



Our voices

firstvoice
THE FUTURE IS HEAR

April 2019

Chair Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the First Voice quarterly news, 'Our Voices'. We are very excited by the enthusiasm of all our contributors for this inaugural edition. We will be publishing an edition of Our Voices 3-4 times a year and expect that future editions will be considerably smaller than this one.

I hope you find this regular update an informative way of keeping up to date on member activities, successes and learnings, and on general areas of shared interest globally.

Each issue of Our Voices will be based around a 'theme' with a focus on future opportunities and growth; this is a member-based newsletter with copy provided by its members. The theme of this newsletter is "Services and Supports for school-age children and youth".

First Voice began nine years ago with a focus on children, families and community in the Australasian region. This focus continues today although it is more far-reaching as we welcome international organisations to the

membership. Its aim then and today is to ensure it speaks on behalf of its members, and the voices of children with hearing loss, and their families, to ensure that listening and spoken language early intervention services are accessible to deaf and hard of hearing children and their families everywhere, that investment in the sector is spent where there is the greatest need, and that services are high-quality, evidence-based and you would the greatest possible communication, social and economic returns.

As a significant membership group, First Voice members must work together to progress and develop an economically viable 'Roadmap for Hearing Health' globally that considers the needs of all, and is funded not just through fundraising efforts, but with the support of governments and businesses working hand-in-hand with a common vision.

This means, moving forward, in Australia 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.

Additionally, as the First Voice membership expands internationally, we are keen to advocate for and promote the opportunities and amazing listening and spoken language outcomes that now exist for children with hearing loss. Outcomes that can only be achieved when they are diagnosed early, given the right technology, and are guided by family and patient-centred therapies that recognise the vital role of the parent in their child's future.

I hope that you enjoy this 1st edition of Our Voices as much as we have enjoyed preparing it for you. On behalf of the First Voice Board thank you for your membership, your support, and your ongoing commitment to children, families and community.

Chris McCarthy
Chair First Voice

First Voice began nine years ago with a focus on children, families and community in the Australasian region. This focus continues today although it is more far-reaching as we welcome international organisations to the membership.

Spreading the Word

It is 2019. Full and fluent speech and language have been attainable for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (hereafter DHH) for more than 20 years. We now have the early detection systems, hearing technologies and specialised, evidence-based therapies to enable DHH children around the world to speak fluently, be mainstream educated and go on to further education and employment on a routine and predictable basis.

This is demonstrated by graduate outcomes from First Voice members' early intervention programs showing that around 75% of children achieved age-appropriate speech and language before starting school; some 95% attended mainstream schools; 86% completed Year 12 and over 80% had progressed to further education and university.

Yet, worldwide, only a tiny proportion of DHH children – and their families and the societies in which they live – benefit from these developments.

While First Voice is primarily an association of early childhood intervention (hereafter ECI) centres providing multi-disciplinary listening and spoken language (hereafter LSL) services to DHH children and their families, we all provide a wide range of additional programs designed to ensure optimal outcomes for our children and their families. Examples include cochlear implant programs; paediatric audiology; transition to school; classroom acoustics; school and student support services; social, emotional, psychological and peer support programs; rural and remote services including video-therapy and tele-audiology (including tele-MAPping for children with cochlear implants); indigenous ear health, screening and intervention – and many more. First Voice member centres are also actively involved in clinical research and development. So there is a lot to share.

Thus, one of the main aims of Our Voices is to spread the word and foster and promote LSL ECI for DHH children throughout the world so that the best possible services and programs, supported with public funding, are available to all.



World Hearing Day message: 'Check your Hearing'

Now in its 5th year, World Hearing Day is a World Health Organisation (WHO) driven global day, drawing attention to the importance of early identification and intervention of hearing loss. This year's theme for World Hearing Day was 'Check your Hearing'.

This is a simple message, but one that is often ignored with many people

throughout the world living with unidentified hearing loss, often failing to realise that they are missing out on certain sounds and words and thereby risking isolation from their family and the wider community.

World Hearing Day is recognised each year by First Voice, and its member organisations.

Check your hearing!



Six quick facts on global hearing loss from WHO

FACT 1



360 million people

There are around 360 million people globally with disabling hearing loss.

FACT 2



\$750 billion global cost

Unaddressed hearing loss poses a global cost of \$750 billion (international \$)

FACT 3



32 million children

Thirty-two million children have disabling hearing loss.

