

# ReBuilding Lives

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Annual  
Newsletter  
2021



Austin  
Speech  
Labs



# Rebuilding Lives Takes Courage, Perseverance and Support

*Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is  
about creating yourself.*

- George Bernard Shaw



Each one of us has our own identity that is made up of a million little pieces. We build this identity as we grow and take on certain roles and responsibilities that give us a purpose in life. We have jobs, hobbies, passions/causes we care about, children, friends, and so much more. When someone suffers a stroke, their identity is suddenly stolen without any warning. If they can't speak, read, or write, who are they?

Rebuilding one's identity after a stroke can take many years, and communication is a critical piece of that identity. It takes intense therapy, perseverance, and courage to relearn how to communicate. It also requires affordable therapy so that stroke survivors can receive speech and language therapy for as long as they need it.

Clients at Austin Speech Labs are **ReBuilding** their lives, creating new identities, and finding new purposes. Jeff Thomas, a former airline mechanic and surfer, is returning to work part-time after five years of intensive therapy. Todd Ballangee began running and is participating in one marathon a month this year, four years after his stroke. Haley, a former kindergarten teacher, is back to school helping kids read again two years post stroke. Jeff, Todd, and Haley are just a few of the many stroke survivors at Austin Speech Labs who are learning to adapt and rebuild their identities. It's not just stroke survivors who are rebuilding - caregivers are rebuilding too, adjusting to life after stroke and taking on new roles and responsibilities. This year, Austin Speech Labs:

- Helped 150 stroke survivors rebuild their identities by providing 14,775 hours of affordable intensive speech, language and cognitive therapy.
- Had our highest number of enrollees in our organization's history: 496!
- Trained 19 graduate students from The University of Texas at Austin, Baylor University, the University of St. Augustine, Texas State University, the University of Virginia, Emerson College, and the University of Nebraska.
- Trained 83 undergraduate students from The University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University, and other universities across Texas.
- Partnered with the Austin Public Library to teach our clients how to download and read e-books.

As we continue to grow, we have done a little bit of rebuilding ourselves, streamlining our volunteer model, building up our graduate student program, continuing research, and providing therapy both in person and through teletherapy. We also have new technology that provides for a cohesive group therapy experience for our in-person and teletherapy clients.

Because of your support, advocacy, and financial investment in Austin Speech Labs, stroke survivors like Jeff, Todd, Haley and many others have the opportunity to receive long-term therapy and find their new paths and identities. They have overcome setbacks and road bumps, celebrated successes, and made strides in their recovery, one word at a time. On behalf of the Austin Speech Labs' board members and staff, I would like to thank each one of you for your continued support and I hope you have a wonderful holiday season!

