

Powering Potential Podcast

Season 2, Episode 6: Dreams for the Future

Harper: I kind of, like, still want to be on Broadway, but I have other dreams, too.

Dr. Teresa Caraway: Welcome to Season Two of *Powering Potential*, a podcast from Hearing First where we explore the unique joys and challenges of growing up with hearing loss. I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway, your host, a mother, and a speech-language pathologist specializing in Listening and Spoken Language. In Season Two, we'll get to know six incredible teens and young adults who are learning to navigate the hearing world as individuals with hearing loss.

So far in this season, we've learned about the experiences and emotions of our young friends on the Listening and Spoken Language journey. In our final episode, we'll talk about their current accomplishments and dreams for the future—and they have big ones, dreams that they'll be able to achieve because of the solid foundation their parents, family, teachers, and friends have helped them create.

While Harper's dreams include gracing the stages of Broadway, it's her current efforts that are laying the groundwork for her illustrious future. She not only has been a leader on her cheerleading squad for several years, but she's also been a leader in student council. She explains how she got the vote.

Harper: I tried out for student council, and I made student council.

- Dr. Caraway: You have to make a speech and do all that? What kind of questions did they ask you? Do you remember?
- Harper: They ask you, like, “Why would you be a good member of student council?” and like, “What [benefits] would you bring?” They also did one fun question for each person, [and mine] was, “If you were in a car, what would you be?”
- Dr. Caraway: Cool. How did you answer the question, “What would you bring to student council?” Do you remember what your answer was?
- Harper: It's been a while, but I think I said something like, “I could bring, like, showing people that they can't limit themselves.” And I don't know why I like that so much. I always say this, like, “You can't limit yourself and stuff.” I just like to help people, and I've always been, like, a natural leader, too.
- Dr. Caraway: And Harper isn't the only one who's achieved a leadership role in school. Kane tells us about his experience on the campaign trail.
- What else do you do at school?
- Kane: Well, at school I'm involved in FCA. I was a class president this year [of] student council. We went to Washington D.C. Our teacher, Ms. Larmen, took us there. She's one of my favorite teachers of all time. She's great. She took us there. She took [the kids in the] Gifted and Talented [program] also. It was a great experience, once in a lifetime.
- Dr. Caraway: Yeah, it sounds like it. Did you have to run for student council president?

- Kane: Yeah, I gave a big speech in front of the class, and it was a pretty good speech.
- Dr. Caraway: Do you remember what you said in your speech?
- Kane: Well, first, we had to talk about why we're running [for] student council, why you should be voted [in for office], and then a little bit about yourself.
- Dr. Caraway: Okay.
- Kane: Well, I talked a little bit about myself: I play sports. I love hanging around with my youth group, my family, [and] going to church. And then I play baseball and travel all over the nation [with my team]. Then, why I should be running for student council? I take the right things serious and I want good things to happen at our school because that's always happened. Then, I'm a man of my word and I'm a man of my integrity.
- Dr. Caraway: That sounds like a pretty good speech.
- Kane: Yeah.
- Dr. Caraway: Their accomplishments have not been limited to the school walls. Zach takes us beyond the classroom, proving that someone with hearing loss can become whoever they want to be, including a musician or an Eagle Scout.
- You're playing guitar. I didn't know that.
- Zach: Yeah, I started, like, a week and a half ago. I was like, "You know, I like listening to music a lot, so if I learn the guitar, later on down the road I can focus on that and my singing." I've always wanted to be, like, a performer.

Dr. Caraway: Yeah.

Zach: [I] just kind of thought that'd be a good place to [start].

Dr. Caraway: You may have that hidden talent. Who knows? We may be talking to the next Garth Brooks or something.

Zach: No, not country, not country.

Dr. Caraway: Not country?

Zach: No.

Dr. Caraway: Oh, what kind of music?

Zach: I like more alternative, pop-type music.

Dr. Caraway: Okay. Tell me about Boy Scouts.

