



# COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Better Hearing & Speech Month

## CRMS SLP Provides Hearing Screenings During Better Hearing & Speech Month

May is Better Hearing & Speech Month (BHSM), and a time for Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Audiologists to raise awareness about communication disorders. For the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row, SLP Kelly Brophy will offer hearing screenings to teachers and staff at Chestnut Ridge Middle School.

Hearing screenings are standard practice routinely performed on students by the school nurse in public schools. Brophy can remember having her hearing screened when she was school-aged, "...but it wasn't until *and because* I was in graduate school for Communication Sciences and Disorders that I had my hearing screened as an adult."

Brophy first offered screenings in May 2015 and explains that she found her situation to be commonplace—the vast majority of her colleagues at CRMS expressed that the hearing screenings Brophy offers each year are the first they've had in adulthood.

A hearing screening is usually a preliminary step in which an individual's hearing is checked to see if further evaluation by an Audiologist is warranted. Screenings are completed with an audiometer, which is a machine used to evaluate hearing acuity. Brophy explains, "It's simple—I instruct each person to put headphones on, listen for tones at different frequencies presented in each ear, and raise the right hand if the tone is heard in the right ear, and raise the left hand if the tone is heard in the left ear."

Each year, Brophy borrows the CRMS Health Office audiometer and schedules varying blocks of time throughout the month to offer these quick screenings to the CRMS staff. Brophy says the screenings were and continue to be very well-received. "Everyone is always so enthusiastic and grateful for these screenings that take literally 3 minutes to complete!"

She notes that some people have expressed apprehension alongside enthusiasm to have their hearing screened. "I often share what I discovered when I first had my hearing screened as an adult: I have a mild hearing loss in my right ear that impacts the speech frequencies." She explains that sharing her story, its impact, and how to compensate for it seems to be

comforting or help normalize less-than-perfect screening results for some. Brophy uses a visual commonly known among SLPs and Audiologists as the “Speech Banana” to illustrate the speech sounds the screening tests. “For my degree of loss, I might have trouble hearing /s/ or /z/ sounds in noisy environments like a school cafeteria or at a restaurant. Those speech sounds are important for many communication functions, such as expressing plurality and possession.”

Hearing loss is an intangible difficulty many people don’t know they have. Brophy sprinkles in suggestions for hearing protection (e.g., while mowing the lawn), and insights into hearing and balance disorders like tinnitus (i.e., ringing in the ear[s] ) when colleagues show up in her speech room to take advantage of the offer. “It’s beneficial to me too—us SLPs are guided by the ‘use it or lose it’ neuroscience principle, so I get to use hearing science I learned about in graduate school, so I don’t lose it!”

For information on hearing and balance, visit: <http://www.asha.org/public/hearing/>

To locate an ASHA certified Audiologist, visit: [www.asha.org/proserv/](http://www.asha.org/proserv/)