

Connections

2023 Annual Newsletter



Austin Speech Labs

stroke recovery one word at a time

Letter From The President

Celebrating 15 years of Stroke Survivors' Recovery and Paving the Way for the Next 15

Over the last 15 years, your support helped us provide thousands of stroke survivors with the life-changing speech, language, and cognitive therapy they needed to reclaim their voices, rebuild their professional lives, and rediscover the joy of connection and communication. As I am writing this article, I am thinking of Austin Speech Labs' journey of growth over this time - our challenges, our resilience, the community support we've received, and the possibilities for our future.

A Journey of Resilience and the Power of Community

In 2008, Shelley and I worked at a hospital and had to discharge a young stroke survivor due to insurance limitations. At the time, medical professionals and insurance companies believed that improvements in speech were not possible beyond a limited number of therapy sessions. However, stroke survivors did not feel adequately prepared to resume their professional or social activities because of their ongoing communication challenges. They not only needed additional therapy, which insurance would not pay for, they needed a community where they could feel connection and support.

Motivated by the lack of post-stroke therapy options, we founded Austin Speech Labs, a non-profit dedicated to providing speech therapy to stroke survivors regardless of their insurance or financial situation. We started in a donated room with four previously discharged clients. Despite initial uncertainties, they made progress and demonstrated the potential for recovery, fueling our dedication/commitment to help others.

The journey of the last 15 years was not easy. We've seen our share of ups and downs. But through it all, we've seen the power of determination – from the stroke survivors and their families, who have taught us to embrace challenges, transforming failures and setbacks into stepping stones for growth - to the members of the community who have rallied around our cause. It is the collective generosity of our donors, grantors, and university collaborators, the guidance of our Board Members, and the hard work of our team that has propelled us forward, enabling us to overcome barriers and serve our mission. This support has played a pivotal role in helping our stroke survivors defy the odds and we are immensely grateful for the invaluable help throughout the years.

Reflections and Achievements

Over the last 15 years, Austin Speech Labs:

- Provided over 210,000 hours of affordable and intensive speech, language, and cognitive therapy to **over 5,000 enrolled stroke survivors**, helping them return to their social and professional lives, and improving their quality of life.
- Increased stroke awareness and post-stroke recovery education by **training approximately 2,500 volunteers** across Austin and around the country.
- Started our **Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Student Program**, which has trained over 100 future therapists from universities around the country.
- **Launched our App, "Phonology: Speech Therapy,"** making speech therapy accessible beyond therapy time and to stroke survivors outside of Austin Speech Labs.
- Conducted **research** studies in collaboration with UT Austin

and other universities to understand neurological changes and language recovery post stroke. Our research studies helped us develop effective treatment techniques.

The Next 15 Years:

As we celebrate our past accomplishments, we look forward to the next 15 years with anticipation and excitement. Our vision for the future:

- **Affordable Therapy** - With the support of our community, we will continue providing stroke survivors with intensive speech therapy at a subsidized rate to ensure they receive the therapy they need to reach their goals.
- **Expand Reach** - We will serve more stroke survivors across Texas, and will promote the Phonology App to therapists and stroke survivors outside the walls of Austin Speech Labs, ensuring that no one faces the journey to stroke recovery alone.
- **Innovation in Speech and Language Recovery** - Continue collaborating with the University of Texas at Austin and stroke experts across the country to advance stroke recovery and reduce the length of recovery time.
- **Education and Awareness** - Continue training and educating our student volunteers - the future doctors and speech-language pathologists of our community - so they can understand the impact of stroke and provide better services to stroke survivors.
- **Community Connections** - Increase our visibility in the community, build upon existing relationships, and form new connections to support research and innovation opportunities.

On behalf of the Board Members and staff of Austin Speech Labs, I extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support, which has been instrumental in our success over the past 15 years. Together, we have defied expectations, transforming the lives of thousands of stroke survivors and their families. As we look to the future, we remain committed to our mission, fueled by this support. With your ongoing partnership, we will continue to provide stroke survivors with the comprehensive, evidence-based care they deserve, empowering them to regain their language, rebuild their lives, and rediscover the joy of communication, One Word At A Time.

