

My name is Jessica Huddleston, and I am a third-year AuD student at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) in Oklahoma City, OK. When I am not in class or clinic, I spend my time in valuable ways serving my school, my future profession, and my community. Audiology, especially educational audiology, are reliant on providers going above and beyond for their patients, profession, and communities. Several of my professional mentors have invested in developing my love for service, leadership, interprofessionalism, and research. I hope to be a lifelong learner of these mentors and pass on my joy of service to future students and professionals. I have been a member of the Student Academy of Audiology (SAA) for three years. I serve as the SAA Oklahoma State Liaison. Through this I have been paired with a professional mentor, Deborah Earley (AuD), who is a pediatric audiologist in the public health arena. She has shared her joy in connecting families with resources in their community and throughout the state to provide interdisciplinary care to all whom she serves. I have also been privileged to serve for four years as an undergraduate and now graduate research assistant in the Hearing Evaluations, Rehabilitation, and Outcomes Laboratory under Dr. Carole Johnson. Dr. Johnson is passionate about teaching and inspiring students to provide excellent aural rehabilitation and pediatric habilitation. She served as a mentor for my undergraduate research project that investigated the listening effort in children and adults using subjective and objective measures. The understanding and appreciation of outcome measures and parent/teacher reporting tools and truly understanding all of the auditory and non-auditory needs that the patients/families have are skills that I will always remember due to being mentored by Dr. Johnson.

Pediatric audiology is something that I had no idea I would love, until I needed it. I was diagnosed with hearing loss in middle school after referring on a school hearing screening. This diagnosis was a shock to my parents. Being fit with amplification, learning to care for devices, and wearing the hearing aids in middle school were all spots on my journey that we did not anticipate. However, they are important milestones that would grow to shape my future interest in pediatric audiology. I soon realized that these milestones had shaped how I hope to serve children and their families as a pediatric audiologist. I can use my experiences and the insight my parents have shared with me to provide patient/family-centered care to families who are at an unexpected part of their journey. I hope to provide empathy during this time and to promote self-advocacy in the children that I serve. This can begin at a very young age, since a fair amount of my pediatric patients with hearing loss will have permanent hearing loss, they will need to learn to be confident advocating for themselves in school and recreational activities.

I can distinctly remember the moment that solidified my choice to transition from elementary education major to studying audiology and specifically pediatric audiology. When I was completing my undergraduate degree I often observed with pediatric speech language pathologists and audiologists. In one particular appointment the speech pathologist, who knew that I had hearing loss, was attempting to teaching similarities and differences. She was having the mom, patient, her, and I all take turns sharing a similarity and a difference and then the patient got to guess which one was a similarity and which was a difference. I shared for my similarity was that I too had hearing loss. He and his mom became emotional. She reported that

I was the first adult that she had met who was also diagnosed with hearing loss as a child. She was encouraged that hearing loss does not have to be a factor that limits your dreams or future. This moment was what encouraged me to continue pursuing pediatric audiology so that I can provide excellent interdisciplinary care to children and families. From that time, I have had several wonderful mentors who have continued to help me refine my clinical skills and encourage me to pursue research as way to keep pushing the envelope of what excellent care is. I have also been able to serve children and families who are underserved or unserved in Yucatan, Mexico. All of these experiences have worked together to solidify my interest in being a pediatric audiologist