FACT 4



Chronic ear infections

Chronic ear infections are the leading cause of hearing loss.

FACT 5



1 in 3 affected

Nearly one in every three people over 65 years is affected by disabling hearing loss.

FACT 6



Noise

Noise is a major avoidable cause of hearing loss.

First Voice members providing services and support for school-age children and youth

While specialist speech and language ECI is critical for spoken communication, it is also important that appropriate supports are provided to school-age children and youth when they need them.

While some children need little or no support after their ECI, a large and growing body of research shows that DHH children are at significant risk in relation to their educational outcomes and social, emotional and mental health in comparison with children and youth with normal hearing.

While some schools provide significant support to DHH children, many do not. The failure to provide appropriate and targeted supports to school-age children jeopardises their long-term education, social and economic outcomes and the substantial investment that has been made during their pre-school years. Provided below are examples of the work First Voice Centres are doing in this area:

Telethon Speech & Hearing (WA) commenced as a school which still receives significant State Government education funding for students in its 10 school-based units. (refer story below)

The Cora Barclay Centre – CanDo4Kids, was Australasia's first oral school for the deaf starting in 1946. After decades of providing an itinerant 1:1 Teacher of the Deaf service to DHH children at their mainstream school, during school hours things are now changing in response to feedback from students, families, teachers and school systems and an examination of the latest research. (read about their self-advocacy work below)

Hear and Say (QLD), through its 'Hear to Learn', school hearing screening program, have screened over 35,000 school children across Queensland since piloting the program in 2015. Almost 1,000 Central Queensland school children have had access to the program thanks to their founding regional partner, Thiess.



CanDo4Kids WHISPA group Manga Art Workshop

Telethon Speech & Hearing opens 10th in-school support unit

Earlier this year, Telethon Speech & Hearing (TSH) commenced its newest partnership with local high school, Mazenod College, to provide in-school support for students with hearing loss. Known as the Outpost program, specialist staff from TSH will base themselves on campus and provide comprehensive in-school support for students with hearing loss in partnership with the mainstream school team.

Studying in schools for children with hearing loss is not always easy. Their continuing need to develop speech and language skills, coupled with extraordinary focus required to hear and interpret teachers and classmates, mean students with hearing loss can quickly fall behind if they don't get the support they need.

The Outpost program is designed for students from kindergarten to Year 12 who use oral communication to maximise their active participation in mainstream schooling. Each student has an individualised support program that is developed collaboratively with parents, school staff and TSH's Outpost team. The level of support that a student receives is based on individual need.

Mazenod College is the tenth school in Western Australia to take on this incredibly unique and inclusive support program run by TSH, which originally began in 1978.

How does the Outpost program work?

In the Outpost program, students attend mainstream classes whilst receiving support and individual assistance from a Teacher of the Deaf. Individual assistance may include extra language, speech, auditory and academic support tailored to meet the individual needs of the students. Children are also assisted in the management of their audiological equipment, including hearing aids and cochlear implants.

TSH audiologist, speech pathologist, occupational therapist and psychologist provide support and visit the school on a regular basis. Parents are also an important part of each student's team.

The future is still not hear for totally implantable CIs

In October 2018 Cochlear Limited announced they had commenced a further clinical feasibility study as the next phase in its long-term research and development program towards a totally implantable cochlear implant (CI). It is believed that Cochlear is the only company, to date, that has reported such studies.

The study which is being conducted in Australia is being led by Principal Investigators Associate Professor Robert Briggs, The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (surgical), and Professor Robert Cowan, The HEARing CRC (non-surgical).

The single-site 11 patient study will collect data associated with the performance and safety of totally implantable CI technology to provide people with 24 hour hearing. The objective of the study is to obtain preliminary evidence of the efficacy of the treatment, to collect additional safety data, and to compare clinical outcomes before and after an intervention.

The new technology being studied includes an implanted microphone, an implanted rechargeable battery, and an implanted sound processor. This means that the patients can choose between using an external sound processor, or taking it off and relying on the implanted microphone and internal sound processor, while still maintaining hearing function.

But don't get too excited as the development of totally implantable cochlear implant technology is complex, and a commercially available product is not expected for some years.

Source: Cochlear Limited, online media centre 10 October 2018

The new technology being studied includes an implanted microphone, an implanted rechargeable battery, and an implanted sound processor.



