

# Parent-to-Parent Support

### Meet the family:

Mom: Audrey, hearing

Dad: James, hearing

Children: Caitlin, 16, hearing  
Brienna, 13, deaf,  
profound hearing loss

Communication method:  
Sign and Voice

Newborn Screening:  
None available

Age at Diagnosis: 14 months

Uses a cochlear implant

### Dear Parent:

Like you, I have a child with a hearing loss. My daughter, Brienna, is 13. So her hearing loss was identified a long time ago. Still, I remember how I felt in those early days, and I hope sharing my family's story encourages your family.

We learned Brienna was deaf when she was 14 months old. In those days, a baby's hearing wasn't screened before leaving the hospital. So for her first year, we just thought we had the best "napper" in the world—nothing would wake her. When the doctor first told us Brienna couldn't hear, I couldn't believe it. I didn't know anyone who was deaf. For days, I couldn't even say the word "deaf." It sounded too final. I had so many questions: How can we talk to her? Will she be able to speak? How will she learn to read? Why is she deaf? I felt overwhelmed.

What helped me get past that was support from other parents who have children who are deaf. My first call was to an organization like the Family Support Connection. Talking to a parent of an older child gave me hope that things would work out. I realized I'd been looking too far into the future. Focusing only on what I needed to do right now made everything more manageable.

It also helped me to keep a journal of Brienna's progress. I could look at the journal and feel encouraged by seeing how far she'd come. At 15 months, she was learning to notice sounds with the help of hearing aids. We were taking classes and learning to sign. I would write down all the signs she learned. Within a few months, the list filled pages.

Now Brienna is in 7th grade in a regular classroom. She is the only student who is deaf in the school district. Her hearing aids have been replaced by the cochlear implant she got four years ago. With the implant, she hears a lot but has trouble understanding speech. She uses a sign language interpreter in class. Her friends have learned to sign a little with her. She's on the basketball and Cross Country teams and is doing very well academically—earning honors for her good grades.

It has been work getting her to this point. She's needed speech therapy since she first got hearing aids. And, she's had to be trained to listen with her cochlear implant. But, the work has been rewarding.

So much has changed for people who are deaf since Brienna was a baby. Cochlear implants and hearing aids have really improved. New devices, like captioned phones, pop up all the time that make it easier to live with limited hearing. And, I've noticed a big interest in learning to sign—even our little high school offers American Sign Language as a foreign language. All of those resources—those signs of acceptance—make it easier for parents like us to raise a child who is deaf or hard of hearing. I know you'll have many rewards along your journey.

Best wishes for your future,

**Audrey**

*For information about how to connect with a family like this, please contact the Family Support Connection at 1-866-DHOH-KID, or 651-265-2435 in the Twin Cities. Or, you can email [fsc@lifetrackresources.org](mailto:fsc@lifetrackresources.org).*