Zach: I like it a lot. I like going camping outdoors and, of course, outdoors meant bugs. To me, back then, that was, like, [a] huge deal. As I got older, honestly, it kind of dropped off and the fun level [tapered off a bit.] I still ... I enjoyed it, but at that point I was starting to get busy with other things in high school, and it was just kind of ... Like, I just felt like I wasn't being able to experience it to the full potential. I mean, I kept going, and I got my Eagle Scout [Award].

Dr. Caraway: Yeah. That's a huge honor. That's a huge rank and attainment.

Zach: Yeah.

Dr. Caraway: I mean very few people reach Eagle Scout.

Zach: Like 5 percent.

- Dr. Caraway: Earlier in this episode, we heard from Harper and her dream of being on Broadway, but that's not her only dream for the future.
- What are some of your dreams?
- Harper: It kind of changes throughout the years, but I think I have a pretty good plan that I'm probably going to stick to. I really want to be, like, a personal therapist that you can, like, talk to, to help you with your problems. Then I want to be a lawyer, too, like a litigator that goes into court.
- Dr. Caraway: Oh, wow.
- Harper: I was thinking, because I can go back and get my law degree later in life, so I could just work [on] being a therapist and then, like, find a good spot and then go back [to school]. I mean, I've always been kind of curious about what I'm going to do when I'm older.
- Dr. Caraway: Sure.
- Harper: When I was little, I had five things that changed every day. I'd be like, "I want to be a baker. I want to be a vet." I mean—
- Dr. Caraway: I love Harper's big dreams and big heart. Kane and Zach tell us about their dreams for the future too.
- Tell me, what are your reasons of why you want to be an audiologist?
- Kane: Well, one is because I've always been around them. Like when I go to [audiologist office], I realize that, like, what they do is just amazing, with kids. And they always have a smile on their face to do whatever they have to do to

help them. That's what I've always wanted to do since I've always been around them.

Dr. Caraway:

Tell me about [your] hopes and dreams for going off to college and what you envision.

Zach:

That's such a hard one, [such a hard] question because there's just so much that I want to do. I've always had an interest in politics, so going into strategic communication could help with [that]. ... Honestly, my biggest dream is to have a political talk show. That'd be awesome.

Dr. Caraway:

For Peter, his path to college took some unexpected turns, but along the way, his positive attitude and resiliency shine through the disappointments.

Peter:

I'm fortunate enough to say that I haven't experienced that much failure in life because I'm pretty smart, and I'm good at school and that kind of thing. But the few failures I have ... I remember I was applying for colleges, right? That's a very scary time for anybody, let alone somebody who has a disability, who's scared of failure and rejection.

Dr. Caraway:

That's the ultimate worst is college applications, right?

Peter:

Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Anyway, June rolls around and I hear back from those schools. [And I] didn't get into any of them, which was a big bummer. I was super sad about that. Then I realized that's what happens. I mean, you tried, and that's why I put myself out there is because I always knew that if I didn't try at least, I would always have this, "What if? Could have I gotten in?" I feel like that was very important to me to, like, put myself out there and try. If it didn't happen, it didn't happen.

- Dr. Caraway: Yeah.
- Peter: I was just down in the dumps for a while. Then I was realizing, I mean ... And my mom and my girlfriend and my dad and they all told me, "This happens; it happens." I mean, there's nothing you can do. You just got to wait and see what happens. I'm not sad or disappointed [that] I didn't get into those schools. I feel like the fear of failure you were talking about earlier ... I feel like I've just accepted it and moved on and realized it's opened new doors for me, and [I've] got to take advantage of those doors.
- Dr. Caraway: Connor has already been in the workforce for several years. He's currently just one of a handful of pediatric audiologists with hearing loss.
- Connor: I will tell you there [are] not a lot of audiologists with hearing loss. There's—
- Dr. Caraway: It's probably a very small number isn't it?
- Connor: It really is. I can only think of about 40 to 80 in the country.
- Dr. Caraway: What type of accommodations or modifications ... How do you do that?
- Connor: An audiologist's typical day is, of course, testing hearing, but you also have to be able to listen to different people's hearing aids. I have a really profound hearing loss, but if I'm testing somebody with a much lesser degree of hearing loss, I have to be able to do that. You also have to be able to talk to patients. There's a lot of accommodations involved.
- Dr. Caraway: Specifically, like you just said, you have to listen and test an individual's hearing aid.

