

MEDIA RELEASE

**Early intervention triggers social success for children with hearing loss**

**TUESDAY, 20 MAY 2014:** New research has revealed the social benefits of early intervention for children with hearing loss. The three year study has shown children with hearing loss who receive listening and spoken language early intervention not only demonstrate improved spoken language skills but also show social inclusion skills that are as good as their hearing peers.

*Sound Connections* is the first study of its kind and looked at social inclusion and the impact of spoken language skills on social inclusion for children with hearing loss. The study was conducted by researchers from First Voice, a coalition of Australian and New Zealand organisations providing listening and spoken language early intervention for children with hearing loss.

According to Dr Gabriella Constantinescu, lead researcher on the Sound Connection project, the study will help dispel some common misconceptions about the extent to which children with hearing loss experience isolation from other children.

“Social inclusion relates to how connected a child is to their social setting rather than their physical ‘presence’. This project confirms that children with hearing loss can develop similar spoken language and social inclusion skills to typical hearing children,” said Dr Constantinescu.

Listening and spoken language early intervention programs and hearing technologies expose children with hearing loss to social situations at an early age. This means children are listening and understanding spoken language, following instructions, engaging in lessons, playing with friends and socialising in general from a young age – standing them in good stead for the social interactions to come.

Sound Connections assessed the impact of spoken language skills through a database of almost 500 children with hearing loss from around Australia and a survey of almost 100 parents.

Social Connections revealed that children with hearing loss who received listening and spoken language early intervention had an average language performance standard score of 94.73, placing them within the average range of their hearing peers (standard score for typical hearing children is 85-115). This group of children also demonstrated comparable levels of social inclusion to their typical hearing peers, with their level of spoken language shown to impact on several aspects of social inclusion.

Sound Connections determined social inclusion by evaluating two faces of social inclusion; education and interacting with society and fulfilling social roles.

Therese Kelly, Chair of First Voice, said that this research will provide reassurance to parents of a child with hearing loss. The vast majority (92%) of those parents do not have a hearing loss themselves.

“We have known that children with hearing loss in listening and spoken language early intervention may develop spoken language skills in line with their hearing peers. Now we also know that these children may thrive equally as well as their hearing peers in social situations,” said Ms Kelly.

Sound Connections was supported by a Social Innovation Grant from the Telstra Foundation.

Telstra Country Wide Area General Manager Ingrid Harvey said: “Telstra has as its purpose to create a brilliant, connected future for everyone. By supporting Sound Connection’s research with a \$450,000 grant into how best to give a voice to these young people, we’re helping to make that brilliant future their reality.”

**SOUND CONNECTIONS RESULTS LAUNCH:**

- Tuesday 20 May 2014
- 10:00am (9.30am – 10am: photo and interview opportunity)
- Taralye, 137 Blackburn Road, Blackburn, VIC, 3130

- ENDS-

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES:** please contact Anna Greenhalgh (0437 282 467; [anna@palin.com.au](mailto:anna@palin.com.au)) or Simone McKay (0430 551 906; [simone@palin.com.au](mailto:simone@palin.com.au)) at Palin Communications (02 9412 2255)