



Anna, Marco and Zoe, RIDBC

first voice
THE FUTURE IS HEAR

2018 Year in Review

About First Voice

First Voice is an association for member and affiliated organisations that provide listening and spoken language early intervention services to children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) and their families.

Our values: First Voice believes that all children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), regardless of their social and economic circumstances, should have access to the hearing technology and specialist early intervention services that will enable them to achieve the best possible speech, language, education and social outcomes.

The requirement: Optimal speech outcomes for DHH children requires comprehensive, coordinated and financially sustainable services including universal newborn hearing screening; early access to hearing aids, cochlear implants and other hearing technologies; and immediate commencement of evidence-based, outcome-focused listening and spoken language early intervention with ongoing assessments and support as required.

Our approach: First Voice pursues these ends through advocacy, research, information sharing, collaboration, and continuous improvement of services and programs. The effectiveness of the First Voice approach is demonstrated through published annual outcomes data for more than 1,000 children receiving early intervention from First Voice member centres (e.g. [Sound Outcomes 2015](#)) and through a 2017 survey of education, social and employment [outcomes of graduates](#) now in the 18-28 years' age range.

Children's Outcomes: First Voice early intervention outcomes reports show that over 70% of children in First Voice member centre programs in Australia and New Zealand achieve speech and language prior to school commencement that is equal to that of children of the same age with normal hearing. The key findings of the 2017 graduate survey of young adults aged 18-28 years were that: 95% of respondents attended a mainstream high school with 86% completing Year 12; 82% went on to further education with 62% having completed a tertiary qualification and others still studying; 77% had at some point been in regular paid employment for a period of six months or more.

Strategic Directions

In late June 2017, First Voice reviewed its strategic direction and operations. The review:

- confirmed its focus on improving children's outcomes through advocacy, research, information sharing, member support and continuous service improvements in the Asia Pacific region;
- agreed to expand membership to include like-minded organisations in Australia and overseas
- determined to re-structure operations to ensure optimal effectiveness in meeting its strategic goals.



Mia with mum Claire, AVUK



Charlie and Elizabeth, The Shepherd Centre



Hearing House - The Stichbury Bidwill Centre



Owen, The Hearing House



Hazel and her father Tristan, Cora Barclay Centre



Lylah, Telethon Speech and Hearing

Working collaboratively with the other First Voice members enables us to share information, learn from one another, and work as a united voice to advocate for change.

- Dr Jim Hungerford, CEO, The Shepherd Centre

Membership

First Voice members include some of the largest, oldest and most respected centres

providing services for childhood hearing loss in Australia, New Zealand and across the globe. These include:

The five Founding Members - **Cora Barclay Centre**; **Hear and Say**; **Taralye** (an RIDBC Service); **Telethon Speech & Hearing**; and **The Shepherd Centre**; **one new Australian member** - **Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children** (joined 2018); and **two International Affiliates** - **The Hearing House**, New Zealand (since 2010) and **Auditory Verbal UK**, United Kingdom (joined 2018)

2018 in review

The past 12-18 months have been busy and productive for First Voice and its member centres.

Highlights include:

- solid progress with the Australian Government and National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) regarding access, referral and funding arrangements for DHH children under Australia's new National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- our continued involvement in the Australian hearing sectors' campaign for hearing health to be recognised as Australia's 10th National Health Priority
- national Power of Speech Awards at Australian Parliament House, Canberra in August 2017 and May 2018 demonstrating the extraordinary achievements of young First Voice centre graduates

The NDIS

Strengthening arrangements for DHH children in Australia

First Voice is a strong supporter of the NDIS and has enjoyed a close and collaborative working relationship with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) since the Scheme's commencement in June 2013. First Voice appreciates the huge challenges faced by the NDIA in designing and implementing a new national scheme covering permanent lifelong support needs and early intervention across all disabilities within extremely ambitious timelines.

Under the new Scheme a number of significant issues has arisen - including Scheme access, referral pathways and funding levels - that potentially threaten Australia's historically world-leading outcomes for DHH children. First Voice has taken a lead role in working to resolve these with the Federal Parliament, Government, NDIA and other interested parties. This has involved us in many meetings

First Voice welcomes its two new members who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our organisation.

Why expand our membership?

Over the past decade, First Voice has proven the value of working closely and consultatively with families, government and the health professions in instituting and maintaining comprehensive and adequately funded services accessible to all DHH children and their families. During this time, we have developed distinctive skills and experience that we believe could be beneficial to our counterparts in other parts of the world. We are now developing a business model for building overseas membership and working with overseas members.

