

COCHLEAR IMPLANT UNIT KOGLEËRE INPLANTINGSEENHEID

HOSPITAAL • TYGERBERG • HOSPITAL



NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2015
NUUSBRIEF OKTOBER 2015

Thanks to our new cochlear implant users and their parents for writing the stories of their experiences. Excerpts from their stories appear below. The full versions of their stories are available in the photo-album in the Cochlear Implant Unit.

Tasie Ken-Akparanta (No. 545)



In the hearing test booth, when I noticed the body language of the 'technicians' fidget and stay mute during Tasie's hearing screening, I sensed that my deepest fears about Tasie being deaf were coming to pass faster than I imagined.

Tasie was 26 months old when he was diagnosed with severe bilateral sensorineural hearing loss. That day our walls as parents came crashing down. The news robbed me of sleep. My best meals tasted bland and were repulsive. I desperately needed to turn the news we had received into fiction yet the plot of this true story thickened. I was dreaming indeed, a very bad dream, a nightmare as it were and wondered why nobody woke me up to help end it. This dream had now become my reality, my new world, my next phase, my life's journey, my job and above all my amazing story.

The first 20 days of Tasie's life on earth were traumatic. As parents we knew that there were only two options for Tasie; the first was to speak and the second was, to speak. Nigeria was of no use to us in this regard, so as parents we made informed decisions and did the inevitable. I resigned from my job, left my dear husband and relocated to Cape Town with Tasie and his big sister to seek help for our precious little one.

Tasie got bilateral cochlear implants two days after his third birthday. Waiting eight hours outside the theatre for our only son isn't what we would love to relive. Tasie's remarkable improvements with receptive and expressive speech is my brag. Barely two weeks after Tasie's switch on, he said, "mummy" for

the first time. It was no longer a tap, shove, tug or push to get my attention but a casual mention of mummy- God is great! That indescribable feeling got me bursting into tears. What mum wants to wait 3 years plus to hear her child call her mummy? So my deaf child now talks? Ordinarily, this feat was deemed impossible but the cochlear implant is God's miracle of medicine through technology. I'm no longer the drained, confused moving-ghost but a proud, confident mum. Indeed God has put a new song in our mouths and we have grateful hearts.

Mma Ken-Akparanta

ABDUL YASR MAART (No. 558)



Is my son deaf? No! Not at all, according to everyone who has walked our journey with Abdul and myself. The progress he has made with the cochlear implant is superb. From Abdul having no speech at all to now, to where we have to tell him "Abdul – ssshhh!" Abdul had his implant surgery on 17 November 2014. Everything happened so fast. He had his switch on 19 January 2015, and Abdul excelled in everything, to even being super naughty, but I honestly wouldn't trade it for a thing in this world. He has been making me proud since day one. I did not expect much when I found out about his hearing impairment, but he surprised me, he is one magnificent little boy and I just can't help boast about him. His speech has become so beautiful over the past few months. I correct him time and again, and he is so eager to impress me with new words he's learnt.

Shakiera

Mbalentle Zwele (No. 553)



Mbalentle had a cochlear implant operation in October 2014 and switch on was on 11 November 2014. Before the cochlear implant, she was not hearing anything, not even loud sounds. I didn't have hope that one day she will hear. After a cochlear implant she is hearing everything, even soft sounds. Now I am so proud of a cochlear implant because she can talk. She was 2 years and 3 months when she had the implant. She is 3 years old now.

The cochlear implant is amazing! Without it, my little princess would not be able to hear and speak. Now my daughter has the gift of hearing. I am extremely happy with that and she is improving every day. Working hard with our children is the best for them to learn to speak and hear.

Singatwa

Lucio Harper (No. 582)



My son Lucio Harper was born at 26 weeks in 2011 and only weighed 1.13kg. We stayed in hospital for two months until he gained weight to 1.8kg. For his first year we were in and out of hospital every month with viruses that he picked up. We almost lost him at 4 months old when he stopped breathing and ended up in ICU for 2 weeks.

