

Early Career Professional Meet Stephanie O'Silas--Speech Language Pathologist

When I first made the decision to become a Speech-Language Pathologist, I asked myself what kind did I want to become? My nature has always fixed toward programming and planning. I certainly had the stamina for being very involved and engaged in groups. When I chose the profession, I made a conscious commitment to advocate for the profession, learn about it, and to find ways to be engaged. In an undergraduate elective course for 'History of Non-Profits,' I chose to focus my own research paper on the history of ASHA. Doing so allowed me to thoroughly understand ASHA's presence, resources, and programs. As a result, I learned of NSSHLA and became more empowered to advocate. I organized a group of CSD classmates to join me in reviving a NSSHLA chapter on our campus at Case Western Reserve University. In this same year, I drove to my first ASHA convention in Philadelphia. Awards night for the Honors and the Fellows was the most inspiring. I took time to review the biographies of the recipients and this shaped my understanding of what I could eventually do for ASHA. I also noticed a prerequisite--being awarded Fellow required volunteerism with the Association.

Sometimes it takes others to notice dormant talent in others and the right opportunities to cultivate that talent. My professor encouraged me to apply to the Ohio Speech-Language Hearing Association Leadership Development Program. I was totally surprised when I got accepted and I feel that attending board/committee meetings provided more insight. I later discovered ASHA provided leadership development opportunities as well. I saw that then, I could volunteer at convention and apply to the ASHA Minority Leadership Program (MSLP). I was accepted for each program in addition to the S.T.E.P. mentoring program. I must say that these three programs guided my entrance into the profession and fostered a culture of engagement. Volunteering at convention taught me how convention was structured and how to count CEUs while at the CE Booth! The MSLP program taught me how to make the most of my time at convention and while a member of ASHA. Each experience helped me learn a little more about ASHA and matters relevant to SLPs. Having several mentors available helped shape my goals for engagement. In turn, I now serve as mentor to other students through the STEP program.

Trying for leadership took several attempts. After MSLP, I completed an interest form for an open position on the Multicultural Issues Committee. I was not chosen, and this was 7 years ago! I reapplied to be a volunteer and expressed committee interest in early 2017. I received a call 6 months later announcing that I had received my first appointment to the Committee on Leadership Cultivation. This opportunity allows me to impact the longevity and agency of ASHA through members who are just as empowered to lead and engage.