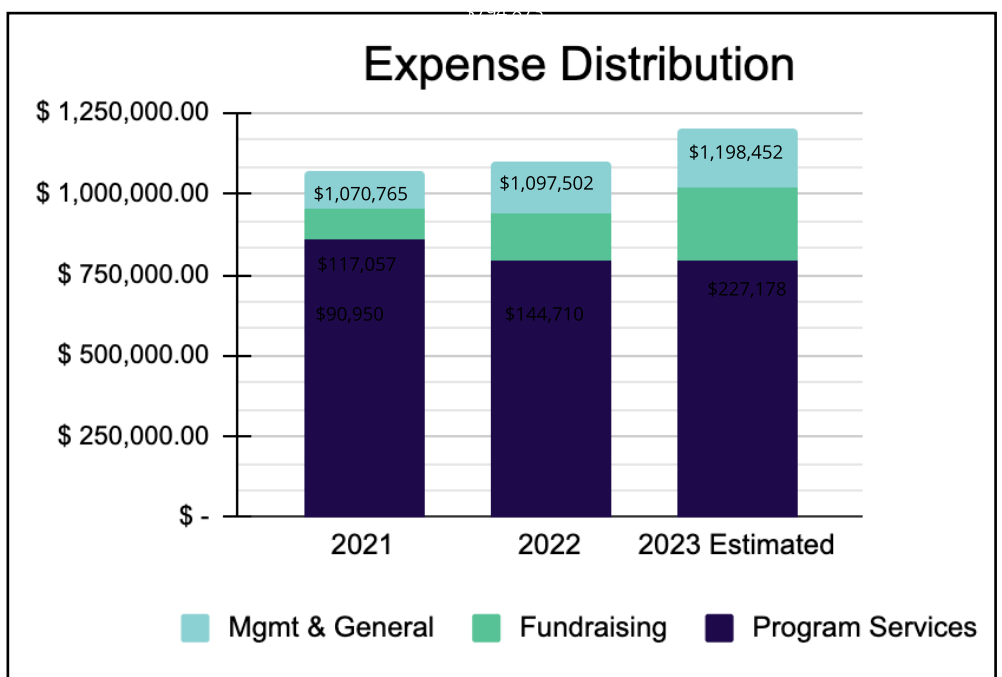
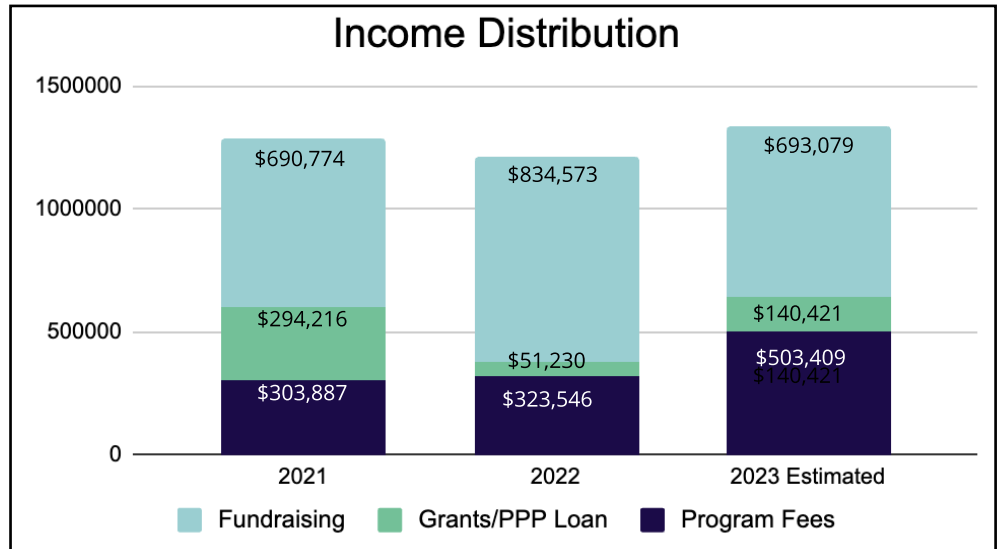


Shilpa Shamapant

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

Growth and Impact

Over the past two years our growth has shown a consistent upward trend. This year we provided 575 more hours of therapy than last year, including offering a new program: mini boot camps. The mini boot camps were offered during our typical break times in order to provide our clients an opportunity to keep working on their goals. We are delighted to report these mini boot camps have proven immensely successful, with 56 clients benefiting from this initiative. The feedback from our clients was overwhelmingly positive and our staff loved the change of pace and the collaborative moments the mini boot camps provided.