All Lucio's milestones were late. In March 2013 just before his 3rd birthday Lucio was diagnosed with permanent hearing loss in both his ears and this after being born

with hearing and having a vocabulary the first 3 years of his life. After several tests and scans they concluded Lucio was a candidate for a cochlear implant.

Seeing our son lose vocabulary more and more after his diagnosis was extremely hurtful, especially when he's around kids that can talk and my boy speaks a baby language no one understands. It was sometimes very difficult to communicate with him. His visual sense became exceptional and he never forgets.

He had his cochlear implant done 28 May 2015 and it was a huge success. On the 25th June we switched on his cochlear only to get the most unexpected response from our boy. We were fully prepared that he may not respond as yet but the minute he could hear and for us to see his reaction was beyond explainable. I was in tears (of joy) with the excitement and gratitude I felt. Lucio is progressing extremely well at school and at home. He is using sentences now. He loves repeating things we say.

Pascal Harper

Blake Solomons (No. 577)



When my second born was diagnosed at 6 weeks with a profound hearing loss I literally felt my heart shatter. It was a pain of a loss, a loss of the life I thought he'd have, the loss of what I dreamed for him. Before leaving the doctor's room I asked can he hear me say "I love you" and the answer was "No".

Fast forward a year later I find myself on a journey I'm still not even sure I'm equipped for. I am still asking many of the same questions what is the cause? Why Blake? I have gained insight and knowledge about hearing loss. I have gained courage and despite all my fears I am not afraid of what the future holds. I have gained a stronger bond with my family. I have gained so many new friends. I have met so many medical experts who are so caring and supportive.

On the 08 May 2015, Blake received his cochlear implant. The wound healed nicely and within days he was back to his happy self. On the 19 June 2015 it was Blake's switch on. His initial reactions were not great, he didn't respond well to sound. It was as if he would cringe when he heard sounds and put his head down trying to block it

out. As time went on things got better. At his own pace and in his own time he warmed to the idea of sound. Initial reactions were small. With time we could see the progress.

The CI has opened the world of sound to Blake. He is able to hear me say I love him, he listens when his brother calls his name and turns to hear his dad. These little things are constant reminders of the miracle my little boy has received. I thank God that we are so truly blessed. We are only at the beginning of our journey but already we are seeing great milestones.

Martina Solomons

Lister Maramba (No. 564)



I never thought my child will be able to speak like she is doing now. My child's life changed completely. She is speaking so beautifully. She was struggling a lot with some of the sounds, but from the day she was switched on, she became a new child. She is hearing each and every sound, I am so glad, and she is responding very quickly.

Thank you very much to each and everyone in the Cochlear Implant team who put a hand to help my child. That gift is so special. One day my child will thank you. I wish the best for all of you, and may God bless you and give knowledge and wisdom and a long life to save people.

Viola Maramba

Remember their siblings

As seen in the stories above the journey for a child receiving a cochlear implant is an intensive one. Jonene Johnson's young daughter Kaylin lost her hearing after meningitis and subsequently received a cochlear implant. After realising the impact of his sister's hearing loss and treatment on her son she wrote a blog post which brings insight into the journey for the siblings. Here is an excerpt: "Daniel is not hearing impaired, but he's the one person who I feel got the 'short end of the stick' during this wild 5-year journey we've been on I realised that I never explained to him how his sister lost her hearing and what

a cochlear implant was. All this time it hadn't occurred to me to include him on our journey. He'd always been a spectator, standing on the sidelines. I've come to realise how important it is to include all members of the family on a life-changing journey like this. A family is a unit, and if one 'suffers', everyone is affected. I never realised that Kaylin's illness and hearing loss diagnoses would have such a profound effect on my son. I'm grateful that I made this discovery while I am still able to do something about it." Parents of children with cochlear implants are encouraged to read the full blog at www.joureny2sound.co.za

John Barnardt (No. 578)



I was diagnosed with hearing loss at the age of four. I went through mainstream schooling and university with the assistance of hearing aids. My hearing loss became gradually worse with age.

