

[2024 Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipients Announced](#)

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Shannon Williams of Cary and Ian Fan of Raleigh are being recognized with college scholarships through the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Wake Chapter Scholarship Program.

The program provides \$500 scholarships to high school seniors residing in Wake County who plan to attend an accredited university, college, community college or trade school. In its fifth year, the program is made possible by the generous support of participants in the North Carolina Walk4Hearing, a hearing health awareness and fundraising event conducted by HLAA.

Williams will graduate from Green Hope High School and attend the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Fan will graduate from Cary Academy and attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Learn more below about our outstanding scholarship recipients.

[2024 HLAA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Shannon Williams](#)

Shannon lives in Cary and is graduating from Green Hope High School.



Shannon's hearing loss journey

Since birth I have been deaf in my left ear, with moderate fluctuating hearing in my right ear. Since 2020 I've used a hearing aid in my right ear.

In and outside of school environments, I advocate for myself by moving closer to the front of the room or closer to the source of the sound. I often discretely let a teacher, boss or co-worker know about my situation and suggest how they might adjust their methods of communication for our mutual benefit.

"Shannon has always been proactive with regard to her hearing loss," says B. Carl Rush, her teacher in Advance Placement Environmental Science and Honors Marine Ecology classes. "Her self-advocacy is respectful and mature. Shannon does not let her hearing loss slow her down in any way, demonstrating a persistence in her interests and an unwillingness to let hearing loss lessen any experience."

School accomplishments

Shannon is an excellent student and is active in her school's chorus and theater programs.

My involvement in music began in middle school band, learning percussion instruments and music theory. I eventually progressed to leading sectional rehearsals in my Advanced Treble Choir in high school. Chorus serves as a therapeutic activity for me, offering stress relief and a sense of community with diverse individuals united by love for music!

A crucial turning point in my musical success was in my sophomore year when a chorus peer encouraged me to audition for a solo in a song. I was on the fence contemplating whether I should audition. Many negative thoughts raced through my head. Participating in that audition increased my confidence and opened up more singing opportunities, such as with the Eastern Regional Choir in my junior year.

“Shannon is a true lover of music,” says Chorus teacher Allen Botwick. “Her passion is evident in her rehearsals, out-of-class preparation and musical creativity. Her hearing loss regularly impacts her communication, social and musical skills. It took Shannon a few semesters in chorus to improve her pitch accuracy. However, I find her growth since ninth grade to be quite impressive. Fighting through this challenge demonstrated Shannon’s incredible perseverance.”

Future plans

Shannon plans to attend the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Although I am unsure of which specific direction in the field of music I would like to go, I am certain that in my future career I will continue to serve my community with my passion for music. I have been considering music education, with my inspiration coming from my chorus teacher, Mr. Botwick, or music therapy, which is a new career field in the music industry.



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2024 HLA Wake Chapter Scholarship Recipient Ian Fan

Ian lives in Raleigh and is graduating from Cary Academy.



Ian's hearing loss journey

I passed the newborn hearing test but developed rapidly progressive hearing loss and received a late diagnosis of profound deafness at age two. After months of fighting the insurance company, I finally had surgery for both ears (six months apart) by the age of two-and-a-half.

Afterward, there were constant reminders that I was different. I was labeled the “bionic man” because of the magnets that hold the implants securely on my scalp. I didn't play with other kids because I didn't communicate and often wandered off alone. I

traveled long commutes to a specialized preschool for deaf children to receive intensive therapy.

I was mislabeled due to a delay in my speech and communication. The developmental experts recommended a vocational training path. Self-contained classrooms or specialized schools were recommended. My parents were told I could not learn to play sports or music, but I could live successfully in adult homes or with assistance in the future. Knowing I was motivated, my parents decided to go with that and ignore the rest of the experts' opinions.

Thankfully, the miracle of medical technology, supportive parents, and thousands of hours of speech and occupational therapy paid off. I now attend a mainstream high school. Some experts doubted my ability to play music or sports, but I went on to become an all-district clarinetist and co-captain of the junior varsity basketball team.

Overcoming obstacles to do what most kids take for granted has given me a unique understanding and empathy for others. My self-belief is one of my greatest attributes when others doubt me. I was also blessed with a fantastic support system. For those less fortunate, I want to help them access resources that were available to me.

I've learned about families' financial burdens to pay for hearing devices and therapy sessions. Since the sixth grade I have raised funds for The Children's Cochlear Implant Center at UNC (University of North Carolina) through my participation in the North Carolina Walk4Hearing. Although annual fundraisers draw great publicity, I find the greatest satisfaction in the personal conversations. From speaking to parents with a newly diagnosed child with hearing loss to fist-bumping tearful eight-year-olds after coaching a winless basketball season, I realized I could pass my gift of self-belief to others and inspire a brighter mindset in each person. Seeing my story inspire hope and put smiles on people's faces is a gift.

I've learned that my disability isn't a loss but an opportunity for me, my family, my church, and my community to be more accepting of others who are different. Through my story, I hope other kids will learn not to let a label or diagnosis define who they are and can be.

There are still moments when I'm insecure about my hearing and speech issues. And there were those learning professionals who doubted what I could do based on a label. During those times, I tell myself to recount the lessons I've learned, remember where I started and the obstacles I've overcome, and be excited about future opportunities to be great and do great things!

Through the NC Walk4Hearing, Ian has raised more than \$50,000 to help The Children's Cochlear Implant Center provide remote therapy sessions for deaf children in rural areas.



School accomplishments

Ian is an exceptional student whose potential is described by one of his teachers as "limitless."

"Ian is a mathematics talent and basketball coaching enthusiast with the gentlest soul you could ever encounter," says college counselor Brandon Carter. "He'll be the college student everyone wants to live, study and grow with in their time together."

"This young man is a champion," says Precalculus teacher Dr. Hillary Sawyers. "He has done what experts told his parents that he would never be able to do. He works hard at everything. For example, in 2021, he was named first chair clarinet at NCAIS (North Carolina Association of Independent Schools); he had to push himself to garner that recognition. In addition, he is the founder and president of the Cary Academy Sports Analytics Club, where he teaches the importance of data-driven decisions. Team coaches have benefited from Ian's data analysis and reports."

Future plans

Ian plans to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Pursuing a major in statistics and data science is, for me, a strategic choice. It's about equipping myself with the tools to analyze, interpret and leverage data to advocate for policy changes, resource allocation, and awareness that can significantly improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. Data has the power to tell compelling stories, to

unveil the hidden struggles of marginalized communities, and to drive evidence-based solutions that can help my community.

My aim is to use my expertise in data science to conduct research that sheds light on the challenges faced by the deaf and hard of hearing community, among others. By quantifying the impact of early intervention, accessible education, and community support, I can provide concrete evidence that empowers policymakers, educators and advocates to make informed decisions that uplift those in need.

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