



## **We are Team Wendorf.**

We are a family of six and we want to give you a quick snap shot of our family, our son and our life with hearing loss.

### The Beginning

Our son Kai Atticus was born six weeks early and only 14 months after his big sister Lucia. We noticed immediate differences between Kai and Lucia from the way they observed people to the way they responded to visual elements. We had several people tell us Kai was the most observant baby they had ever met. As an infant Kai would study people's faces intently, this seemed untypical to many.

Kai had failed his newborn hearing screen. At the time we did not really know what that meant, but we were not concerned. A nurse informed us that 90% of babies fail due to fluid that has not drained from their ear canals. Four months later Kai failed another hearing screen, and when the UW hospital called to follow up on Kai's inconclusive hearing screen we finally took Kai to Children's Hospital for a BAER test.

Two hours after his initial BAER test we were told your that Kai has a moderate bilateral sensori-neural hearing loss. We were given a pamphlet on hearing loss, a hug and another appointment scheduled in 6 weeks for more tests. The news was strange and unexpected; we didn't even know what all those words meant but we just kept going knowing this was all in God's plan for our family and our son.

After several phone calls, a providential family connection to a nationally known hearing loss expert, and a handful of professionals who were willing to educate us we found ourselves at the UW pediatric audiology department with our wonderful audiologist Dr. Lisa Mancl. By the time Kai was 6 months old he had his first pair of loaner aids and had started auditory verbal therapy through Listen and Talk with our much loved therapist Star Leonard-Fleckman.

### The Blessing

When Kai was 18 months old our third child, named Otto, was born. Otto was thoroughly tested for hearing loss and the BAER showed normal hearing. It was not until we confirmed that Otto had normal hearing that we grieved the loss of "normal" in Kai. The emotion was difficult to process because it felt like we were denying who Kai is, or wishing for him to be different. We felt we had failed our son living in a world of denial and naivety.

In the midst of our emotion we realized something beautiful, that we had come to view the "loss" not as such, but rather the amazing blessing to live life with Kai in a wholly new and unexpected way. We jumped with both feet into a world we had never previously given thought to and in the process found a renewed beauty, admiration and love in the ability to

listen and talk, in the gift of language.

Hearing loss is a part of who Kai is, it shapes who he is and how he experiences every aspect of his world. It is now also part of who we are as a family. In the one minute it took to receive Kai's original diagnosis everything about our life became different. Swim lessons, play groups, soccer, every day trips to Trader Joe's have become something entirely different for Kai and our family. We no longer take for granted the ease with which people communicate or the natural progression of language development.

Outside of his hearing loss Kai is like any other little boy. He loves playing ball, skateboarding, reading, playing with trains and cars, slaying dragons, riding his new scooter and hanging out with Battle Cat (our cat). He loves playing with his sister and making his brother laugh. Kai seems to have an intrinsic love of music and has some impressive dance moves. In our own home while playing games, sharing stories, dancing or painting his hearing loss is often unrecognizable aside from his cute charcoal gray hearing aids.

Once outside the comfort zone of our immediate family Kai's differences become more apparent. If Kai walks into a large room with several people, if friends come to play or if a new face is introduced he faces new challenges; he must adjust to the noise level, it is more difficult for him to localize sound (even our familiar voices) and he has to accustom himself to new voices. He often struggles to regain his confidence and assert himself as we know he can and want him to.

#### The Current Path and the End Goal

Upon his original diagnosis and our early meetings with both Dr. Lisa and Star we were encouraged to create family goals for ourselves and Kai. These original goals written in our IFSP have intensified in nature but stick to the big idea that we desire Kai to be successful in a normal hearing world. In order to achieve this goal we desire for Kai to:

- Be mainstreamed into our neighborhood Kindergarten along with his peers.
- Clearly articulate his speech so that someone unfamiliar with Kai can understand and respond to him.
  - Be able to tell a sequential narrative in order to explain something that has happened.
- Be able to confidently play and converse with other children aside from his siblings during play.
- Be able to use words to articulate emotion.

Every day we are humbled, amazed and encouraged by Kai's language development. His encouraging growth is due in large part to the professionals who have helped us navigate the waters of having a child with hearing loss. We are excited and scared as we prepare to enter into a new season outside of Early Intervention Services and into the IEP process.

In accordance with our goal and dream for Kai to enter mainstream Kindergarten we desire Kai to have continued support, direction and teaching by trained teachers of the deaf. There is still much work to be done before he is able to clearly and articulately communicate with someone unfamiliar to him and can participate in our neighborhood Kindergarten classroom. In order to equip Kai with not only the language skills necessary to be successful we know he will need to be taught to advocate for himself in a way that is specific to a child with hearing loss. We believe these needs can be best met by professionals who have been specifically trained and have experience working with other children (and families) with hearing loss.