Throughout my professional career (I now hold a CEO position) I have embraced the challenges that go hand in hand with profound hearing loss. Between 48 – 50 years of age I could not converse on the telephone/mobile phone at all. From age 50 - 54 I only had limited telephone conversations, as I had become 100% dependent on my very well advanced lip-reading capabilities. At the age of 54 years I needed to improve my ability to converse on the phone. I could not converse in a motor vehicle due to the "noise". I did not want to be a "deaf old man" when I became older. Background noise with "normal" hearing aids was becoming unbearable and was seriously impacting on my ability to socialize, both at a business and personal level.

I consulted with the team at the Cochlear Unit. After all the tests we decided to go the Cochlear route. I decided that we should go for both "ears" simultaneously - to me it was "all or nothing". The financial challenge appeared to be enormous but was overcome. The procedure was performed on 14 May 2015. I did not suffer any pain - only total deafness for 3 weeks between the procedure and the fitting of the new sound processors on 3 June. I continued to "work" via the electronic media at my disposal.

The switch on of the sound processors was joyful in the sense that we found some "sound points", yet the

immediate “total hearing” effect was not what I had hoped for. I had simply been “deaf” for too long to expect the hearing nerves to immediately become “fit” after lying idle for 50 years. During the 3 month process that followed with almost weekly adjustments, I found myself repeating the ABBA lyrics..”I have a dream, A fantasy. To help me through reality. And my destination ...makes it worth the while....”

I can now converse comfortably while driving. Listening to music while driving is a novelty. These processors are great at reducing the background noise automatically. I am running the business as close to “normally” as possible. My hearing ability at business and family meetings has already improved.

Do not postpone the procedure - have the cochlear processor fitted as soon as possible. The longer you postpone this, the longer the “recovery process” will be. Just do it.

Theresa Niewoudt (No. 557)



Op drie jaar, het my ma gedink ek is ongehoorsaam en besoek ek 'n oorspesialis. Gehoortoetse word gedoen, maar dit bly daar. Ek moet net voor in klas sit word voorgestel. Op universiteit gaan dit moeilik. Klaskamers is groot en ek sukkel om by te bly. Ek doen als moontlik in my vermoë, maar dit raak te veel vir my en stop ek met groot teleurstelling my Huishoudkunde kursus in die begin van my derde jaar.

Gelukkig ontmoet ek my man in hierdie emosionele tyd. In 1975 trou ons, en een seun en drie dogters word kort na mekaar gebore. Die drie dogters is met erge gehoorverlies gebore, en so maak ek vanaf 1979 kennis met die oudioloë en ONK spesialiste by Tygerberg Hospitaal.

Aanvanklik het ek gedink koglêere implantings word net gedoen op mense wat niks baat vind by aparate nie. Maar ek het my heel misgis nadat ek van 'n jong vrou, Leana Opperman van Upington, te hore gekom het wat onlangs 2 koglêere implantings ondergaan het. Ek besoek haar en sy moedig my so aan om te gaan daarvoor. Sy hoor nou selfs haar man in aangrensende kantoor as

hy met haar praat. Op 61 besluit ek om te gaan vir 'n koglêere inplanting. Liewer nou as op 70 !

Desember 2013 word die inplanting gedoen. Die verbetering gebeur nie eensklaps nie. Dis egter 'n aanpassing vir die brein om nuwe klanke te verwerk wat nog nooit gehoor is nie, en te verstaan. Ek hoor vir die eerste keer die pragtige gesang van voëls ! Dis so wonderlik !!

Die geritsel van papier, as mens deur 'n koerant blaai, was aanvanklik vir my 'n vreemde sensasie en oorweldigend. Die eerste 2 dae na aanskakeling van die inplanting, het ek onophoudelik 'n klokkespel in my kop ervaar ! Met verloop van tyd het die klank verbeter soos my brein aangepas het. Die oudioloog verduidelik dis omdat ek amper nooit hoë frekwensies kon hoor nie. Partykeer raak 'n mens moedeloos want al die nuwe klanke oorweldig soms, maar weet nou met tyd sal verbeter dit. En dit het voorwaar na 8 maande drasties verbeter. Ek kan nou selfs gesprekke op radio en TV soveel beter volg, sonder om te liplees.

