

Parent-to-Parent Support

Meet the family:

Mom: Sarah, hearing
Dad: Steven, hearing

Children: Ellen, 3, deaf,
profound hearing loss

Communication method:
Voice

Newborn Screening: Yes

Age at Diagnosis: Birth

Uses a cochlear implant

Dear Parent:

We are proud parents of our beautiful daughter, Ellen. Because of the infant hearing screening test done at our hospital, we knew that she had a hearing loss before she was 2 days old. After a couple more hearing tests, she was diagnosed with a severe to profound hearing loss. At the time, we did not understand what this meant. So, we began a series of audiology appointments to learn how we could help our daughter. Having a baby with a hearing loss suddenly made life a lot busier!

At 9 weeks Ellen started wearing hearing aids. But, by the time she was 6 months old we learned that her hearing loss had gotten progressively worse. Her hearing aids were giving her no benefit at all. This is when we began to educate ourselves about the cochlear implant. After thorough testing we learned that Ellen was indeed a candidate for an implant. We were both excited and nervous about what this opportunity could mean for her future.

Soon after turning 12 months old she was implanted. She heard her first sounds during her hook-up when she turned 13 months old. It was truly an amazing sight. To see her turn her head to noise was amazing! One week later she turned her head to voices. You can imagine our excitement. Within just a couple of months of getting the implant hooked up her baby babbling sounds started to come back. She started talking when she turned 18 months old.

Ellen has been in communication therapy since she was 3 months old. We wanted to give her every chance to communicate. So during her first year of life, while still being uncertain whether the cochlear implant would be successful, we used sign language with her. By the time she was 11 months old, she was using about 15-20 signs. We were very proud of her. She was succeeding with sign language, but we realized we would have to make a commitment to a new education method if she were to make the most use of her new implant. We stopped signing to Ellen shortly after her hook-up, taking a leap of faith that the combination of technology and early diagnosis would bring the best results. We turned to the “auditory verbal” method, immersing her in sound. This method allows her to train her ear to listen and also to speak using no visuals. Ellen loves to hear.

With the help of her implant, Ellen now can listen and sing to tapes playing in the car, recognize airplanes flying overhead, dogs barking in the neighborhood, birds chirping in the trees, and phones ringing. She whispers, talks on the phone, dances to music, and recognizes peoples’ voices. This has not been easy. She constantly works hard at home and preschool with her teachers and speech pathologists. While she does have a delay compared to her hearing peers in articulation, she continues learning new words. Her language is developing, and she progresses at a rate parallel to hearing kids. We are confident that Ellen will join her schoolmates on the first day of kindergarten.

We are thankful that we learned of Ellen’s difficulty so early. Our advice to you is to learn everything you can about your child’s difficulty. Whatever communication method you choose, surround yourself with people that are successful with it, and do not lower your expectations. There are many great resources available, but it takes the parent to make it happen. You are your child’s best advocate.

Blessings to you and your family,

Steven and Sarah

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.