- important developments in hearing screening and supports for school children at a number of First Voice centres
- Loud Shirt Day 2017 which raised over \$200,000 nationally for early intervention services in Australia
- the Official Opening of the amazing \$8 million facilities for our Overseas Affiliate, The Hearing House in Auckland, New Zealand
- two new members, the Royal Institute for Deaf & Blind Children in Australia and Auditory Verbal UK from the United Kingdom. RIDBC membership means that First Voice now represents the overwhelming majority of DHH children under six years in Australia who have chosen a hearing, listening and speaking future.

with the NDIA and its consultants; stakeholder meetings; commissioning a **Cost Benefit Analysis**; multiple written and oral reports and submissions to parliamentary committees, the government and Productivity Commission.

In July 2018 the NDIA announced five initiatives to definitively address concerns about access, referral pathways and funding and since then these matters have been progressively resolved. Also, the NDIA has undertaken to monitor the new arrangements in consultation with First Voice and other stakeholders and to further refine them as and when necessary. This is a wonderful result for DHH children, their families and chosen providers and First Voice is grateful for the time and intensive effort invested by the NDIA particularly over the past 6-8 months.

Through our work with children and their families we see significant value in being part of a combined leading, global voice that champions the right of all deaf and hard of hearing people to listen and speak.

-Mark Fitzpatrick, CEO, Telethon Speech and Hearing

Power of Speech



Challenging Perceptions

Now in its fifth year in Australia and held at Parliament House, Canberra, Power of Speech is a public speaking event aimed at challenging common perceptions surrounding what deaf children and young adults can achieve. Its purpose is to increase awareness and encourage conversations amongst key policy makers about the critical importance of continued and improved support for people with hearing loss and highlighting the need for the government to make hearing health a national priority.

This compelling event has been attended by many members of the Australian Parliament including Prime Ministers, Ministers, and Opposition spokesperson for health and disability. It is also frequented by other key stakeholders including government agency executives and board members, service providers, advocacy groups, academics and researchers - and of course the media. It would not be possible without the generous support of Cochlear Ltd for which First Voice is immensely grateful.

Loud Shirt Day 2017

Loud Shirt Day is the only international fundraising event supporting children with hearing loss. Hosted by First Voice members and affiliate members in [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#) and the [UK](#), Loud Shirt Day is celebrated in October each year.

This community fundraiser invites schools, workplaces, social and sports clubs, families and

Advocacy

First Voice and its Australian member centres have advocated forcefully in relation to the NDIS, provision of hearing technologies including cochlear implants and Bone Anchored Hearing Aids, and support for DHH children at school. The past year has been particularly intensive, and we are pleased to report substantial progress in resolving a number of the key NDIS issues at hand.

First Voice has a proven capacity to influence and persuade governments, government agencies, doctors and other health professionals in relation to listening & spoken language communication through strategic, evidence-based and persistent advocacy with relevant bodies including

At this year's event, 6 graduates representing First Voice member centres from Australia and New Zealand, showcased their achievements to key members of parliament including Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP - Minister for Aged Care & Indigenous Health, Senator Carol Brown - Shadow Minister for Disability and Carers, Senator Jordon Steele-John, Mr Tony Zappia MP and Trent Zimmerman MP.

Key Messages of this year's Power of Speech included:

- Notwithstanding the success of early intervention, there is still more to be done to ensure that hearing health is made a priority.
- With the right early intervention, hearing loss in children will not stop them from doing anything – they can reach their potential in life.
- First Voice centres achieve amazing outcomes for children with hearing loss and are world leading in the early intervention field.

International Affiliate, AVUK have held a biennial Power of Speech event in London since 2016. In 2018 inspirational deaf children and young people from across the UK joined MPs, hearing experts and VIPs to highlight the achievements of deaf children with additional needs.

individuals to wear their brightest clothes to raise awareness of hearing loss in children and to help centres raise the necessary funds to deliver intensive therapy to children with hearing loss.

Loud Shirt Day



parliamentary committees, Government Ministers, Opposition and cross-bench spokespersons, and relevant government agencies.

Despite significant successes to date, much more needs to be done and First Voice will continue to advocate for government support for clear and measurable programs and Hearing Health policies.

A key to this is ensuring that through our members we have access to credible research and published outcomes data providing 'proof' of what can be achieved through early detection and the latest hearing technology combined with world-leading therapeutic techniques.