*Shilpa Shamapant*

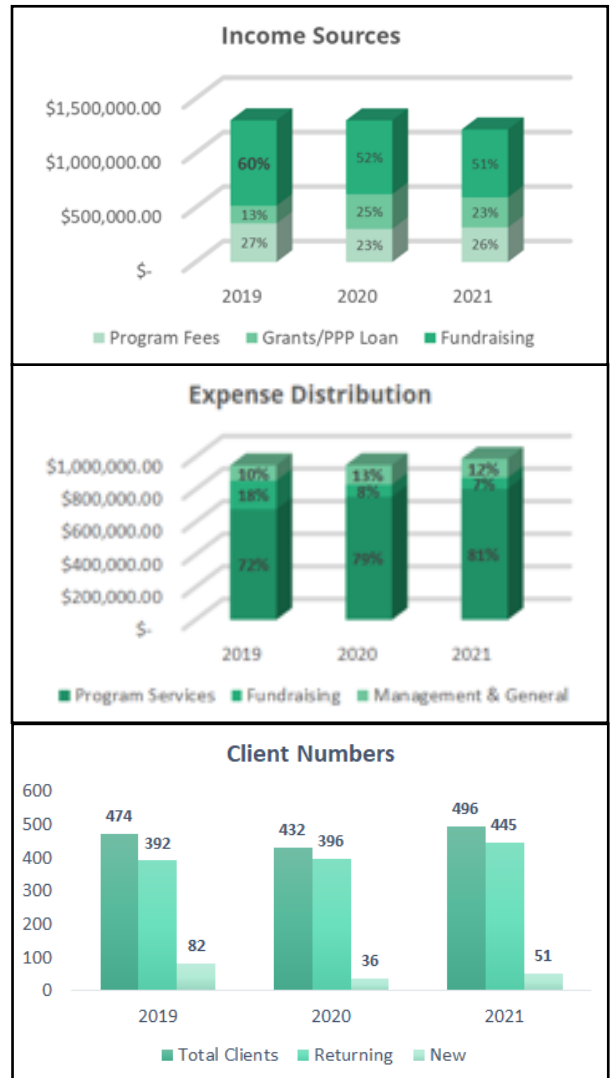
Shilpa Shamapant

M.S., M.A., CCC/SLP  
President and Co-Founder

# Our Growth and Impact

In 2021

Through the Years



\*The cost to provide therapy is more than the hourly rate we charge, so all clients receive some level of discount.

## Strategic Technology Partner



Your donations and continued support have helped us stay the course to continue to build our sound practice app, *Phonology*. We were fortunate to have our Board Chair, Adi Mishra, and his wife, Rajul, take over the app this year. Through their company, *Anchoreo*, they have developed the app pro bono, taking it to the next level of usability, engagement and functionality.

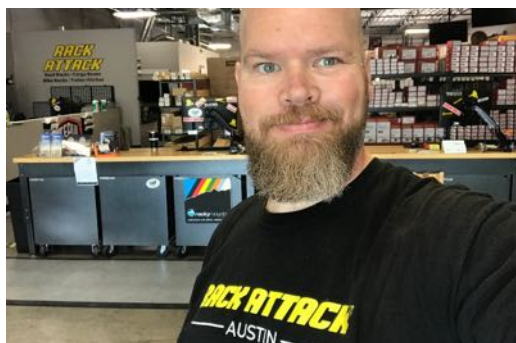
Our clients have been using the app in their therapy sessions at Austin Speech Labs since June of this year. Soon, the app will be available in the app store to use on Apple devices. The app is designed to improve reading and writing for stroke survivors as well as kids and second language learners.



ANCHOREO™



**PJ** is back at work and couldn't be happier. PJ lost his job during the pandemic, but he used that closed door as an opportunity to find something more meaningful for himself. He spent the summer interning at Garner State Park, and that turned into a full time job this fall. PJ loves spending his time doing something that matters and connects him to the outdoors.



**Zack** recently started working at Rack Attack. Although he was unable to return to his job in the food industry, he has always loved tinkering with his car and spent much of his free time doing so. Zack went out on a limb and emailed the company asking if they were hiring, and shortly after that, he got an interview and a part-time job! Way to go Zack.



**Haley** started back to work 2 years after her stroke. She is back in the school room working as a teacher's aide, and couldn't be happier. Haley still comes to speech therapy once a week and is hoping to eventually get a special education certificate and resume her post as a primary teacher.



**Jeff** is working for Rhino Staff in Waco, Texas. His wife, Marcy, started working there last year and the team was able to find a position for Jeff, too. He is helping direct traffic at the Baylor events center, and catching a point or two of those Bears. He was also recently hired to work in a local coffee shop that just opened in November of 2021.



It has been a journey of finding the right fit after his stroke, but 15 years later, **David** landed where he was meant to be. David was recently hired as the Chaplain for Baylor Scott and White. He says this experience has taught him how to better empathize with his clients, and he feels he was called to minister to others that are suffering as he once did. He also recently opened his own law firm.



Prior to his stroke, **Casey** was a brewer in New Mexico. Now he is working at REI and he's grateful that his new employer supports his therapy progress and goals! He also loves their products - so it's a win-win for him.