Volunteer and Donor Spotlights

At Austin Speech Labs, the backbone of our organization is a dedicated group of volunteers and donors who consistently shape our mission. Their contributions allow us to extend the reach of our speech therapy and offer reduced rates to all our clients. Our team of volunteers consists of college students and community members who offer their time, knowledge, and compassion to help stroke survivors practice the skills they have worked on in therapy. Our donors provide the monetary contributions that are crucial to our organization. Both are essential to the success of our stroke survivors and our organization as a whole. We recognize and are grateful for the sacrifices they make to assist us in our mission.



Louise Pickney, a 2017 graduate from UNC, recently decided she wanted a change in her career after working in public policy and education. She began volunteering at Austin Speech Labs to see if speech pathology was the right path for her. Louise has been volunteering with us since June of 2022, and this is what she has to say about her time with us:

Volunteering with ASL has impacted me both personally and professionally. In my personal life, ASL has shown me the power of community in recovery. It is a real gift to see how clients, volunteers, and providers here at ASL create a

community that supports people in each of their individual recovery journeys. Professionally, volunteering at ASL is one of the biggest reasons I hope to become an SLP who works with adults who have experienced strokes and TBIs. I love the creativity, joy, and tenacity that providers and clients bring to this work.

What has been a highlight of volunteering for you? *I have loved seeing the community that clients at ASL have built. This semester, I've been able to spend time volunteering in a group that focuses on verbal expression that is facilitated by two former clients. It is amazing to see these clients share about their lives with one another, find humor in their experiences, and support each other in recovery. Another highlight has been getting to volunteer with the same clients across multiple boot camps. It is really incredible to see folks progress and grow in so many ways -- not only in terms of language and communication, but also in confidence!*

Anything else you'd like to mention? *I'm just really grateful to ASL for providing students with the opportunity to work closely with clients and implement lesson plans created by SLPs. I've learned so much from the SLPs here about what individualized, thoughtful, and fun practice looks like.*

We are immensely grateful to have such hardworking and dedicated volunteers like Louise at Austin Speech Labs. Not only do they help us advance our mission, they infuse our work with a sense of excitement and joy as well.



For over five years, **Walt and Patricia Allinger** have been generous donors to Austin Speech Labs. Walt's journey with us began when he heard an NPR ad seeking community volunteers.

Walt, inspired by his own father's stroke journey (which began at the age of 30), took the opportunity to give to a cause close to his heart. Before the pandemic, Walt dedicated his time as a volunteer, drawing inspiration from his father's resilience and the transformative impact of speech therapy he had witnessed first-hand.

As a volunteer, Walt noticed a common thread between his father and our clients - an admirable lack of self-pity. Walt was also impressed by the positive and helpful nature of our staff during his time as a volunteer. As he gave his time to our cause, his connection with Austin Speech Labs deepened.

Thank you, Walt and Patricia, for five years of unwavering support. Your compassion propels our mission forward and creates a positive impact on the lives of stroke survivors. Here's to the continued journey of making a difference, one contribution at a time.



Client Victories

At Austin Speech Labs, we get to see the challenges as well as the successes our stroke survivors experience daily. Though we do not have space in our newsletter to report all of the victories we saw this year, we would like to highlight just a few:



After three years of dedicated therapy and unwavering determination, Haley has successfully resumed her full-time role as a kindergarten teacher with AISD. Her remarkable journey was celebrated at a school board meeting, where she was honored as an *AISD hero* and warmly welcomed back by the district's superintendent.



Beth passed her driving test! This is a huge milestone for her because at one point she was told she would never be able to drive again. She has been working on her vision and her cognition to get her back on the road to regain her independence.



