

## Facebook Live Interview with Hanna

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*If you have further questions for Hanna, you are welcome to email her at [hanna.smith@wavefrontcentre.ca](mailto:hanna.smith@wavefrontcentre.ca).*

### **Can you please describe to us a little bit about what you do at Wavefront Centre?**

Sure, I guess I'll give maybe a little bit of background about what Wavefront Centre actually is first. When you're an audiologist, you can work in a number of different settings. You can work in a public type of setting, like a hospital or a public health clinic. You can work at a fully private setting, which is the case for many hearing aid dispensing clinics. Wavefront Centre is kind of a unique situation in that we are technically privately owned, but we are non-profit. We're actually a registered charity, so we are governed by a board of volunteer directors. We basically charge what we need to charge for the hearing aids and services and any kind of surplus profit goes back into running the other services we provide. We have a communication devices showroom and we also do things like seniors outreach for seniors that are deaf and hard of hearing. So that's a little bit of background about Wavefront Hearing Centre.

I'm an Audiologist here, so my role within the organization is to basically see people who are having some kind of communication-related difficulty that's related to hearing. As part of my job, I will do things like see people for hearing tests. If there is hearing loss and there's interest in hearing aids, we will discuss the hearing aid options. We fit, service, adjust, and repair hearing aids here too. We do a lot of counselling regarding how people can adjust their communication to improve their hearing outcomes in different difficult listening environments.

### **What is the type of clientele that you work with? Do you see primarily young people or seniors?**

Our clinic is mostly adults. At one point, we considered ourselves to be adult-only, but we sometimes do hearing tests for children when there's too long of a wait list for them to get into the public health unit. We mostly work with adults, but it's really spread across the age range. I would say that a good portion of the clients I see are seniors that have hearing loss related to aging. That's one of the most common types of hearing loss that you find in adults.

But we also see people who are not seniors, such as younger people who have lost their hearing due to noise exposure, genetics, or other things like that. It's pretty spread out, but I would say a good percentage [of our clientele] is seniors.

### **Do you also work alongside any SLPs?**

No, actually, we don't have any SLPs working with us directly, but there are a lot of cases where we would want to refer back and forth. I think pediatric audiologists work more closely with SLPs, just because they'd want to rule out hearing loss as a cause of delays in speech. I think there are other settings where the two professions work more closely together, but not necessarily here.

### **We had a question here about ASL. How much of an asset is fluency in ASL for audiologists? Does it depend on specific practice settings?**

It very much depends on the practice setting. I would say it's definitely not required in any setting that I'm aware of for audiologists. It's always an asset. It's never not an asset to be able to communicate in sign language. The number of deaf and deaf culture clients that you see is relatively low. Even here, the majority of clients we see are hard of hearing as opposed to deaf and communicating with sign language. I started learning a little bit of sign language when I started working at Wavefront specifically, and that is because this organization has a lot of ties to the deaf community and we hire deaf staff as well, so it's been really useful for the work I'm doing here personally, but in other settings it might not come up as much.

**Have you always worked at Wavefront Centre? Have you worked elsewhere?**

I started working here in 2017, but I briefly worked at two different private clinics before. I've never worked in a hospital or a public health unit or a school or anything like that. In the audiology program, you definitely have the chance to do practicums in settings like that. I did two placements that were in hospitals, so I do have some experience with that, but I've never actually worked there after graduating.

**What are the differences between working in public versus private settings?**

There are some really big differences, and I think a lot of this depends on the age population that you are working for. I worked in [public] settings that were more diagnostic-related, which means that the role of the audiologist is to do diagnostic audiological evaluations - that's a fancy way of saying hearing tests, basically - and trying to diagnose any other communication-related issues. In the hospital settings I worked at, you would test hearing, write the report, and then you'd refer to a doctor if they needed more medical evaluation, or you'd refer to a clinic if they needed hearing aids or assistive devices. That was my experience in hospitals, but there are public health units where you're seeing pediatric clients, so you're not only doing the diagnostic testing, but hearing aid fittings and everything that comes with that as well.

**Do you have a preference in terms of which [setting] you'd prefer to work in?**

I enjoyed my time in the hospital setting, but I wanted to do more than just the diagnostics. I didn't feel quite as fulfilled just doing the test and then saying "Okay, go somewhere else and get a hearing aid now. Goodbye!" So it's nice to be in the setting where I'm in right now, where I get to do the hearing test, but also help that person for the rest of the journey with the hearing aid and so on.

**I know a lot of our club members are undergraduate students who are either looking into SLP or audiology. The biggest thing on our minds right now is graduate school. Where did you do your undergrad and what was it in?**

My undergrad was also at UBC in Speech Sciences. I received a Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Speech Sciences, so I probably took a lot of classes that are similar to what you guys are taking right now in linguistics.

**For graduate school entrance, I know UBC has a class called AUDI 402 (Neuroanatomy), which is daunting to a lot of us. Did you have to take that class as well?**

Yes, I did! Nobody gets out of that one, unfortunately. Not going to lie, it was a nightmare. I didn't really have the neuroscience background that some of the other people had that gave them an easier time. Some of my classmates were from biology-type undergraduate programs and I was like "I'm in psychology and linguistics!" so 402 was not fun. I don't think anybody had good feedback and to be honest, the online format wasn't great. I know that doesn't sound very reassuring, but I mean, just do it! Just get through it, nobody enjoys it.