- Connor: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dr. Caraway: How do you do that?
- Connor: There's some equipment that we can use that will allow us to be able to do it. I don't rely on my own hearing to do that. I rely on the equipment. I rely on science to be able to test it. And that's how I can most effectively be able to assess someone's hearing aids. As far as testing hearing, I use the FM systems that I so much didn't want to use in middle school. I use FM systems now to be able to test hearing.
- Dr. Caraway: What do you see for yourself 10 years from now?
- Connor: I've thought about that a lot. Obviously, being an audiologist of some sort. My mentor is amazing in that he is on all of these boards, and he provides a lot of education. I've really kind of set myself up to try and follow in his footsteps the best I can, but I don't know if I would want to do just cochlear implants. I would like to be in a teaching role, something like that. That's really where I see myself headed. For me, if I'm able to positively impact one person a day, that's a good day for me. So that's really what I want to do.
- Dr. Caraway: The future isn't all about school and work. Just like all of us, our young friends have dreams of finding love and starting a family.
- Do you think someday you'll get married?
- Jayden: Probably, yeah. I'd say I could get married.
- Dr. Caraway: You think someday you'll have children?
- Jayden: Yep.

Dr. Caraway: Yeah?

Jayden: If I get married. Yep.

Dr. Caraway: If you get married. Yeah. What kind of parent do you want to be?

Jayden: I want to be a good dad, just be caring and loving.

Dr. Caraway: For Connor, this reality could be sooner rather than later. As we heard in the last episode, Connor recently got engaged to Stevie. Their future with children is top of mind.

At some point, do you envision [in] your future that you and Stevie would have children?

Connor: Yes, we are thinking about children.

Dr. Caraway: Okay, so have you guys talked about what happens if a baby is born with hearing loss?

Connor: We have, yes. There is a likelihood that I could have children with hearing loss. My hearing loss is genetic in nature, so it's possible that I could. And we would definitely do cochlear implants and Listening and Spoken Language.

Dr. Caraway: You guys have talked through all that?

Connor: Oh yes. Yeah.

Dr. Caraway: Our young friends are trailblazers with wisdom beyond their years. They have overcome obstacles and fought for their place in the world, sharing their passion and enthusiasm. They have built a legacy, but they are not done yet.

Let me ask you this: If you were coming back to your high school reunion, what do you want your classmates and your teammates to remember about you and say about you?

Kane:

I was good in class and I wasn't, like, just deterred and I didn't disrespect teachers and stuff like that. And that I was always a good influence [on] others.

Peter:

Everybody always asked me, why are you so competitive? I feel like part of it's because I hate losing so much. And I feel like part of the reason I hate losing so much is because I want to put out such a good image for everybody. [I want to show people] that, for lack of a better word, that, "Hey, people who are deaf aren't losers. So like, people who are deaf can be winners too."

Harper:

I'm, like, doing student council and cheer, but I was born deaf. Like me doing it, I feel like that shows a lot. Also, I just try and be nice to everyone—even if they build robots.

Dr. Caraway:

We would all do well to listen to Harper's final words of wisdom: To just try and be nice to everyone. I want to thank Connor, Jayden, Harper, Kane, Zach, and Peter for opening their hearts and bravely sharing their stories with us over the last six episodes. I've been truly inspired by their wisdom, kindness, and grit as they navigate the world with hearing loss. And I hope you have been to. Thank you for listening to Season Two of *Powering Potential*. If you haven't already, I encourage you to go back to Season One and listen from the beginning. You'll get to meet parents who've been in the trenches and have invaluable wisdom to share on raising children with hearing loss.

Announcer:

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