CanDo4Kids WHISPA group preparing their meal at the Aldinga Camp

Self-advocacy: the action of representing oneself or one's views or interests. (CanDo, SA)

As adults we constantly advocate for our own needs in our day to day lives. It is important for self-concept and self-esteem to be able to advocate for your views, interests and opinions. Even when we are very small we can tell a person that we don't want something by crying or simply shaking our head. As we grow up we become better at expressing our needs and opinions. For a DHH child or young person, self-advocacy is essential for ensuring that they can hear properly and can access all activities that they desire, this is especially important at school.

There is a continuum of self-advocacy skills for children who are DFF. At first parents will need to remind and gently coach a young child to use these skills but over time we want them to independently self-advocate in school, in the community and ideally in the workplace. Self-advocacy can be hard, but is especially so for children entering their teenage years and navigating changing peer and educational environments. Ideally all adolescents should have a safe and welcoming space to develop their social skills and the confidence to ask for the things they need to have the same opportunities as those around them.

Last year South Australian children were given the opportunity to develop these skills through a range of groups delivered by the Cora Barclay Centre, now the Can:Do 4Kids Cora Barclay Listening and Spoken Language Program. The WHISPA (Web of Hearing Impaired Students Peer Alliance) group, in particular, is a highly effective engagement and empowerment program for older children (11-18 years) who are DHH. The WHISPA group held regular activities, and a camp. It is inspiring to see how eager these young people are to try new experiences - and how supportive are of one another. Whether it be a matter of trusting each other during indoor rock climbing, developing leadership skills by beating an escape room or tackling issues such as gender stereotypes, they are always accepting of themselves and celebrate their own and each other's uniqueness.

Developing self-advocacy in a peer group is key to the development of these young people, and it is only with the continued support of their families, government and the community that we can continue to develop the programs that will support them to thrive and develop into independent young adults that can shape their own destiny.

Self-advocacy can be hard, but is especially so for children entering their teenage years and navigating changing peer and educational environments.

Hearing requires listening... but it's hard work (The Hearing House, NZ)

Listening fatigue impacts all children with hearing loss. For some children, by the time they leave early intervention programs, they are competent communicators and the effort they exert to function and listen competently is often overlooked.

Parents are educated about listening fatigue from an early age. However the effects are not seen until the child reaches school age and the learning environment becomes more structured, with longer days and a lot more demands on listening. Usually, the impact of listening fatigue is not "real" until children start school. The use of remote microphones is encouraged however, in many cases, teachers do not understand the impact of effortful listening.

As many schools are choosing to use 'modern learning environments' with open plan classrooms, multiple teachers, and high student numbers, the listening environment quickly becomes very challenging. Especially for those with hearing loss. Although, children may be listening successfully (i.e., following instructions, responding appropriately) the effort required to do so increases, resulting in fatigue. Remote microphone systems are intended to alleviate some of those difficulties.

As parents have not observed a lot of listening fatigue in their child prior to them attending school, and teachers are seeing that children are apparently "listening successfully", this hidden problem becomes a significant barrier to learning. Children experience increased distractibility, feelings of anxiety, reduced attentiveness, alertness, and decreases in mental energy or efficiency, tiredness, giving up easily, low frustration tolerance levels, mood changes, and changes in play activity. More work needs to be done to educate teachers on the impact of listening fatigue in children with significant hearing loss and, that although they are able to listen successfully, it has huge impacts on their cognitive and energy resources.

In light of this The Hearing House audiologists and therapists start conversations about listening fatigue with parents as early as possible. When a child turns five audiologists work closely with therapists and schools to ensure all professionals working with the children understand the impacts of hearing loss and associated barriers to learning.

Despite this, listening fatigue remains an issue and more work needs to be done on the continuing education of teachers and parents.



Hear and Say (QLD) Training Professionals in China

Three of Australia's most respected paediatric audiologists and speech pathologists from Hear and Say conducted the first training program for 30 of China's professionals in Auditory-Verbal Therapy in November 2018 in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province China.

Hear and Say Founder, Dr Dimity Dornan AO, travelled with the team members to officially launch the training partnership which plays

a role in equipping China's professionals to help them deliver improved outcomes for China's children who are deaf. With over 26 years of, knowledge and expertise, Hear and Say are keen to make a major impact in training China's professional workforce of audiologists and speech pathologists in this technique.

This is the first of many training programs that

Hear and Say hopes to undertake in China and follows a successful training program in India in 2017.

The training was made possible with sponsorship from Sonova, Australian philanthropy group Fletcher Philanthropies and the Lee Long Family, who all contributed to the cost of delivering the training.