There are times where knowing the cranial nerves and stuff like that kind of comes in handy for a better understanding of how things work, or for when you have to give a complicated explanation. That's when it helps to understand a bit more, but you're not going to use it on a regular basis.

### **In terms of applying to grad school, did you apply right away and did you get in right away?**

I did, and I did! I think I wanted to keep the momentum going, personally. I know that's not always the case. I definitely know some people who have started audiology or speech pathology as a second career, later on, and I think they had to do some course upgrading and things like that.

I was fortunate in that I finished my classes, applied, and got in on the first try, so I think I had an easier experience compared to some, for sure.

### **Another thing that is on a lot of our minds is resume-building and getting into graduate school. In terms of experience, what kind of experience did you get in your undergrad that you think helped you get into your masters?**

It might surprise you - I didn't have any kind of shadowing experience, volunteer experience or really *any* experience with audiology whatsoever other than what I learned in the classes I took in undergrad. UBC lays out their entrance requirements pretty clearly and they require either shadowing or observation or just an interview with an audiologist, so that was what I did, specifically for the application. I think the things that helped me get in the most was honestly just having a high GPA. Even today, it's pretty skewed towards having high grades. It's intense work and it's a 2-year program, so they want to make sure that you can handle the workload.

Other than grades, some things I had on my application that I think were helpful include volunteer experience with clubs. At UBC, I was the vice-president of a club and so it was helpful to show my experience in leadership, but it wasn't actually anything audiology-related. I think a lot of people think they need to volunteer so that they can get in, but that's actually not the biggest requirement. The biggest thing they're looking for, is that they're looking to know that you can handle the coursework, so that would be my advice - make sure your grades are up there when you're applying.

They're looking to know that you can handle the coursework, that you've done the prerequisites, and that you have interest in the field. They want to know why it's a good fit for you. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to have strict volunteer experience because honestly that's pretty hard to get and it's pretty hard to offer as well. Audiology is such a specialized field that it's hard to take volunteers and have things for them to do. It's almost creating more work for them, so in doing that, you're making more work for yourself. I encourage people, when applying, to make sure your grades are high, even if it means upgrading a course or re-do a course.

**Is it possible to learn ASL, or any other kind of sign language, quicker than the typical rate of acquisition? What kind of challenges did you see with learning sign language?**

I think it's similar to learning any kind of language you haven't learned before. I think in some ways you'd experience the same challenges you would learning a language you haven't had exposure to before. You need to practice a lot and you need to have conversations with people that know the language. That was a big challenge. The other thing with ASL is that it is different from a spoken language, so a lot of the rules that you learn in linguistics about languages are very focused on spoken languages. ASL is a visual language, which means there's a lot of information that's conveyed by facial cues. Even whether your eyebrows are up or down means something is different in addition to what you're doing with your hands. It involves the whole body, basically.

I was trying to learn ASL, but I didn't have time to immerse myself fully in it since I was also working full time. I did a two-hour class one night a week and after four of those courses, I was at a basic conversational level. But it's really hard if you're just doing it one night a week and if you're not constantly practicing it. One of the things that helped me a lot is that I have coworkers that are deaf - they were very nice. It's intimidating when you don't know the language, but you're trying to use it and you don't know how to say what you want to say.

If you find sign language fascinating, you should maybe consider doing an interpreting degree and learning sign language that way. You don't actually have to have a background in sign language to go into an interpreting program, but sometimes they might want you to have some basic knowledge. But if learning and using sign language is one of your main reasons for going into audiology, your opportunities for that may actually be quite limited.

**When did you decide you wanted to go into audiology and how did you decide you wanted to do it?**

It was pretty late into my degree actually, I think it was in my third year. My whole degree was me messing around and taking courses that were interesting and that I liked. That led to linguistics and psychology. That's where the speech sciences degree came in. I learned about audiology in one of my linguistics classes. An audiologist came in and spoke to us - that kind of thing. I think that was when it clicked for me. It was a good way to bring together all of the interests that I have. I've always gravitated towards some kind of health care work, but I could never handle anything as intense as being a doctor or nurse or anything like that. If you love learning about linguistics and communication, then audiology and speech pathology are the fields you should look into.

I guess Audiology drew me more because I really like the technology side of it, as far as hearing aid and assistive equipment go. I like the idea that you can use technology to make peoples' lives better. I think hearing aids are super cool now, cause I'm a big nerd! Honestly, technology has progressed so much and that's a really cool part of this job - to see how it's changing and to use it to help others.

**Did you consider speech language pathology at any point?**

I definitely did consider it, but I think I was turned away from it because it's so much one-on-one rehab type work. It didn't appeal to me in the same way that audiology did. IN both fields, you get to do so many different things, but I think audiology is maybe *more* diverse. I'm not quite sure

how to explain it, but you get to do the diagnostic part, you get to use the technology. You do get to do the rehab part and the counselling, but that's not the whole part of your job.

Many people know what speech pathology is but when I tell people I'm an audiologist, they think I'm a DJ or something. I still get that a lot! I encourage people to consider it because it's a really good job and there are so many different places you can work and so many directions that you can take it. That's my pitch for audiology!

Normally this is the point where I would say, "Email me! Come in and do shadowing!" but we can't right now for obvious pandemic-related reasons. If anyone wants to set up a phone call or send me an email, feel free to do that. I want to see this field get bigger :)