Anna Meehan (No. 546)



My hearing loss was not sudden but started deteriorating gradually over a period of 14 years. In the beginning I was in denial and blamed everyone for speaking too softly, but when everybody automatically started repeating everything three and four times, I had to admit that I did indeed have a problem. The audiologist that I went to fitted me with two hearing aids. After a while the right ear's hearing deteriorated rapidly, and it got to the stage where a cochlear implant was suggested. My first reaction was that I was too old to spend such a lot of money, as I was almost 80 years old. My audiologist convinced me, that it would improve my quality of life and the medical aid would pay for most of it. She referred me to the Cochlear Implant unit, and after many tests and assessments, it was decided that I would be a suitable candidate for a cochlear implant in my right ear. The cochlear implant procedure was done in August 2014, and I went home the following day. Switch on was on the 9th September.

I still wear a hearing aid in my left ear, and at the age of 80, I am now part of life again. I can take part in conversations, listen to music and hear birds sing and dogs bark. I sometimes feel that towards evenings that all this sound becomes very tiring, and I get to the stage where I just switch off to have some peace and quiet.

Martha Nel (No. 588)



As kind het ek middel-oor infeksies gekry, wat veroorsaak het dat my oordrom geperforeer het. In my vroeë twintigerjare het ek 'n timpanoplastie ondergaan in my linkeroor; en as gevolg van die operasie het ek al die gehoor in die oor verloor. Geleidelik het die gehoor in my regter oor verswak totdat ek later al hoe sterker 'n gehoorapparaat moes dra. Op 14 Maart 2015 het ek sonder waarskuwing al my gehoor in my regter oor verloor. Dit was vir my geweldig traumaties. Ewe skielik was ek totaal afgesny van die buite wêreld van klank. Die lewe het nie meer sin gemaak nie. Dit was 'n baie eensame, moeilike pad om te stap.

Op 6 Julie het ek 'n kogleêre implanting in my regter oor gekry en net een nag in die hospitaal gebly. Die pyn was minimaal. Op 7 Augustus is dit aangeskakel en het dit baie anders geklink as waaraan ek gewoond was, maar dit verbeter elke dag. Dit is wonderlik om weer te kan kommunikeer, om voëls te hoor fluit en nog baie meer. Ek kan selfs geluide hoor wat ek nooit met my gehoorapparaat kon hoor nie. My lewe maak weer sin. Ek het 'n tweede kans gekry waarvoor ek onbeskryflik dankbaar is.

Ab Latief (No. 566)



I am a 65 year old male and have run a small logistics company for the past 40 years. I have had middle ear

problems with my right ear since childhood. At the age of 18 years, I had a tympanoplasty done on my right ear. There was gradual hearing loss with this ear. I always used the left ear for telephone calls as it was my better ear. At the age of 60 I had Ramsay Hunt Syndrome and lost my hearing in the left ear. It was extremely difficult to communicate in the business environment and at home. I have a hearing aid for my right ear and this helps a lot. Towards the end of 2014 I had a cochlear implant done on my left ear. It has enhanced my hearing, but it is a slow process. With my hearing aid and cochlear implant I feel more confident with my interaction as far as communication is concerned. My left ear with no hearing can now pick up sounds with the help of the program. Thank God for the technology.

Steve Davies (No. 547)



After school I started as an assurance clerk and I noticed gradually that I was not hearing things all that clearly. I underwent at least four ear operations but the gradual hearing loss continued.

I qualified as a first aid worker and eventually as a part time paramedic. I rose through the ranks of officers to the final position of acting commissioner of the Good Hope Country Districts for the Red Cross.

In the meantime I took early retirement due to high blood pressure in 1998 from my full time work, but carried on with voluntary work. In 2014 I noticed that my hearing had deteriorated considerably. Tests at Tygerberg hospital showed that I was a suitable candidate. In the August of that year I had surgery for the implant, and then in the September the device was activated. The very first sound was very loud and I really jumped!