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RIDBC Renwick Centre (NSW) Continuing Professional Education

RIDBC Renwick Centre has announced the 2019 Continuing Professional Education program. It lists the wide range of courses, seminars and workshops being offered this year. This year's program will operate in a range of sites around Australia and New Zealand and online to provide access to local professional development opportunities. Its focus this year is to meet all the accreditation needs of teachers, auditory-verbal therapists, audiologists and health professionals at our accredited events to help them gain the points, hours and Continuing Education Units they need. The Centre is also developing a program for the Itinerant Teachers of the Deaf Conference 2019 and a call for papers will be made soon. For more information please visit <https://shortcourses.ridbc.org.au>

RIDBC Expansion (VIC) Our new Victorian Centre

Two of Victoria's early intervention services, Taralye and Early Education Program for Hearing Impaired Children, have merged with RIDBC – strengthening essential early intervention services for DHH children and their families across Victoria.

In October last year, Taralye, formally opened a new centre in Moonee Ponds located in Melbourne's West, responding to the incredible growth and demand for services across Melbourne's North and West.

The opening represents a significant step forward for DHH children across the region and supports the development of speech and language, while empowering families. This new Centre provides one-on-one therapy sessions, group program activities and a base for therapists to travel to see clients in-home while engaging the local community, Australian Hearing and Local Council.

Two of Victoria's early intervention services have merged with RIDBC – strengthening essential early intervention services for DHH children and their families across Victoria.

Centre Updates

Telethon Speech & Hearing (WA) 9-year-old “Aussie Deaf Kid” among top ideas for new hearing invention

Earlier this year, Leon Dean, a 9 year old self-described “Aussie Deaf Kid” from Perth, was the first and only Australian child to win MED-EL’s annual global invention competition “Ideas for Ears”.

Leon is a bilateral recipient of MED-EL Synchrony EAS Hearing Implant System, and a student of Telethon Speech & Hearing’s school support Outpost program.

Leon’s winning entry was a video and drawing of a Bluetooth watch that was able to communicate with hearing implants and change them to various custom settings, such as reducing wind noise when outdoors. One of its many well thought out features was a “Device Locator” app to help find lost processors easily, and a “Wakey Wakey” function which is a “vibrating, flashing alarm to wake you up, but also has a setting that turns your cochlear volume up slowly over 5 minutes” so that users don’t experience sound shock.

As his prize, Leon will be flying off to MED-EL’s Headquarters in Austria later in the year. He will get to meet the engineers and scientists behind the life-changing technology that helps him hear, including the original inventors and pioneers of MED-EL cochlear implants, Ingeborg and Erwin Hochmair.



