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PRESS RELEASE

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**THE WITHMERCİ FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES ITS' 2020 DISABILITY  
-Houston Texans Whitney Mercilus opens the door for new partners-**

HOUSTON, TX – Houston Texans' Whitney Mercilus and the WithMerci Foundation announces its' 2020 disability spotlight, **Invisible Disabilities**, which includes **Aphasia, Apraxia and Hearing Impairment**. Local non-profit organizations and schools who specialize in one of these three invisible disabilities can partner with Whitney Mercilus and the WithMerci Foundation by applying for a WithMerci Foundation grant. Applications open today and will close on Monday, April 6, 2020. All interested organizations can apply via the WithMerci website [www.withmerci.org](http://www.withmerci.org).

Each Invisible Disability will be introduced in a separate phase of this year. Mercilus and his foundation leaders will support children with each disability, including spending time with them in school and in their home creating videos to increase public awareness and educate the Houston community. *"God made us all in his image and likeness, we are unique in a beautiful way. It is important to me that this year we share our extended family, the children with disabilities, which we get the honor to work with. It is my goal that we continue to educate the community on all disabilities and make sure everyone understands it's not just physical or visible, they come in an invisible way as well,"* Whitney Mercilus said.

According to the National Aphasia Association, **Aphasia** is an **acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to process language, but does not affect intelligence**. Aphasia impairs the ability to speak and understand others, and most people with aphasia experience difficulty reading and writing. The **most common cause of aphasia is stroke** (about 25-40% of stroke survivors acquire aphasia). It can also result from head injury, brain tumor or other neurological causes. Aphasia affects about two-million Americans and is more common than Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, in order for speech to occur, messages need to go from your brain to your mouth. These messages tell the muscles how and when to move to make sounds. **When a child has Apraxia of speech, the messages do not get through correctly**. The child might not be able to move their lips or tongue in the right ways, even though their muscles are not weak. Sometimes, the child might not be able to say much at all. **A child with Apraxia knows what they want to say. The problem is not how the child thinks but how the brain tells the mouth muscles to move**. Apraxia is sometimes called verbal dyspraxia or developmental apraxia. Even though the word "developmental" is used, Apraxia is not a problem that children outgrow. A child with Apraxia will not learn speech sounds in typical order and will not make progress without treatment. It can take a lot of work, but the child's speech can improve.

**Hearing Impairment is the partial or total loss to hear sound.** According to the National Institute on Deafness & Other Communications Disorders, about 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears. More than 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents.

To date, The WithMerci Foundation has raised over \$500,000 and recently donated \$75,000 to the education of Down-syndrome. Mercilus and the WithMerci Foundation plan to donate over \$100,000 toward Invisible Disabilities. To learn more about Invisible Disabilities, Aphasia, Apraxia and Hearing impairment please visit [www.withmerci.org](http://www.withmerci.org). Also connect with us on social media @withmerci.

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**ABOUT WithMerci Foundation** – The WithMerci Foundation was founded in 2016 by Houston Texans Outside-Linebacker Whitney Mercilus. To date the foundation has raised over \$500,000. Each year the foundation highlights a new disability, bringing awareness to not only that disability, but local organizations who focus on the specific highlighted disability. The vision of the WithMerci Foundation is to **Start WithMerci** by believing in and advocating for children around the world with disabilities and special needs. **Live WithMerci** through services and support that ensure children with disabilities feel included through all aspects of life. **Work WithMerci** through special sporting events and by providing education to individuals. **Give WithMerci** through financial support.