



Cochlear™ Awareness Network

Chris's Story

Chris Blackham-Davison

Hears with a cochlear implant and a hearing aid

**Is now learning to hear sounds
in the hearing world, with a cochlear implant.**

Hear now. And always





Cochlear™ Awareness Network

Meet Chris

Chris Blackham-Davison

Teacher

Currently hearing with a Cochlear Implant and a hearing aid

Implant 20th November 2009



Chris was born with a severe to profound hearing loss to a hearing family. The cause of his Deafness was due to Rubella. He had been deaf for 40 years wearing a hearing aid in the right ear before he decided to take challenge of having a cochlear implant in the left ear. Chris also writes this story in memory of his mother who was tragically murdered just days after his operation. This is his story.

I was born in Melbourne as a deaf baby in a hearing family. From the time I was born until I was formally diagnosed as having a hearing impairment, my mother suspected there was something wrong with my hearing, but nobody believed her until NAL (Australian Hearing) diagnosed my hearing loss when I was three years old.

I was immediately given two hearing aids but it was soon discovered there would be no benefit of using a hearing aid in my left ear. So from that time on I wore a hearing aid in my right ear.

I started my education at the Princess Elizabeth Kindergarten for the Deaf and then went to Glendonald School for the Deaf. After a few years my parent took me out of Glendonald, and enrolled me in a hearing school. I completed the rest of my education in this normal mainstream school.



In 1991 I was accepted at Griffith University through the Griffith University Deaf Students Support Program. I studied for a Bachelor of Teaching (Special Education – Hearing Impairment) and graduated in 1995. Unfortunately soon after graduating my kidneys started to fail and had to go on dialysis.

I found it difficult to get a teaching position in Brisbane and in 1998 I decided to move to Darwin where I was able to obtain employment as a short term teacher. I had taught both in mainstream and special education environments; however I did find it difficult to hear in a mainstream environment.

In Feb 2000, I had a kidney transplant, which is still working very well and within a year, I was offered a contract position as a Special Education Teacher in a remote community of Lajamanu in the Northern Territory. This was a great experience as the majority of the students there had a hearing impairment.

Since then I have taught at various schools in the Territory.

Because I am hearing impaired, it has never been easy to be a teacher even though I have never regretted being Deaf. In fact I never had seen myself as a hearing person, and still don't despite having a cochlear implant. Sometimes it is difficult to have a conversation when I am in a noisy environment. Using the phone can be difficult to understand especially if my caller has an accent or I don't know that person very well.

I use a Lions Hearing Dog, and currently Ivy is just a wonderful companion to have. She alerts me of important sounds such as door knocking, telephone ringing or alarm clocks. I am a lipreader and despite my hearing impairment, I have achieved well.

What made me finally decided to have a cochlear implant?

My mother always wanted me to have a cochlear implant, but I didn't want it because of the fear of the unknown. There are a number of factors that made me decide to have an implant.

1. I had never ever met a person that had a cochlear implant. I believe that I am the 14th person in Darwin to have the implant. I am now the only Cochlear Awareness Volunteer in the Northern Territory.
2. There is a history of going deaf later in life in my family, my grandmother, my great uncle, and my uncle all went deaf in their older age, in fact my uncle had a cochlear implant just a year before I had mine.
3. I caught up with a mate of mine from the university days and he had a cochlear implant. I couldn't believe how well he was able to communicate despite being in a nightclub while I was having difficulties in hearing what was being said.



With all those reasons combined together, I had no idea of how to get a cochlear implant, so I went and saw my audiologist and told him I was interested and how I could go about getting one. He was able to refer me to the ENT at the Royal Darwin Hospital who assessed me and referred me to the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre. I went to Sydney for further assessment and saw Prof Bill Gibson. Here I was told I was a suitable candidate for a cochlear implant, but I would have to have the operation in Sydney, because they don't have the facilities for the operation in Darwin. This meant I would be away from home for 4-6 weeks.

On the 20th of November, I had the operation for a cochlear implant at The Mater Hospital, Sydney with the operation conducted by Professor Gibson.

A week after the operation, I had just recovered from the side effects when I received a call informing me my mother had been murdered. This was devastating news. I immediately travelled to my mother's hometown in Bairnsdale, Victoria. She had been due to meet me in Sydney three days later and was getting excited about the switch on of my implant. It was a real disappointment she could not share this experience with me as she had always had dreamed I would get a cochlear implant and had been really looking forward to meeting me in Sydney. Because of my mother's death my cochlear implant switch on had to be delayed and I had to remain away from home even longer than I had expected.

On the 6th of January I had the switch on my cochlear implant. Immediately I was just amazed by sounds and soon I was able to recognize some of them; the sounds of the computer keyboard clacking away, a tap running, the toilet making noise. My identification of sound gradually increased over time and soon I was able to hear noise coming from the radio and GPS even though I didn't understand it. I could hear Ivy panting and the indicator in the car clicking. I heard the waves by the seaside crashing onto the beach.

I have recently been able to hear the ceiling fans swishing, the refrigerator humming; it is just amazing. I have people commenting to me that my speech has improved since I had the implant.

I am still learning what sounds are and I still got a long way to go. For me it is a totally new learning process because some sounds I have never heard.

At this stage, I am still dependent on using my lip-reading skills and my hearing aid for communication and cannot depend on using the implant for communication alone. But it is expected I will be able to improve my hearing over the next 12 months as my brain get used to my implant giving me better clarity of sound which is likely to allow me to understand speech better than I ever have in my life before.



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I would like to thank the SCIC, Cochlear, my audiologists at NT Hearing, Royal Darwin Hospital, and The Mater Hospital for helping me with my cochlear implant and a very special thanks to Margaret Lee, a close friend of mine for being patient and supporting and teaching me to learn to hear with a cochlear implant.

If you are considering a cochlear implant, certainly I would strongly suggest you do discuss this option with your audiologist or your doctor as I now wish I had made the decision years ago.

Chris Blackham-Davison is now a volunteer with the Cochlear Awareness Network. The Cochlear Awareness Network is a team of volunteers who educate how a cochlear implant can dramatically change the communication ability and quality of life for those impacted by a significant hearing loss.



Connect with the Cochlear Family

Want to connect with other people who hear with Cochlear Implants or Bone Conduction implants? Here's how:

1. Read more stories on www.cochlear.com
2. Visit the Cochlear Awareness Network website www.c-a-network.com.au
3. E-mail or call us to connect you with a Cochlear Awareness Network (CAN) Member who can share their personal story with you. CAN Members offer something unique – and that's experience. All CAN members are recipients of cochlear or bone conduction implants.

E-mail: happybuddha68@gmail.com

Ph: 08 89482059

Mobile: 0427897170

Be sure to tell us a little bit about yourself and your situation so we can match you with the most suitable CAN member.