I have now been wearing my implant for a year and I am more than satisfied. I am able to pick up various sounds which I had forgotten around as well as not had to ask people to repeat what they were saying. All in all if you or someone you know has been suggested to have a cochlear implant, my answer is "go for it!" and enjoy life again as you will find that your hearing will improve.

Barry Wegener (No. 569)



I was fortunate to be born with normal hearing and enjoyed it for the first 30 years or so of my life when my hearing gradually started deteriorating. In 1976 I started working in the reservations department of British Airways in Johannesburg. My job entailed being on the telephone all day. I started to notice that I was starting to battle with hearing properly on a phone. I continued as though nothing was wrong.

I moved to Cape Town in 1996 and was working in a travel agency which again entailed being on the phone most of the day. I still did not accept that there was a big problem with my hearing. My hearing really seemed to disappear almost completely in 2000. I couldn't hear the phone on my desk ring. Life became very difficult as I could barely have a proper conversation with my friends and I started becoming very insular.

The hearing aids that I got in 2010 did not help me at all with speech and I was withdrawing socially more and more. My close friends asked me to help them out with their children. I would pick the kids up and take them to my place and the parents would pick them up on their way home from work. I wasn't able to hear what the kids said, and that was what spurred me on towards the implant.

I had the implant done on the 26th January and switch on was the 16th February this year. I don't think anyone can understand the impact that the switch-on has, it is absolutely mind blowing. To be able to hear again was the most unbelievable thing that has happened to me in my life time. I can hear birds, traffic, dogs barking and most importantly I can hold a conversation with the kids and my friends. I seem

to be doing quite well with one on one conversation, still battle a bit when in a group of people or if there is a lot of noise around. I cannot yet hear music all that well but am sure that will improve with time. If anyone reading this is contemplating a cochlear implant my advice would be GO FOR IT, your whole life will change.

Van Der Spuy Brink (No. 576)



Om te hoor is die mees kritiese aspek van die lewe. Dit is wat mense aan mekaar bind. Vele van ons verloor dit om verskeie redes. Ek was eers 'n soldaat, toe werk in die harde mynbou nywerheid en 'n deeltydse polisieman. Koeëls en dinamiet! Gehoor versleg en jy is die laaste om dit te erken. Die familie is die eerste wat swaar kry, want ontkenning is deel van menswees. Ons dink, "Ek 'n gehoor apparaat dra en almal kan dit sien? Nooit!"

Daar is gedeeltelike verlies en totale verlies, dikwels weens 'n virus. Beethoven het die mooiste musiek geskryf na die virus aanval en Edison het die grammofoon uitgevind na skarlakenkoors toegeslaan het. Toe skielik vernietig 'n virus my goeie oor: 'n Kogleêre inplanting die enigste oplossing. 'n Lang pad van toetse en om die mediesefonds saam te neem. Die grootse vrees is die operasie ... die dag breek aan, vele vorms en mense in wit jasse, ure onder narkose. Word weer wakker, min pyn, en kon dadelik met die lewe aangaan.

Die aanskakeling was 'n gekrabbel en na 'n paar dae begin klanke een vir een sin maak. Uitdagings bly soos sopraan stemme en die telefoon. Vele lesse geleer: Erken dit en loop die pad. Die operasie is die minste, wees nie bang nie! Aanskakeling is 'n lang reis, doen alle oefeninge oor en oor en gee terugvoer. Klanke sal eers meganies klink, dit verbeter oor tyd.

Maak kontak met ander wat die pad geloop het. Wees sag met jou geliefdes, hulle het die swaarste gekry. Dit is 'n lang reis, maar om soveel beter af te wees as selfs tien jaar gelede is groot genade. Vir vrae: <http://www.corvus.co.za/contact.htm>

Monica Farmer (No. 543)



My lewenskwaliteit het soveel verander en verhoog omdat ek weer duidelik kan hoor. Baie dikwels besef en waardeer jy nie iets totdat dit nie meer daar is nie. Ons aanvaar ook baie dinge vanselfsprekend soos ons gehoor.