# CLIENT SUCCESS STORIES: REBUILDING THEIR LIVES



# What Just Happened?

by Jocelyn Leffall

Hi all, my name is Jocelyn. I am a classically trained Pastry Chef from Le Cordon Bleu. After graduation, I continued to fine-tune my skills working for Disney World in Florida and then returned home to Austin, TX, to start SugaPlump Pastries, LLC, where I went on to do weddings, festivals, conferences and even shared my love of pastries on local TV stations. During fall 2020 and the height of the pandemic, I started to develop a new brand called The Healthy Swap® that integrated my love of people, savory food, desserts, health, and fitness. I tested recipes, took nutrition classes, and was a fitness junkie training for my first power lifting competition.

I was ready to take on the world, but little did I know of the challenges ahead. On November 22, I was 42, and my life was forever changed. On the day, I remember feeling very tired, so I went to take a nap. The phone rang, I awoke and answered it with only moans and groans. The person on the other end said, "You sound like you are waking up. I will call you back." I finally fully woke up. I realized something was wrong at that moment. I tried to use my phone to call for help. I started pushing buttons, and when a person answered, I couldn't communicate. I tried to talk and nothing, I tried to write and nothing. It was like a bad game of Charades. I remember seeing people surrounding me. I was overwhelmed and remember thinking that I was okay and wanting everyone to leave me alone. In a flash, I was in the back of an ambulance being transferred to St. David's Neuro ICU. I was rolled into surgery because I had a ruptured brain aneurysm that caused my stroke. Of course, at this time, I didn't understand the severity of it. I ended up spending the next ten days, including Thanksgiving, in the ICU.

This was especially hard because I was in ICU alone at the height of the pandemic in stage 5. The nurses, therapists, nurses assistants, phlebotomists, doctors, housekeeping, and cafeteria staff became my best friends. Letting people in to see me was not something they allowed. In addition, they wouldn't allow gifts or deliveries. It was very lonely and scary for me since I had just gone through all that trauma. All I can remember wanting was someone to stay with me 24/7. I was scared and couldn't understand what was going on around me. Every morning, one good experience I had was when my daughter and mother came with coffee from my local Starbucks, where I was a frequent customer for five years. The

baristas left positive notes on my cup for seven days while I was in ICU. This was the moment I realized that my community was supporting me in ways that I hadn't noticed before.

I have faced every type of therapy to get me to where I am today with intensive Occupational, Physical, and Speech therapies. Additionally, I completed St. David's adaptive driving school. I passed that with flying colors, with some limitations slowly lifted as the months went by.

The most difficult part of my recovery has been my **Invisible Disability**. People are quick to judge and perceive me as the "old Jocelyn" when I'm still struggling with things they don't have a clue about and can't see. My current Invisible Disabilities are memory issues, cognitive fatigue, processing, aphasia, and sensory processing difficulties. After the BA/Stroke, it was like I didn't have a business. I couldn't remember anything. Fortunately, I had a business coach I was working with named Penny. I was grateful for Penny and my weekly meetings, they helped play a role in regaining my memory and what I have in the pipeline. Running a company in startup mode and having a BA/Stroke is very ambitious. However, I am determined to keep going with what I started and refuse to give up!

Many of the goals I'd had before the aneurysm and stroke weren't as important to me now. Being at ease with the uncertainty of my future has been challenging to achieve. I genuinely believe that having your life as you know it taken away from you in an instant, you tend to re-evaluate every part of it. We often take life for granted because we forget that it is fragile and can change in a second. During my therapy at Austin Speech Labs, they challenged me to ask the people who dropped everything to be with me during my crisis the simple question, "Who am I?" What I went through was all for a purpose that is bigger than I will ever understand. The one thing that I can and do understand is my daily gratitude mantra "I Choose to Live in Gratitude with my new Attitude."