Telethon Speech & Hearing - Leon Dean celebrating his win



AVUK Lily, David and Anita at City Hall

Auditory Verbal UK

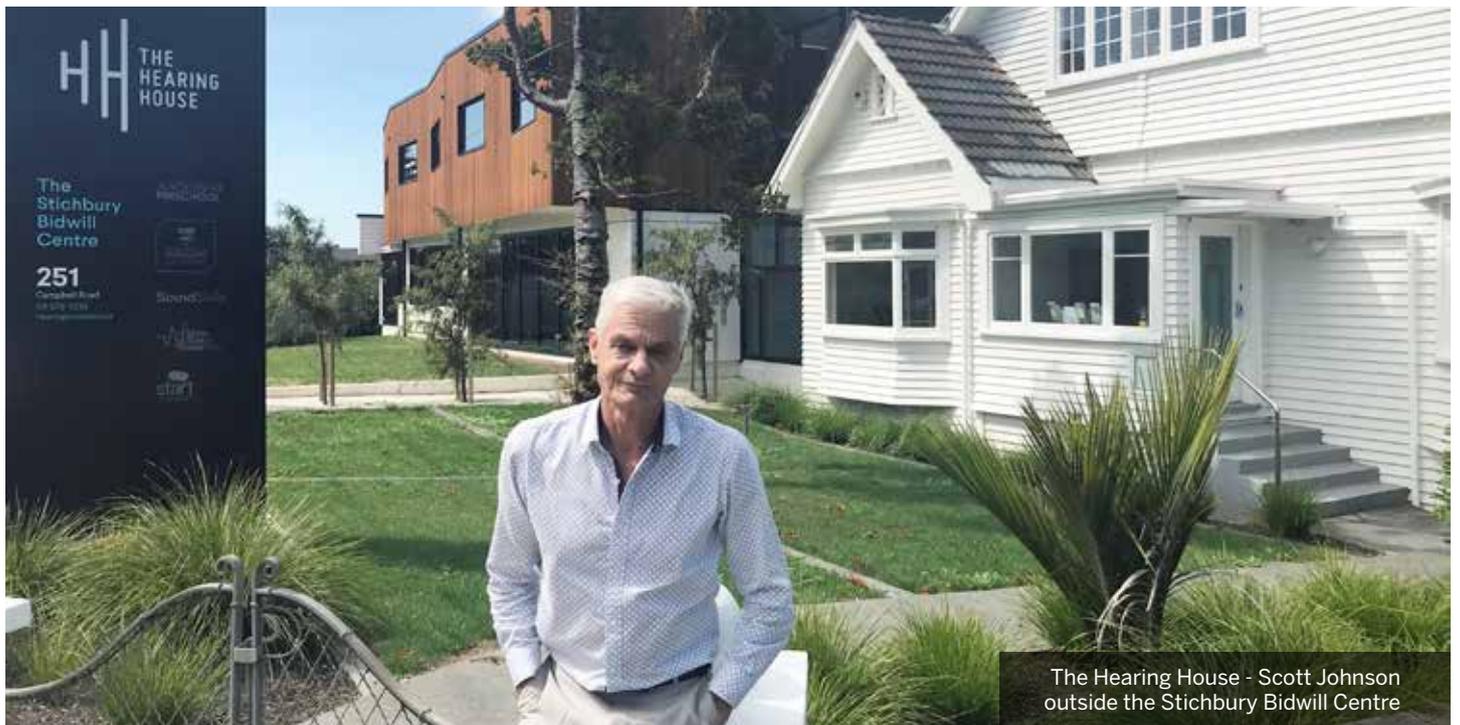
In March 2019, three graduates from Auditory Verbal UK and CEO Anita Grover spoke at an early years’ conference, organised by the Mayor of London. The event was attended by high profile figures working in early years’ education across the UK capital. The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and Deputy Mayor for Education Joanne McCartney are the main influences in changing the face of education in London, which often acts as a model for the entire country.



Telethon Speech & Hearing - With family, MED-EL, surgeon and TSH staff



Telethon Speech & Hearing - Supporting students with hearing loss in the classroom



The Hearing House - Scott Johnson outside the Stichbury Bidwill Centre

Scott Johnston Retirement

Scott Johnston was Chief Executive of The Hearing House (THH) in Auckland, New Zealand from 2004 – 2019. He has made an extraordinary contribution in the provision of listening and spoken language/auditory-verbal therapy services for THH children and their families in New Zealand. Scott played an active role in the establishment of First Voice in 2010, and served as a board director until 2018. We wish him well in his retirement and have already canvassed an ambassadorial role for him his travels overseas. More about Scott below – in his own words.

How did your position at The Hearing House come about?

I had been overseas for eight years and when I returned to New Zealand the then CEO asked if I could do a small IT project for them. She left soon after and the board approached me to take on the role of Chief Executive. It was very easy to say yes to the role as the work that we do with children is life-changing. I wanted to be part of this.

How has The Hearing House changed during your time there?

The growth in the program has been exponential over the last 15 years. In 2004, we had seven staff and 58 children, no government contract or government funding, and relied solely on private funding. Now, 15 years later, we have 29 staff, just under

1000 clients and a government contract for audiology and therapy services to children and adults with cochlear implants.

The founders of The Hearing House were strong supporters of an auditory-verbal therapy approach for deaf children. This methodology has served our early intervention program well over time. We now have services that support teenagers and adults with cochlear implants, a CMV clinic and sensory integration program, provide distance therapy, and operate a preschool.

What are the key highlights from your time at The Hearing House?

In 2004 the cochlear implant program was somewhat fragmented with a number of agencies providing services to different populations from different locations. There is a strong clinical argument in NZ for providing audiology and therapy services to all people with a cochlear implant under one roof. This was a key motivation for The Hearing House – it just took 15 years to achieve it.

Development of The Stichbury Bidwill Centre which opened in late 2018 was a significant highlight. Moving in and opening the doors of the new Centre felt a bit sublime. Only three years earlier we were operating out of two old houses and a couple of garages. To move into a 12,000 sq ft, state-of-the-art,

purpose-built centre was such a massive step.