Jun, a nurse in the Plano area, has been making significant strides in his speech recovery. During this boot camp, he improved his verbal production from 32% to 70%. An example of this progress is evident in his ability to describe a scene. Initially, he could only say 'pay,' but now he can express more complex thoughts such as 'she is paying money.'



Emily gave a presentation to the first year Dell Medical students with our board member, Dr. Steven Warach. She educated the students on the impacts of aphasia and how her stroke has impacted her life as a mom, wife, and copywriter. The students were so grateful for this learning opportunity and have requested that Emily return.



Louise Michaud and Bob Westbrook, two of our former clients, are now running a communication group on Tuesdays and Thursdays. What a joy it is to see two of our former clients share their experiences with our current stroke survivors.



Sarah suffered a stroke in March of 2023. Sarah attends teletherapy from Laredo, Texas twice a week. Her goals are to return to work as a stand-up comedian and to return to college. We are proud to announce that she is taking several courses this semester and she reported she is happy with her grades.

Resilience, Recovery, and Rediscovery

My name is Edward Castillo, and I want to share a story that includes resilience, recovery, and rediscovery. On July 17th, my life took an unexpected turn. I had a near-death experience, a momentary departure from this world, only to return with a renewed determination to live life to its fullest.

I've always been independent, a trait instilled in me by my single mother during the years we spent homeless in Austin. I started working at the age of 15, and after graduation, I ventured into the music industry. Through hard work and determination, I helped transform our small team into one of the state's leading music industry promoters. Along the way, I became a father to my son James. Life was busy, fulfilling, and seemingly unstoppable, until that fateful day in July.

July 17th began like any other day, but by 2 p.m., I found myself on the floor, surrounded by concerned faces – my mom, my partner, coworkers, and EMS personnel. I had experienced a seizure, a stroke, and cardiac arrest. My brain was covered in blood clots, and I was in critical condition. Waking up in a hospital bed two days later, I was disoriented, struggling to remember even my name. This marked the beginning of a journey, a journey of recovery that I had never anticipated.

The days that followed were a blur of confusion and frustration. I would spend two weeks in the hospital in and out of consciousness. I discovered I had lost the ability to read and remember basic words. I longed for my normal life, which revolved around reading and interacting with others. Depression set in as I grappled with the reality of my new challenges. However, amidst the darkness, a glimmer of hope appeared.

Austin Speech Labs entered my life, offering a lifeline when I needed it the most. The dedicated professionals there introduced me to a supportive community of individuals facing similar struggles. In their group sessions, I found inspiration and camaraderie. I learned about Aphasia and tackled my stutter with the help of compassionate speech-language pathologists, especially Austin, whose guidance became a beacon of light in my recovery journey.

In the past three months, I have faced physical and mental challenges, but I refuse to succumb to despair. With the unwavering support of Austin Speech Labs, I am rediscovering my voice and my purpose. They have not only helped me overcome communication barriers but have also guided me in navigating my personal life – from attending my son's football games to important work meetings.

My journey is far from over, and there are still hurdles to overcome, like remembering everyday items and new names. Yet, I am filled with excitement and determination to conquer these challenges, knowing that I have the incredible team at Austin Speech Labs by my side. I share this story not only to update you on my life, but to share my deep gratitude.

Thank you for being a part of my journey. Thank you, Alicia, for taking care of me and dealing with me. Thank you to Suzanne, Shelley, Austin, Victoria, Kristen and to all the Grad students for teaching me and encouraging me. To each person on their journey, I can only encourage you and tell you, "We've got this!"



The Castillo Family

Edward Castillo

Age: 34 Stroke: 7/17/2023

We Developed an App!

We are thrilled to introduce our latest accomplishment: the release of our app, **Phonology: Speech Therapy** in the Apple app store. This cutting-edge app aligns with our mission to provide accessible speech and cognitive treatment to all stroke survivors.

The Phonology app serves as a vital tool in assisting clients to build the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and word-finding. Many clients lose the ability to connect sounds with letters following their strokes, even if they can recognize a few whole words. *Phonology* helps our clients rebuild their phonic system so they can read and blend sounds to form words. Although this journey can be arduous, the app gives clients the ability to work on phonics outside of our therapy sessions. As a result, we have seen great outcomes with consistent practice. Our app is now accessible to the general public, so we can extend our mission's reach to stroke survivors around the world.