**Thank you, Austin Speech Labs, for giving me back my communication confidence to return to the world!!**

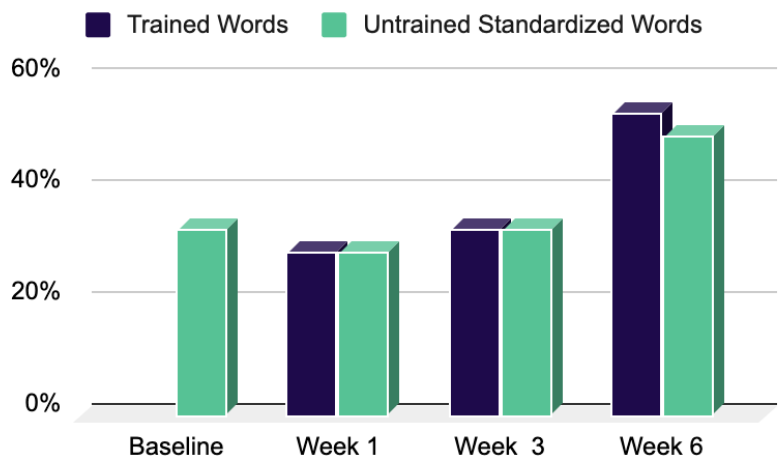
# Research

After a two-year pause, research is up and running at Austin Speech Labs. Here are the projects we've worked on this year:

1. In January, we conducted an evidenced-based practice study in collaboration with Dr. Lisa Edmonds from Columbia University and Dr. Jessica Obermeyer from the University of North Carolina. The study focused on verb usage and conversational speech in people with aphasia. We had a total of eight participants in the study. Our speech therapists were trained by our collaborators to apply a single subject study design to our intensive setting. The results of the study are currently being analyzed by Dr. Edmonds in her lab.
2. In August, we completed a two-year bilingual study in collaboration with Dr. Swathi Kiran from Boston University. The goal of the study was to be able to predict the most effective language that should be used in treating aphasic individuals with Spanish and English proficiency. We recruited twelve Spanish/English-speaking stroke survivors, and our bilingual therapists conducted pre-testing, post-testing and provided therapy in the predicted language. Boston University is wrapping up their end of the study now.
3. This fall we revamped the 2019 study of understanding neural substrates involved in language recovery with intensive speech therapy in collaboration with Dr. Mayra Henry from The University of Texas at Austin and Dr. Stephen Wilson from Vanderbilt University. Our clients complete MRI imaging and testing before and after our eight-week Boot Camp sessions. We have collected six participants' data and have four more participants to complete imaging for the first phase of study.
4. In September, we designed our own clinical treatment using a multi-modal learning approach of phonomotor and phonological treatment to help a stroke survivor improve his reading at the single word level. Using an application developed by Austin Speech Labs, the participant's therapy was designed for 3 hours each day, three times a week for a total of six weeks. Each day therapy was divided into three individual hours. The client is eight years post stroke, and over the six-week period, he improved his ability to read a set group of words from 33% accuracy to 54% accuracy for trained words and 33% to 50% accuracy for untrained words.



## Phonology Treatment on Single Subject



# Grants

## Finding unique ways to fund therapy for stroke survivors

As we reflect on 2021, we wanted to shine a light on our funding structure, with a specific focus on our grant partners. As our clients rebuild, we continually focus on making sure the Austin Speech Labs house is strong and that our three pillars of support - donations, program fees, and grants - remain solid. While the hourly fee we charge for therapy pays a portion of the cost to run Austin Speech Labs, we rely on donations and grants to make up the difference and ensure that therapy remains affordable for everyone. Grants, on average, cover 18% of our expenses each year, but in 2021, grants covered 28% of our expenses thanks to several Covid-related grants.

This year, eleven different local grantors supported our cause and became partners in our clients' recovery. Since each grantor has a different funding priority and our clients have a variety of needs, we tailor every grant application to meet the needs of both parties and to ensure successful partnerships. In 2021, our local grant partners:

- supported therapy for everyone
- supported therapy for seniors
- supported therapy for individuals in need
- supported our clients' engagement with technology and the City of Austin's Virtual Public Library
- provided new office chairs and personal protective equipment
- provided funding to hire a new therapist in the Spring
- provided community volunteers to assist in therapy, become conversation partners, and help with marketing
- provided general operating support

In addition to our local funders, we had the benefit of support from the Paycheck Protection Program, which provided much-needed relief during Covid



and kept us fully staffed. Our Research Team also concluded a project funded by the National Institutes of Health that investigated the treatment of bilingual stroke survivors.