Also it has always been a highlight and privilege working with a really committed board, and staff who really care about what they do.

And the challenges?

The biggest challenge was managing the exponential growth in client volumes and the need to generate additional funding from the government and the private sector to support this growth. Rapid growth has put a lot of stresses on the whole organisation. We've had 15 years of growing pains!

How has First Voice been relevant and helpful to The Hearing House?

First Voice provided us with an opportunity to understand how ECI services were operating in other jurisdictions. This exposure to like-minded services was essential for us in a country as small as New Zealand. First Voice provided a very supportive environment where we could share information, service design and programs and was immensely helpful in developing our own program and services over time.

Your advice for similar centres?

It's very important to have an international lens – you learn so much from other programs and services.

Rapid growth has put a lot of stresses on the whole organisation. We've had 15 years of growing pains!



Jim Hungerford awarded Outstanding Business Leader

Jim Hungerford Business Award

CEO of The Shepherd Centre, Dr Jim Hungerford was awarded Outstanding Business Leader in the NSW Business Chamber State Awards last November. A global leader in early intervention for children with hearing loss, The Shepherd Centre was also a finalist in the Excellence in Business category.

The awards recognise unique business people and the diverse and forward-thinking organisations the state has to offer. The Shepherd Centre was the only not-for-profit organisation to win.

Dr Jim Hungerford, CEO of The Shepherd Centre, says of the accolade, "I am remarkably humbled by the win and it really is a testament to the hard work of not only our team, but also of the children with hearing loss and their families."

"We work from six locations across the state of NSW, The ACT and Tasmania and have the capacity to treat children regardless of location via our teleintervention and online support. For every child The Shepherd Centre sees there is another child in Australia that goes without services. We currently have several initiatives to address this need."

"Along with tele-intervention and online services, we have opened an interim site in Minto to support the booming population of the Macarthur region, while we fundraise to build a permanent site in Campbelltown."

The cost per year per child for these essential services is approx. \$16,000 and only 30% of this is government funded. The Shepherd Centre relies on fundraising to help the more than 500 families who turn to them each year and close the gap in access to these critical services.

We treat children regardless of location via our teleintervention and online support.



Telethon Speech & Hearing - Geoff Reader and Reece Whitby

Deputy Principal awarded top hearing prize

On 26 February 2019 Telethon Speech & Hearing's Deputy Principal, Geoff Reader, was awarded the prestigious Dr Harry Blackmore award for his exemplary service and contribution to supporting the DHH community.

The Award recognises the contribution made by an individual or organisation that has enhanced the quality of life of DHH people or who have raised the level of awareness in the broader community of issues that affect DHH people.

Working as a tutor, note taker, Teacher of the Deaf and now Deputy Principal, Geoff has had an astonishing 35-year work history dedicated to ensuring every child affected by hearing loss is given the best education and learning foundation for later success in life.

Such work includes being a central figure in TSH's school support program (known as Outpost) for primary and secondary school-aged children with hearing loss. He also has championed TSH's 'Power of Speech' event, which began in 1989 and is now a national First Voice event for DHH students to speak on policy issues concerning their future at Australian Parliament House in Canberra.

Congratulations Geoff, from the First Voice Board and Members on a well deserved recognition.

Geoff has had an astonishing 35-year work history dedicated to ensuring every child affected by hearing loss is given the best education and learning foundation for later success in life.

First Voice has continued to be actively engaged with Federal and State parliaments and government committees and agencies over the past 3 to 6 months, particularly in relation to the NDIS and the National Roadmap for Hearing Health.

The Roadmap for Hearing Health

The Roadmap for Hearing Health seeks to foster collaboration between stakeholders in agreeing priorities and aspirations addressing the challenges facing an estimated 3.6 million Australians who experience some form of hearing impairment.

It has been developed by a Hearing Health Sector Committee established by the Commonwealth Government in June 2018 and was recently endorsed as an aspirational document by the Council of Australian Governments. The Committee met four times between July 2018 and January 2019 and held two stakeholder forums attended by representatives from First Voice.

The Roadmap is divided into six domains: Enhancing Awareness and Inclusion; closing the gap for aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ear and Hearing Health; Preventing Hearing Loss; Identifying Hearing Loss; Providing Support; and Enhancing the Sector's Workforce. Each domain specifies desired outcomes and proposes key actions in the short (next two years), medium (3–5 years) and long (5–7 years) timeframes.

