

Misha's story

“When I found out Misha had a bilateral profound hearing loss I was shocked. A couple of days later, after I had gone through a box of tissues, I looked at my chubby, 10-month-old, adorable angel, the picture of health, and thought – this is only news to me. Nothing for him had changed.

Very soon after diagnosis I happened to visit my parents in Perth. My mother was very proactive, saying, ‘OK, we know he’s deaf; now we have to thoroughly educate ourselves as to the best path for him to take’. We researched dozens of sites on the Internet and visited the library for all the books on deafness we could get our hands on.

One of my main concerns was language development, since I’d read that deaf children were generally two to three years behind their hearing counterparts. I also wanted to avoid the sad situation I found in my research, where some children who had grown up without signing at home had felt left out of family

discussions because they couldn’t follow the conversation, and those who also felt like they had missed out on a lot of their childhood by spending inordinate amounts of time in speech therapy from a very young age.

My mum borrowed Oliver Sacks’ *Seeing Voices* from the local library, and it opened my eyes to an amazing world of deafness. I found it incredibly uplifting that through sign language, Misha would have an easily accessible language through which to communicate. We really wanted Misha to be like a normal kid and be able to communicate quickly and easily with his parents and siblings. I also didn’t want to be Misha’s teacher/speech pathologist all the time – I just wanted to be his mum.

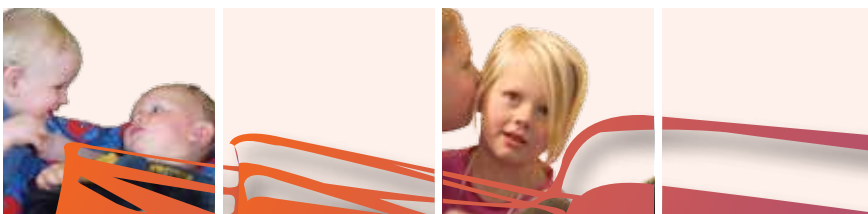
Straightaway we learned a few signs and started using them all the time. It was as if a light bulb had lit up in his head. Within a week, Misha who had just turned one, was signing ‘light’, ‘food’ and ‘drink’, and we enrolled in a TAFE course so we could continue to be language models for him. As Misha was our first child, we figured that any of our other subsequent children would pick up signing fairly easily from seeing us use it all the time. Our family were very supportive and six of our immediate family started the course with us, which was lots of fun and there was no written homework!

A year after Misha was diagnosed, we visited the Cochlear Implant Clinic, having done a lot of research into the relative success of the CI [cochlear implant]. When they told us they couldn’t guarantee an improvement greater than the equivalent of an aided severe hearing loss (even though a few children with a CI do better than that), we didn’t think it was worth the risk of implanting a foreign object into Misha’s head. It didn’t feel right for us – we felt that by implanting Misha we would effectively be saying ‘You aren’t good enough the way you are’.

Two years down the track, my husband and I are enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Auslan at La Trobe University to further our skills and finetune our grammar. Misha has a good language base in Auslan and, with his current cognitive and language skills, he has shown a lot of interest in tackling speech. He is now old enough to spend a bit of time in speech therapy and, more importantly, understands the purpose of it. With his funky bright red hearing aids, Misha signs non-stop at home, at the playground, everywhere. People often approach me because they are fascinated by seeing us sign in Auslan and express interest in learning it. Often I show them a few signs so they can sign with Misha and they love it when Misha signs back!”

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