

It Starts With One Person

**HEAR &
Be HEARD**



Each of the stories below begins with just one individual who, in taking a stand—for accessibility, equal rights, or safe noise levels—is making a difference to many.

From a Verbal Fog to Perfect Clarity

AS I SAT IN A HISTORIC ABBEY on Scotland’s Isle of Iona, the worship leader’s amplified words reverberated off its stone walls. When they reached my ears, the sound was a verbal fog.

A hearing assistance sign with a “T” indicated the presence of a hearing loop, a surrounding wire that magnetically transmits the sound from the public address system to a hearing aid T-coil (telecoil)—a simple \$2 sensor that now comes in most U.S. hearing aid models and all cochlear implants. When I turned on my hearing aids’ T-coils, the fog instantly cleared. I was in ecstasy.

After that Iona experience, and after seeing hearing loops spread to tens of thousands of venues across Britain and Scandinavia, I wondered, why not loop America,

too? Returning home, I looped my home TV room. With the press of a button, muffled sound becomes clear. My hearing aids act as wireless speakers, delivering sound customized for my hearing loss right into my ears.

Next I asked my community in Holland, Michigan, to embrace this technology. Today, we have hearing loops in nearly every worship place and auditorium, including those of the Hope College campus, where I teach.

In nearby Grand Rapids, hearing loops have not only spread to most worship places, but also to its convention center and to Michigan’s second largest airport. Down the road is America’s largest hearing loop installation, the 12,200-seat Michigan State University basketball arena.

Loops also are serving people in smaller venues—at thousands of British post office windows and in all London taxis, and now at New York City subway booths and in new taxis. In all such looped venues, the telecoil transforms hearing instruments into customized, wireless,

This sign shows a loop is available.



in-the-ear speakers. With my hearing aid microphones turned off and my T-coils turned on, sometimes I can hear the spoken words better than the typical hearing folks next to me.

Thanks to the initiative of dedicated hearing advocates based in New York City, Wisconsin, and elsewhere, and with support from the Hearing Loss Association of America and the American Academy of Audiology, the momentum is growing. Hearing loops are spreading across the U.S. in places such as Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Utah, Washington, and Washington, D.C.

Unlike traditional assistive listening devices in the U.S.—which are incompatible with hearing aids and require locating, borrowing, and wearing conspicuous equipment that delivers generic sound—people actually use and love sound delivered directly to their own hearing devices. Although more costly to install (several thousand dollars for a modest-sized auditorium), the much greater usage means that loops often cost less per user. In a 2014 Hearing Review survey, 866 people with hearing loss were asked about their hearing loop experiences. Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” the hearing loop system increased their satisfaction with their hearing aid or cochlear implant.

Just 16 years from that ear-opening experience in Scotland, we can now foresee a future where hearing aids and cochlear implants will have doubled their functionality—as personal wireless speakers in all sorts of public venues. Hear ye! Hear ye! —*David G. Myers*