Nou geniet en waardeer ek weer my man, my kinders en kleinkinders se geselskap. Ek kan deel wees van familie gesprekke en my opinie lig. Die lewe is vir my soveel meer genotvol en ek het opnuut waardeerding vir seëninge van God en die wonder van gehoor. Ek is ook innig dankbaar vir die medici wie hierdie gehoorstel ontwikkel het, om mense soos ek 'n tweede kans in die lewe te gee. Dit is dus met veel dankbaarheid dat ek hier op hierdie ouderdom die lewe weer voluit kan leef!

Antoinette Couzyn (No. 591)



Op die ouderdom van 20 is my gehoor getoets en gehoorapparaat is aanbeveel.

Oor die jare het my gehoor so versleg dat ek my meer en meer begin onttrek het van geselskap. Die ergste was dat ek nie meer met my kinders kon kommunikeer nie. Dit was vir my baie moeilik.

Ek is getoets en meegedeel dat ek 'n kogleêre implanting'skandidaat is. Ek het werklikniks daaromtrent gedoen nie totdat iemand my aangemoedig het om dit te oorweeg. 'n Afspraak is gemaak, toetse gedoen en ek's geopereer. Ek was baie onseker van wat om te verwag veral met die aanskakeling. Ek het nie hoë verwagtinge gehad nie en het besef dat dit tyd sal neem voor ek beter sal kan hoor.

Groot was my verbasing met die aanskakeling. Ek kon hoor! Duidelik hoor! Ek het nie geweet hoe om te voel nie! Klanke is duidelik en ek kan nou met gemak met mense en met my kinders kommunikeer. Die klanke van voeltjies en lopende water en die wind wat deur die bome waai is so mooi en strelend!

Elke dag is 'n uitdaging wat ek geniet soos om in groepe deel te neem in geselskap en in winkel sentrums met mense te kan kommunikeer. My selfvertroue is terug en ek geniet dit om weer deel te wees in geselskap. Ek kan sekere TV programme met gemak volg en het selfs gewaag om op my selfoon se luidspreker met familie te praat. As ek 10 jaar gelede geweet het wat ek vandag weet sou ek lankal gegaan het vir 'n kogleêre implanting. Dit is die begin van 'n nuwe lewe vir my.

Wilma Esterhuizen (No. 556)



I became deaf at the age of 35 – first in the one ear and over the years the hearing in my other ear weakened as well. I was reliant on hearing aids for many years. Eventually my hearing deteriorated to such an extent that I could not cope with ordinary hearing aids any longer because I could not decipher what people were saying – just the sound of people talking around me. This caused me to become very depressed and I tended to withdraw from socialising.

At the beginning of 2014, my husband and I decided to consider an implant. It took us nearly a year to finalise the testing and application for financing the implant, but eventually on 31 October 2014 the operation took place and two months later I was fitted with the processor for my left ear. At first I was very disappointed because I couldn't hear immediately. However, after I started going for sessions to set in the sound-pitch on a regular basis, I gradually started hearing with my cochlear implant.

Today, I can communicate with people, I can make out what my grand-children are saying. I can hear water-streams and bird sounds, the wind blowing through the trees and even make out what people say over the telephone. What a wonderful experience this is for me – I call it my MIRACLE – because that is what it is!! Communicating with people has made an immense difference to our lives.

Florence English (No. 572)



My hearing loss started in my late forties very gradually; my family noticed it really, before I was aware of it. I went for a hearing test and was told I needed a hearing aid, but after trying them decided I would stay without hearing aids at that stage.

As time went on of course, my hearing got worse and late in 2002 both ears were fitted with analogue aids. I managed with those comfortably for nine years, and needed them upgraded over time.

In 2011, my ears were very bad; all I could hear were croaky noises with the hearing aids, when anyone spoke to me. So I started thinking about a cochlear implant. After some months I went for hearing tests and was told yes, I definitely needed an implant.