A special acknowledgment goes out to our Board Chair, Adi Mishra, and the dedicated team from Anchoreo, including Shivani Desphande and Srinithi Arun. These individuals have generously dedicated their time and expertise pro bono to take this app to new heights. Their commitment resonates with the generosity of our community that propels Austin Speech Labs forward. We deeply appreciate their outstanding contributions.

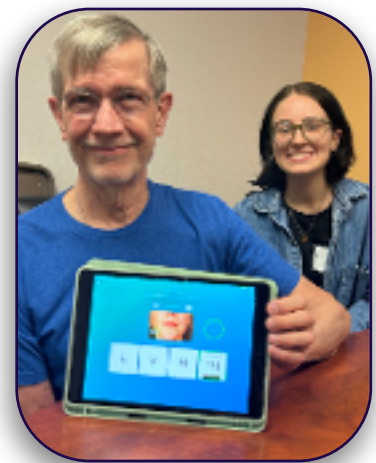
Shivani Desphande, part of the Anchoreo team, shares her perspective: "I remember my first visit to Austin Speech Labs with Adi, and watching a client practice sound production using a development version of this app. I was blown away to see how impactful the app was for the client! After that visit, I started working with Adi, and I was amazed to see what our small but mighty team was able to deliver in a short duration of time. I am so proud of the app and excited for its future potential. I am truly grateful to have been a part of this journey."

The impact of the Phonology app is already being felt by stroke survivors and therapists outside of ASL. A speech pathologist who recently downloaded our app shared her experience: "I used this app with a patient post stroke with apraxia. The visuals were really helpful, especially the mirror where he could see his mouth next to the model."

The Phonology app marks a significant step forward in our quest to enhance stroke recovery, making it more accessible, personalized, and effective. With the support of our generous donors and the dedication of remarkable individuals like Shivani, Adi, and Srinithi, we are improving the outcomes for stroke survivors *one sound at a time.*



Shivani Desphande, Srinithi Arun and Adi Mishra of Anchoreo



A client using the app during his sessions at Austin Speech Labs.

One Word At A Time Event

Our 2023 One Word At A Time event was a phenomenal success! Over 400 supporters of our cause filled the Four Seasons for a thought-provoking and inspiring evening. With your support, we reached our goal to fund our efforts to rebuild the lives of stroke survivors. We are so grateful for your generous donations and for the contributions of clients and caregivers who made the evening unforgettable.

We were fortunate to have Lynne Williams emcee the event. Lynne is a caregiver of our former client, Haley Piotroski. Lynne knows first-hand what it's like to watch a loved one lose everything in an instant. Her daughter was just 33 when she suffered a massive stroke.

During the event, Haley and her neurologist, Dr. Jefferson T. Miley, took the stage to talk about her remarkable journey. When Haley first had her stroke, she was not able to speak in full sentences and had lost her knowledge of phonics. Now, she is an Austin Speech Labs graduate and has officially returned to the classroom, including teaching phonics to her kindergarten class. Dr. Miley recounted that when he met Haley in the ER he could never have predicted such an amazing outcome.

Another highlight of the evening was when our stroke survivors, Daniel Maldonado, Maegen Lane, and James Molinoski shared their stories of stroke and recovery. Each speaker was given a well-deserved standing ovation as they talked about their experiences and impacts on themselves and their families.

The Austin Speech Labs team cannot thank you enough for your continued support, and we look forward to sharing more stories from clients like Haley, Daniel, Maegen, and James in the future.

The wheels are already in motion for our next annual event. Save the date for May 3rd, 2024, at The Four Seasons Hotel. We can't wait to share our stories and to celebrate the accomplishments of our clients.



Shilpa Shamapant , President, Sangeeta Sethi, and Anita Daver, committee members



Lynne Williams, Emcee/Caregiver



Haley Piotroski , Client Speaker, Dr. Jefferson T. Miley, Neurologist



Daniel Maldonado, Client Speaker

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

austinspeechlabs.org

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