First Voice will continue to ensure that the voices of those children, families and communities whom we serve are not lost and that the time, effort and investment of the sector is spent where there is the greatest need and the greatest return on government and all our investments. As a significant membership group, First Voice will work together to progress and develop an economically viable 'Roadmap for Hearing Health' in Australia that considers the needs of all. This means, moving forward, we must proactively advocate for social equity as a part of the 'Still Waiting to be Heard Report' and an NDIS that is inclusive, fair and deliverable. We will do this by calling on our members and using collaborative research, so we have real stories and measurable outcomes to support our position.

-Chris McCarthy, Chair, First Voice (CEO Hear and Say)



2018 Power of Speech speakers



Loud Shirt Day



Hope, Hear and Say



Izabella, The Hearing House

Research

First Voice, through its Research Advisory Committee and its member centres, is committed to undertaking and promoting research and development activities to ensure the quality of our programs and services, and to inform and influence public health policy. Members and affiliated members maintain an active research agenda and work with leading research institutions to conduct hearing research relevant to young people with hearing loss.

First Voice centres continue to make a major contribution to the HEARing Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), particularly in the areas of language development, early intervention outcomes, telehealth, and functional listening.

Member Centre spotlight

Telethon Speech and Hearing: The Belong project aims to improve the wellbeing and school experiences of students with hearing loss. The research is led by the Telethon Kids Institute - and Telethon Speech & Hearing has been involved since the planning of the project. An online intervention resource has been created following consultations with students, parents, classroom teachers, teachers of the deaf and other stakeholders/organisations in Western Australia. This resource is currently being trialled. If the resource is found to be helpful, it will be made available to all students with hearing loss in Australia.

Hear and Say: The results of a research collaboration between the University of Queensland and Hear & Say are soon to be published in the Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research and the Journal of Deaf Studies and Education. Taking a psycholinguistic approach, this innovative new program of research compared the early literacy skills and subskills of DHH children aged 6-9 years who had received early listening and spoken language intervention to chronological and mental age-matched controls with typical hearing: results show similar performance on measures of reading, comprehension and spelling. Other results highlight specific differences in decoding, phonological processing, and phonics that have important implications for ongoing support for children.

The Shepherd Centre: The Functional Listening Index™-Paediatric is a joint collaboration between The Shepherd Centre and The HEARing CRC, to integrate a measure of functional listening as a critical component of early intervention. This provides the opportunity to bring a child's real world listening skills and every day context into consideration for language acquisition. Along with quantifying cognitive components of auditory skill development in a meaningful and contextual way for families, it provides the opportunity to support parental understanding of the development of their child's functional listening skills to guide choices, awareness of learning opportunities, engagement and predict their child's later language outcomes.



William, Hear and Say

We have benefited tremendously over the past 12 months from the increased influence that the collective First Voice team has been able to exert with the NDIA in addressing the access and funding problems facing children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families under the NDIS.

-Amanda Haskard, General Manager, Cora Barclay Centre

Find out more:

T: 07 3850 2111

E: admin@firstvoice.org.au

W: www.firstvoice.org.au

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THE FUTURE IS HEAR

Benefits of First Voice membership

The key benefit of becoming a First Voice member is joining an association with a large body of knowledge and experience in the children's hearing services and language acquisition field that is committed to sharing this with like-minded organizations in the interests of better outcomes for children and provider sustainability and excellence.

Following our 2017 strategic review, First Voice aims to grow its membership base in Australia and overseas with a view to ensuring that our collaborative work will continue to achieve measurable outcomes for all, no matter where they live, with social equity a major focus.

Our **Membership categories** are documented on our website and offer a range of benefits including:

- information sharing and networking
- representation on the Research Advisory Committee
- representation on the Clinical Advisory Committee
- participation in the annual two-day First Voice Colloquium
- access to published outcomes data and shared database and research
- collaboration on research initiatives
- participation in benchmarking activities
- professional development and mentorship
- advocacy and campaign support

Interested organisations are invited to contact First Voice Executive Officer, Bryony Roschitsch on admin@firstvoice.org.au or call on 07 3850 2111.



teaching deaf kids
to speak



Giving deaf children a voice



Hear and Say
Opening worlds



Telethon Speech & Hearing
Reloosing children's potential



The oral language centre for deaf children

An RIDBC service



Royal Institute for
Deaf and Blind Children



AUDITORY VERBAL UK
Creating a sound future for deaf children