I had the surgery, and came through with flying colours. My big switch on was on 9th March 2015, and my family noticed a difference straight away. It was so weird, but quite funny; I could hear this little

Mickey Mouse voice gradually merged into one. I am really doing fantastic, but to hear again the sounds, birds singing and tweeting in the garden, the sound of running water, the doorbell, the simple sounds of life, the things we take so much for granted, it is so precious and it is getting better all the time. Also the support from my family and friends was invaluable. I am so glad I have had this opportunity, as I was slowly withdrawing from all things social, and was feeling very isolated, but now at the age of 72, I have been given a new lease on life. The Lord definitely does work in mysterious ways, and I thank Him most gratefully.

Not all hearing loss is progressive. Here are stories from two young adults who had normal hearing but suddenly lost it due to medication needed to treat an illness:

Phumeza Tisile (No. 570)



I am 25 years old and an XDR-TB survivor. In 2010, I was diagnosed with normal TB while all along I had XDR-TB. My wrong diagnosis led me to lose my hearing. In 2010 I took Multi Drug Resistant TB treatment, it was going so well but then one morning I woke up and everything was so quiet. I tried to turn on the television but there was no sound. I thought maybe there was something blocking my ears so I used an earbud but still there was no sound. I told the hospital nurse that I could not hear. I saw her moving her lips but I could not make out what she was saying. At first people's voices sounded as if they were in a deep hole but as time went by their voices began to fade away and finally it was completely quiet. The conversations changed now, the doctor had to write down that I was deaf and my deafness was caused by the MDR-TB injection called Kanamycin, she also wrote down "Phumeza I am sorry but there is nothing we can do". Suddenly everything changed, I could no longer have normal conversations, the music on my phone depressed me so I deleted it as it was of no use, TV

shows without subtitles were also useless. My social life was a nightmare as I preferred to be alone. I've read 100's books just to keep sane. I had a hearing aid which I preferred not to use as the sound was too much and uncomfortable. One day I was on the internet and I came across cochlear implants. They mentioned that the cochlear implants are expensive. That was when "friends of Phumeza" started the online fundraising. The best gift you can give someone with hearing loss is a gift of hearing again, and that can be done by donating a small amount of money, that amount will go a long way. I was lucky enough to get bilateral cochlear implants.

The cochlear implant is so great that I can now listen to music, have normal conversations with people, watch TV without subtitles. Of course this didn't all happen at once. I had the surgery on the 20th of February, then the switch on was on the 20th of March. Things at first didn't sound normal at all; I had to look when someone was talking. Water running from a tap didn't sound like water but as time went on I began to notice and know sounds. This is an exciting process as you hear new things every day. It was all a bit too much for me as four days after activation I had to attend a World TB Day march that had 5000 people; I was also one of the speakers. I can now make and receive phone calls without hesitation. With the cochlear implant it's like your life is back with even more advantages e.g. sometimes in a noisy place you can mute people and listen to music only. That is totally cool isn't it? I saw a poster in my audiologist's office that said "A cochlear implant is not a miracle, but it makes miracles happen" I totally agree!

Abigail van Wyk (No. 581)



It's been 3 months since the outer part of my cochlear implant has been connected. When my audiologist and my mother spoke to me for the first time after the switch on, I won't lie, their voices sounded so funny, like something out of a cartoon, I couldn't stop laughing. On the next appointment, as my mom and I were travelling by train, on Bellville station, I kept hearing this person repeat "commuters, please do not change platform, the Strand to Cape Town will be on platform 9, sorry for the inconvenience". I asked my mom who that was and she told me that was Metrorail talking from the intercom. I can hear the TV, radio, car moving, kids laughing and talking, frying pan on stove, my kids, my mom, family and friends voices. I know the difference of who is talking now and the people I work with. Every day that I wear the implant it gets so much better. When I'm in a conversation, gone are the days when I had to focus on their lips because even when I look away I can still hear them perfectly well. Having conversations is such a delight, no more do I have to keep asking "huh" when spoken to, like before my implant.

With the cochlear implant I have had the best three months in a very long time and I look forward to a very bright future ahead with God by my side, my determination and patience, my busy brain, my cochlear implant, my supporting family, what more can I say than the sky is the limit. I have got the gift of hearing again instead of feeling left out like I did when I lost my hearing and I intend to use this precious gift to its full potential.