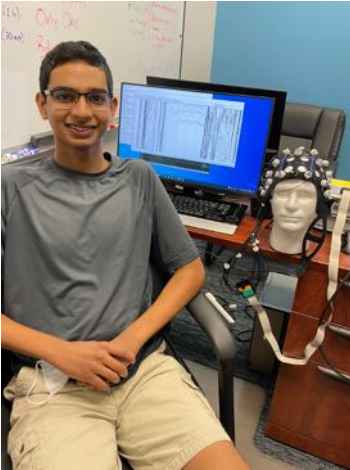
Each grant is a brick in the grants pillar that helps support Austin Speech Labs, and we couldn't do our work without the support of our partners. Thank you to all of our long-time grantors and our new partners as well. We are grateful you are a part of the Austin Speech Labs community!



A client learning how to use a Kindle Fire and the Virtual Library so he can read during therapy and at home. Therapy and devices are funded by the City's GTOPS grant.

# Spotlights

When you support Austin Speech Labs, not only are you making an impact on our clients, you're helping students find their passions.



**Meet Amrit Chandar.** He is an undergraduate student studying electrical engineering at UT Austin. Amrit spends about eight hours a week assisting with our in-office research project. Amrit told us a little bit about his experience at Austin Speech Labs.

**How did you get involved at Austin Speech Labs?** *Shilpa is a family friend, and she introduced me to the idea of helping stroke survivors learn to improve their speech, combining my engineering studies with speech pathology.*

**What are your duties on this project?** *I wrote the code for collecting data, processing the data and deploying the model in real time.*

**How has this experience helped you?** *This has been an incredible experience for me. I've learned so much outside of the classroom. I've learned how to read EEGs, I've learned about stroke recovery and speech communication, and my work here has led to several other internship opportunities. Volunteering at Austin Speech Labs has helped me become a better person. I love that the benefit is not just for me personally, but for others as well.*

**Dena Jansen** is a proud born and raised Texan who lives in Buda, TX with her husband and their two children. She is a CPA and former partner at Austin-based Maxwell, Locke & Ritter, where she managed the nonprofit practice. It was through this work that she was introduced to Austin Speech Labs and became a fierce supporter of the organization. She started out as our auditor and was so moved by our clients and the work we were doing that she gave her time to volunteer one on one with clients in therapy.

Dena has served on our One Word At A Time fundraising committee and is a dedicated sponsor of the event as well. She is a social media warrior, promoting our posts, and expanding our reach.

In 2018, Dena decided to pursue her passion for helping others experience more growth, connection, and joy and retired from public accounting. She started her own business, *Dena Speaks*, that works with strong-willed women and care-based firms as they seek their unique potential.

She continues to support Austin Speech Labs through her business by donating proceeds of sales. Dena is all that we could ask for in a supporter and more. She truly believes in our cause and goes all in. We can't thank her enough for all that she has done for us - volunteering, donating, and bringing attention to our organization. She has given so much of herself and we are truly grateful.

**Thank you, Dena!**



To learn more about all the great things Dena does, and to read her latest book, visit [Denajansen.com](http://Denajansen.com)

# Ways to Give

To find out more, visit our website at [austinspeechlabs.org/get-involved!](http://austinspeechlabs.org/get-involved!)

<b>Volunteer</b> We accept college students and community volunteers to help our stroke survivors.	<b>Friends of ASL</b> Make recurring donations by joining our monthly giving program.	<b>Company Match</b> Ask your company about their matching gift program and make your donation go even further.	<b>Donor Advised Fund</b> This is a private fund administered by a third party and created for the purpose of managing charitable donations.	<b>Shop to Give</b> Each time you shop at <a href="http://smile.amazon.com">smile.amazon.com</a> , Amazon will donate a percentage of your purchase to Austin Speech Labs.	<b>Make a Planned Gift</b> Including Austin Speech Labs in your estate plan is a great way to help make a lasting impact on stroke survivors' lives.
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**2022 One Word At A Time**

Friday, May 6, 2022

Four Seasons Hotel Austin



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### Our Mission:

Austin Speech Labs is a 501(c)(3) approved nonprofit dedicated to supporting stroke survivors and their loved ones in rebuilding their lives.

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