someone so thankful for the services was overwhelming,” Vimpeny remembered. “It reminds us of the reason why we are in the profession in the first place.”

Helping one very grateful person discover what it’s like to better hear the world around her is only one example of the services the College of Human Resources and Education provides. The WVU Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology exemplifies what can happen when academics, professional clinic experiences, and a student organization combine forces to help. 🙌