Some adults who were born with profound hearing loss and have used hearing aids all their lives can also benefit from getting a cochlear implant, even as an adult. Their experience is different to those who had normal hearing to start with. Tracy was implanted at the age of 30 years and had been using her implant for a few months when she wrote this:

Tracy Duncan (Neé Engel) (No. 587)



Although my response to the cochlear implant has been remarkable, I still struggle to hear people call my name in a noisy environment. I still struggle to understand what people are saying. I still struggle to identify what the sounds are. CI isn't a miracle, it creates miracles everyday. Such as hearing my colleague asking me what was for lunch without looking at her lips. It's small, but it's a big step for me who used to be profoundly deaf.

I've got my whole life to adapt, to learn, to grow. It's a journey, not a destination. The world needs to know not to have such high expectations when someone they love goes for a cochlear implant. Have the patience to know that it takes a long time to adapt. But most importantly have the acceptance to know that they'll only hear up to a certain point.

I love having a cochlear implant, it has been incredible. Hearing more does not always bring happiness, because I get to hear all the negativities. I wasn't aware of before. Such as when a person speaks, I can now hear the tone, whereas before I would only see the body language and facial expression.

You have to be courageous, positive, strong-willed and assertive when you go on a CI journey. Support from your family, partners, friends, but most of all from yourself, is so important. Always fight for your rights. Always stand up for yourself. Always gently remind people around you that you do not have normal hearing now. Remember you are no lesser of a person when you aren't hearing like you are supposed to. People will appreciate, respect and admire you for that.

Website

Our Cochlear Implant Unit now has its own website. Take a look: www.cochlearimplants.co.za

Music evening

A Music Appreciation and Training Evening was held on 25 August in Bellville Metronome Theatre. The benefits of music enjoyment and practice were discussed and demonstrated by Fanie du Toit, a music lover and bilateral cochlear implant user. We would like to have this as a regular feature, and extend it to include music appreciation for teenagers and younger children. Any suggestions or contributions are welcome. If any cochlear implant users play a musical instrument or love singing please contact Jenny Perold (jennifer.perold@westerncape.gov.za).

The Association for Hearing Loss Accessibility and Development (AHLAD)

A registered NGO – Lobbying for equal access for persons with hearing loss in SA

While we are proud to live in a democratic South Africa, the lack of access to basic services, information and environments still experienced by persons with hearing loss is overwhelming. We focus on turning the tide on inaccessibility by the community using spoken language and align ourselves with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – articles 2, 9 and 21 in particular. We act as gate keepers and we respond to policies and related documents that are open for public comment to ensure that the needs of persons with hearing loss are considered. As our numbers grow, the voice of persons with hearing loss to lobby for their rights grows stronger. Help us make the difference, sign up today and become a member. Contact us on admin@ahlad.org and see our website www.ahlad.org

Decibels of love

Decibels of Love is a parent driven initiative, providing support and networking opportunities for families raising children with hearing loss. In addition the organisation advocates for a family centred approach to paediatric hearing loss diagnoses and intervention. Families are encouraged to 'like' their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/decibelsoflove for upcoming family focused events, information sharing and encouragement. Also visit www.decibelsoflove.com for more details about the work that they do.

News from a University Student

Jody Bell, age 22, implanted age 16 and 18, will be graduating with a BSc Hons degree in Genetics this year. The real-time captioning services provided by Stellenbosch University were invaluable in making information and communication accessible. Jody hopes to pursue a Masters' degree in Genetic Counselling next year.

In Memorium

We extend our deepest sympathies to the families and friends of those cochlear implant recipients who have recently passed away.

Judy Carelse



Judy received her cochlear implant in 2008. She passed away on 23/6/2015.

Sue Witt



Sue received her cochlear implant in 2012. She passed away on 9/8/2015.

Paul Suttén



Paul received his cochlear implant in 2011. He passed away on 28/8/2015.

Linus Odendaal



Linus received her cochlear implant in 2012. She passed away on 7/12/2014.