The Roadmap is very broad and it remains to be seen which initiatives will be pursued and how they will be funded. Nevertheless, it provides First Voice with a foundation for discussions with governments and other stakeholders on those matters which are most critical for DHH children, youth and young adults during ECI, their school years and beyond.

The Roadmap contains many recommendations of interest to First Voice. These include raising public awareness; increasing supports in the education system; national reporting requirements for educational outcomes for DHH students; provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; hearing screening for school-age children; implementation of a consistent and standard pathway for paediatric referral and services including a single, national point of referral for children post early-identification of hearing challenges; implementing reporting against the universal newborn hearing services (UNHS) standards across Australian jurisdictions and ensuring; extending coverage of the Commonwealth Hearing Services Program to include cochlear implant speech processes include addressing the gap and support for people over 26 years; and many others.

First Voice welcomes the [Roadmap for Hearing Health](#) and is committed to continuing to work with the government and stakeholders for its funding and implementation.

NDIS

Significant progress continues to be made in regard to eligibility, referral pathways and access for DHH children to appropriately funded NDIS packages. This has been a long and complex process and we are appreciative of the National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA) willingness to prioritise and work on these matters including an outcomes-based funding trial involving First Voice centres. Current expectations are that all aspects of proposed new arrangements will be in place by mid-2019.

Farewell to our outgoing Patron

First Voice was officially launched by its inaugural Patron, the Governor-General of Australia, Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, at a ceremony at Admiralty House in Sydney on 7 October 2010.

Following her Excellency's retirement from the role in 2014, Governor-General patronage continued with General Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd) as its current Patron.

In June 2019 Sir Peter Cosgrove will retire from his position as the 26th Governor-General and First Voice Chair, Chris McCarthy will be attending his and Lady Cosgrove's farewell when they visit Brisbane on 29th March.

Cochlear research places hearing loss on the national and international health agenda

Cochlear released the State of Hearing Report 2019 on World Hearing Day 3 March 2019.

The *State of Hearing Report 2019* surveyed 7,200 people in five countries - Australia, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Its aim was to obtain a global perspective of how hearing affects individuals, families and communities.

The research identified:

- That there was a common perception that hearing loss is inevitable as we age which can lead to delays in prevention, monitoring and treatment.
- Since most hearing loss is gradual and painless, people may not be getting their hearing checked regularly or seeking treatment; instead, they learn to adjust their lives to accommodate the loss.
- Healthcare professionals, governments and organisations must work together to educate and reframe perceptions of healthy ageing and hearing loss.

At the launch, Chris McCarthy, Chair of First Voice and CEO of Hear and Say said, these findings support First Voice's position that hearing loss must be a part of the national health agenda.

"The research study findings are in line with our member's ongoing discussions with State and National Governments advocating for hearing loss to be included as a national health priority."

"More work needs to be done by governments, organisations and community groups to ensure that we all 'think hearing first', and ensure that people with hearing loss, no matter their age or social position, have access to hearing tests, and hearing solutions," Mr McCarthy said.

May Federal election

In recent months First Voice and its Australian members have been advocating strongly with the current Government, Federal Opposition and cross-benches focusing on funding and supports for speech and language services for children and young adults. Our activities include the annual Power of Speech event at Parliament House in Canberra, NDIS submissions, and the Inquiry into Hearing Health and Wellbeing. First Voice will work with the incoming Government to secure 'hearing and listening for all' as a major priority on the health agenda

Research Advisory Committee (RAC)

The First Voice RAC has recently released its research priority areas for 2019. These aim to inform both the knowledge base around children with hearing loss and First Voice clinical programs to ensure optimal outcomes for children with hearing loss and their families. Priorities include further research into the outcomes of early Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) Intervention, including studies that:

- follow children for longer into the school years and beyond
- compare LSL outcomes with those of other interventions
- examine outcomes for particular populations of children with hearing loss e.g., those who have mild, unilateral, or transient hearing loss or additional disabilities or for whom English is not the primary language, and
- examine aspects of service delivery, such as cost effectiveness, mode and the impact of NDIS.

Australian Research Council Linkage Grant to RIDBC and The Shepherd Centre

Congratulations to our colleagues from RIDBC and The Shepherd Centre who were recently awarded a 3-year \$500,000 Australian Research Council Linkage Grant in collaboration with partners from Macquarie University, Australian Hearing, Cochlear, and Parents of Deaf Children. Their project entitled "Beyond Speech" will examine listening effort and its impact on the communication abilities of children with hearing loss.

The Belong intervention research project

The Belong intervention research project aims to support DHH children by engaging them, their families and the teachers (as well as other major stakeholders and decision-makers) as co-researchers to develop and empirically test innovative school-and family-based intervention strategies and resources. The project will develop new resources for students who are DHH In Years 4–6 to help build up their sense of belonging to school and connection with their teachers and their peers, to enhance their social and emotional development and academic achievement.

The research is led by the Telethon Kids Institute – and Telethon Speech & Hearing has been involved since the planning of the project. To date, 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.

For more information about The Belong intervention research project [click here](#).

Board activities

The First Voice Board met in Sydney on 27th March. Directors met with key representatives from Cochlear as well International Affiliate members in New Zealand and the UK via video conference.

The Board discussed recent developments of the Australian Roadmap for Hearing Health and the status of NDIS negotiations, including current opportunities for First Voice to represent and provide recommendations which best support the sector to provide early intervention to DHH children to live well in the community.

The Board were pleased to note the increased engagement with the growing number of member organisations, including the launch of the quarterly newsletter, video conferencing, the June colloquium and data sharing through the Sound Outcomes Report.

The Board reviewed its objectives and work plan for 2019 and 2020 and discussed strategy and ongoing advocacy in the lead up to the coming Federal Election. Particular attention was paid to the important issues of keeping hearing health on the agenda, making hearing health a national priority, and ensuring quality listening and spoken language, early intervention programs for children with hearing loss are properly funded.



Clinical Advisory Committee

The Clinical Advisory Committee (CAC) works closely with the First Voice board and the RAC to provide evidenced based clinical practices to families who have chosen a listening and spoken language approach for their child's communication.

Our first CAC meeting for 2019 was held in February with all member organisations present in person or via link up from around Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

The CAC is currently collating clinical data on the early intervention outcomes of children in a First Voice listening and spoken language program during 2017 and 2018. These data will be available in the next Sound Outcomes Report.

The CAC is also planning its agenda for the First Voice Colloquium in June which will provide an opportunity to share knowledge and learnings to better support all children and families across its programs.

Key topics for the colloquium include:

- assessment for children with additional need,
- assessments for children with a CALD background, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background assessments of social skills development, school aged assessments and interventions.

NEW MEMBERS

Royal Institute of Deaf & Blind children (RIDBC)

RIDBC joined First Voice in August 2018 after working closely together with us on national hearing services reform and the NDIS over a considerable period of time. RIDBC provides centre-based services in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory, in addition to video-conferencing to rural and remote communities throughout Australia.

CanDo4Kids

First Voice warmly welcomes its newest member CanDo4Kids who joined in March this year. CanDo is the oldest children's charity for DHH children in South Australia. Last year Can Do merged with the Cora Barclay Centre (a Foundation Member of First Voice) providing highly-specialised LSL services to children aged 0–18 years in a development designed to ensure the continuation of comprehensive, quality speech and language services to DHH children in South Australia.

Why we joined First Voice: AVUK

In August 2018 AV UK joined First Voice as an international affiliate member. AV UK believes that all parents of deaf children in the UK who want their child to learn to listen and talk should be able to access an auditory-verbal program close to where they live. Sadly, less than 5% of deaf children under five are able to do so.

AV UK believes that joining First Voice will greatly assist their advocacy work within the hearing loss sector in the UK and across the globe. Additionally, it will provide opportunities for collaboration on research initiatives with international experts in the field, providing a stronger outcome base, as well as the ability to share knowledge and best practice with colleagues working to create a sound future for deaf children.

First Voice Colloquium

The 2019 Colloquium will be held in Brisbane at the Hear and Say Ashgrove Centre on 4-5th June. The Board will meet for a high-level review of 2018 and discuss the First Voice strategic directions for the next 2-3 years. Advocacy planning, NDIS and membership are key priorities.

The Colloquium enables member centre executives, the CAC and RAC in Australia and internationally (by video conference) to connect with each other and the First Voice Board. These groups will analyse, and discuss research initiatives and priorities, new and innovative programs and what's current in clinical practice. First voice is currently giving consideration to the establishment of an Audiology Advisory Committee with membership drawn from across the member centres.



COMING EVENTS

2-5 June
Speech Pathology Australia
National Conference
(Brisbane)

4-5 June
First Voice Colloquium
(Brisbane)

25-30 August
Speech Pathology Week

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firstvoice
THE FUTURE IS HEAR